**Reflections on an Anglican Service**

**June 23rd, 2019**

**2nd Sunday after Pentecost**

**Rev. Sharon Smith**

**Welcome and Intention**

Welcome to Saint Catherine’s on this Second Sunday after Pentecost.

Today’s service is somewhat unusual.

It is what is known as an Instructed Eucharist or Teaching Eucharist.

Quite simply, we will be reflecting on the components of our service together.

It is an opportunity for each of us to think more deeply about our worship service.

So there will be 5 reflections, including the Children’s talk.

They will be scattered throughout our service this morning.

These are indicated in your service bulletin.

At each of these times, we will be pressing the ‘pause’ button as it were, for two reasons:

* one, to slow us down for reflection: What have we heard or what is coming next? what did we just say? (sometimes repeated actions become so habitual, that we breeze past them without taking them in. Like when we are driving or walking to church after our usual morning routine, and we wonder, “did I brush my teeth”?
* AND second, we are going to ask why? So as we slow down and focus on the what - we will be also asking: Why do we do this? What is the significance or meaning of these actions?

Pause for a moment and look around and take in this space.

What do you see?

What do you smell?

What do you hear?

There are things to touch and to taste...

Each is an invitation for us to consider the journey of transformation that we are on and that awaits us in this service - the very reason we are here.

Come, let us worship together.

**Part 1: Children’s Talk**

We are going to take a break from the Lord’s Prayer – we will be learning the whole thing with actions next week.

We are going to be asking the question.

When you enter the church what do you see?

1. **The Baptismal font:**

We walk past the font on the way to the front of the church, it says to us: “remember...”

“Remember that you are loved

That you belong.

You were baptized when you were just a baby. And couldn’t do anything.

There is nothing that we can do that can make God love you more.

Each of us were loved right from the beginning.”

Priests and servers wear some pretty funky clothes.

We are all wearing white robes, called Albs

(can you spell that - an excellent scrabble word).

These are actually not Priestly clothes, they are ordinary traditional baptismal clothes, reminding us that they we are no different from everyone else. We are all here by the grace of Christ.

1. **Votive Candles**

We light candles as a sign of faith and hope in God’s help that is always present. When one candle is lit, darkness cannot be present.

The candle is also a symbol of our burning and grateful love for God.

Church Father Jerome wrote in the 4th Century that candles are lit even in the daytime as a sign of joy.

And as a reminder of Psalm 119:105: Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path [Works, part IV, 2nd ed., Kiev, 1900, pp.301–302].

1. **The Altar**

At the beginning of the service, we walk into the church and process toward the Altar – it is a symbol of our life as a journey of meeting God.

When we get to the Altar we bow. We bow because it is special. And we bow as a way to say: Christ, you are important. We value you.

It is the place where the bread and wine are prepared and where we will once again meet Christ .

Now you will notice that there are a lot of matchy matchy things going on.

Everything is in rainbow – or green today. The Altar, the banners and our clothes.

1. **Altar dressings and Vestments**

The colour green marks the season of the church year.

Just like we have winter, spring, summer and fall.

These are spiritual seasons. They mark mysteries of life.

Some people walk right through these mysteries each year and not even know what’s there.

As followers of Christ, we pay attention to these mysteries.

In the green season – we remember that all of life is special and holy. That God meets us in all things. That our very lives and breath are special.

It is also a season of growth.

So we pay attention to the seasons of the year – and the great, green Sundays of the year.

**Part 2:  The Gathering of the Community**

We left home this morning as individuals and in our worship we gather to become the Church - a collective - a community - the Body of Christ. Each of us is a part. Wow.

As we assemble, we ‘become’ the church. We have been called to come together in one place, to bring our lives to be more than we were, to become a new community with a new life.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Being present for Sunday worship is especially meaningful. Sunday is a testimony to newness, dawn, and to resurrection. Sunday becomes a weekly anniversary of Christ’s resurrection, beginning on Saturday at sunset.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Christian Sunday also grew from an idea of the eighth day in later Jewish writings. A day beyond the frustrations and limitations of the seven days in a week.

As each of us enters the church building we are greeted, welcomed and given our service bulletin. We can prepare ourselves for worship by noticing the architecture of the sacred space.

The pitch of the building pulls our eyes upward, beyond ourselves. To the transcendent.

The Anglican service is liturgical. That is, it consists of liturgy.

Liturgy is a sequence of actions carried out by all of us, to unify us.

And to honor and draw near to God. Liturgy is our work - all of our work - as we worship.

Liturgy is transformation, we come not to perform, we come to change...

We walk through these doors as individuals, and we walk into a symbolically rich space that invites us in to the larger Christian story.

And we come to worship, we come to pray.

And we have prayed two prayers already – these are known as collects.

A collect is a focused prayer that ‘collects’ our thoughts and intentions toward a particular theme. Collects address and describe characteristics of God, make a request or petition known, and invoke the name of Jesus in relation with the Trinity.

The first collect, prayed before the Gloria, is the Collect for Purity and it begins: “Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known…”

For centuries, the priest said this Collect for Purity silently but it has since become a prayer said by the whole community.

The second, is the Collect of the Day. This prayer is written to focus the community (gather our thoughts) on both the season of the church year and the readings for the day.

Now that we are together and focused. Let us listen to the reading of scripture.

**Part 3: Liturgy of the Word**

Hear what the Spirit is saying.

We are invited to hear and reflect on sacred stories.

Stories inspired by The Holy Spirit and written by many human hands over hundreds of years. Stories from cultures and societies very different from our own but stories that also speak of our common human experience.

These stories that have been told, read, discussed, and debated for thousands of years.

We hear the stories of creation, of the entrance of violence and division, the calling of Israel, their enslavement and eventual freedom, the Wandering in the Wilderness and giving of the Law, the sacred songs of the Psalms, the Wisdom Books, the cry for justice from The Prophets, the time of Exile and the longing for redemption and liberation. And in the Christian telling, the arrival of The Human One, Jesus of Nazareth, anointed by God to preach and embody the gospel of salvation. And of the descent of The Holy Spirit who calls a community of worldwide disciples seeking to follow the way of Christ to the glory of God. A story that is from the past is also present in our own congregation, and calling us towards a future more expressive of God’s reign of justice and peace

And every Sunday we get to enter into 4 of them.

* 1. An Old Testament story - today from the prophet Isaiah announcing God’s persistence with us.
  2. A Psalm - honest Jewish prayers that express praise, or grief, or thanksgiving or complaint.
  3. A letter written by one of the apostles - today Paul’s letter to the Church in Galatia (one of the first letters written).
  4. And a gospel - a story about the life of Jesus, the Human One.
  5. All over the world, Christian churches in the Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, Anglican, United, Presbyterian traditions will read these very same sacred texts and reflect on them. Unifying us as Christians around the world.
  6. We are invited after each reading to:
  7. Hear what the Spirit is saying.
  8. That is we listen, we reflect, we discern.
  9. The sermon is part of that reflection.

But it doesn’t tell us what to believe or think or decide.

It is still up to each one of us to...

Hear what the Spirit is saying.

In order to discern, we need to hear these words in the context of a long view of time.

And so following the sermon.

We say or sing a Christian creed.

In the 8am service we say the apostles creed.

In the 10am service we say the Shema.

Now for many of us, the creeds are difficult to say. We may not agree with everything that is in the creed. It may also be helpful to know that historically the church has not always agreed on these credal statements. In fact many were formed as a way to ensure unity where there was division and disagreement.

Saying the creed - engages us in conversation with a living tradition that extends back thousands of years.

Dean Peter Elliot of Christ Church Cathedral says that we can think of the creeds being introduced in this way:

“Let us affirm the faith of the church by reciting theological imagery developed at Nicaea in the year 325”

Or let us affirm the faith of the Judeo-Christian tradition of One God who is love and invites us to live a life a love.

We say the creed to hear the Scriptures in the context of a long view of time.

Hear what the Spirit is saying.

Hearing and reflecting on the word of God. Always invites a response.

A response to pray, and a response to bring peace to each other and our world.

Amen.

**Part 4:  The Liturgy of the Eucharist**

Eucharist is the Greek word for Thanksgiving.

On the table set out before us, are bread and wine.

Together, the bread and wine are symbols of the gifts gathered from the community along with our financial gifts.

Historically people would also bring their harvested goods to be blessed at the Table before giving them to the poor.

Ordinary things - bread and wine... they speaks to us how God may be found in the ordinary things of our lives.

We bring bread and wine - manufactured commodities, not grain and grapes - they required harvesting, grinding, crushing, tending, baking.

Through this table all the work of our hands are blessed by God, God gives dignity to our work and new meaning to human labour.

God transforms all that we bring to him. Ordinary things here are made holy. And in this Eucharist, we give thanks for it all.

The prayer over the gifts is a prayer for this transformation.

We ask:

(1) that in the bread and wine we would taste the living presence of God  
(2) that in food for the hungry we imagine a world where there is enough for all  
(3) that in money we have given that our lives will be instruments of God’s peace and love in the world.

The priest begins the Eucharist with a dialogue inviting us to lift up our hearts to God. And as we do... we hear her recite the stories of the people of God, and of God’s relentless love. And we are counted in among the Christian story.

And then we sing. Holy, Holy, Holy Lord....  
This is the Sanctus - a vision of Isaiah - and a vision recorded in John’s revelation.  
It is a vision of worship that is always, already happening.  
When we sing these words - we are joining in an ongoing song of angels and heavenly beings in praise to God.

We then we remember Jesus - and as his disciples we do as he asked us:

We take bread and bless it, we take wine and give thanks and we remember the relationship we have with a faithful, covenantal God.

The Priest signs the cross over the bread and wine and asks the Holy Spirit to descend over the gifts and on us.  
It is in the Spirit that Jesus is present to us - this Grace we receive in taking the bread and wine.

It is not magic - Rather it is God being true to God’s promise. To meet us when we gather and when we break bread together.

And before we receive, we pray as Jesus taught us.  
The Lords prayer has been part of the Eucharist since the 4th century.

Give us this day our daily bread... It gives voice to our hungers.  
And we are HUNGRY - for food, for love, for affirmation, for friendship, for peace, for rest, for kindness...  
And so we pray for daily bread. Not just for our stomachs and physical needs but for our emotional and spiritual needs too.  
And this bread, this blessed bread from heaven - feeds us.  
And when we receive, we feed on Christ in our heart by faith.

There is one bread - And so we all belong.  
We are many but this meal makes us the one body of Christ.  
Christ connects us to each other as equal members of one family, it is indeed a communion. Communing with God and with each other.

Now, let us commune.

**Part 5: The Sending**

After communion the liturgy prepares us for going out.

We begin this part with the Post Communion Prayer; a prayer of thanksgiving that sums up what God has done with us in the liturgy and stresses that our worship has prepared us for our daily ministry in the world.

After experiencing the mystery of communion, the community is transitioning to go out and be Christ in our world. Post communion prayers date back to the fourth century.

We then state together the doxology, a prayer of praise to the glory of God reminding us that it is God working through us that gives us all we need to do God’s work in the world.

The priest offers a blessing which pronounces God’s love and favour on the community.

The final word of the liturgy is the dismissal

We hear:

*Go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the spirit.*

The dismissal should not be seen simply as a concluding phrase.

We, the people of God are not just being told things are finished here; we may go home. Rather, we are being commissioned.

We are being sent. We have not been instructed and fed merely for our own sake, but for the life of the whole world.

We are being sent out to continue the mission that Jesus began but which was interrupted by his premature death.

The spirituality of the Eucharist demands that we do something practical for other people. The liturgy pours into us an abundance of spiritual energy which is given to us not just for our own spiritual journey but to help others along the way.

Equipped with the Word, nourished with the Bread from the Table, we go out as Christ into our world.

1. Schmemann, A. (1963). *For the life of the world*. Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. White, J. F. (1983). *Introduction to Christian Worship*. Nashville, Tennessee: Parthenon Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)