

The standard of prayer is the standard of faith.

Attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine

Introduction

Janet has been your friend since you were in high school. She has little background in Christianity, but always was curious about your faith. Recently, she has become a Christian and is looking for a church to join. "I'm confused," she says. "All of these churches say they are Christian, but they seem so different." "They all have a worship service, but they all do different things." "How can one religion have so many different expressions?"

42. Janet is correct in noticing differences in the way that different Christians worship. What differences have you noticed?

43. Where do you think these differences in worship come from?

In our last session we examined elements that are commonly used in Lutheran worship in order to ask the question, "Who is serving whom?" In this session we return to the content of worship to ask different questions. What elements are necessary in the Divine Service? What elements are helpful? How are these things manifest in the church's worship?

The Bible and Worship

44. When we look in the Bible, we might be surprised by what we find about worship. The Old Testament gives very specific directions on how to worship. Quickly browse through Exodus 25–31. What are some of the features of worship found here? Are these still expected of Christians?

45. In contrast, the New Testament provides no detailed list of instructions on how Christians must worship. Yet it does provide descriptions of some early Christian worship, and some guiding principles for our worship. One of the first descriptions of worship after Pentecost is found in Acts 2:42. This verse contains four elements of Christian worship. What is the first one? (See also 1 Thessalonians 2:13) How does this find expression in our worship today? Why is this a vital element of Christian worship?

46. What is the second element of worship in the early church that is found in Acts 2:42? What does this mean? Why is this a significant element of Christian worship?

47. What is the third element of Christian worship found in Acts 2:42? What does this mean? (See also Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 10:16.) Why is this an important element of Christian worship?

48. The Lutheran Confessions assume that the Lord's Supper will be celebrated regularly in Lutheran congregations. In fact, the confessions repeatedly claim that Lutheran congregations celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday. Why do you think Lutherans celebrate Holy Communion more often than some other churches?

49. What is the final element of worship found in Acts 2:42? How does this find expression in the worship and devotional life of Christians? What should be included when we do this? (See also 1 Timothy 2:1–2.)

50. Read James 5:16. What does this verse suggest we ought to do in worship and in our daily lives?

51. What common feature of worship do you see reflected in Hebrews 13:15 and Philippians 2:9–11? How is this present in our worship together?

52. Every element of worship we have examined can be enacted with spoken words alone. This is appropriate, but Scripture also indicates that another dimension may be used to amplify the Word. Read Ephesians 5:19–20. What do you see in this passage? How is this manifest in our worship?

Christian Freedom

53. Scripture doesn't give us these elements as a law. It never says "do these things or you are not a Christian." Why might Christians want to include these elements in their worship?

54. People often characterize worship by the label of the denomination. Are the elements of worship that we examined today “Lutheran”? Explain your answer.

55. In this session we have looked at general elements of worship. If these are present, do we still need to evaluate how they are used in a particular worship service? Explain your answer.

Explore the Scripture

56. The historic liturgy of the Christian church has all the elements that we studied this week. Look closely at a setting of the Divine Service. Many parts of the liturgy come directly from Scripture. List below the passages you can easily find in the Bible.

57. (For individual reflection) What are some of your favorite hymns and songs? Why are they your favorite? Spend some time thinking about the words of these hymns and songs and how they reflect the truth of Scripture.

Comparisons

The form and content of Jewish worship in the first century greatly influenced the form and content of early Christian services (pp. 51–52). Below are some elements of worship that Jewish people are known to have used at the synagogue and at home during the first century. Note how they compare with some elements of the traditional Lutheran Divine Service.

Synagogue Service	Service of the Word
Readings from Torah and the Prophets	Reading from the Old Testament
Sermon	Sermon
Shema Israel Confession	Apostles’ or Nicene Creed
Eighteen Benedictions	Congregational Prayers

Seder Service	Service of the Sacrament
The Kaddish Prayer	The Lord’s Prayer
Cups of Wine	Cup of the Lord’s Supper
Matzah Bread	Bread of the Lord’s Supper
Narration of the Exodus	Narration of the Words of Institution
Singing of Hallel (Psalms 113–118)	Post Communion canticle and hymns

A popular Aramaic prayer used in ancient Judaism is known as the Kaddish (“consecration”). Portions of this prayer are almost word for word the same as the Lord’s Prayer, taught by Jesus. Note how the prayers are similar (italic text) and how they differ (regular text).

The Kaddish	The Lord’s Prayer
Extolled and <i>hallowed be the name of God</i> throughout the world which He has created, and which He governs according to His righteous will. Just is He in all His ways and wise are all His decrees. <i>May His kingdom come, and His will be done in all the earth.</i> Praised be the Lord of life, the righteous Judge forever more. Whatsoever praise we would render unto God, howsoever we would adore the Most High, we would yet fail to give Him the glory due to His great name.	Our Father who art in heaven, <i>hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth</i> as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

Point to Remember

I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God. Exodus 29:45–46

To prepare for “When Scripture Is Silent,” read Romans 14:13–23.