

Spiritual Formation in Worship, Part 4: Lutheran Treasure for an Emerging Generation

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Introduction

- If, in our orthodox churches, the abiding in Christ, the living union with Him, the experience of His daily and hourly abiding presence and keeping, were preached with the same distinctness and urgency as His atonement and pardon through His blood, I am confident that many would be found to accept with gladness the invitation to such a life. - Andrew Murray, *Daily Thoughts on Holiness*
- Many of us have heard His word to follow Him, but have somehow missed His word to “abide in Him.” - Bill Vaswig, *Preaching and Prayer Ministries*

We are a *sacramental* church. When we say that, we are saying a good deal more than that we count two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. We encounter God through these two tangible rites. As mentioned in a previous study, salvation is “Christ for us,” and Christian living—spiritual formation—is all about “Christ in us” (Gal. 4:19). The most profound sense of Incarnational reality, or “Christ in us,” is found in the sacraments. All that we are as a church and all that our worship encompasses is rooted in the Word and in baptism and the Lord's Supper, which influences every other liturgical action in our worship. Or does it?

“For among Christians the whole service should center in the Word and sacrament.”

- Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 53

In previous studies we have explored the Word in Scripture. We turn now to the sacraments. If a guest, Lutheran or not, Christian or not, wandered into worship on any given Sunday, how would they recognize that both sacraments - every Sunday - help center our worship? And, would these two sacraments be presented in such a way that the guest would be drawn to Christ, want to learn more, experience more of Christ, become an apprentice to and abide in Christ?

I. _____ with Christ

Exploration: Figure out the word that should fill in the blank by finding the common thread in these passages:

- Rom. 6:1-4
- Col. 2:11-12
- Eph. 2:4-6
- Isaiah 43: 1b-2a

Discussion: *So what? What does dying with Christ have to do with a regular worship service, visitors who wander into church, and abiding in Christ?*

Baptism isn't a been-there-done-that way-back-when ritual; it can be part of continually practicing the Presence and a witness of the Spirit in us, with us, and for us. Read the following quotations by Martin Luther and then comment:

“Baptism...consists in being dipped into the water, which covers us completely, and being drawn out again. These two parts, being dipped under the water and emerging from it, indicate the power and effect of Baptism, which is simply the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man, both of which actions must continue in us our whole life long. This is what it means to plunge into Baptism and daily come forth again. . . . In Baptism we are given the Spirit and power to suppress the old man so that the new may come forth and grow strong.” — Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*

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"We must draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and we must retort, 'But I am baptized!' . . . Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism, to resume and practice what had earlier been begun but abandoned." – *ibid.*

Application

So how? How can the baptismal life be for us a treasure unpacked and for a non-believer a jewel that beckons?

Whole books and entire lives have been spent on unlocking the treasures of baptism (start with *The Large Catechism*). Following are just a few discussion starters for *you* to answer the above question:

- a. symbolically. Baptismal font – prominent or obscure? Water in the font – when, why? Water images – where? Making the sign of the cross over one's breast in worship – why or why not? What other symbols are or could be used to point to baptism?
- b. liturgically. Contemporary or traditional, mentally walk through your service order – where are there references to drowning/burial/new life, repentance/forgiveness, or any water images? How would a visitor pick up on any allusions to dying/being raised with Christ – how clearly is this communicated?
- c. spiritually. How much space is given – in time and in focus – in your own worship life, to practicing the Presence of Christ in the Confession of Sins? Do you practice the Presence of Christ or do you practice the presence of last night's movie or the noisy kid behind you or of what's for lunch while confessing your sins? Do you think anyone notices?

*** Ah-OO-ga – Misconception Alert Number One! ***

Practicing the Presence through daily "dying with Christ" does not diminish other foundational aspects of what it means to be baptized, namely being adopted into God's family, that the work is completely God's action toward us and not our own good work, or the once-for-all promise of eternal life through the work of Christ on the cross. *Dying with Christ* is simply but profoundly one aspect of abiding in Christ by "putting on the full armor of God," learning to "stand strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (Eph. 6:10-18). "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7).

*** Ah-OO-ga – Misconception Alert Number Two! ***

Imagery of being immersed in water does not mean that people who are sprinkled-not-dunked are second-class baptizees! The imagery still works regardless of the amount of water used in one's actual baptism. Time and space do not allow for a full treatise on the mode of baptism: please refer to your nearest and dearest clergy for further clarification on *immersion* and *afflusion* (sprinkling).



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II. Food for the Journey

Exploration: Read the following two scripture passages and Luther quote.

- I Kings 19:1-8
- Psalm 34:8
- Therefore, [the Lord's Supper] is appropriately called the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new man. While it is true that through Baptism we are first born anew, our human flesh and blood have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint, at times even stumble. The Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken in the struggle but grow continually stronger. For the new life should be one that continually develops and progresses. -- Luther, *The Large Catechism*

Discussion and Application

1. **So how** do these passages just cited apply to Christians going to communion in worship? And *after* communion?
2. **Did you know** that "Eucharist" is from the Greek *eucharisteo*, which means *to give thanks*? Early Christian worship grew out of a centering of Word and Eucharist, with strong emphasis on giving thanks for Christ's victory over death and Satan. We praise God for who he is; we give thanks for what he's done. Where in worship is there s p a c e *each Sunday* [author's mantra: space in t_____ and in f_____] for giving thanks to *Christus Victor*?
3. **So what** would a guest learn about the riches and sustenance given through the Lord's Supper by the way in which communion is enacted and received in your congregation and in your self? Would they know that you have tasted and seen that the Lord is good?
4. This painting depicts a famous biblical scene, in fact a precise instant in the story. It is not the Last Supper. After you determine the story and scene, discuss: have you ever asked the same question posed by the characters to whom this event happened?



by Caravaggio, 1601; London National Gallery

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III. Summary: Lutheran Treasure for an Emerging Generation

An emerging generation, distanced from the Baby Boomers' baggage with old rituals and religious symbolism, is drawn to the deep faith of saints throughout the ages and to ancient rites *which communicate the real presence of God*.* Of all the ways we have explored practicing the Presence – in prayer, in breathing with Scripture, in praise, in assembling and blessing – the unique and fullest experience of Incarnational Reality – the Spirit in us, with us, and for us – in Lutheran worship is found in our understanding of the Word indwelling Scripture and indwelling baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christ conforming us to himself, abiding in us, through Word and Sacrament. It is a treasure we can draw on for ourselves and share with others our whole life long. May Christ dwell in you richly!

*see works such as Dan Kimball's *Emerging Worship* and Robert E. Webber's *The Younger Evangelicals*

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