

Summer Sermon Series
WORSHIP THE LORD! An Inside Look At How & Why We Worship
Week 6: PRAYERS & PRAISE

Pray, Praise and Give Thanks!

Today our summer sermon series ‘Worship the Lord’ takes an inside look at how and why we use prayer, psalms, and hymns in our worship. We listen to the words of the Apostle Paul in **Ephesians 5:19-20**

¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear Friends in Christ,

We’ve come a long way! We have come a long way from the days of TLH, The Lutheran Hymnal. This hymnal was THE hymnal used in our churches from 1941 until 1993. For 52 years, this wonderful book guided us through our Sunday worship, Sunday after Sunday, year after year. It’s all we had...but then again, it’s all we needed. There was the page 5 Common Service and the page 15 Communion Service, Matins & Vespers (which were seldom used), creeds, prayers, psalms, and of course over 660 of the best hymns in all of Lutheranism.

Along about the 1950's, the page 5 and page 15 services became so well known, most regular worshipers didn’t even need to open the book to participate. I can remember knowing the page 5 service and reciting the page 5 service long before I could even read the page 5 service. I didn’t know what “*meet, right, and salutary*” meant, but I knew that it was “*truly meet, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God.*”

Most people knew the congregational parts so well, it wasn’t necessary to open up the hymnal and follow along. And most people knew when to stand and when to sit so the worship leader didn’t have to give hand signals, everyone just stood up at the right time and everyone sat down at the right time. It was this way when I entered the ministry in the 80's. And it continued this way (I helped perpetuate it) in the first two parishes I served.

One Sunday, one of the unchurched people in town that my wife had befriended, responded to her invitation and showed up for church. She was absolutely amazed at the congregation standing up in unison without any cues, sitting down in unison without any instruction, reciting phrases and singing responses without so much as an open hymnal. It must have seemed to her like a well-rehearsed rite of a secret society. After the service she asked, “Does anyone ever convert to Lutheranism, or do you just have to be born Lutheran? And why

do you stand up to pray and sit down to sing? Shouldn't it be the other way around...stand up to sing and sit down or kneel to pray?"

Now, I must admit, Lutherans MAY BE the only people who can remain seated while singing all four stanzas of *Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus* and not think twice about it. But there are reasons and traditions behind many of our worship customs, some dating back to the very early Christian church.

In the past five weeks, we have noted many of the ways in which God comes to you and blesses you in worship. Today we are going to talk about your response to God in worship: prayer, psalms, and hymns.

Let's begin with the topic of prayer in worship. Today's service is typical. There is a prayer towards the beginning of the service on page 2. There is the big Prayer of the Church on page 4, following the gathering of the offerings. This prayer is generally followed by the Lord's Prayer as it is today on page 5. Finally, right before the Benediction on page 5, at the end of the service, there's yet another prayer.

When prayers are prayed in the worship service, we call this 'corporate prayer.' It is prayer that the body of believers, the "corpus" of believers, is praying together. Corporate prayer is as old as the Christian church. There is an example already in the fourth chapter of Acts, only a few weeks following the birthday of the Christian church on Pentecost.

Prayers are certainly appropriate for worship services because prayer is an act of worship. Prayer is also a privilege, a privilege granted only to believers. God says through the prophet Isaiah that he does not hear the prayer of the unbeliever. Isaiah 1:15, *When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen....* You have the privilege of coming to God in prayer only because of the work of Jesus. It is Jesus who made it possible for you to approach the throne of God, because it is Jesus who broke down the barrier of sin that separates you from God.

It is Jesus who came to this earth, put on human flesh and blood and worked out your salvation by his sinless life, a life of perfection which he lived as your substitute. It is Jesus who satisfied God's just and holy decree that all your sins must be punished by taking the punishment for all your sins when he died on the cross of Calvary. It is Jesus who sends the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace to work faith in your heart to believe in him. You have the privilege of coming to God in prayer only because of the work of Jesus. That's why you, the believer in Jesus, pray to God the Father in Jesus' name.

Prayer is a conversation with God, a response to God, that has been prompted by the message of the Gospel. In our corporate prayer we give thanks and praise to God and we

petition him, we make requests of him in behalf of ourselves and other people. But why do we stand for prayer? Some religions kneel in corporate prayer, others, like Islam require its people to prostrate themselves on the ground for prayer. Why do we stand?

Justin Martyr, an early Christian writer, described Christian worship at a time when the Christian Church was barely 100 years old. He wrote, “*On the day called Sunday there is a gathering together in the same place of all who live in a given city or rural district. The memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read... Then when the reader ceases, the president in a discourse, admonishes and urges the imitation of these good things. Next we all **rise together** and send up prayers.*”

Justin tells us the early Christian congregations stood for prayer. Other sources tell us about the significance of this posture: A person would kneel or prostrate himself to express humility, contrition, repentance, submission. Standing, on the other hand, was a sign of joy and boldness, showing the freedom of God’s children to come boldly into his presence. On the first day of the week, standing had a special reference also to the Resurrection. This was the characteristic Christian attitude in prayer. For early Christians, standing meant you had special privileges to come to God as Father, through Christ. To stand in the presence of God meant to be accepted by him and to have the right to speak freely. Remember this in a few minutes when I ask you to stand for prayer.

In today’s text, the Apostle Paul encourages believers to, “*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.*” The Book of Psalms is one of the poetical books of the Old Testament. Most of the 150 psalms in the Bible were written about a thousand years before Christ. Moses wrote the oldest psalm, about 1,400 years before Christ. King David wrote the largest number of Psalms. His name appears on 73 of the psalms, but most scholars think he wrote many of the unnamed, anonymous psalms. Using psalms in worship is not something started by Christians. The Book of Psalms was the hymn book for the people of Bible times. Old Testament believers incorporated psalms along with Scripture lessons and sermons into the worship services conducted in the various synagogues in and around Israel and Judea.

Our hymnal contains 59 psalms arranged for congregational singing. Just as Old Testament and New Testament believers before us, we can use the psalms to give glory to God, to thank him and praise him for all his blessings, to request his help in times of trouble, to ask for guidance in times of uncertainty, and to seek his comfort in times of distress. Using the psalms in worship unites us with fellow believers who have lived and died in the faith over the past 3,000 years. I hope you recall this next time we ask you to join in singing the psalm of the day. It makes you part of a long line of believers stretching all the way back to King David!

After mentioning hymns and spiritual songs, the Apostle encourages us to, “*Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord...*” There are almost 300 references to ‘music’ and ‘song’ and ‘singing’ in the Bible. Songs and hymns, music in general these have always been an

important part of Lutheran worship going all the way back to Dr. Martin Luther himself. In fact, through the ages the Lutheran church has been known as the “singing church.”

You know, there’s something special about music. Music affects the human mind and human emotions in many ways. Psychologists, therapists and sociologists have known this for years. The music your employer plays during working hours is chosen to keep you alert on the job. The music played at the supermarket is chosen to make you buy more products. Elevator music is supposed to keep you calm. The music you hear while “on hold” is chosen to soothe you.

God knows better than anyone that music has an effect on the human mind since God created the mind and gave it this characteristic. God has created us in such a way that music has the ability to touch our emotions. And God has created music in such a way that it has the ability to communicate emotion and feeling. Sometimes words alone are just not adequate to express our emotions. Let me give you an example. What if, on Easter Sunday in the festival service, the pastor were to say, “No singing today. Instead, let’s all recite together the words to *I Know That My Redeemer Lives!*” No! No! No! We want to sing these words to convey the height and intensity of emotion the Easter message contains.

It should come as no surprise that God wants his gift of music to be used to teach the truths of his word and for expressions of praise and thanksgiving...and that’s just what our hymns do. The realities of God’s grace, the redemptive work of Christ Jesus, the power of the Holy Spirit, the wonders of creation, the awesomeness of Judgment day...demand more than just discussion and analysis and description. They demand poetry and song and music.

And finally verse 20, “*always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” You could never pay God back for all he’s done. You could never return the favor. But you can show that you are grateful. You can show him that you appreciate all that he has done for you. You can show that, to you, he is worthy to receive honor and praise and glory. And you do...every Sunday as you respond to him in prayer and psalms and hymns.

Let us stand for prayer:

Gracious Lord, Heavenly Father,

We thank you for the privilege of prayer, the wisdom & depth of the psalms and the gift of music. Help us always to use these blessings in a way that advances your kingdom and gives you honor and praise and glory.

In the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen.