

Zion Lutheran Church – August 2011

Does the Historic Liturgy Hurt Evangelism?

‘American Christianity’ often questions the historic liturgy of the Church and its effect on evangelism. You may have heard the liturgy described as boring, unemotional, stiff, or ‘old-school’ by some outside of the Church or outside of a church that practices the historic liturgy. So, the important question for today seems to be, “Do the historic liturgy and practices of the Church deter us from evangelism?” Evangelism is defined as the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who uphold tenants of what is often termed the *church growth movement* believe the liturgy does hurt the success of evangelism. They believe that the historic liturgy and practices of the Church deter us from the Gospel, are not culturally desirable or contemporary, and therefore hurt evangelism. Is this really true? Do the historic liturgies and practices of the Church hinder the propagation of the Gospel? The answer for me, and the answer for Christians for 2,000+ years in various cultures, is unapologetically, **no**. I am proof that true Lutheranism, which embraces the historic liturgy and practices of the Church, does actually win people with and to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and does not hinder evangelism.

While in college, before I had even heard of the LC-MS, I was searching for a church to attend. Like many from my generation, I was disillusioned with churches that were trying to be culturally relevant with their doctrine and practice.¹ So, what did I as a member of the culture want? I, like many others my age, wanted a church with roots that went deeper than the *church growth movement* of late twentieth century America. That said, is the question of what a sinful culture wants even a good question? Isn't the proper question ‘what does the culture need?’ Our and every other culture needs the Gospel, yet Scripture says the Gospel is a stumbling block and foolishness to the world.²

Christianity is always countercultural. In fact, it has a culture of its own. Christians have different seasons, *holydays*, music, etc. The sacred is always out of step with the secular world. This is what I experienced the first time I entered an LC-MS Church. I wasn't familiar with the historic liturgy. The reverence of the Divine Service was different than the comfortable pop atmosphere that I was used to. Frankly, initially I was offended by the historic liturgy and practices of the Church.³ Yet, the historic liturgy and practices of the Church clearly proclaimed the Gospel. I heard what I needed to hear, the Truth, and not what my sinful flesh wanted to hear. I learned over time that the Church's liturgy, lectionary, and calendar all focus on Jesus saving sinners. Much like here at Zion, the LC-MS congregation that I found embraced the historic practices of the Church that are rooted in the history of the Christian faith. There in the liturgy and practices of the Church I was guaranteed to hear the Gospel, even if the pastor or congregation erred. The historic liturgy guarantees that the Gospel for sinners will be proclaimed for the preservation and propagation of the Church.

The history of the Church shows us that the historical references to traditions, liturgies, and practices keep us focused on our center, Jesus, found in Scripture alone⁴. This is why Christians, pre-Luther, Luther himself, and post-Luther have conserved the historic liturgy and practices of the Church. History tells us that the content of Scripture has created the liturgy and the liturgy has protected the proclamation of the content of

¹ Doctrine and practice are always related.

² I Corinthians 1:18-25 18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (ESV)

³ i.e. I was offended by the Biblical practices of closed communion and confession and absolution. After I was instructed in the faith, I learned that these practices were not offensive, but a loving part of God's Word for all cultures.

⁴ Most of the liturgy is composed of direct Scripture passages.

Scripture, Jesus' work for sinners. This is also why those who have changed the message of Scripture to appease the culture, like heterodox denominations, have different forms and practices that are out of step with the historic Christian faith. The church growth crowd may win many numbers with their novel doctrine and practice, but what are they winning people to? Biblical evangelism is never about numbers or giving a culture what it wants. Evangelism is proclaiming the Gospel of "**A Changeless Christ to a Changing World**" -- we leave the numerical results to God, Who creates faith when and where He pleases in those who hear the Gospel.

Christians have always used the historic liturgy and practices to faithfully proclaim Jesus' message. Therefore, conserving the historical references to traditions, liturgies and practices, which proclaim the pure Gospel, will never hinder true evangelism.

The historic liturgy and practices of the Church clearly proclaim the always-contemporary Gospel to all cultures – yesterday, today, and forever. That is why I am a Lutheran. This is why many of you are Lutherans. The proclamation of the pure Gospel that we conserve here at Zion is what we Christians and the world need to hear constantly. May all the world hear this message wherever it is proclaimed. Rest assured, that by the grace of God, the Gospel will be preached at Zion and conserved in the historic liturgy while I am your Pastor.

Pastor Stark

ZION'S WOMEN'S SOCIETY

Due to the weather, the Women's Society met on Thursday, July 14th at 12:30 p.m. at church for potluck luncheon.

Members of the society will meet on Thursday, August 11th at 12:30 p.m. at the Fill Inn restaurant.

All ladies of the congregation are invited and are most welcome to come.

BIBLE CLASSES

You are invited to attend our Bible studies on Sunday mornings following our worship service.

PARENTS

Watch your cubbies for weekly Bible lesson sheets which you can work on with your children. Be sure to use the children's bulletins each Sunday when you attend worship. These can expand your child's understanding of God and worship. Stop down stairs: Take home DVD's, VHS videos, and books each week full of Bible stories. These are FREE TO BORROW and are Bible based entertainment.

LWML

Zion's Lutheran Women's Missionary League met for their quarterly meeting on July 19th at 7:00 p.m.

We enjoyed the Bible study on led by Pam Rose.

This a mission organization. We meet four times a year. We would be happy to have more members. All ladies are invited and encouraged to attend. We are usually finished by 8:30 p.m.

The “Mites for Missions” box is located outside the sanctuary. The mites will go to various missions supported by LWML. Thank you.

Please continue to save your Gordy's receipts and stamps. The stamps need to be trimmed about ¼ inch around the stamp. The monies received from these are sent to missions. Thank you!

VBS

Vacation Bible School begins today at 5:00 p.m. and goes thru August 4th. It begins with a light supper at 5:00 p.m. and ends at 7:30 p.m. The theme is “Journey With Jesus”.

Devotions, lesson time, craft time, and music time will be led for each of the three class levels. Closing devotions will be at 7:30 p.m.

Classes are planned for ages 3 thru the 6th grade. Bring a friend.

A MESSAGE FROM THE FELLOWSHIP BOARD

Much of June and the first half of July was spent preparing for the Fellowship's part of the installation service and dinner for Pastor Stark. The Bible says we are not to worry, but we are always a bit anxious because we want everything to turn out just right. But as usual, things came together and the end result was a good one.

We hope everyone enjoyed the delicious dinner and had enough to eat. We thought our caterer did a superb job. It got a bit hot in the kitchen for her and her helper. Thankfully it was cooler in the dining hall.

We want to thank everyone that attended and a special thanks to those of you helped us in our part of the festivities. Set up went smoothly with those individuals who came to help. It was good to see so many members assisting with the clean up after the dinner. I'm sure many of us woke up a bit tired on Monday morning. But all of our efforts were fruitful. So a big “Thank You” to everyone who helped us in any way to welcome Pastor Stark and his family.

Now it is almost August and our thoughts shift to the end of the month. Once again it is time to remind everyone of our annual worship service and picnic in the park. The date is Sunday, August 28, there will be a 9:00 a.m. service at church followed by the 10:30 a.m. service in the park with the picnic to follow. The place is the main pavilion at Irvine Park.

The picnic will be a potluck with everyone bringing a dish to share. You can bring a salad, a hot dish, a dessert or some other picnic type food of your choice. Plates, cups, napkins, eating utensils and beverages will be provided.

This will be first for Pastor Stark and his family. We hope we will have a good turn out so this will be a memorable event for Pastor, Brianne and the children. So please a notation on your calendar and reserve Sunday, August 28, for this annual event of Zion. Hope to see you there. Extended family and friends are most welcome.