

Sermon on the 2nd Sunday of Easter – April 11, 2010
The Rev. Ed Lovelady
Some Worship Changes

After the opening hymn WELCOME!

Today, I am introducing some changes in how our worship flows - some changes in the “Rite” - the words we use - and in “Ceremonial” - the actions we take.

I will talk more about this at sermon time - but to get us started off for the Liturgy of the Word - here’s what I’m asking you to do.

I notice that during worship many of your heads are down, eyes are on the service bulletin, concentrating on what you are to say next.

So – I’m asking you to put the bulletin down! Most of you don’t need it for anything except the Gloria and the Psalm.

After the Opening Sentences - I will sometimes read the Collect for Purity. Don’t read along with me either silently or aloud - just LISTEN - as your priest it my role to call us to worship.

We will say/sing the Gloria together - it’s OUR hymn of praise

Next is the Collect of the Day - this continues the Opening liturgy and once again it is my role as your priest to call us to focus on the theme of today’s celebration. Don’t read along with me either silently or aloud - just LISTEN.

And the hardest of all - Put your bulletin down during the scripture readings - just listen to these ancient words and stories of how others have encountered God. Remember “The Word is not the Word until it’s heard.”

Now - let us focus our thoughts and actions on sharing an encounter with the Risen Christ.

Alleluia. Christ is Risen!

At sermon time

I observe that our worship is missing some of the integrity, flow, and drama that it ought to have

You must understand that I don't take changes in worship lightly - I know how important it is for worship to be familiar, comfortable, and fulfilling.

I am a member of the Episcopal Church and a priest because of our worship. It is what drew me to this church and what keeps me involved and excited about our life and ministry.

Our liturgy feeds my soul and inspires my life and my ministry.

I don't know the history of some of the unique things I see and hear in our worship, so I'll need your help understanding "why we do what we do" and your honest feedback.

I do know that it is possible to put together the uniqueness of our parish and its ministries, the style and personality of all of our clergy; and be contemporary, inclusive, multicultural, and do better worship.

I have done this in each parish in which I have served as a priest for the past 16 years.

I have been a student of Anglican and Episcopal worship and liturgy for 35 years.

I was trained in seminary by the foremost liturgical scholar of the generation who prepared our current Book of Common Prayer.

I love the liturgy and music of our tradition and am a priest today because of the life changing experience of Episcopal worship.

My goal, as your rector during this interim time is to provide the best opportunity for every participant in worship to have an encounter with God and with other Christians, in the setting of the faith and practice of the Anglican / Episcopal tradition.

One of the problems with using worship books and bulletins instead of the Book of Common Prayer is that worship leaders and the congregation don't get a chance to see the liturgy as it is laid out in the Prayer Book and the rubrics that direct how worship ought to be done (Rubrics are the instructions printed in italics - and they carry the authority of Canon law).

Some examples of how the text of the Prayer book is designed: Parts of the liturgy that are printed in paragraph form is usually read by the celebrant or officiant – like the collects and the Eucharistic prayer – parts printed in phrase lines are usually read by the congregation – like the Gloria, Creed, and Confession.

Our Prayer Book is more than just a “book of worship” with suggestions about how we might “do” church.

It is our source for worship, doctrine, and theology. For example – If someone ask you what we believe about marriage or baptism – read the Prayer book liturgy for these Sacraments.

Without attention to the form and order of service, over time worship changes based on the worship leaders preferences or particular interest. I believe this has happened to us causing our worship to be less than it could be.

Worship has a drama and flow created by the liturgy, music, ceremonial, and appearance of the worship space.

Every word, every gesture, is important to the whole worship experience.

There are defined roles for each character in the drama (celebrant, preacher, congregation, prayer leaders, readers, servers).

Each of us has a particular role - we are actors in this drama of God’s encounter with us in this place and time.

There is particular ceremonial that reinforces the words that are spoken.

When the roles are confused or the actions aren’t congruent with the words, the integrity, flow, and drama don’t work.

Imagine, in the play “Romeo and Juliet,” if all the cast members together said Romeo’s part when he is romancing Juliet on the balcony.

Now, Let’s talk about some specific roles and parts of our worship

Collect for Purity and Collect for the Day:

These prayers are the role of the celebrant (see the rubrics).

When the congregation tries to say these prayers with the celebrant, they are unable to listen and miss the opportunity to hear the celebrant “set the stage” for what we’re about to do together.

The prayers are not written for congregational participation and the poetry of these traditional prayers is lost in the mumble of the crowd.

Sequence hymn

The “Sequence” whether it be hymn, psalm, or anthem is what is said or sung before the Gospel reading. When we sing a sequence, we’ll sing it all before the Gospel and have silence between the reading and the sermon.

There should be nothing said or sung between the end of the Gospel and the Sermon

Prayers of the People:

Some of the forms we have been using have long petitions that distract from the purpose of the prayers as they attempt to make complicated statements about various causes and concerns.

When the congregation tries to repeat the names of those for who we are praying, it distracts from focusing on the petitions and the individuals we are praying for because we must focus on what we are reading. God does not hear the prayers better because of more voices.

The periods of silence during the prayers offer ample opportunity for the congregation to offer special prayers or thanksgivings, either silently or aloud.

For Rite One celebrations, we will use prayers consistent with Rite One language.

Easter Season Confession:

During Easter season the focus is on Jesus’ death and resurrection as our redemption. Omitting the Confession reinforces the theology that God’s salvation is based in God’s love - not what we do to be worthy.

The Peace:

Some of you have described The Peace as a “free for all” or a “mini coffee hour” - and I agree.

A lot of noise and movement disturbs the continuity of worship

It disturbs my worship and it disturbs the worship of many of our congregation - just watch body language during The Peace.

You may notice that I do not attempt to greet everyone during the Peace - even if I try, I’ll miss someone.

Think of The Peace as “the wave” at a sporting event - someone starts it and it “rolls” across the stands.

The reason we have the Peace is our response to Jesus’ teachings to his disciples to not present their gifts on the altar until they have reconciled with their neighbor.

This is our offering of peace to each other before we approach the altar with our gifts and ourselves – saying “No matter what might be between us - right now we are brothers and sisters through the Peace of Christ

Offertory:

Our theology is that our gifts include all that we offer to God in our worship: money, food for the poor, and the bread and wine for Communion.

All gifts should be presented at the same time and equally, and either handed to the celebrant or placed on the altar by the gifts bearers.

There will be only one offertory procession during the Offertory hymn, without any ceremonial by the gift bearers, acolytes, or celebrant. The money will be placed on the altar during the Eucharistic prayer and the food for the poor in front of the altar in plain sight.

Position of the Eucharistic ministers:

I will invite assisting clergy and Eucharistic ministers to stand with me at the altar.

All who are in the Sanctuary with roles in the worship should be standing at the sides of the Celebrant (read the rubrics), as their presence reinforces our theology that the Celebrant is not acting alone in the Eucharistic celebration.

Altar Setting and the Gospel book:

You may notice that only the Gospel book is on the altar

The focus during the Liturgy of the Word is on the WORD and the Altar should not have any symbols or articles used for Communion.

The Gospel book is appropriate on the altar as it is part of the Liturgy of the Word; and as such, is removed when the table is set for Liturgy of the Sacrament.

There are other subtle changes you might notice, all intended to enrich our worship experience. Even if these changes bother you at first - give them a chance - and I believe you will find your worship experience enriched.

I am willing to talk more about our worship and will offer a “short course” during our Adult Christian education time if anyone is interested.

Worship is the center of our life together as a parish and the source of our inspiration for all else we do as individual Christians and as a Christian community.

We gather to worship God in prayer, praise, and sacrament.

We are fed by God’s Spirit - by the Sacraments we share - and by our fellowship with each other.

In this time together - we share our lives with each other and with God.

We introduce our children to God's love and the love of the Christian community.

We offer ourselves "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God"

We welcome others into our worship and fellowship and invite them to share in our life and ministry

Our Gospel story today is Jesus first post resurrection appearance to his disciples - the "doubting Thomas" story. The real focus is not on Thomas - it is "The Peace" that Jesus gives to his disciples

He says - "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

These disciples had the opportunity to be eye witnesses to Jesus' ministry, to his death, and his resurrection - we are the 21st century witnesses, and sometimes are like Thomas, we want to taste, touch, and feel.

Yet we are blessed as Jesus says "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Here together - in our worship and fellowship - we encounter the risen Christ,

In Sacraments we can taste, touch, and feel - and we are blessed.

We become the Sacrament of God's love through the Gospel of Jesus Christ -

We are fed and called to go out and feed a hungry world.