

**HEARING GOD'S WORD IN GOOD ORDER**

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

**TEACHING SERVICE Point I: The Preparation**

Today's sermon has been divided into four parts in order to remind us about God's work in serving His gifts to us in His Divine Service. We pray that these "sermonettes" will help us to better treasure, understand and communicate God's faithful Service to us. We ask God that our response will be given back to Him in the Faith. It is our hope that you will gain a greater, or renewed, understanding and feeling for the proclamation of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of sins which the Holy Spirit works through His divine "liturgy," that is, "public services."

Though many of the Lord's Services through which we receive God's gifts here are contained in the *Lutheran Service Book*, their orders and rites are much older than the confession of the Faith now called "Lutheran." The Lord's Services may be rightly considered to proclaim the truth that God first speaks to us through His Word, and we then respond back to Him and one another through His Word. It is the Word of God, proclaimed and visible, which remains central to the Lord's Services as we receive His gifts through the public-service orders of the Church.

This manner of public address unites us with "liturgical congregations" around the world and through the ages. Such public orders of service may indicate, but do not guarantee, that we are part of the confessing Church. That is the Visible Church which continues to say in steadfastness to the Faith: "This we believe," that which is written in the verbally inspired Scriptures, and the scripturally illumined Lutheran Confessions. That is why we are called "confessional Lutherans." We

publicly confess, especially through the Lord's Day Services, that we are Christians joined in the fullness of the Faith around God's Word.

We further teach that the confessing believer remains concerned that all the Church's public services be catholic, or, "universal." Any person who attends here, whether he or she is "Lutheran," "Anglican," "Roman Catholic," et cetera, should be able to hear a similar order in the Lord's Divine Services. He or she should think and feel that we are united in music, hymnody, readings and service orders by God Who is giving His gifts through public services, liturgies, around the world. To that end, the whole liturgical service, from Invocation to Benediction is God's gift. Through His Divine Services, He delivers Christ-crucified to us for the forgiveness of our sins. In summary, we say that, in a confessional Lutheran congregation, the Lord's Service is given to us to call us to recognize and confess our sins and sinfulness, and to deliver to us our Savior through Word and Sacraments.

Today's written order for the Lord's Divine Service dates to the mid-1990s. This Service order was purposefully developed to add a late-20<sup>th</sup> century order of service to the Church's hymnals, one that follows the Reformation tenants of Faith Alone, Grace Alone and Scripture Alone. It was introduced in the LCMS through *Hymnal Supplement 98*. This congregation began to use that book almost as soon as it was published, until we received the *LSB* in 2006.

Today, we receive God's gifts through the order that our hymnals name, "Divine Service IV." Though it was given almost 20 years ago in the form we have now, we are free to rediscover that through it God has joined us to His Church of the ages. Through His public services (Divine

liturgies), God has kept us fully grounded through the continued proclamation and administration of His rightly ordered Word.

Our physical actions during the Lord's Services may also be used to help communicate God's service truths. Even the positioning of the service leaders at various times teaches divine treasures. Whenever anyone faces the congregation during the Lord's Service, we say he is standing in the "sacramental position." That is to say, he is declaring God's Word, in Christ's stead, through or under, the Office that Christ established, the Office of the Holy Ministry. When pastors stand in this position, Christ calls you through them to sorrow over your sins and to will to walk in new life, that which is sealed in you by His blood-bought forgiveness.

On the other hand, whenever the servants of Christ face the same direction as the congregation, here the liturgical and true East, we say that they are standing in the "sacrificial position." At such times, they stand with you before the Lord. Facing East, they confess as one with you. In the sacrificial position, we all continue to offer to God the New Covenant sacrifices of prayer, praise and thanksgiving.

The Divine Service may be divided into four chief 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. The first part, the Preparation, in differing forms, also stands alone in the Rites of Holy Baptism; Private Confession/Absolution; and Corporate Confession/Absolution. The Service of the Word stands alone in the services of Matins, Morning Prayer, Vespers, Evening Prayer and Compline. The Preparation for the Service of the Sacrament is recorded in part of Dr. Luther's Small Catechism.

The fourth part is a Service which does not stand alone in the true Church. Christ and His Apostles left us examples in Holy Scripture. These teach that the Service of the Sacrament of the Altar is not separate from the Service of the Word of God. Therefore, the Service of the Sacrament is always to be accompanied by preaching/teaching. Such includes all proclamation of the Word that is done from the sacramental position – that is, facing the congregation.

The four parts of the Lord's Service are in the order in which we have received them not simply on account of tradition. Rather they fall into this order because they best communicate, cross-culturally, across the millennia, that which God is doing in His Service for His people. The services are organized to rightly declare God's gifts as we continue hearing God's Word in good order.

All that having been presented, we turn to where your bulletin usually starts. Before the Invocation of God's Name, the actual beginning of the Lord's Service, our congregation often hears and participates in music. Pre-service music, which may be followed by Processional, Entrance, or Invocation Hymns, is a wonderful vehicle to help prepare us for that which God wills to do for us each Lord's day. Musicians carefully select their pieces in order to reinforce the themes that will be proclaimed through the day's readings. (What is the primary biblical and confessional purpose that all music in the Lord's Services serves? It is to support the readings of the day as it proclaims our sin and God's grace for us).

That is why our congregation asks that we keep conversation subdued, or silent, once we come inside the Nave doors in the 10 minutes or so before the pre-service music. That frees you to hear and reflect on the compositions played into your ears; to read through the texts and prayers

for the day; and to pray prayers such as those listed in the front of our hymnals. So much may happen before the Lord's Service begins!

Most Divine Services typically begin with The Preparation. The opening word of the Lord's Service, the Invocation, is the Name of God. As many of us witnessed on the first Sunday of this month, God's Name is placed upon the baptized as they are washed with the water and the Word. To help keep that in your mind, the servants of the Lord in this place open God's Services over the font.

As we speak God's Name we stand, as we are able. This gives us another reminder that the Presence of the Lord with His People. We rise in honor of the Presence among us of the King of Kings. (That is also why confessing congregations usually stand during the singing, chanting or speaking of the Name of the Lord). As we hear God's Name, we respond with "Amen." In that we recognize that the Church both calls upon God, while confessing that He is with among us in Word and Sacraments.<sup>1</sup>

In Evangelical congregations such as this one, Christians are encouraged, in the rubrics – red letters – of the hymnal, to make the sign of the cross when they hear the Invocation. It is with that image they, you, were marked in Baptism. For that reason, we simply speak the Name of the Lord, and don't add phrases such as "we begin...." We believe, teach, and confess that we begin nothing. We trust that God who has begun His good work in us will complete it to the end.

Following the Invocation, the Preparation contains the Order of Public Confession, and the reason why Christians confess their sins: the Holy Absolution. With words of confession, we declare that the Law of God is doing its work in us: showing us our sins, causing us to sorrow over

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

them, and creating a desire in us to turn from them. The Absolution, then, is God declaring His Son's blood-bought forgiveness to us. The Father speaks through the means of a called and ordained man's mouth: He declares the forgiveness Jesus won on the cross to repentant sinners. Holy absolution is pure Gospel, Good News, for sinners. Through pastoral, diaconal, and elder study of the rite, in this day's order of service a more specific wording of Confession and Absolution is used than that of the hymnal. On these DS IV Sundays, we confess as one Body that we all have sinned and need God's forgiveness. As one Body, we receive His forgiveness.

For baptized believers, Confession and Absolution are tied directly to baptism. For the unbaptized, The Preparation is an open means of grace. God's Word brings forgiveness even to a repentant, yet unbaptized, person. Just as Jesus pronounced Holy Absolution on unbaptized people: so too does His Church.

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

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

Now God's Service to us moves from the declaration of the forgiveness of sins to the proclamation of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of the whole world's sins in the Service of the Word. The hymns, chants, prayers and words of this section lead the hearers of the Word of God to the first high point of the Divine Liturgy.

That indicates that there is rhythm to the order in the Divine Service. Such is heard in the manner in which we say, chant, or sing the Word of God. As in musicals on stage or screen, some of the dialogue is spoken and

some is sung. A basic principle that guides us is this: when the pastor/ deacon/ or vicar sings, the congregation sings. When the leader chants, you chant. When the leader speaks, you speak in unison.

The Service of the Word typically begins with an Introit (to Enter), a Psalm, or a hymn that is tied to the Psalm/Introit for the week. The purpose of the Psalmody is to set the day's Good News tone for the hearer. Later when the Gospel text is read, your heart has already been prepared to respond to it through the Word of God. The Christian is free to read, chant or sing the day's Psalmody and ask, "Where is Christ in this text, and how will He be declared from here on in the other readings? "

The Introit today is from Psalm 84. It was appointed for Trinity XIV a long time ago. In it, we hear of the Christ Who is our shield, into Whom we are anointed to receive eternal homes (recall the anointing that takes place at Holy Baptism). We respond that with declaring our yearning to enter into His courts forever.

From there, the Church's song moves to the Kyrie, "Lord, Have Mercy." The Kyrie is the prayer of forgiven sinners for themselves and for the Church universal. From its words, you are also free to understand that the three-fold prayer is offered to Father, Son and Holy Spirit on behalf and in the stead of those who cannot pray rightly for themselves – including all unbelievers.

In that manner, the Kyrie is intercessory. In the "Lord, have mercy" prayer, you exercise your work as God's kingdom priests. That is particularly helpful to remember in the aftermath of this year's hurricanes, fires, and other tragedies that have impacted so many with the consequences of the results of Adam's Fall into sin.

From your pleas for mercy, the Lord's Service this time of year moves on to the Gloria. There, our voices join the angels who sang at the announcement of Christ's birth. Next, the Collect prayer is offered.

The Collects are traditionally spoken on behalf of the congregation by the presiding pastor standing in the sacrificial position. The Collects were composed, many of them centuries ago, following guidelines established at the Council of Hippo in AD 300. As most of the collects prayed in this place are, this day's Collect was composed by a man living at the time of Dr. Martin Luther. Collects are prayed to lead us to the Gospel emphasis for the day. As you hear the Collect, you can learn where the sermon theme of the Day is likely to be headed.

Following the Collects, three readings are typically read as "sacramental acts" in God's Divine Services. When the words of the primary readings are proclaimed, you are to understand that God is speaking through men – following His Order of Creation – 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 normally drawn 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 hear the Word declare the way of wisdom; the path of uprightness; and life. We learn that, as the faithful cling in the Faith to the Word, we are led away from wickedness into springs of life – that is also a clear tie to a baptismal theme today!

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

The second reading is usually from one of the Epistles – Letters – of the New Testament. This reading looks back in time to the Gospel of the day. Today the Epistle calls the baptized to remain in the Spirit which they received with the water of washing and regeneration. As the Holy Spirit leads us, we daily turn from the works of the sinful flesh, and begin anew to walk in the fruits of the Spirit. It ends with a clear declaration that all this is done in you through the regular reception of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of all your sins.

The third reading, the Gospel, marks the high point of the Service of the Word. It normally contains Jesus' own words spoken and recorded long ago. Today, we hear of the Lord declaring His mercy upon those who were, by nature of their ceremonial and bodily uncleanness, cast outside the place where God regularly gave His gifts. (Fear not about missing its entire proclamation, this text will show up again on Thanksgiving Thursday)! As they were cleansed, they would go through a washing rite that would declare them clean and able to enter again into God's place of His Presence.

Between the readings there are often hymns, verses or psalms. These are used to allow for movement in the Chancel, into the Nave and back. Today we had a Gradual Psalm. Centuries ago, the men whom God had called to publicly read His Word in His services proclaimed it from a Gradus step. Psalms and hymns encourage movement in your hearing as the Word travels 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.

Following the Gospel Reading, the congregation typically responds with a public Confession. As a confessing Church, we may recite any one

of four ecumenical creeds. They are accepted by all who desire to rightly confess God before the world. The Creeds were composed to prevent openly heretical individuals and heterodox confessing peoples from masquerading as true Christians.

The shortest of these is called the Apostle's Creed. That is normally reserved for Baptismal services or those wherein the Lord's Supper is not celebrated. The 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 the Church catholic in the Order of Matins, that sung Creed is heard daily somewhere in the world. The fourth Creed is the longest, the Athanasian Creed. It is the most comprehensive confession of the Faith. Though it was not likely composed for use in God's public services, we here, due to this congregation's understanding about our need to publicly confess before the world, the devil, and our own sinful flesh, recite it on fifth Sundays of the month when they occur. Having learned or been refreshed a bit about God's gifts through the Service of the Word, we now stand for the Psalm.

### **TEACHING SERVICE Point III:**

#### **The Sermon and the Preparation for the Service of the Sacrament.**

The Sermon follows the Church's confession of the Faith and the Hymn of the Day in today's order of service. That hymn is carefully chosen to tie to the theme of the day. Due to the diligence of our Church musicians, working with our pastors, it is usually connected to the text which will be the basis for the sermon of the day.

The sermon was placed where it is centuries ago that it might to look back upon Jesus' words in the readings and forward to Jesus' coming in the Sacrament of the Altar. Thus, the Sermon was placed between the two

peaks of the Lord's Divine Service: the reading of the Gospel and the Administration of the Sacrament of the Altar. It is encompassed by Gospel!

When a pastor preaches God's Word, Christ is speaking through him, out of Christ's Office. Because pastors are human, and subject to sin and all its effects, we sometimes miss clearly declaring the point of Holy Scripture: declaring forgiveness in Christ-crucified to those who are burdened by their sins. Therefore, the Sacrament of the Altar, a Visible Means of Grace, was placed after the sermon, following our Lord's practice first celebrated on the night in which He was betrayed.

Following the sermon, remembering that St. Paul said, "*Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us,*"<sup>3</sup> the Church participates in the Sacrifice of Prayer. Here, petitions are lifted up before the Lord on behalf of rulers, those in need, and those who cannot pray for themselves. Petitions, requests, thanksgivings and prayers are often guided by the Word of God for the day. Prayer is our response to hearing the Word of God.

Following the prayers, we are called to give back to God from that which He has given to us. We often hear of two forms of giving – both which are appropriate to Christian Stewardship. The first is called a "tithe," which indicates a tenth part. A tithe is a gift to the Lord from any increase with which one has been blessed.

The other term is, "first-fruit offering." Biblically, those were given of the first harvest of the fruits of the earth. Believers, in such giving, display trust that the Lord will continue to provide for all of our needs for this body and life.

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<sup>3</sup> *Philippians 3:17, ESV.*

A third offering might be that which is given in thanks. In all this, the Christian is called to give in the spirit of the Scripture that declares,

*“Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”<sup>4</sup>*

Following the prayer of the Church, the Exhortation is declared by the Celebrant. This teaching declaration, composed first by Dr. Martin Luther in the Reformation era, stands to bring the coming realities of that which God is doing through the Sacrament of the Altar into our ears. Your pastors determined to declare the Exhortation as part of the preparation for every Divine Service. Its words reinforce the biblical realities that the Lord’s Supper is no mere memorial feast; not simply a spiritual meal; but a very real participation in the True Body and Blood of Jesus Christ—crucified, risen and ascended to the Right Hand of the Father. The Exhortation is read so that all may understand, as is humanly possible, that those who partake of the Supper confess the same realities: that no one may break our communion-fellowship by holding to a different confession of the Faith at this Altar Table.

To sum up that which is taking place, the Lord’s Service serves to move the Church from Open Absolution, to Open Proclamation to Closed Communion. Throughout, we receive His Means of Grace in Word and Sacraments. The power and danger is reinforced for 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. To those who believe and confess rightly, God gives His gifts of forgiveness of sins and strengthening to life everlasting as we receive Him in the Faith.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. II Corinthians 9:7.

Having been refreshed in our understanding of God's Word for us in the Preparation for the Service of the Sacrament, let us respond to the gifts which God has and will give to us by offering to Him the sacrifice of prayer, praise and thanksgiving....

**TEACHING SERVICE Point IV:**  
**Introduction to the Service of the Sacrament of the Altar.**

God has brought us near to the second high point of His Service to us. Soon, with His Words, Jesus will come to us in His chosen means. 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, Baptism and the proclamation of God's Word. It is a mark of the True Church that the Words of our Lord not be clouded by sacrificial language, or covered over with prayers, or music or actions that do not lead the hearers to comprehend the divine realities before us.

With Jesus' Word, Bread and Wine become His Means to impart His Grace. Jesus' Word, spoken through the men whom He places into the Office which He established, "institutes," the Sacrament of the Altar. All who receive Jesus' Word through consecrated Bread and Wine receive Jesus sacramentally in, with and under those elements.

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, undiscerning people, even those who claim to be Christian, receive God's judgment. In the King James Version of the Bible, it is taught therein that the latter type of person

*eateth and drinketh damnation to [themselves], not discerning the Lord's body.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> I Cor 11:29.

This sacred meal, therefore, is for sinners who know their sins, desire to turn from them, recognize the Real Presence of Jesus in the Supper, and understand that they confess, as one Body, identical truths with all who commune physically at the Lord's Table in a given location.

To reinforce the reality of the Lord's Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar, before the Words of Our Lord, the Preface, Proper Preface and the Our Father are spoken. The Preface sets the tone for this Service with reminders of Who is present, and our biblical response to Him. Next, the Proper Preface is spoken.

From that, the Church joins the pastor in the three-fold "holy" from the vision of Isaiah. In this order of service, it is placed where it is to remind us that heaven is being opened for us. We learn that we are truly joining the heavenly chorus before the Lord.

From our participation in Isaiah's vision, the Church prays the Thanksgiving, uncluttered by extra words today. Then, we offer, with our Lord, Jesus, the Word He gave us in order to address the Father. Flowing from His Table prayer, Jesus' own Words that established His Holy Meal for repentant sinners are chanted – which is specifically Lutheran practice.

After the Lord's Word has been joined to the elements, the congregation receives a reminder that peace with God and one another has entered into our midst. We sing of Him Who is present, in, with and under the Bread and Wine. There, as your voices echo the Word of God from John, Chapter 1, the Spirit opens your hearts to behold Him as the Lamb of God, slain, risen and ascended.

Here, the Lord first communes the men who will serve Him to you. They, we, receive as you receive, from the same hand and mouth whom Jesus has already come to and cleansed. From that, the distribution of

God's gifts continues. Through earthly elements, the Lord of All touches communicants. As table after table recline in the Presence of Jesus, the seated congregation sings words which are tied to the readings of the day, or to the theme of the Lord's Feast.

Finally, when all have received the Body and Blood of Jesus, or a reminder of the grace God gave them in Holy Baptism, or words to encourage them to come to the Font, some of the remaining elements may be consumed and some veiled. The congregation sings of the reality that God has truly been beheld by us. We proclaim that we truly are free to depart in His peace.

Prepared to go, the congregation rises to give thanks to God through a man who again stands in their stead. The congregation then receives a Trinitarian blessing. We are reminded that the totality of God looks upon us, and we live! We are freed to depart in Christ!

**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.

Trinity XIV (*LSB One-year series*)

Introit Psalm 84:9-10a, 1-2a; Psalm 119:9-16; Proverbs 4:10-23; Galatians 5:16-24; St. Luke 17:11-19

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***Soli Deo Gloria***