

## Worship 4: Walkthrough

### The Approach to God

#### PRELUDE

Three weeks ago we looked at the theology of worship, and we focused on worship as proclaiming God's worth. Today we are going to look at the practical side of worship and examine our order of worship. As we go through our worship service this morning I will explain a little about how the parts fit together and how they move us through worship. Worship begins as each person enters the sanctuary. I know many of you get here a little early so that you can sit quietly for a few minutes, gathering your thoughts, centering your hearts and minds, beginning to make connection with God. The prelude concludes this time of preparation. Lonieta's [our organist's] preludes help us as a congregation to begin to focus together on God and worship. At times like Lent or Advent, these preludes may be meditative, helping us get into the mood of the season. At other times they are joyful and full of praise, helping set the tone for our service.

The Votum goes back to the days of Latin. It is connected to our English words devote and devotion. The words I use are from Psalms 121 and 124. They are an expression of devotion and commitment to God. In a secular meeting we might start with the pledge of allegiance, describing who we are as American citizens. The votum begins our worship by describing who we are as Christians – we are God's people, people who have been helped by God and people who continue to need God's help and blessings as we face the future.

Most Sundays the Votum is followed by the Choral Introit. Music is a way of expressing our feelings of praise and worship. In the introit the choir helps us to continue to turn our hearts and minds to God and on our behalf begins the act of praise.

After the Introit we usually have a short responsive call to worship. These words based on scripture, usually the Psalms, help us to express our praise of God as a congregation and lead us into the opening hymn. This morning we are going to combine our Votum and the

Invitation to Worship. If you would take the blue Bibles in the pews and turn to Psalm 124 found on page 444. This Psalm will provide us with the context of our normal vatum, as well as prepare us for worship this morning. If this side of the congregation will read with me the odd verses, and that side and the choir read the even verses of Psalm 124.

**VOTUM AND INVITATION TO WORSHIP** Psalm 124 p. 444 OT

### **CHORAL INTROIT**

The first hymn is almost always a hymn of praise. It often comes from the first 100 or so hymns in the hymnal, because that is where the general praise hymns are to be found. At times the words reflect the Psalm from the invitation to worship, and I try to connect the message of the hymn to the general theme of the service. I might not always succeed, but I try to pick an opening hymn that most people are familiar with. This morning our first hymn is #39 "Come, Ye People, Rise and Sing."

**\*HYMN OF PRAISE #39**

*"Come, Ye People, Rise and Sing "*

The salutation of a letter is that first little part of greeting. In our service, the greetings come from God and Christ. We have focused our hearts and minds on God as we begin worship. We have offered our song of praise. And now God greets us as we get together with God in worship. The words I often use echo the beginning of many of Paul's letters, as he greets his audience on behalf of God.

A little side note here. During our first year of seminary the worship professor made a big deal of explaining our hand and arm position for the Salutation and the Benediction. Placing our hands outstretched indicated that we stood with the congregation as we received these words from God. Placing our hands like this or this indicated that we were speaking on behalf of God as we shared these words. And we were not supposed to put our arms like that until after we were ordained. After waiting for four years to be ordained, I quickly came to realize I preferred the hands outstretched. I am human, just like the rest of you, and I too need to hear and be included in the words of God's blessings and presence.

## **\*SALUTATION**

We have sung God's praises. God himself has greeted us. And we are already to delve into worship. Well, not quite. As we come into the presence of God, we realize our faults more clearly. We sing praise to a holy God, and we realize that we aren't always holy. We come near to God's light, and that light shows all the stains and dirt that have accumulated. We talk about God's steadfast love, and realize that our love and faith occasionally waver. And thus, before we can go further in worship there is a need to get our relationship right with God. Since God is the one we have sinned against, the one we have failed, we need to seek God's forgiveness. That is the purpose of the prayer of confession. It is a chance for us to take stock our lives, and to ask God for forgiveness and for help in the future.

## **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

(unison)

Gracious Lord, we come before you this morning acknowledging that we are not always the people you have called us to be. We have not always shared your love with others. We have not always proclaimed by our words and deeds that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. Forgive us and through the power of your Spirit renew us. We offer this prayer in Jesus' name, Amen.

The Prayer of Confession is not the last part of the worship service. It is but one step in connecting with God. The next step is our assurance of forgiveness. We don't send our prayer for forgiveness out into the great unknown. We address our prayer to a loving God. We know from past history in the Bible and in our own lives, that God loves and forgives. In addition we have the promises of God that he will hear our prayers and forgive us. The Words of Assurance are one of the scriptures where God does offer us forgiveness. Today's words come from Micah. They are part of the Christmas prophecy, telling us of the coming one who will forgive.

## **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

Micah 5:2-5a

God's law gives us directions as to how we are to live our lives. Advent and Lent are times of Penitence, and during those seasons we often use God's Law as an introduction to our Prayer of Confession. In those times, God's law gives us a measuring stick by which we can judge our lives. But God's Law also gives us direction as to how we can live our lives in

gratitude after God forgives us. So most Sundays, the Law comes after the prayer and the Words of Assurance. The Law is taken directly from Scripture. This morning God's law comes from the Prophet Micah.

#### **LAW OF GOD**

Micah 6:6-8

In many ways, this part of the worship service is a capsule of our Christian life. God reached out to us; we realize our need for God's love and forgiveness; God forgives and saves; God directs us on our path of life. It is only natural, after God forgives us and then points us on the right path, for us to thank God for his love and forgiveness. Our whole life should be lived in thankfulness and praise. But we also include such praise as a response within the worship service. We do that many weeks by reading a responsive Psalm. The Psalms were the hymnbook and the prayer book of the people of God, and can still function that way for us. We offer up our words of praise through the scripture, and then we stand and sing them in the Gloria Patri. If possible I try to pick a psalm that has some loose connection with the theme of the service. For example, today's reading #29 includes Psalms 121 & 122. Near the beginning of Psalm 121 there is an echo of the Votum, and Psalm 122 speaks of the joy of worshipping in God's house. Let us join together in reading our responsive psalm, reading #29 from the back of the hymnal.

**RESPONSIVE READING #29** Psalms 121 & 122

p. 501

#### **\*GLORIA PATRI**

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Ghost;  
As it was in the beginning, is now and  
ever shall be, world without end.  
Amen. Amen.*

The first part of the service where we approach God in adoration and praise ends with the ministry of music. 3 or 4 times a year I spend an afternoon planning the sermon themes and texts for several months. I'll then send them on to Lonietta so she can start thinking about them and what music might be appropriate. Early each week I email her a copy of the worship service for that Sunday. That gives her a little more sense of where I am going with the service. And then she does her magic with the music. I have asked her to share with you a little bit of her theology and practice of the music she and the choir provides. [To view Lonietta's comments, go back to the Worship page and click "Addendum."]

## MINISTRY OF MUSIC

### The Word of God

The Prayer for Illumination is not asking for Ward [one of our sound & lighting guys] to turn up the lights. We are speaking about spiritual illumination, so that our minds and hearts can see and hear God's word for us. Calvin was emphatic that we know that the scripture is God's word because through the Spirit we hear God speaking to us as we read or listen to the Bible. This prayer is to ask God for such inspiration. Let us pray.

#### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

##### SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 6:1-8 (p.492 OT)

Acts 1:6-11 (p.90 NT)

##### CHILDREN'S TIME

Why children's sermon? Everybody out there likes to see you and think you are cute. More importantly I try to share with you one idea that comes from the scripture I just read. Sometimes the Bible is written in language it is hard for us to understand, but it is important for us to work at understanding it so I share. 2 – You are important to God; you are important to the congregation; and you are important to me – so I want to have a special time in the service just for you because you are important!

According to the official RCA liturgy, there is a Passing of the Peace that is part of the Lord's Supper. As such it is an expression of the community and togetherness that God's grace in Word and Sacrament give us. We put our time of fellowship and greeting here in the middle of the service. The Children in Worship people are up and moving, so it seems like a natural time. Plus, you've been looking at that head in the pew in front of you for awhile, and it is nice to see them face to face for a minute. And I think it is good to affirm our community and togetherness, as we get ready to hear and consider God's word. Let us rise and welcome each other to worship this morning.

#### \*MOMENT OF FELLOWSHIP

##### \*HYMN #244

*"Come Thou Almighty King"*

**SERMON      “We Come to God and Respond”**

Since this is more of a teaching service than a preaching service, let me make two brief points based on our scriptures this morning. First, worship can be viewed as a dialogue. We speak to God, and God speaks to us, we reply, and God responds. You can see this basic nature in the Isaiah 6 passage. The passage begins with the vivid experience of God’s presence. The heavenly choir takes the place of our human choir and sings praise and adoration to the holy God. As Isaiah experiences the majesty, awe, and holiness of God’s presence he realizes his sinful unworthiness. Through the angel God forgives Isaiah and then assures him of that forgiveness. God then speaks to Isaiah and asks a question. Isaiah responds to this question and commits himself to following God’s direction. And in the part of the passage after we stopped reading, God then gives Isaiah a message to proclaim to the people. In many ways the rest of Isaiah’s life was a continuation of this worship and dialogue; his life was a response to God’s message and call.

Our worship is a conversation between ourselves and God. We communicate to God through our songs and through our prayers. Sometimes we speak to God through scripture. And God speaks to us. God responds with his presence. God offers us forgiveness and assurance. God gives us his word to convince us and instruct us. We then respond to God through our confession of faith, by giving our offerings to God, and through prayer. As we are leaving to live a life of response, God’s blesses us with the promise of his presence and strength.

That leads us to idea number 2. Just as Isaiah’s worship and response did not end when he left the Temple that morning, neither should our worship end when we go into the parking lot. This is seen in the passage we read from Acts. For forty days after the resurrection Jesus has been appearing to the disciples and teaching him. They acknowledge and confess that he is their Lord and Savior. In the Acts 1 passage, Jesus gives the disciples some last instructions and ascends into heaven. The disciples stand there with their mouths open, staring into the clouds. They must have been filled with awe and adoration. But then a pair of angels straightens them out. “What are you doing standing here with your mouth open? Jesus just told you what to do. You are to return to Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes

upon you. And then you are to share Jesus' message of love with the rest of the world. Your response is not to stand here in awe but to go forth and obey his command."

Worship is proclaiming the worth of God. We do that as we gather on Sunday morning by singing and praying and all the rest of the worship service. Maybe your children are practically perfect, but there was a time or two over the years, after hearing for the umpteenth time how much my sons loved me, that the thought crossed my mind "if you love me so much, it would be nice if you just did what I asked." Worship is telling God that we love him. How we live the other 167 hours each week is worship in action. What we do after we leave this wonderful building also should be a proclamation of God's worth and a result of our love for God.

### **Our Response to God**

After we hear God's Word we move on to our response. Years ago, one night Colleen bolted upright in bed at about 3 in the morning. She started singing the then current McDonald's commercial – You, you're the one, you are the only reason. And then she laid back down. As a young husband it was wonderful to know the great love my wife had for me. In some ways that is what the Confession of Faith does. We tell God that he is the one – God is the creator of heaven and earth; God's Son is our Savior; God's Spirit is with us each day. That is proclaiming God's worth. And it is a proper response to God's message of grace and love. And I think there is also an implication that if we truly believe God is the one, then we will follow what he tells us throughout our lives. So our Confession of Faith is an important part of our worship. Let us tell God that he is the one by using the words of the Apostles' Creed.

### **\*CONFESSION OF FAITH**

Offerings and sacrifices were a major portion of Old Testament worship. Some of them, like the sin offering is no longer necessary, as Christ himself died as the sacrificial lamb to remove our sin. But the thanksgiving offering, the response of the worshiper for what God had done, is still something that is part of our worship. We bring to God our gifts in thanksgiving as a response for all that God has done for us.

In the earliest days of the Old Testament, people were either farmers or shepherds. The gifts they brought to God were a part of their everyday existence; they were literally the fruit of their labor. While our lives are much different, we can learn from their gifts. Fruits and grains were supposed to be given from the very first crops harvested. This symbolized that all the crops really belonged to God. It also showed faith and trust in God, in that one trusted that the rest of the harvest would come in and there would be enough to last the year.

Lambs brought as an offering were to be spotless; they were to be the best the shepherd had. They were also supposed to be a year old. That meant the shepherd had spent a year feeding and caring for that lamb; the lamb literally represented the shepherd's blood, sweat, and tears.

While we don't bring grapes, wheat, or sheep to put in the offering plate, the ideas should be the same. The gifts we give are the fruits of our labors, a symbol of what we do all week long. Our gifts should be near the top of our financial priorities. Not just what we have left over, but the first gifts of our love.

## **RECEPTION OF GIFTS AND OFFERINGS**

### **MINISTRY OF MUSIC**

### **\*DOXOLOGY (#544) AND PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

### **CONGREGATIONAL CONCERNS**

The congregational prayer is our final talk with God while we are together. It is titled the "congregational prayer" because it should be something that all of us are participating in. We have just expressed our joys and concerns, and these are fresh on our mind as we pray. The prayer starts with thanksgiving and praise. We have been worshiping God, we have been enjoying God's presence, and we have heard God's message proclaimed, thus it is natural to offer thanksgiving to God. But because of who God is, because God really cares, we include our prayers of supplication and intercession. We bring our joys to God and we bring our concerns to God. We started the service by proclaiming that our help is in the Lord, and now we ask him for help in specific areas.



The Lord's Prayer is at the end of this time of prayer. Up to this point, the congregation has been participating silently, but now they can join the prayer verbally. And the Lord's Prayer is the best example of a prayer – it includes praise and adoration, confession, as well as supplication and intercession. And we end with "Amen." An ancient word meaning let it be so.

#### **CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER**

As I mentioned, the opening hymn in a service is usually a hymn of praise. The middle hymn is focused more on God's Word. Often the words of the hymn reflect the words of the scripture passage we just read. Or sometimes they are hymns emphasizing the importance of God's word. The last hymn is aimed more at our response to God's Word. It might be a song of faith, or a challenge to action. Our next hymn reminds us that worship does not cease as we leave this building, but continues on in what we do all week long.

#### **\*CLOSING HYMN #283**

*"Go Labor On"*

Benediction literally means "Good Words." These are words from God to us, paraphrased from the scriptures. The words promise God's continuing presence in our lives, as we go forth to continue our worship and our service in the world.

#### **\*BENEDICTION AND RESPONSE**

#### **\*POSTLUDE**

\*The congregation may stand.