

# How the Redeemed World Is Done: Charting the Relationship between Liturgy, Discipleship, and Mission

James Marriott

## What is the purpose of Christian Worship?

In my recent experiences, which include the research and writing of a dissertation on worship, my teaching of various worship courses at a seminary, my participation in worship leadership nearly every day of the week, and my own discipleship as a church member, husband, and father, I constantly encounter this question. I hear others asking it, both in voice and in action, as they fit their priorities and loves into the endless demands for time and capacity. I ask it myself. What is the point of all of this? What is the purpose of Christian worship?

The uncertainty surrounding this question is shown in the ways our societies and communities engage Christian worship. Simply listing some of the recurring issues demonstrates this uncertainty. Attendance in Christian worship in many church bodies is significantly diminished. Worshiping communities continue to be one of the most segregated spaces of our week. Transactional and consumeristic expectations surround the engagement of Christian worship, both “what’s in it for us” and “what we do for God.” Various influences of Cartesian modernity continue to drive a text-based, cognitive, individualized practice of the Christian faith that permeates worship patterns. Christian

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worship leaders continue to modify, recreate, argue about, and invest countless dollars and hours in revitalizing Christian worship practices. Our worship is also one of the most bifurcated moments in the Christian life! How does what we do on Sunday morning relate to the rest of our lives? And yet, we face the same frustratingly simple question that has faced Christian communities throughout history. We keep asking: What is the purpose of Christian worship?

This short essay is intended to frame a more extensive pursuit of that very question. And while we may not find definitive “answers” to this question, we can become equipped with better tools for the journey, better questions to ask, and a better sense of our *koinonia*. While the larger pursuit will journey through the Scriptures, theology, history, the arts, the social sciences, and other pertinent influences, these next few pages are intended to illuminate the path for the journey. Here we will work to establish a defensible thesis and answer to the question: What is the purpose of Christian worship?

Discipleship. The purpose of Christian worship is discipleship. This is certainly not novel, as this has been the orthodox understanding of Christian worship throughout the history and practice of the Christian Church. If that thesis is simple enough, perhaps a negative extension of it will be more compelling: Issues in Christian discipleship stem directly from issues in the practice of Christian worship. The Church is less effective as Church when our worship is oriented toward something other than Christian discipleship—whether the colonialist power of the Roman empire, the decision-oriented practices of late revivalism, the attraction-oriented practices of so-called “seeker-services,” or the narrow purview of traditionalism, to name a few. So how do we as servants of the Church and ritual stewards of Christian communities, guard against these pitfalls that distract us from this simple thesis? What follows is an attempt to articulate a case for Christian worship as discipleship, in the hopes that you, through your calling, might journey this careful path yourself, and may shepherd those in your spiritual care to the same.

### **On Whose Terms?**

Present-day liturgical theology draws upon authors from a great variety of fields and perspectives: philosophy, liturgical theology, ritual studies, cultural anthropology, and the like. Each employs a distinct set of terms as well as an overlapping understanding of the same terms. For our thesis, then, it is crucial to establish a foundational understanding of *liturgy* and *discipleship*. Not only are these words both foundational and prominent in the field of liturgical theology, but they also are loaded with hermeneutical “baggage” from our own experiences. I offer below my operative meaning of these terms as a common foundation for our consideration.

#### *Discipleship*

Discipleship occurs on two axes for the Christian. The Christian is made to be a disciple (vertical axis); the Christian lives as a disciple (horizontal axis). This is quite simply depicted by Robert Kolb and Charles Arand who describe two kinds of righteousness for the Christian.<sup>1</sup> First, the Christian is made righteous before God by grace through faith, not of one’s own merit, through the creative and recreative Word of God. This passive righteousness is received as the promises of God are heard, and the Spirit

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creates faith and trust in the hearer through these promises. As will be demonstrated below in greater detail, the Church liturgically stewards the enactment of this passive righteousness in the Christian, not in a manner that “puts God in a box,” but rather in a way that trusts the places and manner God has promised to act. The passivity is what is important here. Christian worship is often seen and enacted as that which the Christian does to earn some sort of favor with God. We must distinguish our Lutheran liturgical enactments from the patterns and practices which lead to this kind of misguided endeavor. We revel in the grace of God enacted upon us as “Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous.”<sup>2</sup>

The second axis enacts a different kind of righteousness, a righteousness established and enacted by God’s human creatures throughout His creation. As Christian disciples, saved by grace through faith (passive righteousness), we live as Christ’s redeemed and restored people in the world (active righteousness): “that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally.”<sup>3</sup> We serve Christ by serving our neighbor. As we live as God’s renewed and forgiven people, we model “how the redeemed world is done.”<sup>4</sup>

Central to our understanding of righteousness is the notion of being in a right relationship. We are put into a right relationship with God through faith. We are then able to be in a right relationship with our neighbor through love and service. In the final section of the essay, I will outline how the liturgy of the Christian Church habituates God’s people into specific behaviors, living in a right relationship with their neighbors through love and service. Here I am simply distinguishing these two kinds of righteousness for the Christian disciple and suggesting that both kinds of righteousness are enacted in our liturgical practice. Through the liturgy, Christ makes disciples and Christ teaches and empowers His disciples to live in His world through His Word and His Spirit.

### *Liturgy*

With this understanding of discipleship, I also hope to broaden and sharpen our understanding of *liturgy*. Liturgy is the performance of faith. The two critical words in this definition are “performance” and “faith.” The notion of “performance” brings together Roy Rappaport’s fundamental definition of ritual (“the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers”<sup>5</sup>), James K.A. Smith’s emphasis in *Desiring the Kingdom* on behavioral practices as the source of knowledge,<sup>6</sup> and Aidan Kavanagh’s suggestion that “A liturgy of Christians is thus nothing less than the way a redeemed world is, so to speak, done.”<sup>7</sup> Here Kavanagh most succinctly articulates my definition of liturgy as performance of faith. For Kavanagh, “the Church is the central workshop of the human

The Church’s orientation is towards the world, bearing witness to a story that is the story of humanity’s salvation. God is making the world new *through* Jesus Christ *by* the power of the Spirit *in* the Church which *is* the body of Christ. This is God’s story.

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City, a City which under grace has already begun to mutate by fits and starts into the City-of-God-in-the-making, the focal point of a World made new in Christ Jesus.”<sup>8</sup> The Church’s orientation is towards the world, bearing witness to a story that is the story of humanity’s salvation. God is making the world new *through* Jesus Christ *by* the power of the Spirit *in* the Church which *is* the body of Christ. This is God’s story. By faith in this story, the Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us<sup>9</sup> to share in this story and invite others to participate, as well. Liturgy, then, is not merely a pattern of rites and ceremonies that we enact as community on a consistent basis though—as we will see below—these rites and ceremonies are certainly important. Here liturgy has a cosmic scope. It is performing our redemption, living out God’s story, “doing” the world rightly. It is the performance of our faith—not by “our own understanding or strength,”<sup>10</sup> but by the Spirit’s work in and through us as the Church in the world.

This understanding of liturgy, as the performance of faith, provides an important framework for bridging the gap between “11:00 on Sunday morning” and the daily life. Many articulations of “liturgy” seem to be Sunday-specific, more concerned about what we do *at* church than what we do *as* church. Among these Sunday-specific liturgies, some seem to suggest that Sunday morning is an escape from the daily life, an oasis in the desert of this world, a culture all its own, a way of being humanity removed from the burdens and responsibilities of being human in relation to other humans. We enter the sanctuary to find sanctuary—no wonder we are so disappointed when we find the same broken people from the same broken world filling our “sanctuary!” (Or, more frighteningly, we find that this so-called sanctuary cannot really provide the escape that we need from ourselves and our own sinful brokenness.) This vision of the liturgy proclaims a redeemed Church, yet describes that church in terms of a juxtaposition to the world, rather than the Church as “the focal point of a World made new in Christ Jesus.”<sup>11</sup> Other Sunday-specific liturgies seem to operate as if they are *the* access point to Christianity, with an expectation that the world will *come* to church rather than the Church *going* to the world. In their many iterations throughout Christianity, these various Sunday-specific liturgies too often fail to hold together the relationship between our Sunday gathering and our daily lives. The hinge is the two kinds of righteousness that link liturgy and discipleship.

Liturgy as discipleship is not only a cognitive, audible process, but it fosters practices that rehearse how the redeemed world is done. Sunday morning becomes a microcosm of daily life—a true “little world” that is neither removed from the real world nor positioned as the destination for the world. Instead, Sunday morning is aimed *at* the real world. The Church, through its practices (liturgy), is how the world is done. This bridge between 11:00 on Sunday and the daily life offers significance for how the Church speaks of “mission,” “evangelism,” “witness,” “service,” and other critical aspects of discipleship. Sadly, these

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aspects have become more programmatic than generative in many churches.

### **Getting It Right**

As the performance of faith, liturgy involves the interdependent interaction of three tiers of practice: the Story, Word and Sacrament, and rites and ceremonies. Even naming them as distinct “tiers” is problematic since they are so interdependent. However, the tiers immediately indicate a common misperception of “liturgy” that is prevalent in our congregations today. For many of us, we consider what is in the hymnal, or bulletin, or screens, as *the liturgy*. And this is not completely incorrect. However, in the truest understanding of the term, the iconic “p. 5 and 15” for Lutherans is not the liturgy. They are rites with particular ceremonies. It is through rites and ceremonies that the Church participates in Word and Sacrament, the means of grace. It is through those means that the Church is enabled to rehearse the story. And it is through that rehearsal that we perform our faith; a microcosm of how the redeemed world is done. So what, then, does it mean to speak of a Lutheran liturgy?

Lutheran worship practice is primarily concerned with the formation of disciples in the community of the Church. The Lutheran Confessions provide a clear foundation for this orientation to the formation of disciples. The writers of the Confessions consistently connect the Gospel with worship and discipleship, suggesting that “the chief worship of the Gospel is to desire to receive the forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness” (Ap V, 310).<sup>12</sup> This forgiveness, grace, and righteousness is the crux of the story of salvation by God’s grace through the merits of Jesus Christ, delivered to the believer by the work of the Holy Spirit, who creates and sustains faith. These promises are communicated through divinely instituted means: the proclamation of the Word and the faithful reception of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (AC, V, 1-2).<sup>13</sup> These means of grace are the enactment of the promises of God. The Spirit works through these means of grace to produce the fruits of faith (AC, V, 3).<sup>14</sup> The Church, then, exists as “an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons” (Ap VII and VIII, 5).<sup>15</sup> The proclamation of the Word and the faithful performance of the Sacraments serve as the external markers of the Church, to the end that the Gospel promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation offered by God in Christ through the Spirit might be evident through the Church to the world (Ap VII and VIII, 5).<sup>16</sup> Liturgy is the Church’s performance of the Gospel faithfully evidenced and produced through these external markers: the proclamation of the Word, Christian baptism, and the Lord’s Supper.

There are several implications and considerations here. First, these means of grace are not the grace in themselves; rather, they are means. They impart grace because of divine promise and institution, in that the Spirit uses these means to create and sustain faith. Second, as means, these become foundational to the way Lutherans understand how the Christian faith is to be performed by the Church in the world. All performances of the Christian faith—or, all worship rites and practices—stem from these means. Thus, the liturgy is centered on these means. There is no Christian worship without these means, chiefly because these are the divinely instituted means by which the promises of God in Christ are delivered to the believer by the work of the Spirit. For Lutherans, there is no Christianity without the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of Christian baptism

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and the Lord's Supper.<sup>17</sup> These means were divinely instituted and thus are normative for Christian life and practice. These means of grace become the foundation for all Christian rites and practices. Thus, there is a kind of tiered distinction in the Confessions: primarily, there is the Gospel. This Gospel is communicated in the Church to the world through the means of grace, by which the Holy Spirit creates and sustains the faith of individuals in community. These means of grace are enacted through various rites and ceremonies.

It is on this liturgical foundation that Lutherans can work to establish a notion of confessional *orthodoxia* as central to Christian discipleship. *Orthodoxia*, or right praise, consists of the Spirit's work in the believer by the means of grace which animates the faith in God's Gospel promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation through the merits of Christ. Early Lutheran liturgical revisions directly reflect an ecclesial orientation to *orthodoxia*. Rites and ceremonies which obscured the central tenets of the Gospel communicated through the means of grace for the formation of Christian disciples were either revised or replaced. The Reformation was at its theological root a concern over proper pastoral care. This pastoral care included the effort to restore *orthodoxia* as the foundation for Christian discipleship, and the heritage of Lutheran worship to the present day is measured by its fidelity to these theological tenets.

To this end, the Confessors take great efforts to distinguish between the means of grace (which as external markers of God's story of salvation are not adiaphora) and the rites and ceremonies that express and enact these means of grace in community. The means are not adiaphora, the rites and ceremonies are adiaphora. This again was a chief sticking point of the Reformation, as the Lutherans generally took the liturgical "middle ground"—Roman ecclesial officials insisting that the rites and ceremonies must be retained completely in order to maintain not only *orthodoxia* but also the salvific integrity of the Mass, and other reformers calling for more aggressive and comprehensive liturgical reform in order to reestablish the *orthodoxia* lost in liturgical development from the early church through the medieval era (Ap XV, 50).<sup>18</sup> The Lutheran Confessors worked to clearly establish their position on liturgical rites and ceremonies as adiaphora. The Church, as noted above, is identified by the external markers of the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments. The liturgical rites and ceremonies that offer those means of grace in the gathered assembly, while associated with the means of grace, are subservient to the means themselves. Thus, the rites and ceremonies are not normatively an external marker of the Church, and the Church's unity is not dependent on the uniformity of rites and ceremonies (AC VII, 1–4).<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the Confessors insist that they maintain the integrity of the Mass, including "almost all the customary ceremonies" (AC XXIV, 1–2).<sup>20</sup> This is, indeed, the Confessors' understanding of the default position of the Church. The purpose of rites and ceremonies "should serve the purpose of teaching the people what they need to know about Christ" (AC XXIV, 3).<sup>21</sup> The Confessors also acknowledge that, while not essential for a unified understanding of Gospel *orthodoxia*, consistent rites and ceremonies do foster a certain sense of unity and tranquility (Ap XV, 49–52).<sup>22</sup>

Rites and ceremonies, then, are useful for communicating and animating the truth of the promises delivered in the means of grace, even as they are distinguished and distinguishable from the means themselves. This distinguishability, though, requires

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special care and attention, for there is a hermeneutical spectrum on the relationship between rites and ceremonies and the means themselves. For example, through the course of liturgical history, the practice of the Lord's Supper led to the development of various rites and ceremonies. At the same time, the performance of these rites and ceremonies conditioned the meaning of the Lord's Supper itself, leading to the very abuses of the Mass addressed by the Confessors.

Thus, rites and ceremonies are not neutral entities that merely "deliver the goods." Rather, there is an inherent and symbiotic relationship formed over time between structure and meaning of rites and the Sacrament. It is not a simple exercise to distinguish rituals and liturgical rites from the meaning and purpose to which they point; while there is a tiered distinction between Gospel, means, and rites, the borders around those categories are often difficult to pinpoint and specify. This hermeneutical tension is between sacramental efficacy, or that which works the means of grace in the Sacrament, and ritual efficacy, or the manner in which the ritual enactment of the means of grace can and does contribute to the understanding of those means. To this end, changes to rites and ceremonies can and do impact the hermeneutical effect of the Gospel story and its work as means of grace even if the rites and ceremonies themselves are in some manner distinguishable and subservient to the story and its external markers. At the same time, these rites and ceremonies can, through their liturgical performance over time, become elevated above their proper function, seen not as the rite which enacts the means, but rather as equal to the means itself. This leads to idolatry and to the obscuring of the Gospel.<sup>23</sup> Rites and ceremonies, then, are by no means arbitrary or meaningless. Rather, they are distinguished, as much as is hermeneutically possible, from the means of grace; even as the means of grace themselves are hermeneutically distinguished as *means* by which the Spirit works faith in God's work of salvation through Jesus Christ, rather than the operative grace itself. Thus, in the liturgical performance of faith by the community, *orthodoxia* is consistently centered in the divine work of salvation as narrated in Word and the Sacraments for the sake of a sinful yet redeemed Church who proclaim, serve, and live as witness to the world. This *orthodoxia* is contextually and dynamically conditioned by communal rites and ceremonies.

### **Liturgical Discipleship**

New obedience, then, is the fruit of the Christian life.<sup>24</sup> Here we see the axes of active and passive righteousness coming together in our liturgical enactments. It is in the liturgical enactments of the Church that disciples are initiated into God's story of everything, made righteous in faith. It is in the liturgical enactments of the Church that disciples are sustained in faith. And it is in the liturgical enactments of the Church that disciples learn "how the redeemed world is done."

In what follows, I offer some connections between the elements of the general Divine Service pattern and behaviors of liturgical discipleship. The behaviors that God has done to us and for us are the behaviors that we enact as His disciples for the sake of the world. The behaviors that we rehearse together on Sunday are the behaviors of our daily life. I will outline them first in a kind of chart form:

Invocation

Hospitality

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Confession and Absolution	Reconciliation
Kyrie	Advocacy
Reading of Scripture	Submission <sup>25</sup>
Sermon	Proclamation
Prayers of the Church	Intercession
Offering/Offertory	Generosity
Preface, Sanctus, Prayer of Thanksgiving	Sacrifice (praise and thanksgiving)
Distribution	Communion/community
Benediction	Blessing/sending

I hope to develop all of these in my future work. However, as one brief example, and perhaps a less intuitive one, let me take up the Kyrie as Advocacy. Throughout the Scriptures, the invoking of God’s mercy is most closely associated with God’s action on behalf of His people.<sup>26</sup> It is a cry for advocacy. In the Gospels, the cry “Lord, have mercy” aimed at Jesus is almost always associated with Jesus’ act of healing. Thus, when we pray the Kyrie in our Divine Services, we are calling upon our God in faith to act on our behalf. This is why the petitions of the Kyrie are cries for peace. We conclude the Kyrie by boldly praying “help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.” This is a weighty prayer! As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are the body of Christ. We are the hands, feet, and other members through whom the Spirit is working the fruit of faith for the sake of the world and our neighbor. We are the ones who are advocating for the world. In the same way that we call upon our God to advocate for us and for the world in this prayer, we also commit ourselves to the work of advocacy in this world. We commit ourselves to acts of mercy for those who need healing, for those who need help, for those who need physical bodily care and those who need Christ’s grace and mercy, for those who need comfort, and for the defenseless. As we pray the Kyrie each week, we would do well to commit ourselves, as Spirit-filled, fruit-bearing disciples, to the weight of this weighty prayer!

In the liturgical behavior of advocacy, we are formed to be people who “do the world rightly.” We receive God’s defense, help, and salvation (vertical; passive). We then engage the world as advocates, those who serve and protect our neighbor as directed by God’s truth and by the power of the Spirit (horizontal; active). These liturgical behaviors demonstrate that liturgical formation lies at the heart of Christian discipleship. The liturgy is where we enact and receive the means of grace, God’s forgiveness, His mercy, His pardon. But it also where we are formed to live as witnesses for Christ during the rest of the week. Through these liturgical behaviors, we learn the actions God has done for us (the story of everything) and what God desires His human creatures to embody for the right ordering and proper stewardship of God’s creation.

And in the nexus of liturgical formation through passive and active righteousness, we discover one final connection (or even major thesis) that is the subtle undercurrent to this whole article. Liturgy, viewed as the world done right, *is mission*. As this entire issue of

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*Lutheran Mission Matters* has depicted for us, our evangelism hinges on our *orthodoxia*, our right worship. This *orthodoxia* is the performance of faith in the story of everything through the rites and ceremonies that enact God's means of grace. The *orthodoxia* of these liturgical behaviors is the connection of Sunday services to daily life. This behavioral framework, this emphasis on liturgical formation, helps us to be better equipped, to ask better questions, to embrace *koinonia* in a way that goes beyond much of our misplaced liturgical banter. As we continue to live as disciples, we will continue to discover how "the redeemed world is done," to the glory and praise of our triune God.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Robert Kolb and Charles Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 21-128.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Franzmann, "Thy Strong Word," (1969) in *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), hymn 578.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 355. [SC, Creed, 4]

<sup>4</sup> Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984), 100.

<sup>5</sup> Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24.

<sup>6</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 100.

<sup>8</sup> Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Kolb/ Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 355.

<sup>10</sup> Kolb/ Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 355.

<sup>11</sup> Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 42.

<sup>12</sup> Paul McCain, ed. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 130.

<sup>13</sup> Kolb/ Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 40.

<sup>14</sup> Kolb/ Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 40.

<sup>15</sup> Kolb/ Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 174.

<sup>16</sup> Kolb/ Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 174.

<sup>17</sup> Or perhaps better said that there is no externally evident expression of Christianity without these means. This is affirmed in AC V.

<sup>18</sup> Kolb/ Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 230. See also the arguments made by the Roman Catholic Church in "The Confutation of the Augsburg Confession," trans. Mark D. Tranvik, in Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen, ed., *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 111, 115.

<sup>19</sup> Kolb/ Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> Kolb/ Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Kolb/ Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 68.

<sup>22</sup> Kolb/ Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 230.

<sup>23</sup> James Brauer, *Worship, Gottesdienst, Cultus Dei* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 256.

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<sup>24</sup>This is the confessional trajectory of AC IV, V, and VI.

<sup>25</sup>Submission to the authority of the Word of God.

<sup>26</sup>Psalms 90:13–16 is one of many examples.

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