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ENLIVENED WORSHIP WITH THE DIVINE:
EVALUATION AND INNOVATIVE APPLICATION OF THE LITURGICAL ARTS
FOR WORSHIP RENEWAL

Thesis Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Michael Hawn". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "C." being more compact and the last name "Hawn" having a long, sweeping tail.

Dr. C. Michael Hawn
University Distinguished
Professor *Emeritus* of
Church Music
Southern Methodist University

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Bauer". The script is cursive, with "Michael" written in a more formal, slightly larger hand than "Bauer", which is more compact.

Dr. Michael J. Bauer
Professor of Organ and Church Music
The University of Kansas

ENLIVENED WORSHIP WITH THE DIVINE:
EVALUATION AND INNOVATIVE APPLICATION OF THE LITURGICAL ARTS
FOR WORSHIP RENEWAL

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty of Perkins School of Theology

Southern Methodist University

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Pastoral Music

by

Nicole Gray

B.M., Vocal Performance, Baldwin Wallace University
M.M., Vocal Performance, The University of Houston

April 23, 2024

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to Patrick and Sam, who constantly inspire me to think creatively and with patience. I hope that by joining me on this journey, they witness the joy in crossing the finish line of a marathon—that hard work, sacrifice, and dedication really do pay off. I also hope they won't hold back if they believe something is important to share with the world.

Nicole Gray

B.M., Vocal Performance, Baldwin Wallace University, 2002
M.M., Vocal Performance, The University of Houston, 2004

Enlivened Worship with the Divine:
An Evaluation and Innovative Application
of the Liturgical Arts for Worship Renewal

Advisor: Dr. C. Michael Hawn

Doctor of Pastoral Music conferred TBA

Thesis complete TBA

ABSTRACT

Liturgical arts are meaningful resources and vessels for reclaiming and renewing the storytelling abilities of dynamic worship. This thesis explores a strategic evaluation of liturgical arts through the foundational and relational subjects of theology, ritual studies, and liturgical theology. Through the Holy Spirit, liturgical arts have formative powers that lead congregations into a deeper meeting with God—sending them forth as renewed signposts¹ of Christ’s transcendence. They provide the space where pain and brokenness meet hope and grace for the renewal of the world. This thesis examines those powers in combination with a foundational evaluation to restore and apply innovative liturgical art that allows for the possibility of a vibrant and active dialogue between worshipers and the Triune God. A series of liturgies are included as examples highlighting these powers. Through a continuous process of evaluation and innovative application of the liturgical arts, a worshipping community has a foundational strategy to actively maintain, reimagine, and renew an ever-evolving, enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine.

¹ N.T. Wright, “The Surprising Faithfulness of God: A Sermon at DITA10,” *The Art of New Creation: Trajectories in Theology and the Arts*, eds. Jeremy Begbie, W. David O. Taylor, and Daniel Train (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 210.

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INTRODUCTION

“As If”

Give to him that asketh thee,
and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. (Matt 5:42)

The Giver of all gifts asks me to give!
The Fountain from which every good thing flows,
The Life who spends himself that all might live,
The Root whence every bud and blossom grows,
Calls me, as if I knew no limitation,
As if I focused all his hidden force,
To be creative with his new creation,
To find my flow in him, my living source,
To live as if I had no fear of losing,
To spend as if I had no need to earn,
To turn my cheek as if it felt no bruising,
To lend as if I needed no return,
As if my debts and sins were all forgiven,
As if I too could body forth his Heaven.¹

Storytelling #1

Kennywood Day was here! It was July 1992, we wore matching puffy-painted T-shirts, neon bike shorts, and brand-new white Keds. We were ready to take on the dirt and thrill-seeking rides of Kennywood Park, Pittsburgh's legendary amusement park. Our group of twelve-year-old best friends piled into Jennifer's mom's maroon mini-van giggling with excitement as Three Rivers Stadium and the 1992 skyline of Pittsburgh zoomed past our windows. Finally crossing over the Rankin Bridge, there it was—the big yellow Kennywood arrow pointing us closer to the adventures and delights every Pittsburgher, young and old, anticipates and treasures—a warm welcome sign to a family reunion. Kennywood Day was and is a cherished ritual of being a Pittsburgher. Brian Butko, a well-authored Kennywood historian explains it this way, “parents remind their children and grandchildren that when they were young, the two most important days of the year were Christmas and Kennywood Picnic Day.”²

¹ For a video of this poem see Regent College, “As If,” Malcolm Guite, <https://vimeo.com/340307462> (accessed March 27, 2023).

² Brian Butko, *Kennywood: Behind the Screams Pocket Edition* (Pittsburgh: Senator John Heinz History Center, 2016), 7.

What is it about Kennywood Day, a community Christmas parade, or celebrating a home team's victory that creates such a vivid experience? Kennywood Day and other experiences like it create intangible souvenirs of delight and love for a community. It links a group of people to its past, present, and future using sensory-rich symbolism and tradition that reminds them of their identity and that they belong to something bigger than themselves—a community. Kennywood Day remains a central source of joy for the Pittsburgh community.

Malcolm Guite's poem, "As If," and the story above are both examples of how humanity innovatively and imaginatively creates art from the iconic themes of the Judeo-Christian callings to give and to belong. Guite's poem is a response to Matthew 5:42. It inspires a renewal of purpose for creating—to give because Jesus gave, to give to glorify God, to give out of love for God and creation. Humanity creates to give back to God. The story of Kennywood Day is a fun and creative narration that describes an experience of humanity enjoying each other and the inspiration to create out of love for creation. It suggests a liminal space where participants experience a sense of *communitas*. This oneness in belonging and the invitation to create from a calling to give back to God out of love are foundational motives for corporate worship.

While corporate worship may not have rollercoasters and tower drops, it does have the thrills and chills of encountering a living God who invites congregations on an ethereal ride of liturgical twists and turns rooted in love. The people of God lift their collective voices in the fullness of their being with the saints and the Holy Spirit and sing, "Hallelujah!" They gather into an inclusive celebration of the Trinity's redeeming love and resurrection power—a strong and grounded roller coaster not to be missed. Right?

For some congregations, this is an accurate description of their worship experience. Using rich and contextual symbols, enlivened liturgical art, and ritual, they encounter the Divine. They are transformed and renewed to serve in the kingdom of God.

Their liturgical arts are selected for worship to inspire a deeper meeting with the Triune God. The liturgical arts become a means of grace, a sign of the everlasting covenant between God and the gathered community, and a central instrument for encountering the Divine. They understand they are called to be creative people, born and nurtured in the image of a Creator God who, after finishing the monumental work of fashioning the heavens and the earth, the plants, the animals, and humankind itself, rested and called it good.

The prophet Isaiah challenges, “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isa 43:18–19, NRSV) This is stirring language, yet it falls flat on the congregation as the liturgical reader’s voice gently lulls the gentleman in the front pew into a yawn and stretch.

How do life-giving, missional, and convicting words of faith lose their transformative power? It is not the words that have lost their power but rather a disconnect between the people and their liturgy. Unfortunately, this is a common scenario in many churches. Continuing the amusement park metaphor, some celebrants have let their theme parks go, or worse yet, abandoned them. Communal worship needs constant ritual updating, editing, and evaluation to maintain a truth-filled, engaged, and enlivened worshiping community. The family practice of going to Kennywood on a hot summer day with friends and family does not change, but the symbols and patterns involved in this whimsical ritual must evolve to reflect the fullness of its community. The church needs to continuously refine its communication with God, the faithful, and the surrounding culture to reflect the fullness of its community.

Recently, Kennywood added a new section to their park called Steelers Country, including a colossal steel roller coaster called the Steel Curtain. Based on the twists and turns of the Steelers’ Superbowl-winning defensive line during the 1970s, the ride was an instant hit

amongst all ages. Although Kennywood was undoubtedly trying to stay competitive in the theme park industry, Steelers Country teaches more than business and physics. They knew that by adding new symbols, like Steelers football, people's spirits and joy would increase as they connected more with their community.

Nonetheless, most churches do not have the budgets to create multi-million-dollar steel structures to unite the hearts of their congregants, nor is that approach appropriate for Christian liturgy. This should not discourage congregations from creating enlivened and imaginative worship experiences that encounter the Divine. God invites liturgical artists to create anew with whatever resources are available. This is where understanding the evaluation and innovative application of the liturgical arts can provide resources and strategies to reinform and renew worship experiences.

The following chapters argue that through a continuous process of evaluation and innovative application of the liturgical arts, a worshipping community has a foundational strategy to actively maintain, reimagine, and renew an ever-evolving, enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine. This thesis is divided into two sections. Part 1, "Evaluation," focuses on three areas that inform worship design and liturgical arts—theology, ritual studies, and liturgical theology. A set of questions is provided within each section to evaluate that area of study within the worshipping community.

Chapter 1 identifies a working Christian theological rationale defining a vocational, covenantal, and relational calling to respond to God through the liturgical arts in worship. Chapter 2 reflects on the instinctual human ritual experience and the behaviors that call humanity into community with one another and into Christian worship. An awareness of ritual evolution, Victor Turner's understanding of liminality and *communitas*, and Ronald Grimes' description of

ritual sensibilities and web-like connections inform how and why ritual studies can shape liturgical art. Chapter 3 utilizes Gordan Lathrop's concept of "holy things for holy people"³ to discuss the importance of understanding Christian ritual symbols and signs. Through evaluating and taking inventory of a congregation's liturgical patterns and symbols, cultural contexts, theology, and history, worship designers reimagine a richer palette to make wise, informed, creative, and innovative choices to apply liturgical arts. Through the Holy Spirit, these liturgical arts serve as a means of grace within an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine.

Part 2, "Innovative Application," defines the application process of building enlivened worship experiences through the lens of new creation—an alternative and transformative reality here on earth revealed by the Holy Spirit through liturgical art in corporate worship. This lens, in combination with the evaluation work of theological, ritual, and liturgical studies from the previous chapters, along with the grace and mercy of a creative process offers worship planners and the assembly a firm foundation and identity upon which liturgical arts are applied. Chapter 4 will explore the Holy Spirit's wild, unpredictable, yet purposeful creative process, when applying liturgical art. Chapter 5 highlights the overall power of liturgical art through the lens of new creation. It goes deeper into individual liturgical arts and provides innovative and creative responses through liturgy that emphasize the specific art in application. Learning the languages of the individual liturgical arts assists worship designers and teams in choosing the appropriate art form that communicates God's truth at higher levels of creativity or in combination with each other, ushering participants into an innovative and enlivened worship experience.

³ Gordan W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 11.

This pilgrimage through the liturgical arts begins at the relational entrance point between God and creation, and the cultural, ritual, and theological contexts that inform them. This leads its readers to learn the language of liturgical arts and the creative process of applying them. The Triune God is constantly creating an ever-evolving cosmos; our worship should reflect this movement. Through the Holy Spirit, the liturgical arts provide a transformative dialogue with the Divine. Through a continuous process of evaluation and innovative application of the liturgical arts, a worshipping community has a foundational strategy to actively maintain, reimagine, and renew an ever-evolving, enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine.

PART 1: EVALUATION

CHAPTER 1 CREATED TO CREATE

Storytelling #2

The year was about 1988. Didi's wild flaming red hair tied back with a silver metallic headwrap kept her locks in place while she danced and played the keyboard to the cover songs on Alvin and the Chipmunk's "Chipmunk Rock," an album featuring popular covers from the late 70s and early 80s. Her look was one that defined the 1980's lingo—"rad." Her eyes, sparkling with bright blue eye shadow and purple liner matched her iridescent knee-length vinyl blazer, which glistened almost as if it was from a star in the midst of a galaxy of light. Her friend, Barbie, rockin' glittery neon pink tights and pleather boots, with platinum teased-out hair, and a tightly held diamond studded microphone, suddenly stopped singing and looked intently at Pete. She was more than annoyed at Pete the Panda, as he was known. He had made a habit of covering her vocals with a screaming electric guitar solo. Pete was clearly a diva. He was high maintenance and challenged her patience at every turn. Nonetheless, he was a talented player and, for now, that was keeping him in the band. Barbie was not the only one who was annoyed. As the decibels got higher and higher, Albert, "the Cabbage Patch Kid" drummer with a penciled-on five o'clock shadow, could no longer take it. He threw his drumsticks up in the air in frustration and left the room. Thus went a typical day in the life of Barbie and the Rockers at the Sikora residence, which was nestled in my childhood imagination.

My brother and I loved designing scenarios of make-believe with our stuffed animals and Barbie dolls. Using household resources, we would sail Styrofoam yachts to the Medici Coast in the bathtub or create electric guitars from badminton racquets. Our imaginations were a place of joy and laughter. Our elementary years were spent learning lessons from King Friday XIII and Lady Elaine from Mr. Rodgers Neighborhood of Make-Believe. These lessons and trips to our own neighborhoods of make-believe were teaching us how to work through life problems, to be innovative, and to create, and imagine. We were doing exactly what God created us to do—create, enthusiastically, without boundaries—CREATE! God was sharing with us a desire to dream big, use the available resources, and travel to infinity and beyond!

In the musical, *The Sound of Music*, Maria begins to teach the children she governs how to sing a song. She sings, "Let's start at the very beginning—a very good place to start. When you read,

you start with A-B-C. When you sing, you start with Do-Re-Mi.”¹ She continues to sing using solfege—a foundational language for learning music. As the song progresses and the children grasp the musical linguistics and the interaction with each other’s voices, the level of creativity, musical complexity, and imagination builds into a brilliantly scored round with harmonies, dancing, and theatrics.

Brilliant, creative, and imaginative liturgical arts must start at the very beginning as well. When the church creates, it starts with relationships. It asks, “what is humanity’s relationship with God as worshipers,” “what is God’s relationship with creation,” and “what is humanity’s relationship with creation?” Then, “how will these answers affect the use of liturgical arts in worship?” When a worship arts team understands the relational purpose for the application of liturgical arts, then the energy to create colorful, intertwining masterpieces with the Holy Spirit begins to spark and deepen the worship experience.

Imagination is a remarkable tool, but without the knowledge of a contextual Christian theological rationale, liturgical arts can distort the truth, become stagnant, or uninspired. Sacred music scholar Michael Bauer explains, “Imagination takes images from the material world and uses them to evoke that which is beyond all speech and all imaging. In so doing, connections are formed between human experience and the divine mystery. This fosters a sense of wonder and awe and spurs our devotion.”² The foundational and relational understanding of God toward humanity and creation informs the responsive devotional effectiveness of liturgical arts.

The joyful stories of the author’s childhood led her and her brother into a kingdom that was different from the realities of a hurting world. In and through the life of their imaginations,

¹ Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein III, and Mark Nevin, “Do-Re-Mi,” *The Sound of Music* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1981).

² Michael Bauer, *Arts Ministry: Nurturing the Creative Life of God’s People* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 159.

which was a gift from God, they found renewal and hope. God gave them visions and created scenarios where there could be laughter amongst chaos and redemption as Barbie forgave Pete the Panda. Albert, the troubled Cabbage Patch Kid doll, ran back home hugging everyone in the process, cleanly shaven. God used them and said, “Let there be light!” (Gen 1:3, NRSVUE) And, yes, there was light. Childlike imagination rooted in an understanding of God’s invitation to create here on earth provides the church with people equipped for sharing that light.

God in Relationship with Creation

Humanity was made in God’s image (Gen 1:27) so that they, too, could experience creation and create with the same gladness and delight as God. We are created to create. Entrepreneur and CEO, Jordan Raynor adds, “His creating was a way of serving us, by making us in his image so we could experience a glimpse of the joy he has been experiencing for all of time.”³

God created out of a desire for humanity to be involved—to be invited to continue to create with God. We are called to be creative people, to emulate the creative impulse of the One in whose image they are made. This love and relational motivation to create with God is called the creation mandate, a responsibility granted by the ultimate innovator to do fruitful work together. Bauer writes, “Formed by God, every man is given the task of responding to His call to be a co-creator.”⁴ God calls humanity to use their imaginations to enrich and enliven the setting in which they live—to continue honoring the goodness of God.

The liturgical arts flourish as Miriam dances (Exod 15:20–21), Bezalel and Oholiab design a tabernacle (Exod 31), and David composes praises and laments to God (Pss 100 and

³ Jordan Raynor, *Called to Create: A Biblical Invitation to Create, Innovate, and Risk* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 27.

⁴ Bauer, *Arts Ministry*, 169

130). Lutheran biblical scholar Terrence Fretheim explains, “The creative activity of the human, in particular, has the potential of significantly enhancing the ongoing life of the world and every creature therein, indeed, bringing into being that which is genuinely new.”⁵ The goodness of creating is a taste of the divine on earth.

Humanity is called to respond to God’s creative impulse through all their senses. In so doing they foster an awareness of God’s presence among them. They taste the communion bread, smell the rich aroma of the incense, wonder at the creative design of altars and paraments, listen attentively to orchestras and choirs as they intone magnificent alleluias, and join in community with one another around God’s sacred table. Indeed, humanity was created to create, to help themselves and the wider community to experience the richness of God’s presence in their lives. This is what should happen in worship. They “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps 34:8, NRSVUE) and that they can be good as well. Souls renewed!

When a worship arts team uses the liturgical arts as a resource to abundantly experience the Divine and to understand their relationship in creating with God as the task of mending a broken world, beauty emerges. Worship designers are motivated by God and are invited to continue the work of building God’s kingdom here on earth.

However, even with good intentions, liturgical artists can miss the mark or begin to steer away from God. When this happens, it is important to get back on track. Strategic evaluation questions begin a dialogue between creative motivation and the direction in which the Spirit is leading. This communication requires examining and evaluating liturgical arts as they unravel a constant dialogue between self and Creator. While this idea of keeping a constant dialogue may

⁵ Terrence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 28, Kindle Edition.

seem obvious and rudimentary, sometimes the simplest actions become easily forgotten, and therefore, the work becomes self-indulgent.

The dialogue begins with initial questions between liturgical arts teams, themselves, and God. It is like having a locker room huddle before a football game where all the players and coaches are going through bullet points and strategies. In the huddle, it is essential first to ask:

- In your context, when applying liturgical arts, does your motivation connect back to God and say something about our relationship with God?
- Is the liturgical art a response to God?
- Does the piece communicate truth within a broken world?
- Does the offering glorify God? If not, then who does the liturgical art serve, and who does it glorify?
- Does the art say something new about our relationship with God or God's kingdom?
- Is the liturgical art inclusive or exclusive to the rest of the creation?

If the response to these questions comes back to God and for the good of creation, then the work is valuable—not only to God but for all of creation. Liturgical art should always point back to the deep and meaningful covenantal relationship between God and humanity. Theologian Walter Brueggemann says, “Thus we sing to render our lives in all of their rich complexity, in honesty, back to God.”⁶

God has given humanity an enormous sandbox in which to create and play. God invites humanity, created in God's image, to imagine innovative liturgical art that, through the Holy Spirit, adds goodness, truth, and beauty to God's earthly realm. The Triune God, as the foundational and relational motivation of liturgical arts, is pivotal in bringing worshipers into enlivened worship experiences that encounter the Divine.

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *A Glad Obedience* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), Kindle Location 227, Kindle Edition.

Creation in Relationship with God

Who liturgical arts serve is the second area of evaluation that constructively allows liturgical artists to edit their work. The worship arts team at First Pasadena United Methodist Church remembers working on an altar installation for a worship series discussing God and family. The worship series used nostalgic accounts of common human memories that would be relevant to its worshipping community. These included memories such as kids playing outside with friends until the streetlights came on while parents sipped on “sweet tea” discussing the weather on the front porch. The series focused on pausing for a family meal around a common table. Other weeks in the series discussed how God works through families during periods of change and how God transforms communities in a quickly evolving world. As an anchor image to the series, our team decided to recreate a 1950s white picket fence home as an altar installation.

They used a traditionally styled plastic Barbie house, a pale-skinned man mowing his yard in far-too-dressy clothes, and even placed a golden retriever on the front lawn fashioned with some green felt grass and white picket fence. They stepped back as a team, took a look, and an hour later got an email from their worship pastor. . . “NO!” The critique was more constructive than that, requiring them to ask essential questions. Did this problematic exclusive display serve as a trip down memory lane for a specific group of people, or did it say something significant about God and/or God’s kingdom? The worship arts team removed the display after a short discussion. I do not remember what we did instead, but it was certainly not an exclusive memorial to childhood recollections that said nothing about God, their relationship with God, or their diverse faith community.

It is easy to get swept away by the excitement of visions and agendas. The freedom to create is an amazing gift but also risky. From mass genocide to atomic bombs to creative

exploitations of skewed truths, humans can generate painful, hurtful, and disgusting exhibitions of hate. Creative impulses can sow chaos into the cosmos producing destructive results. Though the decision to use Barbie's classic 50s-styled dream house with a white picket fence was not in the same category as mass genocide, the artistic choices did not reflect our vocation as children of God and co-creators with the Creator.

Liturgical arts should never be used to cause harm or to misrepresent the Creator's vision for the redemption of humanity and the world. However, it is essential to make clear that humanity holds the power to do so. People must always be aware of the power and freedom that they have in creating. This is part of creation's relationship with God—the *choice* to be a co-creator with God.

God bestowed on humans the freedom to experience the fullness of creating. Out of love, God gifted us with free will, knowing full well that this could lead creation astray. As Fretheim continues, “This move is risky for God, for it entails the possibility that the creatures will misuse the power they have been given, which is in fact what occurs.”⁷

Every day, humanity is faced with the choice of either crafting and constructing with God or doing it their way. Creation's success depends upon humanity's movement with the Divine. However, the struggle to accept this eternal calling is one of the most challenging parts of their relationship with God. Theologian W. David Taylor writes, “The Father makes a world that, while wholly dependent on him, is also endowed with its own integrity, its own way of being. He places humanity in it to steward it and to draw out its riches and potentialities.”⁸ Unfortunately, they do not always do so. Bauer goes on to say, “It is remarkable that so soon after the original

⁷ Fretheim, *God and World*, 354.

⁸ W. David O. Taylor, *Glimpses of the New Creation: Worship and the Formative Power of the Arts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 60.

creation mandate in the Garden, we are faced with the bald, hard fact of Cain's murder of his brother. Right from the beginning, human actions, and specifically human creativity had consequences in the world."⁹

Often, humanity sharpens its imagination for personal gain, power, wealth, and temporary happiness, leading to emptiness, desolation, greed, and pain. However, God continues to work with them, inviting them to create for the advancement of a better place—God's kingdom here on earth. God does not desert humanity even when they desert God. Catherine Kapikian, liturgical artist, explains this dual-dimensional fight, "Like Jacob, we must wrestle with the angels, risking the agony and the ecstasy of living into the fullness of our potential. We are intended to be initiating centers of life, contributing to the gracious work of transformation. Creation bears the imprint of God."¹⁰

When humanity creates in relationship with God, they reflect something of God's nature and character to the rest of the world. When they reveal God's goodness, then God is glorified. Therefore, the liturgical arts in relationship with God have the authority to unveil truth and light to the world. Art in service of the Creator voices creation's themes, bringing meaning and purpose out of chaos. They become a resource to bring in the lost in spirit, to provide peace to the grieving, to melt the hardened heart. They have the power to respond to the context of brokenness and resurrect that which is distorted. Bauer says, "The response takes our own unique distillation of the world around us and translates it into a creative form that can be offered to others and back to God."¹¹ It is in these works that the artist begins to find their divine potential and the rest of creation delights in the experience.

⁹ Bauer, *Arts Ministry*, 156.

¹⁰ Catherine Kapikian, *Art in Service of the Sacred* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 106.

¹¹ Bauer, *Arts Ministry*, 170.

If the liturgical arts are creative resources that help to clarify God's reality back to humanity, then worship designers should delight in understanding that what they plan and execute can change and enrich lives, bringing creation into a deeper relationship with God. Liturgical arts are never "fluff," nor are they merely "supplemental." On the contrary, there is always profound meaning in the anointed power of the liturgical arts when used sensitively. Taylor writes, "This is simply to say that every practice of art in worship opens up and closes down possibilities to form a congregation."¹²

Returning to the *Barbie* house example, the worship arts team tried persuading their worship pastor that, indeed, the retro-visioned house was a symbol relevant to the current worshipping community. They argued that the altar installation married the past with the present and that it reminded everyone that all were invited into the house of the Lord. Would this remind everyone of an all-inclusive house of the Lord? No. The team took the installation down, knowing full well that the artwork did not open the congregation's minds to God's truth. Unfortunately, it rested more in line with a distortion of the truth that closes down a divine opportunity to form the congregation in God's image.¹³

Truth is not revealed in liturgical arts unless God is at the center of the work, and the liturgical arts inclusively speak to a larger worldview. Using liturgical arts to shape the body of Christ in God's image begins with telling the truth about humanity through a lens of grace, love, and hope that all will understand. Such art builds community and belonging. It helps to produce God's work here on earth while strengthening the relationship between humanity, creation, and the Triune God.

¹² Taylor, *Glimpses of the New Creation*, 12.

¹³ Bauer, *Arts Ministry*, 170.

An Incarnational Relationship with Creation

I used to dream of becoming a famous rockstar. I drew pictures of limos, big hair, and microphones. My mom's old bridesmaid dresses became red-carpet attire. I can still remember the heat of using my dad's halogen work lights for stage lighting. I wanted to be a Rockstar.

As a kid, I always thought vocation meant a specific career or occupational path like becoming an entertainer, lawyer, or doctor—personal success stemming from these pursuits. Then, Christ showed me a new vocation. I learned about his teachings and ministry. I met the incarnational Christ on a sacrificial cross and then in the resurrection. I began to see Christ working with the Holy Spirit in others and myself, creating resurrection stories right here on earth. I started to understand that being a Rockstar was not a vocation but rather a vessel for responding to God's love and Christian vocation.

Before Christ, God knew that creation needed to be redeemed. In perfect love, “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14, NIV)

The truth found in Christ's ministry and life changed the focus of humanity's vocation. Love became the central work of God's people, creating a new covenant of hope and new life. This alternative reality is a response to God's love—creating hope for all. Theologian Steven Garber writes:

Sometimes they are bankers, and sometimes they make hamburgers. But always and everywhere, they are people who have vocations in imitation of the vocation of God: knowing the worst about the world, and still loving the world. They are people who learn to live in the tension of life, living with what is and longing for what will be—keeping clear of great temptations, for the sake of the world. Simply said, they become *hints of hope*.¹⁴

¹⁴ Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 193–194.

Christ died for humanity while they were yet sinners (Rom 5:8), reconciling creation through grace and resurrection that reveals a new way of life. Through their Baptism they are called to bear witness to Christ abiding in them and working in them through the Holy Spirit. This is the “meat and carbohydrates” of their relationship with the Creator, creation, and how they respond to both. Their lives are a creative vocation serving the divine. Matthew Fox, quoting the Medieval mystic Hildegard of Bingen in his book *Creativity*, clarifies this point, “Because ‘Divinity is aimed at humanity,’ we are ‘exalted with the vocation of creation,’ and we can receive the Divine powers and graces and give birth accordingly.”¹⁵

Through the continuation of God’s redeeming love for creation, through the Holy Spirit, humans are called to be co-creators with God for the transformation of the world. They are called to live imaginative sacred lives—artifacts of Christ’s transcendence. Jeremy S. Begbie summarizes:

The one through whom all things were created has become part of a creation whose praise has been corrupted, and in him, crucified and risen, creation is offered back to the Father, redirected toward its goal. At last, God receives what he has longed for and is due. And now, through the Spirit, we are given a part to play: made one with Christ, and as members of his new community, we are to bring creation to be more fully what it was created to be, and in so doing we anticipate the final re-creation of all things.¹⁶

Liturgical artists have a choice. They can pursue the truth and light of the Trinity within their work as they were created to do or not.

Worship arts teams can focus on their vocational responsibility of communicating love back into the world or not. The dual dimension of self and Christian vocation will always be a balancing act. Liturgical artists should feel the wild and whimsical Holy Spirit grabbing hold of

¹⁵ Matthew Fox, *Creativity* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2002), 57.

¹⁶ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2007), 207 (*Italics in original*).

their hearts and whispering, “Create!” Taylor says, “If the arts are capable of becoming effective servants of the church at worship. . . it is only because they have been caught up in the life of the Triune Creator.”¹⁷

Liturgical artists are part of a whirlwind cosmos connected to the Triune Creator who gifted them with the vocational identity of Christhood, inviting them to create through the Holy Spirit beautiful and mysterious works of art that reflect Christ’s truth and love as symbols and signs of God’s grace and redemption. Therefore, liturgical arts that choose the path of the Trinity become indispensable resources for creating enlivened worship experiences that encounter the Divine.

¹⁷ Taylor, *Glimpses of the New Creation*, 2.

CHAPTER 2 RITUAL STUDIES

“In a scene near the end (8:34), a woman is getting her feet washed while eating. Everyone else has one foot washed at a time. She is having both feet washed simultaneously. I ask why she looked so happy. ‘Honey,’ she says, ‘eating while having my feet washed is as near to heaven as I will get, so, you bet, I’m enjoying it.’ This outdoor liturgy is roomy enough for her to experience heaven on earth without feeling awkward or judged.”¹

Compare “ritualizing”² a domestic activity described by Ronald Grimes with an evening family ritual in my home:

Storytelling #3

Normally my family’s oral health routines wouldn’t be the first choice for an academic example of an ethnological exploration of a ritual. However, about a month ago, perhaps in connection to voluntarily registering myself for 24-hour shifts in ritual studies thought, I heard something in the bathroom that got my attention. Patrick, the ten-year-old, decided to start his toothbrushing ritual with a full-out concert of JVKE’s “Golden Hour” with gestures, dancing, and hairbrush microphone amplification. I was curious and drawn to the sound. I then witnessed a good three-minute mirror presentation of facial expressions, two minutes of hairstyling, and then finally two minutes of teeth brushing while striking poses and flexing muscles. Upon being done, the toothbrush was flung onto the counter—bristles down, excess toothpaste wiped on pajamas, and then a jump out of the bathroom for a big ending. For Patrick, this nightly ritual communicates with his inner spirit of creativity, playfulness, and energy. The ritual order changes every night with new improvised actions and assorted symbols that complement his sacred dance of joy. This ritual appears to be a celebration with the moon.

After witnessing Patrick’s toothbrushing ritual, my curiosity was piqued and I had to attend Sammy’s ritual as well. After watching for a few nights, I noticed that Sam, the 9-year-old, would use this time similarly to Patrick, but the ritual’s order and symbols remained the same: the mirror, water, hairbrush, and toothbrush (toothpaste is assumed). Like Patrick, there are moments of mirror reflection and striking poses, but never foolishness. The energy is peaceful and has space to breathe. The ritual seems like it is following an imaginary order, ceremoniously flowing through hair brushing, analyzing hair, more hair brushing, stepping backward for reflection, and satisfaction. Then, he meticulously places the sacred brush down and thus begins the toothbrushing—as if all was in preparation for this moment. At exactly two minutes into the brushing, he carefully sets his toothbrush down, swishes out his mouth with no mirror splattering, breathes, and the little prince is ready for the close of day.

The adult-only bathroom holds toothbrushing rituals in the mornings for thirty seconds, where the male individual leading the solo ritual displays carnal aggression

¹ Ronald L. Grimes, *Endings in Ritual Studies* (Waterloo, Ritual Studies International, 2020), 6, Kindle Edition.

² Grimes, *Endings*, 147.

towards their teeth and the instrument used to clean them. The subject spits, wipes their mouth using a clean hand towel, and then goes on their merry way. Seemingly bored with the monotony of this static ritual the subject seems only willing to participate for fear of bad breath and desire for dental longevity. I will need to further explore this behavior suggesting a few reforms, perhaps reteach the purpose of a hand towel, and supply a pamphlet from the American Dental Association reminding the subject of the two-minute rule.

The toothbrushing rituals of The Gray Family children are meaningful to them and communicate the importance of end-of-day preparation. My husband's morning toothbrushing ritual informs the observer that this might be a mindless action and not a ritual, but that is debatable by ritual and performance studies scholars. In my opinion, his aggression towards his toothbrush is not biological posturing and it is a stretch to hypothesize that this is a thirty-second time of reflection, but I wish that it was! I wish we all creatively indulged ourselves in the transformation of making our routine rituals into holy ground. I want to join my children's rituals, but I will remain in the hallway, learning from a distance.

How does the study of The Gray Family toothbrushing rituals help inform an evaluation of the liturgical arts used in an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the trinitarian God? While appearing as a domestic story of dental wellness, this also offers a portrait of human behavior through the lens of ritual study. Barry Stephenson, religious studies scholar, articulates that “to think about ritual is to explore its place, power, and potential in our lives and our society.”³ The field of ritual studies attempts to explain the social dynamics and cultural context of a group or individual through the observation of the communicative behavior within rituals. Ritual studies suggests that something seemingly ordinary, like a routine ritual of toothbrushing, might be an extraordinary behavior with the capacity to hold the power of peace and joy for two little boys as they relate to their world.

In ritual studies, researchers identify the ritual's actions and symbols and begin to ask questions that emphasize the “hows” and “whys” of human behavior. Anthropologist and ritual studies pioneer, Victor Turner, instructs that “one must learn to go underneath the symbol to the

³ Barry Stephenson, *Ritual: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1, Kindle Edition.

reality which it represents and which gives it its meaning.”⁴ Going underneath the symbol or human behavior in ritual invites evaluators to explore the cultural, historical, theological, political, sociological, psychological, and ecological melting pots of humanity that identify human nature. Christian worship is ritual and, therefore, can be evaluated through ritual studies.

Ritual studies gifts liturgists with endless avenues for contextualizing liturgical critique. Through the observation of a congregation’s behavioral and symbolic connections with ritual play, liturgy, improvisation, ceremony, flow, and/or other “sensibilities”⁵ of ritual, a richer evaluation of the assembly’s identity and corresponding use of liturgical arts can be obtained.

Patrick and Sam dance, gesture, ceremoniously bow to their hairbrush, sing, play, use liturgical symbols, include space and flow, improvise, celebrate, and commemorate the end of the day with a toothbrushing ritual that has evolved for over nine years. Upon studying this ritual through the lens of ritual studies, a liturgist may discover that their Christian community’s worship has just as rich a ritual as Patrick and Sammy’s toothbrushing ritual.

The following chapter introduces the basic concept of ritual studies as a means of evaluating how the liturgical arts function in the life of the church. It will focus on three working methodologies to serve as a possible launching platform that may best benefit liturgical critique. They are as follows: Biologist Julian Huxley’s “Crested Grebes and Ritualization,”⁶

⁴ Victor Turner, “Victor Turner,” in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, ed. Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 91.

⁵ Ronald L. Grimes, “Ronald L. Grimes,” in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, ed. Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 132.

⁶ Stephenson, *Ritual*, 7–11.

anthropologist Victor Turner’s development of “liminality and *communitas*,”⁷ and anthropologist Ronald Grimes’ “modes of ritual sensibility”⁸ and a “web system metaphor.”⁹

RITUAL STUDIES

Ritual studies methodology is a valuable resource for informing the evaluation of liturgical arts used in worship. As previously stated, ritual studies attempts to answer the “whys” and “hows” of a congregation interacting with its biblical narrative and the complex worlds in which they live. Ritual studies tries to reveal the corporate nature of the “holy people,”¹⁰ or assembly. Its methodology does not evaluate to prescribe, nor does it describe its findings through the ideals of the observer but rather through a web of contextual and ritual sensibilities. When liturgists perform evaluations of Christian rituals and their symbols, they are not critiquing as consultants for reform, but rather they are observing, participating, and retelling the story of that ritual. After this has concluded, there is a time for prescribing ideas towards worship renewal, but only through the contextual eyes of ritual connection. Liturgical theologian John D. Witvliet describes the process this way:

Like anthropologists observing the fertility rites of a third-world tribe, liturgists observe Christian ritual, describing not what they believe should be done, but rather what is being done, and then interpreting that action in terms of the theological commitments it reflects. Particular attention is given to nonverbal communication, to meanings not self-consciously promoted. . . It is in this particular activity that a liturgist must master the art of self-consciousness, so that the descriptions they generate arise as much as possible from the given liturgical event and not from the liturgist’s own ideals.¹¹

⁷ Marcell Silva Steuernagel, *Church Music Through the Lens of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 40–41, Kindle Edition.

⁸ Ronald Grimes, “Ronald L. Grimes,” in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, ed. Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 132–147.

⁹ Grimes, *Endings*, 216–221.

¹⁰ Gordan W. Lathrop, *Holy Things* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 11.

¹¹ John D. Witvliet, “John D. Witvliet,” in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, ed. Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 25.

Through the observation and/or participation of ritual, the liturgist begins to identify the communities' distinctiveness as part of the worshiping body of Christ. They ask the assembly:

- Why do they feel different after attending the ritual?
- Does the rite transform worshipers? If so, how?
- Does the ritual promote empathy, or does it fear the marginalized?
- How does the ritual connect to the congregation's values?
- Does it flow and give participants room to improvise, or does it require a certain rigidity?
- How are the assembly's symbols reflective of their vision, theology, and culture?
- How does the ritual inform something new—something extraordinary of God?
- How does the ritual hold its rich history and diversity in juxtaposition with the biblical narrative?
- Why and how does this group of believers display a love for the trinitarian God?
- Did the individual(s) experience *communitas*? If not, why?

The previous questions begin to form a methodology of approaching liturgical critique through the application of ritual studies. However, the number of theories instructing ritual studies can be daunting. Since rituals exist “everywhere and nowhere,”¹² flow in and out of sensibilities, and are a complex interwoven web, the methodology for studying them is just as complicated.

¹² Stephenson, *Ritual*, 71.

RITUAL STUDIES METHODOLOGIES

The Crested Grebe

In 1914, evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley wrote a paper on the courtship rituals of the Great Crested Grebe.¹³ Huxley focused on connecting his work on the evolution of birds and nature to the evolution of human progress and rituals. During breeding season, both male and female Great Crested Grebes perform ritualized mating dances. This was interesting to Huxley. He understood that animals ritualized through postures and movements of aggression, or dominance for survival, but this species jointly existed together, sharing all rituals of life equally.

Male and female grebes cooperate in building nests and incubating the eggs of their offspring. In mating rituals, both the male and female birds practice gestures and postures that clearly communicate to one another how to dance. The evolution of this mating ritualization is beautiful, “transmitting information between the members of a species for their mutual benefit.”¹⁴ This was not within the normal ritualization patterns known at the time. Huxley defined *ritualization* as “the adaptive formalization or canalization of emotionally motivated behavior, under the teleonomic pressure of natural selection.”¹⁵ Huxley felt that Grebe’s ritualization was an evolution of Darwin’s natural selection theory. The Grebe mating dance and the normative behavior between the male and female birds were for mutual benefit, not survival,

¹³ The great crested grebe is a water bird known for its courtship rituals and its evolutionary distinct roles in sharing egg incubation. For more information see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_crested_grebe (accessed on February 27, 2024).

¹⁴ Stephenson, *Ritual*, 8.

¹⁵ Timothy D. Son, *Ritual Practices in Congregational Identity Formation* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 10. Rather than behaviors that showed dominance as mating ritual posturing, or behaviors to scare, or battle as the fittest, the crested grebe displayed behavior of working together for the mutual benefit of the species as a means for survival.

altering Darwin's theory of natural selection. Huxley labeled this behavior as "mutual selection."¹⁶

While not the most obvious method of gathering information for evaluating the liturgical arts, Huxley's birds are a good starting point for a dialogue in the methodology of ritual studies. I have chosen two points from Huxley's Grebe methodology. Throughout the course of his career, Huxley's advocacy for human equality, especially women, in the name of science, was primary to his studies and presentations. He felt that if the "lower" species, like the Grebe, could perform together equally then so could human beings. He said, "Mutual sexual selection could lead to the continued improvement of men: 'To put the whole matter in a nutshell, if ideas rule the world, then the complete emancipation of women will decrease the number of those rulers that are stupid, petty, self-sufficient, and prejudiced, and add to the number that make for happiness and progress in their dominion.'"¹⁷ Therefore, the power of ritualization can and should benefit the good of the species. If nature can evaluate its rituals and evolve accordingly, so can we. This is the first point of information to take away from Huxley's biology and ritual studies.

The mutual selection mating dance ritual of the Grebe raises the following questions:

- How do parishioners mutually share participation in their rituals? Is there an equality of power within the rituals?
- How does the ritualization of Christian worship honor the sacred mutual needs of the species?
- How has the ritual evolved?

The other point from Huxley's ritualization methodology is the birds' use of gestures and posturing. Timothy D. Son, religious scholar, explains, "terms like *ritual* and *ritualization* draw our attention to the way in which certain social actions and behaviors strategically distinguish

¹⁶ Mary M. Bartley, "Courtship and Continued Progress: Julian Huxley's Studies on Bird Behavior," *Journal of the History of Biology* 28, no. 1 (1995): 91–108, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4331336> (accessed on September 26, 2023).

¹⁷ Bartley, "Courtship and Continued Progress," 98.

themselves from other random actions. . . to accomplish an envisioned goal or purpose.”¹⁸ The Grebe use their wings, stances, and dancelike craning to communicate what seems like love and affection for one another. Just like the Grebe, we cannot neglect the unsaid as part of our worship evaluation. If the voice is saying something profound and elegantly holy, then the body must comply. When we greet one another or show a smile, this must never be without meaning. Son supports this by saying, “A smile exhibited on a person’s face, being accompanied by bodily expressions of joyful acceptance, enhances a sense of connectedness and belonging to a meaningful relationship within a community.”¹⁹ Thus, the liturgical art of smiling holds the power to transform. How intangible “holy things”²⁰ are used within the worshipping body should be included in liturgical critique.

Humanity, as well as the animal kingdom, ritualize their lives, from toothbrushing, egg sitting, and mating dances, to Christian worship, ritualization is an inborn behavior. Additionally, like the Crested Grebe, people are capable of change and reform. Christian rituals inspired by the Holy Spirit should always be an evolutionary experience that is mutually acceptable for all of humanity. Through its gestures, dances, and songs, worship offers a chance for everyone to participate. The evolutionary behaviors of the Crested Grebe serves as an example of equality within the species that is foundational to worship.

¹⁸ Son, *Ritual Practices*, 11.

¹⁹ Son, *Ritual Practices*, 11.

²⁰ Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 11.

Liminality and *Communitas*

The liturgical arts open liminal spaces that enable worshipers to encounter the reality of the Triune God—offering and introducing creative ways to help disengage from normative society. This liminal space in ritual releases room for *communitas*—a deep, homogeneous, and sacred experience between communal participants.

Liminality is a concept first developed by anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep to explain the “liminal phase of *rites de passage*.”²¹ Van Gennep saw ritual as a three-phase process:

1. Separation: a detachment phase where the individual or group is sent away from society.
2. Transition: a liminal phase where the initiate, or ordinand is stripped of status and identity, seen as ambiguous and low in stature, accommodating to activities and behaviors asked of them during this time.
3. Incorporation: The individual or group is reintroduced back into the society changed and transformed.²²

However, to inform liturgical critique, the following will focus on the liminal stage of Van Gennep’s process. During this transitional stage where the individual or group is stripped of all self-identity, it would not be uncommon for initiates or groups to experience periods of deep sacred togetherness—*communitas*. Victor Turner, anthropologist and ritual studies pioneer, observes, “What is interesting about liminal phenomena for our present purposes is the blend they offer of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship.”²³ This intense bonding is the experience of *communitas*. He writes:

²¹ Bradshaw and Melloh, “Turner,” *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, 74.

²² Bradshaw and Melloh, “Turner,” *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, 75.

²³ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell Paperbacks, 1969), 96.

Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or “holy,” possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency.²⁴

His observation of liminality implies “that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low.”²⁵ Victor Turner and his wife Edith developed Van Gennep’s theory of liminality further by theorizing that liminality could be found in all ritual, not only rites of passage. Liminality is the constant and fluid movement between “communitas and structured, equality and inequality, transition and state, sacredness and secularity.”²⁶ These juxtapositions become a “threshold”²⁷ where creativity and transformation can occur in ritual.

Through this theory we can assume that Christian worship is a liminal opportunity away from the everyday realities of our worldviews. It is a place where we can be stripped of our mundane existence and stand amazed as an assembly to rejoice in the immanent glory of God. Worship offers a space for structure and individualism to give way to *communitas*, where all can be children of God unified by the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. Liturgical studies scholar Ruth C. Duck declares, “The sacramental rite can be a liminal moment in the presence of God in which we suspend our questions about universal truth.”²⁸ It is within the nakedness of liminality that the assembly finds truth and where the created meet with the Creator, free to dance.

As a Protestant, westernized child of God, I confess that entering a liminal space of worship can be difficult to experience, even uncomfortable. Allowing myself to break apart from

²⁴ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 128

²⁵ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 97.

²⁶ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 106.

²⁷ Stephenson, *Ritual*, 50.

²⁸ Ruth C. Duck, *Worship for the Whole People of God*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 164.

my social culture, individualism, and middle-class order of privilege seems threatening to those securities. The decline of church attendance, membership, and the mundane usage of liturgical arts in the United States would support this as a shared claim. However, if I want to deepen my relationship with God and participate with God in the creation process, then I need to embrace a separation from my ordinary life to see the world through Christ's eyes. Participating in the assembly can be the place for this. It is here in the communal and liminal time with the Holy Spirit where I can hear the cry of the needy or see the struggles of the brokenhearted. They become mine, and mine to them. Through the redemptive equality of freedom that extends to us without prejudice, we are moved and transformed, preparing ourselves to be better than the normative lives in which we will return, ready to make a difference.

Unfortunately, not everyone is going to leave the comforts of their TikTok, soccer fields, or comfy loungewear to experience this. Even if they did, I am not confident that our worship services project anything more than an extension of our mutually understood worldviews. Turner suggests, "what was in tribal society principally a set of transitional qualities 'betwixt and between' defined states of culture and society has become itself an institutionalized state."²⁹ Turner argues that our Protestant westernized religious rituals have become too established to leave room for the "betwixt and between"—a mere reflection of secular ideals. The contemporary Protestant sees value in individual enlightenment, personal growth, and the promotion of self as a result of the social structures in which they live. This influences the rituals they create, making it difficult to leave the security of individualism and live in liminal spaces and times. However, for Christian ritual to be an effective source of *communitas*, this must occur. *Communitas* happens when the assembly embodies their communal commonality in Christ's

²⁹ Turner, *The Ritual*, 107.

death, resurrection, and ministerial calling. Gordan Lathrop, liturgical theologian, supports this requirement of the assembly, stating:

Instead, we look with them [the assembly] to Christ giving himself away to them in the word and sacrament so that they might in turn give to their neighbor. In those gifts, the Spirit poured out from the death and resurrection of Jesus makes them the body of Christ.³⁰

If the pendulum of worship swung more towards *communitas*, to the marginalized and forgotten, the “sacred” and the “humble,”³¹ to the hands and feet of Christ, rather than the comfort of social ideals then the body of Christ grows.

I argue that the liturgical arts are necessary vessels for this to occur. The liturgical arts open wider liminal spaces that creatively empathize with the realities of the poor and marginalized, and together intersect with the freedom cries of Jesus Christ that generate *communitas*. The liturgical arts enlarge the tunnel vision of individualism through the imaginative and colorful storytelling of Christ’s reality, thus increasing the liminal space where creativity thrives, and new songs are produced. It is here where the poetry of our prayers and the rhythms and notes of our songs sing the language of the redeemed that we give voice to the lyrics of the voiceless. When we confess that “we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy,”³² we are moved to action, transformed into agents of love. Here, through the safeness of imagination, the liturgical arts create a liminal space for *communitas*. In her case study of a marginalized and disabled congregation in Atlanta, Rebecca Spurrier, an ethnographic researcher, writes,

Through art forms, congregants insist that even in the liminal, provisional space and time of a congregation, something new can be created and held out as a witness to other social

³⁰ Gordan W. Lathrop, *The Assembly: A Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022), 5.

³¹ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 106.

³² “Confession and Pardon,” *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 51, Kindle Edition.

arrangements. Such hope insists that something impossible be understood as possible; a different way of dwelling together as both church and neighborhood can be imagined.”³³

It is understood that we will not always hear and see what God wants us to imagine. We will retrograde back into old habits of normative behavior that cloud the possibility of invention. However, the chance for renewal and resurrection are always available because God will always continue his relationship with us. The door to transformative worship is always open. We employ liturgical critique to help re-center and evaluate the worship experience and our communal relationship with God. Aiming for a liminal worship experience that intersects with *communitas* might ask the following questions:

- Who are the members of the faith family? Do they include the outcast and marginalized?
- For whom do we pray?
- For whom do we sing?
- Are the faces of the unseen seen?
- Are the cries of the poor and the grief of the mourner heard and welcomed in the space?
- Turner’s characteristics of liminal space include sacred vs. secular, foolishness vs. sagacity.³⁴ How well does sacred and foolishness flow within the structure of the liturgy?
- Are there opportunities for range of expression between quiet reflection and unbridled joy?
- How do the liturgical arts creatively inform the gathering of a richer worldview through Christ?

The answer to these questions can be fertile ground for experiencing the hope and resurrection that Christ offers in the form of *communitas*. Their response should offer inclusive answers that explore all the corners of God’s creation—sharing in a rich, liminal, and transformative worship experience of *communitas*.

³³ Rebecca Spurrier, *The Disabled Church: Human Difference and the Art of Communal Worship* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 191.

³⁴ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 106.

I believe non-worshippers realize that *communitas* offers the depth that they are missing in their lives and attempt to seek it outside of the church, but they often come up short. They search for it in parent groups while their kids play soccer five times a week, in Friday night wine and book clubs, or in Thursday evening Happy Hours. Humanities and social sciences scholars Eric Bain-Selbo and Gregory Sapp state, “We are both individual and social beings, and though the soul is individual in us, it is part of a larger soul or spirit that is the society.”³⁵ The individual seeks relationship and connection within society. However, the positive development and depth of that relationship depends upon how wide the circle of the assembly stretches and to which direction its agenda points. . . to self, or to the other.

A domestic religion like sports, hobbies, or philanthropy is only as strong as its liminal space. That space will never be wide enough, unless the communal doings include the fullness of creation that meet outside of individualism. This places the Christian church in an exciting time for inviting people into liminal space to experience *communitas*. The Christian assembly can begin to offer an alternative experience that is usually missing in domestic religion—*communitas*. Through liturgical critique, Christian ritual can be and is a beautiful place of liminality and *communitas* where the liturgical arts serve as transformative mediums that shift the weight of a heavy pendulum stuck on institution and individualism and offer *communitas* to everyone.

Web System Metaphor and Modes of Ritual Sensibility

Ronald Grimes is a religious scholar whose work and theories in the fields of anthropology and ethnology help to shape and unshape, explain and unexplain the influence of ritual studies used

³⁵ Eric Bain-Selbo and Gregory D. Sapp, *Understanding Sport as a Religious Phenomenon* (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 135, Kindle Edition.

to understand human behavior. His metaphoric comparison of ritual study to a web system reminds us that liturgical critique uses a multi-dimensional complex web of study that includes connected rituals of the ancient world, biblical theologies, and cultural and sociological disciplines.

Grimes explains: “A web is suggestive of systemic interconnection, reminding us that, although we may be talking about a ritual, this ritual may be embedded in a ritual system, which is embedded in a cultural system, which is embedded in a global, or even interplanetary, system,”³⁶ While the classical and process ritual models base their study on patterns, classifications, process, and symbols, Grimes describes and teaches ritual through an embodiment of a thick and rich web of ritual study and interconnection. In a presentation given for a seminar on the politics of performance, Grimes describes his web of ritual studies as boundary hopping.

So, when I was hired, I was not hired like I was or still am in a religious department. I was not hired to do Islam or Christianity, or Judaism, or Buddhism. I was hired to boundary hop. So, my job description actually was religion and the arts. And my job was to constantly be crossing, transcending, and transgressing those various boundaries.³⁷

Though perhaps boundary hopping and the metaphor of ritual to web seems directionally challenged, overwhelming, and perhaps messy, this approach towards ritual studies provides an endless shelf of valuable inspiration to use in evaluating and constructing liturgical arts for the enlivenment of Christian ritual. While people have different reasons for wanting to go to church, the main reason many Christians attend church is that they want to know more about God. A free-moving and active web of connections into sacred ritual can serve as a flowing fountain of

³⁶ Ronald L. Grimes, *Endings in Ritual* (Waterloo: Ritual Studies International, 2020), 219–220 Kindle Edition.

³⁷ Ronald L. Grimes, “Ritual Studies: Practicing the Craft,” Duke Franklin Humanities Institute, streamed live on July 13, 2015, YouTube video, 2:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsb5UwrjbII> (accessed September 23, 2023).

metaphors, symbols, theories, actions, and imagination leading to liturgical critique and the knowledge about who God is.

Grimes proposes that “ritual has six modes of sensibility: ritualization, decorum, ceremony, liturgy, magic, and celebration. I regard these, not so much as types of ritual, as sensibilities, or embodied attitudes, that may arise in the course of a ritual.”³⁸ Each mode serves as descriptions for understanding the nature of the ritual. Knowing which modes are being used within the ritual, or which is primary, suggests an approach to integrating the liturgical arts in the context of ritual behavior. Below is a list of questions to help analyze the liturgical arts through Grimes’ mode of ritual sensibilities:

- Ritualization
 - What are the gestures used in worship?
 - How do they communicate with the congregation?
 - How do moods change throughout the Christian Year?
 - How does the history of the church and its community shape worship?
 - How does the congregation keep patterned “good habits”³⁹ like lighting the altar candles aligned with more exciting behavior?
- Decorum
 - What are the church’s formalized social rhythms?
 - How do people greet one another?
 - How do people dress for the ritual?
 - How do people enter the sanctuary?
 - How do people use the altar rail at communion?
 - Are you allowed to bring coffee into the worship space?
- Ceremony
 - Where is the central power during the Christian gathering?
 - Does the action symbolize the “power to conserve, or the power to change?”⁴⁰
 - Is there an officiant, or a host directing the service?
 - Is this event more about pomp and decorum than the central worship of Christ?
- Liturgy

³⁸ Bradshaw and Melloh, “Grimes,” *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, 133.

³⁹ Bradshaw and Melloh, “Grimes,” *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, 136.

⁴⁰ Bradshaw and Melloh, “Grimes,” *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, 139.

- If liturgy is “a way of coming to rest in the heart of cosmic change and order,”⁴¹ then what actions are being used in worship to usher in the Spirit?
- What is the general order of worship?
- Does the liturgy invite flexibility?
- What event does the liturgy “re-present and event-ualize?”⁴²
- Magic
 - Grimes suggests a ritual has magical sensibilities when “it is a deed having transcendent reference and accomplishing some desired empirical result”⁴³
 - Does the calendaring of the body of Christ include healing services?
 - Do the liturgical arts like prayer or music suggest and expect God to do something with specific results?
- Celebration
 - Is there playtime within the work of the liturgy?
 - Are there moments for spontaneity and improvisation during the order?
 - Is there freedom towards “pure expressivity and response?”⁴⁴

Congregations can gain a better sense of their corporate Christian identity through Grimes’ ritual sensibilities and how they inform what we do in worship. There must always be room for the unknown. Grimes’ methodology for ritual study includes video documentation of rituals, interviews with hundreds of people on ritual and performance studies, lectures, teaching, and the Lab (an immersive practice lab for improvising and building ritual), providing an energizing current of whimsical wisdom interfaced with respect and love for the mystery of ritual uncertainty—the excitement of possible ritualization. Ritual web connection corresponds to the artist’s palette of multiple colors; when mixed and blended, the artist unearths a masterpiece. Ritualization, through all its sensibilities, expands our spaces to the possibilities of mysterious new beginnings that embrace a web of connection to the past, present, and future unknowns.

⁴¹ Bradshaw and Melloh, “Grimes,” *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, 141.

⁴² Bradshaw and Melloh, “Grimes,” *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, 143. This question is in reference to which stories are being told within the worship service? How will they be represented and acted out?

⁴³ Bradshaw and Melloh, “Grimes,” *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, 143.

⁴⁴ Bradshaw and Melloh, “Grimes,” *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, 147.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter was a transcription of a scene taken from Chapel on the Green's outdoor Maundy Thursday Service from 2012, documented by Ronald Grimes. It is described as follows:

Chapel on the Green is a weekly outdoor service sponsored by Trinity Episcopal Church, New Haven, Connecticut. On Maundy Thursday, 2012, grounded by the rhythms of Drums Not Guns, volunteers, church members, and clergy combined the ancient ritual of foot-washing with medical foot care for people who walk the streets. After many feet were washed, massaged, and outfitted with new socks, vouchers were given for a pair of shoes, and an outdoor meal was served. The service is a combination of the ancient ritual of foot-washing with medical foot care for people who walk the street, spoken liturgy, a meal.⁴⁵

This is Christian ritual at its best—where there is a web of ritual context working together within the space of liminality. Here is where *communitas* exists. This is where the homeless and volunteer eat together and where clergy and laity serve as the hands and feet of Christ, and all are welcome to tell their stories. This scene serves as a witness to the evolution of an ancient foot-washing ritual that now serves not only hygienic needs, but the medical and emotional needs of the marginalized. The powerful symbols of communion spaghetti, the sacred water for foot cleansing, prayers of healing and peace for the assembly and for the world, drum rhythms of liberation, and visual art flags with community concerns written on them all effectively lead the body of Christ into *communitas*. Here on this noisy urban street is a lesson on how ritual studies can inform the evaluation of liturgical arts to help build enlivened worship experiences that intersect with the Divine.

⁴⁵ Ronald L. Grimes, "A Foot Washing Service for Maundy Thursday," Trinity Episcopal Church, New Haven, Connecticut, streamed live on April 5, 2012, Vimeo video, <https://vimeo.com/40054208> (accessed: September 22, 2023).

CHAPTER 3 LITURGICAL THEOLOGY AND ARTS

“What Is This Place”

What is this place, where we are meeting?
Only a house, the earth its floor.
Walls and a roof, sheltering people,
windows for light, an open door.
Yet it becomes a body that lives
when we are gathered here,
and know our God is near.

Words from afar, stars that are falling,
sparks that are sown in us like seed:
names for our God, dreams, signs, and wonders
sent from the past are all we need.
We in this place remember and speak
again what we have heard:
God’s free redeeming word.

And we accept bread at this table,
broken and shared, a living sign.
Here in this world, dying and living,
we are each other’s bread and wine.
This is the place where we can receive
what we need to increase:
our justice and God’s peace.¹

Storytelling #4

“Clang, clang, clang went the trolley. Ding, ding, ding went the bell. Zing, zing, zing went my heartstrings hmmm dah dah dah doo dah di dah,”² sang my mom while humming and scatting along to the toe-tapping “Trolley Song” from “Meet Me in St. Louis.” She loved playing upbeat show tunes, or Big Band’s Greatest Hits as she danced around the house dusting and vacuuming as a way to escape the monotony of cleaning. I remember the year when my parents purchased a multidisc player. There would be hours of uninterrupted Saturday afternoon dance hall domesticity with Count Basie, Glen Miller, and Duke Ellington. During the summer months, the windows would be thrown open, inviting the neighborhood to join into a music appreciation course on American culture circa 1940s-ish. . . “clang, clang, clang.”

¹ Huub Oosterhuis, “What Is This Place,” © 1970 trans. David Smith; © 1967, Gooi en Sticht, bv., Baarn, The Netherlands, Exclusive English-language agent: OCP Publications; © 1984, TEAM Publication, publ. by OCP Publications.

² Ralph Blane and Hugh Martin, “Trolley Song,” *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Nashville: EMI Feist Catalog Inc., 1944).

All I knew about trolleys was an upbeat and somewhat embarrassing show tune that my mom didn't know the words to but loved to share with the neighbors. Trolleys were not something with which I was familiar. By the time the 1980s rolled around, trolleys in Ingram, PA, were replaced with bus routes, or personal vehicles to travel from here to there. Some of the main streets in town held the remnants of the old trolley rails within the bricks, or cement and rebar of the new construction, but they had long been retired. My grandma would reminisce about taking the trolley into town with my grandpa to go shopping at the old Horne's department store. I always thought that sounded romantic, it was a different time.

Lately, I've been thinking about trolleys. On a brisk Christmas Eve night in 1967, the assembly of Ascension Roman Catholic Church celebrated its first Mass. Bishop John J. Wright saw the need for a new space of worship for his communities in the west-end suburbs of Pittsburgh, PA, and created the Ascension Parish from the boundaries of St. Philip Church of Crafton, Holy Innocents Church of Sheridan, most of Ingram, and parts of the twentieth and twenty-eighth wards of the City of Pittsburgh. Architects Edward Horley, Robert Murray, and D. McGerver were hired to transform, restore, and renovate what people knew as the old, abandoned trolley barn on Berry St.³ What was once the bustling intersection for the people of Pittsburgh Transit was now a bustling intersection for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh and the Holy Spirit. Ascension Roman Catholic Church would become a central meeting space for many people to connect with the Divine and each other—myself included.

My dad was an altar boy that night helping the priest and other laity to illuminate the liturgical elements of the Mass—telling a story of a savior born in a lowly manger for the salvation of the world. Here, in the glow of its warmly lit windows, the lowly, abandoned trolley barn on Berry St. would become a part of that story, equipping people to go out and serve the world as the body of Christ. This was my home church. Trolleys. Perhaps I know more about them than I thought—that God can take something broken and dirty like an abandoned trolley barn and use it as a means of grace—a resource for holy people to experience transformation.

The Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church is another “holy thing” in my life. On Memorial Day, 2023, we met at the Hilton of Americas in downtown Houston. Bishop Cynthia Harvey's episcopal address stated:

Last week this space held people for some ordinary meeting, convention, or luncheon—THIS week THIS space has been made sacred and holy by your presence and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. This space has been set aside for Holy Conferencing—for love made flesh, for REVIVAL.⁴

I deeply value the sacred spaces, signs, and symbols that have shaped and continue to shape my life; those restored trolley barns “made sacred and holy by our

³ “Church of the Ascension, Ingram, PA: Rooted in Faith, 25 Years” (unpublished manuscript, 1992), Church Membership Directory.

⁴ Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, “All You Need Is Love,” Episcopal Address, Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, May 28, 2023, Houston, TX, trans. <https://www.txcumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/AC-2023-Episcopal-Address.pdf>, 2.

presence and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.”⁵ Time and time again, they transform me into being a part of something bigger than myself showing me mercy and grace to then extend to my brothers and sisters. They inspire me to open all of my windows to colorfully sing, hum, skat, and dance to the tunes of the Triune God inviting all my neighbors to join.

Liturgical Theology

The previous chapter was a strategic examination of liturgical critique using methodologies of ritual studies and a basic understanding of human’s instinctual need to ritualize. Asking questions involving the sensibilities of ritual, the weblike interconnection of ritual context, liminality, and *communitas* better informs the evaluation process for liturgical arts teams.

A proper understanding of “holy things and holy people”⁶ not only enhances the liturgical ministry teams’ abilities to incorporate richer liturgical arts but is essential for the clearer and more significant communication and glorification of God for the entire assembly. This chapter explores the significance of “holy things for the holy people” in Christian worship in connection with liturgical art. It offers an evaluation strategy through liturgical theology that supports the importance of comprehending the functionality of sacred symbols in combination with liturgical art to actively maintain, reimagine, and renew an ever-evolving, enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine. These sacred items are the vessels for which the liturgical arts live and communicate.

Liturgical studies that informs the evaluation and liturgical critique of Christian worship and its use of liturgical arts is liturgical theology. While ritual studies reports on the essence, behaviors, or space found in ritual, liturgical theology refers to the whole phenomenon of Christian worship. It attends to the biblical narratives and theologies of Christian tradition held in

⁵ Harvey, “All You Need,” 2.

⁶ Gordan W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 11.

juxtaposition with the contemporary realities of the assembly. Liturgical theology defines the past and present meanings of signs and symbols or the “holy things” used within the worshipping body of Christ. This includes trolley barns which are no longer trolley barns, but sacred spaces.

Gordan Lathrop, liturgical scholar, explains:

The classic Eastern liturgy brought the assembly and its focusing materials to expression in the communion invitation sung out to the people by the presiding priest over the proffered foods: “holy things for the holy people.” Here *things*—in this case, bread and wine—and *people* have a meaning as they are held together with the word and spirit of God’s promise. This meaning is holiness. That invitation to participate, to take up the holy things and be the holy people, ought to be the continual theme of any helpful liturgical theology.⁷

Liturgical theology supports the belief that Christian worship is an evolution of human ritual where the past, present, and future ideals of the trinitarian God continue to breathe into the world, the holy assembly, and its holy signs and symbols. Those ideals are held in juxtaposition with the gathered body of Christ that expects to experience an encounter with the Divine through gathering as the assembly. This encounter with Christ’s paschal mystery communicates new truth and understanding about the assembly’s holy reality and sends the community of faith transformed and prepared to continue Christ’s hope-filled message into the world.

This chapter’s opening hymn boldly reminds us of the divine significance of gathering as a congregation and the meaningful importance of the symbols and signs used in worship. Huub Oosterhuis invites singers to the transformative power that the sacred arts hold within worship. It is a hymn about being the assembly—an evaluation of being “holy people” using “holy things” to meet with the trinitarian God in a formational intersection of divine power that encompasses our relationship to God and our neighbors.⁸

⁷ Gordan W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 11.

⁸ *Assembly: A Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022), 147–149. Gordan Lathrop uses this hymn as a “brilliant choice” when imagining assemblies gathering after a long absence due to the pandemic in his book. While this chapter draws from a wide variety of ecumenical theologians, Lutheran (ELCA) Gordan Lathrop thematically

If one of the objectives of Christian worship is the spiritual formation of the assembly through an encounter with the Divine using sacred symbols, then developing strategies of symbolic evaluation informed by liturgical theology will build stronger liturgical critique. Liturgical theology offers a response to the challenge of finding symbols “capable of holding us in material and social realities, giving new grounds for hope and a social context for the functioning of the individual mind” in Christian worship.⁹ Using liturgical theology in liturgical critique allows the ordinary to become “holy things for the holy people.”

Philosophy and theology scholar, James K. A. Smith, writes:

Emphasizing the material conditions of worship and the formation that is effected by participation in such practices is not meant to be a naturalization of worship but rather to honor the incarnational nature of God’s dealing with humanity: that worship is a mediated encounter with the Triune God, who condescends to meet us in the stuff of which we are made. And in and through that stuff, God is active.¹⁰

A worshipper’s awareness and understanding of their “stuff” and the power that they hold through the Holy Spirit provides a launching pad for the liturgical arts to respond—illuminating the paschal mystery for the gathering of the faithful. Being attentive to liturgical theology allows for a specific focus on the juxtaposition of the two realities of trinitarian worship—the assembly’s story and God’s story. The use of liturgical arts and their associated symbols enhances the spiritual formation of the assembly by creating an environment that facilitates a profound encounter with the Divine, leading to transformative worship experiences.¹¹ Liturgical theology provides insight into how ordinary people and things can become extraordinary through

serves as a primary source using the theology found in *Holy things: A Liturgical Theology*, *The Pastor: A Spirituality*, and *The Assembly: A Spirituality*.

⁹ Gordan W. Lathrop, *The Assembly: A Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022), 36.

¹⁰ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 151.

¹¹ While worship arts teams design with the goal for a profound encounter with the Divine, it does not mean that if this does not happen that the work is without value. The offering and response still serves as the team’s best effort as a means of grace. The Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways, we are simply asked to accept the invitation and do our best to create accordingly. How the Spirit uses it, is beyond our control.

the intersection of this Divine encounter. Understanding the functionality of foundational symbols and actions through liturgical theology helps liturgical ministry teams imagine and appropriately apply the use of liturgical arts within the worship experience.

Holy People

Storytelling #5

My two sons, Patrick and Sam, whom we met from their earlier tooth-brushing rituals, are heavily involved in club soccer. If you are familiar with club sports, then you will already know where this is leading—a conflict of Sunday morning worship versus the religion of sports. It has always been a priority for my husband and me to reserve Sunday mornings for attending worship as a family. This summer, not seeing the schedule beforehand, we paid and signed forms for Sam to play in an extra soccer league that met on Sunday mornings for eight weeks. We justified this commitment by agreeing that it was only for eight weeks and that after the eight weeks, we would not allow this to happen again. In the sixth week, Sam had a game later in the day that permitted him to attend worship beforehand. Sam surprised me with his response to the worship experience. Our dialogue went something like this:

SAM: Mom, I miss going to church.

ME: Yeah, I know. You'll be back into the church routine in a few weeks. Just curious, what do you miss?

SAM: Well, [taking a second to think] I just like being there, like, with the people.

ME: Like your friends from Sunday school?

SAM: Nope, just the people. I like them. I don't know most people's names, but I'm glad that they're there and that I get to be there too. It's just cool.

ME: So, not the music? I thought the choir anthem was pretty good today.

SAM: Mom, it was fine. I like going to worship and being with the people.

Being the director of worship arts and music at the church we attend, I expected my child to say that they missed the inspirational music or the sacred beauty of the space. Considering both of my children vocalize when a liturgical art is not up to their standards, I assumed this would be Sam's liturgical critique. However, I assumed wrong and instead was taught a valuable lesson on a foundational symbol that is essential to Christian formation—the assembly.

When assessing liturgical arts from a liturgical theology perspective, the initial hurdle is comprehending the role of the symbol that the liturgical art enhances. The first fundamental symbol evaluated through liturgical theology for the development of richer liturgical arts is “the holy people.” In Sam’s critique of Sunday’s worship, he reminds his mom that worship is fundamentally about gathering in the presence of Christ. He may not know their names, but he “just likes” the spirit and energy embodied in the symbol of the body of Christ. Through past worship services and Bible stories, he has faith that this is a special people and that there is something indescribable that occurs when they gather. He “just likes it.” Philosopher and theologian Philip Kenneson notes that “Over the centuries, the people of God have gathered to worship the God revealed in Jesus Christ. By the grace and power of God, such worship has often transformed the lives of those who have prayed ‘your kingdom come, your will be done,’ nurturing within them an alternative social imagination and thereby enabling them to bear embodied witness to the desires and purposes of God.”¹² It is within worship that the assembly is seen more than a meeting but formative and “a special people.”

There are two principal characteristics of the assembly informed by liturgical theology that Sam helps to explain in his simple conversation with his mom. The first defining function of the assembly as a symbol is that the body of Christ *gathers*. Gathering for corporate worship is a fundamental action of spiritual development and Christianity. Gathering is a summons of the baptized by the Holy Spirit to collectively respond to the mystery of faith and the continuation of Christ’s saving ministry through the embodiment of his life, death, and resurrection in worship for the transformation of themselves and then the world. It is a responsibility of “a chosen

¹² Philip Kenneson, “Gathering: Worship, Imagination, and Formation,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed., eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 67.

people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Pet. 2:9 NIV) In this passage, "you" is not directed to the individual, but rather to the "chosen people" to praise together in celebration of Christ's redeeming power.

It is in the assembly that the individual—being part of the gathering—is reoriented and reconciled through Christ and sent forth back into the world to share mercy and grace with each other and those in need. Through gathering, the identity of the congregant is no longer self-centered—rather, they turn their attention to the concerns of the body of Christ. "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Cor 3:18 ESV) Through the same Spirit, the "holy people" become a sacred body to go out and heal the world.

Scripture directs its message towards the gathered union and declares, "You are a people set apart as holy to God, your God. God, your God, chose you out of all the people on Earth for himself as a cherished, personal treasure." (Deut 7:6, MSG) The apostle Paul says, "he has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Col 1:13–14, NRSVA) Even when the biblical narrative focuses on individual characters, it is intended as spiritual enlightenment for all believers of Christ's body—breathing new life and hope into the sacred people of the Trinity. As Gordan Lathrop explains, "The assembly is word next to sacrament leading us again to faith and turning us toward our neighbor's need. That juxtaposition we cannot enact at home by

ourselves.”¹³ Therefore, gathering as the body of Christ is a necessary act to be a part of the trinitarian community.¹⁴

In gathering, the biblical story is enacted through word and sacrament, and the assembly remembers their identity as God’s “chosen people.” Gathering is an act where the individual’s Christian identity is only made visible through the body of Christ, providing communal belonging, purpose, and spiritual development. Through the transformation of those who attend, the Holy Spirit perpetuates Christ’s saving ministry to extend beyond the worship experience and into a way of life. It is an “us” experience that not only shapes who the church is, but serves as the catalyst for personal sovereignty, communal sacred mission, and the transformation of the world. The Christian identity is not found just in individuals, but in the formation of individuals into a holy people united in Christ. Gordon Lathrop provides this insight:

But we find out who they are not by looking at their individual identities nor by asking them to look at themselves. Instead, we look with them to Christ giving himself away to them in word and sacrament so that they might in turn give to their neighbor. In those gifts, the Spirit poured out from the death and resurrection of Jesus makes them the body of Christ; that is their identity. In this very gathering, the holy trinity shows them mercy, calling this “not a people” to be the very holy people of God; that is their identity.¹⁵

Individuals form the assembly, but it is their gathering as a holy people held in juxtaposition with Christ’s paschal mystery that transforms them into the body of Christ. Catholic liturgical scholar Joyce Ann Zimmerman continues, “There is no greater response than to say yes to who we are and who we are becoming. In our response, together as a liturgical assembly, we mediate God’s saving grace. Mediation is an exercise of our baptismal priesthood.”¹⁶

¹³ Lathrop, *The Assembly*, 49.

¹⁴ Please note that if a person is homebound, or lacks transportation, or has health issues that restrict them from being present with the body of Christ, then the assembly needs to actively pursue a relational interactive worship opportunity for the inclusion of these congregants. Live streaming worship is not the only answer to this.

¹⁵ Lathrop, *The Assembly*, 5.

¹⁶ Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *The Ministry of the Assembly* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016), 16.

The trinitarian God's people gather in answer to their baptismal summons to be the body of Christ for the transformation of the world. Though bringing many gifts and talents as individuals, it is through their actions and their joining together as one worshiping entity that the assembly encounters the Triune God. Paul says, "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another." (Rom 12:4–5, NRSVUE)

Sam's story suggests a second defining function of the assembly as a symbol that informs liturgical art through liturgical theology. It implies that the assembly not only gathers but gathers in the presence of Christ. It embodies the reenactment of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ's paschal mystery. This is something "cool" about Sam's congregation that he senses.

The Christian assembly is the symbol of God routinely inviting believers into the holy mystery of Christ to carry forth Christ's redeeming ministry through the Holy Spirit. They meet with the sacred purpose of fulfilling their baptismal covenant. When they leave the gathering, they have been renewed by the reality of Christ's presence with them in worship. Philip Kenneson writes that the assembly is an "embodied sign and foretaste of God's continuing work of reconciliation and healing in the world."¹⁷ The assembly is not an audience listening to a concert for individual consumption, a platform for town politics, a family reunion for nostalgic reminiscing, nor is it, as liturgical theologian Robert E. Webber states, a "giant psychiatric couch or pep rally for human potential."¹⁸ While these are all normal symbolic actions of social ritual, the assembly does not mirror the secular corporate rituals of society that focus more on individualism.

¹⁷ Philip Kenneson, "Gathering: Worship, Imagination, and Formation," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 62.

¹⁸ Robert E. Webber, *Worship Is A Verb: Celebrating God's Mighty Deeds of Salvation* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publisher, Inc., 2004), 4.

There are gestures, symbols, and other ritual vehicles that crossover between the two worlds; this is how the body of Christ communicates. Nonetheless, it is difficult to prevent individualism from infiltrating modern cultural symbols that promote self and the success of self. In a consumer-friendly capitalist society where self-reliance and self-improvement are encouraged, its symbols often reflect this reality. Within these social liturgies are positive community-building actions and symbols. Many of these symbols take pride in the achievement of the individual organization, or self. This is not the agenda of the body of Christ. When modern actions and structures, secular symbols, and cultural fads are used in Christian worship as forms of communication, they must be held in connection with the holy narratives of the Trinity, where they are transformed as a means of grace for communicating with God and the assembly. Liturgical scholars L. Edward Phillips and Sara Webb Phillips suggest, “What we need is a way to worship that grounds us in tradition without sentimentality and inspires enthusiasm without self-centeredness.”¹⁹ The assembly gathers and welcomes all believers willing to embody and enact Christ’s presence. That is the agenda of the assembly—being present with Christ, imagining a new world with the assembly’s “stuff,” but only if it can appropriately participate in the dialectic and transformative encounter with the Divine.

The assembly requires not only gathering but gathering in the presence of Christ. “Holy things and holy people” are only made holy in the presence of Christ. If this is the focus of corporate worship, then the assembly is the symbolic vehicle that reestablishes and continues its chapter within the biblical story. Liturgical scholar Sister Catherine Vincie, RSHM, says that “the discussion of the presence of Christ in the assembly and in its liturgical actions supports the insight that the assembly is the subject of the liturgy. The liturgical assembly itself constitutes a

¹⁹ L. Edward Phillips and Sara Webb Phillips, *In Spirit and Truth: United Methodist Worship for the Emerging Church* (Maryville: OSL Publications, 2006), 22.

special mode of Christ's presence."²⁰ The body of Christ is an image bearer of Christ incarnate, a "royal priesthood" that serves as a people of God to and for the world. This happens when the assembly gathers in the presence of Christ remembering and renewing themselves through active and meaningful worship—"doing and being" a part of the liturgical assembly.²¹

Zimmerman notes that when the assembly gathers, there is an active balance between "doing and being."²² Sam likes gathering and *doing* all the "holy things" of worship. Those holy things mean something to him because he knows they are more than what they appear to be. He likes *being* there with the assembly in the presence of Christ because it is through this *being* that makes those things and himself special, or "holy things."²³ He engages in a reality that is beyond himself—God's reality. Attention to how the assembly gathers can improve the spiritual development of the worship experience. Zimmerman writes:

All this *doing*, however, is empty—is going through mere motions—if we are not also *being*. Our being the assembly requires other-centeredness, surrendering to God's transforming action during Mass, accepting diversity, recognizing each member's place and role in this diversity, focusing on our common identity under Jesus Christ, committing ourselves to celebrating Mass wholeheartedly, hearing the dismissal at the end of Mass as a command from Christ to live what we have celebrated.²⁴

In Christ's presence, the assembly receives the gift of being a "people set apart" to attend to the continuation of Christ's saving ministry. This honor gives purpose-filled direction to serve as the body of Christ within God's kingdom here on earth to all those in need of mercy and grace.

Zimmerman continues, "When we gather as liturgical assembly, we call to mind and live out our identity as Christians to be the church, the body of Christ. We are the church made visible. We

²⁰ Catherine Vincie, *Celebrating Divine Mystery: A Primer in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), 36, Kindle Edition.

²¹ Zimmerman, *The Ministry of the Assembly*, 3.

²² Zimmerman, *The Ministry of the Assembly*, 3.

²³ Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 11.

²⁴ Zimmerman, *The Ministry of the Assembly*, 3.

are the members of Christ's Body now gathered around Christ, the Head of his Body."²⁵ Paul writes, "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many." (1 Cor 12:13–14, NRSVA) It is then through the gathered assembly in the presence of Christ that the assembly becomes a foundational sacred symbol of the Christian faith. It is here, gathered in the presence of Christ, that sight towards the other is restored. Ronald Michener, theologian and liturgical scholar, writes, "Worship displays, in community, not the turn toward the power of empire and exclusion, but the weakness of the cross and the inclusive invitation into the resurrection power of God's renewal of all creation."²⁶ This is the liturgical theological lens through which the evaluation of liturgical art should be seen—the assembly as the gathered body of Christ for the renewal of all creation.

Evaluating Liturgical Art

Knowing the functionality of the liturgical assembly through liturgical theology, the following questions can inform the evaluation of liturgical art:

- How flexible are the boundaries of the gathered assembly? Do they allow others to join the circle of worship? Does the space and leadership allow for all to participate—for all to have a role in worship?
- Is the stranger welcomed into the worship service just as Christ welcomes back the familiar week after week? How do the liturgical arts act as a resource for its people to see the stranger as part of the assembly?
- Does the assembly meet with an expectant energy to encounter God through word and sacraments? Do the liturgical arts support this energy?
- Does the assembly see themselves as the primary symbol of worship united in Christ and called upon by their baptismal covenant to gather in the presence of Christ to be reconciled, transformed, and sent forth to love and show mercy to the world? How do the applied liturgical arts reflect this diversity and union?

²⁵ Zimmerman, *The Ministry*, 3.

²⁶ Ronald T. Michener, "Humanity and Worship," in *Theological Foundations of Worship*, ed. Khalia J. Williams and Mark A. Lamport (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 75.

- Are the applied liturgical arts individual ideals; do they support the concurrence of the assembly's reality with God's reality? Do they say something specific that is relevant to the entire body of Christ?
- Lathrop asks, "whether the assembly, by the presence of the elements of its classical constitution, is open to the chaos and the hope for order and justice in the world?"²⁷ How do the applied liturgical arts aid in envisioning this world, and while emphasizing that understanding this duality is a fundamental responsibility of the assembly gathered in the presence of Christ?
- Is there a balance of "doing and being" in Christ's presence within the worship experience? How do the liturgical arts help the assembly to respond and listen?
- Does the assembly gather regularly to worship? If not, how does the congregation identify themselves as an assembly? Are there specific symbols that help them know that they are a body of Christ? Which liturgical art could be applied to re-center the assembly into its purpose?
- Could the use of liturgical arts educationally aid in clarifying and redefining the assembly's gathering role?
- If there is a regular worship routine, is there a commitment to regular liturgical critique through the lens of liturgical theology?
- If cultural symbols are being used as liturgical art, have liturgical artists re-centered the cultural symbols to represent God's mercy and hope? Is there any reason to believe that these symbols might be misinterpreted by the assembly, resulting in more harm than good?
- How is the space prepared with a sensitivity to others?
- Do the liturgical arts help identify the assembly as part of the universal assembly? How do they invite broader thinking about who Christ includes at a gathering?
- Does the assembly share in each other's joy, sorrow, and pain? How do the applied liturgical arts foster this?

God's "holy people" have the potential to create liturgical art that shares the sacred intersection of a people gathered in the presence of Christ, fostering an enlivened worship experience with the Divine. Through this encounter, the embodiment and enactment of Christ's life, death, and resurrection held in dynamic tension with the story of the "holy people" and the world in which it lives sends forth the assembly prepared to serve one another. Lathrop says:

Learning the assembly by heart—learning the spirituality of the assembly—will then include learning again the shared rituals and symbols we enact in assembly and the resonance of these things in daily life, learning the importance of recovered community, and regularly encountering the material reality for persons and place. That is a starting point in thinking about why assembly is so important.²⁸

²⁷ Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 163.

²⁸ Lathrop, *The Assembly*, 52–53.

Through the guiding lens of liturgical theology, the liturgist is enabled to confidently evaluate the gathering and ensure its effectiveness defined by the body of Christ. “Speak to all the congregation of the Israelites and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” (Lev 19:2 NRSVUE)

Holy Things

Storytelling #6

“It reminded me of being a little boy going to the beauty salon with my mom and siblings. It was an all-morning event—smells of nail polish, hair, and community. My aunties would be there, my grandma; it was the place to be if you wanted to look good and be in the know. Ladies getting ready for church, gossip, and kids—whether they wanted to be there or not, but that nail polish. It was like I was there, all over again. Nail polish and Jesus.”

I had no idea the use of red nail polish would serve as such a strong symbol in our service. The use of drugstore red nail polish for an experiential closing response for an intercessory prayer service centering around the Trinity, poverty, racism, science, and broken HealthCare systems, was a functional, yet rich and creative, liturgical art choice that would represent the blood of Christ, the voice of the voiceless, and our commitment to our baptismal covenant. It is always a significant experience when the Holy Spirit reveals and interprets layers to symbols in worship that are not expected.

The Celebration of Life: A Prayer Service of Henrietta Lacks was a worship experience that explored the symbols of word, intercessory prayer, prayer through hymnody, space, the assembly, visual art, and a closing experiential response in juxtaposition with our story, Henrietta’s story, and Christ’s story. The gathered assembly was a group of Doctor of Pastoral Music students at Southern Methodist University who were assigned readings on contemporary topics toward the formation of an intercessory prayer agenda.

My agenda dealt with Henrietta Lacks, a poor black tobacco farmer in the late 1940s—50s, whose cells were collected from the tissue of a large tumor found in her cervix and given to a lab for research, of which she knew nothing about, nor did she sign a consent form for a tissue sample. HeLa cells were the first collected human cells to divide indefinitely with proper nutrients. HeLa cells were said to be immortal. The cells would continue to live on as a vital resource for vaccine research, cloning, gene mapping, blood pressure medicine testing, and many more research needs—selling by the billions making profits for the researchers and laboratories. Henrietta and her family would profit nothing. Due to Henrietta’s color and monetary status in life, her name, character, values, and voice were left for dead on the autopsy table while her cells flourished and grew under a new name HeLa. Her family would continue in a cycle of intergenerational

poverty, systemic racism, and the inability to afford HealthCare or pursue legal counsel for the injustice of the stolen HeLa. Henrietta loved to dance and wear red nail polish.

The body of Christ participated in a service of prayers and singing, yearning for the reconciliation of creation, full inclusion of a dancing cosmos where everyone is invited to participate, and claiming active membership in the baptismal covenant where all have a voice. Through this encounter with the Divine, they were renewed and sent forth to be the voice for the voiceless. At the very end, with the soft hymn singing of “The Love of God,” the assembly was invited to write their names with red nail polish on a poster laid out with a DNA helix of diverse people and a superimposed painted swoosh cross laying over the helix. The red nail polish was Henrietta’s voice that would join our names with hers as we remembered our baptism and creation. The red polish looked like the blood of the covenant shed for all for the forgiveness of sins and the newness of life.

I was not prepared for how loud this symbol spoke through this liturgical art. It was moving for me to include my name with Henrietta’s, fixed to the cross while I smelled the chemical scent of science and hope for a world where all of creation is treated equally through Christ. Additionally, this was a personal smell for my African American friends whose beauty salon childhood voices took them to a liminal space with Henrietta, their own pain, and Christ. I felt honored to be included and reoriented as a member of the body of Christ.

The path of discipleship begins with seeing the self as part of a whole—the assembly. In gathering at the foot of the cross, the eyes of the disciple open and intercede to the needs and pains of the other and the marginalized. Through the actions and symbols of renewal found in liturgy, the disciple turns toward a way of life where Jesus is present not only in the confines of the liturgical assembly but visible in all aspects of disciple life. Through the embodiment of Christ’s pain and suffering, a liturgical disciple eats at a table with the hungry and poor, the shattered in spirit, and the grieving widow. Through the enactment of the resurrected Christ, the disciple shares in a meal where no one goes hungry, where there is joy and peace served to all, and all leave feeling full and commissioned to bear the image of the Triune God’s kingdom.

Setting the table with a book, a loaf of bread, a cup of wine, and a pool, time and time again, God invites the body of Christ to gather into a holy mystery where Christ is seated at the head, transforming the lives of the people called Christians. It is through these items and actions being held in combination with the holy mystery that all become “holy things” for a “holy

people” to richly imagine and understand the fullness of God’s grace and mercy. Smith says, “Indeed, the Father invites us into union with Christ through Spirit-charged practices that, over and over again, sink us into the triune life. It is in their repetition that the story begins to sink into our imagination, thus sanctifying our perception and engendering action ‘toward the kingdom.’”²⁹

This is liturgical theology at its best, when the actions and symbols of the assembly and the assembly itself clearly, mystically, and richly intersect with Christ’s life, death and resurrection, the words of the prophets, and stories of generations of apostles—filled with brokenness, resurrection, and hope—all encountering, reconciling, and transforming through the living God. Lathrop says, “ Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection and the faith that is through him, juxtaposed to these preexistent rituals, is the institution and consecration of sacraments.” Liturgical theology sheds light on the transformative and sacred actions and symbols within worship, bringing to attention these “holy things” whose power is used during worship to sharpen and deepen the assembly’s experience with the Divine through the Holy Spirit.

God invites the assembly into holy creation to better inform and share with the congregation the story of redemption for the transformation of the world. However, a symbol is only as powerful as the assembly understands it to be. This requires holy evaluation. Liturgical theology interprets the symbols and the applied liturgical arts used in a worship experience. Careful attention to these interpretations should always be under reform so as not to distort the story of hope or confuse the assembly. Also, the evolution of power within symbols, people, and actions is constant. Therefore, the meaning and power of a symbol change as well. Webber describes this power:

²⁹ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 185–186.

All symbols have external, internal, and spiritual qualities. The external quality is the physical entity, such as a cross or an appropriate gesture. The internal quality is the interpretation given to a symbol by the group (in this case the church). The spiritual quality is the spiritual energy released by the individual or congregation in relation to the external symbol and the internal meaning. Consequently, symbols demand faith if they are to become a means of worship.³⁰

Symbols and actions require evaluation so as not to translate into something other than the reality of the assembly held in juxtaposition with God's kingdom. To a non-believer, a symbol might not have any power at all and is interpreted as something completely different than what a believer might consume from the symbol. This quality is what makes sacred symbols distinctive—they only have power when used by the body of Christ. For example, a pitcher of water and basin may symbolize washing and cleanliness to the non-believer, but to a Christian, it encourages a remembrance of baptism or Christ washing the disciples' feet—a call to servanthood. In a worship service held surrounding the theme of baptism with word, prayer, song, and visible baptismal symbols, the assembly creates holy ground that springs forth an encounter with the Triune God and breathes new life into the believer through the power of Word and the font. Holding the service outdoors near flowing water, or perhaps celebrating a baptism in the service, enhances the possibilities of an even deeper experience with the Holy Trinity that focuses on word and baptism. Using the imagination, the symbols of the assembly's faith are clearly revealed and evoke the heart to bear witness to God's kingdom. This is the power of the symbol, and or action when joined with the paschal mystery.

The assembly's experience of the holy mystery is dependent on their use of the primary symbols, namely, word and sacrament. Through secondary symbols such as space, ordo, action, prayer, and liturgical arts, word and sacrament come to life. Red nail polish by itself does not hold sacred power. However, held in juxtaposition with stories of the assembly, the death and

³⁰ Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 89.

resurrection of Christ, science, creation, Henrietta Lacks, and reconciliation, red nail polish has the power to redirect attention toward the hope of Christ, making it a significant metaphor that can refocus the assembly. Lathrop says, “They [symbols] represent and proclaim Christ coming among and breaking to new meaning the stuff of religious hope.”³¹ Liturgical theology evaluates the power of the symbol that makes them holy. It can help the assembly make better choices in choosing actions and symbols within the service by providing thoughtful questions about primary and secondary symbols. The liturgical arts move within these symbols with their own power and feed from these foundational symbols. The liturgical arts will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. The subsequent questions offer guidance for the use of the following foundational symbols: word, communion, baptism, ordo, and prayer.

Ordo

- Does the ordo feature the tension between the brokenness of Christ’s death joined with the hope of Christ’s resurrection in its symbols and rites? Does the liturgy include both lament and thanksgiving within scripture, its rites, and symbols? Is there evidence that this duality transforms the assembly? Lathrop asks, “Holiness set in apposition to ordinary life?”³²
- How does the ordo allow for movement and processions to focus the assembly’s attention on the scriptural text and sacraments?
- Does the pattern of the liturgy flow in and out of call and response? Is it dialectic? Does it allow for the full assembly to communicate with the Triune God?
- How well is the ordo prepared and practiced? Does the leadership take time to carefully center themselves around the liturgy?
- Does the worship experience follow the pattern of ancient communal ritual: gathering, scripture reading, preaching, and intercessions?
- How often is communion a part of the ordo?
- Is the theme of reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins woven into the liturgy? Is hope and restoration for a better future the end result of service?
- Is the word held next to all of the actions of the ordo?

Word

- Are the sermon, prayers, and other liturgical elements in line with the scriptural readings?

³¹ Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 173.

³² Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 163.

- Where are the Scriptures or other sacred texts read in the worship space? Are they within the congregation, bringing the word to the people of God?
- Is the word being spoken clearly and with conviction, without being overly dramatic?
- Is the sermon a response to the word, or does it have its own agenda?
- How is the Bible displayed and used within the worship experience?
- Is the Scriptural reading, or reading of other sacred texts from the Bible, done with a cellphone, tablet, or a piece of paper? How does this affect the significance of the symbol?
- How many scripture readings are read during the service? If more than one, are they read together or do they allow room for response?
- Does the worship team use the lectionary calendar for planning texts? Does it value the rhythm of the church calendar?
- Do the texts include space for everyone? Which translation is used? Is it faithful to the original language, but inclusive?

Prayer

- Is there a balance of prayers of praise and petition? Are both included in the worship service?
- Do the prayers allow the assembly to participate?
- Do the prayers foster a heart for creation?
- Does the body of Christ pray to the Triune God? Is there diversity in the names of God used in prayer?
- Is there a theme, or focus within the prayers of the service?
- Do the liturgical ministry teams pray together? Do their prayers ask for God's blessing and offer the work to honor and glorify God?
- Lathrop asks, "Do they [prayer and sermon] set situations of chaos, injustice, and need throughout the world next to the grace that has been proclaimed in scripture and preaching?"³³
- Do the prayers and sermon help us imagine God's kingdom here on earth? Do they help the assembly see the world through a different reality?

Communion (Table)

- Is communion being celebrated?
- Does the assembly share communion from one loaf? If not, how does it symbolize the significance of one body of Christ?
- Do the word and liturgical texts speak meaning into the act of communion? Lathrop asks, "Do the eating and drinking indicate the meaning of the texts, drawing the whole to speak Jesus Christ for the life of the world?"³⁴
- Does the communion liturgy prepare the assembly to be sent forth to change the world?
- Is the table large enough to accommodate the needs and diversity of the universal table? How does it reflect this?

³³ Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 171.

³⁴ Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 171.

- Does the great prayer of thanksgiving offer an eager and urgent summons for the meal?
- Does the sacrament of communion, as liturgical scholar and theologian, Laurence Stuckey asks, “create the condition for our renewal as we enter ever more fully into the covenant initiated for us and with us by the One who hosts the feast?”³⁵
- Are the communion elements visibly central in the service?
- Does the communion meal offer words of need beyond the local gathering?
- Is there a collection taken for the poor, sick, and hungry?
- Is communion available and sent to those who cannot come to worship?
- Does the assembly receive communion with reverence and love? What are the actions of receiving communion?

Baptism (Font)

- Zimmerman asks, “When am I most aware of my baptismal self-identity as the Body of Christ?”³⁶ Is baptism only mentioned in a gathering for a baptism, or is it made known in the liturgy of the regularly offered gathering and through its symbols?
- Is there a baptismal font? If so, how visible is it?
- If a baptism is not part of the worship service, how is the symbol of baptism represented in the worship experience?
- Is the baptismal font in the narthex or commons reminding people that they have received their baptism and that, as they pass the font, they pass through the waters again as they gather? If it is on the worship chancel, does it clearly and beautifully mark the space as a primary symbol of the identity of the body of Christ?
- Are there living plants surrounding the baptismal font offering the symbol of new life?
- Is the baptismal font large enough for full immersion? Is a sprinkle enough to convey baptism’s power?
- Is there teaching involved in the baptismal process of new initiates or their families if it is an infant or child?
- Does the assembly understand their baptismal covenant? Are there opportunities to renew baptismal teaching within the liturgy?
- What is the follow-up on the newly baptized? If it is an infant or child, how will the children learn their Christian identity?
- Is the word held next to baptism?
- Does the worship presider utilize the baptismal font as a symbol with more than visual storytelling during the baptismal liturgy? Are there moments the assembly can touch the water, or hear the water being poured?

³⁵ Laurence Hull Stookey, *Eucharist: Christ’s Feast With the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 97.

³⁶ Zimmerman, *The Ministry of the Assembly*, 25.

Conclusion

The symbols of word, ordo, prayer, baptism, and communion are foundational to communication in communal worship. Liturgical theology enables the assembly to evaluate the clarity and significance that the symbols and actions possess. It assesses how the worship experience intersects with the assembly's reality and the Trinity's reality. It asks whether Christ is present in the gathering of the body of Christ and its "holy things." Through this assessment, the liturgists have a basic canvas upon which they can paint and enhance these central symbols and actions.

The apposition between brokenness and wholeness through the Trinity allows the liturgical assembly to imagine the possibilities of what the world could look like— an alternative to a world filled with violence, poverty, abuse, racism, and unethical power ceilings. The triune kingdom reestablishes the assembly's identity through its doing and being, through its actions and symbols, through its breaking and transforming. The paschal mystery teaches that this is not the end of the story of Christ. The story continues with the body of Christ taking helpings of sacred and Divine encounters into the world to share and heal creation. A liturgical people, armed with a book, an ordo, a loaf, water, and imagination, lift their broken voice of praise and petition, thanksgiving and lament, death and resurrection, and meet a God of renewal and mercy, a God of dying and rising. The Triune God hospitably gifts the assembly with grace and purpose, responding with zealous commissioning. Lathrop writes:

So, go into church. Before you, in some form, are some things: a pool, a book, bread, and wine. Around you are people, the primary thing. In this place, at an appointed time, these all will interact. If you let them, they will interact with you, inviting you to the breaking, surrounding you with the faith, engaging you in sending portions.³⁷

The apostle Paul teaches, "When it comes to the church, he [Christ] organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body. He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the

³⁷ Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 115.

resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. . . Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross. . . Christ brought you over to God’s side and put your lives together, whole and holy in his presence. You don’t walk away from a gift like that.” (Col 1:18–27, MSG) The assembly and its “holy things” gather to declare that the blood of the new covenant resides within them. Through their actions and symbols, they embody and enact the teachings of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection in the presence of the Holy Spirit, ultimately leading to a transformation and renewal of their souls for the hope of the world. Through liturgical theology, the body of Christ better understands themselves and their “stuff”—encouraging the creative and imaginative application of liturgical arts for an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine.

PART 2: APPLICATION

CHAPTER 4 CREATIVE PROCESS

“Now Thank We All Our God”

Now thank we all our God
with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom his world rejoices;
who from our mothers’ arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us,
to keep us in his grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given,
the Son and Spirit blest,
who reign in highest heaven
the one eternal God,
whom heaven and earth adore;
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.¹

Storytelling #7

We were in the sanctuary, all wearing masks and sitting in different sections of the pews. Only a few of us were present—our communications director/videographer, myself, and the accompanist. We were recording the weekly worship, as we had been doing for the past month. After the pastor recorded his parts of the service and left, I would enter the chancel area to record my parts, followed by the other pastor. That day, while filming the hymns, our communications director suddenly left the space to go to the restroom, feeling anxious and sick to his stomach. He spent hours rendering the footage from the day’s work, hoping to have something that would keep our congregation engaged. It was

¹ Words by Martin Rinckart (1636); Trans. By Catherine Winkworth (1858). Public Domain.

crushing his spirits. The more creative we were, the longer he would have to spend on his computer, hoping it wouldn't crash during rendering or uploading. It was a messy process.

We created digital choir projects and online devotionals with music; we had the praise team record from home on separate tracks, learned PremierePro, and dealt with older technology that was not happy with larger files. For this one project in particular, we had choir members come in groups of four to sing an anthem at different parts of the sanctuary. We recorded six separate videos and then merged them together to create an illusion that the entire choir was present at the location. It was pretty neat!

Simultaneously, the church sponsored a sacred online art gallery that coincided with a worship series in which local artists participated. Of course, we wanted to include kids reading the scripture, so we would have their parents submit videos of them and add them to the weekly project. Then there was the Maundy Thursday dinner service on Zoom, and then, and then, and then! People were dying, loved ones were sick. ENOUGH! It was too much. There had to be order; there had to be a process. We were doing what we felt was right, to sow hope, but we needed to pause and rest. We were overwhelmed and could not keep up with the pace of our creative process. We were flying by the seat of our pants and could not catch our breath. As the pandemic was suffocating the world around us, our creative process was sucking the life out of us as well.

Creative Process

It is hard to imagine the pain and suffering of burying one's wife along with over forty people a day while composing songs of thanksgiving and managing a city during a famine, a plague, and a war in the 1630s. How anyone could focus on creativity through the liturgical arts during this era is beyond modern-day comprehension, yet the vocation of sowing hope in the darkest of days was something that Martin Rinckart, the poet who wrote the text "Now thank we all our God," took seriously.² Rinckart's poetic creations are a testament to the power of art and its ability to inspire and uplift even in the most challenging of circumstances between God, the artist, and the community. With only the Holy Spirit as a guide, Rinckart would serve until his death as a faithful minister of hope. In the midst of this horrific time, it is worth wondering what his

² For more information on the story of Martin Rinckart and his hymn, "Now Thank We All Our God," see Alissa Davis, "Now Thank We All Our God" (posted October 22, 2014), <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-now-thank-we-all-our-god> (accessed February 28, 2024).

creative process was. How did he stay focused on the praise and thanksgiving of God? What were the means with which he so diligently served the people of God? Was it that he had nothing else—only parchment and ink and his faith in God?

Having experienced the COVID-19 pandemic of the 2020s, would the words of stanza 2, “with joyful hearts, blessed peace,” or “guide us when perplexed and free us from all ills,” best describe the creative process of this modern era in its pandemic state? Did the creative process of 2020 contain the trust and peace through God’s guidance that Rinckart wrote of in his poetry? It is worth exploring.

In this modern era, artists, churches, worship designers, educators, businesses, musicians, and the whole world experienced the heartaches of COVID 19. They were challenged to rethink creatively and courageously and to broaden the boundaries of their specific fields. This was no small task and, for many, it resulted in burnout, extreme loneliness, and isolation. “I spent hours and days painting hands,” reminisces New York City artist and photographer Zoë Lintzeris, “yearning for connection and touch, it was the only way to process what I felt at the time, as my camera and lenses were shelved. . . But then I had a thought that forever changed my concept of work/life: Why not connect with others through art in a new way?”³

Many churches with no experience in worship streaming were learning new ways to reach their congregations through digital platforms. Though isolated from their teams and church families, worship artists brainstormed alternative experiences for gathering. Their ministries created multi-platform digital spaces that enabled congregations to virtually participate in worship. Digital communication formats like ZOOM or Microsoft Teams flourished as

³ Zoë Lintzeris, “How COVID-19 as an Artist Transformed My Arts in Health Practice,” *ARTSBLOG: For Arts Professionals in the Know* (posted June 8, 2021), <https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2021/06/08/how-processing-covid-19-as-an-artist-transformed-my-arts-in-health-practice> (accessed June 23, 2021).

connectional lifeboats whose purpose was to sustain the community of the church.

Churchstreaming.tv, BoxCast, Facebook, and YouTube subscriptions rose astronomically. Online worship became the only way for the assembly to have a sense of gathering together. The global church had to answer Zoë's question to survive: why not connect with others through art in a new way? The church went into a fast-paced period of taking inventory of its resources and thinking of new ways to reach its church families in this time of change and disruption—fearful of losing the rich relationships within their churches. This digital tornado of hope swirled around the world.

In a January 2021 interview between Kathy Smith and Andy Crouch, Crouch said:

We are living through some transformations in the way people affiliate with organizations, the way people learn, the way, perhaps, that people worship that may never change back to what they were. And so we actually, all of us, need to be rethinking in a very deep way: We know who our people are. We know what our mission is. But what is the means by which we actually can see that happen in this new cultural environment that we're going to be in?⁴

Churches embarked on a pilgrimage that challenged their traditional ways and opened them up to new possibilities in new cultural environments. They accepted the invitation of the Holy Spirit to continue to create beautiful art and beacons of hope during this dark time, to “ponder anew what the Almighty can do.”⁵ A Spirit-driven journey dedicated to seeking the Divine in places of unknown territory through the worship arts opened new doors of God's mercy and goodness, healing and strength as worship leaders worked hard in keeping their communities together.

⁴ Andy Crouch and Kathy Smith, “Leading Beyond the Blizzard,” Calvin Institute for Christian Worship (posted January 19, 2021), <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/leading-beyond-the-blizzard> (accessed June 20, 2021).

⁵ From “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” (stanza 1) by Joachim Neander (1680); trans. Catherine Winkworth (1863). Public Domain. It is interesting that this hymn was written only slightly later than “Now thank we all our God” and in a different part of Germany. Neander would have a completely different experience in which the context of this hymn was written. Praise would come from a different place for Neander.

There was deep comfort and peace while relying on the grace of Christ as innovation took sharp turns into failure and frustration, often dominating their souls.

At the same time, church leaders shut down and became burnt out. The personal struggles of human life, coupled with the inability to physically care for one another was daunting both mentally and spiritually. The ongoing expectation to lead a cycle of brainstorming and executing, without rest, compounded by a lack of skills, resources, and personnel, was truly enervating. When it came time to re-open and return to in-person worship, many people did not go back. Somewhere along the path through this new cultural environment, creative people lost their steam and means for creating anew—understandably so.

Returning to Andy Crouch's seminal question, "What is the means by which we actually can see that [the mission of the church] happen in this new cultural environment that we're going to be in?" The means were not able to meet the demands of the chaotic deadlines, and there was no time to rest in the peace of process and allow ideas to incubate with the Holy Spirit. Many times, the emphasis was placed on achieving a high level of productivity rather than experiencing the calming and fulfilling process of creating with the Holy Spirit. The body of Christ is a body, not a machine. It must grieve, breathe, process, and be given permission to do so. The option for creating with the Holy Spirit felt so far gone during this time. This was creativity at its worst during the pandemic.

It has been some time since shelter-in-place, but Crouch's question is still useful. By what means can a liturgical artist embrace the creative inspiration of the Holy Spirit and stay focused on showcasing the creativity of the Triune God? Today, tomorrow, and the next day, the church will be in new environments. As worship continues to evolve, the means upon which to better navigate and apply liturgical art in new cultural environments are found in the contextual

evaluations of worship from the previous chapters and a Spirit-driven creative process. This creative process teaches the worship artist how to better discern where and what God is calling them to design.

Worship artists recognize that they are meant to create holy things for the church to connect into an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine, sending themselves and the worshipers forth—filled with renewal and resurrection power to serve the kingdom. This is the end goal of the creative process. Disciplining a creative heart to follow the designs of God’s creativity involves a challenging act of trust. Artists need to trust that the Holy Spirit will guide them as they work with the God-given materials of their craft. Creative work is challenging. The author of Ecclesiastes reminds people that there is a time to breathe or speed up, or being mindful when God is saying to stop.

The creative process is pursued in the context of a personal relationship with God. As this process develops, artists wrestle with their tradition. They encounter biblical ancestors and seek to discern the new truths that they can learn from these partners who travel the same road on which they are going. Along the way, nuggets of redemption are revealed to them, insights that will one day find their way into the world through the art they will produce. Keeping one arm stretched into the past while the other is reaching toward the future of the triune kingdom here on earth, the artist meets Christ in the present, shining a light that will guide their whole journey.⁶

As worship designers begin to create, they are aware that there are recognizable characteristics within the creative process that define and shape how the artist and Creator work together. This creative process is non-linear but identifies structural stages within the chaotic messiness of creating. Understanding the sensibilities of the Holy Spirit’s creative process

⁶ For more information on the concept of anamnesis and prolepsis see Laurence Hull Stookey *Calendar: Christ’s Time for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 28–38.

reassures the artist that this is part of growing in their craft with God. Liturgical artist, Catherine Kapikian, describes how some of these stages work:

Clearly, the attributes of a creative mentality trigger similar behaviors across fields of human endeavor. In terms of defining those behaviors, I turn to my own creative process to explicate them. When an artist undertakes a creative process attempting resolution of a challenge, stages, sometimes distinct, define the activity. Their edges more often blur, and the stages themselves may exist in simultaneity relative to the complexity of the challenge. These stages for me bear the names of: acquisition, frustration, incubation, illumination, articulation, and communication.⁷

Kapikian validly observes that there are defined stages in the creative process with God that support artists in their quest to be image-bearers of Christ. Although often blurred, exploring these stages acts as a guidepost along the pilgrimage of a new creation for an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine.

Invitation

As noted in Chapter 1, one of the most difficult parts of being in a relationship with God is accepting the invitation to create with God rather than according to one's own design and desires. Throughout history, God invites and uses ordinary people to create holy things for the redemption of the world. From Moses responding to a burning bush, to people creating a hole in a roof just so a friend had access to meet Christ, to a contemporary artist's painting of doctors making their way to heal people in a war-destroyed city, the invitation to chronicle stories of hope and redemption is unending. Regardless of how humans behave, God continues to invite artists to be the hands and feet of Christ within a great cloud of witnesses as a testimony to show how powerful accepting the invitation to serve the Almighty can be. This is the way God cares for creation. Bauer says, "God continues to care for creation as long as history endures. The

⁷ Catherine Kapikian, *Art in Service of the Sacred* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 97.

name we give to this process is *creatio continua*.”⁸ No matter how far humanity strays, the Creator continues to invite everyday people to refashion themselves and their materials into holy things that bear the image of Christ within the world. Through the Holy Spirit this first step in the creative process is where the worship designer begins their journeys; this first step is accepting the invitation to create with the Divine.

Church “ImageSmith”⁹ trainer and theologian, Rob Weber, stresses the importance of living a life as a colorful storyteller of redemption and grace. He even calls humanity “story agents of God’s life and light in the world.”¹⁰ As story agents of God’s life and light in the world, worship artists are invited to interpret the stories of the kingdom of God. Karla Kincannon, the liturgical scholar, and theologian, beautifully describes this process:

Initiated by Love and undertaken for the sake of Love, our pilgrimage has transformed us into servants of Love. Our light now shines brilliantly into the world. And as it shines, we discover we have reached the place of our own resurrection.¹¹

If this is the starting point for applying liturgical arts, worship designers are working from a place of love—an invitation full of grace and mercy. God initiates a call for worship designers to create with Love. (1 John 4:7–12, NIV) This should always be at the forefront of creativity—emulating Christ and his love for creation.

As learned earlier, the creative process works within blurred stages. It is not a step-by-step cookie recipe. The journey may sometimes be black and white, and the Holy Spirit may decide to paint with shades of gray and fuchsia, sometimes cayenne, but it always paints with the primary colors of love, redemption, and grace. Remembering this invitation of love should be the

⁸ Michael J. Bauer, *Arts Ministry: Nurturing the Creative Life of God’s People* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 165.

⁹ Rob Weber, *Visual Leader: The Church Leader As ImageSmith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 16.

¹⁰ Rob Weber, *Visual Leader*, 76.

¹¹ Karla Kincannon, *Creativity and Divine Surprise* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2005), 210.

canvas of every worship artist and everything that they create—living with the awareness of God’s Divine presence. Troy Bronsink calls this living a life that is “drawn in.”¹² It is being able to see the mystery and beauty of creation going on within the quotidian—everyday, mundane, routine—activities of life, knowing to join in when hearing the invitation. Kincannon says, “Creativity shapes artists into people who perceive the unseen reality of the Divine woven into the fabric of life. With the ability to hear and see the things of God, they perceive the pulse of life underneath the surface of all activity.”¹³ Perceiving the pulse of life initiates a response to create love.

Acquisition Stage

The “Acquisition Stage,”¹⁴ also referred to as “Discerning the Direction,”¹⁵ or “Dreams,”¹⁶ or “Encounter”¹⁷ is when the Holy Spirit inspires the creator to go deeper into an experience with the Divine. During this stage, worship designer and liturgical arts scholar, Marcia McFee, challenges liturgical artists to “fall in love with a particular aspect of the faith story, discern how it intersects powerfully with our context—our lives, our community, and our world—and then cast that vision to the rest of the team so everyone can begin to brainstorm about how to bring the story to tangible, inspirational form.”¹⁸

During this stage, artists determine the need within creation to reimagine with God and to respond by imagining. Liturgical art heals, praises God, sows hope, and peace. The need is

¹² Bronsink, *Drawn In*, 137.

¹³ Kincannon, *Creativity and Divine Surprise*, 21.

¹⁴ Catherine Kapikian, *Art in Service of the Sacred*, 98.

¹⁵ Marcia McFee, *Think Like a Filmmaker: Sensory-Rich Worship Design for Unforgettable Messages* (Truckee: Trokay Press, 2016), 28.

¹⁶ Bronsink, *Drawn In: A Creative Process for Artists, Activists, and Jesus Followers* (Paraclete Press, 2012), 20

¹⁷ Bauer, *Arts Ministry*, 169

¹⁸ McFee, *Think Like a Filmmaker*, 28.

established, and then the artist responds. Bauer says, “The response takes our own unique distillation of the world around us and translates it into a creative form that can be offered to others and back to God.”¹⁹ For example, during COVID-19 the need to safely connect congregations into a corporate worship experience called creative people to dream with the Holy Spirit of new ways to reach the assembly of God. This dreaming stage is when artists brainstorm, imagine, and begin to fill the sketch pad with ideas, directions, resources, people, and plans. They encounter the Triune God’s vision and then respond through application.

Frustration Stage

The frustration stage is when the artists hit the wall. They cannot make sense of the vision and, as much as they try to muscle the material to work, it will not. Kincannon reassures us that this is normal. “Every time an artist begins a new project, confusion and chaos are built into it. The resulting frustration, this natural ingredient of creativity, comes from sorting through numerous possibilities for that best solution to the current creative challenge.”²⁰ Frustration is born out of the “struggle between the artist and his or her materials.”²¹ So many times, the artist is ready to throw out the beginnings of a beautiful sermon because they cannot get their opening line right; it seems like the whole thing is a wreck. However, it is part of the process. It is a gentle nudge to walk away, regain grounding with God, and let the living matter percolate. William Dyrness, theologian and professor of theology and culture, recalls well-known painter Vincent van Gogh saying:

At the moment I am absorbed in the blooming fruit trees, pink peach trees, yellow white pear trees. My brush stroke has no system at all. I hit the canvas with irregular touches of the brush, which I leave as they are. Patches of thickly laid-on color, spots of canvas left

¹⁹ Bauer, *Arts Ministry*, 170.

²⁰ Kincannon, *Creativity and Divine Surprise*, 93.

²¹ Bauer, *Arts Ministry*, 171.

uncovered, here and there portions that are left absolutely unfinished, repetitions, savageries; in short, I am inclined to think that the results are disquieting and irritating as to be a godsend to those people who have fixed preconceived ideas about technique.²²

Working with broken materials, the broken artist must accept that it is part of the creation process. There is no perfect technique that can prevent frustration. The artist must let it go and allow for the piece to speak on its own. This takes practice. Dyrness continues, “The anguish and discipline of art is not born until the artist reaches the point where the work becomes the most important thing—until the artist is willing to give himself or herself over to the work so that it can take on a life of its own.”²³ It is out of this turmoil that new life begins to emerge.

This is where trusting the Spirit’s creative process can be overwhelming. The artist pours themselves into a piece for days and then is asked to step away—the piece is not theirs. The artist says, “If I just try a little harder, or practice more, or maybe add this color, or do this, or . . .” Let it go. Take a breath and remember that the artist does not work alone, the Spirit is moving and pulling elsewhere. Walk away.

Incubation Stage

The Incubation Stage is where the worship designer takes the time to clarify and regain the rhythm of the Holy Spirit that their work is flowing through; somewhere, they began to dance the samba while the Spirit is waltzing. There is no time limit to this stage of the creative process, or any of them for that matter, but during this stage, taking time is the most important thing to do.

²² William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2001), 153.

²³ Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 153.

Moving through the incubation stage is time spent listening and being still. “Be still and know that I am God.” (Ps 46:10, NIV)

Bronsink says, “The art of listening is the process of understanding the stuff or matter you’re engaging.”²⁴ It is learning the ebb and flow of the silent language within the work, or project. Kincannon reminds readers of Paul McCartney’s lyrics, “‘there will be an answer’ if we let it be, if we trust and wait.”²⁵

Liturgical artists need to take the time to let it be. When the work of the artist becomes stale and no longer contains the mystery within it, give it time to speak again. Bauer suggests, “It [human creativity] seeks out ways to give the Creative Spirit access to our lives once again, thereby creating the conditions where epiphanies can occur, where God can be experienced anew under the guise of the mundane.”²⁶ The lack of patience within a “right now” society leaves the voice of the ordinary behind, never allowing it to come to the fruition of extraordinary, numinous speech, to speak with the voice of holiness. If the worship artist waits upon the Holy Spirit, the mystery and beauty will be revealed once again.

Please note that the message revealed may not look like what the artist expected, but it will always tell the truth that God wants to share. Sometimes, an expectation for creating liturgical art to minister and heal within worship might be meant to communicate with someone specific or the artist alone. This is all part of working within a nonlinear and mysterious Creator who shifts the atmosphere and illuminates what is needed in the present moment.

Illumination Stage

²⁴ Bronsink, *Drawn In*, 174.

²⁵ Kincannon, *Creativity and Divine Surprise*, 121.

²⁶ Bauer, *Arts Ministry*, 173.

“Aha!” moments! The stage of illumination begins with an “Aha!” moment where mystery and beauty crack through the mess. Kincannon declares, “The insight of the ‘Aha!’ moment comes out of nowhere through a nonlinear process. It appears by a seemingly mysterious force. For the artist, such a moment clears a way for continuing the creative process; the energy to proceed accompanies the solution.”²⁷ After the “Aha!” moment the work of the creative becomes free and is once again able to communicate through the Holy Spirit. These moments bring a feeling of transcendent joy and indescribable warmth.

McFee refers to this stage as “pitching the story.”²⁸ This is where the main vision or story comes to life within a creative work. It is where the clay begins to take shape, characters of books come alive, liturgies take shape with their worship arts teams, and choreography rehearsals begin.

The Illumination Stage is where the imagination starts to unravel an extraordinary vision of the ordinary. These are the moments in our creative process where we can once again evoke a new world within the current world and where the paint flows freely. Bauer states, “Through disciplined exercise of the imagination, we have the opportunity to engage in creative ministry, to help us hear the voice of God calling us home.”²⁹ This is where the human imagination and Divine inspiration meet to create with the artist a taste of heaven on earth.

Articulation Stage

²⁷ Kincannon, *Creativity and Divine Surprise*, 153.

²⁸ McFee, *Think Like a Filmmaker*, 33.

²⁹ Bauer, *Arts Ministry*, 160.

The articulation stage focuses on the final execution of the design and the finishing touches of a project. It emphasizes the importance of going back to refine and edit. The articulation stage is where a fine-tooth comb inspects and adds any last detail of the design before giving it over to a worship service. Some creatives skip this stage and impatiently release their work too soon, or are under strict deadlines that do not allow for this stage. When this happens, the artist does not have the full experience of working with the Spirit before their piece goes public, thereby creating the opportunity for unforeseen problems to manifest themselves.

Exploring the articulation stage within work enhances its clarity and allows the artist to delve into its deeper meanings and unlock portals to mysteries that may have gone unnoticed before. Kapikian stresses this importance this way, “In the doing [of the Articulation Stage], the being emerges in such particularity with paint or biblical text that the product of the particularity may open a window on archetypal experience.”³⁰ This obedient surrender to the voice of the work can completely enhance the power of a piece. Again, this stage catches any obstacles that may hinder the experience of the creative work’s Spirit-driven power. It highlights hidden revelations that might have been missed without careful evaluation.

Communication Stage

The overall process of creativity is the response of the worship artist to an invitation initiated by the Holy Spirit to journey with the Divine in reimagining and renewing ordinary material into something extraordinary, mysterious, and beautiful—displaying the goodness and glory of God. It is an omnidirectional process requiring patience, discernment, creativity, trust, and joy through a sacrificial rendering of the self that pours forth into a new creation. When ready, the thrill of

³⁰ Kapikian, *Art in Service of the Sacred*, 104.

communicating this reality materializes and gifts a new piece of the kingdom of God. Bronsink says, “And so the creative work of God’s commissioned artists involves sharing, generously giving what we’ve found to be beautiful, good, and true, with the world in which we live. We must share with no strings attached, out of mutual appreciation and curiosity.”³¹

Bronsink calls this stage “reintegration.”³² McFee calls it “The Release.” This Stage involves the congregation. It introduces new artifacts of the tangible Christ, creates new means of grace for the worship service, and enlivens the experience that intersects with the Divine.

Kapikian describes this stage as a convergence—a God, self, and community release party. She says, “It is an opportunity to learn, grow, and indeed be transformed myself. My work is always my best offering. In Christian community, we aid in each other’s becoming.”³³

As the creativity process comes to an end and the artists offer their best creations, they release a piece of themselves with God. Arias are sung, poetry is spoken, liturgical dance curls, and art is rendered. The church shares in the love feast where Divine transcendence occurs, inviting the community to the communion table where the artist and the church receive the gift of grace together.

Rest

Joseph Sikora Sr. took a nap after every family dinner. He would cook a large meal with his wife, enjoy it with the family, and then fall asleep in his recliner—the Rest Stage. So often the busy creative artist forgets, or denies the significance of this stage. Rest is the sacred space where the gentle embrace of Christ envelops the artist, surrounding them with unconditional love and

³¹ Bronsink, *Drawn In*, 187.

³² Bronsink, *Drawn In*, 34.

³³ Kapikian, *Art in Service of the Sacred*, 106.

healing mercy, whispering words of encouragement and affirmation, “Well done, my faithful servant.” (Matt 25:23, NIV) In this moment, the artist finds solace and renewal; in so doing, they inspire us once again. Rest is the nap after a well-cooked creative journey—refueling the soul. Bronsink suggests, “Grace and Sabbath are not places to brainstorm and plan for the next day, they are the opportunity to be here now, to taste and see that the Lord is good in this moment. Rest is the space where we look at one another and rediscover the words of Jesus that the kingdom of God is in your midst.” (Luke 17:21, NIV)³⁴

Conclusion

The exploration of reviewing the creative process within the context of the worship arts encourages grace, imagination, healing, and, most importantly, the remembrance of the power of the Holy Spirit directing and moving within each stage of worship design. As worship continues to evolve, contextual evaluations of worship and a creative process designed to be traveled with the Holy Spirit are the means to better navigate and apply liturgical art in new cultural environments.

Each stage of the process allows for the artist to understand where and why the Spirit is moving a certain way. It invites the artist to be an Imagesmith, a story agent of God’s life and light in the world in a compassionate and grace-filled environment holding back the chaos. Through a series of non-linear stages, worship designers are called to rely on the relational pull of the Spirit within the process. While pandemics and new cultural environments will come and try to suffocate the breath out of creating transcendent liturgical art, having a creative process guided by the Holy Spirit that is governed by Christ’s love, timing, and patience is a powerful

³⁴ Bronsink, *Drawn In*, 39.

means to stave off the temptation to focus on finishing a project or mission without living through the steps of the creative process. In doing so, the effective application of the liturgical arts for an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine is possible. In closing, hear these words of Martin Rinckart and be encouraged and guided to create liturgical art with the Holy Spirit:

O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us,
to keep us in his grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world and the next.

CHAPTER 5
NEW CREATION AND THE APPLICATION OF LITURGICAL ARTS

“God’s Grandeur”

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.¹

Storytelling #8

It was Easter Sunday! Even as a little girl, I understood Easter Sunday to be different, fresh—new. Maybe it was the early morning sugar rush from the chocolate bunnies found in my Easter basket plunder, but Easter morning was and is sweeter than the rest. My brother and I looked forward to the fake bunny paw prints floured onto the woodwork my dad imprinted around the house as we searched for resurrected old Easter baskets containing the goodness of candied treats! One found in the clothes dryer; one in the dishwasher; we would yell in delight at our discoveries and immediately shove as much “Double Bubble” Easter egg gum into our mouths. Then, we would run to our rooms, put on our Easter best, and rush to church. You could not be late for Mass, or you would be the recipient of the death glare of my mom, who had been at church earlier singing in the choir. However, my dad’s concept of time was to be early for everything—so we would be fine. Plus, we got “the glare” more for playing elbow wars while using the kneelers and talking during the homily. Funny—I use the same glare for my children in church. Besides, it was Easter—we would never be late!

While I have no desire for this story to be a debate on the secular symbols of Easter, I do know this: after participating in the sacred journey of Holy Week, which included Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday, even as a child I knew the pain and sorrow that accompanied the sound of the nails we dropped into a stainless steel bowl with a “clash” at the foot of the crucifix that had been taken down during the

¹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Praise (Penguin Classics, 1985), cited in and discussed by Devon Abts “In God’s Good Time: Poetry and the Rhythms of New Creation,” in Jeremy Begbie, Daniel Train, and W. David O. Taylor, eds., *The Art of New Creation: Trajectories in Theology and the Arts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 27–31.

Good Friday service. I knew I was involved in this suffering as we mournfully kissed the feet of Jesus and smelled the incense of lament; I was connected to this part of the story. I knew the weight of emptiness in that sacred space and the car ride home. Everyone was sad. But then, full of anticipation, opening the dryer door and seeing my basket full—Christ had risen! Christ had risen indeed! Alleluia! When I found my Easter basket on Sunday morning, joy! I knew the joy of Christ's resurrection. A stretch? No, not for me. Usually, I would roll out of bed, brush my hair, put on something suggestive of nice, and head out the door to church. Not Easter Sunday, there was an urgency and instinctual need to look my best, a hurriedness to go—an energy of expectation. I couldn't wait to see and smell the Easter lilies, genuflect towards the crucifix hanging back where it should be, gleefully feel the baptismal water being flung over the congregation, marvel at the shimmering white and gold fabrics, sing and speak the celebratory liturgy, hear the trumpets, and participate with my mom leading the sung alleluia as the priest brought the proclamation of the Word of God to the body of Christ! Christ had risen! Christ had risen indeed! Alleluia! It was and is exciting! It was Easter Sunday—new creation!

Introduction

This story is an example of how the liturgical arts within a specific liturgy, embodied by the Holy Spirit, can serve to enliven and widen the intersection between the body of Christ and the Divine—breathing new life and new creation within its worshipers. The story describes the creative, effective, and appropriate application of the liturgical arts within the context of Roman Catholicism in the United States during multiple services of Holy Week. These services are based on traditional Roman Catholic rituals and beliefs, common cultural rituals of North American Christianity, and the liturgical signs and symbols of a local Roman Catholic Church. The enactment of these liturgical symbols, signs, and liturgical art engages the five senses of the congregation and is presented alongside the stories of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Through this juxtaposition of stories and the Holy Spirit, the liturgy transforms the memories of those assembled to perceive reality through the lens of new creation and new beginnings. This is the power of applying liturgical arts in worship. Liturgical arts serve as a bridge between humanity's narratives and the metanarrative of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. With the

Holy Spirit, they offer an alternative and transformative reality of new creation here on earth. This new reality is one of the main objectives of this chapter.

This chapter defines the power of applying liturgical arts for an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine. It defines the application of building enlivened worship experiences through the lens of new creation—an alternative and transformative reality here on earth revealed by the Holy Spirit through liturgical art in corporate worship. This lens, in combination with the evaluation work of theological, ritual, and liturgical studies from previous chapters, along with the grace and mercy of the creative process discussed in Chapter 4, offers worship planners and the assembly a firm foundation and identity upon which liturgical arts are applied.

These resources reestablish worshipping communities in identifying themselves as the body of Christ, deepen the assembly's theological understanding of being invited to create through the Holy Spirit, stress the importance of ritual study, context, and holy things, and enforce inclusion within these evaluation tools. Through the constant evaluation of ritual behavior, signs and symbols held in juxtaposition with the Trinity's narratives of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, a community of faith can make educated decisions to creatively apply liturgical arts to help worshipers engage in an inclusive and deeper encounter with the Divine.

This chapter has three main objectives:

1. To define the overarching transformative power of liturgical arts by incorporating new creation theology.
2. To identify unique characteristics in individual categories of liturgical art.
3. To provide models of liturgies that highlight the applied liturgical art following each section.

NEW CREATION THEOLOGY AND THE POWER OF LITURGICAL ARTS

The apostle Paul writes, “From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor 5:16–17 NRSVA) During Holy Week,² from the above example, the priest and his worship team made informed decisions to incorporate meaningful liturgical art that reminds the body of Christ that they are resurrection people—a new creation sent forth to continue to create out of Christ-like love and redemption for the transformation and reconciliation of the world. Theologian and historian Jon Pahl writes, “And we can recognize that the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body is not primarily about a magical kingdom for the afterlife, but rather is a vision of an inclusive and open city of God here, as in heaven where love is stronger than death.” This is the truth that liturgical art, through the Holy Spirit, reveals to its congregants.

Easter Sunday and the days that lead up to it have long been regarded as significant occasions for Christian communities to reclaim this Christian doctrine and to reestablish an alternative view toward a triune kingdom that is already at work in the world. This is strengthened during those occasions through the liturgical arts. While special occasions like Holy Week receive much attention in the church calendar, liturgical artists strive to craft worship services that enables transformation throughout the year. The weekly routine of experiencing enlivened worship that encounters the Divine leads to spiritual formation and growth.

The power of liturgical art is dependent on the discipline of the body of Christ attending these enlivened worship experiences frequently. Theologian W. David O. Taylor says, “[liturgical

² The Holy Week services in the referenced story above included a Roman Catholic Mass of the Lord’s Supper, a liturgy of Good Friday, and a Mass for Easter Day. Easter Vigil was not a requirement in the Sikora household.

art] solidifies and reconfigures identity and over time generates a certain way of being in the world.”³ While Western culture is always looking for the fast tracks of life, there is no Genie+ or SpeedyPass⁴ to spiritual development through the liturgical arts; experiencing worship that intersects with the Divine must be practiced often for it to become a way of life. In Chapter 3, the primary symbol of worship was emphasized to be the body of Christ, or the collective congregation. The chapter stressed that without the assembly, there is no corporate worship and there are no transformative opportunities to experience the resurrection together—no people, no worship. However, the slow, beautiful, and mysterious pace of spiritual formation within the routine of ritual, liturgical things, and art often deters the “right now” mindset of humanity. However, worship artists must not succumb to the culturally hip flavor of the month in hopes of building their number of congregants in worship. The worship designer has to trust the symbols and signs and design according to the Spirit.

Through the embodiment of sung songs, gestures, praying together, breathing together, looking at visual art, listening to the trinitarian message, and experiencing the stories of faith, the human body begins to take the form of these learned narratives outside of the worship space. It is the faithful discipline of experiencing love and grace through worship and all its liturgy that the congregant can then be able to live it outwardly, repeating the cycle. New Testament scholar N.T. Wright asserts, “We are called to embody the surprising faithfulness of God and to bring its effects to birth in the lives of others. We are called to be new creation in ourselves, to be the means of new creation in the present world, to be signpost-makers for God’s ultimate new

³ W. David O. Taylor, *Glimpses of a New Creation: Worship and the Formative Power of the Arts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 2.

⁴ These are Walt Disney World and Kennywood’s line programs for avoiding wait times.

world.”⁵ “Signpost-makers” best develop through the habit of attending corporate worship which reveals new realities of Christ’s light to be shared in the present world. Living a life with eyes that see new creation is an ongoing journey of encountering the Divine through worship experiences that utilize the liturgical arts to communicate new truths to be sent back into the world through the transformed congregation.

Through the application of the holy imagination in the form of sacred, embodied liturgical art, Christian ritual, and liturgical holy things, God invites gatherings of the faithful to encounter the Holy Trinity, where the realities of creation and God’s kingdom converge, inspiring the faithful to live differently within their own realities as “signpost-makers” for the realm of God. Worshipers leave empowered as new creations, glimmers of the ultimate new world.

This is the essential power of all liturgical art. Liturgical art guides, reveals, and challenges Christians to view everything through the lens of Christ’s new realities. Robin Jensen, art historian and theologian, says, “Their [liturgical arts] creativity and audacity broaden our vision to encompass things that we could not imagine on our own. When they shock us, we are forced to think harder about what we really believe.”⁶ This power unveils prejudice, sympathizes with the heavy-hearted, inspires compassion, and embraces an alternative way of love and redemption in a broken world. Liturgical arts are the solution for successful communication of the trinitarian narrative of heaven on earth. Theologian W. David O. Taylor writes, “arts marshal

⁵ N.T. Wright, “The Surprising Faithfulness of God: A Sermon at DITA10,” in *The Art of New Creation: Trajectories in Theology and the Arts*, eds. Jeremy Begbie, et al., 210

⁶ Robin M. Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 152.

metaphors in a way that orients our sense of self in the world with a potency that cannot be easily matched by other media of communications.”⁷

Liturgical arts possess the power to reorient the body of Christ towards an alternative way of living through Christ, one that is characterized by resurrection rather than endings, and abundance instead of fear and scarcity. Liturgical arts translate creation’s needs and dreams into visions of Christ at work. When applying liturgical art, they welcome and interweave a diverse range of God’s biblical narratives of love and redemption with humanity’s story in the hope of opening the hearts of the masses. They are a potent means for breaking the silence of injustice within worshiping communities and the outside world. The spiritually transformative power of liturgical art makes it an invaluable instrument in reshaping and enriching the spiritual lives of believers and non-believers, helping them see bigger pieces of humanity. Walter Brueggemann writes:

It is important for congregations and pastors to remember that we are primarily in the imagination business. It is our work to line out what the world is like as Christ presides over it. . . It is the work of Christian liturgy to line out that world with freedom and playfulness. It follows that the church defaults on its mandate to imagine when it settles for didacticism, or to put it colloquially, “man-splaining.” The imaginative work of the church intends to break open the world of fear, to witness to “a more excellent way” beyond scorekeeping and vengeance, and to show that we may alternatively practice a world of hospitality, generosity, forgiveness, and abundance.⁸

Brueggemann envisions a world of hospitality, generosity, forgiveness, and abundance communicated through the imagination of Christian liturgy as a vital source of changing the world’s status quo by revealing something new in “a more excellent way.” The worship arena is not a place to hide the truth about the world, nor is it a “feel good” platform. Its main objective is to encounter and dialogue with the Triune God and, through the Holy Spirit, be transformed into

⁷ Taylor, *Glimpses of a New Creation*, 54.

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, “The End of Imagination,” *Church Anew* (posted April 24, 2023), <https://churchanew.org/brueggemann/the-end-of-imagination> (accessed January 26, 2024).

a new creation that shines the light of Christ in the world, regardless of how uncomfortable the truth may be. Liturgical art serves this mission.

Everyone is called to this mission. Liturgical artists are not only creative people that went to art school, or a music conservatory. They include pastors, musicians, worship directors, visual artists, media teams, dancers, actors, writers, worship designers, AND anyone else who understands the calling of leading people into an enlivened and spiritually transformative worship experience with the Divine through the liturgical arts. Liturgical artists guide people to new truths about God's kingdom here on earth. They believe in the transformative power of the liturgical arts.

As theologian Natalie Carnes observes, "One of the things artists specialize in doing is to take what has been distorted and twisted, stained, and spoiled, and refashion it into something of radiance and promise."⁹ They take worldly fabric and weave it with the word of God. The story is then "refashioned" to say something truthful and grace-filled—a new creation that inspires innovation. This innovation transforms communities. This innovation of new creation heals broken hearts and fuels inventions and strategies that feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or provide the skills necessary to obtain clean drinking water. The liturgical artist believes that they can spark change through the materials they create.

United Methodist theologian L. Gregory Jones says, "[Churches] need to recover this witness not so we might be relevant, but rather as an intrinsic part of our witness to the God who we believe is making all things new by the power of the Holy Spirit."¹⁰ As a result, liturgical artists' souls burn to work and speak through the prophetic imagination of new creation. This conversation compels its artists to act, to have purpose, and to make a difference. Liturgical arts,

⁹ Natalie Carnes, "Foreward," in *The Art of New Creation*, 16.

¹⁰ L. Gregory Jones, *Christian Social Innovation: Renewing Wesleyan Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 8.

inspired by new creation theology, contagiously spreads the energetic fire of the Holy Spirit that reveals an alternative reality which is in contrast to the realities of individualism, greed, control, apathy, and power. Liturgical arts are conduits of new creation creating enlivened worship experiences that intersect with the Divine and send forth the assembly prepared to serve as the light of Christ.

At the start of this chapter, readers were introduced to the famous poem “God’s Grandeur,” penned by Jesuit priest Gerard Manley Hopkins. “God’s Grandeur” was written during Hopkins’s final year at St. Beuno’s College in Northern Wales before his ordination in 1877. Although a joyful and aesthetically beautiful time in his life, he was acutely aware of the oppression of industrialization, poverty, and pollution that plagued the areas of his appointments in the United Kingdom. “God’s Grandeur” is considered a reflection of his innovative style and thematic writing on the spiritual focus of God’s commitment to and through creation in response to humanity’s sinful nature.¹¹

This poem serves as an excellent introduction to this chapter’s overarching theme of new creation powering the purpose and voice of liturgical art. Through Hopkins’s prose, readers are vividly reminded that, regardless of the state of humanity, God will creatively spring forth streams of new beginnings. God will continue to create and call it good. Devon Abts, theologian, and literature scholar, describes the poem as saying, “Though existence seems barren to material eyes, at all times God is at work ‘deep down,’ renewing all things from within and directing each created being toward its eschatological fulfillment. To live fully into the creaturely life that God intends for us, we must turn from ‘the black West’ of spiritual inertia toward the ‘spring’ of

¹¹ “Gerard Manley Hopkins,” produced by Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/gerard-manley-hopkins> (accessed January 27, 2024).

resurrection in the Spirit.”¹² Acknowledging that a piece of art holds the power to speak new creation into the world is the first step to applying liturgical art.

“God’s Grandeur” is one of those pieces. It possesses the power of God’s transformative and alternative truth to enliven a worship experience that intersects with the Divine and focuses on new beginnings rather than endings. In his description of humanity, they “trod, have trod, have trod,” deafened by their self-absorption, overworked bodies, and dirty existence; they cannot even feel creation beneath their “shod” feet. However, the Holy Spirit, like a caring, “brooding” mother dove, hovers over the world with a warm heart, taking flight with the message of hope, “Ah!,” and reminds humanity that God’s boundless goodness will always triumph. “God’s Grandeur” is a poetic narrative of new beginnings that are available through the Triune God. Applied to a worship service, the poem would do well in serving as a conduit of new truth. It could be used as a response to scripture, a sermon illustration, or made into a call to worship. The worship design options are multiple.

While “God’s Grandeur” is strong enough to stand alone, applying coordinating liturgical art could make the experience of encountering God more vivid and personal. For instance, a more current narrative could be expressed by projecting present-day digital photography depicting similar images of the poem while it is recited. Additionally, an arrangement of the piece sung quietly in the background as it is spoken, such as Kenneth Leighton’s arrangement, could set the tone of the piece, elevating and enlivening the work.¹³ Marcia McFee, worship

¹² Devon Abts, “In God’s Good Time: Poetry and the Rhythms of New Creation,” in *The Art of New Creation*, eds. Jeremy Begbie, et. al., 31.

¹³ Words by Gerard Manley Hopkins, Music by Kenneth Leighton © 1957 Novello. (All Rights Reserved). See preview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJGLBTbFnRs&t=41s> (accessed February 28, 2024).

designer and scholar, bases her designs on intentional layering, or not layering of liturgical art to help create an “emotive landscape.”¹⁴ She says this about the technique:

This is the layering of the art forms that brings out a way of communicating a moment in the story that cannot be done by one art form alone. Layering is how we experience everyday life. We combine sensory experiences to create moments.¹⁵

This illustration uses layering to describe an application of spirit-filled liturgical art that creates a deeply meaningful and liminal environment where the congregation is held at an intersection with God and themselves. Again, this piece is powerful on its own. However, layering the work gives it a deeper meaning. Planned worship design carries the ability to know when and how to layer or not to layer. Making those decisions is dependent upon the contextual work and evaluation done prior to and during the design process. When the design of worship aligns with the authentic identity of the worshipping community, their rituals, and liturgical flow and meaning, then the Holy Spirit reveals the truth, and hope is renewed. This renewal helps the mission of the body of Christ to transform the world.

In conclusion, liturgical art that is inclusive and imaginative expresses the message of Christ’s new creation on earth as it is in heaven and appropriately serves within the ritual and liturgical context of the worshipping assembly has the power to enliven the worship experience and foster a deeper encounter with the Divine. McFee inserts, “When worship is meaningful and memorable (what I call ‘M-M-Good’ worship), it is because we have connected the faith narrative with our own life stories through the combination of words, visuals, actions, and media of the ritual.”¹⁶ Liturgical arts are the storytelling tools that create those “M-M-Good” worship experiences that prepare the body of Christ to be sent from worship as renewed spirits to serve

¹⁴ Marcia McFee, *Think Like a Filmmaker: Sensory-Rich Worship Design for Unforgettable Messages* (Truckee: Trokay Press, 2016), 21.

¹⁵ McFee, *Think Like a Filmmaker*, 21.

¹⁶ McFee, *Think Like a Filmmaker*, 3.

the Lord. Over time, this enlivened experience begins to form deeper spiritual lives with Christ. The following sections of this chapter provide a description of some of the unique characteristics and power of each liturgical art form, aiding worship designers in selecting the most appropriate form for their “M-M-Good” worship experiences.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LITURGICAL ARTS AND MODELS OF APPLICATION

Worship design begins in those scene shops that allow creative processes to incubate and birth beautiful liturgical arts. These are places where liturgical artists birth the visions of telling the stories of life, lived with the Triune God through the arts.

Sacred in its own vein is the paint-splattered and sawdust-covered workroom of the University of Houston’s Moores Opera Center’s scene shop where the sounds of imagination ring through the air as power tools and muffled rock-n’-roll plays in the background. This is where dreams take form. As an alumnus of the opera program, it was hard not to walk past the shop without sneaking a peek at what the dreamers were up to. These scene shops were spaces full of life and energy, creating environments that could transport its audiences to ancient Rome, Jay Gatsby’s mansion, or even outer space. This is a space where creation and innovation thrive.

This is the energy of worship planning—messy and inspiring, building designs for specific spaces and times to bring forth an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine. Peeking in and exploring the power tools of liturgical art is motivating. Worship designers can then begin to dream and think of their own spaces and times to create. By remembering and learning about their tools, inspiration of new creation begins. While worship artists have different shops to work in, the tools all contain the same power at different levels,

and as Hopkins writes, “There lives the dearest freshness deep down things.” Be excited; the Holy Spirit springs forth, “ah! Bright wings.”

Liturgical art is a vast field with many categories and branches that speak new life into the world. Judith M. Kubicki reminds readers that, “At its best, liturgical language is biblical, symbolic, metaphoric, poetic, doxological, communal and ecclesial, repetitive, embodied, and revelatory.”¹⁷ The following sections will lead worship designers to a better understanding of those languages. Listed below are the most used liturgical arts, or liturgical languages that liturgical artists work with. Each section will describe the power of the individual art in the context of corporate worship, followed by a liturgy highlighting it in the application found in a corresponding appendix. Before working through the liturgy, there are icebreaker questions to inspire contextual thought for the general usage of the liturgy. The liturgical design will be layered, sensory-rich, and convergent but will apply the art in a way that features its effectiveness, or purpose. It is understood that culturally diverse, multi-generational, and all genders will be represented in the leadership of the liturgical elements; thus, the rubrics do not mention this. These arts, in one way or another, are used in almost all Christian corporate worship regardless of the ordo of service and doctrine of the worshiping community.¹⁸ For the purpose of this writing, the liturgies will follow the general and ancient four-fold pattern of worship: *Gathering, Word, Table or Response, and Sending*. The resulting liturgical arts along with their liturgies will be:

1. Sacred Space

¹⁷ Judith M. Kubicki, *The Song of the Singing Assembly: A Theology of Christian Hymnody* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 2017), 29.

¹⁸ There are traditions that do not accept dance, but still move, or gesture within worship. There are worshiping communities that do not accept instrumental music, but use their voices. Some do not accept formal visual arts in church, yet people still come into a visual sacred space and are visual works of art themselves. Congregations are aware of their power, but have rules, or bans governing them to control where they want the power of worship to be focused. The majority of worshipers experience them in one way of the other.

2. Visual Arts
3. Musical Arts
4. Literary and Verbal Arts
5. Liturgical Dance

Sacred Space

Sacred space is the tangible boundary within which worship occurs. These boundaries create and contain pre-existing artistic elements that have the power to work with or against worship design. For this reason, it is essential for worship designers to assess the space before applying any other liturgical art. These elements are the size and shape of the space and spaces (i.e., seating space, chancel area, side areas, narthex, atrium), the style and height of ceilings and walls, color, texture, natural light and shadows, stained glass, mosaics, or other permanent visual art fixtures (i.e., statues, murals, signs), architectural style, lighting options, media options and fixtures, fixed seating arrangement or movable seating arrangement, levels, immovable fixtures (i.e., baptismal pool, rood screen, or built-in pulpit), slopes and galleries, natural focal points, atriums, naves, and side aisles. Catherine Kapikian suggests that liturgical artists “observe the dominant sight lines that traverse the space and the repetitive and echoing shapes found in volumes and voids. Discourse on how color creates movement in the space, and locate where the intensity of one hue hijacks the life out of another.”¹⁹ Space becomes a relational guidebook on how it communicates with the body of Christ.

What do Gothic ceilings do to a congregant as they lift their eyes up into the space? How does this connect people with God and shape their imaginations of God? If the service relies

¹⁹ Katherine Kapikian, *Art in Service of the Sacred* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 43.

heavily on artificial lighting and technology, how do they control and/or use the natural light of the space? Does manufactured light create a different ethos than natural light? These are all questions that liturgical artists need to consider as they engage in their work—advising them to make wise decisions regarding application. Liturgical artists have a lot to consider when designing worship.

Furthermore, worship designers need to be honest about the space. For instance, if the seating space accommodates eight-hundred people but only one hundred are attending regularly, this effects the worship design. All these elements influence how the energy of the room communicates with the gathered assembly—sometimes good; sometimes bad. This is true for all liturgical art, but space is the first liturgical art that worshipers experience. Therefore, it is important to give careful thought to the space when designing worship. McFee suggests:

When we enter a space, we get an immediate “hit”—a visceral snapshot of what we imagine will happen here. Several factors contribute to how a space feels. Color, light, architecture, and spatial relationship communicate energy dynamics. We perceive and react to light waves, the movement of architectural lines, the “heat” or “cool” of color, and the arrangement of seating, which forecasts the kind of relationships and movements that will take place in a worship space.²⁰

The elements of space can either enhance worship or obstruct it, depending on their relationship with the social, cultural, liturgical, and ritual needs of the assembly. This is ignored at the risk of obscuring the worshiper’s relationship with God. If a traditional Roman Catholic Mass is held in the basement of a church that has a low, tiled ceiling, no windows, fluorescent lighting, smells musty, and has very little room for an altar, or the other symbols of the Mass, how can the worship designer create around those obstacles? How can they elevate the Eucharist and the divine association of the priest? Is there enough room for the ceremonial acts of the Mass? Depending on the context of the assembly, formalized or anti-formalized, auditorium

²⁰ McFee, *Think Like a Filmmaker*, 70.

seating or long straight-lined pews, high ceremonial Gothic revival architecture or school cafeteria, all of these inherited worship design elements need to be navigated. This is true for outdoor worship without any walls; there are still boundaries of space. Recognizing the tangible boundaries of space matters in relation to the task of designing worship. Space is the overall evolution of an assembly's physical, theological, ritual, and liturgical history.

The above description of space operates as a detailed blueprint for the possible pre-existing liturgical art already at work within a worship design—it matters, it literally matters. This is a challenge at times. Nonetheless, designing worship within the given space as a partner rather than an inherited burden opens communication for creative application and modification if needed. If alterations cannot be made to the space, the designer must work with it and accept the positive challenge to create within it. Jeanne Halgren Kilde, a scholar of sacred spaces and architecture, continues, “part of our challenge will be to negotiate between these perspectives, retaining the analytical character of the situational view while remaining cognizant of the power of the substantive view.”²¹ However, if the space carries any harmful elements that exclude or discriminate against the body of Christ, it must be changed immediately. If there is an inherited permanently hung painting that blatantly insults a portion of the entire assembly, this is distorted truth—get rid of it. Knowledge of the spatial elements that inform worship design is crucial for successfully applying new liturgical art within the space.

In addition to the tangible boundaries within the worship space, there are intangible boundaries that direct worship design. These intangible boundaries of space are divine, social, and personal powers. Due to the sacred expectation of encountering God within space, space becomes a symbol of these powers. The power and influence of sacred space within a

²¹ Jeanne Halgren Kilde. *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Kindle Locations 109-110. Kindle Edition.

community is dependent on its theology and doctrine, ritual, and liturgical theology. Jenson observes, “[Space] manifests an idea in nonverbal form, functioning as a symbol at the most mundane and the most profound levels. Since spatial design here is symbolic, even the most utilitarian of buildings, such as a storage shed built to serve a religious function, can be a religious image, a religious symbol.”²² As in previous chapters, it is recognized that when people participate in Christian rituals and experience an encounter with God, that space becomes more than material, it becomes sacred both socially and personally through divine power. Space becomes formational in the lives of that assembly, and they begin to have a deeper connection to the divine, social, and personal power of those spaces.²³ As Chapters 2 and 3 point out, people ritualize, and then through an encounter with the Divine, their common things assume holy qualities.

This is the nature of Christian ritual with its symbols and signs. Space becomes a symbol of a person’s spiritual journey. Kilde reminds worship designers that, “Individuals connect profound spiritual meanings to specific places, including buildings and landscapes, and personal feelings of spiritual empowerment often result from connection to those spaces.”²⁴ Approaching space with sensitivity and grace, encourages worship designers to embrace the space with the people in mind. They must remember that liturgical art and space are about the people and God and how they connect to the story of faith. Regardless of the distorted powers of nostalgia and denial, the liturgical arts ministry is a ministry of care and servanthood. If an artist neglects or is unaware of the powers that are already at work in the space, then the application of worship arts

²² Robin M. Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen*, 104.

²³ For more information on these three powers refer to Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Sacred Power, Sacred Space*, Kindle Locations 54–149.

²⁴ Kilde. *Sacred Power*, Kindle Locations 134–135.

will not enliven the worship experience and it may create obstacles for people encountering God.

William A. Dyrness, theologian and professor of theology and culture says:

We must consider critically what certain traditions represent, noting their weaknesses, even as we appreciate their contributions. As noted earlier, we must also be sensitive to the traditions and values of our own denominations and congregations. And we need careful and sensitive leaders who can guide us in the practices of worship in ways that honor the diversity of our heritage even as they develop new spiritual sensitivities.²⁵

Worship renewal and evolution are necessary, but careful and grace-filled designers must learn how to navigate the powers of space and its people to compassionately make changes to speak truth through art.

Sacred space is a place where people encounter the Divine simply by entering it. Through the ritual and liturgical actions of those congregants and their encounters with God, the space is a tangible symbol of hope. Consideration of both the personal and social powers in relationship with divine power places value on that space—positively and negatively. Sacred space and the ability to give tangible boundaries to worship through its pre-existing artistic elements and its intangible boundaries of divine, social, and personal powers all create an active and working blueprint from which liturgical art is designed. The following liturgy highlights the use of *sacred space* for an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine.

²⁵ William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 160.

1. *A Service Celebrating Sacred Space (APPENDIX A)*



Figure 5:1 Dickinson First United Methodist Church
Historical Marker, Dickinson, TX

This liturgy is written for a single service but could serve within a worship series. If within a series, the rock placements around the foundation of the church should be saved for the last service within the series. This liturgy is non-lectionary. It is best suited for a worship space that has screens and multi-media capabilities. While the song selections suggest a large praise team and a four-part choir, simplified or different arrangements, or similar song choices are appropriate as well. The brackets, italics, and **red font** indicate **rubrics** (worship instructions) for elements requiring action. The **bold text** denotes those parts spoken by the assembly. The use of an asterisk (*) asks the worshipers to stand.

You are now invited to work through the following liturgy in APPENDIX A. Before you do so, ponder the following prompts in the context of your own worship arts ministries and then imagine how this liturgy could be adapted for your church:

- What are the sacred spaces in your church? Can you describe what makes them sacred?

- Can you begin to tell personal sacred stories about the space?
- Are there architectural elements and/or permanent fixtures that focus the congregation on God?

Visual Arts

Visual arts illuminate the Holy Spirit that indwells within space through the power of image.

They are physical, yet mysterious portals that reveal the Trinity within creation through its intricate and symbolic snapshots curated by the imagination of the visual artist. Visual artists work with the belief that God’s presence is in all physical materials, which can be crafted into symbols and signs that glorify and represent God’s goodness in connection with creation.

Theologian and professor of theology and culture, William Dyrness explains, “The artist always starts with something in the world—objects, colors, shapes—and collects and draws out of the ‘sense’ that the Creator has placed in these things, and shapes this into an image of meaning. This process implies that the world need not be left as it is; it is ‘redeemable.’”²⁶ Visual arts illuminate the revelations of God. It takes the mundane, raw, simplistic elements of creation and forms them into a new creation for the reflection of God’s truth. The visual arts inspire worshipers to glorify, contemplate, devote, and connect through memory and sensation into an experience with God.

Visual art comes in all forms, from painting, sculpture, photography, video, lighting, architecture, mosaics, and stained glass to digital mediums. They can be modern, ancient, abstract, or classical. Whichever medium or style applied, visual art contains the power of beauty and mystery, illuminating new truths about the Creator through the messages hidden inside. The power of beauty is a fascinating, awesome, and supernatural Holy Spirit-infused symbol of adoration that focuses worship on a state of awe, gratitude, and the glorification of God.

²⁶ Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 144.

Through its power of mystery, the visual arts ask the body of Christ to contemplate new revelations about God and creation that lie within the layers of signs, texts, and colors. They open a dialogue between the human soul and the re-ordered materials that speak a language of new creation. They remind the assembly that while “we privilege meaning over form,”²⁷ God asks to be seen through the unexplainable as well. Dyrness continues, “We have been taught to believe that art, if it has value, needs to be explained (often explained away)²⁸ in terms that are clearly related to scriptural truth.”²⁹ This is not how visual art communicates. In visual art, the story is told in a unique visual way. Through the power of the Holy Spirit working within visual art, the abstract explanation through the Holy Spirit is revealed through the imagination of the eyes.

Visual arts produce images to tell their stories. Visual art can be Incarnational—Christ physically working through that art. Visual art, Kapikian explains, “actualizes the language of Incarnation through material means. This statement is crucial to welcoming aesthetic forms as mediators of the Word.” As mediators of the word of God, and Christ’s life, death and resurrection, visual art allows worshipers to understand the narratives of faith through visual and devotional contemplation that allows for personal and spiritual illumination through the senses of the soul rather than only the mind. Visual art that embodies the incarnation reveals the beauty of God as a reflection of Christ. Beauty, when incarnational, can suggest uncomfortable and challenging realities of the revelations of God that inspire reform and redemption. Beauty is a painting of hospice workers acting as the hands and feet of Jesus providing comfort and care to the suffering. Beauty can be an abstract graphic design of chaotic lines and colors, but in the

²⁷ Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 145.

²⁸ A piece of art can speak for itself. If the meaning and interpretation are louder than the image, then the experience of mystery and beauty becomes dull and the imagination cannot have a mind of its own.

²⁹ Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 145.

middle, there is a small beacon of light and order. Beauty can be a photograph of children of all races and nationalities playing in a playground while their parents look on peacefully.

Visual arts tell humanity's story through the light of Christ. As a response to Rudolph Ottom, C.H. Cilliers says, "The approach to God is a deeply human and existential experience, but never equal to sentimentalism or emotionalism. It is also a deeply divine experience, born out of the revelation of God, but never abstract or inhuman. What happens on a Sunday morning when we attend worship services is indeed more than meets the eye."³⁰ Visual arts invite worshipers on behalf of the Trinity to approach these revelations and are sent forth as philanthropists of hope. They are never without human reference, but they are "deeply divine" focal points within worship.

Visual artists ask the congregation to use their imaginations to experience the new truth and goodness of God through their art. Through its powers of beauty, mystery, contemplation, and illumination, it invites congregants to participate in the visual stories of their faith and perceive a deeper understanding of Christ and the world as it could be. Dyrness states, "When artists do capture something of the way 'God does things,' whether they are Christians or not, we are challenged to see the world, and even God's presence there, in ways that we have not seen before."³¹ Unfortunately, the visual arts have historically been debated as a controversial and misleading resource within worship because of this power. The debate argues that visual art used in worship has the potential for deceptive interpretation, immoral emotions, and places a higher value on the mystical and mysterious communication with God than the word of God. Due to their worldly nature, the debate contends that visual art cannot possibly contain the sacred.

³⁰ C. H. Cilliers, "Mysterium tremendum et fascinans: liturgical perspectives on the approach to God," *In die Skriflig: tydskrif van die Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging* 43, No. 1 (2009), 36.

³¹ Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 97.

However, with the dawn of the digital age, humanity lives in a visual art form of non-stop virtual realities containing every type of visual art at its fingertips.

From videos of cats with AI filters to virtual tours of the National Museum of Fine Art, to some of the heinous images of our world, humanity cannot escape a visual virtual art reality.³² Humanity needs a safe place where visual art can be trusted. This place is worship. If this debate continues, congregations miss the opportunity to serve as visual witnesses to stories of God's glory, goodness, and redemption in this primary language. Dyrness warns, "Ultimately, the created order holds us accountable, and we either see through it to the loving hand of the Creator, or we make it something of an idol—something that refers only to itself."³³ As a mom of two young boys whose favorite visual artists are Youtubers making Fortnite instructionals, this is a risk the church needs to take. There needs to be a place for a deeper connection with visual art. Worship designers need to use visual art to see "to the loving hand of the Creator," which gives them the possibility of experiencing an encounter with Jesus. This illuminates not only redemption and liberation, but the harsh realities of life lived in a fallen world. Visual art calls the viewers into action—to be the hands and feet of Christ.

A worship design that uses visual art only for decoration or is not relevant to the current congregation, starves its worshipers of the abundant and formative power of incarnational art. Worship art creates an environment that connects faith gatherings into experiences that persistently show the illustrative revelations of God. Jenson says:

Art, if it is to have any use for the church, must be vital and dynamic, relevant to the lives we now live. It can affect us and even change us by addressing us at intellectual, emotional, ethical, and spiritual levels. Art can delight our eyes and inspire devotion. Art

³² There is a large population living with moderate to severe visual impairment, of whom there are almost 300 million in the world today.

³³ Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 100.

can deepen our understanding and enrich our worship. It can soothe, delight, and set us on fire.³⁴

Visual arts are focal points for meeting God in awe and wonder within its Incarnational reflection that is culturally relevant, inspiring, and deep. Through the conversation of beauty and wonderment, the congregant is blessed and affected by its dialogue with the Creator. The intention of visual art is to intersect with the Divine in a beautiful, mysterious, and unspoken language that enlivens a worship experience and connects the congregation to God. The following liturgy highlights the use of *visual art* for an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine.

2. *A Service for the Thirsty (APPENDIX B)*

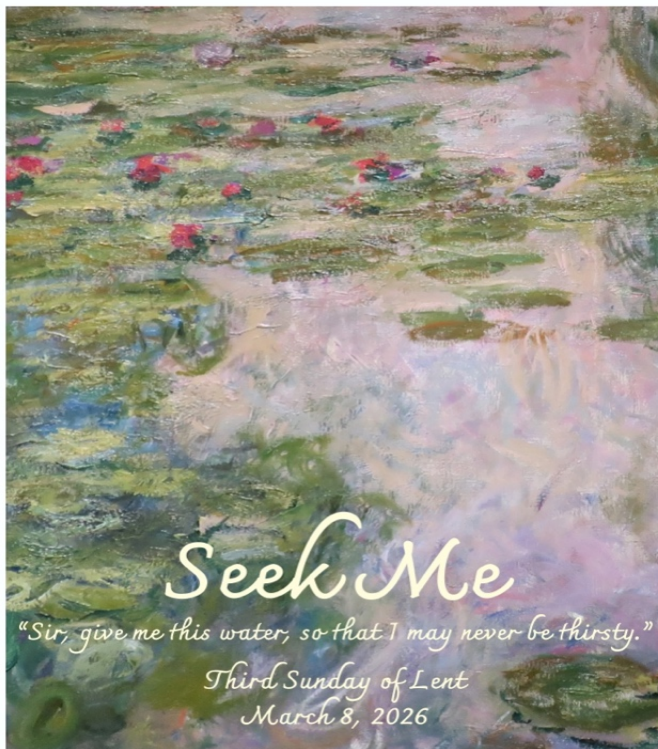


Figure 5:1 "Waterlilies" (1917-1919) by Claude Monet as Order of Worship Cover

This liturgy is written for the Third Sunday in Lent, within the worship series *Seek Me*, *Lectionary Year-A*; however, it can stand alone outside of the lectionary. *Seek Me* is a five-week

³⁴ Jenson, *The Substance of Things Seen*, 100.

Lenten Series inviting sojourners to seek Christ and thirst no more. From the wilderness, to the well, to Lazarus, *Seek Me* quenches the thirst for the holy desire of spiritual fullness, revealing clarity and love to the challenges and sacrifices of living a beautiful life of grace. Based on Claude Monet's *Waterlilies*, this worship time invites us into a peaceful, introspective, and meditative refuge where dry bones come alive, blind eyes see, and we are offered living water, unveiling the Holy Trinity's continuous redemption stories—preparing us for Holy Week.

Week three meets Jesus at the well with a Samaritan woman in need of water. The water that she receives from Christ softens her heart and saves her life sending her forth prepared to share the good news of Christ with others. Surrender to an experience. Filling your cup with the kindness, love, and care of the Savior. Quench your thirst with life-saving water.

This liturgy requires full immersion in the visual space. This is achievable with screens, additional screens with rear projection, table settings around the entire worship space, and lighting. Environmental projection without screens would be ideal. If the natural light in the space cannot be controlled, then screens, an altar, and multiple table settings with up-lighting around the room will suffice. A suggested thematic art gallery featuring the work of local artists which is open to the public during the Lenten season coordinates well with this series, or service. The brackets, italics, and **red font** indicate **rubrics** for elements requiring action. The **bold text** denotes those parts spoken by the assembly. The use of an asterisk (*) asks the worshipers to stand.

You are now invited to work through the following liturgy in APPENDIX B. Before you do so, ponder the following prompts in the context of your own worship arts ministries and then imagine how this liturgy could be adapted for your church:

- Who are your visual artists? Do you have painters, graphic designers, sculptors, crafters, floral designers? Do you have builders? Make a list of your artists.

- What are the rules for using visual art, or adapting your worship space for the use of visual art? Is there a way to apply the visual art through floral and greens and traditional symbols that may be more acceptable for your context?
- Are there paintings that would connect to your congregation more successfully within the theme of the woman at the well?
- Can you suggest an alternative experiential activity to quench the thirst of your congregation?

Musical Arts

Sound is a form of energy that travels in waves, which are made up of pressure variations that move through air, water, or solid materials. Music is a collection of those vibrations arranged in a specific pattern. However, it is not merely a collection of any sound; a collection of whining cats would not be considered heavenly music to the ears. It certainly expresses the chaotic, rough and tumble of life, but as a collection of structured sounds made in response to the world around it. They are the rhythmic and melodic expressions and interactions of humanity and creation in a sonic format that triggers the mind to remember, feel mood, learn from, move, and imagine. Through its rhythmic and melodic patterns music is an auditory diary of creation.

What is even more fascinating about music is that humanity is pre-wired to feel and understand emotionally what these rhythms and patterns of harmony do. As babies, the wiggles and giggles in response to an upbeat arrangement of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” prove that in the neuro make-up of the brain, humans are born with a sonic diary of creation to help them navigate and make sense of the world. These felt vibrations are where movement and organized language begin. Yes, humanity would survive without music, but the body would certainly hunger for the vibrations of life that connect them to the narrative realities of their souls. Humanity thrives under the universal phenomenon of music. Jeremy Begbie, theologian and theology and arts scholar, says, “It would be odd if Christians were never to think in depth about something so omnipresent. Not only that, music seems to be *universal*. We know of no culture

without something akin to music.”³⁵ Musical arts connect life together. It is a universal language that keeps a flow of the Spirit in humanity’s ears. From the dental office to the workout playlist to a Sunday morning worship liturgy, music serves as the endless soundtracks of the life and activities of humanity. In worship, music is the constant audible stream of liturgical art that facilitates, inspires, and moves the service. Worship designer, and sacred art and music scholar, Cherry Constance, describes music as a facilitator:

In a real sense, songs carry the worship along from beginning, to end. As we move through the gathering, Word, Table, or response, and sending, songs provide many of the words of the conversation between God and people. The songs don’t just call us to prayer—some actually provide the prayers. They don’t only set up times of proclamation—they proclaim. Worship songs don’t just help independent worship elements flow together—they *are* the worship elements.³⁶

Musical arts invite congregants to breathe together, experience praise and prayer together, harmonize together, actively listen together, feel an understood mood, and move together. Musical arts are a language of togetherness that connects and moves the body of Christ through the liturgy.

The main musical art within worship that does this is singing. A congregation might not always move on the same beat or sing in the same key, but singing together is the principal formational form of musical art that flows through worship uniting humanity in an embodied response to God within worship. These songs include psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. (Col 3:16). Singing in worship is a full-body experience. Singing together creates one voice, harmonized as one sound, one gesture, one movement, one language, and one body of Christ. They become gathered into the diverse emotions and stories of creation that intersect with the

³⁵ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2007), 15.

³⁶ Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, [2010] 2021), 211.

Divine narrative of the Incarnation. Taylor says, “From a New Testament perspective, such an experience of communal singing—wherein the church sings *as* a body, gathered together *in* their bodies, *of* their identity as the body of Christ—is a Spirit capacitated business.”³⁷ When humanity participates in such a “Spirit capacitated business” in worship, they experience the intervention of the Holy Spirit’s voice singing the life of creation through an endless song that continues humming in the ears of the faithful as they move out of the experience. This is why music is essential to worship design. It connects the weblike context of the gathering’s theological, ritual, and liturgical traditions into an understandable and unified format where every “body” can participate and be transformed.

Singing in worship provides holy ground to sing the songs of every “body.” C. Michael Hawn explains, “Singing in worship provides a cosmic connection with the faithful of the past, those who struggle in the present, and all who long for the fulfillment of our hopes. Singing connects the temporal existence of humanity with the eternal realm of the cosmos.”³⁸ Singing the songs of heaven on earth joins hearts and souls of worshipers with the presence of God, the saints who have gone before them, the universal church, and the prayer and praise of all of creation singing, “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.” (Rev 4:8, NRSVUE) Music proclaims, praises, prays, laments, creates, supports, transforms, teaches, unifies, and brings worshipers into a state of Divine sonic communion that embodies an encounter with the Triune God.

The musical arts are the melodic enliveners of stories, prayers, praise, mood, and the songs of new creation. They tell humanity’s stories and God’s stories held in juxtaposition in

³⁷ W. David O. Taylor, “Singing Ourselves into the Future: Worship and the New Creation,” *The Art of New Creation*, eds. Jeremy Begbie, et al., 124.

³⁸ C. Michael Hawn, “Streams and Tributaries,” *New Songs of Celebration: Congregational Song in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. C. Michael Hawn (Chicago: GIA Publications Inc., 2013), 352.

order to speak of an alternative reality where everyone has a voice. The songs teach the faith.

Taylor reminds worshipers that:

Most Christians' primary exposure to theology will occur through the songs they sing. The Dutch theologian Albert van den Heuvel commented in 1966 at the World Council of Churches, "It is the hymns, repeated over and over again, which form the container of much of our faith. They are probably in our age the only confessional documents, which we learn by heart."³⁹

The new songs of creation disciple, challenge, and transform the worshiper—asking if they really know their neighbor and to know them by heart. These songs that are sung in the congregation are not just about the pain and suffering of the individual. They join with the grief felt by the person sitting in the pew in front of them, the bare and blistered feet of the homeless man on the street corner next to the worship facility, the hungry child in the apartment whose utilities were shut off, or the desperation of the widow who cannot help her family because her government won't allow her to work. This is the power of the musical arts that sing of new creation. They unite the voice of the congregation in an encounter with God who then sings a new song of redemption and healing, sending them forth with the movement and sounds of liberation on their lips. Taylor witnesses, "and in the face of pestilential forces and ruptures of justice, which threaten to turn Christians against each other, the Spirit still causes new songs to burst forth: songs that rescue for us the humble mind of Christ, songs that soften hardened hearts, songs that enable us to imagine what seems unimaginable, a unity between friends who have become enemies, and songs that retrain bodies closed off to others to open up again in vulnerable love."⁴⁰

³⁹ Taylor, *Glimpses of a New Creation*, 133.

⁴⁰ W. David O. Taylor, "Singing Ourselves into the Future: Worship and the New Creation," *The Art of New Creation*, eds. Jeremy Begbie, et al., 132.

The challenge in singing these new songs is being willing to know and love everyone in the circle of the body of Christ. A worship design that consistently includes music that embraces the stories of Christ's full kingdom begins to teach worshipers who the body of Christ is and how to sing with empathy and hope embracing neighbors outside of the worship cliques. They provide a tuneful language, that rhythmically and poetically teach us to forgive and to be forgiven. This goes back to Chapter 2 and our discussion of liminal space. By repeatedly participating in the songs of redemption and new beginnings, the congregation begins to work within a liminal space where the neighbor is the self and where struggles and joys are shared together. This experience of *communitas* creates a new willingness to know and love the body of Christ. David Lemley, theologian and theology scholar says, "Music making that enables the trinitarian, self-offering shape of the church as an alternate society could allow us to realize an 'enlivening of the imagination by images that do justice to the central symbol of our faith.'"⁴¹ When the "alternate society" sings the trinitarian songs of the body of Christ and they breathe together, harmonize their praise and prayer together, actively listen together, feel and understand mood together, and move together; they connect themselves to the central symbol of their faith becoming closer to his image. Through singing and participating in the musical arts of worship design, this auditory diary of creation connects worshipers to a universal, united, fully embodied, and enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine.

The following liturgy highlights the use of *musical art* for an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine.

⁴¹ David Lemley, *Becoming What We Sing: Formation Through Contemporary Worship Music* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), 236.

3. *A Service Celebrating Jesus Christ as the True Light of the World (APPENDIX C)*

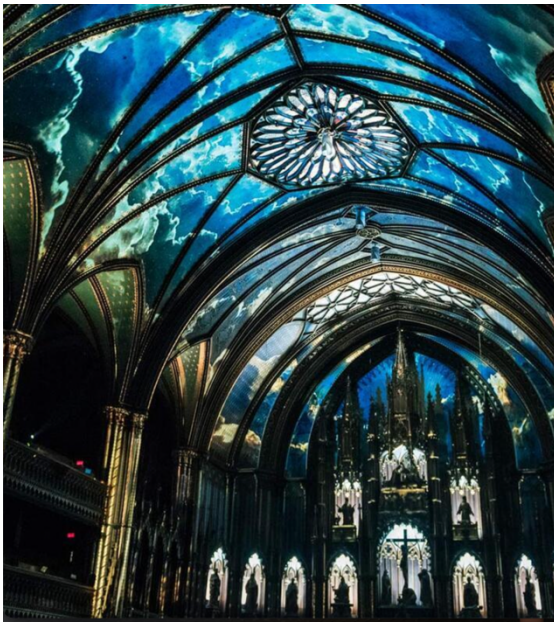


Figure 5:3 The Experience, AURA at Notre Dame in Montréal, Canada, go to www.aurabasiliquemontreal.com/en

This liturgy is written for a single service but could serve within a worship series. If within a series, consideration for an Epiphany-themed series or a Creation and Jesus series would be appropriate. This liturgy is non-lectionary. It is best suited for a worship space that has screens and multimedia capabilities. It is understood that the visuals will coordinate with the liturgical theme. While the song selections suggest a moderately advanced choral ensemble, a handbell choir, and access to brass, percussion, and strings, simplified or different arrangements, or similar song choices are appropriate as well. The brackets, italics, and **red font** indicate the **rubrics** for elements requiring action. The **bold text** denotes those parts spoken by the assembly. The use of an asterisk (*) asks the worshipers to stand.

You are now invited to work through the following liturgy in APPENDIX C. Before you do so, ponder the following prompts in the context of your own worship arts ministries and then imagine how this liturgy could be adapted for your church:

- How else might you create a continuous stream of sound throughout this service with the resources that you have?

- Are there hymns, or anthems that your congregation and music teams might use that better suit your context?
- Although this highlights music, are there complimentary visuals your team is thinking about for this service?

Literary Arts and Verbal Arts

Literary arts are the building blocks of liturgy. These are the stories within the big story of liturgy that navigate the congregation from “A” to “B.” They are the chosen dialogue between the assembly and the Triune God—identifying the congregation as the body of Christ. Taylor describes this interaction: “To receive the Scriptures, then, is to receive an invitation to discover one’s identity within the narrative of both saints and sinners, both believers and doubters, both principal actors and bystanders to the revelatory actions of the Triune God.”⁴² These mini-stories are narrative, poetic, directional, prayerful, dramatic, spoken, historical, extemporaneous, scripted, sung, tonal, expressive, rhythmic, lectures, essays, BUT they are pieces of a larger story that journeys through an exchange of God speaking and then the body of Christ responding—leading the worshipers into a transformative encounter with the Divine. The conversation of God’s stories and creations’ stories begins to build hope-filled interactions where the assembly sees themselves within the story of creation.

In describing the Israelites in the Old Testament, Rob Weber, theologian and pastor, says, “It was as if the life of the story was able to live them into being. In the *storytelling* and in their *storydwelling*, they found the ongoing link to God’s purpose and activity in the world. The story sustained and directed them.”⁴³ The power of storytelling within worship reestablishes, reimagines, and renews the role of humanity within the kingdom of God in an enlivened

⁴² Taylor, *Glimpses of a New Creation*, 149.

⁴³ Rob Weber, *Visual Leadership: The Church Leader as ImageSmith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 26.

encounter with the Divine. Using the literary arts, these stories come to life within the lives of their congregants linking their lives with the Creator. Weber continues, “The Bible is not just *a* story—it is *our* story. In these stories, we find our connection with the common themes of our life with God and God’s life with us.”⁴⁴ Literary art shapes the liturgical design by creating dialogue points within the story of “God’s life with us.”

A recurring theme in this thesis is the utilization of narrative storytelling and poetry to begin each chapter, or some subsections. These vignettes and verses invite the reader into a reimagined application of the content not found within the formalized and expository forms of writings that they prelude. Narrative and descriptive in style, they playfully lead readers into a personal and reflective experience of the subject matter. This helps the reader to remember and to think creatively about the main objective of the structured sections. Using multiple literary styles and forms, the information engages with a diverse range of perspectives, imagination, memory, and communication so that the author’s point of view is better understood.

Using multiple literary styles and forms is helpful for building liturgy as well. The liturgy itself is an active story with a beginning and an end incorporating multiple literary styles and forms that engage and dialogue with the goal of spiritual transformation, or God’s point of view of creation. Taylor writes, “To participate in corporate worship, then, is to participate in what Robbie Castleman calls a story-shaped liturgy.”⁴⁵ The application of diverse literary forms and their styles within liturgy enriches the communicative power and perspective of the liturgical design. Poetry, for example, engages the imagination through metaphor and imagery. A call to worship that uses a Psalm, and a newly written refrain guides the assembly to participate in God’s colorful world through vivid description and metaphor. Taylor writes, “Poetry is not

⁴⁴ Weber, *Visual Leadership*, 63.

⁴⁵ Taylor, *Glimpses of a New Creation*, 149.

chiefly about the transfer of information. It is instead a kind of language that says more and says it more intensely than does ordinary language, to paraphrase Laurence Perrine's definition."⁴⁶ The literary style of poetry takes the concrete and artistically describes it into illumination through the imagination.

Another literary form used in liturgy is illustrative narrative. An illustrative narrative might be a personal story within a sermon or a testimony in response to a biblical narrative. Its style relies on memory and familiarity to explain scripture in terms that connect to personal identity. Illustrations are ways for the assembly to see themselves within a biblical story. The Holy Spirit illuminates how the Triune God is working and calling people into action just like in the story. The past becomes the present situation.

The last literary form of this section is drama. Drama is the active ingredient within all literary forms that give literature motion. It has tone, rhythm, color, expression, tempo, and passion. It is an artistic tool that invites a worshiper to have an opinion about a character, or how something should make them feel. Drama is what moves the congregation to the edge of their seats outside of themselves, fully connected to the characters of the story. Drama uses the power of emotion to bring worshipers into a common energy to experience the meaning of the stories. Theological and liturgical scholar Patricia Wilson-Kastner described the role of drama in an interview with theology and sacred art scholar Debra Sokolove: "Our liturgy goes on to use the metaphor of drama in discussing the connection of liturgy to the entire cosmic scope of creation, good and evil, and the entirety of the sacred. 'Our liturgy expands the context and the participants well beyond the human struggle with ourselves, our feelings, our desires, to embrace

⁴⁶ Taylor, *Glimpses of a New Creation*, 121.

the entire universe.”⁴⁷ Drama is the transformative language that illuminates the minds of the body of Christ to see themselves in the bigger picture of God working with creation and in compassion responds.

Drama constructs characters, sets, moods, conflict, and resolution. They are the action of story. Its ability to engage the gathering emotionally and convey complex ideas in an accessible and influential manner makes it an effective means of communicating the stories of new creation. Roger Grainger, theologian and psychologist, says, “Drama is capable of speaking on our behalf to embody our profoundest longings—bringing them home to us not simply as ideas but as presences, events in which we are personally involved.”⁴⁸ These “presences” that the faith family takes home with them are the transformative power of literary art. Literary art is God’s words to live by.

By incorporating various literary forms and styles, such as poetry, illustrative narrative, dramatic arts, and drama, the liturgy becomes more dynamic and engaging, allowing for a richer and more meaningful worship experience. While these are only a few examples, it is apparent that using a variety of literary forms and styles allows the worshipping body to engage and participate in the application of the stories fully—seeing themselves within the stories and leading to a deeper sense of engagement and understanding of God’s goodness revealed to the body of Christ.

While literary art has its own power, methods, and artistry to communicate and help form the liturgy, it requires an audible translator within worship to fully engage with it. Most literary

⁴⁷ Deborah Sokolove, *Performing the Gospel: Exploring the Borderland of Worship, Entertainment, and the Arts* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019), 81.

⁴⁸ Roger Grainger, “VI Liturgy and Transformation,” in *The Drama of the Rite: Worship, Liturgy and Theatre Performance* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.2307/ji.4116439.11> (accessed March 1, 2024).

art is spoken within the liturgy unless it is on the screens to be read aloud, with, or used for direction or meditation. Verbal art is literary art's translator. It is the voice of the Holy Spirit moving and working through literary art to bring the words and stories within liturgy into sonic action and invite the congregation to participate. Verbal arts, like musical arts, use tone, pace, style, expression, volume, timing, rhythm, and dramatics but do not have the melodic patterns and musical moods of meaning that musical art has. Verbal arts are only as powerful as their spoken delivery, the story itself, liturgical placement, and style. McFee reminds worship designers that,

We are writing words that will be spoken and then vanish in the next moment. We are writing for optimum *hearing* that doesn't stop at the ear but enters and changes the heart. And, in worship, we are writing words for living, breathing bodies to speak aloud. Words become living symbols embodied in the gathered community.⁴⁹

The prophet Isaiah from Chapter 1 challenges worshipers once again, "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isa 43:18–19, NRSV) This is poetry that should not make the person in the front pew stretch and yawn. They should respond with an excited, "We are ready! We have seen your good works and know you will do it again!" Then the lights come up on a dance team celebrating God's faithfulness.

How was the scripture spoken? Was this the only part of the scripture that was read, or was the entire chapter of Isaiah 43 read in a whispering voice with the microphone held at the belly button of its owner? Was there an expectation of a long-winded monotonal exegetical sermon to follow? Just like all other liturgical art, verbal art has the power to enliven a worship experience that encounters the Divine, but only if the "words enter and change the heart." Verbal art must take its role seriously. It is the vessel for conversing with God, yet sometimes verbal art

⁴⁹ McFee, *Think Like a Filmmaker*, 97.

feels like the reading of a grocery list or a long-winded phone call with a friend who has been complaining about their spouse for twenty-five minutes.

Verbal artists are facilitators and enliveners of the stories within the liturgy. They help the worshiper understand how to participate and how to see themselves in the stories and verses. To do this, the tone, body engagement, and THEN words must be spoken artistically and intentionally with the belief that they are life-giving conversations. McFee gives these statistics, “Childers notes that speech-communication research shows that ‘55 percent of all meaning communicated in a face-to-face setting is communicated by the body, 38 percent by the tone of the voice, and only 7 percent by the actual words spoken.’”⁵⁰ Verbal art influences ninety-three percent of literary art’s communication. A beautifully prepared prayer with fluid and floral language meant to powerfully welcome the refugee, the orphan, and the “other” will only intercede on behalf of the full congregation seven percent of the time if delivery is not done well. The artistry of verbal art is important for the communication of the literary art.

The dramatic arts are a form of verbal art that can be effective for engaging layers of literary style and form in an enactment of figurative role-playing. This fully embodied literary art form contains the layering of movement, acting, character analysis, text coloring and delivery, and conversation-driven dialogue or monologues, poetry, or verse. This form of verbal art incorporated into liturgy is always a creative way to use verbal art, theatrical art, and movement in worship that physically reimagines a story. It can include the congregation as well. The communicative and interactive nature of drama helps congregants see themselves within the scripted role-playing of the story. Just like all forms of literary and verbal art, its application needs to complement and flow within the entirety of the liturgy to communicate that message.

⁵⁰ McFee, *Think Like a Filmmaker*, 120.

Verbal art, in whichever form, has the power to share words of faith where the past and future stories of Christ's kingdom become the present experience, enlivening the worship as the body of Christ encounters the Divine. If verbal art is a powerful conduit for communicating the transformative words of faith, then the expectations for the application, amplification, and acoustical clarity must be high and have the aim of glorifying the Triune God. Consistently forgetting to unmute a speaker's microphone would be an obstacle to hearing these words. Liberties in using verbal arts as entertainment or personal agendas are also obstacles to hearing valuable truth within the words of the liturgy. This does not mean liturgy cannot be humorous, whimsical, or speak on behalf of a personal conviction, but it cannot distort, or be dishonest to God's work.

The verbal arts unite the Triune God's stories in relationship with creation within the ritual, liturgical, and theological context of worship with its assembly. Verbal arts extol and adore God and use their words and literary forms with an intention to liberate change through the Holy Spirit and to holistically promote new creation here on earth—inviting the whole body to participate as they reveal the redeeming work of the Creator. These wonderful words of life in their multiple literary forms and styles, in combination with verbal arts and dramatics, flow through the liturgy, with an expectation to spring forth something new. For the body of Christ to perceive these words, there is an understanding and respect for the ebb and flow of literary and verbal layering of forms, style, tone, and gesture within the liturgy. Philip P. Bliss's hymn "Wonderful Words of Life" (1874) reminds worship designers to let the beautiful words of worship shine through.

Sing them over again to me,
Wonderful words of life;
Let me more of their beauty see,
Wonderful words of life;

Words of life and beauty
Teach me faith and duty.

Refrain:

Beautiful words, wonderful words,
Wonderful words of life;
Beautiful words, wonderful words,
Wonderful words of life.⁵¹

The following liturgy highlights the use of *literary and verbal art* for an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine.

4. *A Service Celebrating One Body, Many Stories*



Figure 5:4 "Ezra the Priest Proclaiming Freedom," by Mindy Oaten, 2020, Calgary, AB, www.mindyoaten.com, All Rights Reserved

This liturgy is written for a single service but could serve within a worship series. This liturgy is non-lectionary. It is best suited for a worship space that has screens and multimedia capabilities. It is understood that the visuals will coordinate with the liturgical theme. Some of the selections require participants that are well-versed in the dramatic arts. The brackets, italics, and **red font** indicate **rubrics** for elements requiring action. The **bold text** denotes those parts spoken by the assembly. The use of an asterisk (*) asks the worshipers to stand.

⁵¹ Words and Music P. P. Bliss (1874), Public Domain.

You are now invited to work through the following liturgy in APPENDIX D. Before you do so, ponder the following prompts in the context of your own worship arts ministries and then imagine how this liturgy could be adapted for your church:

- Who reads the scripture in your congregation?
- Do you have liturgists and writers in your congregation? Are there places where they could write their own liturgy and scripts?
- Do you have a dramatic arts team? If not, do you have local actors and actresses that might be able to participate in scripted liturgy? If not, are there visuals that could enhance the story instead of the dramatic arts?

Liturgical Dance

Liturgical dance, in a broader form, is the movements, gestures, and sacred dance of the body in an invited response to the drive of the Holy Spirit within worship. Liturgical dance embodies the meaning of scriptural and liturgical content through movement. Through kinesthetic repetition, the body begins to internalize these meanings. Over time, they begin to guide and change a person's life. Participants in liturgical dance visualize and physically memorize the word of God in such a way that their faith grows. Kathleen Turner, theologian and dance scholar, says, "to refuse to dance would be to identify God with immutable stability."⁵² To dance in worship is to identify with an unstoppable Triune God who boldly lives and moves among the worshipers and throughout the kingdom of God here on earth.

Taking their cue from the ritualized actions of the ancient Israelites of the Psalms, the modern people of God walk, bow, kneel, sit, pray in postures, stand, lift their hands, clap, spin

⁵² Kathleen Turner, *And We Shall Learn Through the Dance: Liturgical Dance as Religious Education* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 145.

around, and dance to praise, glorify, and communicate with the Almighty. Turner teaches, “Liturgical dance can fall into five different categories: processional, prayer (including acclamation and invocation), proclamation, meditation, and celebration.”⁵³ The liminal space created through these ritualized actions, referring back to Victor Turner in Chapter 2, allows for the body of Christ to physically move together as one through the Holy Spirit with the Divine. Liturgical dance invites the entire congregation into its sway. Liturgical dance should never exclude anyone; it tells the story of all believers.

When applying liturgical dance to the liturgy, the consideration of creative and sometimes varied levels of movement should be available for everyone to join in the dance of enlivened worship that intersects with the Divine. For example, when a dance team is leading a special message, they can modify complex choreography to simple movements at specific times of the dance. If the team is doing jumps and pliés that symbolize praise, the worshipers could be instructed to lift their heads and arms up on specific words. Another option would be for the dancers to surround the assembly in the space in such a way that it feels like the dancers are embracing the people with their energy. For example, a liturgical dance is applied in a processional for Palm Sunday. The dancers process leaping and twirling around the space with palms, flags, costumes, and banners leading a congregation that holds palms. They wave the palms in the air, following the dance team proclaiming the triumphant entry of Christ. If there are congregants with mobility issues, they, too, need a palm to be able to wave and shout from their seats. Dance is communal and the work of the people; everyone must be included in the dance. No one should be left behind in the unpredictable and bold dance of Christ Incarnate. New creation worship is meant for the whole body and the whole Body to participate.

⁵³ Turner, *And We Shall Learn Through the Dance*, 162.

If there is an opportunity for a gifted dancer, or a gifted team of dancers to give a sermon through dance, this is not a performance where the action of the liturgy stops for a presentation, but rather the dance progresses and compliments the flow of the liturgy's message. Dancers must be able to understand that there is not a third wall in liturgical dance. God knows no walls in worship, and the message must be danced with a deep connection to the meaning and undertones of the scripture for the intimacy of movement to be effective. The dance also connects with the congregation's sensibilities to the scriptural meanings. This bearing of the soul style of dance acknowledges and invites the congregation into the presence of the dance space. However, if it is a dance on injustice, but the dancer has never experienced deep injustice or does not understand a method of acting to empathize, the liminal space will not be there; the piece will be decorative, and the story will fall flat. The dancer(s) must be willing to experience the message they are dancing and preaching with the congregation. When that happens, the emotional connection between the Holy Spirit and the gathering as one is beautiful.

While this application of liturgical dance sounds transformative and exciting, so many congregants are uncomfortable challenging themselves past the walking, kneeling, and sitting stages of liturgical dance. Liturgical dance has been a part of human religious rituals for thousands of years. It is radically biblical and powerfully enlivens and manifests an encounter with God through the Holy Spirit. However, in western Anglo-Saxon Protestant cultures, people have moved away from their bodies in worship. Many of them forgot, or have never been taught how it feels to reach out their palms in prayer or raise their hands as a loud gesture of hallelujah and amen. Begbie encouragingly says, "To insist that Christians are to be spiritual is indeed quite proper, but to be spiritual is not to renounce the body per se (though it is to renounce immoral uses of the body). It is rather to be Holy Spirit inspired, an inspiration that encompasses the

body—indeed, liberates the body—and as such grants a foretaste of what it will be like to have a spiritual body beyond death—a body animated by the Spirit.” (1 Cor 15:42–49; cf. Rom 8:11)⁵⁴

Liturgical dance encompasses and liberates the body, fully inspired by the Holy Spirit. This should make the reader want to get up and dance. Liturgical dance is an all-encompassing art form of the Holy Spirit that many members of the body of Christ intimately struggle with. In a conversation between Turner and Bishop Charles Ellis, Ellis says:

Culture many times gets in our way of being all of what we can be in terms of utilizing our gifts and talents to God. Case in point: Dance and song have *always* been a part of Israel’s life; Israel, the first church; it was not either or. Liturgical dance, if you read the bible, will always be a part of our gifts to God. We read about David dancing out of his clothes, and people say, “That was then and not now.”⁵⁵

The uninhibited trinitarian energy of David’s dancing—not the removal of clothing—is still appropriate within the liturgy, but over time, as Ronald Grimes suggested in Chapter 2, the evolution of the modes of ritual sensibilities changes and shifts amongst cultures. Where decorum and ceremony are of high formational value within the liturgy of some congregations, movement that is celebratory and magical might be harder to embrace within that assembly. McFee reminds worshipers that, “The Enlightenment era (1700–1800) brought rational thinking into view as a sacred edict, bringing with it a decline in a variety of the visual and dramatic arts. The physical and visual were dissociated from the inward and spiritual.”⁵⁶ While the intimacy of the mind and a modern consumer-styled model of worship come to the determinate of the body, a new surge towards relearning the body and moving with the Spirit continues to surface amongst worshipers today within the western Anglo-Saxon Protestant communities.

⁵⁴ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2007), 217.

⁵⁵ Turner, *And We Shall Learn Through the Dance*, 146.

⁵⁶ McFee, *Think Like a Filmmaker*, 184.

Ritual modes can shift and change. Rituals and the meaning of liturgical sacred things and symbols can evolve. The levels of utilizing body, mind, and spirit in worship can also progress. This does not mean that constricted primary streams of dance and movement are not of value, or formative within a community of faith, but the liturgy provides opportunities for the body to move in new ways, sharing in a bigger picture of the body of Christ—mind, body, and spirit. This should be true for all cultures. Herein lies the purpose for liturgical dance: the Holy Spirit moves the body to respond and to internalize with the mind the meanings of scripture and the liturgy, and through the kinesthetic repetition of those movements, new choreography of the living God takes form within the congregant.

Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.⁵⁷

The following liturgy highlights the use of *liturgical dance* for an enlivened worship experience that intersects with the Divine.

5. *A Communion Celebration of Praise (APPENDIX E)*



Figure 2:5 Mark Dukes, "Dancing Saints," 1997–Current, San Francisco, CA, [St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church](#)

⁵⁷ Sydney Carter, "Lord of the Dance" © 1963. Stainer & Bell, Ltd., London, England. (admin. by Hope Publishing Co., Carol Stream, IL 60188).

This liturgy is written for a single service but could serve within a worship series. Falling on the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B, using only the Samuel and Ephesians texts within the liturgy. The liturgy requires the congregation to have a strong liturgical dance team and praise team, although movement can be scaled down to meet the congregation's resources.

Congregational movement can always be modified for the mobility needs of congregants. It is best suited for a worship space that has screens and multimedia capabilities. The brackets, italics, and **red font** indicate **rubrics** for elements requiring action. The **bold text** denotes those parts spoken by the assembly. The use of an asterisk (*) asks the worshipers to stand.

You are now invited to work through the following liturgy in APPENDIX E. Before you do so, ponder the following prompts in the context of your own worship arts ministries and then imagine how this liturgy could be adapted for your church:

- What are the ways your congregation physically moves during worship?
- Do you have a liturgical dance team? If not, are there dancers at your church that might be willing to explore movement within your worship setting?
- Is your congregation willing to learn simple movements, or open to processions? If this is a new art language for your congregation, how might you introduce it?

CONCLUSION

“And Can It Be”

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.¹

Amazing love! Dan Forrest's choral arrangement of Charles Wesley's "And Can It Be" washes over listeners in a tidal wave of Christ's rich and deep unconditional and sacrificial love for humanity. It moves the singer to embody a spiritual conviction toward a life of love and grace for humanity and God. Amazing love! Liturgies, topics on reestablishing liturgical identity, worship renewal, art installations, new hymns and choral anthems, meaningful rituals, or simply changing a lightbulb in the choir loft are insignificant without love.

¹ Music by Dan Forrest, Text by Charles Wesley, © 2014 Beckenhurst Press Inc. (All Rights Reserved). See preview <https://www.jwpepper.com/And-Can-It-Be%3F/10458750.item> (accessed February 28, 2024).

God continues to create out of love for humanity and asks the church to give their hearts within that story. There is no amount of vibrant and sensory-rich liturgical art that can substitute for the love of God. The liturgical identity of the worshiping community begins with their desire to love God and to love their neighbor. Without it, their offerings are nothing more than a “resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” (1 Cor 13:13 NIV)

These chapters are filled with foundational and contextual concepts that support a fruitful evaluation of liturgical critique that points to love—responding in love and being loved. They offer inspiring ways to see how the liturgical arts should be used as vessels for communicating this love. Taylor says, “In the end, when the love that characterizes the life of the Trinity marks all our practices of art in worship, it is then that they will serve the purposes of God in the church’s liturgical life.”² The opening and closing question of evaluating and applying liturgical arts should always be, “Do the liturgical arts applied within worship love God and love people?”

The liturgical plans, musical offerings, sermons, floral arrangements, etc., etc., will not always come together, nor will they be mind-blowing, enlivened worship experiences that intersect with the Divine. However, if they are the best offering of love in response to God’s stories of love, then it will be heard. This is an expectation of corporate worship: through one means of grace or another, the body of Christ will encounter the love of the Triune God. **This is not a strategy for successful worship but rather a foundational reminder and invitation to contextually participate in God’s life-changing story with love for one another and God. A story where pain and brokenness meet hope and grace for the renewal of the world.** It is a blessing to be invited to create channels for this type of storytelling and relational connection. To help a

² W. David O. Taylor, *Glimpses of a New Creation: Worship and the Formative Power of the Arts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 248.

community see into God's love story, to see past themselves, and to follow where the Spirit is leading is a beautiful and blessed opportunity.

Through working with liturgical arts ministry teams and evaluating and applying innovative liturgical art together, as modelled in the liturgies that follow, I have found that the Holy Spirit draws us closer to the Divine. In my primary places of ministry—Dickinson First United Methodist Church and the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church—we will continue to explore our worship contextually. We will deepen our worship by sharing the stories and conversations that shape our realities, juxtaposing them with the Triune God's reality. Our conversations with each other and our deepening knowledge of the Creator are the rubrics by which we evaluate and decide what to apply within our liturgy. This work is invaluable to who we are. Relationship is everything.

In moving forward with this work, I want to discuss how other worship teams work with the liturgical arts. I hope to engage in more conversations on how the liturgical arts are meaningful vessels for encountering the Divine and provide spiritual enrichment for their churches. I want to know who their discussion partners are. Who makes up the work of the people? How do they engage their contexts for enacting art-full liturgy? Congregations have a powerful love story to write together. May the God of the past, God of the present, and the God of the future continue to inspire and set the church on fire to tell this timeless story of amazing love.

Storytelling #8

We make the pilgrimage from Houston, Texas, to Pittsburgh, PA, every August to visit family and friends. We enjoy the fun and family-friendly tradition of experiencing Kennywood Park, which the boys have been going to since they were born. A trip back home would not be complete without a ride on the Thunderbolt or some fries from the Potato Patch. This Pittsburgh ritual has been passed on to my boys and, hopefully, someday, theirs as well. I would like to think that the creative and imaginative joy that

Kennywood offers them inspires a desire to dream big, care about community, and always include a sense of whimsy within their work.

The more I think about Kennywoods, Christmas parades, and delightful teeth-brushing rituals, the more I hope WORSHIP does this and so much more for them. I hope that through the routine of participating and belonging to a local congregation that values and understands the importance of the liturgical arts, they, too, will get to know the redemptive and transformative power that they can have in worship. I hope they get to know the spirit-filled “communitas” that a liminal experience of worship can create—a place of love and belonging. As the Holy Spirit invites them to participate in “holy things for holy people,”³ I hope that they respond in the vibrant and active dialogue between worshipers and the Triune God. I hope they feel the comfort and support of a loving community of Christ in times of pain. I hope that they are renewed and sent forth as voices of new creation, offering an alternative reality as signposts⁴ of Christ’s transcendence.” Most importantly, I hope that through the Holy Spirit’s work through the offerings of liturgical arts, they will come to know that they are loved by a Triune God who never ceases to invite them to spread and tell the story of love, hope, and mercy for the kingdom of God here on earth.”

³ Gordan W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 11.

⁴ N.T. Wright, “The Surprising Faithfulness of God: A Sermon at DITA10,” *The Art of New Creation: Trajectories in Theology and the Arts*, eds. Jeremy Begbie, W. David O. Taylor, and Daniel Train (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 210.

APPENDIX A

A Service of Sacred Space



Figure A:1 Dickinson First United Methodist Church
Historical Marker, Dickinson, TX

PRELUDE

[Worshippers are asked to first gather outside around the church's cornerstone; if not available, then by the entrance doors of the facility before entering the main worship space. Instrumentalists begin ten minutes before the service in front of the cornerstone, or entrance doors, while greeters welcome congregants and hand them a rock with a painted cross asking them to form a group facing the musicians. Sharpies will be pre-placed on the seats/pews of the worship space.]

PRELUDE SONGS

[Instrumental music only; acoustic guitarists, string players, flute, or harp suggesting an earthy mood, improvisational playing around melody]

“Holy Ground”¹

“Cornerstone”²

HOLY GROUND

Hillsong United/Edward Mote/William B. Bradbury

¹ Text and Music by Geron Davis, 1983 © Meadowgreen Music Co., Songchannel Music Co., CCLI Song # 21198. See https://hymnary.org/text/we_are_standing_on_holy_ground (accessed February 15, 2024). For lead sheet and chord accompaniment, see <https://songselect.ccli.com/songs/21198/holy-ground/viewleadsheet> (accessed February 15, 2024).

² Text by Jonas Myrin, Reuben Morgan, Eric Liljero and Edward Mote, Music by Jonas Myrin, Reuben Morgan, Eric Liljero and William Batchelder Bradbury, 2011 © Hillsong MP Songs, Hillsong Music Publishing Australia, Hillsong Music Publishing UK, CCLI Song #6158927. See lead sheet and chord accompaniment <https://songselect.ccli.com/songs/6158927/cornerstone/viewleadsheet> (accessed February 15, 2024).

***OPENING WORDS** *[These are instructional words where the pastor invites people into a worship experience of remembrance and celebration for this sacred space, gives examples of encountering God within the space, and celebrates God's plan for continuing encounters with the community of faith.]*

***WELCOME**

We gather today in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ—the cornerstone of our faith; the solid rock on which we stand. All are welcome on this holy ground; all are welcome in THIS house of the Lord, and God's people respond with, **“We celebrate the cornerstone of our faith!”**

***CALL TO WORSHIP**

(adapted from Psalm 24:3)

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it.

We celebrate the cornerstone of our faith.

We shall ascend the hill of the Lord.

We shall stand in this holy place.

We celebrate the cornerstone of our faith.

Lift up your heads, O gates!

and be lifted up, O ancient doors,

that the King of glory may come in! *[Open the entrance doors of the church]*

We celebrate the cornerstone of our faith.

Who is this King of glory?

The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.

We celebrate the cornerstone of our faith.

Let us enter his gates with thanksgiving and praise.

***PROCESSIONAL HYMN** *[greeters motion for congregants to enter the worship space to arrive at their seats while singing]*

“My Hope Is Built” (repeating refrain only)³

THE SOLID ROCK

***OPENING SONG** *[worship leader connects people, instructing congregants to continue to sing for the joy found within this house of the Lord during this congregational praise song]*

“House of the Lord”⁴

Jonathan Smith/Phil Wickham

³ Text: Edward Mote (1834); Music: Williams B. Bradbury (1863) Public Domain.

⁴ Text and Music: Jonathan Smith and Phil Wickham 2020 © Be Essential Songs, Cashagamble Jet Music, Phil Wickham Music, Simply Global Songs (admin. Essential Music Publishing LLC), CCLI Song # 7168995. See lead sheet and chord accompaniment <https://songselect.ccli.com/songs/7168995/house-of-the-lord/viewleadsheet> (accessed February 15, 2024).

Video Testimony *[two-minute pre-recorded personal testimony of encountering God within the church space and how those encounters have changed their lives. The B-roll needs to include those places that are mentioned, and the filming needs to be in the worship space]*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Holy God, as we listen to the stories of faithful people in ancient days, open our hearts and minds to the understanding of the truths contained therein. Once again send your Spirit so that, hearing your words calling out to your beloved, we may be inspired to works of love and justice in your name. Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT READING

Genesis 28:10–22 (NRSVUE)

10 Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. 11 He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. 12 And he dreamed that there was a stairway set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And the Lord stood beside him and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring, 14 and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. 15 Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” 16 Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!” 17 And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

SONG OF RESPONSE

“Praise God for This Holy Ground” (vs. 1–3)⁵ John Bell/HEYMONSYSTRAAT
[Piano and Acoustic Guitar accompaniment/Cantor sings verses, ALL sings refrain]

*GOSPEL READING

Matthew 16:13–19 (NRSVUE)

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades

⁵ John L. Bell, 2002 © 2002 WGRG, Iona Community (admin. GIA Publications, Inc.).

will not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

SERMON *[preaching point: Christ is the cornerstone]*

ANTHEM

“Upon This Rock”⁶

Pepper Choplin

[Singers and musicians are on ground level with the congregation. A video of still shots of other congregations worshipping in their churches from around the world is shown during the singing of this choral piece]

*AFFIRMATION FAITH

We are not alone, we live in God’s world.

We believe in God:

**who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.**

We trust in God.

We are called to be the church:

**to celebrate God’s presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.**

In life, in death, in life beyond death,

God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God. Amen.⁷

“Gloria, Gloria”⁸

GLORIA CANON

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION AND INTERCESSION

Let us pray:

God of time and sacred space,

⁶ Pepper Choplin, “Upon This Rock” (Dayton: The Lorenz Company, a division of The Lorenz Company, 2009). See recording <https://www.facebook.com/100000148089777/videos/803959891370328/> accessed February 15, 2024).

⁷ “A Statement of Faith of the United Church of Canada,” *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 883.

⁸ Text: Luke 2:14, Music: Jacques Berthier and the Community of Taizé © 1979 Les Presses de Taizé (All Rights Reserved).

we know not what is holy.
We have put our idols of this earthly world
in front of all your glory.
Illuminate this holy ground and turn us from our ways.
Help us see you in all things
forgive us, Lord, we've strayed.
Holy Lord, in your mercy, you hear our prayers.

We lift our eyes up to the hills
but our steel castles block the view
Our polluted streams and naked forests.
moan and weep for care.
We war against our brothers; spit upon our sisters.
We do not hear the cries of the needy.
Yet, YOU, Jesus, with your mercy and grace
YOU open wide the gates of love
your lamp breaking our nights with your radiant light.
Holy Lord, in your mercy, you hear our prayers.

And your prodigal sons and daughters return home
embraced by the warmth of your house.
In praise and thanksgiving, we lift our hands
to an eternal heavenly ceiling
and with the saints and angels we sing
holy, holy, holy, you are Lord God Almighty!
Hallelujah, the rocks cry out, we are on holy ground.
Holy Lord, in your mercy, you hear our prayers!
We honor this space by praying as you taught us to pray.

LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass
against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

OFFERING PRAYER

Holy and most merciful God, your Holy Spirit lives and works within us inviting us once again to be in this safe haven. We've been reconciled through the blood of your son, Jesus Christ, to be a new people, sent forth to bear light in a hurting world. In this very room, we respond to your mighty acts of love and kindness. In this very room, we remember who we are and give you back what little we have. Please bless this offering as a token of our love for you. **Amen.**

OFFERING

[Ushers are instructed to pass baskets; after the offering has been collected the praise team is instructed to invite the congregation to stand and join in the singing]

Video Testimony *[Two-minute pre-recorded personal testimony of encountering God within the church space and how those encounters have changed their lives. The B-roll needs to include those places that are mentioned, and the filming needs to be in the worship space]*

*"This is Your Church"⁹

Charles Bautista, Bryson Breakey,
Langelihle Mbonambi, and Elle Cabiling-Tumaliua

*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Ever-loving God, we thank you for this haven of hope, that we can come within this space and be renewed; that we may go into the world with the strength of the Holy Spirit to reimagine a better world, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*SONG OF THANKSGIVING

"Firm Foundation"¹⁰

Cody Carnes, Austin Davis and Chandler Moore
[the band continues underscoring instrumentally during the dismissal and benediction]

*DISMISSAL AND BENEDICTION

You've been given a rock with the sign of the cross painted on it. Before you leave this sacred space, as a pledge of your commitment to Christ's love to serve and cherish God's kingdom here on earth, we ask that you write your names with the Sharpies provided to you and as you leave, drop them around the foundation of this building reminding yourselves that this is a place where Christ is the cornerstone of faith and our firm foundation; that this is a place of worship where you will encounter the living God.

⁹ Charles Bautista, Bryson Breakey, Elle Cabiling-Tumaliuan and Langelihle Mbonambi, © 2022 Every Nation Music, www.victoryworship.ph (All Rights Reserved).

¹⁰ Cody Carnes, Austin Davis, and Chandler Moore, © 2021 For Humans Publishing, Maverick City Publishing, A.L.K.D. Music, Capitol CMG Paragon, Writer's Roof Publishing (For use solely with the SongSelect® Terms of Use. All rights reserved. www.ccli.com), CCLI Song # 7188203.

Go forth in peace.
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.

Amen. *[the pastor(s) leave as the congregation follows while the congregation sings the choruses of “Firm Foundation” as they process outside and place their rocks.]*

APPENDIX B

A Service for the Thirsty

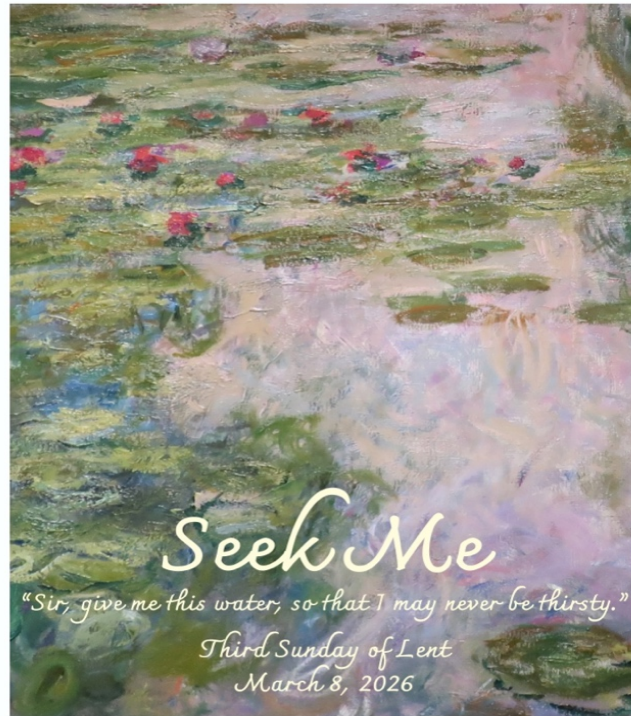


Figure B:1 “Waterlilies” (1917-1919) by -
Claude Monet as Order of Worship

PRELUDE

[Worshippers receive an order of worship with Claude Monet’s “Waterlilies” preparing them for the space they are about to enter. The worship space is to project Monet’s paintings featuring his pond at his home in Giverny. All screens, even those for lyrics and liturgy, should use this as a background. Use a font that is elegant, but easy to read.]

The altar and table settings around the space should reflect live greenery with subtle pops of pastel flowers. Purple paraments are appropriate with the scene as well and should complement the scene. The central focal point of the worship space should feature a large cross, pillar candles, a Bible, and a visible elegant glass pitcher positioned as pouring into the greenery, symbolizing the life-giving aspects of Christ’s living water. Clear, elegant, and disposable plastic glassware filled with water is to be placed within the design available for drinking later when instructed. The multiple tables around the space should be up-lit with shades of amber and pink. They are to mirror the central worship scene minus the symbols of the cross and pitcher.]

[Instrumental music only; harp and string ensemble, but piano reduction, or a piano solo will work as well.]

I. “Danse sacrée”
from *Danse sacrée et Danse profane*¹

Claude Debussy

WELCOME

We meet at the shoreline of grace and truth, where the soothing balm of God’s love meets those who seek renewal from the barren wilderness. We are in a place where streams of mercy run deep—filled with grace and forgiveness. We will continue our Lenten journey to the cross, but today, let us pause at the well of redemption, where Christ offers a cup of water—not just any water—life-giving water. Come, open your hearts, and be renewed.

MUSICAL INTROIT

[The chancel or main worship leader space is lit in a water lighting effect in cool blues; the soloist stands in front of the altar with arms stretched in a welcome gesture. The screens display a film without audio of Monet’s “Waterlilies” in movement.² As the song starts, long and wide pieces of pastel chiffon are slowly walked and slightly rippled around the worship space starting from the back entrance and going in two directions.]

“Follow Me”³

Mark Miller

[This is a choral introit with soloist. Choir is instructed to PAUSE for Call to Worship while the music continues underscoring; the fabric procession pauses, but is still rippling. Harp, strings, and piano are used throughout the service.]

SOLOIST:

Shall we gather?
At the water, at the water of God’s grace?
On the shoreline, at the water,
can you hear the voice of God?

CHOIR:

Calling follow me, follow me,
follow me to the heart of eternity
where the reign of God is unending.
Follow me.

*CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from John 4:5–42)

Do you seek respite for your hollow legs?
We come to the well to thirst no more.

¹ Claude Debussy, “I. Danse sacrée,” *Danse sacrée et Danse profane*, 1904, Public Domain. See for an example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMRzGjqXChs> (accessed February 17, 2024).

² For an example of the type of film see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XeApLWd7240&t=65s> (accessed February 29, 2024).

³ Music and Text by Mark Miller, © 2012 Mark A. Miller (All Rights Reserved). To view a sample performance, go to https://youtu.be/3FS79H4yXXo?si=91q62NG3j_wVg9pV&t=1411 (accessed February 29, 2024).

Do you seek comfort and peace from the weary road?

We come for living water.

Do you seek the treasure of life from your empty well?

Fill our cup, Lord.

Have you forgotten you are born new through water and the Spirit?

Fill our cup, Lord.

Do you seek an oasis in the wilderness?

We come to surrender and open our hearts.

Come, let us worship in spirit and truth,
from the eternal well of Christ's living water.

*MUSICAL INTROIT CONT.

Mark Miller

ALL:

**Calling follow me, follow me,
follow me to the heart of eternity
where the reign of God is unending.
Follow me.**

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Loving Lord, we do not wish to see ourselves as you see us. We ignore our sin and keep ourselves busy and preoccupied with the "stuff" we put in front of it. Our wilderness has no end and our bones have become dry and brittle. We have lost sight of the gift of life, the gift of living water that you so willingly poured over us at our baptisms. We are anxious and do not know the peace of your living water. We live with our sin rather than repenting of it. Forgive our fear of transformation. Soften our hearts to once again feel the presence of you. Guide us to new life through Christ, our redeemer, in whose name we pray. **Amen.**

Hear the good news! Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to your mighty grace and love. Through our baptisms we are incorporated by the Holy Spirit into your new creation and made to share in Christ's royal priesthood! With joy and thanksgiving we are members of the family of Christ! **Amen.**

*HYMN OF PRAISE

[media goes to a still background of the Monet. Fabric is ushered out of the back.]

"Healing River of the Spirit"⁴

BEACH SPRING

⁴ Text by Ruth Duck © 1996 The Pilgrim Press (All Rights Reserved), Music attr. to B. F. White 1844, Public Domain. See for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znW3veGNUR4> (accessed February 18, 2024).

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Holy Spirit, pour out upon us wisdom and understanding that, being taught by you in Holy Scripture, our hearts and minds may be opened to receive all that leads to life and holiness through Jesus Christ, our Lord, **Amen**.

GOSPEL READING

John 4:5–42 (NRSVUE)

[Reader 1 is the narrator. Reader 2 (Jesus) speaks to the congregation (Samaritan Woman). When Reader 2 (Jesus) speaks, move the text on the screen as living water.]

Reader 1: Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her,

Reader 2: "Give me a drink."

Reader 1: His disciples had gone to the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him,

Congregation: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

Reader 1: Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans. Jesus answered her,

Reader 2: "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

Congregation: "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

Reader 2: "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

Congregation: "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Reader 2: "Go, call your husband, and come back."

Congregation: "I have no husband."

Reader 2: “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!”

Congregation: “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”

Reader 2: “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father SEEKS such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Congregation: “I know that Messiah is coming; When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”

Reader 2: “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Reader 1: Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,

Congregation: “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

Reader 1: They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” Jesus said to them,

Reader 2: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

Reader 1: Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

SERMON *[preaching point: Christ seeks worshipers with thirsty hearts open to receive living water.]*

ANTHEM

“O Love”⁵

Elaine Hagenberg/George Matheson

[VIDEO of photography of people around the world giving water to the thirsty should play during this choral anthem. Pan into the eyes of the receiver; then, go to the next photo. The first and last image should be Léon Augustin Lhermitte's "The Samaritan at the Well" (1897), video should be roughly 4:30 minutes in length.]

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thy ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Joy that seeks me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.



Figure B:2 Léon Augustin Lhermitte, "The Samaritan at the Well" (1897)

*AFFIRMATION FAITH

Psalm 23 (NIV)

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
**He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.**
**He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.**
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me,
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;

⁵ Music by Elaine Hagenberg, Text by George Matheson, © 2016 Beckenhurst Press Inc. (All Right Rerved). See preview and video <https://www.elainehagenberg.com/o-love-satb> (accessed February 16, 2024).

my cup overflows.
**Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.**

***MUSICAL RESPONSE**

Mark Miller

**ALL:
Calling follow me, follow me,
follow me to the heart of eternity
where the reign of God is unending.
Follow me.**

PASTORAL PRAYER

You have become in us a well of water springing up to eternal life. Use us as a channel through whom your living water may be poured out to all with whom we come in contact. Open our hearts to the world around us so that we can be a well that fills the cups of those who are thirsty. Open our eyes to those who are physically dry, who have no clean water to drink, or to bathe. Through our baptismal covenant, help us to be the hands and feet of Christ providing water of physical life. Those whose wells have been dried by oppression, abuse, or injustice, help us to be an oasis in their wilderness through your channels of redemption and liberation. For those who weep themselves waterless in grief and anguish, let us be a peaceful stream of love and comfort. May your love and refreshment stream out of us to all those with whom we know need You—the water of life. In Jesus name, we pray together the prayer your son taught us to pray.

LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass
against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

OFFERING PRAYER

“Living Water. . . who. . . refreshes our weariness, bathes and washes and cleanses our wounds before us always a fountain of life, and for all the world, a river of hope, springing up in the midst of the deserts of despair. Honor and blessing, glory and praise to you forever and ever. *(Medical Mission Sisters)*”⁶

May these gifts be a sign of our love and a response to the waters of our baptism—glorifying you. Amen.

OFFERING

“My Soul Is Thirsting”⁷

Francesca LaRosa

Offering Response

[Ushers are instructed to pass baskets. During this time, while the soloist sings, ten congregation members, one at a time, walk to the center of the worship space with a large gold-framed piece of art only showing the back. The back is to read: “I was thirsty and. . . they fill in the blank. They turn their canvas around so that the beautiful frame and front are seen. It reads: You gave me living water and. . . they are each asked to fill in the blank with the positive testimony. At the end they are all lined up with their masterpieces. They remain standing in the front through the Doxology.]

*DOXOLOGY⁸

OLD 100th

INVITATION TO CONNECTIONAL RESPONSE

Before we end our time together, there are glasses of water placed around the worship space. We invite you to take a glass, drink, and find an area to contemplate a time when you were thirsty, and God renewed you with living water. Dialogue with God about the areas in your life that are dry. How are you like the woman at the well? Let us take a moment and prepare ourselves to be filled once more to serve. *[instrumental music begins to underscore this movement.]*

*HYMN OF DISCIPLESHIP

“Make Me a Channel of Your Peace”⁹

CHANNEL OF PEACE

⁶ Lauren F. Winner, “Second Monday of Lent,” *God for Us: Rediscovering the Meaning of Lent and Easter*, eds. Greg Pennoyer and Gregory Wolfe (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2014), 54.

⁷ Francesca LaRosa, © 2022 Francesca LaRosa (All Rights Reserved), See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBns3cy81gU> (accessed February 18, 2024).

⁸ Text: Thomas Ken, 1674, Music: attr. to Louis Bourgeois, 1551, Public Domain.

⁹ Text: att. to St. Francis of Assisi, Music: Sebastian Temple, © 1967 OCP Publications.

*DISMISSAL AND BENEDICTION

We have been renewed and prepared to leave the safe haven of the well; know that you carry with you the water of refreshment, the water of healing, the water of cleansing, and the water of life. We invite you to continue to journey into those wells of living water by experiencing our art gallery, *Seek Me*, which is open to you right now.

May the blessing of God, fountain of living water, flow within us as a river of life. May we drink deep of her wisdom. May we never thirst again. May we go through life refreshing many, as a sign of healing for all; through the one who is life eternal. Amen.¹⁰ *[include a well-marked pathway to your art gallery from the worship space so people know to go.]*

*POSTLUDE

II. “Danse sacrée”¹¹
from *Danse sacrée et Danse profane*

Claude Debussy

¹⁰ “564 Miriam Therese Winter, U.S.A., 20th Century,” *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 579, Kindle Edition.

¹¹ Claude Debussy, “II. Danse profane,” from *Danse sacrée et Danse profane* (1904), Public Domain. For an example, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMRzGjqXChs> (accessed February 17, 2024).



Figure B:3 Art
Gallery- "Seek Me,"
Pasadena First United
Methodist Church,
Pasadena, TX; April
10-14, 2019



APPENDIX C

A Service Celebrating Jesus Christ as the True Light of the World

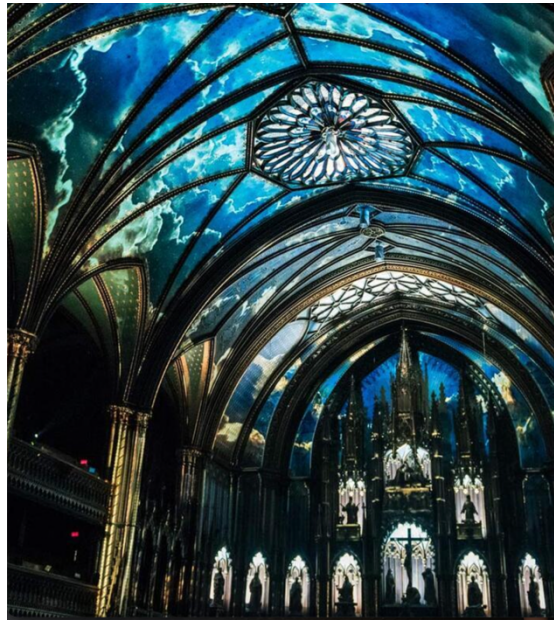


Figure C:1 The Experience, AURA at
Notre Dame in Montréal, Canada,
www.aurabasiliquemontreal.com/en

PRELUDE

“The Jupiter Hymn”¹
from The Planets, Opus 31

The Barclay Brass/Gustav Holst

[This is arranged for brass sextet, but other brass ensemble arrangements and orchestral arrangements are available as well. If there is a balcony behind the congregation, arrange for brass to play from the balcony. If not, then they can surround the worship space if they do not block congregants from getting to their spaces. The idea is to accomplish an embracement of ethereal sound.]

WELCOME

God of Wonderment,
You weave us all into connection with one another.
We must not see any person as an abstraction but as real and created with purpose.
We must see in every person a universe with their own secrets,
With their own treasures, with their own sources of anguish,
And with some measure of the triumphant light of new creation,

¹ Music by Gustav Holst (1918), Public Domain, arr. by David J. Miller © Sterling Music Editions (All Rights Reserved). See for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxKxrOHdYmg> (accessed February 18, 2024).

through the Great Creator and the Almighty Wild Wind of Heaven, Amen.²

MUSICAL INTROIT

“Caritas Abundat (The Great and Fiery Force)”³

Michael John Trotta/
Hildegard of Bingen

I am the great and fiery force,
that breathes life into all things;
I am what awakens and supports life
and enkindles all living things.

I am the great and fiery force,
that breathes life into all things;
everything in the cosmos
is encircled in my wisdom

I am the beauty in the fields
The force, that moves like a graceful wind
I shine in the waters, and burn in the sun,
glimmering in the stars.

***CALL TO WORSHIP** [*Keep instrumental parts and choral clapping underscoring the call to worship.*]

We invite all creation to worship with us.
**We invite glittering galaxies high in the sky
to radiate the splendor of God’s presence.**

We call distant domains of space to celebrate with us.
**We invite nebula, nova, and red giant star
to thank God for their formation in the universe.**

We summon that domain of stardust called Earth,
**To pulse with the rhythm of God’s presence
and celebrate God’s glory in this planet garden.**

We invite millions of living things to dance with life,
**The turtle, the toad, and the elephant,
the earthworm, the ant and the dragonfly.**

² Adapted from Elie Wiesel, “The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code,” in *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, by Rebecca Skloot (New York: Crown, 2010), Epigraph.

³ Text by Hildegard de Bingen (12th century), tran. Michael John Trotta (2019), Music by Michael John Trotta © 2019 Carl Fischer LLC (All Rights Reserved). See example of <https://www.jwpepper.com/Caritas-Abundat/10944946.item> (accessed February 18, 2024).

We invite every creature in the web of creation
**To consciously connect with others
in this cosmic community called the universe.**

Dance in the light, the true light!
Light of our life and cosmic creative energy.

*PROCESSIONAL HYMN OF PRAISE

“O God Beyond All Praising”⁴ **THAXTED**/Dan Forrest/Michael Perry

PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND PARDON

O God, *[begin to underscore with a recording of peaceful nature sounds]*
the earth is full of your creatures and your light;
in wisdom you have made us all to live in your light,
and you have delivered us into one another’s care,
asking that we love one another as you first loved us.

But we fostered discord rather than unity, *[begin white noise sound effect]*
contempt rather than respect, ignorance rather than love.

Communities, peoples, creatures, lands, seas—
they have been set apart, or torn apart, or driven apart,
by conflicting claims and thoughtless ambitions.
You know our works and our thoughts, Lord.

So do this day as you have promised:

Gather together all our tribes and tongues, and restore us to true light.

Reconcile us in your spirit of peace, and from new moon to new moon,
and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall worship your name. **Amen.**⁵

[begin vamping beginning of True Light]

Hear the good news of the gospel based on Romans 8:1-2 (NRSV)

about our life in Christ, the true light:

There is therefore no condemnation
for those who are in Christ Jesus.

For the law of the Spirit of life
has set you free from the law of sin and death.

ANTHEM

“True Light”⁶ Keith Hampton

⁴ Text: Michael Perry © 1982 The Jubilate Group (All Rights Reserved), Music: Gustav Holst (1918), Public Domain, and Dan Forrest © 2010 Hinshaw Music, Inc. (All Rights Reserved). See full preview <https://www.jwpepper.com/O-God-Beyond-All-Praising/10087562.item> (accessed February 18, 2024).

⁵ “A.2.6 Confessions and Assurance,” *The Worship Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Faith Alive Christian Resources, and Baker Books, 2013), 387–388.

⁶ Text and Music: Keith Hampton © 2002 Dr. K. T. Productions (All Rights Reserved). See full preview <https://www.jwpepper.com/True-Light/3700850.item> (accessed February 18, 2024).

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

[Continue to underscore with True Light]

Lord God,
at the beginning of time your Spirit moved over the waters.
Send your Spirit to us now to open our hearts and minds
to receive the re-creating power of your Word.
Through Christ, **Amen.**⁷

OLD TESTAMENT READING

Genesis 1:1–4, 26–31 (NRSVUE)

[Continue to underscore with True Light, singing “He lives in us, as true light!”]

1 When God began to create the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.

Refrain: He lives in us as True Light!

26 God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

Refrain: He lives in us as True Light!

27 So God created humans in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

Refrain: He lives in us as True Light!

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” 29 God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Refrain: He lives in us as True Light!

⁷ “3.1.12 Prayers for Illumination,” *The Worship Sourcebook*, 141.

SONG OF RESPONSE

“Let There Be Light”⁸

Paul Melley/John Marriott

[violin and piano accompaniment, handbells are added around the worship space playing the melody of the song in all octaves.]

*GOSPEL READING

John 1:5–42 (NRSVUE)

[handbells continue on a major ninth chord using singing bell technique; stop after the reading]

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

SERMON *[preaching point: Jesus Christ is the true light of the world.]*

*AFFIRMATION FAITH

[handbells resume on a major ninth chord using singing bell technique during the Affirmation of Faith; sing chords of “O God Beyond All Praising” underscoring when Prayers of the People begin.]

**God saves the world through Jesus.
Those who call on that name will have life.
Christ’s hand reaches out beyond those who say “Lord”
even to the farthest stars and planets of all creation.
The boundaries of God’s love are not known;
the Spirit works at the ends of the world
before the church had spoken a word.
God will renew the world through Jesus,
who will put all unrighteousness out,
purify the works of human hands,
and perfect their fellowship in divine love.
Christ will wipe away every tear;
death shall be no more.
There will be a new heaven and a new earth,**

⁸ Text: John Marriot (1813), adapt. Paul Melley (2008), Music: Paul Melley © 2008 Gia Publishing Inc. (All Rights Reserved). For a preview <https://giamusic.com/resource/let-there-be-light-print-g7521> (accessed February 19, 2024).

and all creation and the saints will be filled with God's glory.

***PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

[Begin underscoring "O God Beyond All Praising"]

Master Quilter, you have sewn us into your marvelous creation, and we marvel at your beauty. We confess that we have ripped and torn your fabrics; that we have not stayed within the patchwork of your mighty works. We turn to your Son, to once again be wrapped in the warmth of your grace.

God Beyond All Praising, hear our prayer.

For your world, may we not be moved by private ambition but rather a vocation of mercy and love. Open our ears so that we hear the stories of the exploited, dehumanized, and racialized and become advocates for those lied to and cheated. We will not accept benevolent deception for the sake of anything; we demand the whole story. Help us to read the fine prints of life and be true light.

God Beyond All Praising, hear our prayer.

For our communities, may we not ignore the cries of the needy. May we not be afraid of naming systemic racism and intergenerational poverty as pandemics. May we fully embrace that our cells all look the same and there is no hierarchy in the Kingdom of God right here, right now.

God Beyond All Praising, hear our prayer.

For the church, may we peel the layers of tired apathy off, emerging ready to go to work; ready to be the hands and feet of Jesus; to continue the drama of the resurrection story.

God Beyond All Praising, hear our prayer.

Bless all whose lives are closely linked with ours, and grant that we may serve as Christ to them and with them as true light. Let us love one another as Christ loves us.

God Beyond All Praising, hear our prayer.

OFFERING PRAYER

[stop underscoring "God Beyond All Praising" and begin the introduction of "The Majesty and Glory of Your Name." Handbells finish playing. Full Orchestration suggested.]

Almighty God, who gifted us with you son, the True Light, we thank you for seeing that we were created and called it very good. May these gifts be our response to your abundant love for creation through Christ, our Lord, and the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

OFFERING

“The Majesty and Glory of Your Name”⁹

Tom Fettke/Linda Lee Johnson

When I gaze into the night sky,
And see the work of Your fingers.
The moon and stars suspended in space.
But what is man that You are mindful of him?
You have given man a crown of glory and honor.
And have made him a little lower than the angels.
You have put him in charge of all creation;
The beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea.
But what is man, oh, what is man
That You are mindful of him?

O Lord, our God the majesty and glory of Your name
Transcends the earth and fills the heavens.
O Lord, our God little children praise Him perfectly.
And so would we, and so would we.
Alleluia, Alleluia. The majesty and glory of Your name!
Alleluia, Alleluia.

*DOXOLOGY¹⁰

LASST UNS ERFREUEN

*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Ephesians 3:20–21 (NRSV)

Now to him who by the power at work within us
is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations,
forever and ever. Amen

*HYMN OF DISCIPLESHIP

“I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light”¹¹

HOUSTON

*BENEDICTION

Bearers of True Light, may you leave today knowing that through the Holy Spirit
Christ’s light goes with you, through you, and around you so that you may be a
beacon of hope throughout the world.

*RECESSIONAL

⁹ Words by Linda Lee Johnson based on Psalm 8, Music by Thomas Fettke © 1979 Norman Clayton Publishing and Word Music (All Rights Reserved). See example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPyJiP-wZik> (accessed February 18, 2024).

¹⁰ Text: Thomas Ken, 1674, adapt. by Gilbert H. Vieira (1978), Music: *Geistliche Kirchengesänge* (1623), harm. by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1906), Public Domain.

¹¹ Words and Music: Kathleen Thomerson © 1970, 1975 Celebration.

“Thine Be the Glory”¹²

JUDAS MACCABEUS

[This should be a bold instrumental ending with congregational singing that plays out beyond the singing]

¹² Text by Edmond Budry (1904), trans. Richard Birch Hoyle, Music by G. F. Handel (1747), Public Domain. For example, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWQDNIX3w9I> (accessed February 18, 2024).

APPENDIX D

A Service Celebrating One Body, Many Stories



Figure D:1 "Ezra the Priest Proclaiming Freedom," by Mindy Oaten, 2020, Calgary, AB, www.mindyoaten.com, All Right Reserved

PRELUDE

[Play at about 2 minutes before worship begins; this serves as a prelude and a gathering piece. We want the congregation to hear the last minute especially.]

Video: One Body, Many Stories¹

Diana Butler Bass

WELCOME

[Keep a rolling video of a firepit, or a campfire during the welcome, musical introit, and Call to Worship]

Tell me the stories of Jesus I love to hear;
Things I would ask him to tell me if He were here:
Scenes by the wayside, tales of the sea,
Stories of Jesus, tell them to me.

First let me hear how the children stood round his knee,
And I shall fancy his blessing resting on me;
Words full of kindness, deeds full of grace,
All in the love-light of Jesus' face.²

¹ Diana Butler Bass, "One Body, Many Stories," Trinity Church Boston, Boston, Massachusetts (streamed on March 17, 2010) Youtube Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JtSos0cho0&t=27s> (accessed: February 18, 2024).

For a cleaner viewing see <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JeI4DYrSFvd-6Frq64U335SGwGj69ocJ/view?usp=sharing> purchased from www.theworkofthepeople.com.

² Text by William H. Parker (1885), Public Domain.

MUSICAL INTROIT

[keep an open F5 underscoring with keyboard strings, or PAD. As the drama is acted out, there will be moments when the congregation sings the refrain of "Wonderful Words of Life."]

Woman: I had nowhere else to go, but they took me in, no questions asked. They saved my life that night. I had nowhere else to go.

Boy: I used to sit by myself, I didn't know anyone, and everyone had their little groups. I was in a new place, a new school. It was hard. They invited me to sit with them and we got to talking. It was going to be ok.

Sung Response:

Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.

Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.

Man: NOTHING was good enough for her. NOTHING! I couldn't do anything right and I had my foot out of the door. Then, we sat down in that pew right there and listened, listened, and then started to listen to each other. Suddenly everything was enough.

Older Woman: I had my routine. I would get up early to read the paper, I liked getting the real newspaper still. I would have my coffee, go for a stroll with Charlie, the golden retriever, do my crosswords, and get ready for tea with Susan. She's the young mom from down the street, but once a day, we would sit a spell and just have tea.

Sung Response:

Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.

Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.

Woman: I get scared at night especially. We can hear the planes flying overhead, the explosions, the gunshots. We're taught to turn it off, but be on high alert. The only thing I cling to is the old book of Psalms my grandfather gave me when he fought in the war. They have his writing in it.

Girls: *Squeals* I LOVE HER!!

Girl 1: She is the best teacher ever!!

Girl 2: I know!! She gave me a hug the other day 'cause she knew I was sad about my kitten. She always asks how I am doing. She makes me feel happy.

Girl 1: Yeah, and she knows how to tell a good story!!

Sung Response:

**Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.
Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.**

***CALL TO WORSHIP**

Why are you here? Maybe you are here because you recognize in your own story a greater story,

One spoken since the beginning of time by prophets, preachers and peacemakers, a story where God calls the world into liberation and wholeness.

Maybe you are here because you have glimpsed a moment of love that is beyond human reach,

All the grace that lies just beyond our fingertips, that transforms the ugly into the breathtaking, the impossible into the real.

Maybe you are here, not defined by faith but with a deep conviction

That the ending to everyone's story is yet to be written and can be shaped into life by justice and compassion.

Maybe you are here because there is someone who needs to hear your story and feel welcome into the story of God.

Let us join together in listening and sharing in the greatest story, the story of God's grace.³

***HYMN OF PRAISE**

"Blest Be the Tie That Binds"⁴

DENNIS

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION**

[A group of congregants are asked to prepare the prayer of confession. They stand in a line in front of the congregation holding hands. At the beginning of absolution, they release their hands and gesture outward toward the congregation and ALL respond]

Merciful God, for the stories that we regret, forgive us.

For the lies and stories we act out in our heads, forgive us.

For the stories we ignored and turned our backs from you; forgive us.

For hurtful words said and for truth-filled words unsaid, forgive us.

For the distorted stories of life that we need to turn from, forgive us.

God, forgive us and make us one in unity through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**We are one body through Christ and through his death and resurrection,
we are forgiven of our sins and join the stories of the faithful. Alleluia! Amen.**

³ The United Methodists of New Jersey, *Telling Your Story: Week 4 News Worth Sharing Life Worth Sharing* (2019), <https://www.gnjumc.org/content/uploads/2019/11/Telling-Your-Story-Worship-Resources-11.18.pdf> (accessed February 19, 2024).

⁴ Text by John Fawcett (1782), Music by Lowell Mason (1845), Public Domain, See <https://hymnary.org/text/blest-be-the-tie-that-binds#tune> (accessed February 18, 2024).

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

O God,
you spoke your word
and revealed your good news in Jesus, the Christ.
Fill all creation with that word again,
so that by proclaiming your joyful promises to all nations
and singing of your glorious hope to all peoples,
we may become one living body,
your incarnate presence on the earth. **Amen.**⁵

OLD TESTAMENT READING

Nehemiah 8:1–3, 5–6, 8–10

[Actors are dressed in biblical costumes and begin gathering in front of the congregation. The congregation is invited to act with them. Characters needed: Narrator, Ezra, scribes, and Israelites]

Narrator: All the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. *[people gather in front of the congregation and take a seat on the ground]*. They told Ezra *[Ezra makes a grand entrance with the scribes carrying a really heavy book]* the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel. 2 Accordingly, Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. *[the actors gasp with excitement, motioning for congregation to gasp]* This was on the first day of the seventh month. 3 He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand, and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. *[keep rolling a scroll of long paper and motion for the people to be deep in thought.]*

5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people, and when he opened it, all the people stood up *[actors and congregation stand up]*. 6 Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, “**Amen, Amen,**” lifting up their hands. *[actors and congregation lift their hands]* Then they bowed their heads *[bow heads]* and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground *[place head in hands]*. 8 So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

[Nehemiah takes the center focal point where actors and congregation watch]

9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people,

⁵ Revised Common Lectionary Prayers: Proposed by the Consultation on Common Texts; Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2002), Kindle Location 446, Kindle Edition.

[Actors and congregations are weeping for having heard these words of life for the first time]

Nehemiah: “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.”

Narrator: For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. 10 Then he said to them,

Nehemiah: “Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord, and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

[Actors rush out rejoicing]

HYMN OF RESPONSE

“Blessed Assurance”⁶

Fanny Crosby/**ASSURANCE**

GOSPEL READING

Matthew 13:1–3, 10–17, 34–35 (MSG)

1–3 At about that same time Jesus left the house and sat on the beach. In no time at all a crowd gathered along the shoreline, forcing him to get into a boat. Using the boat as a pulpit, he addressed his congregation, telling stories.

10 The disciples came up and asked, “Why do you tell stories?”

11–15 He replied, “You’ve been given insight into God’s kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn’t been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. That’s why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward a welcome awakening. In their present state they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till they’re blue in the face and not get it. I don’t want Isaiah’s forecast repeated all over again:

Your ears are open but you don’t hear a thing.

Your eyes are awake but you don’t see a thing.

The people are stupid!

They stick their fingers in their ears

so they won’t have to listen;

They screw their eyes shut

so they won’t have to look,

so they won’t have to deal with me face-to-face

and let me heal them.

16–17 “But you have God-blessed eyes—eyes that see! And God-blessed ears—ears that hear! A lot of people, prophets and humble believers among them, would have given

⁶ Text by Fanny Crosby (1873), Music by Phoebe Palmer Knapp (1873), Public Domain.

anything to see what you are seeing, to hear what you are hearing, but never had the chance.

34–35 All Jesus did that day was tell stories—a long storytelling afternoon. His storytelling fulfilled the prophecy:

I will open my mouth and tell stories;
I will bring out into the open
things hidden since the world's first day.

SERMONS *[4 Storytelling Sermons about kingdom work, stories of Christ working revealed to the world in our stories—in our lives. Preachers/Laypersons are asked to tell a story or stories of an experience of sharing wonderful words of life with someone or a group of people that was spiritually transformative. What is it like to experience God's love and forgiveness? Wonderful words of life can mean actions just as much as words. We are one body, many stories!]*

ANTHEM

[This is a light-hearted theatrical skit for 2 actors reminding the audience of the importance of making connections and being unified in love, spirit, and purpose. This is a good opportunity to find a skit that works best within your ministry contexts.]

“Connections”⁷

Tracey Wells

***AFFIRMATION FAITH**

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of haven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;*
the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic** church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,**

⁷ Tracey Wells, “Connections,” *A Skit from Skitguys.com*, © 2022 Skit Guys, Inc. (All Rights Reserved), only original purchaser is granted photocopy, See for a full preview <https://d3ik9vqgpprl4l.cloudfront.net/Connections-PV.pdf> (accessed February 19, 2024).

**the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*GLORIA PATRI⁸

GREATOREX

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

[Have 5 congregants pray 5 different prayers covering the topics of suffering and oppressed, hungry and forgotten, the local church, the community and city, and the world. Pastoral leadership reads the first and last sections.]

Let us pray: **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.**
As we remember the story of God's gracious presence
with us through life and death,
we lift our prayers on behalf of all creation.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

[INSERT PRAYERS HERE]

God of salvation your wisdom and compassion
guide us in the midst of pain and grief,
in the midst of temptation and fear.
Through your resurrection power
heal our sorrow and uplift our delight,
that we may know the fulfillment of your promise
in our restoration to wholeness.⁹
Let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray.

LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass
against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

OFFERING PRAYER

⁸ Text: Lesser Doxology, 3rd–4th cent., Music: Henry w. Greatorex (1851), Public Domain.

⁹ Revised Common Lectionary, Kindle Location 730–731, Kindle Edition.

Lord, we've sat together around the fire of your Spirit telling stories—your stories—stories of hope and lives filled with grace and tenderness even in the darkest of days. Story after story, your unfailing love for us and your people breaks the ice of our hearts and warms the action of our souls. We respond with gratitude on our lips and praise in our giving, reminding us that our generosity strengthens not only us but the whole body reaching the furthest places of the globe. May this thanksgiving be a sign of your continuous story of grace.

OFFERING

[This is a spoken word poetry piece. The one chosen is for an example. If your church has a poet that would like to write their own, this is highly encouraged. However, this "We Are" is thematic and would work. This needs to be underscored with PAD, or Strings.]

"We Are"¹⁰

David Bowden

*DOXOLOGY¹¹

OLD 100th

[Keep the PAD, or strings with one note the whole time; a "oneness" vibe]

*INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP

We need stories to help us see what living as a disciple is like. We hear and experience the stories of our faith as we tell our stories, and the stories of others as examples of a faithful life—renewing our spirits so that through the Holy Spirit we may be fruitful in sharing a life of Christ with others. Continue to be one body, but many stories.

*HYMN OF DISCIPLESHIP

"Rejoice in God's Saints"¹²

Fred Pratt Green/LYONS

*BENEDICTION

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in
peace according to thy word.
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
to be a light to lighten the Gentiles
and to be the glory of thy people Israel.¹³

¹⁰ Text by David Bowden © 2017 The Poetic, Inc. (All rights reserved), Used by Permission. See for words https://drive.google.com/file/d/17x-jal1pwzF_2ljXuAcS1AAvs3eW_Shc/view?usp=sharing (accessed February 20, 2024), or for an example https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_7g5x0OOGG0 (accessed February 20, 2024).

¹¹ Text: Thomas Ken, 1674, Music: attr. to Louis Bourgeois, 1551, Public Domain.

¹² Text by Fred Pratt Green 1977 © 1978, 1980 Hope Publishing Co. (All Rights Reserved), See https://hymnary.org/text/rejoice_in_gods_saints_today_and_all_day (accessed February 18, 2024), Music attributed to Joseph Martin Kraus, or Michael Haydn, or Joseph Haydn, Public Domain.

¹³ Malcolm Guite, *The Word within the Words: My Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022), Kindle Location 384–392, Kindle Edition.

*RECESSIONAL HYMN

[Everyone is sent forth leaving the worship space singing together]

“Wonderful Words of Life”¹⁴

WORDS OF LIFE

¹⁴ Words and Music P. P. Bliss (1874), Public Domain.

APPENDIX E

A Communion Celebration of Praise



Figure E:1 Mark Dukes, "Dancing Saints," 1997-Current, [St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church](https://www.saintgregorys.org/art.html) in San Francisco, CA

*FESTAL PROCESSIONAL

[The service begins with a festal procession from the common area into the worship space accompanied by percussion and other instruments as available. A full praise team will be needed as well. As people enter the worship space, they are invited to touch the water of the baptismal font and remain standing and swaying during welcome and call to worship. Dancers in liturgical dance costumes of diverse style will lead and then surround the congregation with banners and ribbons. On the screens will be similar artwork of Mark Dukes, "Dancing Saints." ¹]

* "Come, All You People"²

Alexander Gondo/UYAI MOSE

[Keep humming and swaying to "Come, All You People" through the welcome; we will respond by singing the words during the call to worship. Dancers continue to be leaders in the movement]

*CALL TO WORSHIP

based on 2 Samuel 6:1–5, 12b–19

God is here. The Creator of the Universe is with us.

So, we will dance.

God is here. God is on the move!

So, we will dance, so that our children can see what we do when God is on the move.

Sung Refrain:

¹ For a tour and more information about Mark Dukes, "Dancing Saints," see <https://vimeo.com/298269290> or <https://www.saintgregorys.org/art.html> (accessed March 1, 2024).

² Text by Alexander Gonder and Music by Alexander Gondo; arr. by John Bell © 1994 WGRG The Iona Community (admin. by GIA Publications, Inc.) (All Right Reserved).

**Come, all you people, come and praise your Maker.
Come, all you people, come and praise your Maker.
Come, all you people, come and praise your Maker.
Come now and worship the Lord.**

Our backs are against the wall, but God is on our side.
So, we will dance with all our might.
After all that we've been through, we still have joy.
So, we will dance with great abandon.

Sung Refrain:

**Come, all you people, come and praise your Maker.
Come, all you people, come and praise your Maker.
Come, all you people, come and praise your Maker.
Come now and worship the Lord.**

We are a dancing people.
Dancing in all seasons of life is in our very DNA.
So, let's dance our truth.
We will dance in our homes.
We will dance in our communities.
We will dance in our churches.
We will dance together.
We will dance!³

Sung Refrain:

**Come, all you people, come and praise your Maker.
Come, all you people, come and praise your Maker.
Come, all you people, come and praise your Maker.
Come now and worship the Lord.**

***HYMN OF PRAISE**

[Worship leader instructs congregation to lift their arms up and then out during the chorus of the song.]

* "Sing a New Song"⁴

BJ Putnam, Doug Engquist,
Melody Putnam, Riley Erin

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

³ Ashley Johnson, "We Will Dance," *Setting a Hope: Geared Up For Life, Seventh Sunday after Pentecost Year B*, (Discipleship Ministries: The United Methodist Church, July 11, 2021). See <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/geared-up-for-life/seventh-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/seventh-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-additional-liturgical-resources> (accessed February 20, 2024).

⁴ Text and music by BJ Putnam, Doug Engquist, Melody Putnam, Riley Erin © 2013 DLD Music, Entertainment One Music, Centricity Songs, REM Publishing, Amplified Admin, Riley Erin Music. CCLI Song No. 6231497. CCLI No. 1169030 (All Right Reserved). See example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFqLddb19Y0> (accessed February 20, 2024).

God of all creation,
God of mercy, love and power,
we have come to sing a new song today.
We want to sing it out louder than before!
Open our minds to receive your words
so that the whole earth hears the good news when we leave.
Open our hearts to dance with the Holy Spirit!
Come, Holy Spirit,
and fill us for your glory;
for you, O God, are One and holy!
Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT READING

2 Samuel 6:14–21 (NRSVUE)

14 David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. 15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet.

16 As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart.

17 They brought in the ark of the Lord and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the Lord. 18 When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts 19 and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

20 David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, “How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants’ maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!” 21 David said to Michal, “It was before the Lord, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord—I will dance before the Lord.

SONG OF RESPONSE

[a soloist dancer, representing David dancing to honor God accompanies the singing of Psalm 98]

“Sing a New Song”⁵

Dan Schutte

⁵ Text based on Psalm 98:1, 4–6, Music by Dan Schutte © 1972, 1979, 2008 OCP (All Rights Reserved). See for preview <https://dh8zy5a1i9xe5.cloudfront.net/shared/pdf/preview/30102039.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2024).

*NEW TESTAMENT READING

Ephesians 1:3–14 (NRSVUE)

[Instruct congregation to lift hands up on the word praise]

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. 5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the **praise** of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight 9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the **praise** of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14 this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the **praise** of his glory.

SERMON *[sermon point: We are adopted by God through Christ and so we dance and share in the communion table feast together. How do we respond?]*

ANTHEM

[This is a prepared dance by the liturgical dance team. They are instructed to invite the congregation to stand and join them by singing and lifting their arms during the second chorus. They are to bow their heads during the Amen section.]

“Total Praise”⁶

Richard Smallwood

INVITATION

Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another. Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another.⁷

CONFESSION AND PARDON

**Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we**

⁶ Text and Music by Richard Smallwood © 1996 T. Autumn Music (All Rights Reserved). Choose an arrangement that fits best with your congregation, but for a preview see <https://www.jwpepper.com/Total-Praise/10012249.item> (accessed February 20, 2024), or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCjaUwEsMdQ> (accessed February 20, 2024).

⁷ The communion liturgy, minus The Great Thanksgiving, is found in “Service of Word and Table I,” *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, © 1992 The United Methodist Publishing House (All Rights Reserved), Kindle Location 50–58, Kindle Edition.

have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All pray in silence.

Hear the good news: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that proves God's love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

Glory to God. Amen.

PEACE

Let us offer one another signs of reconciliation and love.

[congregation exchange signs and words of God's peace]

OFFERING PRAYER

As forgiven and reconciled people,
let us offer ourselves and our gifts to God.

OFFERING

[Ask people to listen to the vocalist and watch the solo dancer and as they are moved to do so, they are invited to make a decision to stand as a child of God in their places. Remain standing and swaying]

“Child of God”⁸

Mark Miller

TAKING THE BREAD AND CUP

[The pastor, standing, if possible, behind the Lord's table, facing the people from this time through breaking the Bread, takes the bread and cup; and the bread and wine are prepared for the meal.]

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

[Using a musical setting that your congregation is used, but with the following liturgy, have the dancers arch around the communion table only moving when the liturgy is sung. When the congregation sings, they are instructed to mirror the dance movements of the dancers.]

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.

⁸ Text and Music by Mark Miller © 2004 Choristers Guild (All Rights Reserved). See for preview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYZ79kSC6_I (accessed February 20, 2024).

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

[Dancers are instructed to make the drama come alive through strong gestures during the entirety of the Great Thanksgiving, but freeze "on the night in which he gave himself up." Continue moving during "and so in remembrance."]

It is right, and a good and joyful thing,
always and everywhere to give thanks to you,
Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.
You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.
When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.
You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God,
and spoke to us through your prophets, who looked for that day
when justice shall roll down like waters
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream,
when nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

[The pastor may lower hands.]

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

[The pastor may raise hands.]

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.
Your Spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
and to announce that the time had come
when you would save your people.
He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners.
By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection
you gave birth to your Church,
delivered us from slavery to sin and death,
and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.
At his ascension you exalted him
to sit and reign with you at your right hand.

[The pastor may hold hands, palms down, over the bread, or touch the bread, or lift the bread.]

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread,
gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:
“Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.”

[The pastor may hold hands, palms down, over the cup, or touch the cup, or lift the cup.]

When the supper was over he took the cup,
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:
“Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

[The pastor may raise hands.]

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

[The pastor may hold hands, palms down, over the bread and cup.]

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

[The pastor may raise hands.]

By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church,
all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and for ever.

Amen.⁹

THE LORD'S PRAYER

⁹ You should substitute your communion traditions within your liturgy, but this is an option, “The Great Thanksgiving for the Season after Pentecost,” *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, © 1992 The United Methodist Publishing House (All Rights Reserved), Kindle Location 105–108, Kindle Edition.

[The pastor's hands may be extended in open invitation.]

And now, with the confidence of children of God, let us pray:

[The pastor raises their hands]

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass
against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

BREAKING THE BREAD

[The pastor, still standing behind the Lord's table facing the people, breaks the bread in silence, or while saying:]

Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. The bread which we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

[The pastor lifts the cup in silence, or while saying:]

The cup over which we give thanks is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

GIVING THE BREAD AND CUP

[The bread and wine are given to the people with the dancers joining the congregation in receiving the elements, with these or other words being exchanged:]

The body of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**

The blood of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**

[The following songs are sung during this time:]

"I Come with Joy"¹⁰

"Let Us Break Bread Together"¹¹

Brian Wren/**DOVE OF PEACE**
LET US BREAK BREAD

BLESSING UPON RECEIVING

[When all have received, the Lord's table is put in order. The following prayer is then offered by the pastor or by all:]

¹⁰ Text by Brian Wren (1970) and © 1971, 1995 Hope Publishing Co. (All Rights Reserved), Music by *The Southern Harmony* (1835).

¹¹ Text and Music by Afro-American spiritual; adapt. and arr. by William Farley Smith © 1989 The United Methodist Publishing House (All Rights Reserved).

Eternal God, Lord of the dance, we give you thanks for this holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us. Grant that we may DANCE into the world in the strength of your Spirit, to give ourselves for others, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

***HYMN OF SENDING FORTH**

“Lord of the Dance,” vs. 1–2, 5¹²

LORD OF THE DANCE

***BENEDICTION**

[Dancers and musicians come forward and begin the movement and music of “Come, All You People,” prepared to lead people outside of the worship space.]

May the Lord of the dance fill you
with all joy and peace in believing
so that you may abound in hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

based on Romans 15:13 (NRSV)

***RECESSIONAL HYMN**

* “Come, All You People”¹³

Alexander Gondo/**UYAI MOSE**

Sung Refrain:

**We are your people, dancing in the Spirit.
We are your people, dancing in the Spirit.
We are your people, dancing in the Spirit.
Sent forth to share the Lord.**

¹² Text by Sydney Carter (1963), Music by 19th cent. Shaker tune; adapt. by Sydney Carter © 1963, 1989 Galliard, Ltd. (admin. by Hope Publishing Co.) (All Rights Reserved).

¹³ Text by Alexander Gonder and Music by Alexander Gondo; arr. by John Bell © 1994 WGRG The Iona Community (admin. by GIA Publications, Inc.) (All Right Reserved).

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