

THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

A Journey through the Movements of Worship

*Background material for Sardis Academy in Oct./Nov.
And the Church Retreat with Michael Hawn on Nov. 17 & 18, 2007*

1) Praise – October 17, 2007

Praise is the beginning point for Christian worship. Evelyn Underhill in the first words of what became a classic mid-20th century seminary textbook, titled simply, *Worship*, wrote, “Worship... is the response of the creature to the Eternal.” The act of Christian worship is our collective response – we, who are mortal and limited – to the acts and presence of God, who is boundless, eternal. Praise is a natural place for this response to begin. In fact an awareness of nature often elicits this type of response from religious and non-religious persons, alike. A view of the Grand Canyon, sunset over the ocean, hillsides under a newly fallen snow, often times moments like this in nature make us realize how amazing this world is. Feelings of praise and awe and gratitude flow out of us.

Christians direct such feelings to God. In worship we collectively bring those and mold them into our praise of God. In human relationships praise is an essential part of loving relationships. We praise the people we love; we praise their attributes, their accomplishments, their very being. Gratitude and thanksgiving are wrapped up inside of praise. What happens in loving, human relationships should come out in our loving devotion to God through worship. We praise God out of love. We share gratitude and thanksgiving to God for the blessings of life.

- *First breakout* – Discuss why praise is important in human relationships. Then, talk about ways this may be similar (or different) in our relationship with God.

A) Biblical Foundation

Both the Old and New Testaments give evidence of the use of praise in the worship of God. The psalms are filled with poems and prayers of praise to the God of creation – the mighty works of God are praised, as are God’s acts of salvation, redemption and protection.

The last 5 of the 150 psalms are prayers of praise, and the last one seemingly shouts it in one great cacophony of sound. [Ps 146-150] We are familiar with two words that are at the basis of praise. Hallelujah or Alleluia are transliterated words from Hebrew, which literally mean “Praise the Lord!” So, whenever we say or sing, “Hallelujah” or “Alleluia,” we are saying, “Praise the Lord.”

Typical praise psalms in the Bible include Psalm 67, 84, 99, and 111. Chronicles portrays King David leading the Israelites in God’s praise in I Chronicles 29:10-13, 20-22.

Prayers of thanksgiving are a type of praise psalms. Here praise is offered to God in direct thanksgiving for some act of mercy, protection or grace. Typical thanksgiving psalms include Psalm 9, 92, 100, and 136. Chronicles states that King David employed Asaph and his family to offer thanksgiving to the Lord and to regularly praise God’s name on behalf of the people. [IChr 16:4-7] The Chronicler even creates a “praise medley” of three psalms (Ps 105, 95, 106) to illustrate how the Levites praised God. [IChr 16:8-36]

In the New Testament we see the use of doxologies in worship and in expressions from one Christian to another. The word “doxology” comes from two Greek words; *doxa*, meaning “praise, honor, glory” and *logos*, “word, saying.” A doxology is a speaking of praise, or words of praise. The ending of Matthew 6:13 (footnoted in some Bibles) concludes the Lord’s Prayer with a doxology, “for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” The angels sing a doxology at Jesus’ birth: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” [Luke 2:14] Other doxologies include Romans 11:36; 16:27; Eph 3:21 and I Timothy 1:17. The

longest one in the New Testament is found in Jude 24-25. Processionals of uplifting song and prayers were a part of worship both in the Jewish and Christian traditions. Psalm 136 may have been a processional hymn.

B) Christian Theology & Practice

The theology behind the practice of praise in worship begins with the realization that we are mortal, limited creatures in relationship with an eternal, powerful, awe-inspiring God. Reflection on God's awesome power often brought biblical people to their knees. When the Israelites reached Mt. Sinai and the Lord descended upon the mountain with dense clouds, thunder and lightening, the people "were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance..." [Ex 20:18] When Elijah climbed the same mountain and sensed God's presence, "he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave." [I Kings 19:13] The New Testament hymn sings that at the name of Jesus "every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." [Philippians 2:10-11]

Awe seems to be at the heart of praise. We mortals praise this amazing God who created the heavens and the earth. For biblical people that praise may have come from the gratitude of not being "zapped" by this powerful, awe-inspiring God. Through the centuries this has matured into gratefulness for the experience of life.

The earliest written text about Christian worship was written around AD 100. The Didache provides a brief account of a worship service, which it seems every week included the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Thanksgiving was a part of the main movements in worship. The worshipers gave thanks to God for the gifts of the bread and wine and the acts of Jesus which they represented, for God's holy name and the knowledge of faith, for God's might and power.

In Justin Martyr's writings (AD 155) we see that thanksgiving and praise were a part of the prayer life of the congregation, particularly when it came to receiving the Lord's Supper. Justin wrote, "The bishop sends up praise and glory to the Father of all, through the name of the Son and Holy Spirit and offers thanksgiving at some length... We give thanks to God for having created the world, with all things therein... and for delivering us from the evil in which we live; and for utterly overthrowing the principalities and powers..." [Liturgies of the Western Church] We see similar language and practice in *The Apostolic Tradition* by Hippolytus of Rome, written around AD 215. At the beginning of the service the bishop or pastor and the people say responsively:

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And with your spirit.

Pastor: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Pastor: Let us give thanks to the Lord.

People: It is fitting and right.

This response is still a part of many Protestant liturgies, usually at the very beginning of the service.

Praise and thanksgiving, so clearly a part of worship in the Bible, became a fixture very early in Christian worship. The traditions of singing a doxology, reading or chanting praise psalms, of offering great prayers of thanksgiving at the time of the Lord's Supper were passed down from generation to generation. They are a part of Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox worship. In the Catholic and Orthodox traditions the Lord's Supper is called the Eucharist. A word which in Greek means "thanksgiving."

- *Second breakout* – Discuss times in your life when you have been filled with praise and thanksgiving for God. Think of a time that happened in Christian worship and outside of gathered worship. What common points exist between the two?

C) At Sardis

The first movement in worship at Sardis is praise. We begin with praise as a foundation for all that occurs in worship. We praise God through music; congregational singing, choral and instrumental music. We praise God through the reading of scripture, usually a psalm. We invoke God's blessing and pray to be made aware of God's presence as we worship.

Notice that when we have a spoken Call to Worship it is almost always from the Book of Psalms and is almost always a praise or thanksgiving psalm. The first hymn is usually chosen for words and tune that encourage the praise of God. Following the Invocation and Lord's Prayer we always respond with a Doxology. Sometimes that is *the* Doxology, which comes from the mid-1600's, or an even older one, the Gloria Patri, which has been sung with the exact same words since the 4th century and has even older variations. It is sometimes referred to as the "lesser doxology." At other times, Pam will find an alternative doxology for us to sing.

It is our practice that after the singing of a doxology, we sit and then move to another movement in worship.

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2) Confession – October 24, 2007

If praise is the first reaction in our response as mortals to an eternal God, then humility is the second. For on the one hand, if we – out of awareness of both our condition and the wonder of the universe – praise this amazing God who created us and all that surrounds us, then a moment later we realize on the other hand just how small we are in comparison. Marva Dawn in *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down* writes, “The more we encounter the holy God in our worship, the more we will recognize our utter sinfulness and be driven to repentance. This, too, is an essential part of our praise.”

We are mortal and limited and dependent. We fail and succeed, betray and protect, are plagued by regrets and lifted by fond memories. We sin and doubt, remain loyal and believe. All of this and more we bring to worship when we gather as the Body of Christ. The song of praise rings hollow without the honesty of confession.

Confession is focused on honesty. We speak the truth about our condition to God. In praise we focus on all that God brings in this dialogue of worship. In confession we state what we bring to God.

First and foremost, we bring ourselves. Scripture tells us that we are both children of God, made in God’s image, and sinners who have fallen short of God’s glory.

An important part of worship is to confess our sin, our regrets, our failings, to give them to God in order that we may be remade by God’s steadfast love and forgiveness.

We also confess our beliefs. To speak the truth about ourselves and our lives, we also must testify to the good in us. We bear witness to what we believe about our faith; we affirm what we believe about God, our world and ourselves. The Reformed, Lutheran and Anglican traditions have made it a weekly practice to confess sin and affirm beliefs as an integral part of worship.

As praise is an essential part of loving, human relationships, so apology and forgiveness are necessary for all continuing and deepening relationships. All human relationships are in the repair and renovation business, so it is with our relationship with God. Confession in worship provides us with the rituals to keep our faith honest through changes and stages of life.

- *First breakout* – Discuss why confession is important in human relationships. What is it about “I’m sorry” and “I believe in you/us” that is necessary for healthy relationships? How may that be similar (or different) in our relationship with God.

A) Biblical Foundation

The concept of confession has a broad and varied practice in the Bible. Embedded in the old sacrificial system of worship in the Hebrew Bible is the idea that believers must make amends to God for sinful actions. The Priestly tradition, most easily found in Leviticus, requires a number of sacrifices for various occasions. One example of the “guilt offering” made “when you have sinned and realize your guilt.” In addition to making reparations “you shall bring to the priest, as your guilt offering to the Lord, a ram without blemish from the flock, or its equivalent, for a guilt offering. The priest shall make atonement on your behalf before the Lord and you shall be forgiven...” [Lev. 6:6-7] The Priestly tradition placed a high focus on holiness, so there was a high emphasis on sin being confessed, sacrifice made and forgiveness received. The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) was an annual festival whereby the sins of the whole community for the past year were “placed” on a “scapegoat” which “took” the sins of the community out into the wilderness and “away” from them.

The Book of Psalms contain many confessional-type prayers. “Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment... Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.” [Ps 51:4,11]

“Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered... While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” [Ps 32:1-5]

Other prayers of confession include Psalms 78, 79, 90, 106; Daniel 9:4-19; Nehemiah 1:5-11. An oft-quoted passage from II Chronicles 7:14 says, “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and forgive their sin and heal their land.” Isaiah’s vision and call from God in the Jerusalem Temple included a confession, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Moments later a seraph places a live coal taken from the Temple’s altar on Isaiah’s lip and tells him that his guilt is departed and his sin blotted out. [Isaiah 6:5-7]

In the New Testament it seems evident that the early church had some sort of confession as a part of worship and/or Christian fellowship. James instructs believers to “confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.” [James 5:16] Elsewhere Christians are told that “if we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” [I John 1:9] If confession was not a part *of* worship, it may have been a part *before* worship. The apostle Paul warns the Corinthians to examine themselves before taking communion so that they may not take it in an “unworthy” manner. [I Corinthians 11:27-34]

Confession in the Bible was not restricted to “sin.” To “make a confession” was understood as confessing God’s holy name, acknowledging God’s mighty acts and declaring God’s steadfast mercy. Many of the psalms “confess” allegiance to God by declaring God’s wondrous deeds. While there are no formal “creeds” in the Bible as churches use them today, there are certainly many “affirmations of faith.” These declarations express particular beliefs about God. The Shema is the most known one, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your heart.” [Deuteronomy 6:4-5] Deuteronomy 26:5-9 includes an ancient affirmation about God’s actions during Israel’s beginning.

In the New Testament the simplest confession was to proclaim that “Jesus Christ is Lord.” This phrase comes from an early Christian hymn that Paul quotes in his letter. It declares that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bend... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...” [Philippians 2:10-11] Many of the speeches in Acts are affirmations or declarations of who Jesus Christ was and what he did. Paul declares his own affirmation of faith to the Corinthians, “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...” [I Corinthians 15:3-6]

Don Saliers in *Worship as Theology* also discusses lament as an important part of confession in worship. To speak the truth to God about ourselves and the world is to hold up the pain of the world, its injustice and suffering, and to claim God’s justice and peace for the world. Lament psalms are numerous in the Bible, which wail about tragic human conditions. The Book of Lamentations, written after Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, is five chapters of nothing but lament.

B) Christian Tradition & Practice

Christianity is a religion that takes sin very seriously. We believe that sin, however it is defined, separates us from God. It misses the mark. It tears down the bridge between us. From the

beginning of scripture with the Adam and Eve tale, the faith story of the Bible has been trying to reconcile humanity and God. The Book of Hebrews declares that Jesus was the final sacrifice – that the tradition of sacrifices was ended with Jesus’ death and resurrection. With his death somehow God builds a bridge back with humanity. The cross is the centerpiece of our faith. It is the central symbol of our faith. Without the confession of sin in worship, we lose our bearings. In fact the same passage that declares we will be forgiven, if we confess our sins, also says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” [I John 1:8]

Confession of sin became a regular part of worship in the Roman Catholic Church. It became so important that a separate practice of using confessional booths rose up during the Middle Ages. Protestants removed the practice of confessional booths, but retained the practice of making corporate confessions of faith during worship. Baptists during the revivalist era of the 19th and 20th centuries did not have a “liturgical” approach to worship, but confession was still a vital part of worship. Walking down the “sawdust trail” to confession your sins, to give your life to Jesus or to recommit your life to Christ became standard evangelical practice. During the Camp Meetings of the 19th century, services would start in the afternoon and go till late at night. Baptisms would be held in the morning for those who had confessed their sin and affirmed Jesus as Lord and Savior. If you made it through a week of seven days like that without confessing something and turning your life back over to Jesus, you had some kind of strong will!

Standing and saying a creed or making an affirmation of faith became standard practice in the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopalian and Methodist traditions. The Apostle’s Creed is probably the most frequently used creed in worship.

- *Second breakout* – Discuss a time in your life when you left moved by worship to confess your sin to God (you don’t have to state *what* you confessed). What would help make that movement in worship more meaningful to you? When we say the Apostle’s Creed in worship, what do you think about that?

C) At Sardis

The second movement in worship at Sardis is confession. We offer confessional prayers in a variety of ways. We affirm our beliefs. We share testimonies of faith. Sometimes a drama is used to lay out a reality or issue that will be dealt with later in the service. Sometimes we include lament into our prayers – confessional or pastoral.

During Lent we highlight this the most as we extinguish a tenebrae candle each week, read part of the Passion Story and listen to the choir sing a *Kyrie*.

It is rare during a service that we confess our sin *and* confess our beliefs. Usually we do one or the other in the service.

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3) Intercession – November 7, 2007

Praise and confession are natural responses in Christian worship when we bring awareness of our mortality and of God's wonder to the dialogue of worship. We do this with other Christians, together in community. It is not practiced alone by a shrine. Christian worship is a communal enterprise. This broadens our worship experience. Because we come to be in community with the Church to worship God, Christian worship cannot attend solely to individual needs and wants. We stand in solidarity with our community as a microcosm of the world before Christ. We cannot speak honestly to God about the world without praying for the world. The two are tethered in authentic worship.

The third movement of worship as we practice it at Sardis is intercession. To intercede is to intervene on someone's behalf. It is to be a mediator for another. In worship the acts of intercession are to speak to God on someone else's behalf.

Baptists eschewed the idea of priest or pastor as mediator between God and the people – the idea that you had to go through a priest to get to God. So this idea of being a mediator for others at first may seem antithetical to Baptist belief. However, the doctrine of the priesthood of the believers, that all believers are to be priests to one another, is actually practiced in the movement of intercession. We, as individuals in the congregation, pray to God for others. This is not just the minister's function to be the intercessor or mediator. We are to intercede for one another and especially for those who have no voice. Even when a collective prayer is offered by a minister or other worship leader, it is to be a prayer that invites the participation of us all.

Intercession is the movement that broadens our worship from just love of God to include love of neighbor.

- *First breakout* – What does interceding on behalf of others do to in human relationships? (For example, an adult advocates for a child, a neighbor assists an overwhelmed widow with all her paperwork.) How may interceding for others effect our relationship with God?

A) Biblical Foundation

Interceding on behalf of others is a reoccurring story in the scriptures. Moses, Abraham, Elisha, Jeremiah, Jesus and many others intercede on behalf of others. Intercession with God is a powerful activity. Abraham is able to haggle with God on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, getting God to compromise and decide to relent from destroying the city if Abraham can find 10 righteous persons. Moses intervenes on behalf of the people during the Golden Calf episode. God is furious and plans on wiping out the Israelites. Moses' mediation works, "And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people" [Ex 32:7-14] Job is invited by God to pray for his so-called friends and God will honor his prayer [Job 42:8] Jeremiah is told by God NOT to pray for his people. [Jer 7:16] Which begs the question why? Why does God not want Jeremiah to intercede for them? The implication is that prayer changes God – and God was fed up with the people and didn't want to change in regards to them. An example of intercessory prayer in worship is found in II Chron 6:14-42, where King Solomon prays for the people of his nation, including the aliens living in the

kingdom. The Old Testament prophets tell us to remember the poor and the outcast. Prayer is not be the only thing we do for the poor and outcast, but it is to begin there. In worship it is not enough to lift up lament at the problems in the world, we are to pray for persons touched by the problems of the world.

In the New Testament Jesus is seen as the example for intercession. His prayer in John 17 is a detailed prayer not only for his disciples and followers of the time, but for those of us who have followed those disciples. The Pauline tradition instructs readers to remember one another in prayer. In addition it displays great examples of intercessory prayer. James tells us that we should pray for one another. [James 5:14-16]

The writer of Ephesians prays a beautiful prayer on behalf of his readers, “that you may have power to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” [Eph 3:18-19]

B) Christian Tradition & Practice

In addition to examples of New Testament texts which encourage intercessory prayer, numerous examples exist in Early Church documents. The Didache (AD 100) makes intercessory prayer a part of worship ritual before celebrating communion. Justin Martyr (2nd century) mentions that intercessory prayer was a part of Christian worship, as do the early “Church Fathers” whose work becomes the backbone of Eastern Orthodox liturgy. By the middle ages an intercessory prayer for the local parish, the church leaders, the state leaders, for seasonable weather, for the sick and suffering, for all who face afflictions, became a part of the written, or fixed, liturgy. This has been modified but is still in worship books of liturgical churches, today.

In the non-liturgical traditions, like Baptists, this transformed into expository prayers on behalf of persons in the church and community as well as for national and world concerns. In some churches, people might be invited forward to have other persons pray over them. The laying on of hands and anointing with oil would sometimes accompany this practice.

- *Second breakout* – Discuss a time when intercessory prayer (praying for others) or prayer in general was especially meaningful to you. In what ways might we make prayer at Sardis more meaningful in worship?

C) At Sardis

At Sardis we practice intercessory prayer in several ways. We invite worshipers to share prayer concerns and joys. We follow guided prayer by a pastor. We join together in sharing the “prayers of the people.” We write down prayers for others, collect them and offer them to God by placing them on the communion table. We listen and pray with a spoken prayer by a pastor.

Intercessory prayer is one part of the larger enterprise of prayer in worship. In addition to prayer to God for others and for ourselves, we will want to listen for God in prayer. At Sardis we have used periods of “Quaker” silence and *Lectio Divina* readings to create a space for listening to God.

One of the ideas that came out of my sabbatical, which the deacons have affirmed, is to make the lighting of votive candles a part of our morning prayer sometimes. The candle itself does not *do* anything. It is symbolic for our prayers rising up to God, like the flame and smoke of fire. The continuation of the flame also reminds us to pray continually.

The movement of intercession is potentially a very intimate time in the worship of God. We unload the burdens of our hearts and open our spirits to the loving presence of God. We bring the burdens of the world to God and in remembering them, follow the Christ who remembers all. In the act of interceding on behalf of others, we imitate Christ who intercedes for us.

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4) Proclamation & Response – November 14, 2007

The German word for worship, *Gottesdienst*, means “God’s service to humans and humans’ service to God.” [White, *Christian Worship*] This idea frames worship as a dialogue between humans and God. We’ve mentioned a couple of practices of this belief already. In confessional prayer we speak and God’s forgives. During intercession we pray and we create time to listen for God. In the final two movements of worship as practiced at Sardis, we speak less and look to hear and experience a word from God.

During the Proclamation movement we listen to choral music – choir, solo, or ensemble. The audience is two-fold. Music is sung to the congregation and to God. This proclamation is often a direct quotation or paraphrasing of scripture. It combines both a devotion to God and a word of grace to the congregation.

Center stage in this movement, however, belongs to scripture. Here a word from God is not just read, but hopefully fully expressed with all its dramatic power. Multiple scripture passages where appropriate are encouraged. The sermon is to be an extension of the scripture’s witness.

God’s word to us as revealed in scripture and through the movement of the Holy Spirit demands a response from us. If God says this, then what are we going to do?

The final movement of worship at Sardis is response. There are many ways to express this movement of response. The revivalist tradition of an invitation hymn is one Baptists are most familiar with. The response might also be the best place to have the offering. In liturgical churches communion is a part of the response movement in worship.

The movements of proclamation and response keep us centered in God’s revelation; both in hearing God’s word and responding to it.

- *First breakout* – Why is dialogue so important in human relationships, as contrasted to lecturing? Can that be translated into our relationship with God?

A) Biblical Foundation

From the time of the prophets, the revealed word of God became a centerpiece of God’s revelation to the people of Israel. The prophet passed long God’s message with the phrase, “Thus says the Lord.” These were not to be the prophet’s words, but he or she was to truthfully pass along what God had revealed. The Book of Deuteronomy came to be read at particular times of worship when the Jewish people would gather in Jerusalem for the festivals around the Day of Atonement.

After the Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, Judaism was transformed from a religion of place – the Temple – to a religion of the book – the Hebrew Bible. It was from the experience in exile that Jewish worship moved towards worship centered on God’s word to the people.

By Jesus’ day the people practiced sacrificial worship at the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem as well as a synagogue worship service held in their hometowns. The reading of scripture, followed by a commentary was standard practice in a Jewish synagogue worship service. We saw this Luke 4:16-30. Jesus is a guest in his home synagogue in Nazareth. He is asked to read from the scroll of Isaiah, which he does. Then, he sits down and delivers the commentary on the scripture.

The Book of Acts demonstrates that preaching, based on the evidence and citation of scripture was used by Paul, Peter and Philip. Acts also reveals that response was part of the dialogue with the

proclamation of God's word. When Peter preaches on the day of Pentecost, he is asked, "What should we do?" [Acts 2] Similarly, those who heard John the Baptist say the same thing, "What then shall we do?" [Luke 3:10] Peter tells his congregation, "Repent and be baptized." John baptizes people and then tells them to live ethically and justly.

The apostle Paul tells the Corinthian church that when they gather for worship they should include a time for singing hymns, a scripture lesson and a time for proclamation. He even adds that the service should be conducted "decently and in order." [I Cor. 14:26-39]

B) Christian Theology & Practice

The Church has made proclamation a major focus in Christian worship throughout the centuries. Whether a priest or pastor preached the sermon, or an ensemble or choir sang an anthem, the scriptures have been read and interpreted in worship.

The Protestant Reformation made the proclamation of the Bible the centerpiece to worship. In Baptist congregations, the pulpit is the architectural centerpiece and the sermon dominates the clock during an average hour service. This is where the emphasis is in our worship experience. It should be reiterated here that the emphasis is on hearing a word from God, not from the preacher.

The preacher's task is not to stand in the pulpit and speak for God. God does not need her to be a surrogate voice. There's no need for the pastor to intercede on behalf of God to the congregation. If we envision the line moving... God → Preacher → Congregation ...we put the pastor in a mediator role that Baptists long ago surrendered.

A better linear image would be... God → Congregation & Preacher. Here the preacher stands with the congregation, rather than standing between God and the congregation. Here the preacher listens with the congregation to the word of God, and openly struggles with the biblical text for understanding. The preacher's task is to first ask with the congregation, "What is God saying to us?" Then, it is to grapple openly with the text so that the congregation may join in on this discernment.

We should also recognize the power of music to proclaim as well. Christian hymnody and the rise of choirs both came alive during the Wesleyan movement of the Methodist Church and the camp meeting style of worship from the early 19th century. Of course, choral music has a much longer and richer heritage in the Church, but it was often the work of a monastery or the cathedral church of a community.

In the revivalist branch of Baptist tradition, persons responded to the proclamation of the gospel through an invitation hymn at the end of the worship, whereby persons are invited to profess their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, to join the church membership, or to publicly respond to a call to Christian ministry. In some churches persons may rededicate their lives to Christ, or come forward for a special time of prayer. The offering may also be set aside as a time to respond to God's blessings by returning a portion of our resources to God in the form of tithes and offerings.

Our Baptist ordinances – the Lord's Supper and Baptism – may be the most meaningful rites of our response to God. The offering of the bread and cup are symbolic gestures embodying the loving gifts of God for all of God's people. In the taking and eating of the bread and drinking from the cup, we are likewise symbolically responding to God's grace and to God's call upon our lives. As believing Christians we renew our vows, accepting God's salvation and redemption as well as God's directive to live as redeemed people.

Baptism is the symbolic ritual that acts out our personal response to God's love through our commitment to follow Christ as Lord and Savior. We die to one life and are raised from the water to a new way of living. At Sardis we aim to make each baptism a personal expression of the candidate's response to God's love.

Ordinations, installations, and baby dedications are other ways in which we lift up those who are publicly responding to God's call upon their lives.

- *Second breakout* – When have the times of proclamation and response been especially meaningful to you? What could we do at Sardis to make these more meaningful?

The movements of worship – praise, confession, intercession, proclamation and response – bring us back full circle. We begin by praising God’s mighty acts, humbling confessing our humanity, bringing the concerns of others to God, listening for a word from God and then responding to a new understanding of God’s work in our lives and in the world – from which we can begin the cycle again celebrating and praising this new act of God’s grace to us. Thus worship doesn’t really end, but picks back up between gatherings and scatterings of the local congregation and the Church universal.