

Worship Notes for Sunday, June 12.

First Century Christian Worship

“[Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” (Luke 4:18-20)

Jesus’ first sermon wasn’t a hit; however, he forever transformed worship on that day by announcing that the Messiah had come. It’s no wonder that the earliest Christian worship services were modeled after synagogue worship. The first followers of Jesus were brought up in Jewish households, just like he was.

Today, the beginning portion of Christian liturgy, the Service of the Word, maintains elements of its Jewish roots. Take note of the following comparison chart:

| Synagogue Service | Christian Liturgy of the Word |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Profession of Faith (The Shema) | |
| Prayer of the “Eighteen Blessings” | Prayers of Intercession |
| Psalms | Psalms (?) |
| Readings (Law and Prophets) | Readings (Law, Prophets, Gospel) |
| Sermon | Sermon |
| Priestly Blessing | |
| Collection for the Poor | Collection for the Poor |

Since the Psalms were considered the hymnbook of the Second Temple, they were incorporated into synagogue worship. Psalms were sung before or after the readings as responses to God’s Word. This practice continued throughout the history of Christian worship.

“Hence, today, Christians should realize that when they listen to the proclamation of the Word of God in the liturgy, they are taking part in a form of worship which has its roots in Judaism, that is to say, a form of worship which was used for the first time one day in the earthly life of Jesus Christ in the synagogue of Nazareth.” (Fisher, Eugene J., Ed. *The Jewish Roots of Christian Liturgy*, p 17)

At the end of his earthly life, Jesus drew from the tradition of the Passover Celebration in order to bring another element of Christian worship life into existence, the Sacrament of Holy Communion, or The Lord's Supper. By the end of the First Century, sharing the meal known as the Lord's Supper became a regular practice during the weekly Sunday gatherings as celebration of the day of the Lord's resurrection.

Until around 90 A.D., many Christians of Jewish background continued to attend the synagogue for Sabbath services. They, then, met to share the meal on Sunday with their sisters and brothers. After Christians were expelled from the synagogues, Sunday worship became a regular practice, and the synagogue service elements became part of weekly worship in addition to sharing the Lord's Supper. Thus the two-part structure of Word and Sacrament became a typical pattern of Christian worship.

On Sunday, June 26th, our worship service will follow a format of ancient Christian worship from the 3rd Century. Join us for a chance to step back into history and learn more about the roots of our Lutheran liturgy and worship.