

*IN NOMINE JESU*

**SPECIAL INVITATION: GOD SERVES US!**

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

*TEACHING SERVICE Point I: The Preparation*

Following this week's Vacation Bible School's theme, the sermon for today has been divided into four parts. This is something done here about once in each year. It is a teaching tool for the people of God in this House. It is my prayer that these "sermonettes" will help us to better treasure, understand and communicate how God gives His gifts through the time-tested and time-honored public services of the Church.

Another single word for these orders of service is "liturgy," which means simply enough, "public service." There are only two religions in the world. The first, and largest among mortals, is found where humans view a gap between a god and man. That moves the majority of people to work to reach up to bring Him down. Theirs is a service to a god that people might receive good, or at least, "not bad," from that god. The second religion is found where God views the gap between Himself and humans, and in Himself determines to bridge that chasm. He looks down on the children of man, in their need, and He comes to them to deliver them and give them good gifts.

Both are concerned with movement: that which takes place between God and humans. As the so-called "Lutheran Liturgy" reflects that second, and only true view of worship, it holds movement that is helpful to communicate the way true worship flows. There are two facings in the movements to which we may be attentive. They are the motions which place the pastor, and his assistants, in

either the sacrificial position (facing the Altar Table of the Lord); or the sacramental position (facing the Lord's people).

When the pastor faces the Altar, we say he is offering the sacrifices, with God's people, of the New Covenant Church. These are, on this Sunday which speaks of good stewardship of the mysteries of God, (as well as any day): prayer, praise and thanksgiving. When the pastor faces God's people, is speaking as he is called to do – in the stead and by the command of Jesus the Christ. The words he declares, at different times in the Lord's service to us, are the convicting, killing, condemning Law of God. Then, as the service is biased toward delivering the Good News of Jesus, he proclaims the acquitting, atoning, and enlivening Gospel of God.

Our public service is actually much older than the confession of the Faith we call "Lutheran." To be a Lutheran is to be part of the confessing Church, the One who says, "This we believe." To be called Lutheran as a confessing believer means that one is necessarily a Christian. In fact, in congregations like this one where both pastors and people are completely committed to hearing and receiving God's revealed Truth in both Word and Practice, we are free to boldly say, because I am a Christian, I am a Lutheran!

Therefore, the concern for the confessing Church is that all her public services be catholic, or universal. That is to say, a person who receives God's gifts here, whether he or she is from a "Lutheran," "Anglican," "Roman Catholic," "Eastern Orthodox" confession, and so on, should be able to find familiarity with how God is serving His people forgiveness, life and salvation through the words and hymns of the Church.

The three Divine Service liturgies which are participated in regularly at Catalina Lutheran Church date to different eras of history. (We taste and hear the Lord's Word with such a variety, plus the orders of Matins, Vespers and Evening Prayer at times, because God has assembled this congregation from all parts of the country, where one order may be predominant. All the orders, in their catholicity, are faithful to the Word of God in teaching and practice).

Today's Divine Service comes from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has roots that run back through 20 New Covenant centuries. In addition, it has sources and patterns that runs deep into the Old Covenant history. Adult students from this past week's VBS should be able to share their notes on those ancient dates with you!

Typically, each Divine Service is divided into four parts: The Preparation; The Service of the Word; The Preparation for the Service of the Sacrament; and the Service of the Sacrament of the Altar. It may help you to think of each as being an order which could stand by itself. They are in the order which we have received them not because they are merely given to us by tradition, but because in this order they best communicate, cross-culturally, that which God is doing in His service as He comes to us with His Law and His Gospel.

Usually, before the Invocation of God's Name, our congregation hears and participates in music. Pre-service music, often followed by an Entrance or Invocation Hymn, are wonderful means given to help prepare us for that which God wills to do through the liturgy. That is why our congregation asks that folks keep conversation muted once you come inside those doors in the minutes before the pre-service music. On the subject of music in the Church, what is its primary

purpose? (To serve us God's gifts by proclaiming Law and Gospel, sin and our Savior).

Most Divine Services here typically have The Preparation. The service properly begins then, not with pre-service music, and hymns if any, but with the Invocation. The opening words of the Lord's Service are the Divine Name of God. They are usually accompanied by standing to recognize the Presence of the Lord with His People. In hearing His Name, and responding with "Amen," "Yes, it shall be so," the Church both calls upon God and recognizes that He is with us, as He promised to be wherever two or three people gather in His Name.<sup>1</sup> In truly Evangelical congregations such as this one, Christians are encouraged to make the sign of the cross when they hear the invocation. It is with that image they, you, were marked in Baptism, both upon the forehead and breast. With this sign, you received God's gift of His Family Name upon your person.

Following the Name of God, the Preparation contains the Order of Public Confession; and the real reason why Christians confess their sins: the Holy Absolution. With the words of confession, we offer to God our sins. We declare that the Law of God is doing its work in us, showing us our sins, causing us to sorrow over them and creating a desire in us to turn from them.

The Absolution is God declaring His Son's blood-bought forgiveness to us. The Father speaks through the means of a man's mouth, and His forgiveness is declared to repentant sinners. This absolution is pure Gospel, Good News for sinners. For the baptized, the Confession and Absolution are tied directly to that Sacrament. For the unbaptized, the words of the Preparation are an open means

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Matthew 18:20.

of grace, which, by God's Word, brings forgiveness even to the repentant, yet unbaptized person. As Jesus pronounced Holy Absolution on unbaptized people, so too does His Church. In fact, as a separate rite, one may depart the Lord's Service at that point, if need be, cleansed, forgiven and renewed.

Now that we have heard some of the working of God in the Preparation, let us begin to receive His gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation through this first of the four parts of the Lord's Service to His people. (Please stand).

*TEACHING SERVICE Point II: The Service of the Word*

(Please be seated). You will have noted that the end of the Preparation brought forgiveness and the Name of God spoken over you. Now God's Service to us moves us from the Good News of forgiveness to the proclaimed Law and Gospel of the Service of the Word. The hymns chants, prayers and words of this section move the hearers of the Word of God to the first high point of the Divine Liturgy. What is the highest point of this part of the service? (It is the reading of the Holy Gospel from one of the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).

The Service of the Word typically begins with a section from a Psalm, or a hymn that is tied to Introit (which means "entrance," (note the movement of the pastor), for the week. The purpose of the Psalm is to set the Gospel tone for the hearer, so that when the Gospel text is read later, your heart has been prepared to respond to it through the Word of God. The Christian is free to read, chant or sing the day's Entrance Psalm and ask, "What is the Gospel going to draw from this text?"

From there, the Church's song moves to the Kyrie Hymn. Kyrie is a Greek word which means "Lord." You are free to understand that the three-fold prayer "Lord, Have Mercy," which you pray is to the Triune God, comes after you have heard your sins forgiven, and have begun to speak the Word of the Lord from the changeable readings of the day – the Propers. Your triple petitions you offer as prayer in response to the forgiveness you have receive. You do so on behalf and in the stead of those who cannot pray rightly for themselves – including all unbelievers. In saying those words, you are exercising your work as part of the priesthood of all believers.

From your pleas for mercy, the Lord's Service moves from the "Lord, have mercy" to the Collect prayer. It is spoken by the presiding pastor in the sacrificial position, with you and in your stead. The Collects were composed, many of them centuries ago, to tie to the Gospel emphasis for the day. If you ever want to know what the theme of the Day is likely to be, read the Collect. Did you notice today that the Collect of the Day both asked God to continue to keep us from coveting, and help us be faithful managers of God's gifts? Those petitions are all drawn from today's Gospel Reading.

Following the Collects, three readings are typically read in God's Divine Services. They are read facing the congregation as "sacramental acts." That means that God is working through the Office of the Holy Ministry to bring His grace to His people. Therefore, when the words of the primary readings are proclaimed, you are to understand that God is speaking through the men – following His Order of Creation – men whom He has called into and under His Office, as the scriptures declare: *let a man continue to reckon us as servants of Christ*

*and stewards of (the) mysteries of God...and, give attention to the readings, to the exhortation, to the teaching.*<sup>2</sup>

The first reading is usually from the Old Testament. In it, you will find God preparing the way for the emphasis the Gospel will bring forth for the week. Today, we are reminded that God grants wisdom through His Word, and that those who stewards in His Word are found forgiven and declared faithful. The second is usually from one of the Epistles – Letters – of the New Testament. This reading looks back to the Gospel of the day. Today it proclaims that the sins of the people of Old stand as examples that we not walk in such ways, but ever be found in the Way of the Lord. The third reading, the Gospel, is that which contains Jesus' direct words. Today, He declares that He is faithful, and has given us His faithfulness to share. The sermon usually draws from one or more of the readings of the day – that we who have heard the Scriptures might have a deeper understanding of them.

Between the readings there are often hymns, verses or psalms. These are to allow for movement in the Chancel, and into the Nave and back. They also encourage movement in your hearing as your heart is moved from the Promise of the Old Covenant, the Life of the New Testament, and the realized Promise of the New Testament – Christ Jesus and Him crucified for the forgiveness of all your sins.

Today we had a Gradual verse. This is so called because, centuries ago, the men whom God had called to publicly read His Word in His services, read, chanted or sang it from a step called a Gradus.

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<sup>2</sup> *I Corinthians 4:1 and I Timothy 4:13, NA 27.*

Following the Gospel Reading, the congregation typically responds with the Confession of the Church. This is either spoken or sung. As a confessing Church, we have four ecumenical creeds – accepted by all who would rightly confess God before the world – from which to draw on Sundays. The shortest of these is called the Apostle’s Creed. It is normally reserved for services wherein the Lord’s Supper is not celebrated. Then next longest is the Nicene Creed. It is typically reserved for services containing the Sacrament of the Altar. The third is the sung Creed, called the *Te Deum*. In general use, this sung confession is found in the Order of Matins. That means, in the church catholic, this Creed is sung daily somewhere in the world. The fourth Creed is the longest, the Athanasian Creed. It is the most comprehensive confession of the Faith. The Creeds were intended to prevent openly heretical individuals and heterodox confessing peoples from maintaining they are true Christians in confessing congregations. They contain both the Law and Gospel of God. Having learned or been refreshed a bit about God’s gifts through the Service of the Word, we now stand for the Introit.

*TEACHING SERVICE Point III:*

*The Preparation for the Service of the Sacrament*

(Please be seated). Following the sermon, the Church who has been again led to the reality of Jesus’ death and resurrection for forgiveness and the declaration of being right with the Eternal Father, prays the Offertory. There we offer to God petition for purity and to keep us in His Presence. From there, we have opportunity to give, out of joyful response, our first-fruit tithes and

offerings. Then we offer sacrifice of the Prayer of the Church. Today, we will be praying the “General Intercession” from page 308 of our hymnal.

From the prayer of the Church, the Admonition is declared. This teaching tool, composed first by Dr. Martin Luther as he reformed the Mass of his day, stands to bring the coming realities of that which God is doing through the Sacrament of the Altar into our ears. Because of the nature of the communities in which this congregation sits, we determined to declare these words as part of the preparation for every Divine Service. They reinforce the biblical realities that the Lord’s Supper is no mere memorial feast, nor simply a spiritual meal, but a participation in the Very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ – crucified, risen and ascended to the Right Hand of the Father.

So, to prepare us as we receive His Means of Grace, God moves the Church from Open Absolution, to Open Proclamation, to Closed Communion. The solemnity, power, and danger to unbelieving or not rightly confessing people in this touch of the Lord’s Body and Blood in, with, and under the consecrated Bread and Wine is reinforced by the way the Church prepares to receive these wonderful gifts. Having been refreshed in our understanding of much of God’s Work in the Preparation for the Service of the Sacrament, let us respond to the gifts which God has already, and will soon, give to us with the Offertory and our first fruit tithes and offerings. Again, please note the movements and transitions in the words of the Lord’s service.

*TEACHING SERVICE Point IV:*

*Introduction to the Service of the Sacrament of the Altar*

(Please be seated.) God has brought us to the second high point of His Service to us. Soon, with His Words, Jesus will come to us in the means He chose. It is a mark of the True Church that these Words of our Lord not be obscured by sacrificial language, or muddied with prayers, or music which do not propel the hearers to the divine realities before us. As the Sacrament of the Altar is one of God's means of Grace, it ranks in order of God's emphasis with equal value to Holy Absolution and the proclamation of God's Word.

To reinforce the reality of the Lord's Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar, following the Words of Our Lord, the bible verses remind us Who is Present with us. We hear declarations of God's work for His people. Then, congregation sings from the vision of Isaiah. There, as your voice echoes the Word of God, He opens your heart to behold Him by the Faith high upon His throne, surrounded by the hosts of heaven. He is reigning even as your mouth sends forth sounds that mingle with the seraphim, the burning ones. Threefold holies ring out into heaven and earth, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit reign in our midst!

Then, immediately after the last Hosanna – Save Now! – rings out, the prayer Jesus gave is offered. Note the position of the pastor, and remember who is praying with us. From that, comes more of Jesus' own unending narrative.

With Jesus' Word, Bread and Wine become His Means to impart His Grace. Since it is Jesus' Word, spoken through the Office which He established, which "consecrates" (sets aside for holy use) the Sacrament of the Altar, all who receive the Bread and Wine set aside by His Word for holy use receive Jesus. From this Real Presence of our Lord, repentant, believing, confessing Christians receive forgiveness, life and salvation. From this Real Presence of our Lord, unrepentant, unbelieving, unconfessing people, even those who claim to be Christian, receive

God's judgment, or, if you prefer the King James Version of the Bible, *eateth and drinketh damnation to [themselves], not discerning the Lord's body.*<sup>3</sup>

This sacred meal is God's gift for sinners who know their sins, desire to turn from them, recognize the Real Presence of Jesus in the Supper. It calls us to remember that we are also, at the same time, confessing identical truths with all who commune at the Lord's Table in any given place.

From that awesome reality and spiritual image, the Church then sings of the Lamb of God. There, the Lord first communes the men who will serve Him to you, from His hand. They, we, receive as you receive, from the same hand and mouth whom Jesus has already come to and cleansed. You declare, in a sacrificial manner, for you are facing the Lord's Table, the Lamb who was slain and who now comes to bring you mercy.

Then, comes the distribution of God's gifts to His people. Through simple bread and wine, the Lord of All touches you. As table after table reclines in the Presence of Jesus, the congregation sings words which are tied to the readings of the day. Some of them speak of the realities of that which God is doing as He comes in the Sacrament. Others declare our wonder that God would love us so much in our sins as to send His only-begotten Son into His creation to die for us.

Finally, when all have received the Body and Blood of Jesus, or a reminder of the grace God gave them in Holy Baptism, the remaining elements are consumed and some veiled. The congregation rises to give thanks that our sins are forgiven, and that we are free to live with Him in eternity. We then join our thoughts to the pastor's words of thanksgiving. The congregation receives a

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<sup>3</sup> I Corinthians 11:29.

Trinitarian blessing, and is freed under the Gospel to depart – all having heard God’s forgiveness, a few perhaps having rejected it, many willing to live in it, to return again in God’s good time.

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**

Let us now receive God’s gifts anew in the Sacrament of the Altar. Please stand.

Trinity IX (*LSB* One-year series)

Introit Psalm 54:1(3, 4-5); Psalm 51:1-12; Proverbs 16:1-9; I Corinthians 10:6-13; Luke 16:1-13  
July 24, 2016

*Pastor Michael A. Morehouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***