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 Minneapolis, Minnesota

## Faithful Worship in a Changing World

Good Morning. I am going to ask you to sing with me. Whenever you are in front of a new group of people, once you have sung together, it is a lot less stressful. They should teach that to theologians. On page 14 of the booklet I will teach you the song. Your response is like this, "Within the reign of God" (\*Response: "Within the reign of God"). Good. When you teach a song to a congregation, the first thing you always say, no matter what they sound like, is "good." And then you can say "but."

You sound like a good Lutheran congregation. A lot of power, very little rhythm. I want you to sing, "Within the reign of God" (Response: "Within the reign of God"). Really good. And the response goes, "Blessed are they who will feast in the reign of God" (Response: "Blessed are they who will feast in the reign of God"). Notice that I am teaching this one line at a time. So you don't need to look down at the music. Now we are going to do the whole thing. "Blessed are they who will share the bread of life" (Response: "Blessed are they who will share the bread of life"). "Blessed are they who are least in the reign of God" (Response: "Blessed are they who are least in the reign of God"). "They shall rejoice at the feast of life" (Response: "They shall rejoice at the feast of life"). Try the whole thing. "Come now the feast is spread, in Jesus' name we break the bread. Here shall we all be fed" (Response: "Within the reign of God"). "Come take this holy food, receive the body and the blood. Grace is the mighty blood" (Response: "Within the reign of God"). Great. All: "Blessed are they who are least in the reign of God, blessed are they who will share the bread of life. Blessed are they who are least in the reign of God, they shall rejoice at the feast of life." "Here shall the weary rest, the stranger be a welcome guest. So shall we all be blest" (Response: "Within the reign of God"). "Now at the wedding feast, with gracious tears shall be the least, all bonds shall be released" (Response: "Within the reign of God"). All: "Blessed are

they who will feast in the reign of God, blessed are they who will share the bread of life. Blessed are they who are least in the reign of God, they shall rejoice at the feast of life.” “Sing out the jubilee, with those enslaved, we’re all set free, children of God are we” (Response: “Within the reign of God”). “Go forth as we forget, the ones who bear life’s crushing debt, God’s justice guides us yet” (Response: “Within the reign of God”). All: “Blessed are they who will feast in the reign of God, blessed are they who will share the bread of life. Blessed are they who are least in the reign of God, they shall rejoice at the feast of life.”<sup>1</sup>

Liturgy is modeled in a conversation, a sacred conversation. The better we do the conversation, the better we understand our relationship within worship. I want to thank Lutheran Life for allowing me to be here and Waterloo Seminary, their staff, faculty, and administration for helping make this happen, and Mt. Zion Lutheran congregation for letting us have this wonderful time in this sanctuary. I was back in Toronto in May. It is nice to come back again every six months or so. This last time I was with the Roman Catholics, so I am getting around the ecumenical block. I had a fascinating ride to the airport with a nun about six months ago, and I felt my life was going to end in Toronto. But I am back. I am going to talk this morning about faithful worship in a changing world. This morning will be more theoretical. This afternoon I will look at the pastoral implications of worship practice.

This morning’s lecture topic is one that has been addressed by theologians and Scripture scholars down through history. I can’t possibly encompass all their academic work this morning. In fact I am not an academic at heart. Therefore I am going to be more pastoral in my presentation this morning, and I hope you came prepared for that. My goal, as a musician, is to come to worship with a realization that music in worship is different than almost any other kind of music. If I go to a Jazz, Rock, or Classical music concert, music is the reason I go. If I go to worship, music is there to serve beyond itself, to make the prayer happen. So that is the perspective I bring. Obviously I love music, but I never forget that worship music is at the service of the prayer. It is an art form, but it is different than other art forms. Take, for example, painting. If I am a painter and I make a painting, you may or may not like it, but that doesn’t matter. It is my painting. I went to the Picasso museum last year in Paris with my wife and some of the art I really didn’t care for. However, other works of Picasso I liked. But I am sure Picasso could care less whether or not I liked his work.



By way of contrast, worship music I think is more like a chair. When making a chair you want to be an excellent craftsman. You want to make the most beautiful chair because that is a service to the prayer of the whole community. But you have to be able to sit in it. If you can't sit in it, then it is no good. So music in worship is like a craft. It is art at its highest form, but at the service of the prayer. For me this is a topic that I have been thinking a lot about. Every week I am with people who are involved with leading worship. And every week I am fascinated by how people are so passionate about it, especially in the Lutheran church right now. There is a real sense of the question, "What does it mean to pray as Lutherans in the future?" "Where are we standing on this?"

In 1985 I went to a gathering in Milwaukee. It was for text writers, musicians, composers, liturgists, and theologians. For three days we discussed the question, "What is ritual music?" I was sitting next to Richard Hillert. He was the token Lutheran and I was the token United Church of Christ person there among the Roman Catholics. Richard Hillert said to me, "This is a discussion that wouldn't happen in the Lutheran church today." In 1985 Lutherans didn't ask what ritual music was, because ritual music was whatever was in the Lutheran Book of Worship. Now these days, a dear friend of mine, Mary Preuse, is head of the committee that is choosing the next generation of Lutheran resources. She just left for Chicago for a meeting of this committee this morning. At that meeting there will be twenty Lutheran musicians, sitting around a table, who can't agree on what ritual music is, and she is the chairperson. I don't envy her at all. But now Lutherans are asking, not only what is ritual music, but what is faithful Lutheran worship. The word "crisis" sounds kind of extreme. But I think I like the word "crisis." For the Chinese the word "crisis" comes from two ideographs, one that means danger and one that means opportunity. I think moments of crisis offer you some cautions (beware of this, watch out for this), but they also offer opportunities. That is, when you are in a crisis, you ask fundamental questions that you don't ask when things are going smoothly. I really believe the Holy Spirit moves better in tension than it does in a well oiled worship service. It is in our passionate discussions, as long as we keep talking, that the Spirit can move. So if tension is a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence, I think the Lutheran church today is filled with the Holy Spirit. I don't know about Canada, I have to be asking you about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in



Canada. I am just aware of what is happening in the United States as far as issues around worship and what is faithful worship.

This morning I am going to describe for you what I see faithful worship to be in our world. In doing this I am fully aware of the fact that you all are working in worship leadership positions, and have your own ideas about faithful worship. I am also aware of the limitations of my own vision. So in both sessions today I am going to leave some time for you to ask questions and comment. When I worked full time in parish for 15 years I got my share of unsigned letters and anonymous phone calls. We all do. And it is nice now to give a talk and leave town. I don't mind you coming back at me. Because, like I said, I think the Holy Spirit moves in our passionate discussions and disagreements. So I will leave a little bit of time in the morning and more time at the end of the day for us to discuss this.

In my presentation this morning I will take care to follow a framework. I am not an organized thinker, and without a framework I tend to just ramble. So I want to give you that framework at the start, and then try to follow it. I am going to cover seven things that I think are in faithful Christian worship, seven characteristics that I think we can identify. Obviously this list is not exhaustive. You may think they are not even necessarily all right. That is where the discussion comes in. I should also mention that the characteristics I will be identifying generally follow the model of the four part liturgy: Gathering, Word, Eucharist, Sending. Therefore, we will in some sense, move our way through the liturgy as I address these characteristics.

### **Gathering: Part One**

To start with, why don't you open your books to page 8. I am going to play through this once and then I want you to hum it. Hum along with me. Now sing softly. "Kyrie, Eleison, Kyrie, Eleison, Kyrie, Eleison, Eleison, Eleison" (Response: "Kyrie, Eleison, Kyrie, Eleison, Kyrie, Eleison, Eleison, Eleison").

Worship is a place in which we are called to enter into sacred time and sacred space. As we gather we gather into sacred time and sacred space. This doesn't mean that the time outside of worship is not sacred or the space outside of worship is not a sacred creation. But somehow our awareness of sacred time and sacred space is more focused in worship. When is Thanksgiving Day in Canada? So you have had it already. When I was working full time in a Roman Catholic parish my

favorite holiday was Thanksgiving, which is coming up next week in the United States. It was my favorite because there was only one service, and then I could go eat the rest of the day. It was like Eucharist in reverse, first we ate, and then we told the stories. No one had a watch. There was no sense of time passing. It was sacred time. The only thing on the agenda was to be with each other. So the place became sacred, until someone turned on the television and watched football. Then suddenly we were aware of the outside world. But outside of that it was a sacred space and a sacred time. How often do we wish for that in worship and it doesn't happen? My last parish job had so many masses that we had to clear the parking lot between them. And if the mass went 57 minutes instead of 56, the parking lot wouldn't clear. So we were painfully aware of time passing. My sense is that sacred time and sacred space are necessary for us to make the connection with our God and with each other. So much of the culture (and in each of these dimensions I am going to talk about worship, and then I am going to talk about our culture), either supports or works against that. Because when you talk about faithful worship in changing times, as the times shift, worship has to be also engaged with the culture. American culture, North American culture (I speak of the United States and you will have to tell me if this is true in Canada as well), is increasingly isolated; individuals in their cars, their walkmans. I remember as a child singing around the piano. Then we got a stereo system when I was twelve. We still sang but instead of singing together we were listening to music. I wasn't aware at the time of how that shifted our experience of togetherness.

Worship is like being with the beloved, where time drops away, space drops away, and just becomes misplaced. But so often that is hard to have happen. And when it doesn't happen, I think sometimes we lose a sense of presence. There is a wonderful book by Walter Brueggemann called *Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology*. It has a terrible title but is a good book. He talks about when Christians gather for worship, together with God, we participate in world making. We say, in the reign of God this is the way we will be. This is the way we will treat each other; these are the words we will use, this is the way we will sing. So it isn't just what we sing, it is how we sing. It isn't just when we stand, it is how we relate. So the sense of presence is critical.

I remember doing a workshop at a church in Hawaii where the



pastors were very proud of their brand new church. They had put in these wonderful pews. A friend of mine attended that workshop and was sitting about twelve rows back. At one point he just jumped up and shouted, "There is no energy in this space." He was talking about the fact that the congregation never saw each other. When people look at each other, it changes the whole experience of how we are engaged in worship. I think sacred space isn't just about being quiet in church. It isn't about solemnity, although it may be solemnity. It is more about being really "present" in those sacred moments. And it is interesting that in human life it is the key fundamental moments that highlight this sense of "presence." We see this in the moment of birth. My wife and I remember that both our children were born with a midwife. There were three of us in the room, and then suddenly there were four of us in the room. And there was a sense of being absolutely fixated in this place and this time. The same kind of thing occurred at the bed of my father when he was dying. Everything drops away. The same thing happened when I was with my wife when we were falling in love. What we celebrate on Sunday is our death and resurrection in Jesus. This is every bit as important as those moments I have just mentioned. It should have that same powerful sense of being connected, of being present. That is where worship begins, with a sense of presence and a sense of connectedness.

For those of us in the United States, who live so much of our life mindlessly (driving in ways that create road rage, and listening to music and not instead to each other), September 11, 2001 was one of those breakthrough moments, like birth or death. On that day the image that struck me watching my television, was papers fluttering across the East River. These papers which the day before had been so important to people, had suddenly dropped away and became meaningless. In a parallel fashion it struck me that worship is something that also reorients priorities. It says, this is what is important. And the first step to that reorientation is borne by those of us in leadership positions. How do we create that sense of presence through the way we lead?

The Kyrie that I sang earlier we translate in English as, "Lord, have mercy." And for most of us I think "Lord, have mercy" has a penitential dimension. In the Roman Catholic church it is even more obvious; "O God, I've sinned so much since last week, Lord, have mercy, O God, I am going to sin even more before next week, Christ, have mercy." A friend of mine, a black Jesuit priest from Cleveland,



once said to me, “If you want to understand Kyrie Eleison, talk to an elderly black woman in Mississippi, and say Mary, you just won the lottery. Her response will be, ‘Lord, have mercy,’ which means something very different than how many understand that phrase.” And for the Greek Orthodox church it has that same different meaning. It was a way of creating sacred presence. And it is a very open-ended form.

Lutherans are good at hymns, aren't they? Hymns are very time bound; three, four, or five verses. You have a sense of time. When singing a hymn people notice how many verses there are. And if there are, for example, fourteen verses, they often wonder if all verses have to be sung. You have a real sense of time. By way of contrast, a Kyrie might be sung as long as fourteen verses, but it moves you into that sacred time and sacred space. Originally the Kyrie was that way. It meant in my moment of greatest joy and in my moment of greatest sorrow, in all the greatest and deepest moments of my life I invoke God's presence, and place myself within the circle of the sacred space and time. Kyrie is sort of emblematic for me of sacred space and time.

### **Gathering: Part Two**

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (Response: “And also with you”). Worship is about invitation and response. We invite people into an experience of prayer and they respond, hopefully, if they are well trained enough. It is a radical invitation. It is not like inviting someone over for tea. It is inviting people into a life-changing, life-long encounter. Christianity, because it is incarnational, is relational. God chose to become one like us. Which means that every relationship is changed forever because of that. And our worship is relational. We believe that somehow in our conversations with each other and with God, the risen Christ is present in our midst. Going back to professor Brueggemann again, this means that the way we do conversation is really important. It is not a casual thing. It is a very important thing.

For those of us who work in music, there is a real strong sense of the presence of the performer-audience model in our culture. That is, music is something the experts do, and non-experts listen to music. Unlike the Roman Catholics, I think Lutherans have been lucky. You have not had the pervasive sense that the congregation is a passive listening group. When I lead workshops and concerts with Roman

Catholics, so often I see this body gesture which says, "just try and make me sing." At least Lutherans understand the purpose of singing. However, I am not certain musical leaders in the Lutheran churches are convinced totally of the importance, not just of singing, but of singing with each other. Do you know John Bell from the Iona community? Have you heard him ever? I heard him once say to a group of church musicians, "The greatest obstacle to congregational singing are choir directors and organists." That was hard to listen to; to hear that sometimes we are not helping the invitation-response happen. I think that this failure happens when a performer role is adopted. The performer operates from the position of power. The performer has the microphone. Therefore the performer can sing louder than all of the audience put together and with little or no effort. The microphone is a symbol, isn't it? It is as much a symbol as the book was in an oral culture. In an oral culture the person who had the book had all the power. In the electronic culture the person who has the microphone has all the power. Just think of the hand-held microphone. I remember a friend of mine who had just started working in a parish. I asked him, "What is the music group like?" He said, "There are six singers in the group, and they all hold the microphone in one hand and the cord in the other". And that is all he had to say. I can picture this group. I said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "Well, next week we are letting go of the cord." It is a process.

One thing about worship, worship is more about formation than it is about training. You know what I mean. Training has an end to it, worship is life long. It forms us. I love the way Roman Catholics talk about formation, because it forms you inside and out. I heard someone describe it this way, worship forms us the way water forms a rock. Now this is a really hard image for those of us who live in a culture where we want things to happen now. It is a very long, patient process. So you work with each other in that process. So you "invite," over and over and over again. And over time you develop these deep relationships that will last through time.

The minister, unlike the performer, operates from a position of vulnerability. It is my vulnerability that allows me to invite you. Think of the first time someone says, "I love you" to someone else. You have a friendship, it has deepened and you want it to go to the next level. But neither one of you has used the "I" word yet. However, until you use it, the relationship is not going to shift. But the first person to use it risks



everything; risks rejection, risks being laughed at. But it is that vulnerability that enables that relationship to move forward. The same for the minister. So if I invite you in with the words, “Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life,” this is the moment of ultimate vulnerability. This vulnerability exists because you, the congregation, don’t have to sing. See how different that is with everyone facing the same direction and singing. A performer can do it. When I came as a Lutheran into the Roman Catholic church I had never sung before the congregation. I was vulnerable, and the priest said, “You’ve got to sing the verses of the Psalm and bring the congregation in.” I was terrified. So I sang (holding the microphone): “Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.” No risk. If you don’t come in, I do just fine. But worship is about profound radical invitation.

We think of Jesus as the greatest success story of all time. But in doing so we often forget all those places in the Gospel where he would say, “Come and follow me,” and individuals like the rich young man would say, “No, I don’t think so.” If you read the Gospels closely, there aren’t many people at the cross. More people said “no” to him than “yes.” But he constantly invited. It was a radical invitation. It wasn’t an easy, “Come and follow me; you are only going to have to work thirty hours a week, and you will get holidays off.” The thing about ministry is that it is radical and the scary thing is two things can happen. One is that people will say “no.” What is even scarier is if they say “yes.” Because then the whole relationship shifts. But that is what Christian community is about. That is what worship is called to do: radical invitation demanding a radical response.

In Minnesota, when you meet people, they shake your hand and they say, “How are you?” They really don’t want to know how you are. And if you start to tell them, their eyes glaze over. The first time I went to Hawaii someone came up to me, gave me a hug, put their face right next to mine, and said, “Aloha.” This was someone I had never met before, and this is something I am not used to. A hug is one thing, but having them put their face right next to mine was more than I really wanted to accept. That was, until they explained it to me. The syllable “ha” is an important syllable for their language, it means the breath. In Hebrew it would be “ruach,” the spirit. And for them, “Aloha” means I share with you the breath of life. Moreover, the traditional way is not with your faces next to each other, but with your noses touching, as the



breath passes between the two people. Interestingly, the word they have for the people from the mainland is “Haole,” meaning without breath. Literally, it means a dead person; someone who shakes hands and doesn’t get close. This was a profound experience for me, an experience of a radical sign of how invitation and response happens. It changes you when you greet each other that way. It is profound. I am not suggesting that you do that next Sunday, although it wouldn’t be a bad idea. But think about how radical invitation happens.

I once went to a church in Washington in the District of Columbia. It was in one of the poorer sections of Washington, D.C., a really rough area. There were about four hundred people in the congregation, and only five of us were white; my wife and I, my daughter, and two students from Georgetown University. The pastor came out at the beginning of the service and said, “Do we have any guests here today?” And then he said, “Let’s make them feel welcome.” Whereupon four hundred people got up, and every single one of them greeted every one of us. It took about twenty minutes. Then they sat down and began the service. This was radical invitation. It is not going to appeal to everybody, and I think that is what is important. When your church practices radical invitation, it is not necessarily going to be big. But it is going to attract people who want to be engaged. I think the future of churches might break into two groups: very, very large churches that allow people to be marginally involved, and small churches that demand radical invitation and response.

### **Word: Part One**

Faithful worship is a place where the Word is proclaimed with power, passion, and conviction. I am using the word “proclaimed” rather than read. I think there is a huge difference between reading the Word and proclaiming the Word. Proclaiming the Word is something you can speak because you have it inside you. A friend of mine is an anthropologist. She told me a wonderful story. We were having dinner with her and her husband, and she talked about when the missionaries came to meet the Hmong people of southeast Asia, on the border of Laos and Cambodia. The Hmong people didn’t have a written language. They told the missionaries wonderful stories of who they were and where they were from. And the missionaries said, “You know, it is too bad you don’t have a written language because you could write these stories down and preserve them from generation to generation.” The Hmong

people then explained that they used to have books, but one day while they were cooking, the books fell in the rice and were eaten. The missionaries weren't sure they heard this correctly, so they said, "It is too bad you ate your books." But the Hmong people said, "No, we have eaten the words and the words are inside us now so we can help you." The implication here was that you couldn't tell someone else the story until you had eaten the words. Remember the passage where Ezekiel is eating the scroll? We can learn a lot from other cultures about what it means to have the Word inside you.

If you ask a Roman Catholic to recite the Ninety-first Psalm, you may just get a blank look. But if you ask that person to sing "On Eagle's Wings," many Catholics can sing three verses from memory. Music is a profoundly important way of remembering. Proclaiming the Word begins with remembering the story. The Word is more about story than it is about lesson. It is more about poetry than it is about creed. Every advertiser knows this. It is in the stories that we remember the really important things. That is why we do the stories year after year. When you think about this, no one is going to be surprised when Jesus is born in a manger and the shepherds and angels show up. We have heard this story countless times. Why then do we tell it year after year? We don't retell it to get the facts down, because every one of us knows the facts, or at least we know what the story says. We tell it because this is the most important story. Similarly, this Thanksgiving I am going to Ireland with my wife and they don't have Thanksgiving in Ireland. So I am going to miss it for the first time in thirty-five years. Nevertheless, at that time every year, my younger brothers and sisters traditionally tell stories about me to my kids; embarrassing stories. And my kids know these stories from memory. They can finish them. Why do we tell the family stories over and over again? If I wrote them down in a book my kids would read it once and put it on the shelf. We do it over and over again because somehow in telling the story they see that I was like them once, and someday they will be like me, and they connect with my brothers and sisters in the stories.

Liturgy is like that. When someone gets up and "reads" the page, what doesn't happen is what I have been talking about. There is something about the power of saying, this story is so important, I am going to know it so when I proclaim it to you I can look at you. If you don't have it memorized at least have it so you are looking out and saying, this is not just the story here, it is also our story. The proclamation



of the Word means the living of it, profoundly. I will show you the difference. Sing with me. "Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life" (Response: "Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life"). "God is my shepherd, So nothing shall I want, I rest in the meadows of faithfulness and love. I walk by the quiet waters of peace" (Response: "Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life"). "Though I should wander the valley of death, I fear no evil for you are at my side, your rod and your staff my comfort and my hope" (Response: "Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life").

As someone who grew up in the Norwegian Lutheran church in Minnesota, it is painful for me to have to look at people when I sing to them. I thought at first it was about making a mistake. However, I have come to realize that there is incredible vulnerability in singing to somebody else. This is especially so if what you are singing is the foundational statements of your faith, belief, hopes, and fears. You see what I mean? The anxiety is rooted in both the vulnerability, and the fact that the story is worth risking that for. Somehow we need to realize that the stories are so important that we take such careful commitment and risk; that we invoke the same commitment and risk in others. In our culture, not only is singing declining, but because singing declines the memory of songs decline. A friend of mine from Ghana said there is no culture in the world that has more music going on in it than North America; music in restaurants, music in elevators, music in restrooms, music in cars, music everywhere. But he said, "I have never seen a culture where everyone sings less than in North America." We listen to music, we don't sing it. This is a difference that is important to note.

There was a memorial service for Jerry Garcia (a member of the Grateful Dead musical group) in Central Park, New York City. Forty thousand people were singing Grateful Dead songs. They had them memorized. They knew these songs. They sang these for about an hour. And then somebody felt the need to sing something more spiritual. So after some hesitation the crowd breaks into "Amazing Grace." Forty thousand people sang the first verse of "Amazing Grace." When they get to the end of the verse there was a long pause, and then they sang the first verse again. Then they sang the first verse again. They sang it nine times. That was their vocabulary of faith. What songs do you know from memory? It is the songs you know from memory that shape



your faith. What songs do we as music leaders teach our congregations from memory? I get sick of music for worship long before my congregation does. And I have had to learn that they need to have these things in their bones. This is also why I am so strong a proponent of blended worship. All the people need to hear all the songs. If they grow up with all the songs, then in the moments of crisis, like after September 11, 2001, what do they sing? You need to have a vocabulary of faith in your bones, not just on the page. It doesn't really live in you until you have memorized it.

My Ghana friend also said, "In my country everybody is a musician. Everybody sings, everybody plays, everyone knows a bunch of songs." I said, "Don't you have special people who you hold up as the artists?" He said, "Yes, the artists are the people you go to when your life is falling apart, when your marriage is breaking up, when you forget who you are, when you are depressed." And I thought, when I think of the artists I know, if I were depressed would I go to any one of them for advice? And he continued, "The artists in my community are the ones who know the great stories, the stories of the people's history, the stories of the people's relationships, and the vision of the people. They sing to you the great stories, and remember you back into the community." Walter Brueggemann says the greatest crisis facing the American church is the loss of its endeavor. We don't know who we are, where we come from, our great traditions, and our great stories. The job of music leaders is to help the people remember who and whose they are through the use of music and poetry and story, in a way that the people own it, not just hear it.

## **Word: Part Two**

It is not enough to proclaim the Word, the Word is about on-going conversion. This is why the lectionary is so important. You go to a football game in the United States and you may see someone holding up a sign with the words of John 3:16 written on it. I would like to go to a football game and also see a sign on which are written the words of Mark 8:34: "If you want to be my follower, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me." No one is going to hold that up in a football game. But they are both the Gospel. That is the two-edged sword of the Gospel. God loves us deeply and dearly, and Christ came and gave his life for us. That is one half. The other half is Christ calls us to take up our cross and follow. That is what worship is. Worship is that two-

edged sword. Worship should say to those who come, "Welcome, we are glad you are here. We want you to be part of our community. We love you and we want you to feel welcome. We love you so much we have a cross made up just for you." That is what worship is about. Worship is about an invitation into a life-changing experience.

We do the first part better than the second part. I was giving a talk in Orlando, Florida. I remember saying very distinctly that worship is "not" a spiritual gas station. It is not a place you go to get tanked up for next week. The next week I remember they put on their web site, "Marty Haugen says, 'Worship is a spiritual gas station.'" You wouldn't believe the e-mails I got. I think it is so typical in our culture. Most of the events we go to in public, whether it is a football game or a concert, we go to be fed, we go to receive something. But in worship we go to give. That is something we sometimes forget. We think we are providing a commodity just in the same way we are providing anything else. Worship is not about providing a commodity. Worship is about inviting people into a life-changing experience, which is radically different. Now it doesn't mean we are not hospitable. We are welcoming, loving, and caring, as we help people make a decision to commit to a real life-changing experience. And that is the trouble. That is the hard part about it. So much of our culture, and I am thinking especially of the United States, is about what can I get out of this, what is in this for me? And this attitude often spills over into worship. I was so struck after September 11, 2001, hearing "God Bless America" sung. The problem I have is this. It is sort of like a mandate saying, "OK God, this is what we want you to do." But conversion is about giving up control, saying, "What should I do?" So I prefer the phrase, "In God we Trust," which says to me, "How do we turn?" I am so struck by the idea that somehow, in radical transformative moments we give up control. I think for many of us in the United States we realize that our military power and our economic power could be blown away in a second. Many now recognize that God is our refuge. However, I am afraid that we might forget that now when I read the papers the last few days. This is a message I think we need to remember. We are dependent upon God. People on the margins understand this all the time. This is embodied in liturgical song in the following way. Sing with me.

"Turn my heart, O God, turn my heart, O God, take my pain and brokenness, shape my life for you, come and turn my heart, O God" (Response: "Turn my heart, O God, turn my heart, O God, take my



pain and brokenness, shape my life for you, come and turn my heart, O God”). One more time: (Response: “Turn my heart, O God, turn my heart, O God, take my pain and brokenness, shape my life for you, come and turn my heart, O God”). “Oh, let your Spirit come, and cleanse my in-most heart” (Response: “Come and turn my heart, O God”). “Give back to me the joy, of walking in your way” (Response: “Come and turn my heart, O God”). “Oh, fill me with your song, that I might sing your praise” (Response: “Come and turn my heart, O God, turn my heart, O God, turn my heart, O God, take my pain and brokenness, shape my life for you, come and turn my heart, O God”). “From all that leads to death, to seek the way of life” (Response: “Come and turn my heart, O God”). “From all that leads to sin, to holiness and truth” (Response: “Come and turn my heart, O God”). “From all deceit in lies, to seek the way of truth” (Response: “Come and turn my heart, O God”). “Come and move my heart” (Response: “Come and turn my heart, O God. Turn my heart, O God, take my pain and brokenness, shape my life for you, come and turn my heart, O God”).

So when the Word is proclaimed with power it is a call to on-going conversion. I remember going home from work late one night. I got on the bus. Nobody was on the bus but me and the driver. I sat on the front seat and after about three blocks he turns around and said, “Have you been born again?” I thought, “Oh, no.” And then I became aware that for me conversion is not a one time thing.

When I say yes to the invitation I get taken to where I don’t want to go, like Peter being tied up. And if I say yes to it then my life changes, and then another invitation comes. It is a constant invitation. Have you heard of the poem “Footprints”? I heard a Bible study at Holden Village on “drag marks.” It was about cattle in Texas that wander off and the only way they can get the cattle to come back is with mules. The mules are trained to come back to the barn. The mule will go back to the barn no matter what. So they just tie a mule to the cow and the mule will drag the cow back to the barn. The point is, our relationship with God, and I can speak with personal experience, is more that God will take us, but it is almost always where we don’t want to go. And when we open ourselves to the Gospel, we will be called again and again and again. This is why community worship is so important, because the community holds each other up in this call. This is so important because it is almost too much to do by yourself, to respond over and over again.

So what I am saying here in “Word: part two” is that when we



break open the Word in our preaching and our singing it is always to call people to an ever deeper faith. A pastor from Washington state said that he and his brother were Lutheran pastors and they would get together and talk about what were the ten sermons that if they preached them they would get fired. And I think that this is one of our callings, to always preach the hard word. The “easy” word is what our culture preaches, the hard word is what the Christian is called to preach. For me as a musician, it means letting go of all my comfort. I am basically a keyboard player. But I let go of the keyboard to sing a-capella. I stand up in front when I don’t want to. It is doing those uncomfortable things to call people out of their comfort zones.

### **Eucharist**

Turning to the fifth element of faithful worship, I want to consider the Meal. However, I don’t mean here simply the Meal per se, but rather the whole matter of nourishment. Faithful worship nourishes us with living tradition in creative tension with culture. When I started studying liturgy I thought that in the Last Supper, between the bread and the wine, Jesus gave the disciples the book and said, “This is how you do it.” The way Christians have prayed has always been a struggle. There has always been a concern for how we can pray faithfully in this time and this place. That is why the title, “Faithful Worship in Changing Times” for this lecture is so critical. Faithful worship today is not the same as it was twenty-five years ago. Changes in worship are important, but there is also a danger in this. To see the danger let me use an analogy.

Think of a river. The river is called tradition and it goes back to the source. The source of the river is Jesus and his Jewish faith. Right from the very beginning the river of this faith was fed by cultural tributaries. First, there was the Greek culture, Roman culture, and European culture. Then later on there was the American, Asian, African, and Latin American culture. All these cultures have come together to feed this river of tradition. Sometimes this river splits. There is, for example, the Roman Catholic stream, the Lutheran stream, and the Methodist stream. But we are all in the same river valley, hopefully. Some of us wander off, but we are trying to stay in the same river valley, going in the same direction. Our source is Jesus, our end is God. We are on the way to the reign of God, together, all these streams. The danger is if you think your stream is the whole river, which we can do.

A lot of us in all denominations tend to think that our stream is the river. But we are one stream, just one of the tributaries that come in. We don't want, like Lewis and Clark exploring the Missouri river, to get mixed up every now and then and go up one of the tributaries and think that is "the" river. Sometimes we do that too. And this happens especially when the culture changes dramatically. You see, we swim in a culture the way fish swim in a stream. The fish aren't aware of the water. Sometimes we are not even aware of the culture. That is why some churches in the United States look so American and so un-Christian. We mistake one for the other. Sometimes the culture supports us, sometimes the culture runs contrary. Our job is to live inside the tradition and at the same time welcome the culture. If we love the tradition deeply, then we will welcome the culture in ways that are needed. If we don't love and know the tradition, we can mistake the culture. We can mistake the small tributary for the river.

My publisher has a new person who sends out the music for my workshops. Not long ago I did a whole new communion setting called "Beneath the Tree of Life." I said please send this for my use at this lecture because there are a lot of Lutherans I want to introduce to this communion setting. Unfortunately, the communion setting "A Tree of Life," which I wrote twenty years ago, was sent instead. So I am going to teach you a piece from my "A Tree of Life" communion setting. The nice thing about this is that it is a piece of ritual music, so you will know the tune, a Lutheran tune.

"Come, let us bring the warm and fragrant bread" (Response: "Come, let us bring the warm and fragrant bread"). "Broken here so all God's people might be fed" (Response: "Broken here so all God's people might be fed"). "Come, let us bring the sweet abundant wine" (Response: "Come, let us bring the sweet abundant wine"). "In this meal we taste the joy of grace divine" (Response: "In this meal we taste the joy of grace divine"). "The warm and fragrant bread broken here so all God's people might be fed." Now we will do this again as a canon.

That is ritual music like "Happy Birthday." "Happy Birthday" is a piece of music that you wouldn't sing unless it was somebody's birthday. Have you ever been out singing with friends and someone says, "Let's sing Happy Birthday, I love that song"? One thing I think that Lutherans can teach Roman Catholics is that to sing a hymn is a ritual act. When you sing a hymn that is enough. You don't have to do anything else. In fact if you try and do something else while you are singing a hymn, you



don't do the action well and you don't sing the hymn well. Lutherans know how to stand still and sing a hymn. That is no small thing. Roman Catholics haven't fully figured that out yet, but they are working on it. On the other hand, what Roman Catholics can teach Lutherans is that when you are going to do movement, maybe a hymn isn't what you want to do. So maybe a piece like I just sang is good ritual music because it allows the ritual to take ownership and the music to support it. Oral cultures do this all the time. Now, if you are not bringing in warm and fragrant bread, and sweet abundant wine, this raises questions about the relation of ritual and music. Good ritual music demands good ritual. Good ritual music can't fix bad ritual. In fact, if you are not doing good collaborative prayer between the different ministries, and if you are not using good symbols and signs, the better the music, the worse the situation. The music ends up trying to fix bad ritual prayer, and it ends up taking the place of prayer. I think we have all been in worship services where the music was wonderful and the prayer was awful. Good ritual music demands good ritual. And that's part of the tradition. We do everything carefully.

A friend of mine who wrote "On Eagle's Wings" said a funny thing to me the other day. He said, "I miss the good old days." To which I replied, "When was that?" He said, "The fourth century." You have to go a long way back to find the roots of these rituals. When we renew our worship we have to ask ourselves, what was this all about at its heart, at its beginning? And then we have to ask how we can make it alive for our people now? In doing this we need to heed what the great theologian Gene Walsh calls the difference between big "T" and little "t" tradition. Big "T" tradition is the living faith of dead people. Tradition with a small "t" is the dead faith of living people. And he said you have to discern the difference. I think when we look at change in our worship forms and styles, we have to think very carefully. We can't abandon Tradition except at our own peril. Here is Tradition and here is culture. They live in creative tension. If we abandon culture and say culture has nothing to offer us, we will just do tradition, the way it has always been done. Then we become a museum piece. If we say Tradition doesn't mean anything to our congregation (they didn't grow up Lutheran, they don't know what it is, we will throw that out and just do culture), then we are only as valid as the next shift. And instead of doing Mark 8:34 we will just do John 3:16 all the time. It is easier for me to appreciate that tension now that I am not full time in a parish. But I think that tension is really important.

**Sending: Part One**

Good worship always focuses on the margins. Churches “maintain” at the center and they grow at the margins. What I mean is that the people on the marginal edges teach us who we are and whose we are. It is so easy for those of us in parish music programs to get caught up in what we are doing and forget that our ministry is about the person who walks in the door for the first time. Something about the seeker churches that I appreciate is they do understand that you are there to reach the person who is coming in for the first time. And we are to do the same thing. The difference is, if I am going to welcome somebody, I don’t say I’ll do whatever I need to do or whatever you want to make you feel welcome. A friend of mine was applying for a job as the music director at a cathedral in Los Angeles. A cardinal was interviewing him and wanted him to take the job, and asked him, “What do you need to take the job? What perks do you want me to give you so you will take it?” And my friend said, “I want to be home every night for dinner.” The cardinal was expecting him to say, “Two weeks’ vacation” or something like that, so the cardinal asked, “What do you mean?” And my friend said, “I believe the eucharistic table is formed by how I do evening dinner with my family. We have a prayer ritual every night with our family, and when company comes we do the same ritual. We invite the people in, we explain the ritual, and then invite them to be a part of it. For some of them it is different, they are not used to it. But we welcome them into our tradition.” I think that if we do our tradition well enough, if we do it with passion, love, and faithfulness, that is what we welcome people into. We don’t say we abandon it just to make you feel welcome. Rather, we say we want you to appreciate what we have. Now the first time you do the ritual at dinner at my friend’s house you may not get the whole thing. It may not resonate with you. But over time you grow into it. I grew up for a long time, as a four, five, and six year old, not having a clue about what was happening on Sunday morning. It took me a long time to grow into that tradition.

So, we focus on those who are the most vulnerable, but we welcome them into our tradition. In this regard I especially think of a friend of mine who is a composer in east London, England. They have a church there with all kinds of homeless people around them. For a long time the church’s council argued about what they could do for the homeless



people. Finally somebody said, "Let's go talk to the homeless people." So they went out and found people living on the streets and said, "What can we do for you?" And they said, "Many times we want to go to a shopping mall, we want to go visit our family, we want to apply for a job, we just want to walk in a nice part of town, but we don't feel like we look presentable. We would like to be able to take a shower and have clean clothes." So the church put in four shower stalls in the basement with changing rooms, and then they stocked it with free clothes. Then they went out and put flyers up all over their part of the city and they went out and found the homeless people. They said to them, "We are going to have a dedication service for you, and the end of the service we are going to have a big feast of food for you, come." And they invited the whole parish. So the parish was there and the homeless people came, and they had a big feast. So my friend wrote a song for that experience. And in that experience the congregation discovered what their ministry was by looking at the people in the margins.

Similarly, we do the music of other cultures in worship, but not primarily because we are doing a good thing for them. Rather, we do this music because a lot of those cultures can teach us about the foundational elements regarding who we are as church. Do many of you know the song, "Freedom Is Coming"? Some of you know it. It is from South Africa. It was written during the time of apartheid. It is one of the most powerful songs of Christian freedom that I have ever heard. It came out of people who understood the value of freedom, because they lived on the margin. It is the people on the margins that help us to understand who we are. It has again and again been proven to me that we do the music of other cultures, not for them but more for us. We need to hear that, because those people have a sense of what it means to be close to the Gospel.

### **Sending: Part Two**

Good worship connects our life of faith with the life of the whole creation; all the world, all the joy and all the pain, the faith and the doubt. So the sense of presence that we have here expands outward, if we do presence really well in worship. Worship has two dimensions. In the Roman Catholic document, "The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy" from Vatican II (I always quote these documents when they agree with what I think), it says: "Worship is the source and the summit of our life as Christians." The source in this sense is the first place that

forms us. Worship together with the family is the most important influence in shaping who we are. It is much more so than schools and catechisms, because worship shapes us like a family shapes us, and those are the lessons that you learn the deepest. Worship is also the summit. It is what we look for. So worship is both formative and expressive. When we do worship really well we learn that not just this place is sacred. We then take that sense of sacred presence out into the world, and eventually we start to learn about treasuring the whole environment. We see the covenant with the whole creation. There is a Roman Catholic church near my house. They were racing to finish their new building. Their church was like the shape of the church here, semicircular, but about three times as large. And their whole back wall would be glass doors. They finished their church building on Tuesday of Holy Week. They said, "Great, we can have holy Thursday, Good Friday, holy Saturday, the vigil, Sunday, all of it at the church." But after thinking about it they decided not to. Instead, they put the altar into the vestibule up against the doors, and the whole congregation packed into the gathering space and looked through the glass doors into the empty church for all of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. At the Easter vigil night they opened the doors for the first time. Then they walked past the paschal candle and font into the church, singing "Alleluia" and lighting an individual candle. The pastor said everyone was weeping in the whole church. I'm talking about creating a sense of sacred space and sacred time for people. People who were there who I meet six years later tell me about that event. When you do things carefully, people remember it, and you start to create a sense of the big story in your story. They understood baptism, death, and resurrection in a new light, in a powerful way, because they walked into it. It was a whole body experience. What happens when we expand our sense of presence and our sense of invitation is that it starts to involve us and engage us in much deeper ways.

Let's stand and sing one more piece and then I will take any comments or questions. On page 10 there is a hymn. I will sing the first verse because I am not sure you all know it. "Let us build a house where love can dwell, and all can safely live, a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive, built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace, here is one we claim, the faith of Jesus, all around us, all around us, all around and in this place" (Response of All: "Let us a build a house, where prophets speak, and



words are strong and true. Where all God's children dare to speak to dream God's reign anew. Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God's grace; here as one we claim the faith of Jesus; all are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place"). (Response of the Women: "Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine, and wheat; a banquet hall on holy ground, where peace and justice meet. Here the love of God, through Jesus, is revealed in time and space, as we share in Christ the feast that frees us; all are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.") Everyone sing the last verse. (Response of All: "Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word. Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace. Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: all are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.")

Thank you.

## Note

- <sup>1</sup> Editor's note: Throughout this lecture the indication of "Response:" within a bracket refers to the collective sung or spoken response of the group to Marty Haugen. "The Lord is with you" (Response: "And also with you").