

The Whys of Worship: What Christians do on Sundays and why we do it.

Class #3: January 21, 2018: Where did this come from? The Development of Liturgy

Our Jewish Roots: Sabbath Meals and Temple Worship

- The Sabbath meal: a family liturgy, sharing the story, giving thanks to God, sharing bread and wine.
- Temple Worship: Sacrifices, reading the Torah, Prophets & Writings, Psalm singing, prayers for high holy days.
- (notice a kind of “monastic”/”cathedral” balance?)

The family experience often defines our expectation of worship: an attitude of Celebration? Obligation? Entertainment? Learning? Praise & Thanks?

The Synagogue became a way for Jews to gather, pray and study the Torah outside of Jerusalem, gathering elements of home and temple worship. The center of this experience was the scriptures, Psalms and prayers. This remains the center of our “liturgy of the Word.”

The First Christians:

Temple worship on the Sabbath (Saturday) and the Lord’s Supper on Sunday (the day of his resurrection)

Gradually combined to center on Sunday as the new Sabbath, with the Word (the scriptures of the Old Testament, the Gospels and letters of the Apostles, sermon & prayers) and Communion.

Acts 2:42: They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

The church became the new family: brothers and sisters in Christ. “Church” (ecclesia) = assembly: the people (not the building). The Christian community gathered in homes to celebrate word and table in the feast of the Eucharist (“great thanksgiving”); see 1 Corinthians 11:20-28.

Easter weekend was/is the central feast of the church: the death and resurrection of Jesus, the sacrifice for our sins and the Passover lamb that gives us new life. In most languages, Easter is “Pascha” (= Passover).

Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast! BCP, p.364.

Easter (specifically the Great Vigil of Easter on Saturday night) then became the model for all services of the Eucharist. In the West, this included the prototype for the Apostles’ Creed (used for examining candidates for Baptism at the Great Vigil); later in East and West: the Nicene Creed was used.

So, early on, a common form developed:

Liturgy of the Word

- Readings from Old and New Testaments
- Sermon
- Creed
- Prayers

Liturgy of the Table

- The Great Thanksgiving
- Sharing Communion
- Dismissal

Sharing the kiss of peace

Those who were not Baptized were dismissed at the peace, and admitted to communion after they were Baptized at the Easter Vigil.

That’s Why:

Psalm verses have two halves because that’s how Hebrew poetry works: couplets that repeat or contrast an idea. Notice the “call and response” of the first and second half of the verse.

The Calendar:

Easter was the central feast, with Pentecost 50 days later. Christmas was added to mark the incarnation of Jesus, and Lent became a season of fasting and preparation for Easter by those to be Baptized, and later by the whole church (and for those under discipline to reconcile with the church). Further feasts were added to commemorate martyrs and saints. Advent became a time of preparation for Christmas.

It gets complicated...

Over time, people added to this liturgical format, and various prayers, songs or actions made the liturgy complex. These additions (“accretions”) were often cleaned-up in cycles of reform: monastic movements or Popes would simplify and unify the liturgy and clean-up the distractions that were added. There was some variation in liturgy from the East and West, and between the continent and England & Ireland.

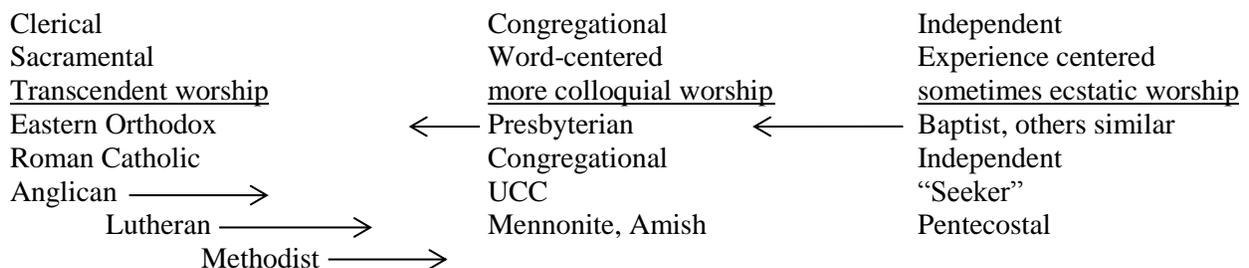
The Protestant Reformation and changes in worship

- Absentee clergy led to a lack of availability of the Eucharist.
- Latin was no longer the common language in the West.
- Worship was sometimes seen as a way to balance the ledger of sin more than glorifying God.
- Reformers challenged the way the consecrated bread and wine were treated like magic objects.
- A re-emphasis on the Bible as authoritative led to further challenges to Catholic practice, including a suspicion of idolatry in vestments, intercession of the saints, statues, candles, incense, the place of clergy (especially Bishops), and even idolatry in communion. These suspicions were strongest in the “reformed” or “puritan” traditions (Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregationalist). These traditions moved toward less frequent celebration of communion and more emphasis on preaching.

Further fragmentation and diversity:

- Later Spiritualist movements such as the Quakers rejected clergy and liturgy, and emphasized spontaneous inspiration.
- “Enlightenment” culture led to a rationalist approach—high and dry and intellectual.
- Later revival movements (e.g. the Great Awakening) reacted to emphasize the *experience* of God, and reflected in a more passionate experience of worship and salvation.
- In the early 20th century, this included “Pentecostal” and “charismatic” churches that experienced the gifts of the Holy Spirit in their services, including prophecy and speaking in tongues.
- Late 20th Century evangelical churches sought to connect to contemporary culture with “seeker” style worship services, designed to resemble rock concerts or theater events, especially using contemporary music (a technique used by Martin Luther!).

Contemporary denominations might also be compared (loosely) in the following three groups:



“**Fundamentalist**” churches describe a theological approach within a Reformed tradition. Due to racism, African Americans also developed offshoots, such as the **African Methodist Episcopal Church** (“A.M.E.”). In most cases, these churches carried with them a heritage of unique preaching and music styles with some similarities, though the basic liturgy depends more on the “mother” tradition from which each offshoot came.

Anglican Developments:

- Theological tensions in England meant the Prayer Book was the unifying factor, though tensions between high and low were always at work.
- The 1700s were influenced by the Wesleys, whose followers became the Methodists.
- In the late 1800s, the “Oxford Movement” led to an appreciation of Catholic heritage, with a resurgence of Catholic vestments and liturgical style.
- The mid 20th century “Liturgical Movement” across denominations led to renewed study of liturgy, culminating in Vatican II reforms, and new prayer books for many, including Episcopalians (1979).
- Social changes influenced the new book as well, softening penitential language.
- But some (not all) of the old language was kept as “**Rite I**” in contrast to “**Rite II.**” TCP, 1/21/18