

In what ways can we make worship more meaningful?

What do these statements mean to you?

- Worship is of the people, by the people.
- Worship belongs to the congregation.

In a busy world, where society has pushed much of church life to the fringes, it's easy for people to find reason not to attend worship. But this is not a new thing. Each century Christians have needed to find relevance for doing what they do.

Three things we can keep in mind as we meet to worship.

1) Scripture calls us to be faithful

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. (Hebrews 10:23-25 NLT)

I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favourable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.

For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. (2Tim 4:1-3)

2) Weekly Worship is the Church's public witness to the world

Every Sunday is a celebration of the Resurrection. It's the day we remind fellow believers that Jesus is alive, and that he has placed us in this world to continue his ministry of drawing people back to the Heavenly Father.

Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.' (Matthew 28:18-20)

3) Corporate worship strengthens and renews us as followers

Some people argue that they can worship God on their own, and while this may be true, they are denying their need for fellowship and their duty to build up others in the faith.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Romans 12:4-5, cf vv5-8; 1 Cor 12:12-26)

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Read and discuss Paul's comments on worship in his letter to the Corinthians

1 Corinthians 14:22-40 "...everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." (v40)

1 Corinthians 11:1-34 "...I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good." (v17)

Worship is the heartbeat of the Christian faith

Just like our heart keeps us alive by pumping blood to feed the body, worship is the heartbeat that keeps the Holy Spirit flowing through the Church, and empowering us to do 'the work God has prepared in advance for us to do' (see Eph 2:10). It's important for us to discern the rhythm of worship that we as Lutherans practice to enrich and enhance our Christian faith and walk.

INTRODUCTION

Saint Paul writes in his letter to the Romans (12:1) **'Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.'**

Simply going through the motions of worship and observing religious duties does not mean that we are offering God pleasing worship. The prophet Isaiah writes, **"What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?" says the LORD. "I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened cattle. I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to worship me, who asked you to parade through my courts with all your ceremony? Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts; the incense of your offerings disgusts me! As for your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath and your special days for fasting — they are all sinful and false. I want no more of your pious meetings. I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals. They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them!** (Is 1:11-14 NLT)

Isaiah concludes that God pleasing worship is to **'Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.'** (v17) (cf Amos 5:21-24) (see also Micah 6:8)

Eugene Peterson in his Message (MSG) translation of Psalm 51 captures well the futility of meaningless performance in worship. **'Going through the motions doesn't please you, a flawless performance is nothing to you. I learned God-worship when my pride was shattered. Heart-shattered lives ready for love don't for a moment escape God's notice.'** (Ps 51:16-17 MSG)

We understand worship best when we see it as acts of service for God. God instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh **'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness.'** (Ex 7:16 NIV) The Hebrew word used for worship is 'abad' (עָבַד) and can also be translated as serve [KJV & ESV]. When God calls us to worship him, he is calling us to serve. In fact our Sunday worship is often called 'Divine Service' because we understand that worship is more about God coming to serve us and less about how we to worship and serve God.

Pastor Peter Hage (M&M Fest 2024)

RHYTHM AND DRAMA OF WORSHIP

Lutheran Worship follows a rhythm or pattern which affirms God as the true leader of worship. The primary difference of Lutheran (Christian) worship as opposed to all other religious worship practices is that we understand God is always coming to us. Picture an arrow coming down and you have the heart of our Christian faith: God comes to us. In much of other worship practices people are always trying to rise up to God, to make their way to heaven. When our worship as Christians focuses on what we are doing for God, then we've misunderstood true worship. God doesn't need our worship. In worship we are called to remember that we need God, and in his grace and mercy he comes to us. In worship God comes to us through his 'means of grace' which our Lutheran confessions define as his Word and Sacraments.



Worship is a divine drama, where God comes to us, and we in turn respond to God. Our traditional Lutheran worship emphasises this very thing.

GOD COMES TO US ↓

↓ **Invocation**

God's declares his presence among us

↓ **Absolution (*declaration of grace*)**

God pronounces us forgiven (in bapt)

↓ **Hearing God's Word**

God feeds us words of hope and peace

↓ **Holy Communion**

God feeds us eternal life (*Jn 6:54*)

↓ **Aaronic Blessing**

God sends us out with his name on us

WE RESPOND TO GOD ↑

↑ **Confession of sins**

we confess our unworthiness/ sinfulness

↑ **Lord have Mercy / Adoration**

we ask God to 'fill us up' & sing his praise

↑ **Confession of faith / Offering / Prayers**

We confess our faith in God

We give of our earthly treasure

We intercede for the world

↑ **Lord's Prayer / Distribution**

We humbly pray as Jesus taught

We receive Jesus body and blood

We thank God for his eternal blessings

↑ **Amen. Amen. Amen.**

It's true. It's true. It's true.

I believe. I believe. I believe.

Worship is a drama between God and his people. It is not a concert or a performance that we watch. We participate in worship with our heart, soul and mind as we respond to his nearness with our prayers and praise and thanks.

Consider Paul's words to the Corinthians as he was trying to correct their attitude and practice of worship **"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.** (*1 Cor 10:16*) *emphasis mine.*

IS WORSHIP STILL RELEVANT IN THIS CENTURY?

An important aspect of our human lives is the need for rest.

Worship needs to be seen as part of our resting with God from the busyness of our mundane routines in life.

Hear again God's promises to us in the 3rd Commandment:

'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.' (*Ex 20:8-11*)

'Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out.' So the people rested on the seventh day.

(*Ex 16:29-30*)

While there is no direct scriptural reference commanding us to worship on Sunday*, Christians continue to worship on Sunday as a witness to the world that Jesus rose back to life on the first day of the week (*John 20:1*) and that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church 50 days after the Passover Sabbath which marks it also as Sunday. This is the beginning of a new day - the 8th day - as a testimony of our new life in Christ (which is why traditional baptismal fonts are made with 8 sides marking our new life in Christ).

'Don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.' (*Rom 6:3-4*)

"By the middle of the second century, Lord's Day worship gatherings had become the universal practice of the church. This is the day Christians gathered to remember Jesus' death and to take part in the Lord's Supper.

Both the historical and biblical record reveal the Lord's Day was the chosen gathering day for distinctly Christian worship because it was the day Jesus rose from the dead.

Every Sunday the church gathers, then, it remembers and celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. When Christians understand who Jesus is and what the resurrection means—every Sunday is Easter Sunday. "

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<https://research.lifeway.com/2019/05/06/3-reasons-christians-should-gather-for-worship-each-sunday>

* Some Christians may use text such as Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10 to justify Sunday worship, but these texts are not conclusive in such a teaching.