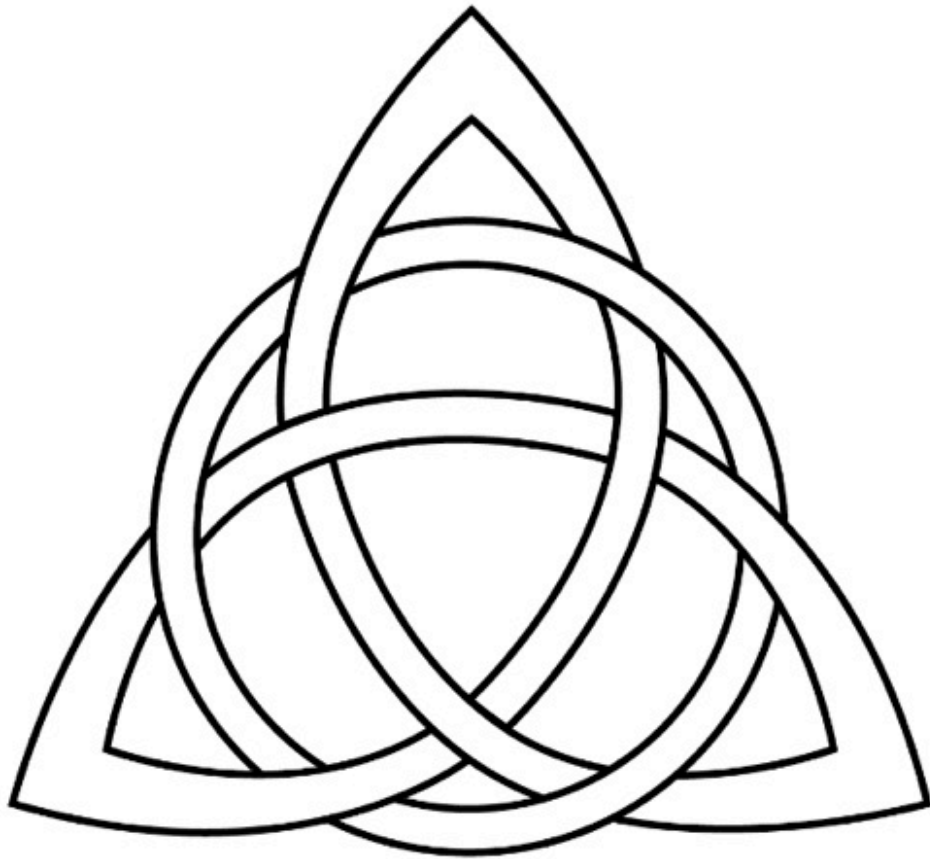


**A
GUIDE
TO THE
LITURGY**



TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Birmingham, Alabama

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

We are glad you are interested in learning more about the form and content of worship at Trinity Presbyterian Church. We believe our greatest privilege and responsibility is to gather together in worship of the living God. We also believe our way of worshipping is firmly rooted in the Scriptures and in the history of the church.

In other religions, people serve their gods and hope the gods are pleased. The god may be named Zeus or Allah, “career” or “romance,” but all idols have one thing in common: they make demands on their worshippers before giving gifts to them. But the Christian gospel does not work that way. Our God serves us first; only then do we serve Him, as a response of love and gratitude to His freely given gifts. This pattern is reflected in our worship service: God gives and we receive. God acts and we react. God offers and we respond. This is why we like to talk about the Sunday gathering as the “Lord’s service” (or the “divine service”), more than “worship.” Yes, we do worship when we gather, but our service towards God is a reflex to God’s service rendered to us. God serves us by calling us together, inviting us into His presence, forgiving our sins, speaking to us through the Scriptures, feeding us at His table, and sending us out with His blessing. We respond with thanksgiving in prayer and song, by listening attentively to His Word, by giving tithes and other offerings, and by feasting at His table. We must always remember that we come to worship first and foremost to get, not to give. Even on Sunday mornings, it holds true that we love God only because He first loves us.

The Lord’s Service and Pastoral Care

Do not be put off by the fact that much of our service is scripted and repetitive. While there are certainly portions of the service that change from week to week or season to season, we intentionally have spoken and sung lines that remain unchanged. In fact, much of the service is repeated, verbatim, week after week, year after year, decade after decade. We do this because God has given His people certain forms, words, and rituals to do again and again so they can have a shaping effect on us. We are not engaged in mindless repetition; rather, we are storing up the Word of the Lord in our hearts. Repeated worship forms are like a river running over stones, smoothing and shaping them over time. The rituals of the liturgy become so ingrained in us that they are woven into the very fiber of our identity.

We have a fixed liturgy because we believe liturgical routine is an excellent form of pastoral care and is the most effective form of cradle-to-grave discipleship there is. The repetition of certain portions of the service allows everyone to participate, even those who are not able to follow a sermon or read the lines of a new hymn. In other words, it makes our worship inclusive of the very young, the very old, and the mentally challenged—the very sorts of people God wants the church to care for most diligently.

Before Jesus came into the world, God’s people worshipped Him in ways that were highly ritualized. With the coming of Jesus, much changed in the form and content of worship. However, the same Spirit who inspired the ancient Israelites to worship with repetitive forms still does so in the new covenant church. What do we see when we get glimpses of the worship practices of the early Christians? They are reciting Psalms (Acts 4:23-31; Eph. 5:19) and prayers (Luke 11:1-4) together, singing the same pieces of music again and again (Rev. 4:8-11), and celebrating the Lord’s Supper every week when they gather (Acts 20:7). The earliest Christians did not see ceremony and ritual as intrinsically evil; rather, ceremony and ritual rooted in Scripture served as a powerfully formative and symbolic way of helping Christians internalize the great truths of the gospel.

Covenant Renewal Worship

Because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on the first day of the week, the church has always gathered to worship on Sunday (“the Lord’s Day”; cf. John 20:1,19,26, Acts 20:7, etc.) in celebration of Christ’s resurrection and victory over death. Christians gather at many different times throughout the week, but Lord’s Day worship is the essential fountainhead from which all other Christian worship, service, and fellowship flow.

Based on the patterns seen throughout Scripture, we view covenant renewal as the primary purpose of Lord’s Day worship. There are plenty of other good reasons for the church to gather (evangelism, education, praise, etc.), but these are side effects and not the focal point. While some well-meaning Christians see no guidelines in Scripture for how the church should worship, we believe that the Bible has much to say on this and that worship “style” is much more than a matter of preference.

The pattern of our liturgy follows the basic biblical structure of sacrificial worship. This pattern is found in both old and new covenant Scriptures, but perhaps the clearest place to see this shape is in Leviticus 9, the first corporate worship service at the newly constructed tabernacle. We are fully warranted in using this pattern in the new covenant.

While Jesus abolished *animal* sacrifice, He did not abrogate *the way* of sacrifice (e.g., Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 13:15, etc.). New covenant worship is still described in sacrificial categories and the church is described as the true temple. As Augustine observed, whatever is fulfilled in Christ (the Head) is also fulfilled in the ongoing life of the church (Christ's body). Therefore, in Christ, our worship service represents the fulfillment and transformation of old covenant liturgical types. The basic service is as follows:

1. **The Lord Calls Us:** The people are called to worship (Lev. 9:5). Our worship is a response to God's summons. He always takes the initiative. We draw near only because He first invites us.
2. **The Lord Cleanses Us:** The sin offering (Lev. 9:15) highlights confession of sin and absolution. Without an initial confession of sin, we are worshipping God with unclean hands and lips. But having been washed, we may enter God's presence.
3. **The Lord Consecrates Us:** The ascension offering (Lev. 9:16) corresponds to our entrance into God's heavenly sanctuary (cf. Heb. 10:19ff) and consecration. This ascent is marked by the *sursum corda* ("Lift your hearts up to the Lord"). The ascension offering consists in a burst of sung praise, since we have received cleansing and access to God's throne room. We enter God's courts with thanksgiving and joy. This offering also includes the reading and preaching of the Word, as we are consecrated to God's service by His truth (Jn. 17:17; Heb. 4:12).
4. **The Lord Collects Our Gifts:** The tribute offering (Lev. 9:17) follows, represented by the collection of tithes and offerings. We offer *ourselves* in the ascension offering; we offer our *works* in the tribute offering. Our works are not acceptable to God apart from the blood sacrifice of Christ, but in Christ, God accepts us and our labors.
5. **The Lord Communes with Us:** The peace offering was at the center of every feast and festival in the old covenant and is the climax of the liturgy (Lev. 9:18-21). This offering is the communion meal we eat in God's presence. The Lord's Supper, of course, is our peace offering in the new covenant, as God shares His table with us.
6. **The Lord Commissions Us:** Finally, we are commissioned. We are sent out with God's benediction (Lev. 9:22-23). At the tabernacle, Aaron raised his hands and blessed the people as he dismissed them (Num. 6:22-27). We are sent out to serve God in the world, carrying His blessing as we go.

An Overview of the Church Calendar

Just as our liturgy follows the sequence of worship prescribed by God, the church calendar is also patterned after the old covenant calendar of festivals and appointed times. The church has historically followed a pattern that shapes and forms our worship and service by continually reminding us of the central facts of redemption. Calendar observance and special services are always optional, but we recognize the wisdom of those who've come before us in setting aside these special days and seasons.

The church calendar has two "cycles" that illustrate how the story of the church flows out of the story of Jesus. The dominical cycle follows the life and ministry of our Lord, and the ecclesiastical cycle commemorates the history of the church. The dominical cycle begins with Advent and runs for about 6 months until it culminates with Ascension and Pentecost. It is foundational, following the contours of the gospel narratives. The ecclesiastical cycle includes special days rooted in church history (e.g., St. Patrick's Day, Reformation Day, etc.), building upon and flowing out of the dominical cycle. The ecclesiastical cycle especially fills in "ordinary time", the other 6 months of the year.

The Pastor's Role in Worship

Another distinct feature of our worship is the role and apparel of the pastor or minister. While there is only one mediator between God and man—Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5)—the ordained minister represents Christ to the church. This simply means that Christ is speaking to, baptizing, and serving His people through the ordained minister. While we wholeheartedly embrace the priesthood of all believers, Scripture also clearly teaches that God sets apart ministers as a gift to His people for the purpose of leading in worship.

Robes and vestments do not set the minister above the congregation, but they do set the minister apart as Christ's representative. The Levitical priests were adorned with robes for glory and beauty (Ex. 28:2), and we believe that it is important that our worship reflect the glory and beauty of our God. While black robes are traditionally academic and judicial apparel, white robes follow the pattern of heavenly worship we see in the book of Revelation (7:9; see also Rev. 4:4, Mk. 9:3) and have been used for much of church history. The stole symbolizes the minister's yoke of service and is often a color that corresponds to the current season of the church year.

EXPLANATION OF THE LORD'S SERVICE

1. The Lord Calls Us

Prelude

The prelude is more than a convenient transition or a beautiful instrumental warm-up. The prelude provides us with a brief opportunity to prepare our hearts for worship. This is the time to deal with any unresolved offense if necessary (Matt. 5) or simply to meditate prayerfully on the "Collect of the Day" provided in the bulletin.

Salutation and Votum (petition)

This is when the pastor (from the back of the sanctuary) greets the congregation in the name of our Triune God. We want everyone to know without a shadow of a doubt who it is that is calling us to worship and to whom we will respond.

Call to Worship

Just as God has always called His people to worship and renew covenant with their Lord, the pastor calls the congregation to worship God with an appropriate passage of Scripture. We wouldn't dream of barging into the Oval Office uninvited; likewise, we wait until we are called by God to enter His heavenly sanctuary together.

Hymn of Procession

Having been called by God to worship Him, we respond with the only appropriate response: praise! The psalms of ascent (Ps. 120-134) show us that it is fitting to sing as we go up to worship God. The pastor's procession down the aisle signifies the movement of the entire congregation into the presence of God.

Prayer of Praise

As the pastor moves to the front, the congregation is now poised to enter God's sanctuary. It was one thing to enter the Holy City (Jerusalem), but it was quite different to enter the courts of God's temple. Quoting from Psalms 122 and 124, we acknowledge the privilege we have to enter God's presence and that we only do so by the empowerment of God's Spirit. The pastor then offers a prayer of praise to God as we enter His courts (Ps. 100).

2. The Lord Cleanses Us (The Sin Offering)

After a brief call to worship the Triune God, we immediately move into confession of sin. If we are going to enter God's house, we must wipe our feet on the welcome mat so we don't track mud into His presence. This is why confession and absolution serve as the "doorway" to the rest of the service.

Confession of Sin

After singing a hymn of confession together (except during Lent) we kneel for the corporate confession of sin as a posture of humility and reverence (Ps. 95:6). While many evangelical churches omit the confession of sin altogether, we believe this is an indispensable part of covenant renewal that is rooted firmly in the biblical pattern of worship.

Declaration of Absolution

What is the declaration of absolution? To absolve is to cleanse from sin. It is a renewal of the promise of washing God made to us in the waters of baptism. While we are justified once and for all at the beginning of the Christian life, we stand in need of continual, ongoing forgiveness as well. When we confess our sins, God is faithful to His covenant promises and absolves us in Christ (1 Jn. 1:8-9). The point of the declaration of absolution is not simply to restore fellowship with God. This is critical, for if we are going to enter God's presence, receive His gifts, and share a meal at His table, we must first be reconciled to Him. But the absolution does more—it serves to assure us of God's favor. It is a renewal of the promises of forgiveness God made to us at our baptisms.

Of course, the pastor has no power in himself to forgive sin. He is not a mediator between God and the people. Rather, he is God's ordained representative, set apart within the covenant community, to speak and act on behalf of God in a unique, symbolic way in the gathered service. Thus, the pastor's declaration of absolution should be heard as though God Himself was speaking from heaven. The pastor is authorized to speak in God's name, so the declaration should be understood as a trustworthy and efficacious application of forgiveness to believers. John Calvin explains the point well: "[Christ calls pastors] in His Name, to declare the forgiveness of sins, that through their instrumentality He may reconcile men to God. In short, properly speaking, it is He alone who forgives sins through His apostles and ministers."

3. The Lord Consecrates Us (The Ascension Offering)

Hymn of Ascent

We have been summoned to the Lord's house, to the foot of the mountain. We have confessed our sins and have been assured that we are clean, ready to enter into the presence of God. With faith in God's promise, we now begin our ascent to His heavenly presence to hear His word and to fellowship with Him at His table (Heb. 10:19-25). Once again following the pattern of the psalms of ascent, we enter God's presence singing His praises (2 Chr. 29:27-28).

Sursum Corda

The *sursum corda* (Latin for "lift up your hearts") is the point in the service when we acknowledge our ascent into God's heavenly sanctuary. Instead of trying to draw God down from heaven with our worship, we believe that God draws His people up into the heavenly sanctuary where Christ, our High Priest, has gone as our forerunner (Heb. 6:19-20). While some liturgical traditions place the *sursum corda* immediately before the Lord's Supper, we believe that the entire service takes place in God's heavenly sanctuary.

Doxology

We all raise our hands together during the doxology as posture of praise for God cleansing us receiving us into His presence. Like little children who want their father to pick them up, we lift up our hands to our heavenly Father and believe that we are drawn up into His glorious presence and join the heavenly hosts in praising our Triune God. We alternate tunes based on the season of the church calendar as a way to include a variety of music.

Scripture readings

We read widely and extensively from Scripture each Lord's Day because we desire to be a people saturated in and shaped by God's Word (Dt. 6:6-9). By this Word we are converted (Ps. 19:7), convicted (Jer. 23:29), revived (Ps. 119:25), sanctified (Jn. 17:17), made wise (Ps. 19:7), and instructed in every good work (2 Tim. 3:14-17). The Word transforms our minds (Rom 12:1-2), affections (Ps. 119:103), and actions (Ps. 119:67).

This practice of corporate reading was necessary in ancient times because most people were illiterate, and only had access to the Scriptures in the context of public worship. Today, of course, we have access to God's Word in private and are free to read it at our leisure. This is a wonderful blessing we should take advantage of as often as we can, especially in family worship. But Scripture itself emphasizes the public hearing of God's Word over any private use of the Bible (Ps. 87:2). When we *hear* the Bible, it is a reminder that God's truth comes from outside of us and carries its own authority. When the Scriptures are publicly read, they confront us in a unique way. Most importantly, it is critical for us to hear God's Word through the ear because faith comes most especially through *hearing* (Rom. 10:17). In the old covenant Scriptures, to "hear" God's Word is virtually equivalent to believing and obeying it (cf. Dt. 6:4; cf. Rom. 10:16). The Spirit works in a special way when the Word goes forth in public worship.

We have readings from every part of the canon of Scripture most weeks because we believe the Bible is one unified, self-interpreting story. The various "parts" of the Bible have to be read in harmony with one another. They confirm one another, according to the biblical pattern of establishing truth on the basis of multiple witnesses (Dt. 19:15). The readings are intended to fit together, showing various biblical themes from an array of perspectives.

Finally, note that we respond to each reading with thanks and praise. In this way, the lectionary trains us in the “manners” of God’s kingdom. God gives Himself to us as His Word is read; it is appropriate for us to respond with a hearty “Thank you!” These affirmations commit us to believe and obey the Word we have heard, in a spirit of joy and gratitude. Even when we hear a part of Scripture that makes us uncomfortable, we are trained to respond in thanksgiving, in the hope that the Spirit will enable us to embrace the whole counsel of God with gladness.

Gospel Lesson

During the gospel reading, the pastor comes to be among the people with the Scriptures, symbolizing that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Individuals may turn and face the pastor wherever he stands.

The gospel reading is given “special treatment” because Scripture is a story, and the climax of that story is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The events recorded in the gospels are the fulfillment of the old covenant Scriptures and the foundation of the other new covenant Scriptures. The gospels are central because Jesus Christ is central. By giving special emphasis to the gospel reading, we highlight that we are a Christ-centered community.

Standing for the gospel reading does not detract from the other readings; rather, it reminds us that those other readings all point to the incarnation of the Son of God and His death and resurrection for our salvation. We stand for the gospel reading like an army standing at attention to hear its Commander-in-Chief speak. We respond to the gospel with a declaration of praise. Christ receives special praise in the lectionary readings because we are disciples of Christ in a way that transcends our discipleship to other prophets and apostles.

Gloria Patri

The *Gloria Patri* (from the Latin text’s opening line: “Glory be to the Father...”) was originally used as a rallying cry during the early church debates over the divinity of Christ and has historically been added to the end of a Scripture lesson. It follows the gospel reading as a reminder that our Triune God has fully and finally revealed Himself to us through the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-4).

Prayer for Illumination

The prayer for illumination focuses on the Holy Spirit's finished work of revelation in Holy Scripture as well as the need for the Spirit's continued work of illuminating our hearts whenever the Word of God is preached.

The Sermon

The sermon has become the focal point and climax of many evangelical worship services, but our goal is for the sermon to complement the many other ways in which God's Word shapes the church's worship. The sermon does hold a very important place in our service, but we believe the climax of covenant renewal is communion with God at the Lord's table. The sermon prepares us for that fellowship by consecrating God's people (note the sacrificial language of Heb. 4:12). The pastor's primary goal is to proclaim God's promises and requirements to the covenant people.

Prayer of Consecration

Following the sermon, the pastor prays that God would effectually consecrate us as living sacrifices through the sword of His word. We trust that God imparts faith through the Scriptures, and we pray for God to help us believe His promises and obey His instructions.

4. The Lord Collects Our Gifts (The Tribute Offering)

Offering and Prayer

The point of the offertory is not just to collect money to support the work of the church; that's necessary, of course, but we offer gifts not just for the good of the church, but for our own good as well. The offertory is not an attempt to buy God's favor or bribe him into blessing us. Rather, we give out of the overflowing gratitude that comes from knowing that in Christ we have received the forgiveness of our sins and new life in the Spirit. In fact, we offer more than our money to God—we offer ourselves, and so we sing a hymn that reflects this desire. God has given generously to us in the gospel; in turn, we desire to give generously to His kingdom and to those in need.

Giving is a way of offering ourselves and the fruits of our labors to God in union with Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest. The practice of tithing trains us in the ways of the kingdom (sacrificial love and self-discipline). In biblical worship, giving generously to the work of God's kingdom is always described in sacrificial terms (e.g., Phil. 4:18). More precisely, the giving of tithes (10% of our increase) and offerings (over and above 10%) corresponds to the biblical tribute offering. But the tribute offering (a bread offering, representing man's work and culture) was never offered on its own; it always followed the sin offering and ascension offering, indicating that God only accepts our works because He has first accepted our persons in and through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ as our substitute. The sin offering (confession of sin) reminds us that God accepts us as we are—as sinners—but the ascension and tribute offerings remind us that God will not allow us to stay as we are. He demands that we consecrate ourselves and our work to His service, and He promises to make this transformation possible by His grace.

The pastor lifts up the congregation's gifts to the Lord in keeping with the old covenant pattern of "waving" or "heaving" offerings up before the Lord (Ex. 29:26-28). We dedicate our gifts to God, and then He gives them back to us to be used for the furtherance of His kingdom.

Song of Intercession

The song of intercession is sometimes used at the beginning of the service as a prayer of penitence, but it also has a long history of use with the corporate prayers of the church. We use several different ancient texts throughout the year: the *Agnus Dei* (Latin for "Lamb of God") during Epiphany and Lent, "Pure and Sinless Lamb of God" during Easter, and the *Kyrie Eleison* (Greek for "Lord have mercy") during Pentecost/Trinity.

Pastoral Prayer/Prayer of the Church

The church is a royal priesthood and so we gather together before God to act as representatives for all humanity. In addition to praying for the sick and afflicted in our own congregation, we make requests on behalf of and for the life of the world. Sometimes the pastor will lead this prayer, and other times the congregation will participate in a responsive prayer (a litany). We always conclude this time by praying together the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray: the Lord's Prayer.

Confession of Faith

When we confess the faith together, we are doing more than reaffirming our intellectual assent to the central tenets of the historic Christian faith. When we say, “I believe,” we are saying that we “trust” or “put our faith in” the Triune God we worship (cf. Acts 16:31). The Nicene Creed is part of the standard Eucharistic liturgy, but we also sing the Apostles Creed on special days in the church calendar and use the Athanasian Creed on Trinity Sunday.

5. The Lord Communes with Us (The Peace/Fellowship Offering)

The Lord’s Supper is the supreme means of covenant renewal between God and His people. The peace/fellowship offering of the old covenant culminated in the animal sacrifice (representing the offerer) being consumed on the altar and rising into the glory cloud of God’s presence that hovered over the Tabernacle. As foreshadowed in the old covenant, the fellowship offering is transformed in the new covenant into a more personal fellowship meal where we feast with God at His table.

The Lord’s Supper involves two distinct movements: we “remind” God of Christ’s sacrifice, and then God comes to visit His people—in blessing or judgment (1 Cor. 11:17-34). The first part is based on Christ’s instruction to celebrate the Supper as His “memorial” (a more accurate translation than “Do this in remembrance of me”). This accords with the old covenant model of God remembering His covenants (Gen. 9:17; Ex. 20:24, 28:12; Num. 10:10) and the new covenant instruction to “show forth the Lord’s death” (1 Cor. 11:26). When God “remembers” His gracious covenant with us in Christ, He comes to visit us by His Spirit and imparts life to us as we receive the body and blood of Christ in faith. This is not transubstantiation (the changing of the physical elements) but the way the Spirit communicates to us the glorified body and blood of Christ.

Preface

The preface serves as an introduction of thanksgiving into the Eucharistic celebration. The salutation between the pastor and congregation echoes the salutation from the beginning of the service and here serves as a prayer for blessing upon the people as the minister celebrates the Lord’s Supper. The people likewise respond in prayer that the minister would be blessed as he carries out his office.

Sanctus

The *Sanctus* (Latin for “holy”) is the refrain of heavenly praise that we see throughout Scripture (Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). We join in praising God with the host of heaven as we prepare to share in the heavenly meal and “see” Jesus in the Word-made-visible (cf. Luke 24:30-35).

“Lord of Sabaoth” is the Old Testament name for God that is commonly interpreted “Lord of Hosts” or, more accurately, “Lord of Armies.”

The Lord’s Supper

Note that our communion liturgy has *two* prayers of thanksgiving (one for the bread and one for the wine). This is the pattern Jesus established at the Last Supper, which became the First Supper for the new community He formed through His death and resurrection. Because of these two prayers, the Lord’s Supper has also become known as the “Eucharist,” from the Greek word for “thanks.” At the Supper, we are trained in giving thanks to God for His gracious gifts. If Adam and Eve had stopped to give thanks, they would not have eaten from the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. Thus, Paul identifies the root of humanity’s problem in our failure to thank and glorify God (Rom. 1:21). The Supper emphasizes thanksgiving, piling gratitude upon gratitude, so that at this table, we are trained in living life as God intended, and are thereby re-formed into Christ’s image bearers.

Receiving the Bread

The bread we use is common household bread, leavened during most of the church year to represent the growth of the kingdom (Matt. 13:33), and unleavened during the season of Lent to symbolize our break with the old world of sin and death (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

Note that we wait to eat the bread together (1 Cor. 11:21, 33). This is because in this meal we act as one body. In this symbolic feast, the Spirit manifests and even creates a bond of oneness, as the many members of the body are united together by our common share in Christ’s sacrificial offering. Waiting to eat together is a way of signifying our communion with Christ and one another at the table and beyond.

Receiving the Wine

We drink the wine as it passed from person to person. This is because in this meal we learn to sacrificially serve one another in the love and strength of Christ. Jesus drank the cup first on our behalf in going to the cross; in drinking the cup, he poured out His life for us. In the same way, following our Savior, we drink the cup so we too can learn to pour out our lives for one another (Mt. 20:23; 26:27-29; 26:39, 42). Having been empowered for service by sharing the cup, we are able to say “my life for yours” to the person next to us. Drinking and then passing the cup hand to hand, as a form of “one anothering” one another, is clearly the pattern Jesus gave us in the Last Supper.

Finally, note that we use wine in the Lord’s Supper, just as Jesus did at the Last Supper. Wine is a symbolic drink in Scripture, signifying festivity, joy, and triumph. At this table, we celebrate Christ’s victory over sin, death, and Satan. For those who are unable to partake of the wine, we also offer grape juice in the center of each tray.

Common Communion Questions

Why do we sit to receive the Supper?

Although other liturgical traditions may celebrate the Eucharistic meal while standing (in a line at the front) or kneeling (at the altar), standing is not a posture for a meal, and kneeling is a posture of contrition. Jesus always instructed crowds to sit down when He fed them, and the disciples were seated at the Last Supper. Sitting and eating together is not only the biblical posture of fellowship, but it also depicts our kingly position as we are seated with Christ in heaven (Eph. 2:6).

Who may participate?

This supper is a family feast for the people of God. We enter the family in baptism; we remain in the family by faithfully participating in the life of a local church. Our table belongs to all Christians, not just members of Trinity Presbyterian Church, and so we invite all members of God’s family to partake with us as the one body of Christ. We ask those who have not been baptized to refrain from participating and instead to reflect on God’s love for the world, manifested in the cross of Christ.

Why are young children allowed to participate?

The participation of young children in the Lord's Supper is referred to as "paedocommunion." Many Christians in our day exclude young children from the Eucharist until they have been confirmed or examined and are able to make a profession of faith and explain the basic tenets of Christianity. Each denomination has its own reasons for these practices, but they generally rest upon Paul's instruction that communicants should "examine themselves" so as not to partake of the Lord's Supper "in an unworthy manner" (1 Cor. 11).

Those who practice paedocommunion follow the biblical pattern of including all baptized, covenant children in the celebration of God's feasts and festivals (e.g., Ex. 12). We recognize the importance of discipling new converts, but we understand Jesus' instructions to emphasize that teaching follows baptism (Matt. 28:19). In addition, we understand that Paul's correctives in 1 Cor. 11 are related not to introspection, IQ, or sacramental theology but have to do with how the Corinthian church's divisions and factions actually undermined the express purpose of Holy Communion—feasting together as the one body of Christ!

The following is an excerpt from the TPC statement on paedocommunion adopted by the session in 2005:

"We believe covenant children are part of the church family and ought to be treated accordingly. We desire to have covenant children to be present with the gathered community in worship and to participate in the service as much as possible (though we understand this cannot always be done). We want to do full justice to Jesus' declaration that covenant children are members of His kingdom and bearers of His name (Mt. 18:1-14; 19:13). We want to receive covenant children into the family of God as fully as possible, giving them needed nurture and care in the covenant community.

We recognize that the issue of including baptized children at the Lord's Table is one of great importance and varying conviction in the contemporary Reformed church (including our own congregation). Out of a desire to practice a charitable catholicity, our church welcomes families holding both paedocommunion and credocommunion viewpoints. We recognize that both paedocommunionists and credocommunionists are concerned to be faithful to Scripture and to the church's historic practice (with paedocommunionists pointing to the early centuries of the church, and credocommunionists pointing to the Reformational era). While

individual officers are free to take a humble, conscientious stance on the issue as they see fit, as a session, we are neutral and inclusive, allowing both practices, as families desire. No one will be ostracized for practicing one view or the other. The session insists on cooperative agreement, even in the midst of possible differences on this issue within our church body.”

Why do we celebrate the Lord’s Supper every week?

Weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper has become surprisingly uncommon in American churches for a number of reasons, but we believe that covenant renewal always culminates in a shared meal. There is nothing magical about the Lord’s Supper, but we strongly believe that it is an efficacious means of grace in which God blesses His people and strengthens them for service.

6. The Lord Commissions Us

Hymn of Dismissal

Following Jesus’ example (Matt. 26:30), we sing a hymn as we prepare to go out into the world. Having received nourishment and renewed covenant with our gracious God, we now leave the heavenly sanctuary ready to labor in Christ’s kingdom and lay down our lives in service.

Benediction

It was the Lord Himself who called us to worship Him, and now the Lord Himself—through His minister—pronounces benediction upon His people. The pastor is declaring God’s blessing and commissioning us to go out and serve as priests for God in the world. Having been blessed by God, we are ready to go bless the world!

Threefold “Amen”

We respond to God’s declaration and to the entire service with the sung affirmation: “Amen!”—meaning “Let it be so!”

CONCLUSION

Liturgy is strange to many Americans in our day, so we hope that this liturgy guide has helped explain the rich theology and history that undergirds our worship service. Many in our culture think of liturgy as repetitive and dry, but it would be difficult to underestimate the formative power of robust, lively liturgy. Unfortunately, much of the liturgy's power is diminished when we don't understand what we're doing or why we're doing it. Once we gain this important knowledge, we can shift our focus away from the logistics of the service and onto the One we meet in worship. C.S. Lewis made this point well by comparing liturgy to a dance:

Every service is a structure of acts and words through which we receive a sacrament, or repent, or supplicate, or adore. And it enables us to do these things best—if you like, it "works" best—when, through long familiarity, we don't have to think about it. As long as you notice, and have to count, the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance..... The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God.

But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about the worship is a different thing from worshipping.

Now that you've spent time thinking about our worship, we hope that you will join us in worship each Lord's Day as we renew covenant with our God, sing praise to our risen Savior, and receive God's gifts together.

RECOMMENDED READING

Tim Gallant, *Feed My Lambs*

Peter Leithart, *Blessed are the Hungry*

Peter Leithart, *The Baptized Body*

Rich Lusk, "Of Prayer Books and Puritans: Reform, Revival, and Renewal in Protestant Worship" (<http://www.trinity-pres.net/essays/HistoryofReformedWorship.pdf>)

Rich Lusk, *Paedofaith*

Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service*

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