**Divine Service Part II:**

**Service of the Word**

Trinity 19 – 10.23.2022

Why do we worship as we do? We began to answer that last week, looking at what is called the preparation for the Divine Service, this week we examine the “Service of the Word.”

Christ, the very Word of God made flesh, Who spoke everything into being in the beginning, is still the Word speaking things into being – faith, His Body and Blood, forgiveness – speaking these things into being now through the mouths of His called servants. He is the living Word still coming down from heaven.

The Service of the Word begins after the absolution – the forgiveness of sin – with the Introit. Introit is Latin for entrance. During the reading of the introit the pastor enters the chancel, that space, which in the temple had been called the holy of holies. It was where the Presence of God would appear. It was closed off to everybody with a veil to protect God’s people. Only the High Priest could enter it on one day – the Day of Atonement – in order to make atonement for the people with blood of the sacrifice sprinkled on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant.

The chancel now stands open, the veil torn asunder when the Word made flesh died upon the cross. Christ's death destroyed those things which separate us from God, sin and death.

Now the chancel is that precious place where God meets His children. He invites them to come to Him and He blesses them. And we respond to the introit with halleluias, rejoicing that we can approach the throne of God's grace.

We continue responding with the words of the Gloria Patri, Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. In ourselves we do not have the words to express appropriate thankfulness for what we have just received in the Absolution, but God’s Word does – so we respond with God’s Word.

Having received forgiveness, we are further emboldened to seek from God’s mercy in the Kyrie, singing, “Lord, have mercy,” knowing we will receive it. Wherefore we continue in Scriptural thanks and praise in the Gloria in Excelsis. Pastor begins this confession with “Glory be to God on high.” God’s people continue praising God in confessing what God has done for us in Christ; taking away our sins, and granting us the Holy Spirit that we might believe and confess this great gift of God’s mercy.

The pastor greets the congregation as the one called by God to serve them as His servant, “The Peace of the Lord be with you.” They in turn bless Him – “and with Thy Spirit.” God’s people bestowing God’s Spirit on him.

“Let us pray,’ is the invitation to join together in prayer. While the pastor may speak the words of the prayer, we all pray together. The congregation’s response of, “Amen,” is their affirmation of the prayer – “yes, let it be so.” Those saying, “Amen,” are declaring, “this is also my prayer, Lord God, let it be so.”

Where else is it appropriate to say amen?

Whenever you desire what was spoken, to be done.

Is this prayer your desire? Amen!

Take eat, this is My body, given for you. Amen!

Take drink, this cup is the new testament in My blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Amen!

When you say ‘Amen,’ you are claiming that which you are “amen”-ing as your own.

The Collect of the Day is a prayer that collects together the theme of the day in a specific pattern. It addresses to whom it is speaking, gives a short phrase of rationale for the coming request, then the petition itself, based upon the benefit or goal toward which the petition is directed, and finally a termination – usually doxological – a phrase which gives glory to God.

At this point, the congregation is to be seated to hear God’s Word. First the Old Testament lesson is read – remember that it’s central theme is Christ and Him crucified – it always points forward to God’s Christ.

The Gradual (read responsively) is a passage of Scripture that bridges the Old and New Testaments. Like unto the Introit, this is most often taken from the Psalms.

A second reading is read, most often it is from a New Testament Epistle, or letter. It may sometimes come from the book of Acts, or Revelation. This second reading furth builds the them, and is usually didactic, that is, instructional – it teaches us about our life in Christ.

Following these two readings, we rise and respond with the triple alleluia. Why triple? We are praising God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One God in Three Persons – for His work accomplished for us.

Why do we rise? It is not liturgical gymnastics, nor is it done to keep you from falling asleep. We stand in a posture of reverence. It is in anticipation of the Gospel lesson in which we hear the Good News of God who came down and took upon Himself our flesh to save us. Gospel lessons are accounts from the very life of Christ, and have the pride of the highest place in the readings of the Divine Service.

Following the Gospel we confess our faith. The Spirit, at work in the word we have heard, has confirmed that faith within us. We have learned of that faith from the Scriptures which make us wise unto salvation.

You will notice that there are two creeds we use most often. We could discuss how these creeds evolved, but that requires the time for a lengthier discussion – which is why you are invited to Bible Study.

Simply stated, the Nicene Creed is more festive, so it is prominent when we CELEBRATE the Lord’s Supper. On the other hand, the Apostles’ Creed is the creed of our baptism – our daily Creed – the everyday speaking the faith.

Following our confession, a hymn precedes the sermon. It teaches and confesses the theme of the day. The rich words of our hymn texts teach and reaffirm the faith.

Many see the sermon as the highlight of the service, and indeed it is important. Dr. Luther stated that the omission and abuse of preaching were two of three serious abuses that had crept into the church. It is important! I pray for the Spirit’s guidance as I prepare the sermons, long before preaching. I have, for many years, prayed a prayer Luther wrote for before the sermon which asks that God’s Word proclaimed in the sermon might change our hearts and be indelibly etched there.

Many believe that the purpose of the sermon is simply to impart wisdom, that it has the sole purpose of teaching people how to live more holy and God-pleasing lives. Indeed, we pray that such might happen. But if you are only ***more holy*** or ***more God-pleasing***, then you still fall short. You are to be more righteous than the Scribes and Pharisees, you are to be “perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

I can tell you what to do, and I can tell you what you should not be doing. You will feel the guilty weight of your sins. Try as we might, you and I are not perfect. Like we said earlier, we are poor, miserable, sinners.

But confessing that truth is where we need to be. Our confession in the Creed set the tone. God graciously created us and sustains us in this body and life, and then He gave His only begotten Son to redeem us – to purchase us back from our sins and death. He also gives us His Holy Spirit who works through Word and Sacraments to build us in the true faith to trust in Christ, not ourselves.

So, the sermon’s main goal is to point us not to ourselves, but to Christ. In fact, Jesus gives us the purpose of the sermon. Just before departing from them and ascending into heaven, *Jesus said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you*.” (Luke 24:44-49)

Repentance for the forgiveness of sins is the purpose of the sermon. Sinfulness is exposed so that Christ’s work for the forgiveness of sins might be proclaimed. It is all about Christ crucified for you – it is all about forgiveness, about God’s wrath against sin being gone, and that you are now a child of heaven – one of God’s saints. Amen – let it be so, just as the pastor proclaims.

It is for this reason that God’s under-shepherd proclaims the votum upon God’s people. It is a direct quote from Scripture – it is God’s Word. What God proclaims in it – He delivers to you. The peace of God which passes all understanding does keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

God’s people respond singing the offertory, by the way, an Old Testament passage from Psalm 51. It is saying, “yes Lord, what we have just heard in the sermon, accomplish in us. Remove those sins from our life, and the desire to do them. Make us abide and rest in the peace which has been delivered in the Gospel.” Do you understand that as your prayer when you sing, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold be with Thy free spirit. Amen. YES! So let it be to us.

Our offerings are our further response of joy! We give back a generous gift from the firstfruits of what God has graciously given to us.

In our joy and confidence of God’s grace, we raise up our prayers and petitions to Him in the prayer of the Church. We prayer for things regarding our faith and our life in the world.

You might say that this prayer bring to a climax the Service of the Word, understanding what a gracious gift it is to have God's Christ, the very Word made flesh come to us, speak to us, and bless us in the Word we hear.

This service of the Word leaves us hungry for more. God’s Christ has come to us in the Word, it leaves us begging for even greater blessings. And yes, He does come to us in an even greater way. He comes to us in His flesh and blood of the sacrament. We gather at His table today to receive Him – the highest point of the Divine Service – The Service of the Sacrament. Amen.