

Our Church is richly blessed by the multitude of gifts and generosity of heart found in Blaine and Karen Davis and their two daughters. They encourage us in so many ways and are always willing to help in a variety of ways. Blaine is in seminary in addition to his teaching profession and being a successful restaurateur. Below you will find the first installment of a three-part paper he recently wrote in seminary. It makes a strong case for confessional and liturgical worship. I recommend it highly and look forward to the rest of the paper over the next few weeks.

-Rev. Martin Moore, Pastor, Our Saviour's Lutheran Church

Dear Friends in Christ,

As your resident seminarian, it is my joy to share with you from time to time the many blessings that I am receiving along the way in my seminary journey. Most recently, I had the privilege of taking the *Liturgics Practicum* with Bishop Keith Ackerman, the 8th Bishop of Quincy (Episcopal Church). My final task, given to me by the good Bishop, is to share with you what I have learned and how I have been shaped through this class.

To begin with, it might be helpful to explain that *Liturgics* is just a fancy word that we use to describe both the *why* behind the rituals and liturgies of the Church of Christ as well as the *how* we go about executing them. Basically this class was a practical “how-to” in learning how to celebrate holy communion, conduct baptisms, funerals, the anointing of the sick, giving private confession, and the blessing of homes—in short it was a crash course in all things pastoral and priestly. Despite the fact that I am a Lutheran attending an Anglican seminary, the Anglicans are *catholic* in practice and as such the rituals and liturgies they conduct come from the same apostolic root stock as our own rituals and liturgies. It has been a blessing to think about our practices as Lutherans in light of our Anglican brethren and to think deeply about the *why* and the *what* that make up our own liturgical practices. Through the course of my *Liturgics Practicum* and through the texts that I've been reading, I have three essential topics that I'm still pondering and that I want to invite you to contemplate along me.

Liturgy: Tradition vs. Traditionalism

One of my favorite experiences of the weekend was the time we spent around the high altar at the Cathedral of The Holy Communion. I had the childlike joy of pointing to different objects on the altar—from the linens, to the candles, to the placement of the altar—and asking *why this? Why that?* The answers to our questions were simultaneously serious and humorous and ranged from profound insights explaining the architecture of traditional cathedrals to the more mundane concerns of logistics.

On the serious end of things, I am struck by the way that everything liturgically ought to have a meaning and a purpose, albeit theological or practical. For example, the candles on the high altar—at the Cathedral there are a total of 8—provide both a theological message as well as a practical purpose. On the theological side of things, the staggering of the six candles along the back edge of the altar with the Cross in the center mirrors the

Jewish *menorah*, which in the Tabernacle and the Temple represent the seven lights of Genesis 1 (Sun, Moon, and the five planets visible to the naked eye). These lights represent the spiritual beings gathered in worship around God's throne. The two additional candles situated at either end of the altar like ours are at Our Savior's represent the two Cherubim on either end of the Ark of the Covenant. These Cherubim function as God's footstool or seat. Thus the lights present around the altar remind us, along with the phrase in the Eucharistic prayer that we are joining "Angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim and all the hosts of heaven" in worshipping the creator of all. Our worship space is built to model the Tabernacle/Temple which in turn are models of God's actual throne room that he revealed in vision to both Moses on Mt. Zion and to St. John the Evangelist on the island of Patmos. What is in the sanctuary as well as how it is designed isn't arbitrary. It teaches us and shows us what God's throne room is like and prepares us for meeting Him face to face.

On the humorous end of the things, I noticed that that there was a 9th candle on the altar that the Bishop had not yet explained. It was smaller than the others and had a handle for someone to hold. I asked the Bishop what it was for, to which he replied, "Oh, that's the Bishop's candle. They keep it on the altar whenever the Bishop is presiding in worship. Do you know why?" I nodded my head to indicate that I didn't and leaned in thinking there was going to be a deeply meaningful reason. Bishop Ackerman chuckled and responded, "It's there because the Bishop is usually old, has weak eyes, and needs more light to read the liturgy. It's entirely practical." Not everything we keep in the sanctuary stems from deep-seated theological symbolism. Some things we do come from basic practical needs. It's important to keep this differentiation front and center as sometimes we hold onto things in our congregations that we think are essential but only serve a practical purpose or we jettison things that are theologically important because we have lost sight of their symbolic functions.

One of my big take aways from my Liturgics Practicum is that there is a big difference between tradition and traditionalism. Jaroslav Pelikan once wrote that "Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living." What we count as tradition needs to be bigger than the last twenty years of congregational life and deeper than the "this is how we've always done things" answer. The apostles give us the basic shape of Christian worship, which is encapsulated in the Divine Service. We dedicate ourselves—as did the first converts in Acts 2—"to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (v.42). This is the living tradition of the apostles that continues in our midst. It provides room for different languages, ethnic customs, and different hymnody, but it establishes a pattern in our midst that we must live by. As we examine our liturgical life together, it is essential for us to continually establish how our practices as a congregation lead us to faithfully practicing the four things that the Christians in Acts 2 committed themselves to so long ago and to let go of things that keep us from fulfilling our call as disciples of Jesus.

(To be continued)