

Hebrews 10:19-25 + Our Church Worships + Series: Our Church
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 10th Sunday after Pentecost + 29 July 2018

Sometimes you just need to get rid of the y. A newer member of one of our congregations once asked their pastor, “So what do you guys do for Good Friday? Do you have a service?” The pastor looked at him and said, “We are having a service on Good Friday. That includes you!” Do you ever catch yourself talking like that, using “you” or “your” when it should be “we” or “our”?

This is more than just a discussion on the proper use of pronouns. As we look ahead to the next chapter in our congregation’s history, it’s good for us to ask ourselves: Is Cross of Christ “my” church, “your” church, or “our” church? During the next couple weeks, we’re going to see why it’s so important for us to drop the “y” and see this church, this congregation as “our” church.

It starts with the first reason that “our” church exists. **OUR CHURCH WORSHIPS**. It’s easy to see worship as something “you” do, right? I might join “you” for worship if I can free up my schedule, if I’m available, if I can get up in time, if I feel like it, but what is worship? Is it just coming to church on Sunday mornings to stand up, sit down, sing some hymns, offer some prayers and offerings, hear a sermon, and receive the Lord’s Supper?

Well, yes and no. Is it simply praising God and glorifying his name? Praising God is an important component of our worship, but there are others. How are we able to worship? Why do we gather for worship? What happens when we worship and what results from it? The writer to the Hebrew Christians has much to tell us this morning about why our church worships!

What worship is and why it matters so much starts with a look at the past. ***“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body...”***

When our first parents fell into sin, a huge, impossibly thick wall went up between us and God. That barrier is called God’s holy Law. It blocks anyone who disobeys God’s Law in word, thought, or action even in the slightest way. Sin against God’s holy Law prevents us all from connecting with God as he intended it back when he created our world. Sin against God’s holy Law led to the creation of that impossible barrier, which continues to bar you and me and every sinner from the presence of God in his holiness. Sin can separate us from our God and his love for all eternity in hell.

What makes it worse is that you can’t just decide, “I’m going to worship God today,” and walk through that barrier. You can’t get on your knees and pray so hard that the barrier opens for you. Every human effort fails to open that barrier between us and God, but that way has been opened for us!

Jesus broke through that barrier for us! He lived a perfect life in every thought, every word, every action. He willingly gave up his life and allowed his blood to be poured out for us. His own body and blood opened ***“a new and living way”*** to the true God. Jesus opened that way to connect each of us with God and to keep that way open for us forever.

By doing all that, Jesus is now ***“a great priest over the house of God...”*** Jesus is our great High Priest who loves and cares for each and every one of us. Jesus is deeply concerned about your soul and mine. He calls each of us to repent of our sins, to turn from those sins and live, and then he says, “Here, I poured out my blood for you. Your sins are forgiven. If you don’t believe me, see the scars, the marks of love for you in my hands and feet and side.

As our great High Priest, Jesus steps between you and God. He serves as your Mediator. He speaks on my behalf. While our prayers and pleas deserve to be rejected by God because we sin, Jesus says, “Here’s my life. Here’s my death. You, O God, can listen to them because I have made them your own.” Jesus watches over you. He watches over your coming and going. He gives life to your soul with precious gifts of grace that only he can give.

...And what tremendous gifts our God gives! The writer tells us, ***“...Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”*** Jesus provides his own forgiving food. With his own body and blood, he nourishes your soul. He takes away the guilt of your sins. He strengthens your faith. He assures you that heaven is yours and gives you the strength to keep going. At the Lord’s Table, Jesus feeds your soul with the life-giving, forgiveness-bestowing food of himself, but before that, he had to cleanse your soul.

The writer here speaks of Holy Baptism. He speaks of guilty consciences cleansed of all their guilt, of **“bodies washed with pure water.”** At the font, babies and kids and adults are brought to the Savior’s waiting arms. At the font, the Lord with cleansing waters forgives your sin, transforms hostile sinners like you into sons and daughters, and raises you to new life.

So where does Jesus do all of this? Where do you and I receive these precious gifts from our God? In worship! When you and I gather for worship, God comes to us through Word and Sacrament. He comes to us so we can enjoy his gifts of grace, gifts that are ours because Jesus, our great High Priest, opened the way for us to God and welcomed us into his family. Is it any wonder why every worship service focuses on the gospel—the good news of our Savior Jesus—or why the gospel in Word and Sacraments is not just the guiding principle in the design of our sanctuary, but also the beating heart of our worship lives as a congregation?

Yet we don’t just come together for worship to hear what our God has done through Jesus! When we hear the gospel proclaimed through the lessons and the sermon and the liturgy each week, when we recall the gospel as we see the baptismal font each week, when we touch and taste the gospel as Jesus gives us himself in his Supper, that has a transforming effect on your life. Our worship lives are not just a one-way street. The writer tells us, **“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another...”**

A healthy worship life that focuses on the faithful use of the gospel in Word and Sacraments results in praise and encouragement. Your heart made clean with Christ’s forgiveness fills you with thanksgiving and praise for what he has done for you. You respond with joy and relief, with thanksgiving and gratitude because you have been washed. You have been fed. You have been forgiven. Is it any wonder why the Christian church’s most beautiful songs are often songs of praise that rejoice in God our Savior, songs that glorify his saving name and recount the great things he has done? The praise and prayers of God’s people go hand in hand with the faithful use of the gospel in Word and Sacraments. When we recall what our God has done, we rejoice!

...But our worship isn’t just about praising. If that were the case, worship would soon become all about what “I” am doing or what “I” have done or what “I” will do for God. It becomes “my” worship rather than “our” worship. You see, worship centered on the gospel in Word and Sacraments causes you to think outside of yourself towards the people around you. That’s what the writer means when he says, **“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”**

When we gather for worship, there’s comfort for the grieving, help for the struggling, and encouragement for the straying. Why? Jesus has made us members of his family. He has made us sons and daughters of the king, not slaves, not servants, not distant cousins, but sons and daughters. That impacts who we are. God provides this family for you when you grieve the loss of a loved one or when you struggle with whatever happens to be going on in your life as Satan or your sinful nature or the sinful world do everything they can to tear you away from this beloved family that God has given us.

...But it’s so tempting to hit the snooze button and go back to sleep on Sunday morning, isn’t it? Why bother? In worship, we gather around God’s Word and Sacraments. In worship, we are equipped to serve. In worship, we are encouraged with the gospel so we can go out to the mission fields in which our Lord has placed us. We go out to glorify our God in the unique callings he has given each of us at home, in society, and in the church. That’s why we gather every week until Christ returns or calls us home.

In the end, God wants us to gather for worship until he returns. He wants us to gather around his Word and Baptism and Supper. He wants us to come together as a congregation week in and week out so we can mutually encourage each other, even as he builds and strengthens us with his gospel. Like keeping your car filled with fuel, in worship our God refills our spiritual tanks week after week with the gospel. That’s why we worship!

So what does “your” church do? That’s the wrong question to ask, isn’t it? Let’s drop the y and ask the right question—What does “our church” do? “Our” church gathers to connect people like us to God our Savior through the faithful and regular use of his gospel in Word and Sacraments, enabling us to glorify God with our lives. Day after day, week after week, year after year, we praise our Savior-God, who feeds and equips us to serve him. How? Why? “Our” church worships Christ. Amen.