

20) The Church, Part 3

When it comes to worship there is also quite a bit of diversity in the practice of various churches.

1) While Protestant churches have emphasized preaching, and preaching based on scripture as the centre of worship, non-Protestant churches have emphasized special readings with responses (called liturgy) authorized by the hierarchy of the church. There are special manuals published by the church's doctrinal and liturgical office containing prayers and readings for each and every Sunday of the church year and special services also. Local parish priests follow these manuals when preparing every worship service. For Protestants, however, what scriptures are read and what the preacher preaches, as well as the prayers, the music and all else, is something that each preacher and congregation decide and prepare for themselves. There is much more freedom and even spontaneity in Protestant worship, and it aims to be more personal also.

Having said that, however, the quality of Protestant worship can vary that much more widely as well because it is so dependent on the local preacher and what the congregation choose to respond to and accept. Let's face it, some preaching and some praying is mediocre if not downright bad. In the more liturgical churches, you still have well framed readings, prayers and even homiletical suggestions for priests to work from. In Protestant worship almost anything can go. At the same time, we also live in times where people feel freer to pick and choose their churches, even crossing traditional denominational commitments all too often. So many of you at Armour Heights come to us from backgrounds in Christianity or non-Christianity that are not Presbyterian or even Protestant in roots.

2) There is also quite a bit of diversity within Protestant churches depending on factors such as:
A) the intellect versus the emotions in worship. What is the balance between the mind and the heart, the thinking and the feeling in worship? Both are important and traditionally, Presbyterians have prized solid, deep and rigorous intellect in their preachers. The cost to that has sometimes been a lack of vibrant emotion in worship. At Armour Heights we like to emphasize the best of both worlds: deep emotion and deep thought that gives meaning to life.

B) Music is also a very important part of worship. Some churches like traditional, choral based music while others prefer contemporary music with a worship band rather than an organ. At Armour Heights we have a blend and variety, catering to the best of both worlds.

C) The structure of worship can vary between churches also. While communion or the mass are the central part of worship in Roman Catholic and Anglican services, the sermon is at the centre of Protestant worship. But where does the sermon fit in in relation to all else in worship? At Armour Heights, we like to put the sermon in the middle of worship with a time

of preparation ahead (call to worship, prayer of approach and confession, sharing the peace) and the response to the word and sermon afterwards (prayer of thanksgiving & pastoral concern, followed by a concluding hymn, benediction and amen). We prepare to hear the word, then hear the word read and proclaimed, and then respond to the word with a prayer of thanksgiving and concern for each other and our world. We conclude with the benediction which is a sending forth into our lives and our world refreshed and renewed in our call as disciples of Jesus going out into a new week.

3) Finally, in the last generation, and with the growth of ecumenism (growing cooperation and mutual learning between Christian denominations), both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches have evolved in interesting ways. While Roman Catholic churches have put more emphasis on preaching as training for its priests and within their worship services, we Protestants have become more mindful of the church year with special readings each Sunday following a common set of readings all churches follow (called the lectionary). We now follow the church seasons, hold special services like Ash Wednesday to mark the beginning of Lent and have more responsive liturgy within our worship services. It is a wonderful thing to be able to learn from one another and grow toward greater alignment in our worship.

While we follow the church year closely at Armour Heights in alignment with all Christian churches, the readings for each Sunday can vary, as can the themes. We pivot according to what is happening in our world or what issues we choose to engage on particular Sundays. We typically choose one bible reading and sometimes more depending on the theme (instead of three or four every Sunday from the lectionary) because we want to engage the passage of scripture more deeply, exploring its context and the larger biblical narrative within which it is heard and meditated upon. A lot of work goes into every worship service, but the sermon itself is the biggest piece of work, crafted through deep study of scripture, prayer, and the search for good illustrations. The sermon and reading also frames the overall worship theme, and Armour Heights is somewhat unique in that we have a theme for worship each and every Sunday, not just for special occasions and times of the year.

What do you think?

Please send any questions you may have about our worship services to: Dr. Harris
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