

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Enjoy Liturgy and Music

Marilyn Schempp and Mallorie Hansmann

Sept. 19, 2005

This seems a little unusual to be standing up here behind the pulpit facing you rather than sitting on the organ bench with my back towards you. It should also come as no surprise that our topic for today has to do with, but of all things, music.

“Enjoy Liturgy and Music.” Well, you might say, “Who doesn’t enjoy music?” But what is meant by the word liturgy? The word actually comes from the Greek, meaning “the people’s work.” It is what God’s people do both in church and outside of the worship service. However, though God expects worship, we should not worship because we have to, but rather because we want to. Worship, like love, is a logical response to our God.

Listen to the words in the introduction to *The Lutheran Book of Worship*:

The Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise. Music is drawn into this thankfulness and praise, enlarging and elevating the adoration of our gracious giver God. The rhythm of our worship is from him to us, and then from us back to him. He gives his gifts, and together we receive and extol them. We build one another up as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Our Lord gives us his body to eat and his blood to drink. Finally his blessing moves us out into our calling, where his gifts have their fruition. How best to do this we may learn from his Word and from the way his Word has prompted his worship through the centuries. We are heirs of an astonishingly rich tradition. Each generation receives from those who went before and, in making that tradition of the Divine Service its own, adds what best may serve in its own day—the living heritage and something new.

Try completing this sentence: “A good liturgy on a Sunday morning in my church would be one in which...” I think we would have many different answers here. But some words you might hear used could include gathering together, prayer, proclamation of the Word, education, comfort, praising and thanking God, communion. Often our notions of liturgy have us doing something *for* or *to* the people, but, in reality, it needs to be something the community does for one another and for themselves, something they do together. There is a problem, then, when we act as if the liturgy is good only when people leave impressed, inspired, healed, or educated. Not that those things aren’t important. But are they the most important? What does matter is that the people leave

having done the thing they have been doing since childhood, doing it yet again, doing it carefully and reverently, doing it with awe and competence, doing it not only because they want to (because they may not want to on any given Sunday), but essentially because they need to.

Liturgy cannot be a one-time event or a now-and-then occurrence. To be liturgy, it needs to be done over and over again. It needs to be done regularly. Musicians know about this “regular” thing. Music itself is built on the good use of repetition, the need for rhythm, for pattern. In his book entitled “*How Can I Keep From Singing?*,” Gabe Huck says this about music and liturgy: “The love of music implies that one accepts what wonders there are in something that does not wear out with repetition but opens the one who knows it to beauty and understanding. What is that bond that can exist between musician and music, doer and deed, when the composition is known by heart—and these two words are important—*by heart*”. The author also says, “Musicians know about our culture’s fear of repetition, our throw-away society’s drive to devour the new. We are better trained in consuming than in savoring. How else will there be a market for next year’s songs, records, and hymnals? To treat liturgy as something that is at our whim is to lose the liturgy. What is done instead may be good for today, but never, never capable of carrying the church, shaping Christians, belonging to the people.”

As musicians, Mallorie and I would obviously like to focus on the musical part of liturgy and our response in that manner. Let me read again the Ephesians verses: “Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.”

The German pastor, theologian, and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, posed this question for himself: “Why do Christians sing when they are together?” He replied: “The reason is, quite simply, because in singing together it is possible for Christians to speak and pray the same words at the same time. In other words, here Christians can unite in the Word. It is the voice of the church that is heard in singing together. It is not you that sings. It is the church that is singing. And you, as a member of the church, may share in this song. It is this singing together that serves to widen our spiritual horizon, makes us see our little company as a member of the great Christian church on earth and helps us willingly and gladly join our singing, be it feeble or good, to the song of the church.”

We sing because that is the nature of the ritual we do together. Our tradition has deeds that need music (processions, for example) and words that need music (acclamations and refrains). We do these things every week. That is the way it is with ritual. What we do over and over, what we do by heart, is the rehearsal of life. It is who we are meant to be. Musicians know the importance of practicing, that repetition until the music becomes second nature. The musician, Suzuki, when teaching young musicians, talks about the “mother tongue.” Just as children learn to speak by listening to others speak over and over again, so they can also learn music by listening over and over again, until it becomes second nature. The tasks and skills we know and do best are those that we have done

over and over again. Life itself has repetition and rhythm—the rhythm of day and night, eating and hunger, work and rest, birth and death, the rhythm of seasons.

Through that repetition and rhythm, music, too, can become a teaching tool for learning biblical texts. How often have you read a portion of scripture and then recalled a musical melody that you've learned with that text? If you've sung in choirs for any length of time, this will be true. Many of the great Easter and Christmas texts as well as psalm texts bring familiar melodies to mind. And isn't it true that long after people forget what they memorized in confirmation or heard in Sunday's sermon, many Christians can still sing at least a verse or two of a familiar hymn. There is something about words carried on the wings of music that drives those words deep into our memories. If you have any doubt, you only need to attend a worship service in a retirement village. Elderly people, some of whom can hardly remember their own names, when a familiar hymn is sung, begin mouthing words that they have known since childhood.

That places a heavy burden of responsibility on those of us who presume to write hymns or select them for others to sing. We are helping form the content of people's faith and the orientation of their lives in ways that last a lifetime. In terms of our faith, there is much truth in the statement, "Who we are is what we sing."

Mallorie Hansmann and Marilyn Schempp

It was a Wednesday evening at Ingham Lake Bible Camp, and everyone was gathering for the great Grill-Out supper. With megaphone in hand, I stood on a picnic table and lead everyone in the "Thank you Lord for this great meal" prayer. Following that, in order to decide which cabins would eat first, we played a game of Bible Trivia. After asking some fairly easy questions like "Who built an ark?" and "What is the last book of the Bible?" I decided to go a different route. "Okay campers, tell me in what book of the Bible these verses are found, "Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free spirit." Many campers were getting a bit excited about the question, and they said things like, "I know those verses! I think we sing that in church! Yeah, we sing that in church all the time!" "So do you know where it's from?" I asked. A cabin then guessed the book of Psalms, and they were right, so they went to eat. And it was time for another trivia question. "In what book of the Bible are these words found? 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'" Again many campers knew the words, but did not realize that they were from the Bible. After a few guesses, a cabin answered the book of John, and they went to eat. I figured I had asked enough of the tough questions at that point, so I said, "Don't worry, I won't ask any more questions like that. But listen when you sing in church, because there are many cool things from the Bible that some of you sing almost every week." The game continued, and everyone eventually got to eat.

Working at a camp affiliated with the ELCA, I had thought that some campers would be familiar with those liturgical texts, and many were. And little did they know, they were singing Bible verses every week. Bible passages that are key to the Christian faith, and

verses they can rely on throughout life. Week after week we gather as a community and proclaim what we believe through song. The musical liturgy is a celebration of what is constant—a celebration of God’s faithfulness. An article entitled “Why is the Lutheran Church a Liturgical Church?” (compiled by David Jay Webber, http://www.blc.edu/comm/gargy/gargy1/liturgical_church.html) stated, “Liturgy focuses the worshipers’ attention on the objective Means of Grace and the unchanging truths of Holy Scripture.” Through the liturgy we are reminded that God is our heavenly king and Father, that God is worthy of our worship and praise, that Christ takes away the sin of the world, that God alone is the holy one, that Christ has the words of eternal life, and that God creates clean hearts in us, amongst so many other promises. Through this proclamation through song, we celebrate who God is, and God’s promises to us.

Some might say that this repetition of liturgy is redundant and boring. At one point, I thought that this was very true. However, I learned that the problem was my own, because I was not thinking about the words and that I was singing. I had simply set my voice on auto pilot, and did not think about the text. However, after realizing that the text I was singing held so many promises of God, I wondered how I could have ever thought that it was boring. I was thankful that these texts are set to music, because I will not forget the words for a long time. The article on the Liturgical Lutheran Church said, “The chief articles of Christian doctrine are deeply embedded in the unchanging parts of the service, and they become deeply embedded in the minds and hearts of Christian worshipers through the disciplined, weekly repetition of those texts.” Through singing these texts each week, the word of God and these unchanging truths become firmly rooted within us. These promises of God are with us at all times in life; in times of great joy and sorrow, frustration and contentment. The practice of liturgy through music is a gift God gives to us, a reminder that He is the Rock to which we can cling at all times.

Marilyn Schempp and Mallorie Hansmann

In closing, I would like to present a challenge to you. As you sing those hymns, those weekly responses, those psalm settings, be mindful of the texts and what the authors have penned. Notice how the lessons and chosen hymns are related. Hopefully, the worship leaders have chosen musical texts that coincide with the spoken texts for the day. From those musical settings, what can you learn and bring with you into your daily life? Let them be a part of the rhythm of your life.

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

KATRINA RELIEF EFFORT - The bracelets for the Katrina Relief Effort have finally arrived! We will be selling them in the chapel office. Cost for the bracelets will be \$2.

WANT TO BE INVOLVED? - If you missed signing up for campus ministry activities at the Activities Fair, it's not too late!! There are sign-up sheets on the Narthex table. Feel free to explore the many opportunities to serve campus ministry.

FALL BREAK SERVICE LEARNING - Pine Ridge Reservation. In a spirit of accompaniment we want to know our neighbors! We work on a Habitat for Humanity project, assist with the after school program for children, and meet folks from the community to know culture, neighborhood and bridges of and barriers to understanding. Registration is now being taken - cost is around \$100. Questions - Inquire in the chapel office or call 5403.

"A Vision of a Wider Church" will be a presentation by Kari Lenander, voting member of the ELCA churchwide assembly in Orlando in August. **Sunday, September 25 at noon, Halverson Room.** Just bring your lunch tray in and join us.

CHAPEL CALENDAR

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| Tuesday (20) | Youth Mentors, 10 am |
| Wednesday (21) | Holy Communion, 10 am - Pr. Paul; Senior Academy |
| Friday (23) | Worship, 10 am - Rebecca Lund, Senior Speaker |
| Sunday (25) | Worship, 11 am - Scott Thalacker |
| Monday (26) | Worship, 10 am - Pr. Paul |
| Wednesday(28) | Holy Communion, 10 am - Paul Rainbow, NABS |