

Worship at First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church

'What is worship?' That sounds like a simple enough question, but it is actually rather profound. What we do in worship, in what order, and how we do it are all reflections of what we truly believe about what it means to 'worship.' If you are curious about why we worship the way we do at First ARP, this pamphlet will hopefully be helpful. Of course, our pastor would welcome the opportunity to talk with you further about worship in this community of faith.

The Overall Logic in Our Order of Worship

The late liturgist Robert Webber once wrote, "A dominant error of some Christians is to say, 'I must bring God into my story.' The ancient understanding is that God joins the story of humanity to take us into his story. There is a world of difference. One is narcissistic; the other is God-oriented. ... [Therefore, proper] worship does God's story." In other words, worship should take us through God's story of redemption every week so that our lives become patterned *into* His story. Worship should enable us to bring our lives to God, re-enter His story of redemption, and be dismissed as redemptively-shaped people going out into the world.

Preparation

That is why we begin with 'Preparation.' The silent meditation is designed to quiet our hearts and to direct our thoughts towards God as we prepare to worship. That is accompanied by a musical prelude which is designed to touch our hearts with its beauty that our hearts might be drawn into worship as well. There is a time of welcome, announcements, and greeting to set out in preliminary matters and to give opportunity for us to briefly connect with our fellow worshippers. This is essential because worship is not an individual matter; it is corporate. We are to worship as a community. Worship, then, officially begins with a Call to Worship. This can be choral or Scriptural and it is the time when God calls us into his presence to worship. We respond to this call through a hymn or song that testifies that we are here to worship and that we come with our minds, hearts, and wills to serve our heavenly Lord.

Adoration

The first major movement of worship after we have been called is a time of 'Adoration.' In a sense, worship starts here because it is the beginning of the story. We were created in the very beginning as worshipping creatures. We were created to bring praise and adoration to the Creator who made us. We do this through a prayer of invocation, which is a prayer that calls on God's name so that he would be present in our worship and receive what is offered to him. We then offer him praise through a hymn or song.

Confession

The problem, of course, is that because of sin, humanity is fallen and cannot approach or worship God rightly. Therefore, the next major movement of worship is a time of 'Confession.' Each one of us is guilty of both corporate and individual sins and so there is time for us to confess both and to repent for our sins of thought, word, and deed. But, in Christ, God forgives us and restores us into fellowship with him. Therefore, the time of confession is followed by an assurance of pardon. Thankful and joyful over our forgiveness in Christ, we stand and exultingly sing the Gloria Patri, which gives our Triune God the glory for all eternity for the gracious redemption we have.

Proclamation

Forgiven and renewed, we enter into a time of 'Proclamation,' in which we hear God's Word read and preached that we might be reminded, convicted, taught, and encouraged by God's work in the world

and in our lives. We include an Old and a New Testament reading because we believe that both are necessary for spiritual growth. St. Augustine wrote, “The New Testament is in the Old concealed; the Old Testament is in the New revealed.” They are two parts of a whole and so we read passages from both testaments, one of which becomes the basis for the sermon.

Celebration

On the first Sunday of each month, we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. We believe that the sacrament of communion is essential to our spiritual growth and that it is a necessary ingredient to our ongoing spiritual nourishment.

Dedication

After we have received God’s Word and have been nourished through the Lord’s Supper, we enter a time of ‘Dedication’ in which we respond to what we have heard by pledging ourselves once again to the Lord. We do that through song, through an affirmation of faith, through intercessory prayer for ourselves, others, the community, and the world, and through generous and cheerful giving. We most often use the Nicene Creed (325 A.D.) for the affirmation of faith because it is the one truly universal creed of faith affirmed and used by all traditions of the Christian faith. By using the Nicene Creed, we affirm our place in the entire Christian church. However, we also use the Apostles Creed and Scriptural creeds on occasion.

Finally, we conclude by coming full circle in praise as we sing the doxology, giving God the glory for his entire story of redemption. Then, we dismiss with a charge and a benediction. The charge is the means through which God commissions us to go into the world as ambassadors of faith, hope, and love. To equip us to do that, God applies his blessing (‘benediction’) upon us that we might go out in his grace.

The Rhythm of Worship

Not only does each week’s worship service allow us to enter into God’s redemptive story anew, but the times and seasons of the year are designed to create an annual rhythm that shapes us as well. Along with most other Christians in the world, we practice the rhythm of the Christian calendar (sometimes called the ‘liturgical year’). The calendar takes the church through the entire ministry of Christ every year.

Advent and Christmas

The Season of Advent is the four Sundays immediately preceding Christmas. It is a time when the church enters into the longing for the Messiah. The church will typically focus on the prophetic and historical build up to the birth of Christ. But, Advent is also about longing for Jesus to come again and so there is often the secondary theme of looking forward to Christ’s second coming. Christmas is a fixed season that runs from December 25th until January 6th. It is important, therefore, to remember that Christmas is not a one-day affair; it is an almost two week celebration.

Epiphany

Epiphany is January 6th and is focused on the making known of Christ to the nations. It is typically a time that focuses on Christ’s identity and glory. The season of Epiphany begins with the Baptism of the Lord Sunday and ends with Transfiguration Sunday. It is a season of variable length because it precedes Lent and Easter (which falls on a different day each year).

Lent

The season of Lent is a time of repentance and preparation for Easter. It begins with Ash Wednesday, which is the date forty days before Easter, and it gets its name from the biblical image of expressing one's grief by wearing sackcloth and ashes.

Holy Week

Holy Week is the week immediately preceding Easter. It begins on Palm Sunday, which remembers Christ's entrance into Jerusalem. On this day, we prepare our hearts for his coming as our King. Thursday of the week is Maundy Thursday, which marks the anniversary of Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper in the upper room. Friday is Good Friday and is the day on which Christ died. Holy Saturday is the day the church lives in mourning, remembering Christ in the silence of the grave.

Easter

Easter is the holiest of days and always falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon of spring. It celebrates the resurrection of Christ from the dead, breaking the bonds of sin and death for us.

Ascension Day

Ascension Day is the fortieth day after Easter and thus always falls on a Thursday. It marks the ascension of Christ to the Father.

Pentecost

Pentecost (also known as Whitsunday) is the fiftieth day after Easter and celebrates the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the church.

Season after Pentecost

The Season after Pentecost begins with Trinity Sunday and stretches for roughly half of the year. It focuses on life in the Kingdom, which Christ inaugurated. The focus is generally on what it means to be a disciple of Christ in the time between his first coming and his second coming. One particular special day in Ordinary Time is All Saints' Day, which is November 1st. It commemorates the Christians who have faithfully lived and died before us and who are now in heaven.

Christ the King

The Season after Pentecost ends with Christ the King Sunday which celebrates and looks forward to Christ's second coming at the end of history as King of the entire world who establishes his kingdom concretely on this earth and inaugurates the new creation. As such it naturally leads back into Advent when the church takes time to focus on their longing for Christ to come.

The Decor of Worship

Robe

Why does the pastor wear a robe? In today's culture, the pastoral robe may seem stuffy or formal (or even worse, pretentious!). But, there are actually very good reasons for it. As another Presbyterian pastor, Jeffrey Meyers, has written, "The robe, among other things, helps emphasize the office of the pastor and de-emphasize the personality of the man in the pulpit. Sometimes it's hard to be led in worship by an elder or pastor who is a good friend or a peer or even (especially) one who is younger. To help us get over this feeling, the church in general, and the Reformed church in particular, has historically placed special robes on her ministers when they conduct worship. This helps the people to remember that it is not just good ol' [so-and-so] up there; rather, it is God's appointed minister leading us into God's presence and speaking God's Word to us."

Colors

We also practice the use of the liturgical colors. There are five colors that are used: white, black, green, violet, and red. White is generally used during the “high” holy days and seasons: Christmas, Epiphany, Maundy Thursday, Easter, and Trinity Sunday. Black is used only once a year, on Good Friday. Violet is used during the times of preparation, Advent and Lent. Red is used on days that mark great events in the life of the church, Pentecost and All Saints Day. Finally, green is used as a symbol of life and growth and thus is used predominantly during the Season after Pentecost, which focuses on living as disciples of Christ.