

## **WORSHIP NOTES – June 5, 2016**

Dennis R Fakes, in his book *Exploring Our Lutheran Liturgy*, writes:

The Lutheran Church is a liturgical church. “Liturgical” means formal worship - following a prescribed order. The literal meaning of “liturgical” is “people work” - the work of the people in worshiping God. Paul H. D. Lang described liturgy as “the church’s worship as distinguished from private, personal, and group devotions.”

Why have a liturgical service? Why not “just let the Spirit move” the people in worship as many critics of the Lutheran liturgy suggest? “Wouldn’t it be more meaningful if the words came from the heart rather than from the worship book?” Apparently the Corinthian Christians thought the same - and it tore the church apart! Paul advised, “all things should be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). A formal liturgy developed very early in the life of the church for those coming together to worship the living God.

There certainly is meaning in individual worship and prayer and this had always been encouraged by the Lutheran Church. But for public worship, the individual becomes part of a larger group - the universal, “catholic” church of all time, space, ethnic background, language, tradition, and so forth. In formal, public worship, the individual is absorbed into something far larger than his or her singular boundaries. Here the individual becomes part of the mystical body of Christ. Here the past traditions (and usually words and even music) are preserved as a symbol of the larger church beyond the individual, congregation, district, synod, denominational body, or nationality.

The liturgy reminds us that we are connected not only to those who worshiped in the many generations before us, but it also connects us to heaven itself and the church triumphant. As the preface before Holy Communion says, “And so, with the Church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might: Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”

The liturgy is the gift of the Holy Spirit and not formulated by some committee. Neither is it the offspring of some creative or gifted writer. In a real sense the liturgy is the response of people moved by the Spirit and revealed and tested through time, tradition, and faith. There is great comfort knowing that the Lutheran liturgy springs from all that is good of the past, and yet the language is ours - unique for our time and subject to the changing needs of future generations. As Paul Zeller Stodach has written, the liturgy “has grown with the centuries. The piety of all wise and pious. It has grown with the centuries. The piety of all times has tested it, added what was worthy, cleansed it from what was unworthy. The fragrant incense of a ceaseless devotion of multitudes to the Saviour comes to us with the liturgy.”

Furthermore, our outward ceremonies testify and reflect our inner beliefs. If I love my family, I will likely participate in certain family rituals that convey my individual love. I will be present as the family gathers for Thanksgiving or Christmas turkey and Easter ham. The rituals of my daily existence will tell of my inner love. I may nightly tuck our children to bed and kiss my spouse before going to sleep. Mere ritual - sometimes and yet never "mere." Always my ritual is important because it reveals my inner beliefs and values. An ancient Latin formula puts it this way: *Lex orandi lex credendi*. "As we worship so we believe" or "as we believe so we worship."

In the coming weeks, we will explain where our Lutheran liturgy came from and how it has evolved.

