
Session 3: Anglican Liturgy and the Sacramental Life

"Liturgy is of comfort to the disarrayed mind. We need not choose our thoughts. The words are aligned, like a rope for us to cling to." — Sister Monica Joan, *Call the Midwife*

"Liturgy is a kind of ritualized action performed within the context of gathered worship (regardless of tradition), and it always involves both scripted and spontaneous actions; it is capable of forming both our beliefs and desires in complex ways" (*What Does Liturgy Have to Do with Doctrine?* Joshua Cockayne, p 17).

- **What Is the Value of a Liturgical Life? On Means and Ends**

- ✓ Habituation: The Means

- **Our spiritual growth is vitally connected to our bodies.** Liturgy (the public work of the people) takes place in us and through us. Liturgy is not a private matter but is shaped in community and by our bodies, our material presence. "Our body is both the place of our personal presence and the temple of the living God—it is the place we meet with him and he lives in and through us" (Matthew Lee Anderson, *Earthen Vessels*, p 182). Christ takes up residence *in* us (Gal 2:20; see also 2 Cor 4:10). Therefore, the habits and patterns of our bodies matter. Our routine and repetitive activities matter.
- **Our spiritual growth is vitally connected to our habits.** "If you think of worship [or liturgy] as a bottom-up, expressive endeavor, repetition will seem insincere and inauthentic. But when you see worship [and liturgy] as an invitation to a top-down encounter in which God is refashioning your deepest habits, then repetition looks very different: it's how God rehabituates us. In a formational paradigm, repetition isn't insincere, because you're not *showing*, your *submitting*. This is crucial because there is no formation without habituation. Virtue formation takes practice, and there is no practice that is not repetitive. We willingly embrace repetition as a good in all kinds of other sectors of our life—to hone our golf swing, our piano prowess, and our mathematical abilities, for example. If the sovereign Lord has created us as creatures of habit, why should we think repetition is inimical to our spiritual growth?" (*You Are What You Love*, p 80).

- ✓ Formation: The Goal

- **Our spiritual growing is vitally connected to our beliefs.** If our chief end is being formed into the image and glory of Christ, and if habituation is the means of getting us there, then I propose we explore a crucial link between our beliefs and our liturgy; that is, between what we know to be true and how we practice that truth daily. Tish Warren offers an important insight in this way. From her *Prayer in the Night* she writes this:

"My friend Julie (Hunter's wife) is an artist. Her watercolors hang in my kitchen. Years ago, when her son was very young, he had to have surgery. Like any parents whose child is going under the knife, my friends were anxious. Before the nurses wheeled their son into the operating room, Julie looked at Hunter and said, 'We have to decide right now whether or not God is good, because if we wait to determine that by the results of this surgery, we will always keep God on trial.'

If the question of whether God is good or not ... is determined solely by the balance of joy in



our own lives or in the world, we will never be able to say anything about who God is or what God is like. The evidence is frankly inconclusive. If the story of my own short life and feelings determines God's character, then he is Jekyll and Hyde. This way of approaching God becomes a never-ending game of poker. For every breath-taking splash of a whale's breach, I raise you a forest fire obliterating acre after acre. For every Monarch migration, I raise you ticks spreading Lyme disease. For every mother enraptured by her child's first smile, there is another mother whose newborn struggles for his final breath. For every inspiring act of human goodness, there is another person scheming against the weak. In all our lives, from the happiest to the most tragic, the circumstantial evidence for God's goodness is divided. There is beauty and there is horror.

We cannot hold together human vulnerability and God's trustworthiness at the same time unless there is some certain sign that God loves us, that he isn't an absentee landlord or, worse, a monster. But we cannot divine such a sign from the circumstances of our lives or of the world. We have to decide about what we believe who God is and what he is like. We have to decide if anyone keeps watch with us. It is unavoidably—even irritatingly—a decision based on doctrine, first principles we return to again and again, the story we define our lives by." (pp 27-28)

What is vitally important here is the admonition to **decide beforehand** whether or not God is good. If I maintain that my circumstances determine God's goodness, then I'm living dangerously close to a shipwrecked faith. On the other hand, if I first commit to the goodness of God, then my circumstances cannot keep God in the dock. Certainly, circumstances are part of my story, but they do not the author of my story! Behind and before, through and alongside my story is a sustaining metanarrative — a narrative within a narrative — that is grounded in a commitment to believe that God is good, no matter what. And by repeatedly insisting that God is good, then I gradually become a person who can rest in that goodness, no matter what. Like Christ in Gethsemane, I am resolute to believe that God is good, no matter what. Beginning every day with a liturgy that re-affirms what I know of God's character helps me re-calibrate circumstances in light of who God is. Beliefs and behavior are indelibly linked.

- **Part of our formation includes a logical sequence**, expressed in our worship order as outlined by the *Book of Common Prayer*. Consider the sequence before we share in the Holy Communion, for example. We confess our solidarity in sin (Prayer of Confession) and then rest in the assurance of God's forgiveness (Declaration of Pardon), which then allows us to extend an offering of peace to one another (the Peace) settling any disputes we may have before offering our gratitude to God with a portion of what he has given to us (Matt 5:23-24). This sequence is intended to rid us of any defilements privately or estrangements publicly so that we have a clean conscience going into Holy Communion. **This pattern that is designed to characterize our daily lives.** Confession > Forgiveness > Reconciliation > Gratitude > Celebration of new life in Christ as we feed on him and are nourished by him throughout our day.
- **What Other Practices Are Useful for Growth in Faith?**
 - ✓ Prayer



- Fundamentally, prayer is an expression of our dependence upon God. Prayer is the surging of the human heart to be embraced by the heart of God.
- Our purpose in prayer is to glorify God by seeing him actively accomplish his will in our lives. God, not self, is the focus of all our prayers and it is his will we must pursue in our conversations with God. This is why we often close our prayers with the caveat, "yet not my will but yours" or "in Jesus's name."
- ✓ Lectio Divina
 - Reflective reading; slow reading; prayerful reading. Not study, not analytical, but contemplative reading. The pattern is first listening for God's voice through Scripture, second pray for God to reveal himself to you through the words, and finally ponder the implications.
- ✓ Liturgical Calendar
 - Along with the entire Anglican communion we establish a rhythm where we live into the life of Christ throughout the year and every year. [See video.](#)
- **How Can I See All of Life through a Sacramental Lens?**
 - "I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before him, who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king." (Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*). There are no mundane duties, no wearisome moments of boredom. None. Whether active or passive, busy or idle, God is present and accounted for at all times because he is *in* all things, material and immaterial. Not a sparrow falls; not a hair unnumbered. Awareness of God's presence is both sustaining and animating (Mt. 28:20; Col. 3:17). God's presence has the profound appeal of intimacy.
 - ✓ A sacrament is a means of God's grace imparted to our lives. While Scripture sanctions two sacraments, this is not to say God is limited to only two.
 - What about **in relationships**? How is God evident to you through others?
 - In **circumstances**? Where is God's presence in your situations?
 - In "**signals of transcendence**," which are faint but very real promptings of something beyond or behind the mundane. Like a hint or a clue in our search for something deeper, if we follow these signals, we can be awakened to unseen realities. These "God adumbrations" serve to provide hints of a divine presence in and among the path of our ordinary, everyday lives. Take nature, for example. When we are struck by the majesty of a vast sunrise over the ocean or the subtle, silent moment under a canopy of trees as fog rests on the forest floor, our spirits surge with a peace as the notion of beauty is awakened within us. Or through story, authors often evoke emotions in readers that create connections. These connections become touch points, not only between writer and reader, but between reader and God linking us to a world beyond the material. This "secondary world" constructed by authors in story admits us "to experiences other than our own" (C. S. Lewis). This linkage between our prima facie world and the world beyond are divine signals of transcendence, indications that God is in and amongst us. Most importantly, these moments often lead to transformation.
 - Recommend David DeSilva's book *Sacramental Life*

- Next Up?
 - ✓ Anglican History
 - ✓ Christ Our Life: Our Values and the Anglican way