

This is an odd experience, what we do on Sunday mornings.

It is not like school or desk work,

where you look at a computer,

talk with the people around you,

maybe have your favorite music in the background

and can get up every 40 minutes or so.

It is not like a rock concert or sporting event,

with people hawking cold drinks and popcorn,

and people milling about at whim.

It is more like going to a movie or an orchestra concert, except it is not meant to entertain.

So, what is this thing we call worship? And why do we – as Lutheran Christians – do it the way we do?

Our fall message series is entitled “Worship in beauty and holiness – Why we do what we do”

So, let's start with some basic principles.

IF any of you watched the videos at the end of my online sermon last Sunday, this will be familiar.

1. Worship is not about us.

- a. Not about how we feel,
- b. how good or bad we are,
- c. or what we get out of it

2. Worship is about God

- a. God alone is worthy of our “worship”

- b. We acknowledge God as worthy of our esteem, honor, gratitude, prostration, sacrifice, thanksgiving
 - c. Everything we do and say in worship is directed to God.
 - d. Especially our full attention
- 3. The God we worship is living and creates us for a relationship of love.**
- a. Worship begins with acknowledging God as our Creator
 - b. But it is a two-way relationship
 - c. God not only *receives* our praise and thanksgiving, but also *gives* us his Word, his grace, and his mercy.
- 4. Worship is holy conversation**
- a. between God and the people he created in love
 - b. and redeemed through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus.

Are you with me?

Each Week, in Jesus Christ,

God is inviting us and drawing us into this holy conversation of love.

Today, God's Word leads us to consider who we are.

So, the subtitle is "Creature, Know Yourself"

The most important thing we need to know about ourselves is that we are *created* by God.

We are creatures. We are not God.

We are the clay – God is the Potter.

Confusing this distinction is the origin of much of the misery we experience as human beings.

Sin, at its very core, is getting it backward.

--acting on the belief that we are God.

--That we control our own destiny.

--That we can do as we please.

As today's scriptures indicate, one of the greatest expressions of this confusion is partiality, or favoritism.

*Do not abuse poor people because they are poor,
and do not take away the rights of the needy in court.*

*²³ The LORD will defend them in court
and will take the life of those who take away their rights.*

*The rich and the poor are alike
in that the LORD made them all.*

For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Although our Founding Fathers were Deists and not Christian, they understood the basic distinction between Creator and creature.

When they wrote in the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among

these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” they understood that this equality was before God.

Certainly, human beings are vastly diversified – men and women, great intellect and simplicity, athletic ability and musical ability, hair color, eye color, race and ethnicity, wealthy and poor.

But before God – as creatures – all human beings are created equal.

Indeed, to justify slavery in the early years of our nation, our leaders had to claim that black people were less than human.

This evil – known today as racism – is a form of partiality, favoritism that Christians are warned about, along with distinctions of wealth and class.

And as the Bible says, injustice leads to destruction –as the Civil War bore witness.

Whenever we look down on others – for whatever reason—we are committing the sin of favoritism, partiality, thinking ourselves better in God’s eyes.

It is a sin of the heart. And we are each of us guilty of it.

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Creature, Know Yourself

– You are not God and you are a sinner – distant from God.

I am not God – I am a sinner, distant from God.

Yet, we are all here – in worship.

How is that even possible?

How do we even dare to come into the presence of the most Worthy God as the sinners we are?

Because, as St. Paul wrote, *“While we still were sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.”*

The Holy Spirit doesn't gather good, sinless people together for worship, but brings ungodly sinners into the loving mercy of Jesus who gave his life for us.

It is for this reason our worship includes elements of Confession and Forgiveness.

We come before God as needy sinners – hungry and thirsty for the forgiveness and mercy that only Jesus gives.

In the olden days, --yes in Lutheran tradition -- Confession and Absolution was held on Saturday night as a special service. Those who attended received Communion cards that proved that the pastor had heard their confession and absolved them and therefore they were to be admitted to the Lord's Supper.

Now, individual confessions to a pastor are heard by appointment (see LBW p. 196) and we use the Brief Order for confession and Forgiveness before the opening hymn, or before the Communion, in some places.

The Kyrie eleison— a Greek phrase meaning Lord have mercy—is another element of worship acknowledging our creatureliness and need for mercy.

And we also hear Jesus' own words, *“This is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”*

All of these serve to remind us that we are not God and we are loved by God in mercy as his own creatures.

When we share the peace, it is the peace of Jesus' forgiveness that we extend to one another – showing no favoritism – for each of us is equally beloved of God and equally sinner redeemed by Christ.

The church is a hospital for sinners, not a hotel for saints.

Jesus is knocking on the door of our hearts, ready to enter with forgiveness and grace.

So, let us engage this holy conversation of worship into which God invites us by affirming who we are, what we need from God, and our joy in being in the presence of our Savior.

Let us pray.

O God, you made humanity in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus, your Son. Look with compassion on the whole human family. Forgive us our prejudice, bigotry, false sense of superiority, and favoritism toward others. Take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts. Break down the walls that separate us. Unite us in bonds of love. And through our struggle and confusion, work to accomplish your purposes on earth, that in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWvsQzgX6JQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAzp-eVsKW0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sd4IEuPvQw8>