

PASTORAL CARE THROUGH
LITURGICAL LEADERSHIP

A PROJECT REPORT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
BY
STEVEN J. SIMPSON

WINEBRENNER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
FINDLAY, OHIO
JANUARY 2014

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ABSTRACT

This project, which examines the symbiotic relationship between liturgical leadership and pastoral care, was born of a crisis in ministry. A pastor serving a church in the United Church of Christ was given notice. Suddenly not only was his own life moving along an uncertain trajectory, but the future of the church was moving into uncharted areas as well. In the midst of the ensuing upheaval and uncertainty emotions ran high in the church. Nevertheless, while his time was coming to an end at the church, the pastor still sought to offer pastoral care to people who desperately needed healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. But how would the pastor offer this care? In a fit of inspiration, the pastor realized that his ministries of preaching, planning, and leading worship were his primary means of offering pastoral care during his seven final Sundays with the congregation.

This project's researcher recorded those seven services and collected worship bulletins from those services. Later he subjected these sources to a literary pastoral analysis wherein worship elements were studied with particular respect to how they offered pastoral care. Additionally, several months after the final service, the researcher formed a focus group (with the permission of the church's new pastor) comprised of people who had worshiped with the pastor during his last seven Sundays. He administered a questionnaire to the group and invited the members to participate in a group interview to find out from their experiences how they remembered receiving pastoral care through those final seven worship services before the pastor left.

The study led to three major discoveries: that the worshiper's active (rather than passive) participation in worship, the pastor's character, and the presence of the Holy Spirit are all crucial factors in a worshiper's ability to receive pastoral care through worship. Drawing on this, the researcher offers recommendations for pastors leading worship, for seminaries training worship leaders, and the United Church of Christ holding these pastors in fellowship.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

. . . to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.

–Finley Peter Dunne

Introduction

Perhaps the most visible ministry performed by any pastor is the work she does when she preaches and leads corporate worship. She may engage in important and fruitful ministries such as teaching, administration, evangelism, counseling, youth work, leadership development, and pastoral care, but the ministries of the pulpit, font, and table are those most symbolic of and therefore most identifiable with the ministry of a pastor.

What are pastors doing when they preach or when they plan and lead worship? What are the purposes of these tasks? Some have suggested that the words Finley Peter Dunne penned over a century ago to describe the role of newspapers (“to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable”) also aptly describe the dualistic purpose of preaching. Others have noted another dualism: preaching should speak both to the heart as well as to the mind of the listener; it is at once both a didactic and a motivational enterprise.

Good worship, like good preaching, functions on both an intellectual and an emotional level; it teaches and it motivates. Some suggest that while preaching can be aimed at both the believer and the unbeliever, so too, worship can be designed for the

believer and at the same time be “sensitive” to the “seeker.” Still others argue that worship is not for human beings nearly so much as it is an activity of humans *for* God alone. “Seeker-sensitive worship” therefore is a contradiction in terms since only those who know God can worship him.

Perhaps the thoughtful pastor considers all of these things every time he writes a sermon or prepares an order for worship. Perhaps not. But from time to time he must stop to ponder the question of “what am I trying to accomplish?” or “whence comes the message?” If he believes the message to be communicated in the sermon and rehearsed and retold in worship can only be found in Scripture, he is half-way there: he has identified God’s Word is the *source* of the message. But he must also identify the *destination* or the intended audience of the message: “to whom am I primarily preaching and what is their situation? Do they have particular needs? Is there a way these needs can be addressed homiletically or liturgically?” Worship and preaching are best when they are prepared with a particular congregation and its particular situation in mind. The wise pastor takes into consideration where the worshipping congregation has been, where it presently is, and what it might face in the future.

This project is about one pastor’s experience as he learned how to preach to a particular congregation and how to lead that congregation in worship as they navigated a difficult transition in their life together. Specifically, it is about what he discovered as he preached his final seven sermons and planned and led his-final seven worship services as pastor of Church A, in Ohio in June and July of 2008.

Context of the Problem

In 2002, the pastoral search committee of Church A in Ohio began the process of interviewing candidates for the position of pastor of the church. For forty years, the church had enjoyed the pastoral care of two pastors whose tenures had overlapped one another. While the first one had been senior pastor, a call to serve as associate pastor was extended to the second. Later, after the first individual retired and was named Pastor Emeritus, the second was in turn called to be the senior pastor. That pastor served for over a decade in that capacity and eventually retired. As the search committee narrowed in on four possible candidates for a new pastor, the members began to feel very comfortable with candidate number three. He was very much like the two pastors who had served for the past four decades. The search committee then received a profile from a fourth candidate. His profile caused the committee to stop and reevaluate just what kind of pastor might be best for the congregation.

Unlike the profiles of the other pastors the committee was considering, the fourth candidate's profile portrayed a pastor whose style was very different from the style of the two beloved pastors who had most recently served Church A. Whereas the previous pastors' ministries were focused on visitation and caring-giving for the members who were already a part of the congregation, this candidate's ministry was focused more on ministries of teaching, preaching, and music. Furthermore, his ministry was more *missional*, (emphasizing the "sent" nature of the church as an instrument of God) and more transformational than the ministry to which the congregation had become accustomed. Though the committee had nearly extended a call to candidate number three, the committee began to believe it just might be candidate number four that could lead the

church to move beyond a focus on self-care to a missional emphasis on reaching out to others.

By the end of the summer, the fourth candidate had been called to Church A as the new pastor. He had clearly communicated to the search committee that his strengths were not in visitation or in youth ministry. That was not perceived as a problem, though, because the church already had a part-time Parish Nurse and a part-time Christian Education director on staff. Their strengths would complement his weaknesses so that he could concentrate on ministering from his strengths and help lead the church in a new direction. The church also had a strong paid staff which included a full-time secretary, a part-time organist, a part-time choir director, two part-time custodians, and a part-time treasurer. But this was not to last.

At the annual meeting of the church in 2004, a little more than a year after the new pastor had been called to at Church A, the positions of both the Parish Nurse and the Christian Education director were terminated in a tactical move to balance the church budget. At the time, the president argued that the church could no longer afford to pay people to do ministries (such as visitation and Christian Education) which could be done by volunteers. There seemed to be a general consensus that the members would all pull together and volunteer more. Unfortunately, within about six months, after this surge in volunteerism failed to materialize, church leaders began to look to the pastor to do the visitation formerly done by the Parish Nurse and to develop and take over leadership of the youth ministries and confirmation classes formerly led by the Christian Education Director.

A year later at the 2005 annual meeting of the church, the outgoing president of the congregation proposed that an associate pastor be hired. This came as a surprise to many members of the congregation who remembered the budget cuts only one year earlier. Although the normal procedure would have been to form a search committee for a new pastoral position, the president had a specific candidate in mind, whom she presented for the position. The congregation rejected the proposal.

A new church president began a new two-year term at that meeting and the outgoing president and her family quickly withdrew from active involvement in the church. That same year, the pastor encouraged the church to enroll in a renewal program offered through the Ohio Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC) to which the church belonged. Known as “Flight School,” the purpose of the program was to help churches take hold of a new missional vision from God and begin to “take flight.”

Through the program, some church members did indeed begin to have a new vision for what the church could be. After a process of discerning core values and “bedrock beliefs” as a church, the church adopted the vision statement, “Come, Celebrate the Journey!” The pastor wrote a song for the congregation by that same name and preached a series of sermons encouraging the congregation to live out this new mission statement by inviting others to come and join them in a joyous spiritual journey.

By many measures, the church was “celebrating the journey.” New forms of worship had been introduced, new people were joining the church, and formerly “dormant” members were being encouraged to discover, develop, and use their spiritual gifts for ministry. Yet there were others who were unhappy, not so much with the *new* developments as with what they perceived as a neglect of *former* ministries which had

been performed by the pastors in the past. Occasional complaints came to the Pastoral Relations Committee that the pastor was not visiting enough people. Certain long-time members began to disappear from regular attendance in worship and other activities. When these people were asked why they were no longer active, they pointed to the pastor and told Pastoral Relations Committee members and others that in one way or another he had disappointed them or that they were not “comfortable” with him in the way they had been with his two predecessors.

The Pastoral Relations Committee responded by circulating a survey that it developed in consultation with the pastor in the summer of 2006. The survey asked members to evaluate the pastor’s performance. While many surveys came back with very positive marks, a few were very negative. With the help of the committee, the pastor developed a strategy for addressing the major concerns that were expressed in those surveys. For example, some people found the pastor to be too business-like on Sunday mornings as he moved quickly through the halls making final preparations for the second worship service of the morning. The committee suggested the pastor should leave choir rehearsals early so that he would have some time to meet and greet parishioners as they arrived before the second service. Over the next few months, the new strategies seemed to be working. Members seemed more comfortable with the pastor and pleased with his ministry.

In November of 2007, a crisis arose when the Pastor Emeritus agreed (without the pastor’s knowledge or consent and against church and denominational policy) to do a private baptism in the church building. When the pastor learned of this, he immediately called the Pastor Emeritus to confirm whether it was true. The Pastor Emeritus

apologized for not contacting the pastor before making the plans and agreed that the pastor's stance on private baptisms was probably the more "correct" one. However, the Pastor Emeritus told the pastor he was still committed to performing the baptism as he and the family had a long history together. In the midst of the conversation, the Pastor Emeritus asked the current pastor whether this was an issue over which he was willing to be "crucified." The pastor understood this to mean that taking a stand against the Pastor Emeritus' decision could have serious consequences for the pastor's future at the church. Nevertheless, he answered, "Yes." It was clear that the Pastor Emeritus has crossed a professional and ethical boundary.

Eventually, the issue came to the Pastoral Relations Committee. The members understood that it was inappropriate for a former pastor to perform a baptism in the church building without the pastor's consent. They also knew that the search committee had nominated the pastor partly because he would end the practice of performing private baptisms in the church. In fact, half of the members of the Pastoral Relations Committee in 2008 had been members of the search committee in 2002. Furthermore, the Pastoral Relations Committee had previously supported the pastor when he had taken a similar stand with another family. Nevertheless, in this instance the committee wanted the pastor to look the other way because of the influence of the family involved. Afterward, the pastor would learn that this was the major turning point for the Pastoral Relations Committee in its perception of the pastor.

Early in 2008, the Pastoral Relations Committee conducted another pastoral evaluation survey. However, this time the survey was circulated only to members who were in leadership positions in the church rather than to all members. Fewer than half of

the active leaders (consistory members, committee members, and those leading ministries in the church) actually turned in their surveys. Many who had not completed surveys later told the pastor they did not feel it was their place to evaluate him. Nevertheless, after reading those surveys which had actually been returned, the Pastoral Relations Committee met with the pastor to review the results in a special meeting on June 5, 2008.

At that meeting, the committee told the pastor that after reading the surveys they each independently came to the conclusion that it was time for him to leave. In their opinion, although the pastor had initially been called to Church A to be a transformational leader, they felt that what was most needed at that time was a chaplain/pastor who specialized in visitation and care-giving. "These things happen in the business world," they explained, "job descriptions change and you either have to adapt or leave." Since the pastor was no longer suited to the job as they now conceived it and since he was unable to change who he was, it was the collective opinion of the committee that the pastor would have to go. The next regular meeting of Consistory was scheduled for the following Monday. The Pastoral Relations Committee told the pastor he would be expected to turn in his resignation at that time or he would be terminated.

The next morning the pastor called his Association Minister (denominational official) for guidance. The Association Minister expressed concern and was supportive of the pastor and said he wanted to be present at the Monday night Consistory meeting. Unfortunately, as this was the weekend of the Ohio Conference UCC Annual Meeting, he had other responsibilities through that Monday night that precluded his attending the Consistory meeting at Church A. He advised the pastor, therefore, to invoke his right (given to him by his pastoral call agreement) to invite him, as the denominational

representative, to mediate between the committee and himself. The pastor informed the chairman of the Pastoral Relations Committee that he was invoking this right, but after worship on Sunday, the chairman informed the pastor that the committee was unwilling to grant him the right to such mediation.

That Sunday afternoon, the pastor called a few Consistory members to see if they were planning to attend the meeting Monday night, and to let them know he would need their support. He also called two other church members who were actively involved in small group leadership and asked them to attend the Consistory meeting as observers since, according to the church constitution and bylaws, Consistory meetings are open to all members of the church. As it was clear there were at least *some* members of Consistory who were intent on firing the pastor quickly and quietly (including the three Consistory members who also served on the Pastoral Relations Committee), the pastor hoped that the presence of a few respected members of the church at the meeting might cause these Consistory members to reconsider their plan of action.

The night of the meeting was an evening that the pastor and his wife later came to refer to as “Manic Monday.” There were hurricane warnings that night and for a while those who were on the church grounds for committee meetings huddled together in the interior hallway while the storm approached. By about 8:00 p.m., the threat of the storm had passed, but by that time, as the Consistory gathered to meet, a “storm” of a different type was brewing. In addition to the fifteen or so Consistory members, over a dozen additional church members squeezed into the meeting room to observe what would happen. Although there were not enough seats for everyone and many had to stand, the president conducted a normal business meeting for an hour and fifteen minutes while

tension grew. Finally, having concluded all the other business at hand, the president recognized the observers and granted each of those who so desired three minutes to speak.

For the next forty minutes or so, over a dozen members spoke passionately and powerfully about what the pastor's ministry had meant to them and their families. After everyone had spoken, the president called for a short recess. Then she called for a closed meeting between the Consistory and the Pastoral Relations Committee with the pastor present. No outsiders were to be admitted. During that time, the pastor pleaded to the Consistory *not* to vote on whether to accept the Pastoral Relations Committee's recommendation that he be terminated, until he had an opportunity to have the Association Minister come and mediate between him and the Pastoral Relations Committee. The Pastoral Relations Committee did not want to consider this request. Their minds were already made up and, as they saw it, a meeting with the Association Minister would not change anything.

Eventually, the Pastoral Relations Committee and the pastor were excused from the meeting (except for the three committee members who were also Consistory members). After some deliberation, the Consistory voted (6 to 5) to grant the pastor the mediation he had requested with the Association Minister. The pastor thanked God for this small victory.

The mediation took place the following evening. With the Association Minister's help, the pastor eventually negotiated the following terms: he would tender his resignation, effective July 31, 2008 and he would be granted severance pay until September 30. The following evening (Wednesday night), a third meeting was held. The

resignation agreement negotiated between the pastor and the Pastoral Relations Committee was presented to the Consistory. The agreement was accepted.

At once the scope of the pastor's ministry at Church A had been dramatically shortened. He had only a month and a half left in which to minister actively with the congregation. How would he use that time? Clearly, this was not a time to launch a new ministry program or to take on any new projects. The pastor remembered being told that his predecessor had "coasted" for his final year and a half at Church A. He had reduced his effort to a minimum, leaving important leadership issues neglected.

Should this pastor do the same? Certainly it would be understandable if he gave no more than minimal effort in performing his pastoral duties during those last few weeks. No one would blame him if he simply recycled a few old sermons, updated his résumé, and concentrated on taking care of himself. But would that be a faithful response? Many in the congregation were hurting and confused. They wondered how their shepherd could be taken away from them in such a manner. Some were considering leaving the church. Others wanted to stay and hold accountable those they felt were responsible for pushing out their shepherd. These people needed words of comfort and encouragement. They needed healing. They needed to come to a place where they could forgive and start to reconcile and rebuild. In short, they needed pastoral leadership and pastoral care. Could this pastor stand idly by while this "flock" floundered for lack of a shepherd?

Statement of the Problem

Here was a pastor with limited time, resources, and energy to offer pastoral care to a hurting, conflicted congregation. The limitations of the pastor's ability to minister as

well as the congregation's acute need for pastoral ministry were both products of the same forced resignation. Gradually, the pastor sensed that the issues the congregation was facing might best be addressed in the context of *worship*—not simply in the form of announcements or discussions within a worship service, but in the context of the congregation's actual corporate *engagement* with God. In worship people gather “in the protective shelter of God's healing love . . . [where they] are free to pour out [their] grief, release [their] anger, face [their] emptiness, and know that God cares (from “Order for Thanksgiving for One Who Has Died,” United Church of Christ Office for Church Life and Leadership 1986, 372).

Suddenly, the pastor realized God was calling him to use his final weeks at Church A in a new and creative way. For months, he had been studying liturgy and worship as he prepared for his doctoral project. Now, it seemed that everything he had been learning had been preparing him for “just such a moment as this” (Esther 4:14 [NRSV]). The pastor sensed he had a “mandate from God” to use his final fifty days to focus on pastoral care. Specifically, he sensed God calling him in his final seven Sundays with the congregation to use his gifts in preaching and liturgy to work for healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

The pastor had a sense that God had called him to help the congregation work through its pain in the context of worship, but he was not sure about exactly *how* to do it. How would he choose the Scriptures from which he would preach and shape the liturgy? Would the situation call for different orders of worship from those that were usually used? Were there resources that could be found, used, and adapted for the church's use in worship? Were there songs, hymns, or prayers that spoke to the church's particular

situation or that would help give voice to their feelings? If so, where could these resources be found? If not, could new ones be created for this purpose?

The pastor wanted to minister to the congregation. He wanted to address with integrity the issues facing the congregation. He wanted to help the congregation engage meaningfully with God in worship, expressing the cries of their hearts. He wanted to help this soon to be “shepherdless” flock wrestle with God’s Word so they could hear what the Spirit was speaking to them in their particular situation. But the pastor needed to know *how* to do this. How could he use liturgy and preaching to offer pastoral care to a hurting congregation in need of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation?

Moreover, was it even clear that it *could* be done? If a series of worship services and sermons *could*, in fact, offer pastoral care to a congregation and help it find healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, what would that look like? Would the end result be that every person would become completely healed, forgiven, and reconciled? Would each person become an agent of divine healing and forgiveness and reconciliation? If so, to what extent would he be so? Furthermore, should it be that some members felt on-going hurt, or refused to forgive, and/or remained unreconciled with at least *some* other members of the congregation, would that mean the worship services and sermons had failed? To what extent would they have failed? For that matter, in what ways and to what extent could healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation meaningfully be measured?

Following on the heels of “*how*” and “*could*” was the question of “*who*?” Assuming that pastoral care could be offered and healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation could be achieved to some degree through the ministries of preaching and of worship leading, who would be able to offer those ministries? Could the pastor himself lead the

congregation toward healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation or would the leadership have to come from someone who would come after him?

As the pastor pondered these questions and sought to guide the congregation and be a healing presence, he became keenly aware of his *own* brokenness and neediness. The pastor himself needed healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Did he have the personal resources to become what Henri Nouwen (1972) called “the wounded healer”? Would the pastor’s efforts for the sake of the congregation somehow stifle or delay his own healing? Or might the process of preaching these sermons and leading these worship services somehow become the very means by which he too would experience healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation?

Assuming then that healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation could, to some extent, be facilitated through carefully crafted sermons and liturgies and *further* assuming that he did indeed have the personal resources to craft and lead these, the pastor still faced the dilemma of whether he *should* do so. Worship, after all, is about God. Would it be appropriate to use worship to accomplish something—no matter how altruistic—other than for the “accomplishment” of honoring God? Would it be right to prepare an order for worship designed specifically for the effect it would have on the worshippers themselves rather than for the sole purpose of honoring the One being worshiped? The question was not only of “*how*,” “*could*,” and “*who*,” but also of “*should*.”

The pastor decided that indeed he *should* try his best to address the pastoral needs of the congregation through worship. Though he was unsure of how to proceed and though he had limited resources and even more limited experience in leading in this way,

he proceeded to prepare liturgy to help his congregation worship God in the midst of the disruption, uncertainty, and strong feelings they were experiencing.

In many ways the pastor felt he was groping in the dark for liturgical solutions to pastoral problems. He was not aware of any resources that specifically addressed the situation in which he and the congregation found themselves. He was left to draw on his own pastoral instincts to craft liturgy that he hoped would be effective in helping the congregation receive the care they needed. *The problem this research project seeks to address is that it is not always readily apparent which liturgical elements might be employed most effectively in the context of corporate Christian worship to offer pastoral care in a given situation.*

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify which liturgical actions were most effective in expressing pastoral care as one pastor sought to minister to a congregation during his final seven Sundays together with them in June and July of 2008. Insights gained from this specific context can, in turn, be applied more broadly to other situations.

Research Methodology

For this project a pro-active research method has been pursued in the form of a case study in which the researcher intentionally engaged in qualitative research while pro-actively working toward personal transformation. The researcher did not place himself outside the study as an impassionate observer, but saw himself very much as a participant in the process and as part of the equation (Myers 2000, 25).

There are two main components to the research portion of this project. The first is a critical pastoral analysis of fourteen primary documents which are presented in Appendix A of this paper. Seven of the documents are transcriptions of audio recordings (Myers 2000, 42) of seven sermons the pastor preached at Church A in June and July of 2008. The other seven are corresponding “found” documents (Myers 2000, 42): the printed orders of the seven worship services in which those sermons were preached.

As primary sources, the sermons and orders are analyzed in terms of their faithfulness to Scripture, their quality as examples of orders for authentic corporate Christian worship (as defined in Chapter Two of this project), and their usefulness in helping to facilitate healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation in the congregation. Part of the analysis of these documents is a description of the pastor’s thought process in preparing these sermons and these orders.

The second component of the research involves the formation of a focus group made up of a purposive sample (Myers 2000, 48) of members of Church A. The focus group members were first given a brief description of the study as well as a brief review of the themes of the seven worship services. Next, they were asked to answer (in writing) a questionnaire (Myers 2000, 55). The questionnaire contained questions relating to how personally the respondents engaged in the process of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation (both as recipients as agents) as a direct result of their participation in worship during the series of seven sermons and worship services. Later, the members of the focus group were invited to gather with the researcher in a neutral place for a group interview in which the members of the group further discussed how they perceived and

experienced those seven worship services in the context of their own journeys toward healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research project is to identify elements of corporate Christian worship that are effective in helping a congregation receive pastoral care. In order to achieve this purpose, the following three research questions have been formulated to guide the rest of the study:

1. What is the purpose and substance of Christian worship? What does the Bible say about worship? How would worship be defined from a biblical perspective? What distinguishes worship as being faithful to the Bible? What makes worship distinctively Christian? How should Christians worship when they are gathered together?

2. In what ways are worship and pastoral care related? In what way can a biblically shaped liturgy combined with biblical expository preaching offer pastoral care to a hurting congregation in need of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation? What are the parameters, connections, and integration points of pastoral care issues in Christian worship? Historically, what has the church understood pastoral care to be? How does liturgical leadership provide pastoral care? How does the ministry of pastoral care shape the liturgy?

3. What liturgical actions or elements are most effective in helping worshipers to receive pastoral care? Specifically, which liturgical actions employed in worship at Church A in June and July of 2008 were most effective in helping the members of Church A experience healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation? What broader applications can be extrapolated from the lessons learned?

Significance of the Study

This study has personal significance for the researcher as a pastor and as a participant in the events presented. Through the feedback of the focus group and through the researcher's own theological reflections on both the events and his actions in them, he has matured as a pastor. It has been a journey of growth in pastoral leadership through liturgical (and homiletical) leadership (and vice-versa).

While every pastorate is unique and the circumstances surrounding the ending of each pastorate are likewise unique, this project can be helpful to other pastors navigating through their own departures, *particularly* if their departure was unplanned or forced upon them. Even in the midst of pain, distrust, and confusion (or perhaps particularly in those circumstances) there is a need for pastoral leadership and care. Although this case is not presented as a perfect and exemplary model for others to copy or emulate, the theological *reflection* on the case can be valuable to other pastors.

Beyond the immediate issue of dealing with the relatively narrow scope of the issue of a pastoral departure, there are some fairly far-reaching implications to this project for preaching and leading worship. This research project seeks to discover principles that can help a pastor more effectively express pastoral care to a congregation in *other* contexts with other needs. The lessons learned here can be applied to new situations. In fact, the researcher has already begun to apply the lessons learned in this research project in other ministry contexts.

For example, as the researcher spent three months with Church B, forty miles away from Church A as an intentional interim pastor, he became aware that the members of that church had become weary of wandering in a protracted time "between" settled

pastors. The researcher chose to preach all but two of his sermons during that time with the congregation from the great Exodus narratives. In those texts the researcher was able to show the congregation how the Children of Israel, too, wandered between “settled” times, yet found their “interim” time to be surprisingly fruitful and formative.

Subsequently, the researcher served Church C (not far from Church A) during a time when that church had just said good-bye to their sixth pastor in six years. The members found it hard to feel hopeful about the future of their church. Arriving at the beginning of the Advent season, the researcher preached from the Advent lectionary passages a message of hope and of expectation for the arrival of the Promised One. This message resonated well with that congregation at that time. Opportunities abound for pastoral care through preaching and leading worship.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

Worship is first for God. It is the height of presumption to think that if the right words are spoken or that if the right acts are performed that God is obliged to meet the demands of the worshiper(s). Nevertheless, God can and often does perform great works in his people as they gather before him in worship. Sometimes those works include healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Also, there are many factors that account for an individual’s or a community’s experience of healing, forgiveness, or reconciliation. Though two individuals worship side-by-side and hear the same sermon, one may find deliverance while the other does not. Though two congregations worship almost identically, one may find reconciliation while the other congregation remains divided and alienated. The process through which

Church A went in the summer of 2008 is not a fail-safe prescription for healing: it is simply the story of one congregation's journey.

It is impossible to know where Church A would be today had the pastor not obeyed what he sensed to be God's call and had not exercised the pastoral leadership that he did. It would be impossible to set up a "control" case to see what would happen if just one item were changed.

Suppose the pastor had demonstrated "perfect" leadership and had done everything "correctly." Would the results have been different? Suppose he had given into the temptation to use the pulpit as a "bully pulpit" from which to attack those he felt had wronged him. How much worse off would the congregation then be? Suppose the pastor had chosen to undermine the power of those in positions of power in the congregation and had actively sought to draw members away from the church so that he could start a new congregation. What would be the result today? One can only guess. While there are examples of angry or unbalanced pastors who have done far more harm than good to their congregations, there is no way of knowing what different outcome may have resulted from a different leadership path from the pastor. All that is available to be studied is what *was* done and what happened as a result of it. There is no "control group" to test what might have happened had one or more factors had been changed.

Further, to the extent that some members may have received pastoral care or experience healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, it is impossible to determine exactly what caused them to receive these gifts of grace. To what degree could it be attributed to the pastor's homiletical and liturgical leadership? To what extent could it be credited to the individual's personal engagement with God? How great was the role of the Holy

Spirit working in and through the pastor's and the individual's efforts—or *in spite* of them? The answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this research project.

Definition of Terms

<i>Association Minister</i>	denominational official in the United Church of Christ.
<i>Church A:</i>	a UCC church in Ohio where the researcher served as pastor
<i>Church B:</i>	a UCC church in Ohio where the researcher served briefly as an intentional interim pastor
<i>Church C:</i>	a UCC church in Ohio not far from Church A where the researcher served as an intentional interim pastor
<i>Common Worship:</i>	the activity of the church gathered together for the common purpose of worshiping the Triune God (see also <i>corporate worship</i>).
<i>Continuous Outpouring:</i>	Harold Best's term in his book, <i>Unceasing Worship</i> (2003, 21) for describing both what God does toward creation and humanity and what human beings continually do toward that which they value; directed toward false gods, this outpouring is "idolatry" but directed toward God, it is worship.
<i>Corporate Worship:</i>	the activity of the church (the body of Christ) gathered together to worship the Triune God.
<i>Cultic Worship</i>	the expression of religious experience in concrete external actions performed within the congregation or the community, preferably by officially appointed exponents and in set forms (Peterson 2002, 30).
<i>Didactic:</i>	having to do with the teaching/instructional (rather than the emotive or motivational) aspect of preaching or worship.
<i>Engaging with God:</i>	David Peterson's all-encompassing term for worship, in his book by the same title (2002, 20) which goes beyond merely "attributing worth" and emphasizes the relational aspect of worship.

<i>Homiletics:</i>	the branch of theology that deals with the composition and delivery of sermons; the study of preaching.
<i>Hymn:</i>	a metered poem expressing faith meant to be sung.
<i>Idolatry:</i>	worship that is not directed toward God.
<i>Liturgiologist:</i>	one who composes/arranges liturgy for worship.
<i>Liturgy:</i>	a form or order of worship; literally: the <i>work</i> of the people in worshiping God.
<i>Missional:</i>	a paradigm shift introduced by Darrell Guder in <i>Missional Church</i> (1998, 6) in which God's people are understood to be the "sent people" of the sending God and the church is understood to be an instrument of God's mission in the world.
<i>Pastoral Care:</i>	ministry that seeks help people to live and express God's presence in all aspects of life.
<i>Triune:</i>	adjective describing one God existing in three persons.
<i>UCC:</i>	the United Church of Christ; a denomination with headquarters in Cleveland.
<i>Worship:</i>	a whole-life approach to <i>engaging</i> with God and <i>outpouring</i> toward God.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters with the following titles:

- Chapter One: Introduction to the Project
- Chapter Two: Biblical and Theological Foundations
- Chapter Three: Review of Literature and Other Sources
- Chapter Four: Research Methodology and Procedures
- Chapter Five: Results and Analysis of Data
- Chapter Six: Summary, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

After describing the context in which the pastor came to lead the congregation of Church A through seven Sundays of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, Chapter One provides a statement of the problem, presenting its context, and introduces the intended purpose of the study. In addition, the methodological approach and research questions are presented. An attempt has been made to assess the significance of the study. Assumptions and limitations of the study are acknowledged and explicitly stated. Terms which have been given a specific meaning in the course of this research project and which must be understood in order to comprehend the material of this project are defined. Finally, this brief overview of the project's organization is presented.

Chapter Two serves to establish the biblical and theological foundations for understanding Christian worship. The first half of the chapter draws heavily on the insightful work of David Peterson in *Engaging God* and of Harold Best in *Unceasing Worship* to construct a biblical definition of worship. In the second half of the chapter, building on that definition, the phenomenon of Christian *corporate* worship is explored. Twelve theses for corporate worship are developed and presented.

The contributions of eight major contemporary voices in the field of worship studies (both theoretical and practical) are briefly presented in Chapter. In Chapter Three the relationship between worship and preaching as pastoral care is explored in detail. United Church of Christ resources for planning and leading worship with an aim toward expressing pastoral care are examined.

In Chapter Four, the process of forming a focus group for this research project (including a discussion of how participants were chosen and how they were invited to participate) is described in detail. The design of the written questionnaire given to them is

described in this chapter and presented in its entirety in Appendix B. The design and moderation of the subsequent group interview with all the participants is described in detail.

There are two components to Chapter Five. First, a *pastoral* analysis of the liturgy prepared for seven corporate worship services at Church A in June and July of 2008 as well as of the sermons preached at those services is presented. The orders for those seven worship services as well as transcripts of the seven sermons are presented in their entirety in Appendix A.

Second, research data collected from the members of the focus group (both from their written answers to the questionnaire and from their verbal responses in the group interview) is presented and analyzed. Written responses from the focus group members and a transcript of the group interview are presented in Appendix C.

In Chapter Six the project summary is developed and findings are made explicit. Through theological reflection on the findings, conclusions are stated and practical applications are recommended.

CHAPTER TWO
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

To construct a theology of worship turns out to be a difficult task.

–D. A. Carson

Introduction

Most Christians have a sense of what it means to worship—a sense powerfully shaped by years of experience worshipping with brothers and sisters in Christ within a local church. “Worship is what we *do* when we get together on Sunday mornings,” they think. “We sing, we pray, we hear God’s word proclaimed and preached.” Certainly those are some things Christians do when they gather as a community to worship. But what exactly *is* worship?

As with all questions of faith for Christians, the ultimate authority for answering them can only be found in God and the word spoken by God in the Holy Scriptures. Unfortunately, while worship is discussed frequently throughout the Bible, nowhere within its pages is a precise definition of worship given. Neither is an authorized order for Christian worship presented. As with many issues of faith and practice for Christians, understanding worship requires a fair amount of theological reflection and interpretation.

In the past few decades, there has been an explosion of books about Christian worship written from a variety of points of view and for a variety of audiences (for pastors, musicians, and different kinds of worship leaders as well as for the average

worshiper in the pew). Some of these books offer great practical insights into how to lead worship, but often they neglect to define worship to any degree of depth. Other books in this genre promise much in their titles: *Authentic Worship* (Bateman 2002), *Dynamic Worship* (Callahan 1997), *Experiential Worship* (Rognlien 2005), *Living Worship* (Dennis 2004), *Real Worship* (Wiersbe 2000), and *True Worship* (Witcomb and Ward 2004), but in the end fail to deliver a sufficiently comprehensive definition.

The focus of this chapter is not on *how* to lead or plan worship, but on developing a working definition of worship which is biblically based and theologically sound. Toward this end this chapter will draw heavily on David Peterson's biblical study of worship in his book, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (2002). Once a satisfactory definition of worship has been developed, the phenomenon of *corporate* worship will be examined more closely. Twelve theses about corporate worship will be proposed which can be used by worship leaders in their task of planning and lead the people of God in worship.

The English Word *Worship*

One traditional approach to defining worship begins with the definition of the English word, *worship* (*cf.* Packer 1966, 5; Allen and Borrer 1982, 16). According to this approach, worship is essentially a matter of "worth-ship" (from the Old English *weorthscipe*) or an act of attributing worth to God. Unfortunately, this sort of working definition has little to do with what the Bible reveals about worship. Worship thus defined is all about an individual's or group's assessment of God's worth, regardless of what God has to say about the matter! As David Peterson observes in his book, *Engaging with God* (2002, 17), "The fact that some worship in the Old Testament was regarded as

unacceptable to God (*e.g.* Genesis 3:4-7; Exodus 32; Isaiah 1), is a reminder that what is impressive or seems appropriate to us may be offensive to him.”

A further weakness of defining worship based on the derivation or common application of the English word, “worship” is that there are a number of different Greek and Hebrew words in the Old Testament which at times (but not always) are translated into the word, “worship” in English. Sometimes the words stand alone, but in other instances they are found in combination with other words, so that it is not a simple matter of studying their “dictionary” meaning in order to understand the concept of worship more fully. Simply stated “there is no one-to-one relationship between any Hebrew or Greek word and our word *worship*” (Carson 2002, 19).

The biblical words or groups of words which relate to worship can loosely be categorized into three major concepts: honoring, serving, and respecting God, which together comprise a biblical sense of what it means to worship. The first concept (that of “honoring”), is derived chiefly from the Greek verb, *proskyneō*, which is virtually the only word used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew verb, *hišṭʿhawâ*. These words carry with them a sense of a literal physical gesture (of bowing, bending, kneeling, prostrating, and even kissing) in homage to or in grateful submission to a great one—either human or divine. The verb is first used in the Septuagint when Abraham *bowed* to the three men who appeared at his tent Genesis 18:2. Early on *proskyneō* came to be used “for the inward attitude of act of homage or respect which the outward gesture represented” (Peterson 2002, 57). This is not to say that the physical gesture is essential for worship. Rather, it was a culturally relevant way of expressing honor in the ancient world which came to be understood as a metaphor for worship.

The second concept (that of “serving”), includes the Greek verbs, *latreueuō* and *leitourgeō* (from which the word, *liturgy* is derived), and the Hebrew verbs, ‘*ābad* and *šērēṭ*. The language of service implies that God should be worshiped through acts of obedient service as well. Cultic service provided by priests and Levites was a specialized form of such service. Whereas bowing down (the language of honoring) implies a *willingness* to serve God, the language of service makes it more obvious that worship also involves the ongoing *action* of serving God, too. Worship is a lifestyle.

The third concept (that of “respecting”), is expressed in the Greek verb, *sebomai*, and the Hebrew verb, *yārē*. It includes a sense of awe, or even trembling, and is sometimes translated into English as “the fear of the LORD.” This kind of reverence encompasses far more than one’s demeanor during a corporate worship service. It has to do with a lifestyle of faithfulness and obedience to the covenant demands of God.

Taken together, these groups of words suggest that worship is a whole-life orientation toward a living relationship with God. No one word in the English language captures all that the variety of words used in Scripture do to describe worship. One that comes close is *engagement*. According to Peterson (2002, 20), “the worship of the living and true God is essentially *an engagement with him on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible.*”

Worship in the Old Testament

Worship in the Old Testament, although traditionally associated with the Book of Psalms, does not begin there, but with “cultic” worship practices instituted by God in the Pentateuch. *Cult* in this context means “all those acts by which communities or

individuals give outward expression to their religious life, by which they seek and achieve contact with God” (de Vaux 1997, 271).

The fact that the system of cultic worship practice (including the sacrificial system) was instituted by God highlights the fact that worship does not begin with the worshiper but with God. God calls humanity to worship him and instructs humanity in how to do it. In fact, acceptable worship is something only “*made possible for us by God*” (Peterson 2002, 19). Throughout the Bible there is a thread of meaning that consistently shows that human beings can find God and worship God aright only when God initiates the action.

God not only teaches *how* he is to be worshiped, but also on what *basis*—his redemptive acts in human history. The central defining event in the life and history of Israel was God’s redemption of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The subsequent establishment of the sacrificial system of worship central to this cultic system was profoundly shaped by that experience. For instance, the Passover meal was to be celebrated “for generations to come” as a reenactment of the first Passover in Egypt when the angel of the LORD *passed over* the homes of the Israelite families who, in faith, had marked the posts and lintels of their doorways with lamb’s blood. (Exodus 12:14). Indeed, most of the various elements of cultic worship (including sacred festivals, holy places, covenant-making, Sabbath-keeping, and ritual cleansing) were intended to retell and live out the reality of that redemptive relationship.

The most important cult objects were the ark and the tabernacle because they represented the dwelling place of the LORD. Later on, the temple would take on the symbolic role as God’s earthly “dwelling place.” Unfortunately, this led to some

confusion and misdirected worship as people began to imagine that the temple was not only a symbol of God's presence, but was God's *actual* dwelling place. In so doing, the people made an idol of the temple.

Liturgy in the Former Prophets

John Witvliet examines Israel's relatively unexplored post-Exodus, pre-exilic era in the essay, "The Former Prophets and the Practice of Christian Worship" in *Worship Seeking Understanding* (Witvliet 2003, 23-38). In the biblical books covering this era there are extended descriptions of both exemplary and nonexemplary liturgical events. These Former Prophets (prophets of God whose stories are contained in the narrative books of Joshua through Kings) "demonstrate the significance of liturgical action as a barometer of corporate spiritual health" (Witvliet 2003, 25). On one hand, every time there is a revival or sign of spiritual health in Israel, liturgists spring into action. For example, after crossing the Jordan the Israelites submit to a second circumcision and celebrate the Passover (Joshua 5). On the other hand, whenever there is a spiritual, political, or moral decline, liturgy suffers. For example, in the First Book of Samuel there are multiple references to the "insensitive and abusive priesthood" of Eli's sons (1 Samuel 2:10-19) and descriptions of "Saul's disobedience to God's explicit commands about sacrifice" (1 Samuel 13) (Witvliet 2003, 26).

Although the vast majority of Israel's specific liturgical practices are not a part of Christian practices, their theme of covenantal renewal is a primary image for Christian worship (Witvliet 2003, 26). Throughout the Bible, "covenant" is the premier word for describing the relationship between God and the people of God.

Historic recitation of the redemptive acts of God is another aspect of Israel's worship which informs Christian worship. "Nearly every major work on the meaning and purpose of liturgy written by a prominent Reformed theologian" says Witvliet (2003, 31), "has emphasized the memorializing function of liturgy, the way it recounts divine action in the past in ways that anticipate divine action in the future." From the song of Moses and Miriam—the first recorded song in the Bible (Exodus 15), worship is about retelling the stories of the mighty deeds of God.

The Latter Prophets and Worship

In the period of Israel's history following the division of the monarchy, the Major and Minor Prophets criticized the empty worship practiced by the people. Their criticism was not of the cult itself (including the temple and the sacrificial system of worship), but of the abuses of the cult, as can be seen in Malachi's complaint:

. . . where is the respect due me? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. You say, "How have we despised your name?" By offering polluted food on my altar. And you say, "How have we polluted it?" By thinking that the Lord's table may be despised. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not wrong? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not wrong? Try presenting that to your governor; will he be pleased with you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 1:6b-8 [NRSV])

The prophets condemned *corrupted* worship in which pagan ideas and practices were introduced to Israelite cultic worship and *empty* worship marked by a lack of repentance or an indifference to injustice in daily life.

Jesus and the New Temple

In the Gospels (particularly in Matthew and John) a picture begins to develop in which Jesus is seen as "the fulfillment of everything that the temple stood for and [as] the

focus of worship under the new covenant” (Peterson 2002, 81). Matthew uses the verb, *proskyneō* more frequently than does any other New Testament writer except for the author of Revelation. In ten instances in Matthew, Jesus is clearly the object of the worship. The whole Gospel of Matthew builds to a point where the reader, like the disciples present at the time of Christ’s ascension, is moved to worship Jesus (28:17) and place confidence in him (28:20).

In the Gospel of John, the divine presence is no longer confined to the temple. Rather, “the Word who was with God ‘in the beginning’ and who in fact ‘was God’,” says Peterson (2002, 93)

has become flesh and taken up temporary residence or ‘pitched his tent among us’ (1:14, lit.: *eskēnōsen en hēmin*). This terminology recalls the instruction to Israel to make a tent-sanctuary (Ex. 25:8-9, *skēne*), as the site of God’s localized presence on earth, and later teaching about God’s presence in the temple or on Zion, his holy hill. The prophets indicated that in the End-time God would ‘make his dwelling’ (*kataskēnōn*) in the midst of his people forever (Joel 3:17; Zc. 2:10; cf. Ezk. 43:7) and John proclaims the fulfillment of that promise in the incarnation of the eternal Word.

Jesus is literally Immanuel: “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

Jesus and Mount Zion

In his conversation with the Samaritan woman by the well in John 4, Jesus advances these ideas even further. Not only is Jesus the true tabernacle (1:14) and the true temple (2:19), but he also “fulfills the ideal of the holy mountain where God can be encountered (4:20-24)” (Peterson 2002, 97). Furthermore,

Jesus shifted the focus from the place of worship, which was such an issue between Jews and Samaritans, to the manner of worship (4:21, ‘Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem’). When he says ‘You . . . worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews’ (4:22), he asserts that Samaritan worship, based as it was on an inadequate knowledge of

God, was false. However, despite the implication that Jewish worship was truly based on divine revelation and therefore honouring to God, it is to be superseded:

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23-24).

. . . Old Testament worship was not false, as Samaritan worship was false, but it was, in effect, only ‘a shadow of the good things to come’ (Heb. 10:1, RSV), pointing forward to the reality which has come in Jesus. (Peterson 2002, 98)

New covenant worship, then, is a matter of encountering and engaging with God “in spirit and truth.” This is made possible by God in Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus and the New Covenant

In the Old Testament, salvation, temple, covenant, and acceptable worship are intimately related. In the New Testament, as it becomes clear that through his death and resurrection Jesus the Messiah has replaced the temple and its ministries, it also becomes clear that he has inaugurated a new covenant.

Nevertheless, in the Gospels Jesus is portrayed as a pious Jew, respectful of the Mosaic Law and the old covenant. He regularly took part in Jewish festivals (Mark 14:12-25), observed the Sabbath (Mark 1:21), taught as a visiting rabbi in synagogues (Mark 1:21), and maintained a personal habit of prayer (Mark 1:35). His temptation by Satan in the wilderness shows him doing exactly what a pious Jew should do: resist worshiping any and all but the living God as he quotes Deuteronomy 6:13, “Worship the LORD your God, and serve him only” (Matthew 4:10 [NRSV]).

Jesus is the worshiper *par excellence* living in perfect submission to the Father. Jesus fulfills the Old Covenant and ushers in the New. Significantly, he ushers in the New Covenant by making the ultimate gesture of uncompromising worship: humbling

himself and becoming “obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8 [NRSV]).

Temple and Community in the Acts of the Apostles

Today many Christians are interested in going back to the basics of the first century church, however, there are surprisingly few references to worship in Acts, the sequel to the Gospel of Luke. In fact Luke’s only use of the Greek verb *proskyneō* (to honor/worship) in reference to Jesus in *either* text occurs in the context of the ascension narrative in Luke 24:52.

The first disciples continued to go to the temple to worship and pray. It was there that they also began to preach the Gospel of Jesus. Eventually, those who opposed the Gospel of Jesus Christ found themselves arguing with Stephen. Being no match for his wisdom and spirit, they concocted lies about him, saying that

this man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us. (Acts 6:13-14 [NRSV])

There is no evidence that Stephen had actually spoken against the temple, yet because of the accusations, he was brought before the high council. Stephen’s bold speech so enraged the council that it had him dragged outside the city to be stoned death (Acts 7:27-28).

The stoning of Stephen marked a pivotal time in the narrative of Acts. While there may have been tensions between those who followed Christ and those who did not *before* this event, after the event, it was clear that Christians were no longer welcome to preach Christ in the temple. Thus by the end of Acts, Christian worship is no longer related to the physical temple at all.

Moreover, while worship is still rooted in the Word of God, in Acts the Word becomes increasingly associated with the preaching of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, prayers of prominent leaders in the church were addressed directly to the person of Jesus. Stephen calls on Jesus in prayer in Acts 7:59-60. Ananias does the same in Acts 9:10-17. The disciples pray to Jesus in Acts 1:24 as does Paul in Acts 9:5, 22:10, and 26:15-18 and in many of his epistles. This homage oriented toward Jesus in worship is extraordinary when it is considered that it came out of a rigorously monotheistic Jewish tradition. This homage in prayer would also come to characterize Christian worship.

As we have seen, Luke only uses the verb *proskyneō* once, and that is in relation to Jesus' ascension. In fact

there is only one context in Acts where [any] language of worship is specifically applied to the activity of a Christian gathering. In Acts 13:2 the prophets and teachers of Antioch are said to be 'worshipping' or, more literally, 'serving' the Lord (*leitourgountōn . . . kyriō*) and fasting, when the Holy Spirit calls for the sending forth of Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey. (Peterson 2002, 150)

Even in this case it seems that Luke is using the term to refer to the prophets and teachers "carrying out their appointed ministry in the church" (Bruce 1988, 245). Thus, "the ministry of prophecy and teaching, which was exercised by those especially gifted for the benefit of other believers in the congregation, was a specific way of serving or worshiping God under the new covenant" (Peterson 2002, 151). This idea was further developed in Paul's letters as we shall see.

A Living Sacrifice: Worship Terminology Applied to Everyday Life

From his earliest writings, Paul contrasted Christian worship of Jesus Christ as Lord with the pagan practice of worshipping idols. What distinguished Christianity from

the various pagan cults that flourished in the Roman Empire of his day was not any set of rituals or secret practices, but the exclusive worship of Christ alone as Lord.

A central theme in Paul's teaching is found in Romans 12:1 which David Peterson (2002, 174) translates:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercies, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, *which is your understanding worship*. (emphasis added)

Peterson renders *logikē latreia* as "understanding worship" rather than the more common, "spiritual worship" in order to highlight how Paul was relating to the Hellenism of his day. Whereas Judaism at that time was moving toward working out the ethical implications of ritual worship, Hellenistic religions of Paul's day were moving inward, making religion more personal. Accordingly, Paul purposely borrowed "buzzwords" from Hellenistic thought to counter the Hellenistic worldview they had come to represent:

Paul would thus be taking up, in quotation marks as it were, a religious slogan common in certain circles at the time. In so doing he completely transforms the saying, while opposing it to those conceptions of spiritual worship so much in vogue at the time. Certainly no more bloody animal sacrifices of the past, but not either the pure interiority of the Mystic. The Christians' spiritual worship involves an extreme of realism—the bodily offering of himself. (Corriveau 1970, 179)

Worship, according to Paul, has a physical dimension as we literally yield our bodies to God's service.

Cultic imagery transformed

Paul sees his own ministry as a form of worship and freely describes it using cultic terminology declaring that he is "being poured out like a drink offering" (*spendomai*) (Philippians 2:17). Any Christian ministry, then, "can be described as

‘priestly’ in the sense that it enables people to present themselves as a ‘living sacrifice’ to God through Jesus Christ” (Peterson 2002, 182).

Unfortunately, two or three centuries after Paul used cultic language to speak of ministry in Christ’s name as an act of worship, Paul’s words came to be understood in a very different way:

What began in Christianity as a metaphorical and spiritual conception was by the age of Constantine ready to be taken literally again. The extension of sacrificial language had come to encompass *the ministry as a special priesthood* (Cyprian), *the table as an altar* and *buildings as temples* (Eusebius). Sacrifice was increasingly *materialized* and traditional content was put into the words. Sacrifice became again not only praise and thanksgiving but also *propitiatory* (Origen and Cyprian). A blending and transformation of conceptions—pagan, philosophical, Jewish and Christian—created a new complex of ideas. (Ferguson 1979, 1189; emphasis added)

The sense that any gospel ministry can be a worshipful sacrifice of praise was lost.

“Worship” came to be understood in a much more restricted sense as the sacrifice made by priests when they celebrated the Eucharist.

For Paul, offering acceptable worship to God is a matter of *lifestyle*—not just of what Christians do when they gather for corporate worship. Sadly, when the understanding of worship is restricted to that which happens in church gatherings, congregational worship in some contexts can be like a “narcotic trip into another world to escape the ethical responsibilities of living a Christian life in this world” (Willimon 1983, 41).

Encountering God through the Word

According to Paul’s logic, the distinction between the sacred and the profane are no longer valid. Worship is not to be understood as confined to certain times or spaces that are somehow more sacred than others. Worship has to do with ministries that

proclaim the gospel through words and deeds. People encounter God through the Word of Christ. Paul tells believers to “sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God” as a way to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16 [NRSV]). In the Bible as a whole

words play a peculiarly important role (in contrast to primitive worship where the *action* is dominant and the word seems to have little role at all), first because faith comes by *hearing*—the word must be proclaimed—and secondly because *response in words* is the specifically human way by which man makes known to himself and to others that he has received the word. (Crichton 1978, 10; emphasis added)

There are similarities between the way the word is received in the Old Testament and the way it is received in the New Testament. In the Old Testament we see Israel gathered at Mount Sinai to receive the law in Exodus 19-24. Again we see Israel assembled in Jerusalem to hear the book of the law read by Ezra in Nehemiah 8-9. The people receive God’s word in specific locations when God speaks. “The profound difference in the New Testament view of the Lord’s assembly,” says Peterson (2002, 198)

is that he comes to his people wherever they are gathered in his name and he encounters them through the ministry which he enables them to have to one another . . . We meet with God when we meet with one another.

Where two or three are gathered and they are ministering to one another through God’s word, he is in their midst. No special location is necessary—the people themselves become the temple of God.

In the Gospels, Jesus referred to his body as the temple. As Paul develops the idea that together believers are the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12), he also develops the idea that the gathered body of believers is also the temple of the Holy Spirit. “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” Paul asks (1

Corinthians 3:16 [NRSV]). By this metaphor Paul makes it clear to the Corinthian congregation that they must be wary of defiling or destroying God's dwelling place through their quarreling and divisiveness. They must resist the dangers that come from within the congregation and commit themselves to the ministry of edification.

Gathering for Edification

While at times Paul uses "building" imagery in conjunction with temple imagery, which harkens back to the Old Testament and cultic practices, at other times he uses such imagery without specific cultic allusions. The Greek verb, *oikodomenō* (edify/build up) in other Greek literature has to do with building houses or other structures. In contemporary English, the word *edify* tends to take on an unintended individualistic connotation as though "edifying" has to do only with growing inwardly and personally. Certainly edification is more than that.

Jesus spoke of "building" his church, quoting Psalm 118:22-23 about the LORD using the stone the builders had rejected (in Matthew 21:42-44; Mark, 12:10-11; and Luke 20:17-18). He also said in Matthew 16:18 "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build [*oikodomēsō*] my church . . ." [NRSV]. Peter likewise told believers to come to "him, a living stone [and] like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house . . ." (1 Peter 2:4-5 [NRSV]).

Paul teaches in Ephesians 4:7-11 that the Messiah provides the church with apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers in order to build his church. The priority is given to word ministries which "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12 [NRSV]). Paul sees his work of evangelism and church planting as acts of building (Romans 15:20), but the work of

edification continues through a process of teaching and encouragement as well (*cf.* 2 Corinthians 10:8; 12:19; and 13:10):

Edification occurs when Christians minister to one another in word and deed . . . Pastor-teachers ought to encourage and facilitate such mutual ministry. Clearly this ought to take place when the congregation meets together, but also as individuals have the opportunity to minister to one another in everyday-life situations (*cf.* Rom. 14:19-21; 1 Cor.8:1, 10; 10:23). . . Paul's primary focus in Ephesians 4 is not on the need for individuals to grow to maturity, but for individuals to learn to contribute to the life and development of the believing community as a whole. (Peterson 2002, 210)

The relative value of the gifts of tongues and of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14 underscores the importance of the ministry of mutual edification. The one who speaks in tongues, says Paul, edifies himself, whereas the one who prophesies builds up the church (14:4). Peterson clarifies:

Public praying and singing must also be intelligible and consistent with apostolic teaching, so that others may be able to say the 'Amen' and be edified (vv. 16-17). . . Here is an important criterion for assessing the helpfulness of testimonies, hymns, choruses, and various other elements that might go to make up a congregational meeting today. (Peterson 2002, 212)

True worship, according to Peterson (2002, 214), ought to include "real engagement with other believers in the context of mutual ministry, shared prayer and praise . . ." He continues (2002, 219) to argue that worship is about a lifestyle and not just what is done when Christians assemble:

People who emphasize that they are 'going to church to worship God' tend to disregard what the New Testament says about the purpose of the Christian assembly. If Christians are meant to worship God in every sphere of life, it cannot be worship as such that brings them to church. 'Corporate worship' may express more accurately what is involved, but Paul's emphasis is on coming together to participate in the edification of the church.

Peterson's corrective to the idea that we come to church to worship (as though it is only at that time and place we worship) is welcome. But he comes dangerously close to overstating his point.

Inevitably, some scholars have taken the argument further, asking whether it is biblical to come together solely for the purpose of worshiping God (*cf.* James 1999, 10). "Noting the lack of any mention of worship when the New Testament writers provide purpose clauses as to why the people of God meet together, these scholars conclude that we should *stop* thinking of 'worship services' and meeting together 'to worship' and the like" (Carson 2002, 25). But as Peterson (2002, 219) himself says, "to put the focus on edification is not to suggest that the church service is the one area of the Christian life where we do *not* worship God" (emphasis added).

The Book of Hebrews and the Worship of Jesus

The most complete and fully integrated theology of worship in the New Testament is presented in Hebrews. "All the important categories of Old Testament thinking on this subject—sanctuary, sacrifice, altar, priesthood and covenant—are taken up and related to the person and work of Jesus Christ" (Peterson 2002, 228). Jesus' life was an expression of worship and in Hebrews it becomes clear that by his worship as the great high priest (laying down his life as a perfect sacrifice) Christ has made it possible for believers to draw near to God (Hebrews 10:21). The writer uses cultic images to make these points and yet, paradoxically, teaches that for those who have faith in Christ there are no longer any cultic obligations.

The writer of Hebrews builds his argument on the understanding that all of the provisions for the sacrificial system of worship in the Old Testament were temporary

provisions carried out by imperfect agents as a sort of shadow of heavenly realities. In the person of Jesus Christ we have the first and only truly acceptable priest and the first and only truly acceptable sacrifice. Jesus has performed the ultimate priestly liturgy, effectively eliminating the need for any other human priesthood on earth.

The sacrifice of Christ is the linchpin of a Christian theology of worship. It is on the basis of Jesus' perfect worship that Christians can "draw near" to God with confidence (Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-23). This is not to say that the writer of Hebrews advocates what the Reformers would later call a "priesthood of all believers." It is not that Christian believers now have the privilege of approaching God as priests themselves, but rather that they can approach God "because they rely on the priestly mediation of Jesus Christ" (Peterson 2002, 239). The "real agent in worship," says James Torrance (1996, 23),

is Jesus Christ who leads us in our praise and prayers, "the one true minister of the sanctuary," the *leitourgos ton hagion*, (Heb. 8:1, 2). He is the High Priest who, by his one offering of himself for us on the cross, now leads us into the Holy of Holies, the holy presence of the Father, in holy communion.

"Christian worship," says Torrance (1996, 15), "is our participation through the Spirit, in the Son's communion with God the Father, in his vicarious life of worship and intercession." We are utterly dependent on Jesus in our worship. As Leanne Van Dyk (2005, 63-64) observes:

Jesus Christ is present in our worship because Jesus is the leader of our worship. It is he who, sympathizing with our weaknesses, ushers us to the throne of grace through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is foolish for us to think that we can casually stroll into the presence of God. . . We don't deserve to worship God. But God graciously invites us to worship and then provides us with the means to receive communion with and revelation from God—the very presence of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is Trinitarian mystery, hospitality, and gift.

Without the finished work of Christ as our high priest, we would never be able to worship God.

Service to Christ

While the Greek verb, *proskyneō* is used only once in Hebrews (and that is in reference to the homage the angels pay to Jesus in 1:6), the verb *latreueō* (to serve) is used more often. In two places (9:14 and 12:28) it is used to highlight what it means to be a Christian. “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer God an acceptable worship (*latreuōmen euarestōs tō theō*) with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29 [NRSV]). Acceptable worship is not just a matter of expressing gratitude. He states:

Since chapter 13 [in Hebrews] follows immediately, with its many exhortations to faithfulness and obedience . . . it is more likely that the writer is indicating that *the words and actions* that flow from such gratitude *are the worship* that is pleasing to God . . .

As in Romans 12:1, Christian worship is the service rendered by those who have truly grasped the gospel of God’s grace and its implications . . . Gratitude expressed in service is the sign that the grace of God has been apprehended and appreciated. (Peterson 2002, 242; emphasis added)

Understanding that our service is given in gratitude for the sacrifice Jesus made for us, the writer goes on to say that “we have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat” (Hebrews 13:10 [NRSV]). Some commentators have understood the “altar” to be a reference to the Lord’s Supper, but according to Peterson this “is to misunderstand the way the writer employs typology.” He continues:

The whole burden of Hebrews is that the high-priesthood, sacrifices and sanctuary of Judaism find their fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ, not in the activities of the church or Christian ministers (*cf.* 4:14; 8:1; 10:19-20). ‘Altar’ is another cultic term used in a shorthand and figurative way for the sacrifice of Christ in all its complexity. (Peterson 2002, 244)

The writer to the Hebrews speaks again of worship that is “pleasing to God” saying that through Jesus believers should “continually offer a sacrifice of praise (*thysian aineseōs*) to God (Hebrews 13:15 [NRSV]. The rest of the verse (“the fruit of lips that confess his name” [NRSV]) comes from language borrowed from the Greek translation of Hosea 14:2 in the Septuagint. This “sacrifice of praise,” may include acts of praise of God in the gathered assembly, but it also goes beyond it. It speaks of a *lifestyle* of worship in which the believer publicly acknowledges the name of God among unbelievers as well. The corporate worship on Sunday morning spills out into acts of worship in the world through the other six days of the week.

Whereas Paul identifies the new temple with the community of God’s people on earth, for the writer to the Hebrews it is in the heavenly realm. Peterson reflects:

As in the Old Testament, the locus of life and worship is to be the sanctuary. However, under the new covenant, that sanctuary is the heavenly Jerusalem . . . What we experience now in our relationship with God, in the company of his people, is an anticipation of the ultimate reality. (Peterson 2002, 254)

Local congregations, then, are earthly manifestations of the heavenly assembly. “In their worship [Christians] participate in the heavenly worship of the angels and of the perfect saints” (Dahl 1951, 409).

And while there is an understanding in Hebrews that believers are called to build one another up, the writer does *not* use the verb, *oikodomein* (to edify) to speak of this process. Rather, the writer uses the “pilgrimage motif” (Hebrews 4:1, 4:11, 6:1, 6:12, 10:22-25, 10:35-39, 12:1) emphasizing that believers are *journeying* by faith to the city of God. Through mutual ministry believers exhort one another not to *apostēnai* (turn away) but to *bebaian kataschōmen* (hold firmly) to the way (Hebrews 3:12, 14). Once there, it is by the blood of Jesus that believers can *enter* the sanctuary in confidence (Hebrews

10:19). Furthermore, believers are called to encourage one another by *paroxusmos* (provoking) one another to “love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24).

Worship in the Revelation to John

According to J. A. du Rand (1988, 70), the Revelation to John is “an apocalyptic writing in narrative form with a prophetic, eschatological aim and a pastoral touch presented in the form of a letter.” On the most immediate level, *Revelation* deals with challenges to the first century church in Asia Minor. The essential problem is a clash of cultures as believers sought to maintain Christian values in the face of the cultural and religious dominance of the Greco-Roman world. John warns the churches of the danger of compromising with or assimilating to pagan society. Specifically, emperor worship was the powerful false religion that the church desperately needed to resist. To engage in the imperial cult according to John was to worship the “beast coming out of the sea” (Revelation 13:1 [NRSV]).

When it comes to Rome, John leaves no middle ground: “either one shares Rome’s own ideology, the view of the Empire promoted by Roman propaganda, [or one sees Rome] from the perspective of heaven, which unmask the pretensions of Rome” (Bauckham 1993, 35). Rome is not to be opposed simply because Christians were persecuted under its authority; Rome is to be opposed because it put itself in God’s place. John shares a glimpse of worship in heaven to show the utter heinousness of the worship of the beast, the harlot of Babylon, or any other false claimant to the throne of God.

The distinction between true worship and idolatry is a major theme of the book (Peterson 2002, 264). In the end, the vision of the fall of Babylon (17:1-19:10) represents God’s judgment on those who worship the beast, whereas the vision of the New

Jerusalem (21:9-22:9) represents the future of those who have remained faithful to God. “The message of these two climactic visions is emphasized by their parallel conclusions (19:9-10; 22:8-9), which enable John to end both with the injunction, ‘Worship God’” (Peterson 2002, 264-5)!

Despite the specificity of the situation addressed in Revelation, the message applies to Christians in every age and culture. Peterson explains:

Acceptable worship involves acknowledging and accepting God’s claim for exclusive devotion and loyalty by rejecting every alternative. In the market-place, in politics, in the field of education or the arts, the Christian is constantly challenged to make the decisive choice for God that Jesus himself made, when he was tested so forcefully in the wilderness (*cf.* Mt. 4:8-10) (Peterson 2002, 265).

In Revelation we see a fulfillment of the promise made to Israel at Sinai: “You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6 [NRSV]) as a vast multitude assembles in heaven:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:9-10 [NRSV])

As in the Old Testament, those who are redeemed respond by worshiping and serving God.

The Priesthood in the Petrine Epistles

The one other place in the New Testament in which Christ’s people are spoken of as priests is in 1 Peter:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10 [NRSV])

The people are “a holy priesthood” precisely because they offer “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter. 2:5 [NRSV]). What are these spiritual sacrifices? They are acts of service to God: good deeds performed by believers in gratitude for God’s gift of salvation through Christ.

This priesthood is not a ministry of certain select individuals in the church for the benefit of others (as was the Levitical priesthood in Israel). Neither is it the perfect sacrifice offered by Jesus. Rather, it is a priesthood shared by all who belong to Christ as they resist the temptation to compromise with the powers of darkness, waiting for the perfection of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1 [NRSV]). Christian worship then can be defined as “*faith in God’s promises worked out in the obedience of everyday life*” (Peterson 2002, 269).

Reflecting Worship in the Heavenly Realm

Revelation also portrays powerful scenes of worship in the heavenly realm. Here we find multiple couplings of the verb *proskyneō* with the verb *piptō* “to fall down” (4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; and 19:4). The point is not so much about the physical posture of the worshipers as it is about an attitude of the heart acknowledging God’s greatness. In other places, verbs of speaking and singing are regularly coupled with the verb *proskyneō*:

The twenty-four elders fall [*pesountai*] before the one who is seated on the throne and worship [*proskunēsousin*] the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” (Revelation 4:10-11 [NRSV])

“This ascription is fundamental to the teaching of [Revelation],” says Peterson (2002, 271), “since it establishes God’s absolute sovereignty over his creation and the fact that all life exists to reflect his glory and honour and power.”

It should be noted that in terms of sharing God’s glory in worship, Jesus is placed on absolutely equal terms with God throughout the Book of Revelation. If it were improper in any way to worship Jesus, John would have pointed it out. John twice depicts himself being prevented from making the idolatrous *faux pas* of worshipping an angel (Revelation 19:10 and 22:8-9), but there is never a prohibition against worshipping Christ.

Some commentators have suggested that John “borrowed” sentences and phrases from first century liturgical sources and put them into the mouths of the heavenly worshipers in the Book of Revelation (*cf.* Moule 1983, 7; Cothenet 1981, 129; and Jörns 1971). Peterson (2002, 277-8) posits that the reverse is true:

John wrote to encourage his readers to reflect the pattern of the heavenly assembly in their life on earth. This could happen when they gathered together and in everyday life situations, when they were faced with any new sign of the dragon’s power . . . It would be simplistic to say that John wanted the churches to imitate the actions of the heavenly assembly or merely to sing the same songs. What was needed above all else was to reflect the same confidence in God . . . *primitive Christian Worship was intended to be a parallel to the Worship of heaven.* (emphasis added)

Thus to sing the praises of God and the Lamb not only honors God, but it also functions with teaching and exhortation to edify believers. The hymnic material in Revelation “should alert us to the importance of singing God’s praises in a way that is truly honouring to him and helpful to his people,” says Peterson (2002, 278):

Do our hymns and songs concentrate on praising God for his character and his mighty acts in history on our behalf? Do they focus sufficiently on the great truths of the gospel? There is always a temptation to focus too much on the expression of our own immediate needs. Is the language we use [as] powerful and as simple as in the material given to us by John? We need to avoid the extremes of being

trite and trivial, and loading our hymns and choruses with so much imagery that only the well-instructed can appreciate them.

It seems counter-intuitive, but the way Christians are built up in the faith is not by focusing on themselves and their feelings in worship, but by lifting up their hearts and their minds to the Lord.

Harold Best and the concept of “Unceasing Worship”

Building on the biblical foundation laid by Peterson for understanding worship, Harold Best (2003, 17) takes a systematic approach positing that “nobody does not worship.” He develops the idea of “continuous outpouring” (2003, 21), saying that God has been eternally engaged in continuously outpouring and that human beings, as creatures made in God’s image, are also created “continuously outpouring” (2003, 21).

Best’s language is somewhat awkward, but his words are carefully chosen. As he describes it, the “outpouring” of human beings finds its expression in worship. In fact, all human beings are always in a state of worship. The problem is, worship is not always directed God-ward. For the Christian, though, because of Christ’s work, our worship *can* be redeemed and can be directed toward God.

Like Peterson, Best understands that all of life is a matter of worship—of honoring and serving that which (or the One whom) we value. But whereas Peterson almost leaves his reader wondering whether there is any value in *corporate* worship (other than for the purpose of edification—building up the body of believers), Best understands *corporate worship to be a continuation of the worship Christians do even when they are not assembled together.*

Thus, there is no need to have a “call to worship” at the beginning of a corporate worship service, as though worship was something believers need to *begin* doing for a while (and which they will *stop* doing in an hour’s time or so) (Best 2003, 61). Rather, there is only *one* call to worship and once we respond to it, our lives are lived out in continuous worship. Interestingly, if all of the Christian life is a matter of worship, then evangelism can easily be seen as an invitation (or a call) to the unbeliever to worship. “Christian witness is overheard worship” (Best 2003, 77).

Worship as a whole-life response to God

It is useful and instructive to think of all of life as worship. From a biblical perspective, worship engages the *whole* person and the *whole* of life. Worship is a matter of honoring and glorifying God with the *whole self* at all times. According to Warren Wiersbe in *True Worship* (2000, 26), “Worship is the believer’s response of all that they are—mind, emotions, will, body—to what God is and says and does.” When he was asked to identify the greatest commandment, Jesus answered:

You shall love the Lord thy God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. (Mark 12:30 quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 [NRSV])

Jesus’ answer was, at its heart, *liturgical*: the greatest commandment is to worship God.

The choices we make about how we live our lives are *all* a matter of worship—of God or of something else we put in the place of God. Worship is a whole-life approach to *engaging* with God and *outpouring* toward God (Best 2003, 21). This, in its simplest form, is the true definition of worship.

Yet something is missing from this definition. What about hymns? Pastoral prayers? Sermons? Benedictions? On one level a definition of worship as a whole-self,

whole-life response to God makes sense and is biblical, nevertheless it fails to address the question of *corporate* worship. There is a simple elegance in speaking (as Best does) of God as the original *Outpourer*. And there is a simple beauty in describing an individual's life-response to God as her *continuous outpouring*. But how do we talk about the kind of *outpouring* that happens when a multitude gathers to *outpour* together?

The Question of Corporate Worship

Everything that has been said about how individuals *engage* with God as *continuous outpourers* is instructive and foundational, but one must go further in order to understand corporate worship in general and *Christian* corporate worship in particular.

D. A. Carson presents a definition of worship in an essay entitled, "Worship under the Word" (2002, 26):

Worship is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so. This side of the Fall, *human worship* of God properly responds to the redemptive provisions that God has graciously made. While all true worship is God-centered, *Christian worship* is no less Christ-centered. Empowered by the Spirit and in line with the stipulations of the new covenant, it manifests itself in all our living, finding its impulse in the gospel, which resorts our relationship with our Redeemer-God and therefore also with our fellow image-bearers, our co-worshippers. Such worship therefore manifests itself both in adoration and in action, both in the individual believer and in *corporate worship*, which is worship offered up in the context of the ascription of all worth to God with the panoply of new covenant mandates and examples that bring to fulfillment the glories of antecedent revelation and anticipate the consummation.

Carson (2002, 26) admits that the definition is both "too long and too complex," but he offers the dozen or so points in his definition as "a useful set of pegs" on which to hang an exposition of essential elements of worship. The rest of his essay is just such an exposition in which he discusses twelve distinct points from the definition.

As Carson and others have demonstrated, Christian corporate worship defies a succinct definition. Any attempt to define it will either be “too long and too complex” or it will be woefully insufficient—only scratching the surface. Instead of trying to *define* Christian corporate worship, then, we shall attempt to *describe* it. We propose the following twelve theses not as a *definition*, but as a biblically-informed *description* of Christian corporate worship.

Twelve Theses of Corporate Worship

1. Christian corporate worship is an extension of personal worship.

Best is correct when he says that we do not *begin* to worship when we come into a sanctuary with brothers and sisters as though before the call to worship we were not worshipping. The call is not so much a call to *begin* worshipping as it is to *continue* worshipping, but in a corporate way.

There is an integral relationship between corporate and personal worship.

According to Evelyn Underhill (1937, 84-85), one of the first scholars to study Christian worship in the 20th century:

Corporate and personal worship . . . should complete, reinforce, and check each other. Only where this happens, indeed, do we find in its perfection the normal and balanced life of full Christian devotion. . . . No one soul—not even the greatest saint—can fully apprehend all that this has to reveal and demand of us, or perfectly achieve this balanced richness of response. That response must be the work of the whole Church; within which souls in their infinite variety each play a part, and give that part to the total life of the Body.

James White (2000, 30) puts it more succinctly when he observes that “common worship needs to be supplemented by the individuality of personal devotions; personal devotions need the balance of common worship.”

By “common” worship, White means “corporate” worship. He uses the term, “common” advisedly because the worship of personal devotions is no less corporate than gathered worship since it also shares in the worship of the universal community of the body of Christ (White 2000, 29). His point is well-taken, yet because the term “common worship” is not without its own problems, (not the least of which is its close association with Anglican liturgy) we will continue to use here the term “corporate” worship to refer to the worship of the gathered people of God.

2. Christian corporate worship is a gift.

Worship is not so much *our* gift to God, but *God’s* gift of grace to us. According to James Torrance (1996, 20 & 59), the notion that worship is essentially something *we* religious people do to please God, as though the only “priesthood” is *our* priesthood is in practice a *unitarian* view of worship. The Trinitarian view, by contrast, is that worship “is the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father” (Torrance 1996, 20). Like salvation, worship is not *achieved* by human effort, but is *received* by God’s grace.

As we have noted above in the treatment of worship in the Letter to the Hebrews, the sacrifice of Christ is the linchpin of a Christian theology of worship (see pages 41-43 above). Christian corporate worship is made possible only by Jesus’ own perfect worship expressed in his perfect self-offering to the Father.

Furthermore, our worship is only possible through the enabling of the Holy Spirit whose presence is always a gift. The rituals of the worshiping church are not guarantors that our worship will be effective or that God will “show up” (Schmit 2008, 37-38). We do not even know how to pray properly, but the Spirit helps us in our weakness,

interceding for us with sighs and groans that are deeper even than human words (Romans 8:26). God “lifts us up out of ourselves to participate in the very life and communion of the Godhead, that life of communion for which we were created” (Torrance 1996, 22). “The first and last thing we have to say about God the Trinity,” says Colin Gunton (2001, 60), “is that he is a God who enables us to worship him.”

A theology of worship that emphasizes that worship is a gift of divine grace has inevitable implications for how liturgy is celebrated (Torrance 1996, 72). Witvliet suggests three such implications:

- a) “Christian worshipers acknowledge the giftedness of worship by means of epicletic prayers, prayers that express our longing for the Holy Spirit to work through liturgical actions to nurture and inspire faith” (2005, 2). The epiclesis is a prayer, says Lukas Vischer (1969, 35), that “shows that the church must always appear before God with empty hands, even when she prepares and performs her worship in obedience to God.”
- b) “Liturgical proclamation . . . is explicitly rooted in God's revelation in Jesus Christ through the Spirit” (Witvliet 2005, 3). It is not necessary to generate a new message: the gospel has already been given in Christ. As von Allmen (1962, 7) argued, “We do not have to invent what we are to say, we have only to listen and pass it on.”
- c) “Trinitarian doxologies at the end of prayers, sermons, absolutions, and benedictions all attest that the action being completed is accomplished only as a gift of grace” (Witvliet 2005, 3). As Donald Bloesch (1980, 36-37) argues: “To

pray in the name of Christ . . . means that we recognize that our prayers cannot penetrate the tribunal of God unless they are presented to the Father by the Son."

"The challenge here," says Witvliet (2005, 3),

is enacting these elements of liturgy in ways that bring the mediation of Son and Spirit into the consciousness of ordinary worshippers—who may otherwise live with the implicit feeling that the success of a worship service depends either on the prowess of the local preacher or musician or on their own mental efforts to make worship work. . . . Offering the faithful such an all-encompassing and grace-filled vision to supplant the rather vague and impersonal notions of deity that our culture perpetuates *is an act of profound pastoral care*. (emphasis added).

Christian worship self-consciously acknowledges that it is a gift of grace by the very way it is acted out: through its prayers, its proclamations, and its doxologies.

3. Christian corporate worship is about God.

As Rick Warren states in the opening line of *The Purpose-Driven Life* (2002, 17), "It's not about you." It is all about God. Later he comments that "the most common mistake Christians make in worship today is seeking an *experience* rather than seeking God" (2002, 109). Sadly, many worship planners and worship leaders (who ought to know better) are often guilty of perpetuating this mistake. The task of a worship leader is to lead people in worshipping *God*—not in *having* a worship *experience*.

Marva Dawn (Dawn 1999, 1) reminds Christians that not only is worship not about us or about our experience, but neither is it about evangelism, outreach, or any other utilitarian concern; it is purely and simply about God:

To worship the Lord is—in the world's eyes—a waste of time. It is, indeed, a *royal* waste of time, but a waste nonetheless. By engaging in it, we don't accomplish anything useful in our society's terms.

Worship ought not to be construed in a utilitarian way. Its purpose is not to gain numbers nor for our churches to be seen as successful. Rather, the entire reason for our worship is that God deserves it.

Dawn identifies two reasons why many Christians tend to forget the simple truth that worship is for God. First, there is the pervasiveness of what social analyst Christopher Lasch (1978, 31-33) called “The Culture of Narcissism,” which, when coupled with the pervasiveness of marketing tempts people to think about worship in terms of what it does for themselves. “Unless we are perpetually vigilant,” Dawn says,

We find ourselves asking about everything, “What’s in it for me?” When that point of view invades our worship attitudes, we complain, “I didn’t get much out of that worship service.”

So what? It wasn’t you we were worshiping, was it?

How we *feel* about worship actually is not the point. Worship is for God, because creatures owe their Creator praise. (2003, 21-22)

One of the most distressing manifestations of the culture of narcissism in the church is around the issue of styles of worship and of music. Much of what is known as the “worship wars” is really about personal musical preferences. When we remember that worship is about God and not about us, these issues become far less divisive.

A second reason why Christians forget that worship is about God is because they confuse the role of worship with evangelism. “Declining church attendance [has] caused many churches to ask the wrong questions,” says Dawn (2003, 22):

Instead of examining how best the worshiping community can praise and glorify God, they begin to inquire, “What can we do in worship to attract the unbeliever?” Consequently, numerous congregations made radical worship changes that arose from and reflected panic more than wisdom.

Dawn references Willow Creek Community Church which three decades ago took the bold step of setting aside Sunday mornings for evangelistic events while scheduling time for believers to worship on Wednesday evenings. While Dawn does not directly criticize Willow Creek, she is critical of those churches which have “falsely imitated” it, turning their Sunday morning worship services into evangelistic rallies (2003, 22-23).

Though Dawn stops short of criticizing Willow Creek's use of worship for evangelism, Willow Creek itself has begun to scrutinize its effort. After a four-year research effort, the megachurch has recently begun to abandon this evangelistic strategy and has adopted a more traditional approach. Weekend services at Willow Creek are now geared toward believers' worship of God (Branough 2008, 13). Clearly, even this prototypical "worship evangelism" church has rediscovered the truth that worship is first and foremost about God.

Even Sally Morgenthaler, the author of *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (1995), has begun to rethink her own paradigm. In the book she had offered an alternative approach to evangelism that traditionally had to do with going outside of the church walls to interact with unbelievers. She explains:

When I wrote *Worship Evangelism*, I'd had no intention of distracting people from the world outside. I only wanted to give them another way of connecting to it. I certainly had never meant to make worship some slick formula for outreach, let alone the one formula. I'd only wanted to affirm that corporate worship has the capability to witness to the unchurched if we make it accessible and if we don't gut it of its spiritual content on the way to making it culturally relevant. (Morgenthaler 2007, 50)

Gradually it became clear to Morgenthaler that her ideas of "worship as an aspect of evangelism" was being interpreted as "worship as the church's evangelism program" and it was not working. She disbanded her worship resource website, Sacramentis, and stopped teaching seminars focused solely on worship.

Evangelism, education, encouragement, and even pastoral care may well be legitimate *byproducts* of authentic worship. But corporate Christian worship must always be directed toward God.

4. *Authentic Christian corporate worship is shaped by Scripture.*

Fred Craddock (1971, 3) began a modern revolution in thinking about preaching when he challenged the three-point sermon structure and asked why sermons “are all essentially the same form.” Since that time, many homileticians have called for preaching that reflects the great variety of the biblical texts. In one way or another, they have expressed the idea that preaching should get its cue from Scripture—not just for *content*, but also for its form or shape.

E. Russell Mitman, in his book, *Worship in the Shape of Scripture* (2001), applies Craddock’s ideas about homiletics to liturgics. Not only the sermon, but the whole of liturgy should be shaped by the contours of Scripture. Each part of the liturgy is important. Worship is not merely the “opening act” for the preaching event. The sermon is not “a kind of homiletical ocean liner preceded by a few liturgical tugboats” (Rice 1991, 31).

Whereas Paul Wilson suggests the process of sermon preparation is not unlike the task of musical transposition, “since the concern of the sermon/homily is based on the text” (1988, 86), Mitman (2001, 59) likewise suggests this kind of transposition is exactly what a liturgiologist does in transposing the Word into liturgy. Such transposition takes time and imagination. As such “it is an art inasmuch as it employs principles that are more poetic and musical than scientific.” The concern with this type of transposition is to allow the Word to say and do in its setting (whether in a sermon or in a liturgical expression) what it says and does in its original setting in Scripture.

Fortunately, the liturgiologist is not alone or without clues as to how to do this type of transposition. Scripture itself is full of examples of transposition (*cf.* all four

Gospel writers' refer to a "voice crying in the wilderness" [Isaiah 40:3] in reference to John the Baptist; Peter uses the "precious cornerstone" [Isaiah 28:16] to describe Christians in I Peter 2:6; Paul uses part of David's prayer of repentance [Psalm 51:4] in Romans 3:4; and Jesus uses the *Shema* [Deuteronomy 6:4-9] to answer the Pharisee's question of the greatest commandments in Mark 12:29-30).

Every aspect of the liturgy should represent a transposition of the Word, from the call to worship to the benediction. This means that when hymns or worship songs are chosen for a worship service, the question, "What songs do the people like to sing?" becomes secondary to the question, "Does this hymn/song accurately transpose today's text?"

Those who prepare liturgies for worship are involved in *servant arts* (Mitman 2001, 52) because it is not about their cleverness or skill, but about leading God's people to an encounter with God. As Paul Wilson has said, "our rhetoric is in Christ's service" (1995, 78), or as Gail Ramshaw (1995, 114) has said:

In the liturgy not any old metaphor, or any new metaphor, will do. Liturgy is not an individual's performance laid before others; nor is it a collection of texts of self-expression. Liturgical language takes as its model not a Pulitzer prize-winning poem but the prologue of John: it is speech that the baptized community already shares. . . Liturgical imagery is not idiosyncratic but communal.

Liturgy's beauty lies in its allegiance to the Word. The arts, in turn, are servants of the liturgy. "The effectiveness of liturgy," says Best (2003, 73), "lies in its humility, in the absence of self-proclamation—'I am the liturgy; notice me.'" All liturgies, then "will stand or fall in direct proportion to the centrality of the Word of God" (Best 2003, 73.) Ultimately, authentic Christian corporate worship is *drawn from* Scripture, *suggested by* Scripture, and *shaped by* Scripture.

5. *Authentic Christian corporate worship is Trinitarian.*

Authentic Christian worship is shaped by Scripture and *because* it is shaped by Scripture, it is also Trinitarian. To begin with, Christian worship will include Trinitarian formulas such as the formula for baptism “in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Moreover, authentic Christian corporate worship will reflect and embody the doctrine of the Trinity. It is not simply a matter of tagging on the phrase, “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” here or there for good measure: it is a matter of worshipping with a “Trinitarian accent” as it were.

“The doctrine of the Trinity,” says Witvliet (Van Dyk 2005, 3), “serves as a ‘grammar’ to organize how we describe both divine life and the relationship we are privileged to share.” The grammar may not always be explicit, but it gives structure and shape to what we believe. To worship using a “Trinitarian grammar,” suggests Witvliet (Van Dyk 2005, 20-21), can even correct “theological astigmatism.” For example, in contrast to “the poverty of Deist and Unitarian worship,” Trinitarian worship understands that God is not “pristine” and isolated from us. Rather, “God’s life is one of abundant communion, a kind of fellowship . . . that overflows to include us” (2005, 8).

Witvliet suggests that Christian corporate worship should demonstrate a “Trinitarian balance,” by focusing on all three Persons of the Godhead. Christian corporate worship should also seek “Trinitarian integration” in which each of the three Persons is seen in every topic, theme, and event in worship (Van Dyk 2005, 16-20).

One of the freshest rediscoveries in Trinitarian theology today is an understanding of the Trinity in terms of community and love. Love is a relational term that requires both

a subject and object (one to love and one to be loved). Were God a solitary acting subject, says Stanley Grenz in *Theology for the Community of God* (1994, 72):

God would require the world as the object of his love in order to be who he is, namely, the Loving One. But because God is triune, the divine reality already comprehends love's subject and object.

In other words, God does not *need* humans to be fulfilled: God already exists eternally as a divine community of love. And yet, in God's great love and profound grace, he creates human beings, redeems them, and extends his love to them, inviting them into the loving divine community. Thus, says Grenz (1994, 112), "as the product of God's essence (which is love) and as God's counterpart, the world exists in order to participate in the life of the social Trinity."

Far from being a dry doctrine that must be incorporated into worship in order for it to be Christian, the Trinity gives life, meaning, and shape to worship. Still, according to Mark Galli in *Beyond Smells & Bells* (2008, 99):

"When we think of the Trinity, we tend to think of the *doctrine* of the Trinity. A doctrine is not an easy thing to love; most of us cannot love theological terms and formulas. . . . Yet hidden in, with, and under the theology is an understanding of the Trinity that will transform us.

We have already noted one way in which the Trinity transforms us, namely: God gives us the gift of worship. Through the Holy Spirit, we participate in the communion of the Godhead made possible by Christ's perfect sacrifice.

Even individual components of Christian worship are Trinitarian. For example, Christian prayer always involves the Trinity: we pray *to* the Father, *through* the intercession of the Son, and *at* the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

6. *Authentic Christian corporate worship instructs believers in the faith.*

While worship is first and foremost for *God*, it also does several things for worshipers. For one thing, it teaches them the faith. Worship is “God’s language school” (Long 2004, 47). Just as a toddler learns to speak English not by reading a book, but by speaking and interacting with her family members, so a Christian becomes conversant in the Christian faith by worshiping. The cumulative process by which worship leads to spiritual formation is not unlike the process of language acquisition (Witvliet 2008, 47). This is why it is so important that worship be shaped by *Scripture* and that it utilizes a Trinitarian grammar.

In *The School of the Church: Worship and Christian Formation*, Lutheran scholar Philip Pfatteicher (1995, 105) observes that:

The purpose of the liturgy is not to *express* our thoughts and feelings but to *develop* them, and like any good school the liturgy expands our horizon, liberating us from captivity to the moment and to the familiar. . . . Because the liturgy does not always express what we think or feel it has the potential to transform those who share in it. (emphasis added)

Part of the reason liturgy can function this way is because liturgical language is “performative language; it accomplishes what it is spoken to achieve” (Pfatteicher 1995, 101). Thus, when a worshiper says, “I confess,” she is in fact confessing, regardless of whether she is able to conjure up feelings of guilt. Likewise, when a worshiper says, “Glory to God” God is in fact praised, whether or not the worshiper’s praise is accompanied by appropriate feelings.

In his book, *Worshipping Trinity*, Robin Parry (2005, 8-9) observes that “the way we think about God and relate to God is influenced enormously by our experience of God in communal worship.” He compares our acquisition of this “participatory knowledge” of

God to the internalized and intuitive process of learning to ride a bicycle. We learn how to ride a bicycle not by *reading* about it, but by *doing* it (2005, 10). In the essay, “Making our worship more Trinitarian,” Parry (2005?) states:

I have a strong suspicion that public worship does more to shape the spirituality of Christians than just about anything else. It is in public worship that we find out how to relate to God by being with other Christians who are relating to God. It is not that there is formal teaching on the topic, though there may be, but we simply pick it up by means of a kind of osmosis just as we learn language. This makes public worship crucial in the spiritual formation of the church. It is here that people will learn, or not as the case may be, how to relate to the Trinity. It is here that the richness of the creating and saving deeds of the Trinity will come to expression. It is here that we will discover how to approach God through the Son and in the Spirit. It is in this forum that we will honour the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Here is where we first live and appropriate theology. If our worship is sub-trinitarian then we will create malnourished and malformed Christians.

The church should function as a learning center for the people of faith. Sunday worship should never be “intellectual coddle time” (Best 2003, 68); but rather, hands-on classroom time where worshipers encounter God and internalize the Christian faith.

7. Authentic Christian corporate worship shapes believers into the body of Christ.

Closely related to the idea that worship *teaches* us is the idea that worship ought to *shape* us as Christians. Rather dramatically, Marva Dawn (1995, 205) declares, “Worship ought to kill us.” Everything we do in worship should shake us up, should change us, should kill us (*cf.* Isaiah 6:5). Only then can we be born again to worship God rightly (*cf.* Matthew 10:39). Less dramatically, but no less clearly, Dawn (1995, 174) states that worship should “form us to be God’s children and followers of Jesus.”

There should be no disconnection between the experience of corporate worship and the rest of life. Christian worship and liturgy, says David L. Stubbs (Van Dyk 2005, 135-136),

can and should function in ways that are both deeper and more explicit . . . liturgy . . . provides a window into the “final ends” or overarching purposes of human life as intended by God. Worship, in short, re-enacts or dramatizes God’s intent for human flourishing. Worship gives us an opportunity to “practice” patterns of eternity.

Given the power worship has, therefore, the work we do in corporate worship on Sundays is in fact the “most real” part of our week. “In the liturgy, in our worship,” Stubbs says,

we are not simply being presented with information, much less simply being entertained; rather, we are being made into Christians—our actions and lives are being linked to the life of the world, our hearts to the heart of God, our minds to the Truth. (Van Dyk 2005, 137)

Liturgy should shape us toward our true purpose in Christ. When rightly understood, worship is all about forming us according to the patterns of God’s kingdom; it is a highly charged ethical activity. Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann (1988, 9-10) likewise recognizes that liturgy is about the formation of the church into the body of Christ and the individual believer into the image of Christ.

In his book, *The Dangerous Act of Worship*, Mark Labberton (2007, 39-40) argues that worship should “recontextualize our entire life” and lead us to live the worship out in our lives. Such worship glorifies God, transforms us, and advances God’s mission in the world.

In *Just Like Jesus*, popular Christian author Max Lucado (1998, 81-82) develops the same idea more poetically, using the metaphor of the changed face:

The purpose of worship [is] to change the face of the worshiper. This is exactly what happened to Christ on the mountain. Jesus’ appearance was changed: “His face became bright like the sun” (Matt. 17:2)

The connection between the face and worship is more than coincidental. Our face is the most public part of our bodies, covered less than any other area. It is also the most recognizable part of our bodies. We don’t fill a school annual with photos of people’s feet but rather with photos of faces. God desires to take

our faces, this exposed and memorable part of our bodies, and use them to reflect his goodness. Paul writes: “Our faces, then, are not covered. We all show the Lord’s glory, and we are being changed to be like him. This change in us brings ever greater glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

God invites us to see his face so he can change ours. . . .

How? Through worship.

To say that God changes our faces through worship is to say that as we worship, God is transforming us into the image of Christ.

Those who are transformed by God in worship demonstrate that spiritual makeover in the works they perform and the lives they live in the world. “Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:17 [NRSV]). Likewise, “adoration that does not evoke discipleship is no sure locus for spiritual transformation” (Schmit 2008, 39). “To worship is to change,” says Richard Foster (1978, 148), “If worship does not propel us into greater obedience, it has not been worship.”

Christian worship is the means God uses for the sanctification of individuals and the incorporation of believers into the body of Christ. Over time worship “quietly but powerfully sculpts our souls” (Witvliet 2008, 52). A changed life is the evidence of it.

8. Christian corporate worship has a symbiotic relationship with pastoral care.

Christians worship for *God’s* sake, but in the midst of worshipping God, pastoral care often comes as a gracious byproduct of being in the presence of God. After all, “the God who is worshiped is the Shepherd of his people” (Forrester *et al*, 2004, 191). As a shepherd tends to his flock, so the Great Shepherd tends to his people even as they are gathered in his presence to worship him.

What is pastoral care? Susan Jorgensen (1996, 245) suggests that pastoral care is not simply one of several ministries separate from others. Rather, she contends that

“pastoral care is the awareness and expression of the essence of God that permeates and informs all areas of ministry.” Put more succinctly, pastoral care is about “living and expressing God’s presence in all aspects of life” (Jorgensen 1996, 244).

Unfortunately, over the past century pastoral care has been envisioned more and more in terms of one-on-one counseling done in the pastor’s office with individuals or couples. But this has not always been so. Jesuit liturgical scholar J. A. Jungmann (1962, 380,) asserts that “for centuries, the liturgy, actively celebrated, has been the *most important* form of pastoral care” (emphasis added). In the past pastoral care was mostly expressed through “corporate, priestly, liturgical actions,” whereas today it is mostly expressed through “individualistic, psychologically-oriented techniques heavily influenced by prevailing secular therapies” (Willimon 2002, 175).

There is, in fact, a symbiotic relationship between worship and pastoral care: worship provides pastoral care and pastoral care shapes worship. What Howard Vanderwell (2007) has said about pastoral care and *preaching* applies equally to pastoral care and *worship*: “they are on a two-way street: each one is different because of the other one.” The wise pastor will bring pastoral concerns into her work as a worship leader and will use liturgical acts as a means of administering pastoral care.

When pastoral care is conceived as expressing the presence of God in all aspects of life, it becomes clear how well-suited worship is to showing God’s presence in all of life. The very act of worship is built on the understanding that God is present because worship is an encounter with God. Special worship services addressing various stages in a Christian’s life (generally referred to as the “pastoral offices”) are rich opportunities for offering pastoral care (*cf.* Westerhoff and Willimon 1980, 99-103).

“Religious ritual,” Willimon says in his ground-breaking, *Worship and Pastoral Care* (1979, 100), “gives us a way through crises that might otherwise overwhelm us.” In fact, as a general rule, “the more threatening and potentially disruptive the crisis, the more detailed and carefully patterned the ritual that addresses that conflict” (1979, 100).

At the same time, regular Sunday worship services also can be occasions for offering profound pastoral care as the worshiper regularly encounters God. In worship there is no need for self-deception when there is a place for confession. Before God the worshiper is free to stand (or sit or kneel) and present herself to God “Just as I am without one plea.” Christianity is (to borrow Freudian language) “a religion of the ego, not of the super-ego” (Tripp 1978, 531).

Paul Anderson (1990, 38) notes that in his experience, those who worship regularly heal faster. Perhaps this is because in worship the focus is away from self:

Sometimes struggling people will find help only when they begin to look outside themselves toward heaven. Worship, because it focuses outward, can bring a healthy corrective to narcissism One cannot truly worship God and be fixated on one’s self. (1990, 38)

Worship “dispels loneliness” (1990, 39), it “helps people step out in hope” (1990, 40), and it puts them “in touch with the healing power of God” (1990, 42). Worship gives pastoral care because it puts people in touch with the God who cares for them.

Homiletical and liturgical leadership are both essential ways by which a pastoral leader expresses concern for shepherding a congregation. As he prepares a sermon, the driving question for a preacher who understands his prophetic role is, “Lord, what do you want to say to the people this Sunday?” Just so, as she prepares the liturgy, the driving question for a liturgiologist who understands her priestly role is, “Lord, what do your

people need to say to *you* this Sunday?” Preparing sermons and creating liturgy are both acts of pastoral care.

Even the delivery of a benediction is both a priestly function and an occasion for pastoral care. As Lee Eclov (2009, 38) remarks:

When a pastor stands before his people, quietly, till they stop their fidgeting and fix their attention on him; and raises his hands over them (a gesture unique to church); and when he says these words as one who means them, as an emissary of the Lord himself, then God's people really are blessed.

The call to worship, the assurance of forgiveness, the pastoral prayer, the reading of the Word, the sermon, the Eucharist, the benediction: all of these become opportunities for the pastoral leader to bless the congregation and offer pastoral care.

This pastoral care is most effective, however, when the pastor knows the people, their struggles, and their pain, and prepares the liturgy and sermon with a “pastor’s heart” (*cf.* Howard 2005, 14). And there is no shortcut to knowing these things without spending time with the people listening to them. As Elaine Ramshaw (1987, 18) observes, the “better listeners are potentially better presiders, for they know the needs of their people well. Worship offers pastoral care, but pastoral care also has a hand in shaping liturgy.

9. Authentic Christian corporate worship is the work of the people.

A “worship service” in which the people are not engaged with God is not worship at all. To use a phrase coined by Sally Morgenthaler (1995, 50), it is “nonworship.”

One of the hallmarks of the Protestant Reformation was the effort to return the “work” of worship to the people. One of the “protests” of the Protestants was that in practice in the Roman Catholic Church only the worship of the priests seemed to matter. In response, the Reformers drew on the phrase “royal priesthood” from 1 Peter 2:9,

developing the Reformation principle of “the priesthood of all believers.” By this they affirmed that each believer had the right (and responsibility) to worship God without a *human* intermediary (though, of course, such worship would be impossible without the intermediacy of Christ—the high priest). In order to ensure that *all* the people could participate in the “work” of worship, Luther advocated a number of practical reforms, among them, the translation of both the Word of God and the liturgy into the vernacular so that *all* could worship God without the barrier of language.

Still, there are always barriers to full congregational participation in worship. Nineteenth century Danish theologian, Søren Kierkegaard noted a tendency (which has only grown in the age of television) for the congregation to take on the passive role of an “audience” during worship. Drawing inspiration from the world of theatre, he suggested that in worship *God* is the audience, the congregation members are the *performers*, and the worship leaders are the “*prompters*” for the actors (1938, 160-66).

Kierkegaard’s paradigm shift is closer to the biblical idea of worship than the congregation-as-audience concept, but it is not adequately Trinitarian as it conceives of worship too much as a human achievement designed to impress a deity. If worship is to be conceived in terms of a theatrical performance, the Father is the audience. The chief speaker and actor is Jesus (*cf.* Kilmartin, 1988, 14) and the congregation “performs” worship only because the Son “carries” the rest of the cast. And while the pastor and choir and other worship leaders “prompt” the congregation in their worship, the Holy Spirit is certainly the *chief* prompter as well as the producer without whom the “performance” would certainly be impossible.

The work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the worship of the church are absolutely essential, but they do not lessen the importance of the work of the people in worship. “Worship is not just one of the many practices of the church; it is the church’s definitive practice” says Singaporean theologian Simon Chan (2006, 93). “To be the church is to be the worshipping community responding to the revelation of the divine mystery.” The work of worship underlies all other practices of the church.

Consequently, the pastor’s role as a “prompter” in worship is a crucial one. The pastor’s influence flows from a clear understanding of the pastor’s role in worship. In an essay, “Planning and leading worship as a pastoral task” in *Worship Seeking Understanding* (2003, 279-284), John Witvliet examines four pictures of the role of the pastor in planning and leading worship (pastor as craftsperson, pastor as director/coordinator, pastor as performer, and pastor as spiritual engineer) and suggests a fifth image to put the other four in context. He suggests all of these roles be approached as *pastoral* tasks:

The craft and coordinating and “performance” in our work find their ultimate goal and purpose if we approach them with a pastoral heart. They find their purpose in acts of hospitality.

As worship leaders, we have the important and terrifying task of placing words of prayer on people’s lips. It happens every time we choose a song and write a prayer. We also have the holy task of being stewards of God’s Word. Our choices of Scripture and themes for worship represent a degree of control over people’s spiritual diets, over how they feed on the bread of life. For holy tasks such as these, the church needs more than craftspeople, coordinators, and performers, and none of the hubris to be spiritual engineers. The church needs pastoral people to plan and lead its worship. (Witvliet 2003, 282)

Leading worship in a pastoral way means helping the people focus not on their own feelings, but on God. Communicating a sense of awe and reverence toward God, says Joyce Thornton (1989, 41), is essential:

The demeanor of the minister's voice and body language can create a sense of the holy. The congregation follows the minister's lead and acts with a sense of reverential awe, and appropriate fear.

The people's work of worshiping is facilitated by good leadership that points to God.

Congregational singing must also be embraced as an essential component of corporate worship. In an age in which singing has increasingly become a spectator sport (witness the huge popularity of *American Idol*) rather than a participatory activity, congregations must be taught and encouraged to sing as an essential part of their worship.

In an essay titled, "Why Congregational Song is Indispensable," British songwriter Brian Wren (2000, 84-96) lists some of the hallmarks of congregational song: it is,

- *corporate*—bringing people together,
- *corporeal*—necessarily involving physical, bodily activity,
- *inclusive*—including all as they make a joyful noise,
- *creedal*—helping the congregation express a believing response in a self-committing way,
- *ecclesial*—declaring what the church aims for and hopes to be, reminding the singers of their common faith and hope,
- *inspirational*—elevating and healing individual singers, and
- *evangelical*—demonstrating to uncommitted people the love relationship of the children of God.

"Because congregational song is all these things in ways often powerful and at times unique, it is an indispensable component of Christian public worship" (Wren 2000, 97).

10. Authentic Christian corporate worship rehearses and retells the story of God's creation and redemption of his people.

In his posthumously published book, *Ancient-Future Worship*, Robert Webber (2008, 29) presents a deceptively simple definition of worship: “worship does God’s story” by which he means that worship is rooted in God’s saving deeds in the past (the “ancient”) while at the same time it anticipates God’s vision for the world (the “future”).

We have already recognized that authentic Christian corporate worship is shaped by Scripture and is Trinitarian. Authentic worship should be about God’s people publicly enacting God’s narrative.

Moreover, God’s story is not simply told from the perspective of an objective observer of ancient history. Through worship, the church, as the community of God, becomes actively involved in the redemption story as God’s people. Just as the Jews—though separated by many generations—could speak of the Passover as an event in which they had been participants, so Christians, too, can speak of the cross and the Eucharist as their reality.

11. Through worship, and particularly through the sacraments, Christians are invited into a new world and a new “time zone.”

We are tempted to see our own culture as the measuring rod for all meaning. When we speak of being “relevant” we are really talking about being relevant to our own culture. Christian liturgy, however, does not need the approval of our culture or any other culture to be considered “relevant” because it pertains to a completely different reality—an *eternal* reality. “The liturgy,” says Mark Galli in *Beyond Smells & Bells* (2008, 58), “presents a form of worship that transcends our time and space.” It invites us into “the

culture of a Trinitarian God and his kingdom” (2008, 60). And the liturgy has always “steadfastly refused to let the culture determine its shape or meaning” (2008, 61). Galli presents a vision of worship:

A minister says words and performs actions, but at a deeper level, it is Christ who is presiding. We share in bread and wine, but the reality is that we are taking Christ into us. It looks like this is all occurring in time and space, when in fact the boundaries of time and space are being shattered . . . (Galli 2008, 52)

This shattering of time is what Alexander Schmemman (1996, 43) calls “supratemporal reality.” We share the Lord’s Supper in *remembrance*, but as we do, we also celebrate his presence with us *now*. At the same time, we look forward with hope to an eschatological *future* with Christ. The Eucharist is “rooted in memory” says Martha L. Moore-Keish (Van Dyk 2005, 112), yet also “something that we anticipate.” As such, the Eucharist offers us, says David L. Stubbs (Van Dyk 2005, 146), “a foretaste of the feast to come.” Past, present, and future exist simultaneously because, according to Gordon Lathrop (1993, 33-52), the liturgy “juxtaposes” the old and the new, the already and the not yet, time and eternity, reminding us that we are on a journey from “this age” to “the age to come.” Through the liturgy, we experience the eschatological tension between the “already” and the “not yet” in terms of the Kingdom of God. For the ancient-future church, past, present, and future all come together as it worships the God “who is, and was, and is to come” (Revelation 1:8).

When we speak of Christian hope, we are speaking the language of eschatology: we are speaking of God’s future and our part in it. Through worship, we connect with that hope and with a clearer vision of God’s future for us. As this hope, bathed “in the biblical poetry of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Revelation . . . enters us, [it] plants in us a vision of a world

very much different from and better than ours,” says Brian McLaren in *An Open Letter* (n.d.), “and when this hope grows and takes root in us, we become agents of it.”

In the words of Swiss Reformed theologian Jean-Jacques von Allmen (1966, 106), “We are tomorrow people.” We live in a time when God’s reign, says Moore-Keish, is both “already” and “not yet” (Van Dyk 2005, 115). Our existence between these two ages is perhaps impossible to realize by any other means, suggests Simon Chan (2006, 82), “except by doing liturgy.”

Even as our worship straddles the dimensions of time, it also straddles two worlds: the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. Corporate worship begins with a gathering of God’s people from the world and concludes with their being sent back into the world. In the meantime, worshipers journey from this world to the heavenly realm. This “heavenly journey” is experienced most poignantly through the Sacraments: through baptism worshipers become participants in the death and resurrection of Christ and through the Eucharist they join in a foretaste of the great wedding feast of the Lamb. Vander Zee views worship as a journey as he poignantly explains:

In the Lord’s Supper, Christ does not descend, we ascend through the power of the Holy Spirit to participate in the life and worship of our ascended Lord. That is why the words, “Lift up your hearts” were so central to Calvin’s Communion liturgy. (Vander Zee 2004, 198)

In a very real way, through the liturgy the worshiper is held in tension between the heaven and earth.

This tension between two worlds, argues Chan (2006, 83), is the basis for the mission of the church. “The moment [the church] resolves the tension either by becoming totally immersed in this world or by divorcing itself from the world, it ceases to be the true hope of the world, even when it is involved in all sorts of ‘mission’ activities and

programs.” The paradox is that the church is best able to offer hope to the world when it is least like it and least able to minister to the world (or itself) when it tries hardest to be “relevant” to the world.

12. Our Christian corporate worship is imperfect, yet it can still be authentic.

We were created by God to worship him, but we are corrupted by sin. As the Apostle Paul observed, “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it” (Romans 7:18 [NRSV]). Our chief end is “to glorify God” but we are too impure to bring glory to his pure and holy Name. This is our “liturgical dilemma” (Cocksworth 1997, 151).

So then, will we ever get it right? Will there ever a point when we can say that our worship has been perfected? The answer is we will not, at least not this side of eternity. Likewise, though we are justified by faith, we are in a life-long process of sanctification which is never completed before the end of our lives on this earth. But thanks be to God, by God’s amazing grace, we are still redeemed.

“God could reject our worship for a number of reasons” says Bob Kauflin in *Worship Matters* (2008, 74). “Try as hard as we can, our hearts and worship will always be tainted in God’s sight.” Our worship, then, is not acceptable because we perform it perfectly (we cannot) or because our hearts are pure when we engage in it (they are not). Our worship is acceptable because, by the power of the Spirit, we have “hitched our wagons,” so to speak, to the perfect worship of Jesus, performed in heaven itself (Hebrews 9:24).

We can enter the Most Holy Place and draw near to God with confidence because our great priest has gone there before us and sprinkled us clean with his blood (Hebrews

10:19-22). Our spiritual sacrifices are “acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). According to Harold Best (1993, 155-156):

There is only one way to God, through Jesus Christ, author and finisher. . . . This means that God sees and hears all our offerings, perfected. God sees and hears as no human being can, all because our offerings have been perfected by the giver. The out-of-tune singing of an ordinary believer, the hymnic chant of the aborigine . . . the open frankness of a primitive art piece, the nearly transcendent “Kyrie” of Bach’s *B Minor Mass*, the praise choruses of the charismatic, the drum praise of the Cameroonian—everything from the widow’s mite to the poured-out ointment of artistic action—are at once humbled and exalted by the strong saving work of Christ. While the believer offers, Christ perfects.

Just as our worship is made possible by Jesus Christ, we are also “desperately dependent,” says Kauflin (2008, 82), on the power of the Holy Spirit. We worship by the Spirit of God, glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3).

Our worship, by our own efforts, then, is never *perfect*. But it can be *authentic*. Our worship is authentic when it is performed in faith. Our worship is authentic when it is offered up, not for what it might “get” from God, but from a heart filled with gratitude for what God has already done, is doing, and will do. Our worship is authentic when it is offered “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23) for this is the kind of worship the Father seeks.

Conclusion

Worship is a whole-self, whole-life response to God. Every aspect of human life can and should be an aspect of worship. Worship involves both the personal and public life of Christians. Furthermore, when God gathers Christians together, their worship becomes something special. Leaders of corporate expressions of worship will do well to remember that such worship is intimately related to the worship of personal devotions, that such worship is a gift from God, and that such worship is all about God. They must be aware that authentic worship is shaped by Scripture, is Trinitarian in nature, and

immerses the participants in God's story, God's world, and God's time. Worship leaders must be cognizant that God uses corporate worship to instruct, care for, and form believers in the Christian faith. Moreover, worship planners and leaders must understand that worship is the work of the people and that while a congregation's worship by itself would certainly be judged imperfect and unworthy, through Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, such worship becomes a "a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18).

CHAPTER THREE
REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND OTHER SOURCES

Theology is liturgy in thought; liturgy is theology in action. –Eric D. Perl

Introduction

In Chapter Two worship was defined as a whole-self, whole-life response to God. This simple definition was buttressed with twelve descriptive theses which work together to present a more comprehensive description of the phenomenon of Christian corporate worship. Christian corporate worship is an extension of individual worship and is the work of the people, yet it is also a gift of God's grace. As such, it is imperfect, yet by God's grace can still be authentic. Corporate Christian worship is about God, is shaped by Scripture, is a rehearsal and retelling of the story of God, and is trinitarian in nature. At the same time it instructs believers in the faith, shapes them into the body of Christ invites them into a new world and "time zone," and, as it ushers them into the presence of God, offers them pastoral care.

These statements on the purpose and substance of corporate Christian worship are by no means the final word on the matter. Thoughtful Christians continue to engage in an on-going conversation on the nature and practice of worship even as Christians all over the world continue to gather before God week after week in corporate worship. As this "conversation" on worship continues, certain voices have emerged to shape that conversation. In this chapter, seven such voices which have been prominent in recent

years are briefly examined. Similarly, five institutions that have fostered deeper conversation on the topic of Christian worship are briefly examined.

Following the brief examinations of voices and of institutions contributing to the ongoing conversation about Christian corporate worship in general, the specific subcategory of worship studies in relation to pastoral care is studied in detail. Finally, a review of resources and literature prepared for those planning worship in UCC churches is presented. Special attention is given to resources prepared by or for UCC clergy seeking to offer pastoral care through corporate worship.

Seven Key Voices in the Conversation about Worship

In his book, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (2002), Australian biblical scholar David Peterson roots his work in biblical studies of worship in both the Old and New Testaments (see Chapter Two, 29-48). Beginning with the cultic sacrificial practices instituted by God for the Israelites in the Pentateuch, Peterson demonstrates a developing thread of thought about worship that sees its completion in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is at once the temple, the sacrifice, and the priest to which Old Testament practices point. Ultimately for Peterson, worship is an “engagement with God” on God’s terms and through God’s means.

Music professor Harold Best builds on Peterson’s biblical foundation (see Chapter Two, 49-50) in *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (2003) demonstrating that human beings are at all times worshipping or “continuously outpouring” (17). When directed toward God, this continuous outpouring constitutes true worship; when it is directed toward anything other than God, it is idolatry.

United Methodist worship historian/theologian James F. White advanced the study of Protestant worship in America by dividing worship traditions into nine categories ranging from conservative (high church) to open (free church). In 1982 he issued *A Protestant Worship Manifesto* as a Protestant version of the Roman Catholic worship document from Vatican II. Prominent in the *Manifesto* is a call for reform in Protestant use and understanding of the Bible and the sacraments.

No discussion of Christian corporate worship in America would be complete without a treatment of the phenomenon of charismatic worship, a movement that drew on both Pentecostal worship and the Jesus Movement. At the center of its emergence was John Wimber, who articulated the concept of “intimacy with God” (Wimber and Wimber 1995, 5-6) as the purpose of worship. Wimber pioneered the use of praise choruses as the main vehicle for achieving that intimacy. This approach has been enormously influential in the contemporary Christian music scene and in the approach to worship favored by most megachurches.

Some of the most thoughtful criticism of the excesses of the charismatic worship movement has come from theologian Marva Dawn. In her book, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (1995) she criticized seeker sensitive “worship” as thinly disguised entertainment aimed at evangelizing. In *A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (1999) she reminded her readers that worship is about God and for God and not a means to any end other than glorifying God.

Perhaps the most prominent and popular voice in the conversation about worship has been that of Robert Webber, who reminded the church that *Worship is a Verb* (1985).

An outspoken proponent of blending old and new, ancient and future, he saw value in both the contemporary worship styles from the charismatic worship movement and of ancient patterns of worship, including those of his adopted ecclesial family, the Anglican/Episcopal Church.

One more voice has emerged in the past decade and a half: that of Reformed worship theologian John Witvliet. He has pointed out (1998, 23) that one of the best ways of understanding a particular Christian worship tradition is by asking in what sense worshipers in that tradition expect to encounter God. In some traditions the tacit assumption is that God will be encountered in the sacraments. In other traditions the climax of the service and of meeting God comes in the preaching event. In still other traditions music serves as the vehicle through which an encounter with God is made possible. The assumptions made by a congregation about where God will be met determine how the church lays out its worship space, how it designs its liturgy, and how it spends its worship budget. Witvliet serves as the director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and as editor for two on-going book series on worship with Eerdmans and the Alban Institute.

Five Institutions Specializing in Worship Studies

The ongoing conversation about corporate Christian worship does not take place in a vacuum, but in books, seminars, and churches, as well in institutions of higher learning. In the United States there are a number of seminaries and colleges at which Christians intentionally meet to study, converse, and learn from one another about the practice and theology of worship. Five such institutions at which the ongoing

conversation about worship is particularly lively, deep, and fruitful are briefly presented here.

The Center for Liturgy at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana has been the leading voice on worship in the Roman Catholic community for over half a century. James F. White taught at Notre Dame and John Witvliet received his Ph. D. there. Notre Dame played a prominent role in the interpretation of the Vatican II documents for Roman Catholic Churches in America.

The leading institution for studying Orthodox Christian worship in America is St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York. The school is closely associated with Orthodox liturgical theologian Alexander Schmemmann, who served as the school's dean from 1962 to 1983. Schmemmann's theological discussion of the role of the sacraments has been an enormous contribution to the ongoing conversation about corporate Christian worship.

The groundbreaking work of Robert Webber is carried on by the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies which he founded in Florida in 1998. It holds the distinction of being the only institution in the country which focuses exclusively on worship education. Though the Institute is multi-denominational, there is a strong Episcopalian element present. The Institute also carries on Webber's "Ancient-Future" emphasis as it seeks ways to wed ancient practices with emerging ones.

The Calvin Institute for Christian Worship at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan is the leading institution for worship studies in the Reformed tradition. John Witvliet serves as the institute's director, leading the institution to be a major voice in worship renewal for churches in the Reformed tradition.

Sovereign Grace Ministries stands as a leader in offering teaching and resources for worship leaders in churches rooted in the church growth movement. Director of Worship Development Bob Kauflin brings a strong musical background to the table, having a long history as performer and arranger with the Christian pop/rock group GLAD. Kauflin emphasizes the pastoral responsibility of choosing songs for worship that can effectively nurture and shape the congregation in the Christian faith.

As Christians continue to meet at places like Notre Dame, St. Vladimir's, the Webber Institute, the Calvin Institute, and Sovereign Grace Ministries, the church's understanding of the worship to which it is called will grow richer and deeper.

Worship and Pastoral Care

All that has been presented in the previous pages about the nature and purpose of worship helps to construct a framework and background for understanding what will be examined next: the symbiotic relationship between worship and pastoral care. Pastoral care is offered and received in a variety of contexts in pastoral ministry other than that of corporate worship, but those contexts are beyond the scope of this research project. The focus of the following section is specifically on the complex relationship between pastoral care and worship. The relationship between the two is examined from theological, historical, psychological, and pastoral perspectives.

Relatively few scholars have written directly about the relationship between worship and pastoral care. Those who do write about them typically write *either* about worship *or* about pastoral care and then touch only briefly on the other. In this respect, William H. Willimon is unique among those who have explored the common terrain

between worship and pastoral care. In 1979 he devoted an entire book to exploring just that relationship.

William H. Willimon—Pastoral Care Is More than One-on-One Counseling

In the 1970s when William H. Willimon was teaching classes on worship and liturgy at the Methodist school, Duke University (where he subsequently served as Dean of the Chapel until he became a bishop in the United Methodist Church in 2004). There Willimon struggled to bridge the gap between Free Church evangelical seminarians and the “high church” dilettantes (whom he suspected Luther might have called “chancel prancers”) among his students. Seeing that these two disparate groups shared a common interest in pastoral psychology (which was an especially popular subject among students at the time), Willimon created a course called “Worship and Pastoral Care” as a way to find a common ground with his students for discussing liturgy (Johnson 2002, 99).

Through the course, Willimon sought to lead his students “to examine worship as a principal means of caring for the congregation, a major resource for offering pastoral care, a source for gleaning deep pastoral insights into the lives of individual believers, and an historic way for caring for souls” (Johnson 2002, 100). Eventually Willimon distilled the insights gained in teaching the course into the book, *Worship as Pastoral Care* (1979).

Willimon begins by presenting the case that there is a symbiotic relationship between worship and pastoral care. There is no place in which the Christian community’s concerns meet and coalesce more plainly than in worship. Therefore, the faithful pastor seeking to edify the local expression of the body of Christ necessarily will be concerned with helping the congregation to worship corporately and authentically.

Willimon soon discovered that there was a deep mutual distrust between leaders in the liturgical world on one hand and leaders in the world of contemporary pastoral care on the other. The beginning of that distrust, Willimon argues, can be traced back to the Protestant Reformation. From the time of the Reformation, preaching gradually came to be seen as judgmental, paternalistic scolding (Willimon 1979, 34) whereas pastoral care came to be seen as something expressed only to individuals. The concept of “pastor became antithetical to priest, and the pastoral aspects of so-called priestly functions were overlooked” (Willimon 1979, 35).

The divide between worship and pastoral care widened in the 1920’s with the widespread adoption of a medical model of pastoral care. By the 1950’s nearly every Protestant theological seminary had embraced the Clinical Pastoral Education model developed by Anton Boisen in which the language of faith had been supplanted by psychiatric categories and terminology (Willimon 1979, 37-38).

While Willimon eschews the uncritical application of a secular agenda to pastoral work, he does, however, recognize that psychological and psychotherapeutic tools *can* be quite helpful in ministry (1979, 55). In chapter four, for example, he explores the concept of “resistance” in psychotherapy, applying it to worship. Just as a psychiatrist recognizes her patient may be on the verge of a significant break-through when he shows the most “resistance,” perhaps a preacher may recognize that a sermon has been most effective when the members of the congregation struggle with the message and are not quick to remark glibly, “Nice sermon, pastor!”

Pastoral Care in Funerals

In the second half of *Worship as Pastoral Care*, Willimon applies his theories to four familiar rituals in Christian worship (the funeral, the wedding, baptism, and the Eucharist). In his treatment of the Christian funeral, he explores how liturgy itself helps people cope with life's most difficult circumstances. He examines death itself as a "rite of passage" through the framework proposed by the French sociologist Arnold van Gennep in his ground-breaking book, *Les Rites de Passage* (1909). Van Gennep had identified separation, transition, and reincorporation as three universal phases through which people in all cultures pass when experiencing the death of a loved one. The community of faith, says Willimon, can be supportive and even instrumental in helping the grieving person through each of these phases (e.g. through the acts of calling, visiting, and providing meals for the bereaved). Furthermore, the liturgy of the Christian funeral can and should address elements of all three phases of this rite of passage.

Willimon also examines the funeral from a psychological perspective, drawing on insights from both Freud and Jung. He stresses that grief is a natural process and that in the funeral feelings should be acknowledged and confronted with honesty (1979, 109). He advocates the *recovery of symbolic actions*, especially in Protestant worship which all too often tends (especially in the funeral setting) to be "*congregationally passive and pastorally verbose*" (1979, 110, emphasis added). Symbols and symbolic actions minister to people in times when the effectiveness of words alone is diminished.

Willimon also examines the funeral from a pastoral perspective and stresses that the funeral is never a private matter, but is always a communal affair. While it may be an important rite of passage for the grieving family, and while it may be a helpful,

therapeutic experience for individual members of the family as well, the funeral is also for the *church*. It can help members of the congregation find healing for their past and strength for their future. It gives people “the opportunity to deal with their own unfinished grief from prior bereavements” in a managed, ritualized way while also providing “an opportunity . . . to prepare for their own future grief situations” (1979, 114). Willimon contends that “carefully planned, theologically full, and well-led funeral liturgies do much to help both the grieving family *and* the congregation as a whole to navigate through the life crisis of death and bereavement” (1979, 117).

Thomas Long, writing thirty years after Willimon in *Accompany Them with Singing* (2009), says as much:

Yes, funerals provide consolation to those who mourn, but they do so as a part of a much broader work involving the retelling of the gospel story, the restoration of meaning, the reaffirmation of the baptismal identity of the one who has died, and the worship of God. (xiv)

Though Long began the process of writing his book with the assumption that “the essential and overriding purpose of the funeral is to provide comfort for the grief-stricken,” he was converted from this conventional wisdom by his research (xiv). Pastors who have “tried to make funerals more pastorally sensitive [by allowing them to be] controlled by psychological rather than theological categories” have inadvertently made them shallower in meaning (xv). The key to “better” funerals is reclaiming their theological meaning.

A Christian funeral is essentially “a piece of religious drama” in which “the people of God re-present the gospel story” (77) says Long. The congregation is not the audience, but the actors. “Despite popular misconceptions,” he says:

A funeral is not primarily a quiet time when people gather to reflect on the legacy of the deceased, a devotional service dealing with grief, a show of community support for the mourning family, or even a “celebration of life.” Good funerals, in fact, do all of these things—console the grief-stricken, remember and honor the deceased, display community care, and give thanks for all the joys and graces experienced in the life of the one who has died. But these are some of the consequences of a good funeral, not its central meaning or purpose. (78)

The power of the funeral to be a locus for pastoral care comes from the way it reconnects people with God, the story of God, and the community of God.

As Willimon also notes, the funeral, like other Christian rituals, is primarily a service of *worship*. It is not so much about celebrating the achievements of the deceased (1979, 119), nor about focusing on ourselves and our desires (1979, 115), but about worshipping God. The focus is on God and God’s relationship to us (1979, 115) celebrated in the *context* of the deceased person’s life (1979, 119).

Pastoral Care in the Christian Wedding

Willimon next examines the Christian wedding, paying particular attention to how the church uses wedding liturgy as a ritualized means of educating people for a new life status. He begins by positing that liturgy is education and that people learn from liturgy whether the worship leader intends for them to do so or not (1979, 122). The question is not *whether* people will learn from the liturgy, but *what* they will learn through it. This is not to say, however, that the liturgy should be used simply as a didactic tool. Willimon agrees with his colleague John Westerhoff that while “we learn through the liturgy . . . our liturgies properly should be understood as ends and not as means . . .” (Westerhoff and Kennedy 1978, 91-92):

Education and pastoral care have nothing in common if pastoral care is conceived of only in terms of psychological support, in the administration of certain therapeutic techniques aimed at the maintenance or reestablishment of personal

emotional equilibrium, and so forth. But if *pastoral care* encompasses the wide range of pastoral acts aimed at the healing, guiding, sustaining, and reconciling of persons within the Body of Christ and the complex ways in which pastors care for and upbuild that body, then surely education can be one aspect of pastoral care. (Willimon 1979, 124)

Willimon further contends that a Christian wedding is not just about the couple and certainly is not merely a private affair. It is also an opportunity to speak about marriage to *all* who participate in the ceremony. It is an occasion for those who are already married to reflect on their own vows. Additionally, it is a key opportunity to speak to those who *may* marry in the future about the meaning of marriage (1979, 134).

Pastoral Care in Baptism

As Willimon scrutinizes the sacrament of baptism, he pays special attention to the relationship between baptism and *identity*. He expresses concern with what James F. White calls the “Enlightenment” view of the sacraments in which they are seen primarily as human actions devised as tools for remembrance rather than as vehicles for the work of God. The sacraments are more than “stimulants to sentiment, occasions for self-commitment, [and] memory exercises,” Willimon argues (1979, 150); they are, according to White, communal events, sign acts, and a direct and personal way by which “God gives himself to us” (White 1976, 49). As such, sacraments are a locus of pastoral care.

The problem with Enlightenment thinking is that it puts the onus on the *worshiper* to understand, commit, and love God whereas “Christian theology has traditionally asserted that *God* is the actor, and that we are the recipients of what God is doing through the sacraments” (Willimon 1979, 150). Baptism, then, is God’s work. “In baptism, God acts in water to enlarge the family of God and to save them through their identification with the crucified and risen Lord” (1979, 151).

Does the sacrament of baptism offer pastoral care? Does it help the one being baptized find healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness? Perhaps not immediately, but in a very profound sense, baptism is a fountainhead of pastoral care because it confers upon the baptized a new identity in Christ. This new identity is the Christian's great source of comfort and hope. It is said that Martin Luther, often given to dark fits of doubt and despair, would emerge from these times of despondency by dipping a hand in a bowl of water, touching his forehead, and saying, *Baptismatus sum* — "I am baptized" (Willimon 1980, 160).

In addition to highlighting the significance of God's action in baptism, Willimon also emphasizes the *communal* aspect of baptism, connecting it with the Great Commission in which Jesus charged the disciples with the responsibility of making more disciples by teaching them and by baptizing them (Matthew 28:18-20). He also warns against overemphasis on the *recipient* of the baptism. Both supporters and opponents of infant baptism, he observes, in their own ways, emphasize the one being baptized over the baptizing community. He asserts that "baptism is proclamation and experience of the fact that we are who we are because God has first chosen us and loved us and called us into his Kingdom" (1979, 154). Baptism tells us that our identity, status, and purpose ultimately are given rather than earned (1979, 156). Willimon reiterates much of what he says about baptism in *Worship as Pastoral Care* in his book, *Remember Who You Are: Baptism, a Model for Christian Life* (1979).

Thomas Long reveals the profundity of this truth as he shows the close relationship between baptisms and funerals:

A Christian funeral is a continuation and elaboration of the baptismal service. If baptism is a form of worshipful drama performed at the beginning of the Christian

life, a funeral is—or should be—an equally dramatic and symmetrical, performance of worship performed at the end of life. (81)

Scripture points to this connection between baptism and death. As the Apostle Paul said:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:3-5 [NRSV])

Baptism ultimately is about what God has done, is doing, and will do about who his people *are* and *will be*.

Pastoral Care in the Eucharist

Willimon's discussion of pastoral care in the administration of the Lord's Supper concentrates on the importance of building community. He draws heavily from the Apostle Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians as the Apostle addressed the fragmentation of the Corinthian church from the perspective of the Eucharist. Of critical concern was the church's failure to "discern the body" (1 Corinthians 11:29).

According to Willimon, Paul's concern was not that the Corinthians did not regard the *elements themselves* highly enough, but that they did not appreciate that when they broke bread together at the table, Christ was with them *in the gathered community* (1979, 170). They mistakenly thought that this meal was "similar to the sacred meals they may have eaten in their former pagan rites where one achieved personal immortality by gulping down as much 'heavenly food' as possible" (1979, 170). Willimon makes the same argument in his book, *Sunday Dinner. The Lord's Supper and the Christian Life* (1981).

As he examines the nature of the celebration of the Eucharist, Willimon revisits the issue of the function of ritual which he initially presented in the first half of *Worship as Pastoral Care*. The Lord's Supper is an example of a *ritual of meeting* which invites worshipers to come into the presence of God while also "protecting" them from this fearsome prospect by providing safe boundaries and a supportive setting for venturing forth. Here Willimon draws on the insights of developmental psychiatrist Erik Erikson who wrote about the adaptive functions of rituals during infancy (Erikson 1968, 711-33) and about the common adaptive significance of children's play and adults' rituals in *Toys and Reasons* (1977). Willimon expands on Erikson's ideas in his essay, "Ritual and Pastoral Care" (Johnson 2002, 101), noting how Erikson contradicts Freud by saying rituals are not only a mechanism for *avoidance*, but also a means of *confrontation* and *adaptation*. Rituals give people courage to reflect on their lives and move into new modes of being.

Drawing on Psychology and Good Theology

In the same essay Willimon also introduces the theories of British child psychotherapist D. W. Winnicott who formulated *object relations theory*—a distinctive non-Freudian version of psychoanalysis. In *Playing and Reality* (1982) Winnicott had observed how infants who were held in the protective, loving, and supportive arms of their mothers reacted toward a new object placed within their reach. When pushed to explore the object, infants almost always resisted and retreated. But when held in the secure, safe, inviting environment of their mothers' arms, infants were much more likely to find the courage to explore and discover a new reality beyond themselves. This is exactly what happens in the Christian liturgy, argues Willimon: "In the liturgy, the

demanding, potentially threatening presence of God is within the reach of the congregation, yet rests in the patterned, predictable, reassuring context of the accustomed liturgy” (Johnson 2002, 105).

Winnicott also observed the importance of what he called *transitional objects* (such as a security blanket or a favorite toy). The wise parent or, as Winnicott would say, the “good-enough mother” allows her child to use a transitional object to help the child negotiate between its inner and outer world. Again Willimon sees a parallel in what Christians do in worship:

In the liturgy, we care for people principally by placing the holiness and otherness of God within the range of our people. Certain objects—bread, wine, water—are set beside our people’s consciousness and placed within the range of their experience. In the gathered assembly, the congregation is given permission to touch, to taste, to handle, to interact with, and to play with these objects. . . .

In the relatively safe and secure confines of the liturgy, worship becomes pastoral care. People are given the safe place they need to dare to venture forth into one of the most threatening, and thereby most avoided, experiences in life, namely, the experience of meeting and being met by God. (Johnson 2002, 107)

Good worship apparently is also good psychology for the worshiper.

Priests, Community, and Authority

In the final chapter of *Worship as Pastoral Care* Willimon wonders aloud why so many pastors struggle with leading worship. For Willimon, the problem comes down to the question of “ministerial identity, role confusion, and authority” (1979, 197). The authority of clergy, he argues, comes not from their advanced education and training, their supposed moral or spiritual superiority, or from any exceptional empathic sensitivity or well-honed skills in pastoral ministry. Rather, clerical authority is derived from the fact that clergy represent the *community* of faith as sanctioned *officials* of the church.

The pastor's authority cannot be separated from the community that calls, recognizes, and empowers the pastor to serve as its representative. This is the difference between a priest and a magician. Drawing from Richard Neuhaus, Willimon says:

Magicians offer certain expertise to a clientele. Priests participate in a community. You go *to* a magician—in our society he may be called a doctor or a lawyer—with a particular problem to be fixed. You *belong* to a community of which the priest is an agent of the community's identity and ministry (Neuhaus 1977, 86). The call to the Christian ordained ministry is a call to the priesthood of the community, not to the performance of magic. The priest lives to serve, not to be served. (Willimon 1979, 202)

The priest's concern is always communal. Whereas individual Christians may concern themselves only with their own struggles to live as faithful Christians, says Willimon, the ordained pastor can never afford to neglect her community-forming role (1979, 204-205). To be a pastor is to be intimately related to the community of faith.

Willimon is correct to recognize that the authority of the pastoral office comes from the faith community and that the pastor has no authority outside of that communal recognition. But in *Worship as Pastoral Care* Willimon fails to adequately address the equally important issue of authorization by God. There is much to be said about God's role in calling persons to ministry and bestowing on them spiritual gifts for that ministry. Fortunately, in his book, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (2002) Willimon addresses this issue with candor, asserting on the one hand that "ordination arises 'from above' as a gracious gift of the Holy Spirit" (2002, 37) and on the other hand that it is also "'from below,' arising out of the needs and expectations of the community" (2002, 38).

A Watershed in Thought

Overall, Willimon's book stands as a watershed in the discussion of liturgy and pastoral care, pointing the way for thoughtful pastors to bring pastoral concerns into their work as worship leaders and to use liturgical acts to administer pastoral care. His specific reflections on how pastoral care can be expressed through liturgical leadership in funerals, weddings, baptisms, and the Lord's Supper leads the way for similar reflection on how pastoral care can be offered through the liturgy of the Christian year. For example, hope can be emphasized through the season of Advent and repentance can be emphasized during the season of Lent.

Likewise, one could reflect on the various components of Sunday morning corporate worship. Many dimensions of pastoral care are expressed through such things as the call to worship, the confession of sin and assurance of forgiveness, the passing of the peace, and the benediction and blessing. These topics have not yet been examined in *Worship as Pastoral Care*, but the groundwork has been laid.

There are other ways by which Willimon's work could be expanded. For instance, as William Adams points out in a review of *Worship as Pastoral Care*, Willimon restricts his understanding of liturgical leadership to the act of leading worship (1980, 614). Liturgical leadership certainly has to do with leading worship, but it also has to do with planning and creating liturgy, liturgical education within the congregation, and collaborative planning and leading of liturgy with other members of the congregation. Each of these aspects of liturgical leadership is an aspect of both leadership in worship and of pastoral care.

Willimon presented an updated and condensed articulation of his ideas in the essay entitled, "Ritual and Pastoral Care" which appeared in a *festschrift* for Robert Webber edited by Todd Johnson and entitled, *The Conviction of Things Unseen: Worship and Ministry in the 21st Century*, (2002). Also, Willimon reframes the issues relating to worship in pastoral care in his book, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (2002) in which he ambitiously sought to lay out a complete theology of ordained ministry. Within that book Willimon includes a chapter entitled, "The Pastor as Priest: The Leadership of Worship" followed by one entitled, "The Priest as Pastor: Worship as the Content and Context of Pastoral Care." The effect of these two chapters together is to demonstrate that on the one hand, the life of the church informs the liturgy of the church, and on the other hand, the church's experience in worship ultimately shapes the rest of the church's life. What we say and do on Sunday has a direct bearing on what we do Monday through Saturday, and vice-versa.

The church is indebted to Willimon for his work over a span of three decades examining the complex relationship between worship and pastoral care. He has helped to strengthen the relationship between the two that was weakened historically by the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century and by the adoption of Boisen's Clinical Pastoral Education model in the twentieth century. He has drawn on the insights of the likes of van Gennep, Freud, Jung, Erikson, and Winnicott to explain what happens, from a sociological or psychological perspective, when people worship. At the same time, his approach has been rooted in biblical theology and rooted in pastoral concern.

Other Voices Connecting Worship and Pastoral Care

Preceding Willimon's work, there had been relatively few writers who had directly addressed the role of ritual in pastoral care. Most of them, such as Karl Barth in *Church Dogmatics* (1958, 638), wrote indirectly about pastoral care by emphasizing the importance of edification in worship. It was Jesuit liturgical scholar J. A. Jungmann who in 1962 asserted that "for centuries, the liturgy, actively celebrated, has been the most important form of pastoral care" in *Pastoral Liturgy* (1962, 380).

Ironically, it was not a theologian, but the clinical psychologist Paul Pruyser who reintroduced the idea of ritual as a tool for pastoral care. He argues for this in his articles, "The Master Hand: Psychological Notes on Pastoral Blessing" (1969), and "The Use and Neglect of Pastoral Resources" (1972), as well as in his book, *The Minister as Diagnostician* (1976) from which Willimon drew heavily in writing *Worship as Pastoral Care*.

Lutheran pastor Timothy C. J. Quill asserts in *Perspectives on Christian Worship*, that "the Liturgy constitutes, shapes, and informs all other pastoral care" (Quill 2009, 76). He also recommends John Pless's article, "Healing through the Liturgy: The Rites of Pastoral Care" (2001) as an excellent overview of the unfortunate shift in the understanding and practice of pastoral care from a sacramental model to a psychological one (similar to Willimon's overview in *Worship as Pastoral Care*).

Other treatments of the dual concerns of worship and pastoral care can be found in Elaine Ramshaw's book, *Ritual and Pastoral Care* (1987), and her article, "Ritual and Pastoral Care: The Vital Connection" (1993). There is Howard W. Roberts' *Pastoral Care through Worship* (1995). Paul Anderson has written *Worship as Pastoral Care* in

Multnomah's *Mastering Pastoral Care* series (1990). H. P. V. Renner's has written an article, "The Use of Ritual in Pastoral Care," (1979). Kenneth R. Mitchell's article, "Ritual in Pastoral Care" (1989) also appears in Robert Webber's *Complete Library of Christian Worship* (1994). Susan Jorgenson's article, "Defining Pastoral Care and Liturgical Renewal," in the same volume of Webber's *Complete Library*, suggests that pastoral care is about "living and expressing God's presence in all aspects of life" (Jorgensen 1996, 244).

In an article in *Reformed Worship* entitled, "Word, Prayer, Meal," Larry Sibley simply states, "Word, prayer, and meal—these are food for the flock, means of grace. And they are the place where pastoral care begins" (2007, 44). In a chapter of *Encounter with God: An introduction to Christian worship and practice* (2004) co-authors Forrester, McDonald, and Tellini boldly assert that worship without a pastoral dimension is inadequate, just as pastoral care without a dimension of worship lacks integrity (2004, 191).

In the opening chapter of *Renewal of Worship: Caring for the People* (2005) entitled, "Worship as Pastoral Care," Donald W. Howard, Jr. declares that "pastoral care evolves within the context of the worshipping community attempting to live out its faith in this world" (9). In effect, the feeding of the Eucharist on Sunday is a repetition of the pastor's work throughout the week in sustaining the flock as the members minister in the world. People do not need "second-hand secular therapy" in the guise of Christian pastoral ministry. Rather, they need to "see God in the midst of their troubled lives" (2005, 14). In worship people are healed of the "tyranny of self" and are able to be shaped by God according to *his* purposes.

An interesting book that picks up some of these themes is a collaboration between scholars from the Brehm Center at Fuller Theological Seminary and the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship called, *Worship that Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation* (2008). The book begins with two essays discussing the theology of worship. In the first, Clayton Schmit presents a study of Romans 12 which demonstrates that “worship involves yielding to God as well as a commitment to transformation and renewal” (Abernathy 2008, 18). In the second essay, John Witvliet addresses the cumulative power of worship to transform people’s lives. Both writers emphasize the agency of the Holy Spirit in changing people as they worship God.

These articles are followed by a second section comprised of six different essays which discuss the roles various arts play in transformational worship. A third and final section of the book presents seven more essays, each of which analyzes how people are in fact transformed by worship. In one chapter, for example, Charlotte vanOyen Witvliet (John’s wife) explores the psychophysiological dimensions of worship. While transformational worship can be studied, throughout the book there is a strong thread of thought that maintains that transformation ultimately is the work of the Holy Spirit and as such is unpredictable and not subject to our control.

The Alban Institute—Building up Congregations and their Leaders

The Alban Institute was founded in 1974 as a major resource for congregations facing the challenge of a changing society. Its book publishing division has brought congregational leaders research-based information and practical advice addressing congregational life and its various challenges. Among the books published by Alban are

many that address issues of pastoral leadership and care in specific situations that many congregations face. Other books, such as those in the Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations Series published in conjunction with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and edited by John Witvliet deal with specific issues relating to congregational worship. In a few books, both these concerns come together in one place.

Jill Hudson—Worship as a Tool for Healing

One such book is Jill M. Hudson's *Congregational Trauma: Caring, Coping, and Learning* (1998). Drawing from real-life examples, including the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 and the brutal murder of a pastor and his wife in Indianapolis in 1996, Hudson explores the psychology of trauma, applying it to the congregational setting. One chapter of the book is dedicated to the role of congregational worship as a tool for healing:

The power of the Holy Spirit, the resources of the therapeutic community, the support and nurture of others, the gift of time—all are important to the healing process. Nothing, however, is more important to the person of faith than the powerful resource of worship. Worship does many things. It provides one with “safe” space for grieving, remembering, and, later, for renewal. Through the beauty of the liturgy or familiarity with the order of worship, participants are invited into a state of dependency on God where the pain of life can be released. The music triggers much-needed tears or, later in the healing process, lifts the broken hearts in hope. It is where those gathered hear the Word of God *for each of them*. It is where others hold up the weak and place them in God's hands. It is one of the most precious gifts and greatest resources of the Christian faith. Never should worship be more carefully planned than in the months following a traumatic event. For some, it may be a matter of life or death. (Hudson 1998, 88)

Though Hudson focuses mostly on the role of the funeral or memorial service throughout the chapter, much of the wisdom pertaining to funerals can be applied to other worship settings. It is important that the worship leader speaks frankly (yet sensitively) about the

trauma and that deep feelings be acknowledged and be given appropriate means of expression.

Speaking of the role of music in worship during times of congregational trauma, Hudson recommends a collection of songs from the Iona Community in Scotland titled, *When Grief is Raw: Songs for Times of Sorrow and Bereavement*. In the introduction to this collection, authors John Bell and Graham Maule state “We believe that essentially a hymn should convey what God has to say to the people and/or what the people need to say to God” (1997, 4). Psalms and hymns of lament can be a powerful way for a congregation to give voice to their feelings with honesty and integrity.

Kathleen Smith—Worship in Difficult Times

Another book published by the Alban Institute (which also comes from the Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations Series) is *Stilling the Storm: Worship and Congregational Leadership in Difficult Times* by Kathleen S. Smith. The book arose out of a conversation she had about liturgical resources for churches going through difficult times. The thesis of the book is: “When congregations go through difficult times, those difficulties will affect the worship life of the congregation and the practice of worship will itself be a key part of the congregation’s healing process” (Smith 2006, xxi).

Smith identifies three main categories of difficulty that congregations may face: *crisis* (a sudden change that creates a great amount of tension and upheaval for people), *transition* (the process of changing from one form, state, activity, or place to another), and *conflict* (a prolonged controversy or disagreement between opposing forces). Each of these problems presents a congregation with its own unique challenges. Drawing on Family Systems Theory, Smith notes that in many ways a congregation behaves like a

living organism. With this understanding, Smith examines the role of worship in terms of corporate, rather than individual, pastoral care. For each of these main categories of difficulty she presents a sampling of appropriate liturgical resources. She emphasizes the importance of the use of *lament* by churches in the midst of crises of loss whereas she recommends the use of liturgies of *confession* and *reconciliation* for churches dealing with conflict.

Craig Satterlee—Preaching in Times of Congregational Transition

Preaching is certainly a powerful tool for pastoral ministry within the context of corporate worship. Craig A. Satterlee focuses on the pastorally sensitive use of homiletics during times of congregational disruption in *When God Speaks through Change: Preaching in Times of Congregational Transition* (2005), another book from the Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations Series. Satterlee understands that times of congregational transition have the effect of reshaping the congregation's faith foundation, identity, and ways of being. These times of congregational transition also affect preaching so that the transitions and the biblical text seem to interpret each other. These can be fertile times of possibility for preaching, but they are not without their dangers. Mindful of these dangers, Satterlee presents five foundational commitments for the preacher to accept in order to help ensure the emergence of faithful and effective preaching during times of congregational transition.

First, the preacher must understand the dynamics of the transitional process and be willing to reflect theologically on the transitions the congregation is facing. Second, the preacher must trust in the power, purpose, and place of preaching in the congregation's journey through the transition. Third, the preacher should be willing to

welcome the transition into the process of sermon preparation. Fourth, the preacher must practice holy and active listening to the congregation, the community, and self. And fifth, the preacher must be anchored in God's presence, grace, power, and direction. Satterlee then examines the unique circumstances of eight different specific changes or events a congregation might face at a given time. He develops a plan whereby a preacher might approach each section as a *kerygmatic* opportunity, applying the five foundational commitments.

The first of the eight congregational transitions Satterlee examines is the event of a pastoral change. This time of pastoral transition presents unique challenges and responsibilities to at least three different preachers: the departing pastor, the interim pastor, and the newly arriving pastor. In each circumstance Satterlee stresses the importance of preaching the gospel rather than a program or an agenda. For example, a departing pastor may be tempted to use preaching to provide details of the pending pastoral transition, but "the congregation's shock and the initial phase of grief make it impossible for the members to process this information" (Satterlee 2005, 119).

Satterlee also stresses the importance of finding healthy ways to express grief so that it does not go unresolved, only to emerge later in unexpected ways. For the preacher, this requires resisting the desire to protect a congregation from pain. It also requires a degree of vulnerability from the preacher and a willingness to listen to other people's pain and grief over the loss.

In many ways the emotions felt by the departing pastor are akin to those of someone who is dying, says Satterlee. At the same time, the congregation's experience of grief in the loss of a pastor is analogous to the experience of losing a close friend or

family member to death. Both parties may go through stages of denial and or anger. Some may feel guilt, others joy and relief, still others, emptiness and loneliness. Just as a pastor ministering through funeral rites seeks to give pastoral care to people who experience a loved one's death in different ways, so the pastor ministering to a congregation in the midst of a change in pastoral leadership may be offering pastoral care to persons experiencing a wide variety of feelings.

Craig Satterlee— When God Speaks through Worship

Satterlee has continued to contribute to the ongoing conversation about worship with two more books. In his second book for the Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations Series, *When God Speaks through You: How Faith Convictions Shape Preaching and Mission* (2007), he uses the images of mountain, plain, and river to describe three ways of understanding the relationship between worship and mission. He explains the images more succinctly in *When God Speaks through Worship: Stories Congregations Live By* (2009). In the worship as mountain metaphor, worship *empowers* mission as worshipers leave the gathering inspired to engage in mission. In the worship as plain metaphor, worship becomes the *means* of or an *occasion* for mission (as with the worship evangelism model).

Satterlee rejects both of these metaphors for the image of worship as a river. “Like a river flowing to the sea, God’s work of reconciliation, recorded in Scripture and accomplished in Christ, continues in the church’s worship and through worship overflows into the world” (2009, 5). Worship begins with God, not with human initiative. Thus Satterlee can say,

Rather than being the means or the motivation by which the church carries out its mission, worship is the location where God carries out God's mission. Worship is the way God gathers people to witness to and participate in God's work of reconciling the world to God's own self. In and through worship, individuals and the community encounter, experience, and celebrate the God who is the source and goal of the rest of their lives. The church proclaims God's reconciliation and shares in God's mission by living in the world in ways congruent with what it experiences God doing and enacting in worship. In this way, God's people worshipping in the midst of the world enact and signify God's own mission for the life of the world. Rather than being distinct yet related activities the church engages in, worship and mission are God's single activity of reconciliation. God is the first and primary actor. While Christians and congregations can participate in, be indifferent to, resist, and even undermine God's saving activity in worship, they can neither achieve nor stop it. Like a mighty river, God's work of salvation, accomplished in Christ and continued and enacted in worship, will not be stopped until it reaches its destination, the fullness of the reign of God. (2009, 5)

This understanding has revolutionized Satterlee's understanding of his role as a pastor.

Once he had chafed under the "disappointing advice" of his bishop to "preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, teach the faith, visit the sick, bury the dead, and leave the growth to God" (2009, 2). He felt that advice cast him as a "chaplain" rather than as a "missionary" or an "evangelist." But in time he came to embrace that "disappointing advice" and to approach worship as "the saving activity of God to which everything else a congregation does points and from which everything else a congregation does flows" (2009, 6).

When God Speaks through Worship is really a collection of Satterlee's stories drawn from his experiences in parish ministry as he sought to follow his bishop's "disappointing advice." One particularly poignant story Satterlee shares comes from a time when he visited a church known for its healing services. Though Satterlee, who is legally blind, did not come forward for healing, he was noticed by the minister of healing as he sat in the congregation. The minister approached him and told him, "I want to heal your eyes." Though Satterlee is gracious in the way he relates this awkward episode, it is

clear that this was *not* a good example of sensitive pastoral ministry. Putting his hands on Satterlee's eyes, the minister began to pray, "Feel the cooling power of Jesus. Feel the healing power of Jesus. You can see. You can see!" Satterlee noticed that the minister was not so much praying to God as he was giving instructions to Satterlee. Three times the minister prayed, with each try longer and more intense, yet no physical healing came. It became clear the minister's reputation in the congregation was on the line. "The issue was no longer healing my eyes," says Satterlee,

the issue was this minister saving face. I knew how these things typically play out, because I had been here before. The minister would declare that I lack sufficient faith to be healed and lament the fact that either I will not let go of my sin or I do not love and trust Jesus enough to allow Jesus to make me see. (2009, 63)

Finally, Satterlee gave the minister a way out by suggesting Jesus might intend more than a physical cure for him. The incident with all its tension and embarrassment underscores the importance of allowing people to choose whether or not to participate. Even Jesus asked blind Bartimaeus what he wanted (Mark 10:50).

Satterlee was once asked if he believed in the power of prayer. "No," he answered, "I believe in God, and so I pray" (2009, 59). He regularly practices prayer that includes touch and anointing not because he believes in the power of these practices, but because he believes in God. He recognizes God's concern for wholeness and healing that goes beyond cure.

Building on the work of Willimon, writers like Hudson, Smith, and Satterlee are providing new resources for pastors to reflect on how to express liturgical leadership in a pastorally sensitive way in a variety of congregational situations. Having explored theoretical resources for understanding worship as pastoral care, this paper will now turn to an examination of practical liturgical resources available to worship planners. In

particular, this research project will explore resources produced by and for clergy serving in the United Church of Christ.

United Church of Christ Liturgical Resources

A number of worship resources have been prepared for pastors and worship preparers seeking to offer pastoral care through worship. Some build on ancient practices while others are more innovative, crafting new liturgies. In this section, a sampling of these resources prepared by or for pastors in the UCC will be examined.

The United Church of Christ (UCC) was formed in 1957 as the Evangelical and Reformed Church and Congregational Christian Churches were joined together. The UCC understands itself to be a voice for justice and for radical inclusivity. That concern has been reflected not only in the policies of the UCC and its recent “Stillspeaking” extravagant welcome campaign, but also in the worship resources produced by it.

The liturgical and musical resources of a denomination in many ways embody its identity and promote its mission. This is no less true with the United Church of Christ than with any other denomination. Four worship resources representing the United Church of Christ are the *Book of Worship* (1986), The UCC website, *The New Century Hymnal* (1995) and *Sing! Prayer and Praise* (2009).

Book of Worship—Worship that Excludes No One

In July of 1977 the bi-annual General Synod of the UCC adopted a resolution directing the Executive Council “to request the Office for Church Life and Leadership to develop, if feasible, a book of worship for the United Church of Christ using inclusive language” (*Book of Worship* 1986, ix). Nine years later, the UCC had a book of worship

which was grounded in the history and tradition of the church and its worship life and which expressed that ecclesial identity in language that was at once poetic and pastoral.

True to the instructions of the Eleventh General Synod in 1977, the *Book of Worship* used inclusive language. The inclusivity of the language here was understood to mean not only the use of both male and female imagery, but also to include images of persons of different ages (including children), of different abilities, and of different races and ethnicities. Out of respect for the total person, the orders for worship addressed the human senses *as well as* the rational mind. This inclusiveness was not understood primarily as a matter of being “politically correct,” but as a matter of social justice and pastoral concern for all people—*especially* those people marginalized by society.

The *Book of Worship* includes orders for services of Word and Sacrament, for baptisms, weddings, and funerals, and for seasonal services organized around the Christian year and the Revised Common Lectionary. As Willimon and others have demonstrated, pastoral care can and should be expressed through each of these services of worship. But pastoral care can be expressed even more explicitly through services which deal with healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness. To that end, the *Book of Worship* includes several occasional services that are especially useful for offering pastoral care. Those include an order for use at the time when a person is dying, another for thanksgiving for the birth *or adoption* of a child, and one for saying farewell. Five orders are listed under the category of “Services of Reconciliation and Healing.” They include: one for reconciliation with a penitent person, one for corporate reconciliation, two for healing (one for use with an individual and one for congregational use), and, finally, interestingly, an order “for recognition of the end of a marriage.” While the idea of a

worship service for use at the time of a divorce may at first sound strange and/or unbiblical, the inclusion of that order in the *Book of Worship* represents an effort on the part of the UCC to offer pastoral care and an opportunity to worship to *all* people in *all* circumstances—including the most painful times—in their lives.

This is not the only time the UCC has produced a liturgical and pastoral resource for use in a controversial situation. In 2005 the Twenty-fifth General Synod of the UCC voted to "affirm equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender" (UCC 2005). Although not all members or churches within the UCC supported or agreed with the resolution, the affirmation created a situation in which one thing was affirmed by the denomination that was not yet supported by the liturgical resources of the denomination. The situation was soon rectified when an inclusive version of the order for marriage from the *Book of Worship* was made available online (UCC 2005). Though a revised edition of the *Book of Worship* was not and is not at this time being prepared, the use of the internet quickly gave pastors who wished to perform marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples access to a suitable resource.

The UCC Website—More Accessibility

The internet has been a powerful tool for the UCC in making new liturgical resources available to churches and leaders. In the worship section of the UCC website, there are a variety of different resources:

- *Worship Ways*: a variety of prayers, liturgies, and "how-to" articles for use on Sundays, Festivals, and special UCC calendar days coming from all settings of the UCC, being written by pastors, educators, musicians and covenanted ministry staff members, based on the Sunday readings found in the Revised Common Lectionary;
- *S.A.M.U.E.L.* (Scripture and Mission: a UCC Electronic Library): a sermon preparation resource designed for use with the Revised Common Lectionary;

- *UCCMNN, Inc.* (United Church of Christ Musician’s National Network, Inc.): a network that provides opportunities for information-sharing and continuing education for pastors, musicians, artists, educators, and laypersons and which holds a conference every two years;
- *Worshiping into God’s Future*: includes worship, music, visual images, and study resources from a recent church-wide worship initiative, including *Summaries and Strategies 2005*, a report of the initiative's research and future plans (see below, page 112);
- *Worship Topics*: provides web pages that explain the UCC’s understanding and practice of communion, baptism, inclusive language, music and arts, and liturgical colors;
- *Mission Moments*: UCC mission stories for each Sunday of the year. These are available in print form on the backs of pre-printed bulletin covers through the UCC’s bulletin service, but are also available online so that all churches may use them, whether or not they subscribe to the UCC’s bulletin service.

Thanks to the internet, UCC liturgical resources for those who plan and lead worship in UCC churches are now more accessible than ever.

The New Century Hymnal—Nurturing the Faith through Song

The New Century Hymnal (1995), like the 1986 *Book of Worship*, had its genesis in the Eleventh General Synod in 1977. The General Synod directed the Executive Council to produce a new hymnal for the denomination and specifically requested that it be inclusive. It was not until three years after the *Book of Worship* had been completed (in 1986) and twelve years after General Synod XI had commissioned it that sufficient resources were set aside to begin developing the hymnal.

In 1990 an advisory Hymnal Committee was formed. The committee held thirty-five public forums throughout the country and conducted a church-wide research project for the purpose of seeking information from every church in the denomination. Once the values and interests of church members had been compiled, hundreds of hymns, both new and familiar, were considered. The emphasis was on selecting hymns which celebrated a

diversity of liturgical, mission-oriented, and topical emphases. Hymns were also edited in ways that would make them more inclusive of all people. The committee extended that inclusivity to include musical expressions from a diversity of ethnicities and cultures. Some of the songs included in the hymnal came from Christian faith communities from a variety of different nations including South Africa, Mexico, Hawaii, Dakota Nation, Japan, and Israel, to name a few.

Eventually over six hundred new and old hymns were selected, scrutinized, and edited so that the hymnbook could provide “rich, varied metaphors for singing about God, and language to sing about people that excluded no one” (*New Century Hymnal* 1995, ix-x). “One of the most distinguishing aspects of *The New Century Hymnal*,” writes the hymnal’s editor, Arthur G. Clyde, “is its language, which is intended to include and affirm all people as children of God.” (Forman 1998, 16). As such, *The New Century Hymnal* serves as a primary vehicle for nurturing the faith of UCC members.

By its inclusion of hymns for times of celebration (such as Alan Luff’s hymn for the dedication of a new building, “They Did Not Build in Vain”), as well as hymns for times of loss (such as John Bell and Graham Maule’s paraphrase of Psalm 22 in the hymn of lament, “O God, My God”), *The New Century Hymnal* also functions as a tool for pastoral care. The hymnal also includes a number of hymns for specific rites and sacraments (including hymns for baptism, confirmation, weddings, and funerals). The topical index (one of eight helpful indexes included in the hymnal) lists hymns that could be used in a number of contexts to express pastoral care, including hymns for the following: comfort and assurance, deliverance, doubt, forgiveness of sin, guidance of

God, mercy of God, grief, healing, health and wholeness, pain and suffering, struggle and conflict, and trust.

Sing! Prayer and Praise—Contemporary Worship Reflecting UCC Values

In 2003 a resolution was brought to the Twenty-fourth General Synod of the UCC calling the church once again to examine its worship and sacramental life. That eventually led to a carefully prepared strategy report entitled, *Worshiping into God's Future: A Worship Initiative of the United Church of Christ, Summary and Strategies* (2005). The report, which began with the prayer, "O God, what is your yearning for the worship life of the United Church of Christ?" (Fowler and Royle 2005, 6) proceeded to make a number of specific recommendations to the UCC for the development of its worship life.

That report paved the way for the "Praise and Worship Music Project" in 2006 which included a praise song writing competition as well as the formation of an eleven member Praise Song Advisory Team which began to lay the groundwork for a new book of praise songs for use in UCC churches. A call was extended to musicians and worship leaders in UCC churches across the country to submit praise songs embodying the covenantal values of the UCC, celebrating diversity and honoring inclusion. The committee also sought songs that would function specifically within certain seasons of the Christian year (such as Steven Simpson's Pentecost song, "Fire!") and songs that would function within specific parts of a worship service (such as "Baptism Song," "Call to Prayer" and "Go Out Now in Peace").

The result of the project is a collection of 219 praise songs published in 2009 under the title, *Sing! Prayer and Praise*. The songbook debuted at General Synod

Twenty-seven in 2009. As John Witvliet has said, “We are what we sing” (2001, 4). The UCC has been intentional about living out that axiom by conscientiously selecting (and in some cases crafting) songs for its hymnals and songbooks that reflect its identity as an extravagantly welcoming church.

Through the *Book of Worship*, *The New Century Hymnal*, *Sing! Prayer and Praise*, and the official UCC website, ample resources are available to UCC congregations and their leaders for corporate worship that embodies UCC identity and values. In addition to these resources, still more are being produced by liturgical scholars within the UCC. Three of these scholars have played a significant role in shaping the worship life of the UCC. This research project turns next to them: Ruth Duck, F. Russell Mitman, and Bruce Epperly.

Ruth C. Duck—Inclusive Language in Worship

Ordained UCC clergywoman Ruth C. Duck, professor of worship at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, has been a leading voice for inclusive language in worship for more than three decades. A graduate of Notre Dame with a MA in theology/liturgy, Duck has written and co-edited a number of both theoretical and practical resources for pastors planning liturgies. Her titles include *Finding Words for Worship: A Guide for Leaders* (1995), *Gender and the Name of God: The Trinitarian Baptismal Formula* (1991), *Bread for the Journey: Resources for Worship* (1981), *Flames of the Spirit: Resources for Worship* (1985), *Praising God: The Trinity in Christian worship*, co-written with Patricia Wilson-Kastner (1999), *Touch Holiness*, co-edited with Maren C. Tirabassi (1990), and *Everflowing Streams: Songs for Worship*, co-edited with Michael G. Bausch (1981).

Though many champions of inclusive language for God seem intent on purging worship texts of all traditional language, Trinitarian language, and masculine images of God, Duck resists that trend by arguing forcefully for a recovery of Trinitarian language. Moreover, she has advocated the use of biblical images of God that are *both female and male* rather than of only those names for God that are gender-neutral.

Duck is also a writer of hymn texts which, not surprisingly, use a variety of rich images for God. Twelve of her hymns appear in *The New Century Hymnal* and eleven are included in the Disciples of Christ's *Chalice Hymnal* (1995). Through her writing about how to create and use liturgy as well as her practical examples of both liturgies and hymns, she is shaping the way people worship in the United Church of Christ.

F. Russell Mitman—Transposing Scripture into Liturgy

Recently retired Pennsylvania Southeast Conference UCC Conference Minister, Russ Mitman, in his book, *Worship in the Shape of Scripture* (1993) argues for what at first may sound like a more conservative concern within a denomination known for its liberal theological leanings. He argues that liturgies should be both *inspired by* the message and *organized by* the contours of Scripture. While many would agree that the preaching of the Word within a worship service should be about the proclamation of the Gospel, Mitman argues that the entire worship service should proclaim and enact the Word of God so that the “*entire liturgical action itself become[s] a proclamatory event*” (Mitman 2001, 15).

Mitman borrows a term from the catalogue of musical disciplines and speaks of the liturgiologist's task of interpreting biblical texts for liturgical use as *transposition*:

Liturgical transposition therefore is an art inasmuch as it employs principles that are more poetic and musical than scientific. It takes a certain liturgical imagination to interpret a text that appears in the Bible in one genre (story, poetry, song, narrative, etc.) and to transpose it in a different genre (unison prayer, responsive dialogue, hymn, statement of faith, etc.). (Mitman 2001, 59)

As a homiletician seeks to bring out the meaning of the biblical text through preaching, so the liturgiologist seeks to bring out the meaning of the same text through the liturgy. As he does, the liturgy (as the work of the people) becomes an opportunity for the congregation to act out the meaning of the text through its worship.

Mitman's idea may be taken one step further: liturgy is not only the means by which God's people act out the text, but also the means by which God ministers to the People of God, expressing to them his healing presence. Since expressing God's healing presence and ministering to God's people is the essence of pastoral care, it follows that proclaiming those texts through preaching and through liturgy may, by their very nature, become profound expressions of pastoral care. Offering pastoral care through worship, then, is not a matter of a worship leader composing her *own* words to try to make people feel a little better. Rather, it is a matter of expressing God's Word homiletically and liturgically so that God—through his Word—can minister to and care for his people.

In addition to *Worship in the Shape of Scripture*, Mitman has written three other books which are essentially compilations of liturgies he has written which embody the principles he espouses in *Worship in the Shape of Scripture*. His first, *Worship Vessels: Resources for Renewal* (1987) predates *Worship in the Shape of Scripture* and was his initial answer to a pastor/neighbor who asked him, "How do I put it all together?" (Mitman 2001, 13). Since then Mitman has also written a book of liturgies for Word and Sacrament called, *Immersed in the Splendor of God: Resources for Worship Renewal*

(2005) and a continuation of that book with liturgies for other occasions called, *Blessed by the Presence of God: Liturgies for Occasional Services* (2007).

Noting that Jesus used words (especially in the Gospel of John) fraught with multiple meanings (such as bread, vine, door, sheep, shepherd, and life), Mitman advocates building the church's liturgical life on these and other biblical multi-valiant metaphors (2007, 8). Likewise, he encourages worship that engages the senses by noting that "what seems to be emerging is not a quest for more multi-media worship but worship that is multi-sensory" (2007, 8). He incorporates the sense of touch into many of the liturgies he presents in *Blessed by the Presence of God*:

These liturgies preserve and/or recover the rich traditions of touching that have been part of the Christian liturgical experience: anointing, laying on of hands, the embrace and handshake of peace, the feel of water dipped into or sprinkled on the head, the texture of bread broken, the handling of the cup, the touch of a ring being placed on a finger, a towel wiping hands and feet. (2007, 10)

In addition to appearing in print in the book, the liturgies are also presented on a CD-Rom that is sold with the book so that they can easily be reproduced in worship bulletins.

Bruce Epperly—Healing Worship

Although there are many other liturgical resources written by or for UCC clergy, one more that deserves special mention is *Healing Worship: Purpose and Practice* (2006) by Bruce G. Epperly, an ordained UCC minister and professor of theology at the UCC-affiliated Lancaster Theological Seminary. The book is presented as a resource to enable pastors to integrate healing services into the regular worship life of the church.

Epperly is especially concerned with avoiding the psychological and spiritual pressure that is sometimes applied to the sick by "faith healers" who promote undue expectations of miraculous healings and seem to "blame" the sick for their problems

when they do not experience healing. “Healthy theology,” Epperly says (2006, 17), “avoids the two extremes of impotence and omnipotence when it comes to the interplay between divine and human power.” Unfortunately, Epperly himself (perhaps because he is a Process Theologian) errs on the side of expecting too little of God in his chapter entitled, “Healing without Supernaturalism,”

Still, Epperly contributes to the Church’s understanding of the role of healing in worship and the role of worship in healing through his discussion of healing homilies, healing rituals, and new visions for healing worship. In each chapter he illustrates his arguments with examples of prayers, hymns, and other liturgical expressions of healing worship. Together with Duck and Mitman, Epperly is playing a significant role in shaping the worship life of the UCC.

Conclusion

In recent years the church has seen liturgical renewal in a variety of ecclesiastical settings from the innovations brought to the Roman Catholic Church by Vatican II to the development of the new charismatic worship movement. Liturgical theologians have stepped forward not only to interpret, but also to inspire and shape these movements. Several voices which have emerged as leaders in the continuing conversation on the nature and practice of corporate Christian worship have briefly been examined here. Likewise, several institutions of higher theological learning, having seen in their students a growing interest in worship studies, have adjusted their curricula accordingly. Five institutions that have taken the lead in providing a forum for conversation about worship have been briefly presented here.

In 1979 the lone voice of William Willimon began to speak of worship as an important locus for offering pastoral care. In the three decades since he wrote *Worship and Pastoral Care*, Willimon has continued to refine and rearticulate his ideas. Meanwhile, other voices (such as those of Jill Hudson, Kathleen Smith, Thomas Long, and Craig Satterlee) have continued to explore the relationship between pastoral care and worship, building on the groundwork laid by Willimon.

Ideas proposed by Willimon, Long, and Satterlee are fleshed out in hymnals, prayer books, and sample liturgies. The UCC has developed a worship book, a hymnal, and a songbook that reflect its identity, mission, and commitment to radical inclusivity. Inherent in the denominational mission is an instinct to express and offer pastoral care, even through worship resources. As UCC churches use (or neglect to use) the liturgical resources produced by the UCC, several poet-theologians with pastoral hearts have augmented the anthology of UCC liturgical resources. Duck, Mitman, Epperly, and others like them have crafted hymns and liturgies which help Christians express their adoration and gratitude as well as their hurts and longings to God in worship. A pastor wishing to lead and care for his congregation would do well to become acquainted with all of these resources.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Worship is the feast of the Christian Hedonist.

—John Piper

Introduction

As Chapters Two and Three demonstrate, there is a strong historical precedent for seeing worship as a proper locus for pastoral care. One of the main reasons pastoral care can effectively be offered through the crafting of liturgy, the faithful administration of the sacraments, scriptural preaching, and pastorally sensitive leadership, is that through these actions, worshipers are invited to engage with God. As they engage with God, worshipers open themselves to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The particular scope with which this research project is concerned is a series of seven worship services planned and led by a pastor in the midst of the upheaval and uncertainty that accompanied his impending departure. He sought through these services to offer pastoral care to people he sensed needed to find healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The question this research project seeks to answer in this chapter, and the next, is to what extent were his efforts effective? The answer to this question will be approached from two very different angles: a “pastoral/literary approach” and a “survey/interview approach.”

A Pastoral/Literary Approach

The first angle from which the pastoral effectiveness of the worship services will be evaluated is through a literary analysis of the services from a pastoral perspective. Written records of all seven services in question are reproduced in Appendix A (218-297). The “found documents” include the orders of worship, prayers, and responses found in the bulletins used during each of those worship services (Myers 2000, 42-43). Transcripts of the audio recordings of each of the seven sermons are also presented in their entirety (Myers 2000, 42). In addition, texts from some of the hymns and transcripts of other worship elements (such as introductions to Scripture readings, explanations of special liturgical actions, and benedictions) are also presented.

Through their written records, these worship services will be analyzed in terms of their *intended* pastoral effect. What specific pastoral ministry, if any, did the pastor intend to offer through each of these services? Were the services well designed to produce that outcome? Was sufficient room allowed for the Holy Spirit to move and minister among the people as they worshiped? This pastoral/literary analysis of documents used in corporate worship will be conducted in Chapter Five.

A Survey/Interview Approach

The limitation of the pastoral/literary analysis of the documents lies in the fact that such a study can only analyze the *intended* pastoral effect of the worship services by studying their design. In order to determine whether the worship services were, in fact, effective, one must go to the people who were present those seven Sundays seeking to engage with God as they worshiped.

Did those who were present feel their participation in the worship services helped them to find healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation? If so, to what extent were they able to find these? This is the second angle from which the question will be approached. The process of eliciting responses and gathering data from those who worshiped in those seven services posed its own distinct challenges. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to describing the design and execution of a plan to elicit said responses. The actual data gathered through this process will be presented in Chapter Five.

Selecting the Focus Group

It was neither feasible nor desirable to survey members of the church while they were still in the midst of the transition in leadership. Ideally, members would be asked to reflect on their experiences after at least six months had passed. This would allow them some time to reflect on what had happened. At the same time, it was preferable that the members be asked before a year had passed, before their memories of their experiences had significantly faded.

About six months after the final service, this researcher began to select possible participants for this research project. Together with the Doctor of Ministry program director, he decided to invite a “purposive” sample (Myers 2000, 48) of six to eight people to participate in the project. Unfortunately, his pool of eligible candidates was severely limited by the terms of his resignation.

Ethical Limitations to the Pool of Potential Interviewees

In the final worship service shared by the pastor and Church A, a representative from the Northwest Ohio Association of the United Church of Christ was invited to

preside at the end of the service in a formal ritual for the ending of the authorized ministry of the pastor (Appendix A 290-292). In that ritual the pastor and the congregation formally released each other from their relationship. At that moment he was no longer their pastor and they were no longer his parishioners.

Pastors in the United Church of Christ are bound by The Ordained Minister's Code ([<http://www.ucc.org/ministers/a-pilgrimage-through.html> accessed 2-23-11]). According to the Code, it is unethical for a UCC pastor to perform pastoral services within a parish or for a member of a parish without the consent of the current pastor of that parish. Further, after the termination and departure from a pastorate, it is unethical for a UCC pastor to interfere with or intrude upon the ministry of his or her successor. Because the researcher was also the former pastor of Church A, an effort on his part to contact members of Church A and to engage them in conversation about their feelings as they relate to their experiences together *could* be interpreted as an intrusion on the ministry of his successor. Eager to avoid even an appearance of impropriety, the researcher resolved to avoid contacting any members of Church A without the expressed consent of his successor.

Securing Expressed Written Consent

The researcher contacted his successor—the interim pastor at Church A—and invited him to get together over coffee on March 10, 2009. When the two met, the researcher shared his plans for his Doctor of Ministry project, including his interest in following up with six to eight members of Church A about their experiences. He asserted that though feedback from members of the church would be invaluable to his research, he

would not contact any members of Church A without the expressed consent of the interim pastor.

The interim pastor was aware that there were a number of members of Church A who had not yet withdrawn or transferred their membership, yet who had ceased active participation in the worship life of Church A. Most of them, in fact, had either visited or begun worshipping at the church where the researcher had been called to serve as an interim pastor four months after his departure from Church A. The interim pastor gave the researcher permission to contact those inactive members, but *not* to contact any members of Church A who were still actively involved in the worship life of Church A. The researcher asked the interim pastor to give him written permission to contact those inactive members. The interim pastor agreed. Subsequently, the researcher prepared a letter of release, sent it to the interim pastor who signed it and sent it back to him a few days later (see Appendix B, 309).

Limitations

The researcher understood well the interim pastor's reasons for setting the limitations he did. Like the interim pastor, the researcher had no interest in causing stress for members of Church A who were adjusting to their new leadership. Neither did he want to undermine in any way the important work being done by the interim. It was not worth jeopardizing that relationship for the sake of a research project. This was clearly the pastoral concern of both the researcher and the interim pastor.

Nevertheless, from a research perspective, it is unfortunate that the perspective of members of Church A who actively sought their former pastor's dismissal could not be included in this research project. Though there had been tension between them and the

pastor—while he was still their pastor— he had still sought to minister to them through his preaching and worship leadership. Were they able to receive pastoral care through the sermons he preached and the worship services he had led? Did the actions in worship help them transcend the turmoil and tensions in which they were involved and help them to engage with God? The answers to these questions lie beyond the parameters of this project.

Similarly, this research project could have benefited from the inclusion of testimony from members who may have decided to stay active at Church A precisely because of what they experienced through their participation in those final seven worship services. Were there some who had considered leaving who ultimately stayed because of what they heard or what they experienced in worship? Perhaps so, but again the answer to that question is beyond the scope of this research project.

The data gathered for this research project does not represent the entire congregation of Church A, yet it does represent an important segment of that congregation. It contains the testimony of a few who participated in the worship services and, for one reason or another, decided to discontinue their active involvement in the life and ministry of Church A.

While all of the participants in the study had begun to worship at Church C where the pastor began serving as an interim four months after he had left Church A, he did not accept that interim position in order to reconnect with those participants (or with any others he had known while serving at Church A). It was his Association Minister (denominational official) who had suggested that he serve Church C as an interim pastor. Once there, the pastor was careful never to invite former members of Church A to

worship at Church C, though neither did he turn them away when they came. Members of Church C, on the other hand, warmly welcomed *all* who came to their church—inactive members of their church, those who had formerly left their church, and members of Church A who visited hoping to find a new church home.

As the researcher began to select potential participants for his research he sought to invite the broadest cross-section possible (Ammerman 205) of the twenty or so eligible people from Church A who were worshipping at Church C. He chose four men and four women, limited participation to one member per family (including extended family members), and sought, as well as possible, to find balance between young and old, new members and long-time members, and even residents of the town of Church A and commuters from other nearby townships.

Inviting Potential Members of the Focus Group

Once the eight potential participants were selected, a letter of invitation was sent to each in mid-March of 2009. The letter explained that the researcher was involved in a Doctor of Ministry project at Winebrenner Theological Seminary that explored the relationship between worship and pastoral care. That relationship would be studied specifically through an analysis of the seven final sermons preached and the worship services led at the end of his pastorate at Church A.

Potential participants were told that they were being invited to participate in a focus group of six to eight members who would complete a questionnaire (Ammerman 217) and later participate in a “round-table discussion” or focus group interview (Lindlof 181). Both the questionnaire and the group interview would seek to elicit their perceptions and responses to the seven sermons and services in terms of how they offered

the participants pastoral care and helped them find healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

The potential participants were informed that their responses to the questionnaire would be kept in confidence (Babbie 67-68) and would not be shared without their permission with the other participants. Further, their identities would be disguised in the description and analysis of the data in the research project.

Potential participants were told in no uncertain terms that the researcher was no longer their pastor and that the invitation to participate in the study “should in no way be construed as an overture toward continuing or resuming [his] former relationship with [them as their] pastor” (Appendix B, 300). They were assured that the researcher’s only interest was in knowledge and understanding.

Invitees were also apprised of the stipulations and limitations set by the interim pastor of Church A, along with his expressed written consent to contact them. Because of the sensitive nature of the study and of their participation in the study group, they were also asked, as a condition of their involvement in the study, that they keep their involvement in strict confidence:

I ask that you do not share anything about your participation in this study with anyone except with the other participants or (in the case of those who are married) with your spouse. Please ask that your spouse also keeps this in confidence. If keeping this in confidence will be a problem for you, please let me know.
(Appendix B, 301)

Married participants were told that they were, in fact, welcome to discuss the questions with their spouses, as a way of jogging their memory about the events in question, but were told that it was their own responses that were being sought.

Finally, potential participants were asked to give some prayerful thought about whether to participate in the study. They were encouraged to ask God how their specific insights might help the researcher with his project (which might eventually help other pastors in their ministry) and to ask God “how being involved in the process may be used by God in [their] *own* journey of spiritual growth and development” (Appendix B, 301). They were further instructed to contact the researcher if they needed anything clarified.

Within a few days each potential focus group member was contacted by telephone or e-mail. All eight agreed to participate in the study; one, ultimately, was unable to participate in the round-table discussion and also failed to return a written survey. The researcher also set a date in mid-April for the group interview. Seven of the eight focus group members affirmed they could be available to meet on that date. During the days leading up to the round-table discussion, the focus group members completed their questionnaires and submitted them to the researcher.

The Questionnaire

Along with the three-page cover letter inviting them to participate in the study, focus group members received a release form, a page of instructions, a two-page summary of the seven worship services, and a two-page questionnaire to be filled out and returned (see Appendix B, 298-309). The summary of the seven worship services gave a one or two paragraph description of each service including major themes and significant liturgical actions. The summary was provided to help jog the participants’ memories. Participants were asked to read the summary using it as an aid to help them recall what they thought or felt as they participated in each worship service.

The questionnaire asked four questions. The first was a question about the participant's initial feelings upon learning that their pastor was leaving. This was to help participants reconnect on an emotional level with the events surrounding their pastor's departure and their participation in the seven final services led by the pastor.

The second question was about the participant's involvement in the seven worship services and consisted of four parts as follow (Appendix B, 306):

1. Amount of participation in defined worship services.
2. Identification of type of benefit.
3. Identification of link between benefit and specific service.
4. Qualification of result.

The third question consisted of essentially the same parts as the second question, except that this question specifically asked about the participant's reaction to the *sermons* rather than to the *worship services*. In the instructions the participants were forewarned that they would be asked to differentiate between their reactions to the services and the sermons, even though the questions were similar. The differentiation between the two was made in order to try to determine if there was a significant difference between how participants were affected by what they *did* (in worship) and what they *heard* (in the sermons).

Finally, the participants were asked to reflect on how the services and the sermons encouraged them not only to *receive* healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, but also "to *be* an agent of God's healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation for others" (Appendix B, 307). Again, the participants were asked to make a distinction. This time it was made between *feeling* and *doing* to determine whether there was a connection

between the two. Were the participants moved only to *receive* healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation (if at all) or were they also moved to *share* those gifts with others? Did the services affect them emotionally, motivationally, or both, or neither?

The questionnaire was designed for two distinct purposes. First, it was designed as a simple, straight-forward instrument to collect intimate personal reflections from the participants on the effect of the seven worship services in their lives. Second, the questionnaire was administered as a way of “priming the pump” for the participants. Answering the questions served as a preparation for the group interview, helping the participants remember the events and articulate them. The questionnaire was designed for the dual purposes of collecting information and stimulating discussion (Ammerman 207).

Over the next two weeks, the participants began to submit their responses to the questionnaire. Overall, the participants exhibited a strong sense of self-awareness of where they were emotionally as the events had unfolded nine months earlier. Some were very articulate and were able to identify specific moments in worship that were particularly poignant for them. Others were more frugal with their words. One participant, for example, left most of the questions unanswered and answered the rest with either a single sentence or with two-word responses. On the other end of the spectrum, one participant shared six pages of typed, single-spaced responses.

Most of the written responses documented strong emotions. Some shared their personal philosophy about how to move on from this painful and unsettling experience. Several had much to say about those who remained in leadership at Church A and how those people had acted in the months following the pastor’s departure. Several of the

participants felt hurt and betrayed by those people and were continuing to come to grips with a situation that had continued to develop.

Within two weeks, all but the one mentioned before had submitted their responses to the questionnaire. Some chose to type their responses and submit them by e-mail. A few hand-wrote their responses and returned them to the researcher.

Round-Table Discussion

After conferring with all of the participants, a focus group interview was scheduled for Sunday April 19, 2009 after morning worship at the church where the researcher was serving. As a more neutral setting, he had originally suggested a weeknight meeting in a conference room at the local town library. He suggested this location and time so as to avoid giving the impression that the participants were expected to worship at the church where the researcher was serving. The participants themselves suggested (Ammerman 204) the interview be held at the church after Sunday worship as they were all planning to be at that church for worship that morning anyway and it was the best time for them all to get together. The one exception was the one potential participant who had a prior out of state commitment that weekend.

A private room was reserved at which all the participants could sit. On the day of the interview, the researcher provided glasses and drinking water for the participants and encouraged those who wanted to bring snacks and coffee and other drinks from the fellowship gathering into the room. Capitalizing on the “surprising importance of the effect of food” in facilitating group conversation (Carey 230), he also provided homemade Irish soda bread. When all the participants were comfortably settled in the room, the researcher closed the doors and began the group interview.

The researcher greeted the seven participants and asked each to state his or her name for the recording he was making of the session (Ammerman 207). To create grounds for rapport (Lindlof 188) he shared a few general remarks relating to the participants' written responses to the questionnaire, and noted that what came through most powerfully in their responses to the questionnaire were feelings. He also noted that most had commented on the fact that they had found it hard to differentiate between their experiences of healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness and that many found it hard to delineate between how they were affected by the worship from how they were affected by the sermons. He told them this was probably normal, yet asked them to try to remember specific reactions and feelings as he read aloud about a summary of each of the services.

The researcher provided each participant with a copy of his or her written responses to the questionnaire as a reference, but assured the participants that their responses would not be shared with the others if they did not want them to be shared. He reminded them that he would be recording the group interview for the purpose of taking notes for his research project. He also reminded the participants that this interview was not concerned with discussing the decisions of those in leadership at Church A, but with the participants' experiences during the seven worship services the previous June and July and how they saw God working in their lives through those services.

The researcher read the description of the first of the seven services and asked for the participants to share their feelings and reactions to that service and the sermon. As one participant began to recall and share feelings from that day, others began to recall and share. This effect is sometimes called "chaining" or "cascading" (Lindlof 182). When no

more memories or recollections seemed forthcoming for that particular service, the researcher read a summary of the next service and solicited responses. The pattern continued until the participants had an opportunity to share thoughts, feelings, and reactions to each of the seven services.

As the interview progressed, the participants gradually opened up more and more to one another and to the researcher. On two or three occasions, the conversation began to drift away from the participants' experiences of receiving pastoral care to their current feelings about the "leaders" at Church A. Each time, the researcher gently redirected the participants to stay on the topic (Ammerman 207). As with the written responses to the questionnaire, feelings came through more strongly than did cognitive perceptions.

In contradistinction to the questionnaire, the focus group interview was designed to elicit a *group* understanding of the events in question. "Group interview material, unlike the responses of a single interviewee," says Scott Thumma in *Studying Congregations* (207), "is the product of a collective effort." The focus group interview employs "the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (Morgan 12). Each person's response will nudge the memories of others, and the perceptions of one participant will be modified by the opinions of others. Focus group interviews exploit this "group effect" (Lindlof 182). Though the responses elicited by a group interview generally are less intimate than those elicited when individuals are interviewed, the group process usually yields a broader and deeper understanding of the shared experience. As Thumma says, "a focus group will produce the story that group is willing to live with, a story that by itself has profound formative power" (205). This was

certainly the case in this focus group interview. There was a clear sense of agreement among the participants as they responded to one another's observations with verbal and non-verbal affirmations.

After each of the services had been discussed, the interviewer asked open-ended questions (Lang 45) inviting the participants to share lasting impressions that had stayed with them from those seven services. He also asked for feedback and suggestions that might help other pastors trying to offer pastoral support through their preaching and leadership in corporate worship. He finished by thanking them for their participation.

At the end of the interview, the general consensus seemed to be that the process of being a part of the group interview had in itself been therapeutic for the participants. They seemed genuinely grateful for an opportunity and a context in which to continue to process their feelings and experiences. This was an unintended, but certainly welcome, byproduct of the process.

At a later time the researcher transcribed the recording of the group interview. An analysis of these verbal responses as well as of the written responses to the questionnaire will be presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Worship is the key to the renewal of the church.

–Robert E. Webber

Introduction

As stated in Chapter One, the purpose of this project is to identify which liturgical actions were most effective in expressing pastoral care as one pastor sought to minister to a congregation during his final seven Sundays together with them in June and July of 2008. Insights gained from this specific context can, in turn, be applied more broadly to other situations.

Also, as stated in Chapter One, there are three research questions. The first had to do with developing a working definition of Christian worship. That question was addressed and answered in Chapter Two. The second research question had to do with the relationship between worship and pastoral care. That question was addressed and answered in Chapter Three.

The third and final research question will be addressed and answered in this chapter: *What liturgical actions or elements are most effective in helping worshipers to receive pastoral care?* Specifically, which liturgical actions employed in worship at Church A in June and July of 2008 were most effective in helping the members of Church A experience healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation? In Chapter Six the broader

applications that might be extrapolated from the lessons learned in this chapter will be explored.

As explained in Chapter Four, this research project is concerned with and limited to a series of seven worship services planned and led by a pastor in the midst of the upheaval and uncertainty that accompanied his impending departure. Through these services the pastor sought to offer pastoral care to people who needed to find healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In this chapter, these questions will be approached and answered from two very different angles: first, through a “pastoral/literary approach” and second, through a “survey/interview approach.”

A Pastoral/Literary Analysis

The first angle is a presentation of a pastoral/literary analysis of the liturgy prepared and sermons preached for each of seven corporate worship services at Church A in June and July of 2008. The orders for those seven worship services as well as transcripts of the seven sermons are presented in their entirety in Appendix A (218-297).

Just as biblical texts can be analyzed through a variety of different interpretive lenses (historical criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, textual criticism, narrative criticism, feminist literary criticism, and other forms of higher criticism), so liturgical texts also can be analyzed through a variety of different interpretive lenses. The particular “lens” through which the liturgies and sermons from the seven services in question will be analyzed is the “lens” of pastoral care.

Through their written records, each of the worship services will be analyzed in terms of its intended pastoral effect. What specific pastoral ministry, if any, did the pastor intend to offer through each of these services? Were the services well-designed to

produce that outcome? Was sufficient room allowed for the Holy Spirit to move and minister among the people as they worshiped? Since the liturgy and the sermon for each service were designed to work together toward a unified theme, each of the seven services will be systematically analyzed in terms of three major categories: sermon and text, hymns and music, and other liturgical elements.

In addition to these three categories, at the beginning of the analysis of each service an introduction will be presented in which the pastor's perceived pastoral objective(s) for that service will be made explicit. After the service is analyzed in terms of the three major categories, a summary will be presented analyzing the service in terms of its intended effect.

Focus Group Responses

The second angle from which the question of the effectiveness of the seven worship services will be approached is a "survey/interview" approach. Chapter Five was chiefly concerned with the process by which a focus group was selected and invited to participate in this research project and how they shared their responses by answering a written questionnaire and participating in a group interview. In this chapter the responses of the focus group members, (both from their written answers to the questionnaire and from their verbal responses in the group interview) will be shared.

Some of the responses from the focus group members were specific to one service or another. Other responses were more general and applied to all seven services. This chapter will present responses from focus group members that are pertinent to each service directly following the pastoral/literary analysis.

After all seven worship services have been analyzed individually in terms of pastoral content and responses from focus group members, general responses from the focus group members that are not specific to one service or another will be shared. Those general responses will be categorized around six themes or “adages” that emerged from the group members’ responses.

Analyses of Each of the Seven Services

Worship Service 1: June 15, 2008: The Announcement

Pastoral Objective

This service marked the beginning of the end. It was the first of the final seven services the pastor would share with the congregation before he would leave and the pastor/congregation relationship would be terminated. In the midst of this service the pastor had several pastoral objectives:

1) Ensure that all of the members understood the new reality concerning the pastors’ relationship with them. Though a pastoral letter had been mailed to all the members outlining what was happening, it was not assumed that all had received, read, and understood the letter. It was important that all understood what was happening.

2) Give worshipers (including the pastor) an opportunity to grieve and express their feelings to God in the context of corporate worship. A number of members had voiced their anger and frustration at a recent meeting of the church consistory. One church member had made a dramatic statement at that meeting by dropping a heavy box of rocks on the table and saying, “He who is without sin should cast the first stone!” Though this worship service was not an appropriate time for angry words, dramatic

gestures, or hurtful actions, within the context of worship members needed to be able to voice their sense of frustration, articulate feelings of powerlessness and bewilderment, and, within certain parameters, express pain, sorrow, and even anger at the current situation.

3) Proclaim the Gospel. In the midst of painful and confusing situations, Christians need to hear the good news. Even though the gospel may not change the situation, a fresh word from God can bring comfort, hope, and a new perspective to those in the midst of that situation.

Sermon and Text Analysis

This worship service was held on a Sunday during which a sermon series on the Apostle Paul's Letters to the Colossians had already been planned. Though an argument could be made for abandoning the series in order to design a new series to address the changes being experienced by the congregation, the original sermon series was continued so that the scriptural texts could be allowed to speak to the congregation even as its current situation continued to change.

That Sunday the pastor preached a sermon entitled "Put on Love" based on Colossians 3:12-17. In the sermon the pastor described the act of "putting on love" as an intentional daily practice, similar to the habit of putting on clothing every morning. He affirmed that it is not always easy to put on love, but that Christians are called to love, to forgive, and to let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts. Near the end of the sermon he told the congregation that the following Sunday he would preach from a companion text in Colossians that speaks of taking off the things that are against the Spirit of God. He

invited the members of the congregation to come the next Sunday ready to make a holy sacrifice to God of something they felt God was calling them to “take off.”

Hymn and Music Analysis

The worship service began with an *a cappella* musical call to worship:

Gathered here in the mystery of this hour,
 Gathered here in one strong body,
 Gathered here in the struggle and the power,
 Spirit, draw near. (Porter, “Gathered Here in the Mystery of this Hour”)

Typically worship services at Church A did not begin with a sung call to worship. The use of this call signaled that something different was beginning. In four short repeated lines the song spoke of gathering, of mystery, of the body of Christ, and of struggle, and invited the Holy Spirit to “draw near.” The musical setting in a minor mode (G Aeolian) reinforced a sense of mystery as the congregation was called to worship and the tone was set for the rest of the service.

Recalling their feelings at the beginning of this seven-week period, members of the focus group described having feelings of anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, and a sense of betrayal (Appendix C, 311-312). They wondered where God was in the midst of this painful conflict. The opening hymn was a song of lament called, “O God, My God” (Bell). The pastor explained that though it might seem almost sacrilegious to express out loud doubt of God’s presence or love, in the Book of Psalms there are many examples of such laments. As the people sang, they had opportunity to give voice to their unspoken questions. One verse asked, “Does God Care? Does God Care?” and another wondered, “Is God alive? Is God alive?” The people finished with the refrain:

O God, My God, O gracious God,
 Why do you seem so far from me,
 O God, my God, O gracious God?

The song expressed some of the congregation's heretofore unspoken fears and doubts, but also communicated an underlying faith that even when God appears to be distant, he is present with his people.

The closing hymn was "They'll Know We are Christians by our Love" (Sholtes) which reinforced the importance of love in the Christian life.

Analysis of other Liturgical Elements

The pastor chose to use the time of sharing joys and concerns immediately preceding the time of prayer to announce his resignation. He referred to the resignation as "the elephant in the room" that needed to be discussed (Appendix A, 220) He also made sure others were able to share various joys and concerns before he shared the announcement so that their concerns would not be "upstaged" by his announcement.

The pastor candidly shared his initial impulse to recycle old sermons, put in minimal effort, and coast for his final few Sundays (Appendix A, 223). He also shared that after prayerful reflection, he realized that these final seven Sundays together were a potentially fertile time during which the congregation could seek God's grace and direction. He shared his hope that they might work together to find reconciliation, forgiveness, and hope in God during the coming seven weeks. He ended the announcement of his resignation with these words:

I wanted to catch people up because it's not fair to have to listen [without knowing what is going on]. So I wanted to share with you the framework of what I understand has happened to this point. I believe God is at work in this congregation and has been moving in this congregation. There are some kinds of growing pains and we're trying to sort out where we are through that. If we get to

a point where we take an “us against them” kind of stance or if we get to a point where we want to stomp off and leave because we’re angry, I don’t think that is going to serve God very well. The Deceiver is very wily and knows that if Christians start fighting each other, we’ve lost the cause. We need to love and forgive and repair what we once had. (Appendix A, 224-225)

A unique feature of this particular liturgy was the inclusion of a creed. After a time of prayer during which the concerns shared by the pastor and congregation were lifted up to God, the congregation shared in the “UCC Statement of Faith.” This creed was not recited every Sunday, but it was chosen for this Sunday particularly because it affirms,

You promise to all who trust you
 forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
 courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
 your presence in trial and rejoicing,
 and eternal life in your realm which has no end. (UCC Executive Council, “UCC statement of faith in the form of a doxology”)

By affirming God’s “presence in trial and rejoicing” the creed answered the question of God’s presence asked earlier through the song, “O God, My God.” The genius of the creed in this situation is that it did *not* so much state something new as it reminded the worshipers of something they already held to be true. It spoke with a depth of insight that can only be heard by those in the midst of turmoil. It affirmed the forgiveness of God, the grace of God, and the abiding presence of God in exactly the kind of circumstance in which the congregation found itself.

Summary

Significant time was allowed to explain the new reality of the pastor’s impending departure near the beginning of the service. Though the announcement itself was not a

part of the liturgy, it was an essential prerequisite for the congregation to worship together in spirit and in truth.

After a common ground of understanding was established, the theme for the service was set as the Gospel was proclaimed by the biblical text that called the people to “put on love.”

Through prayers and hymns the congregation was allowed to voice its and uncertainty fears about the future of the church while also affirming God’s presence through a difficult time. The congregation was affirmed as the body of Christ, and as being one in the Spirit, even at a time of significant disagreement within the body. A foundation was laid for further work in the Spirit, but it was clear that the immediate call was to “put on love.”

In summary: the situation was clarified, people expressed their feelings through worship, and the Gospel was proclaimed.

Response

In the group interview, the focus group members affirmed that it was not until the announcement was made at this service that it seemed “official” that the pastor was leaving:

I think that the announcement at that service for me finalized the fact that [the pastor was] leaving. Prior to that (I won’t say rumors or nothing) but I guess it didn’t quite sink in until [he was] up front and announced [his] resignation. That’s the service when it finally sunk in. (DD, Group Interview, Appendix C, 328)

The focus group members also were moved by the sermon that day. Three affirmed that they visualized how they would “put on love” (Group Interview, Appendix C, 328).

Even if they did not *feel* loving, they understood that love was something they could

don. One asserted in her questionnaire response that this sermon was important to her, “as I wasn't feeling a lot of love toward our church leaders at that point” (DD, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 322).

Worship Service Two: June 22, 2008: The Sacrifice

Pastoral Objective

As time went by, the pastor became aware of some of the inner conflicts some of the church members were feeling about the recent change in events. Some members were experiencing different degrees of anger toward other members with whom they had major disagreements about what was best for the church. As some members expressed to him their desire to leave the church or to lash out at those they felt had wronged him, the pastor sensed there was a real danger that members would turn on each other and that the church would be split or deeply wounded. In this situation, the pastor prepared the second worship service with the pastoral objective of leading members to offer up to God in worship anything causing disunity in the body of Christ (including anger, resentment, pain, and power to hurt or control others). In order to do this, the pastor would a) teach about biblical connection between sacrifice as worship and b) lead by example.

Sermon and Text Analysis

The theme for this service was sacrifice, or more specifically, worship as sacrifice. The theme was drawn from the text for the day, Colossians 3:1-17. The passage speaks of putting to death (3:5), getting rid of (3:8), and stripping off (3:9) the old self and the evil practices associated with it. The actual title of the sermon, “A Time to Kill” came from the other Scripture for the day, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

The pastor explained that while an image of a burly executioner wielding a huge battle-axe had been used in the church newsletter to advertise the sermon, “A Time to Kill,” that graphic seemed too violent for the bulletin cover that Sunday, so a picture of sacrifices being made on an altar was substituted. He went on to explain that the time to kill had to do with putting to death the things of the flesh. He explained that the concept of sacrifice is closely related to the concept of worship (See Chapter Two, pp. 29-31):

Throughout Scripture there is a theme of *sacrifice*: giving up something *valuable* to show that God is even *more* valuable; laying something down before God. We have the story of how Abraham was ready and *willing*, even to offer his son as a sacrifice until God provided a ram that was caught in the thicket for the offering. Something about making a sacrifice is pleasing to God. Offering a sacrifice is at the core/the center of what worship is. (Appendix A a.242)

The pastor gave several illustrations of sacrifices that would be pleasing to God: honoring God by being honest in reporting income for taxes, giving up the power to hurt someone by passing on gossip, and giving up pornography for God’s sake.

He also shared that he had recently seen a television show in which a preacher vengefully used Colossians 3:5 (about fornication, passion, and evil desire) to single out a member of the congregation he had mistakenly thought had tried to seduce him. He explained that a preacher who fears God and cares for the flock should never use the pulpit as a “bully pulpit” to push his own agenda. (Appendix A, 241)

Hymn and Music Analysis

The worship service began with “Gathered Here in the Mystery of This Hour,” the same *a cappella* musical call to worship that had been used the previous week. Again it signaled that something different and mysterious was happening as the congregation gathered for worship, but this time there was a sense of connection with the previous

service in which the call had been used. The pastor used the call for the next two Sundays as well as for the final service, making it a recurrent theme in the seven final worship services.

The middle hymn, “Not My Brother, Not My Sister (Standin’ in the Need of Prayer),” an African-American spiritual, prepared the way for the reading of the Scriptures. It reminded those who sung it that this was not a time to focus on what others were thinking or doing or what they might be sacrificing because, as the refrain said, “It’s me, it’s me, O Lord, standin’ in the need of prayer” (Johnson).

Analysis of other Liturgical Elements

As in the previous service, the “UCC Statement of Faith” was recited as a way of reiterating the foundational beliefs of the congregation. A phrase from the creed that affirms that God calls his people into his church “to accept the cost and joy of discipleship” was echoed in the prayer of invocation written for the day:

Great Redeemer,
 guide us in these challenging days.
 Lead us, we pray to Your fountain
 where Your healing waters flow.
 You call us into Your church
to accept the cost and joy of discipleship.
 Help us accept that cost.
 Help us find that joy.
 Guide us today, we pray,
 to a deeper experience of Your grace
 and a deeper willingness to surrender all to You.
 This we ask in the powerful Name of Jesus,
 through the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The prayer also shared some of the language of the opening hymn, “Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer” (Williams), which immediately preceded it. The words “cost” and

“surrender” in the invocation anticipated the sacrificial theme of the sermon and the act of sacrifice that would follow.

An unusual liturgical element was incorporated into the final portion of the service. At the end of the sermon, the pastor invited the congregation to come forward to make a sacrifice to God as an act of worship. Members were invited either to bring an object to lay on the altar or to write down something on paper to bring forward to be placed in a paper shredder:

This is not something we normally do. Perhaps none of us have worshiped quite in this way before. What I ask is that if you feel moved, come forward and worship God through an act of sacrifice. I was going to have [our accompanist] play some music during this time, but on second thought, we agreed that this is not a time for pretty music, but a time for silent reflection interrupted only by the sounds of sacrifices being made.

The pastor led the way by kneeling before the altar in silence for a few moments, after which he stood and placed a piece of paper in the shredder. On it was written the following:

My Sacrifice

I release/let go of using my anger to fuel sermons

-using the pulpit to advance my own agenda

-using sermons to advance my own point

The pulpit belongs to the LORD for His word, not mine.

I am the shepherd for all the people called

-not just of the ones who like me or want me to stay.

After the paper had been shredded, he sat in an empty pew near the front of the sanctuary where he prayed as others came forward to make their offerings. Some came by themselves while others approached the altar in pairs. After about eleven minutes everyone who wanted to come forward had done so. The pastor returned to the chancel to announce the closing hymn.

Summary

The service built on some of the themes of the previous service. Through the hymns, prayers, creed, and other liturgical elements, the stage was set for the exposition of the Word relating to worship as sacrifice. Finally, the congregation was called to participate in a highly individualized, yet communal, act of worship through personal sacrifice. While on one hand the act of sacrifice is as ancient as the act of worship, the particular way sacrifice was accomplished involved an innovative use of a device not usually found in corporate worship: an electric paper shredder machine.

The pastor led by example by being the first to make a sacrifice to God during the service. About three quarters of the worshipers at each of the two services that morning came forward to make an offering. Of those, about half came by themselves while the rest came forward with a spouse or other family member. All who came forward used the paper shredder as a receptacle for their offering and no one made an offering of a physical object other than paper.

It is beyond the scope of this research project to speculate as to what each worshiper offered or how each one connected with God. Nevertheless, at the very least, an atmosphere was fostered in which each worshiper was provided the opportunity to connect meaningfully with God in worship in a way that was both highly personal and highly communal.

Response

Several members of the focus group mentioned that they participated in the act of sacrifice in the second service. One was able to vividly recall senses and feelings associated with the experience:

I do remember that I wrote something. What I wrote I'm sure was probably more feeling based. And it was a *good* feeling for me to be able to get rid of those feelings. I recall very distinctly the sound of that shredder during the service. I'm not sure it was a *healing* sound, but it was a "getting rid of" sound, like you really could get rid of thoughts that were going through your mind. (GG, Group Interview, Appendix C, 329)

The same focus group member spoke in her response to the questionnaire of how the sermon and the liturgical act of making a sacrifice were connected for her.

This was a way for me to connect the sermon with action. To hear about altar sacrifices and then to be able to put thoughts in my mind 'to death' made a solid connection for me. (GG, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 322)

Others in the focus group recognized their participation in the sacrificial act as important, but not final. One spoke of purposefully using the process to release anger:

I knew that I had to let go of the anger and forgive because that is the only way I was going to heal from all this. I really like the idea of the paper shredder we used at the June 22, 2008 service. I wrote down the things that were bugging me and watched the shredder destroy my list. Now it was up to me to think positive thoughts not the helpless ones that were bringing me down. Again, I had to let go and let God. (FF, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 320-322)

Another confided that she also struggled to let go of anger she had:

I really don't know if at that Sunday I was ready to get rid of it. I mean, I wanted to, but I don't know if I was ready to because it was so upsetting and I was angry and disappointed. It was feelings that I had and I just wasn't sure that I was ready to be done with it. (EE, Group Interview, Appendix C, 329-330)

It seems that making a sacrifice was for the participants by no means a one-time action.

Yet it was an important one in a continuum of releasing feelings of anger.

Readiness to participate in the process was also an important consideration.

Another focus group member recognized the importance and value of releasing her feelings of anger. At the same time, she recognized that she was not yet ready to let go of those feelings:

I felt that those instances where “hands-on” actions were taken were the most beneficial, especially the Sunday where people were asked to sacrifice things at the altar. Although I did not personally offer up anything that day, I could relate very well to the concept. I found that using the shredder was a very good example and even though I was not ready that day to participate, I was able to do that on my own at a later date using my personal shredder at home. It was a good lesson in letting go of those things that can hurt us and giving it up to God. (CC, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 315)

While CC eventually made a sacrifice in a private setting away from the rest of the congregation, for GG, the corporate aspect of the act seemed to deepen the experience for her: “Having time to meditate as other people participated was helpful, as I was able to allow God's presence to calm my heart and soul” (GG, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 322). Though there were a variety of different responses to this rather unconventional act of corporate worship, it seems apparent that each worshiper was challenged to reflect thoughtfully on how, whether, and when to participate in it.

Worship Service 3: June 29, 2008: The Blessing

Pastoral Objective

This service on July 29 was the third of the pastor’s final seven services with the congregation, but the sermon was the final one of a five part sermon series (begun earlier) based on the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae. The pastoral objective for this service was to proclaim the Gospel to a congregation seeking comfort and guidance. Since the congregation had already been encouraged to “take off evil” and “put on love” in the two previous sermons, those dictums could be reinforced.

Sermon and Text Analysis

The pastor concluded the sermon series by preaching a verse by verse expositional sermon based on the fourth and final chapter of Colossians. The title of the sermon, “Grace and Peace to You,” came from the final words of the Apostle Paul in the text. These were not the words of a generic blessing directed toward “to whom it may concern,” but a heart-felt blessing sent to specific individuals with names like Tychicus, Archipus, Justus, Demas, and Nympha. The pastor explained what was known or thought to be known about each of the persons mentioned by Paul in the chapter and explained how they fit into the overall story of the Bible. Noting the specificity of the details of Paul’s letter the pastor noted that:

the Gospel is lived in very specific circumstances. You don’t live it somewhere in a monastery or on a mountain-top or somewhere secluded from everybody: you live out the Gospel among real flesh-and-blood people, some of whom you may not get along with. Nevertheless, you need to live with them and encourage them in the faith and bless them and extend to them God’s grace. You don’t live the Gospel in a vacuum.

And how you treat others says a lot about your faith. Paul was concerned about that throughout his writings. He wanted to show them how to live among others. (Appendix A, 258)

Further, the pastor showed that the apostle’s overriding concern was not for his own safety, his own health, his own reputation, or his release from jail. Rather, his overriding concern was always for the spread of the gospel. His prayer was that the Colossians would have opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ. The pastor expressed the hope that the members of Church A likewise would be witnesses to the gospel through the way they treated one another and built up the body of Christ.

Hymn and Music Analysis

The call and challenge of the sermon was immediately followed by the final hymn, “I Need You Every Hour” (Hawks) as a way for the congregation to voice its need for God’s help in living out the gospel in its present circumstance. Earlier in the service, just prior to the reading of Scripture and the sermon, the powerful words of Ruth Duck and the haunting melody of the middle hymn, “Out of the Depths, O God, We Call,” summoned God to heal:

Out of the depths of fear, O God, we call to you.
Wounds of the past remain, affecting all we do.
Facing our lives, we need your love so much.
Here in this community, heal us by your touch. (Duck)

These were not the words of an “ordinary” hymn, but the words of people in the midst of pain and struggle.

Analysis of other Liturgical Elements

At the beginning of the service the sung call to worship used the two previous weeks and the invocation used the previous week were used again, building continuity with the previous services during this time of transition. The service followed the typical order for worship used by Church A so that there was a sense of order and stability in the midst of a time of change.

Summary

There were no unusual acts of worship in this service, but through ordinary liturgical acts, pastoral care was offered to those who worshiped. First, to people in need of both comfort and guidance, God’s Word was faithfully proclaimed. Moreover, as a five-week sermon series was concluded, basic biblical principles introduced in earlier

sermons were recalled. In particular, the twin themes of taking off evil and of putting on love were reinforced.

To some degree, the sermon text was unusual in its emphasis on the Apostle's specific interactions with relatively unknown individuals, rather than on universal Christian truths. Nevertheless, the specificity of the text underscored the truth that the Christian faith is not lived out in a general way, but is borne out in specific situations as believers interact with particular people. The implication was that the way the members of Church A treated each other in the midst of the difficult situation in which they found themselves mattered to God. Moreover, they were assured that they could depend on God's grace as they sought to respond to their neighbors in grace-filled ways.

Response

The third worship service generated the least conversation from the focus group. Perhaps the members did not find the sermon and the liturgy particularly memorable. One speculated that she may have missed *that* particular service. Only one specifically mentioned the sermon from the third service by name in her response to the questionnaire (FF, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 311 and 321).

It is not clear what the lack of conversation about this service means. Perhaps it shows that it was a weak service and that the sermon did not connect well with the focus group members or offer much pastoral care. Perhaps it simply indicates that the service was cathartic enough that this service was rendered less crucial. It is worth noting that this service took place nine months before the interview. The fact that it was not readily recalled by seven focus group members nine months later does not mean that the Holy Spirit did not use the service to minister to people at the time they participated in it.

Worship Service 4: July 6, 2008: The Lord's Supper

Pastoral Objective

Churches vary widely in the frequency with which they celebrate the Lord's Supper. Some celebrate the Eucharist at least once a week while others have communion only once every few months or less. The tradition with Church A was to celebrate the Lord's Supper on the first Sunday of each month. As it worked out, only one first Sunday of the month occurred within the seven Sundays with which this research project is concerned. The fourth of seven final Sundays would also be the last time the pastor would preside at the Lord's Table with the congregation.

With the Colossians sermon series complete, the pastor was free to plan sermons specifically suited to the new reality he and the congregation faced rather than adapt previously planned sermons to the situation. On this Sunday, he chose to develop a sermon from an exegesis paper he had recently finished for a Doctor of Ministry seminar on the Book of Revelation. The sermon text shed light on the meaning of Jesus' sacrifice and the meaning of communion.

The pastoral objective for this service was, as it was in the previous services, to proclaim the gospel to a congregation seeking comfort and guidance. The pastoral objective was also to help the members of the congregation to commune with God and with one another through the Lord's Supper. Pastoral care is most effective when it concerns itself with helping put people in touch with God. The Eucharist is a gift of God for accomplishing just that purpose.

Sermon and Text Analysis

The sermon text for the fourth Sunday of the pastor's final seven services was Revelation 5:1-14. The pastor introduced the Scripture by explaining that the Book of Revelation, while belonging to a literary genre of its own, also shares certain characteristics with other genres of Scripture. The Book of Revelation functions at different times as epistle, as prophecy, and as Psalter and more.

After reading the text describing the worship of the Lamb in the heavenly throne room, the pastor encouraged the congregation to try approaching the Book of Revelation as a comic book or graphic novel:

I'm talking about those creative pieces of art wherein you can see the characters from all sorts of different perspectives and in which there are a lot of shadows. One frame may show a close-up of a conversation between two characters while the next frame may show them from the far end of an alley—or from a birds-eye-view. Often you can't see a character's whole face. It is that sort of spooky, strange artwork that I'd like you to think about as we look at the Book of Revelation. (Appendix A, 262)

Throughout the sermon the pastor revisited the idea that the Book of Revelation was like a graphic novel, suggesting pictures and perspectives that various passages might elicit.

The pastor explained that in Revelation 5, the central drama revolves around finding someone worthy to open a sealed scroll. The narrator himself is moved to tears when it seems no one will be found. An elder comforts the narrator with news that “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Revelation 5:5 [NRSV]) will be able to open the scroll. This disclosure sets the stage for the arrival of a very powerful, triumphant figure, but that figure is not revealed right away.

The “graphic novel” of Revelation builds a sense of anticipation as the fantastic community of worshipers gathering around the unseen figure's throne is revealed,

including a mighty angel, elders, and four living creatures. The figure himself, however, remains hidden. Finally, the perspective changes and the much-awaited messianic figure is revealed. Astonishingly, something appears to be amiss:

Do you see a lion? No you don't. Stepping into the spotlight you see . . . a little *lamb*! A tiny little lamb—not just any old lamb, but a *young* lamb. And not just any young lamb, but an *injured* lamb, a *weak* lamb. (Appendix A, 264)

This does not seem to be the powerful lion that was anticipated, the pastor pointed out, yet somehow it is. Those worshipping the lamb are in no way put off by his sickly appearance, but join to worship him, singing with full voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! (Revelation 5:12 [NRSV])” The pastor explained that as the chapter unfolds it becomes clear that the central figure is Jesus: Jesus is both the powerful lion *and* the slain lamb. The point is made that the awesome power of God is manifested in what seems, at least initially, to be weakness.

Near the end of the sermon the pastor observed that there are several different “windows” through which the saving work of Jesus can be seen and understood: the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the Epistles of Paul, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the “graphic novel” of the Book of Revelation. He added still another way that the story of God’s saving work through the death of Jesus can be experienced: through the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, which he described as “the sacred action given to us by Jesus through which we can participate hands-on in the saving work of Christ” (Appendix A, 267).

Unfortunately, while the pastor presented good exegesis of the passage and tied the images of Revelation 5 to the Lord’s Supper, he failed to make an explicit connection

between the weak/strong image of Jesus and the congregation's circumstances. While some of the worshipers may have inferred a connection for themselves, this was a missed opportunity for the pastor. It may have been helpful for him to have demonstrated that while a calm, peace-making response to the crisis in the church's current crisis may at first blush seem like a weak response, such a Christ-like response may actually signify great power.

Hymn and Music Analysis

Each of the three hymns sung in this service reinforced different aspects of the communion liturgy. The opening hymn, "Lift up your Hearts" (Butler), is based on the liturgical dialogue, *Sursum Corda*, used in communion liturgy since the third century to introduce the prayer of consecration.

The middle hymn, "Bless God, O My Soul" (Sonafrank II), expresses a theology of forgiveness. In fact, each of the five verses could stand alone in the liturgy as an assurance of pardon following a prayer of confession. The first verse affirms, for example:

When we suffer, God sends healing;
 When we sin our God forgives;
 From the grave our God redeems us;
 And by grace, we rise to live.

Immediately following the Eucharist, the congregation sang the closing hymn, "As we Gather at Your Table" (Daw, Jr.), which includes these words:

Turn our worship into witness
 in the sacrament of life;
 send us forth to love and serve you,
 bringing peace where there is strife.
 Give us, Christ, your great compassion
 to forgive as you forgave;

may we still behold your image
in the world you died to save.

Though this hymn is listed as a communion hymn, in this context it functioned as a *post-communion* commissioning hymn, sending the congregation to live out the truth and power of Jesus' atoning death they had just commemorated at the Table of the Lord.

Analysis of other Liturgical Elements

In the communion liturgy, a number of themes from the sermon and the sermon text were reiterated. Jesus was referred to as the Lamb who was slain. The power of God to save was recognized as being both disguised and revealed in the outward simplicity of the meal of bread and wine. "The power as of a lion expressed in a wounded lamb" (Appendix A, 267) was mentioned in prayer. The Lord's Supper was the focus and the highlight of the worship service, eloquently illustrating the power of God in the Lamb who was slain.

Other liturgical elements in the service served to lead the congregation to the table of the Lord and to reinforce the predominant themes of the service. Though the congregation did not pray a prayer of confession every Sunday, one was included in this service (along with an assurance of pardon) in anticipation of sharing in the sacrament of communion. An assurance of pardon was given by the pastor and later (as mentioned above) that assurance was reinforced by the singing of the middle hymn.

Summary

The central liturgical event of this service was clearly the Lord's Supper. Through the sermon the congregation was invited to recognize the counter-intuitive truth that the wounded lamb can also be the powerful lion. Likewise, they were invited to recognize

that God's power is often manifested in the persons and actions that the world mistakenly views as weak. In sharing the Lord's Supper, the congregation was invited not only to recognize those truths, but also to partake in them and live them out. In this way, the worshipers were offered pastoral care as they participated in the Eucharist.

Communion is by necessity a communal activity (Gallagher 2009, 12). Unlike other spiritual practices, it cannot be done alone. Communion requires people to be together. It is about community building (Willimon 1979, 170). As such, the act of sharing in the Lord's Supper functioned on this Sunday as an exercise in community building for Church A, an exercise that also offered pastoral care.

Response

In the group interview the participants were asked whether any of them had connected with communion in a new way through the sermon or through the fourth service (Appendix C, 332). Several expressed that they thought the sermon was very good for different reasons (FF, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 313 and DD, and GG, Group Interview Appendix C, 332), but none identified the sermon as connecting them in a new way with communion.

Several participants did, however, remark that they were moved by the way the pastor excluded no one from the Table of the Lord:

As [Ms. E] was saying, you were a model. And you served as a model the entire time. And hard though it may have been for us, it had to have been equally hard for you, but your model of ... you can go through each service of putting on love, of sharing communion at a communion table where everyone is welcomed and everyone is present—that idea spoke volumes of your faith. (GG, Group Interview, Appendix C, 332)

Others in the group interview affirmed the inclusive aspect of communion and commented on the importance of the pastor's character in modeling the kind of behavior he called them to exhibit. Since most of what was said about character at this time was applicable to all seven services and not specifically to this service, the entire discussion in which these remarks were shared will be shared toward the end of this chapter.

Worship Service 5: July 13, 2008: The Lord's Song

Pastoral Objective

The pastoral objective for this service was to help the congregation identify with the People of God from biblical times who, like them, had struggled to find ways to be faithful and to praise God during dark and discouraging times. In the midst of their pain and confusion, it could be helpful 1) to learn that other people of faith had found themselves in similar circumstances and 2) to learn from their examples. The chief way to meet these pastoral objectives would be through preaching and through congregational singing.

Sermon and Text Analysis

The pastor introduced three different sermon texts on the fifth Sunday:

We have three Scriptures today. That's out of the ordinary for us. We're going to read a psalm, and then to help understand the *question* raised in the psalm, we're going to read from the Prophet Daniel. Then, to help understand the *answer* to the question raised in the psalm, we'll read from Revelation. It sounds a little complicated—and it is. So pay attention today; this will be a little challenging to all of us, but if you stay with me, it will be worth the reward of understanding at the end. (Appendix A, 271)

Indeed, this sermon was atypical for this pastor and this congregation. The psalm was Psalm 137 that begins with the words, "By the rivers of Babylon— there we sat down

and there we wept when we remembered Zion” (137:1). The psalm poses the question, “How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (137:4) from which the title of the sermon was taken. The pastor explained that the psalm was the last of a group of psalms known as the Songs of Ascent and that it was written during the time of the Babylonian captivity that began around the year 605 B.C. With this question, the psalmist expresses the hopelessness the Israelite captives must have felt when they were taunted by those who asked them to sing happy Jewish songs about their homeland when their hearts were breaking.

After explaining that the story of the captivity of the people of Israel by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon is documented in the book of Daniel, the pastor explained that when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah, he ransacked the temple in Jerusalem and took the utensils and furniture used in temple worship. Apparently these items were storehoused in Babylon.

The pastor introduced a passage from Daniel 5:1-9 about Nebuchadnezzar’s descendant, Belshazzar, who, several decades later, threw a party in which he and his friends proceeded to get drunk on wine served in chalices that came from the temple in Jerusalem. The revelry led to a response by God in the form of a disembodied hand writing an inscrutable message on the wall. Eventually Daniel was summoned to the scene to interpret the message. Daniel let the doomed monarch know that his life would soon end because of his disregard for God and his failure to heed the lesson learned by his ancestor, Nebuchadnezzar, who had been humbled by God. Daniel’s prophecy was fulfilled within a matter of hours.

Belshazzar's death was the beginning of the fall of the Babylonian Empire to the Medo-Persian Empire, explained the pastor, which in turn fell to the Greek Empire, which in turn fell to the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire became the most powerful empire the world had yet known. Its pervasive and controlling presence serves as the backdrop to the stories of the New Testament. Just as the Israelites living in captivity in Babylon struggled to practice their religion within the confines of Babylonian rule, so Jews, and later, Christians, struggled to practice their religion centuries later under the watchful eye and infectious culture of the Roman Empire. While the first generations of Christians were not literally captives in a foreign land, something of their experience in trying to resist the values of Rome and live faithful lives evoked the experience of the Babylonian captivity.

The pastor introduced the final Scripture for the day, Revelation 17:1-14 in which the "Whore of Babylon" is described. She is pictured sitting on a filthy beast, adorned with gold and jewels, drinking the blood of the martyrs from a golden chalice, apparently pleased with her wickedness (17:3-6). Though there is mention of her adultery, it is not so much a description of literal *sexual* immorality, as it is of *spiritual* adultery: "playing the harlot" with false gods rather than being faithful to the true God. The pastor showed how the scene in Revelation paralleled the scene of the drunken revelry and utter disregard for God depicted in Daniel 5. But while the scene in Revelation resonated with that scene from Israel's past, it clearly depicted the experience of Christians contemporary with John the Revelator.

The message to the Christians in Revelation came in the next chapter:

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,
'Come out of her, my people,

so that you do not take part in her sins,
and so that you do not share in her plagues.’ (Rev. 18:4 [NRSV])

Clearly, the people were being told not to conform to the pervasive culture of the day.

The pastor brought the message to bear on present day circumstances:

For the people of God, this is a reminder from God that “you’re living in a foreign land, you’re living in a foreign culture, and you’re living in a whole context that doesn’t honor me. You can either choose to stay with them, be identified with that culture, and be corrupted. Or you can choose to stay with the Lamb. What are you going to choose?”

He added that the Book of Revelation reveals that in the end, the Lamb will win. He revisited the original question of how the Lord’s song can be sung in a foreign land. He asserted that for Christians living in the world, their experience is *always* that of living in a foreign land. Nevertheless, Christians *can* sing the Lord’s song because they know that in the end, it is not Babylon that will last forever, but the Kingdom of God.

Hymn and Music Analysis

Since the sermon asked (and answered) the question, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” it was important that the congregation be given the opportunity to sing the Lord’s song in the midst of worship. For “special music,” the pastor, the organist, and another church member sang a three-part round, “By the Waters of Babylon” (Traditional), based on Psalm 137 which was one of the sermon texts for the day. Later the congregation was invited to join in singing the same round.

Scriptures and themes from the sermon were woven into the liturgy throughout the service. The closing hymn was “We’re Marching to Zion” (Watts). The pastor noted that on one hand the hymn was written in the style of the Psalms of Ascent and that on the other hand it draws heavily from imagery in the Book of Revelation.

Analysis of other Liturgical Elements

When the offering was introduced, the pastor connected the act of offering to themes from the sermon:

Let us present our tithes and offerings. Our giving is a counter-cultural statement that says, “Rome, Babylon—they’re not what I belong to. I belong to the Kingdom of God and I give to God’s work.” In such a way, let us present our tithes and gifts. (Appendix A, 280).

The pastor also connected themes from the sermon as well as from the closing hymn in the benediction, when he reminded the congregation that they were “marching on to Zion—the beautiful City of God.” He asserted that this knowledge is what would give them strength, even while they were still “in a foreign land” (Appendix A, 280). He further connected this to the power of “the Lamb who was slain.”

Summary

“Singing the Lord’s song” does not mean somehow “adding God” to the story of the congregation, but quite the reverse. It means coming to understand that the congregation somehow fits into God’s story. According to Robert Webber in his book, *Who Gets to Narrate the World?*, God calls his people into his story:

God, the divine narrator, is saying: I have a purpose for humanity and a purpose for creation and history. I am not asking for permission to join your narrative (although I do); *I am asking you to join my narrative of the world, of human existence, and of all history.* (2008, 25)

Part of pastoral care is helping people to see themselves within God’s larger story.

There were no unusual or extraordinary liturgical actions in this service (such as coming forward to make a sacrifice or coming forward to receive anointing with oil). Nevertheless, by the way they were framed, ordinary liturgical actions such as singing a hymn, making an offering, and receiving the benediction became vehicles for “singing

the Lord's song" and thereby participating in the great biblical story. The current situation of the congregation in a time of uncertainty became the "foreign land" in which the faithful were encouraged to "sing the Lord's song" in faith and in hope.

Response

The group interview got a little off track when the fifth service was discussed. One participant focused on the image of the hand writing on the wall and wondered aloud whether there might be a similar warning message from God for this generation (BB, Group Interview, Appendix C, 335). Otherwise, it seemed the participants related as much to the song, "By the Waters of Babylon" (Traditional) as to the message. One participant, however, in a response to the questionnaire spoke of being helped by this sermon as well as by the sixth service (the healing service) to "let go and look forward to what God had in store for all of us" (FF, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 318). Elsewhere FF also mentioned that the sermon "helped me realize that though things were dark now there is something better waiting for each of us in the future" (FF, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 317).

Worship Service 6: July 20, 2008: The Anointing

Pastoral Objective

The main pastoral objective of this service was to offer God's healing to members of Church A in accordance with James 5:14. During this time of upheaval, change, and uncertainty, members had a pronounced need to find healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The healing offered was not limited, however, to healing of feelings related to the changes going on in the church. Prayer, laying on of hands, and anointing

with oil for healing was offered to any and all who sought God's wholeness for body, mind, emotions, or relationships. A related pastoral objective was to give the worshipers the opportunity to praise God in the midst of their pain and to allow them to express their need for healing and their hope for God's blessing.

Sermon and Text Analysis

On this Sunday the pastor preached from texts in Jeremiah and James. From Jeremiah 8:18-22 and 46:11 he spoke of the Prophet Jeremiah's metaphorical references to the Balm of Gilead. This balm, known for its healing properties, was made from a resin produced by thyrax trees growing in the region of Gilead which could be found just east of the Jordan River (Feinberg 1986, 439). Jeremiah asked the People of Israel if there was a balm in Gilead. Both he and they very well knew that there was such a balm, but his real purpose in posing the question was to ask why the people were not using it. The balm represented the healing ministry of God offered to those who would come to him for it. Though the people in Jeremiah's time very much needed to turn to God to find the healing he had to offer, they simply did not.

The pastor also preached from James 5:7-9, 13-16. In those passages the writer encourages those who are sick to pray for healing and to call upon the elders of the church to pray for them, "anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14 [NRSV]). He talked about the Saturday night healing services he and the parish nurse and an elder member of the congregation had led during the first year or so of his pastorate at Church A. Then he made a confession:

I regret now that we treated the healing services like an extra-curricular thing. It was as if we were saying, "If you're *really* into this healing thing, come to this special service." (Appendix A, 287)

He said that the order used for those Saturday night healing services could just as well have been incorporated into a regular Sunday morning service. Continuing, he said:

Knowing that our congregation needs to work through some things and that we need healing and reconciliation and forgiveness, it makes sense that we would do something like this *today*. So I invite you—if you feel led, if you are looking for healing—come forward. In a few moments I'll ask for [two respected elder members of the congregation] to come up and assist me. And as long as it takes for as many people who want to come forward, we'll have prayer with them and we'll lay hands on them and anoint them with oil. (Appendix A, 288)

The pastor encouraged all who were present, whether they themselves came forward for prayer or not, to pray for those who did. He also encouraged them to pray for their neighbors, pray for those around them, and pray for the whole congregation.

The pastor finished the sermon with a reminder that James told his readers to confess their sins and pray for one another that they might be healed (James 5:16). Before inviting people to come forward for healing prayer, he led the congregation in a corporate prayer of confession that was printed in the bulletin.

Hymn and Music Analysis

On this particular Sunday, the regular accompanist was scheduled to be away and another member of the church filled in as organist. She was made aware of the nature and focus of the service so she could prepare appropriate music for the time of prayer as well as for the rest of the service. For a prelude she chose “If My People Will Pray” (Owens) based on the biblical text:

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14 [KJV])

For the worshipers familiar with the song, it helped set the right mood for a service in which the people would be encouraged to look to God in prayer for healing. She also played several well-chosen gentle reflective hymns and a musical setting for “The Lord’s Prayer” (Malotte) during the time of prayer and anointing for healing.

The pastor selected three hymns to reinforce the major themes of the service. The opening hymn, “Crown with Your Richest Crowns” (Bridges), reiterated many of the phrases and images from the sermon he preached on the previous Sunday. In particular, the hymn referred to Jesus as “the lamb upon his throne.”

The middle hymn was the African-American spiritual, “There is a Balm in Gilead,” which was sung just before the reading of the Scriptures and the preaching of the sermon by the same name. The spiritual asserts:

There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole,
There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul.

This song and its words of hope to those seeking God’s healing became the centerpiece of the service.

The closing hymn, “From the Crush of Wealth and Power” (Gibbons), expressed in its second and fourth verses both the present experience and the future hope of the congregation:

Even now our hearts are wary of the friend we need so much.
When I see the pain you carry, shall I, with a gentle touch,
bind all your wounds again?

Every time our spirits languish terrified to draw too near,
may we know each other's anguish and, with love that casts out fear,
bind all our wounds again.

Each of the three hymns sung on this Sunday was chosen to help the people voice their praise to God, their need for healing, and their hope for God’s blessing.

A church member sang a solo that morning that reinforced much of what was presented in other ways at this service and the services leading up to it. The solo took as its text the words of a prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Make me an instrument of your peace.” The member had actually approached the pastor offering to sing the solo for the service of healing. The idea in the song of sowing love where there is hatred echoed the ideas of the first two services of putting on love and taking off evil and hatred.

Analysis of other Liturgical Elements

The opening prayer was written specifically for this service as a bridge from the throne room to the place of healing. The prayer began by reiterating words and phrases describing the worship of the Lamb from the previous Sunday that were expressed in the opening hymn (Bridges, “Crown with Your Richest Crowns”). From the scene of the throne, the prayer turned to God in a petition for healing:

Lord Jesus, the Lamb upon the throne, we worship you,
 crowning you the Lord of Love, the Lord of Grace, and the Lord of Truth.
 We join with the heavenly voices in worshiping you
 for who you are and for what you have done.
 As we worship this morning, we invite you to change us.
 Transform us, we pray, from the ways of the world to the ways of your kingdom.
 Help us to live your grace, embrace your mercy, share your forgiveness,
 and experience your healing.
 We pray for ourselves and we pray for our sisters and brothers.
 We pray for your church that among your people
 there may be reconciliation, healing, and forgiveness.
 For your glory we pray these things, Amen. (Appendix A, 281)

As the congregation prayed this prayer, they began to model the transformation they were seeking; they prayed for their sisters and brothers and specifically sought God’s favor in bringing about reconciliation, healing, and forgiveness for the congregation.

The entire service was “bathed” in prayer from beginning to end. In addition to the opening prayer and the extended time of prayer and anointing for healing near the end of the service, there also was a time for sharing joys and concerns. After they were expressed, these concerns were lifted to God in a pastoral prayer. A teen asked for prayers for her grandmother facing surgery. Another member asked for prayers for his family that experienced on-going dysfunction. A young leader in the church asked for prayers as she underwent chemotherapy. A long-time choir member who had recently died after a long battle with cancer was remembered in prayer.

A young brother and sister were also lifted up in the pastoral prayer. For most of their young lives, the two had come to church with a family member who had served as their legal guardian. Now the children were about to move to another state with a parent who had just regained legal custody of them. This, then, was the final Sunday when the two would worship with their faith family at Church A. The pastor spoke with them during the children’s sermon time and used that time to introduce a word, *shalom*, as a way of blessing the two and sending them away with the peace of God.

Before dismissing them to Sunday school, the pastor invited the siblings to come back and join him in the narthex after the benediction. There other members of the congregation could personally say goodbye to them and wish them well. Blessing these children and leading the congregation in sending them with the peace of God served as a kind of prequel to the farewell the pastor and congregation would share the following Sunday. The pastor did not prepare a formal written liturgy for the farewell, yet he used his pastoral instincts in the moment to lead the children and the congregation through the process. His pastoral objective in that moment was to help the children and congregation

express what needed to be expressed and to help them recognize God's presence in the midst of the parting.

The focal point of the service was the time of prayer and anointing with oil. More than half of the worshipers came forward for prayer and anointing with oil and laying on of hands for healing after the invitation at the end of the sermon. Four respected elder members of the church (one male and one female at each service) came forward to assist with this ministry. The pastor had spoken with the individuals prior to the service about this and each was prepared to help. The four who were chosen were known for being wise and for being devout. They were also seen by most members as people who had *not* taken sides in the struggle going on in the church. Two of them were teachers of adults (in Sunday school and in a Bible study group) and another was the one who originally helped the pastor and parish nurse lead the Saturday night healing services. (The parish nurse was no longer a part of the congregation; if she were, she would have been invited to participate as well).

As worshipers came forward for prayer they quietly shared specific prayer requests (if any) with the pastor and two elders assisting him. Sometimes the pastor prayed aloud, but not loudly enough that any confidential details could be overheard by other members of the congregation. Sometimes one of the elder members prayed. Sometimes more than one person prayed. Throughout this time the organist quietly played gentle hymns. This time of healing prayer continued for twelve to fifteen minutes at both services until no more people came forward. The pastor and the two elder assistants at each service were also among those who received healing prayer.

Summary

The central liturgical event of the sixth service was prayer and anointing with oil and laying on of hands for healing. Together the hymns, prayers, Scriptures, and sermon pointed to the importance of seeking healing from God and led the way to a significant time of prayer for healing. Though not all worshipers came forward for healing prayer, space was made for those who sought it to feel welcome to come forward.

All members were invited to pray for those seeking healing, for themselves, and for those around them. Space was made through the liturgical elements of the service for the worshipers to seek God in their own way. Moreover, room was made for the Holy Spirit to move in and among the worshipers. People were offered pastoral care in that they were put directly into God's hands through prayer, anointing with oil, and the laying on of hands.

Response

Participants in the focus group were strongly moved by their participation in the healing service. Five of the seven spoke of what it meant for them to go forward to receive anointing with oil. The other two could not remember whether they had been present for that service. One participant mentioned that she had participated in healing services at Church A in the past and had found them to be healing, especially when she participated just prior to having surgery (CC, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 315).

Another participant had been one of the elders who had been asked to assist the pastor in anointing people with oil and praying for them:

Hearing how people who were sick could receive a healing balm while being prayed over was calming. Then, to actively participate in receiving the healing oil was special. I was one of the people who helped at that service, so I not only

received the oil, but also felt like I was being an agent in helping others. (GG, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 322)

She reported much the same thing in the group interview.

For another, it was his first experience of a healing service:

I think that was for me of the seven services probably the most powerful . . . I was holding a little bit of anger and a little bit of angst and a little bit of this and that. I thought that when we got to this one—maybe I was just kind of ready to let everything go and just heal, forgive and say, “Well, it’s gonna be God’s will—let’s make the best of it.” But when I went up for the anointing it just . . . kind of brought everything home. It really made a big impression on me. I had never been through that before. (DD, Group Interview, Appendix C, 337)

Coming forward for the anointing helped him come to terms with the fact that his pastor was leaving. As he said:

I just [realized] now it’s time to let go and accept the inevitable that Pastor S [was] going to leave . . . [I had to] make the best of it and accept it and move on. So I think that was the Sunday when all of that came to a head for me. It really was. I thought it was a very powerful service. (DD, Group Interview, Appendix C, 337)

Several participants reported that it was not only the anointing with oil that moved them; the sermon also had a strong influence on them. One participant was going through a difficult transition between jobs at the time. That participant was especially encouraged by the sermon that day:

I was also there that Sunday and I did come forward. But it seems like that was sermon that really seemed to help me let go and look forward to what was going to come on in the future . . . I just think that that one really helped me to put things aside. (FF, Group Interview, Appendix C, 336).

When asked by the interviewer whether the participant was moved more by the sermon or by coming forward, she asserted that both were helpful.

Others reported similar stories of how both the sermon and coming forward were helpful to them that day:

I did enjoy that service and I did go up for the anointing. And it moved me: the sermon and going up for the anointing. And it really moved me and it helped more so than the other like the first one where you're putting on the love. When we got to this one with the sermon and the going up—yeah this one helped me a great deal. (EE, Group Interview, Appendix C, 337)

Finally, one participant noted both in her questionnaire response and in the group interview the effect a particular solo had on her:

The song “Prayer of St. Francis” that [Member KK] sang that day was very appropriate comparing its words to the situation at hand. Its wording held a huge parallel to the situation. Great selection! The line . . . “Where there is hatred, let me sow love” . . . comes to mind now which also makes me think of the first service in the series of seven in which it was referenced about “putting on love” such as we dress ourselves each and every day. We should love one another which also lead me to something I say so often. (CC, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 315)

Her voice began to crack as she shared with the focus group how she had been affected by the member's singing of this song. Apparently this was a service in which the various components of the service (the music, the sermon, and the act of coming forward to receive prayer along with the laying on of hands and anointing with oil) came together for the focus group members.

Worship Service 7: June 27, 2008: The Release

Pastoral Objective

Though one of the objectives for all seven services was for the pastor and congregation to say goodbye to one another in a healthy and honest way, in this final service it became the central pastoral objective. It was important that both the pastor and congregation be able to say a healthy goodbye so that in the future each might be able to say a healthy “hello” to a new pastor/congregation relationship. The way the farewell was

handled would impact the way the congregation's subsequent pastoral search process would eventually begin. According to the United Church of Christ:

Farewell celebrations and closure events are much more than "polite activities." If a pastoral departure is handled well by both pastor and church leaders, the range of emotions expressed will be appropriate, and the past will be celebrated in a way that avoids the tendency to idolatry. The church will remain strong as it freely moves into God's future. (United Church of Christ, Search and Call, 2007, section 1-1)

A healthy closure would likewise be a first step toward the pastor moving into God's future as well.

More than simply saying "goodbye," the service was also about giving space for both expressing gratitude and extending forgiveness where it was needed. It was also an opportunity to restate the mission of the church that would continue even after a change in pastoral leadership.

Moreover, it was important for those involved to be cognizant that they were not alone. First, these exchanges would be made in the presence of God in the context of worship; the hopes, desires, and concerns of those involved could all be lifted to God. Second, these exchanges would be made in the presence of the greater church body through the witness of a denominational representative. Just as a representative of the local association of the UCC had presided over the service of installation of the pastor six years earlier, another presided at the termination of that pastoral relationship. The representative's role was not merely perfunctory; by his presence this worship service became an event of the denomination and not merely a "private" event of an individual church.

Sermon and Text Analysis

The pastor chose two texts for his final sermon at Church A: John 15: 5-12 (the Great Commandment) and Matthew 28:18-20 (the Great Commission). The texts (the command to love one another and the commission to make disciples) had been recurring themes in his six years of preaching at Church A, so a sermon on them constituted a kind of review of the basics.

The pastor began by talking about the simple four-step flow of a service of corporate Christian worship, beginning with the act of *gathering*:

Anywhere you go in a Christian church, worship will start with some kind of act of gathering. It may be with the ringing of a bell. It could start with a chant. It could start with a prayer. But in one way or another, there is some kind of signal that says, “Here we are—we’re going to join together now in worshipping God.” (Appendix A, 294)

The flow of the service, he explained, continues toward an *encounter* with God through his Word, and sometimes through the sacraments, and then toward a *response* to God that may be made through prayer or song or offering. Eventually the flow of the service leads to and concludes with some kind of *sending forth*: the worshipers are sent back into the world to live as God’s people, transformed by their encounter with and response to God in worship.

The pastor demonstrated how this pattern of *gathering, encountering, responding, and being sent out* could also be found throughout the Scriptures. One notable example was the way God used Moses to gather the Children of Israel out of Egypt for a prolonged forty year encounter with God in the wilderness that concluded with their being sent into the Promised Land. Another example came in the New Testament as Jesus repeatedly called disciples to follow him, taught them and shared with them in small

groups, then sent them out (sometimes two by two) to put into practice what they had been taught. This cycle continued until the night of his betrayal when Jesus gave his disciples his final commandment: the commandment to love one another (John 15:12). After he was crucified, dead, buried, and resurrected, Jesus gave one more commission to the disciples before he ascended to the Father: the commission to make disciples (Matthew 28:19).

This last commandment and this last commission, the pastor preached, are still at the core of the Christian life. Even though the pastor would be leaving this congregation and even though a number of other things might change, Jesus still commands this congregation to love one another and commissions the congregation to continue to make disciples.

Hymn and Music Analysis

For one final time, the service began with “Gathered Here in the Mystery of this Hour” (Porter), the *a cappella* musical call to worship that had been used in the first four services. Again, the call to worship suggested that something mysterious was happening and that God was at the center of it. The call also signaled that the journey had come full circle from the time when the pastor’s impending departure had been announced.

Each of the three hymns sung in the service was chosen to highlight a specific truth and to give the congregation an opportunity to verbalize that truth. The opening hymn, “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name,” (Perrenet) served as a vehicle for praising Jesus, reminding the congregation that he alone was head of the church deserving of service and praise.

The congregation sang a middle hymn that also had been sung in the first service: “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love” (Sholtes). The song reinforced one of the two sermon texts (John 15:12) in which Jesus gave his disciples the commandment to love one another.

Finally, for a closing hymn, the congregation sang a contemporary praise song that had been introduced during the pastor’s six-year pastorate at Church A. Over the years it had been sung many times by the congregation as a closing hymn and had almost become a theme song of the congregation. The song, “Go, Make Disciples” (Hanson) expressed the Great Commission in song:

Go, make disciples,
 Baptizing them, teaching them
 Go, make disciples
 For I am with you till the end of time.
 Go, be the salt of the earth.
 Go, be the light for the world.
 Go, be a city on a hill,
 So all can see that you’re serving me.
 Go—make disciples.

It served as a fitting closing song both for the service that day and for the pastor’s tenure with Church A.

Analysis of other Liturgical Elements

The prayer of invocation was written by the pastor. It echoed a phrase about accepting “the cost and joy of discipleship” from the UCC Statement of faith that had been used in the prayer of invocation in the second service. The prayer also implored, “Holy Spirit, in the midst of the transitions we are experiencing, help us to know your deep and abiding grace even as we direct our focus and our worship to you” (Appendix

A, 289). This was not a “generic” invocation, but one crafted specifically to help the congregation draw close to God during a specific kind of transition.

The central liturgical act of the entire service was the formal release of the pastor by the congregation and the reciprocal formal release of the congregation by the pastor that followed the sermon and the offering. Fortunately, the denomination provided very helpful liturgical guidelines for this formal release in the form of an “Order for the Ending of an Authorized Ministry” adapted from the UCC *Book of Worship* (United Church of Christ 2002). Just as the *Book of Worship* includes an order for the ordination of a pastor and for the installation of a pastor in a new church, it also includes the order for the Ending of an Authorized Ministry to guide a worshiping community through this important time of transition.

The order calls for a Conference or Association official to be present. The pastor planned this part of the service in consultation with his Association Minister who, unfortunately, due to other commitments, was not able to be present at this worship service. Instead, a member of the T Association’s Committee on Church and Ministry who was a member of a nearby UCC church was found to preside during this part of the liturgy. He was charged with the responsibility of bearing witness to the exchange that the pastor and congregation would make.

Part of the genius of the Order is that it allows both the pastor and the congregation the opportunity to express both gratitude and forgiveness to one other. The denominational representative helps facilitate this exchange so that the pastor is not placed in the awkward position of officiating as he is “un-installed” as pastor of the

church. With minor edits to include the pastor's spouse the liturgy for the ending of the pastor's authorized ministry at Church A proceeded as follows:

Recognition of the End

T Association Rep: On August 18, 2002, this local church called [*Pastor S*] to serve as pastor and teacher. The following year he married [*his wife*] and she also became a valued part of this faith community.

Pastor S: We thank [*Church A*], its members and friends, for the love, kindness, and support shown us these last six years. I ask forgiveness for the mistakes I have made. I am grateful for the ways my leadership has been accepted. As I leave, I carry with me all that I have learned here.

People: We receive your thankfulness, offer forgiveness, and accept that you now leave eventually to minister elsewhere. We express our gratitude for your time among us. We ask your for your forgiveness for our mistakes. Your influence on our faith and faithfulness will not leave us at your departure.

Pastor S: I forgive you and accept your gratitude, trusting that our time together and our parting are pleasing to God.

Vows of Release

T Association Rep: Do you, the members and friends of [*Church A*] release [*Pastor S*] from the duties of pastor and teacher?

People: We do, with the help of God.

T Association Rep: Do you offer your encouragement for his ministry as it unfolds in new ways?

People: We do, with the help of God.

T Association Rep: (addressing Pastor S) Do you, [*S*], release this local church from turning to you and depending on you?

Pastor S: I do, with the help of God.

T Association Rep: Do you offer your encouragement for the continued ministry here and on the relationship with another who will come to serve?

Pastor S: I do, with the help of God.

Witness of the T Association

T Association Rep: On behalf of the [*T Association*] and the United Church of Christ, I witness to the words spoken: words of thankfulness, forgiveness, and release. The member churches of our association and conference hold each of you in prayer. We pledge our support in the transitions signified in this service.

People: Thanks be to God. (Appendix A, 291)

After the recognition of the end, the vows of release, and the witness of the T Association, the Association representative led in a prayer that lifted all of the concerns to God asking for his guidance specifically for the pastor and his family as they would move “to new and unknown places” (Appendix A, 292).

The services concluded with the singing of a Great Commission praise song entitled, “Go Make Disciples” (Hanson), and a final benediction given by the pastor. The benediction reiterated one final time the Great Commandment to love one another and the Great Commission to go, make disciples. The benediction ended with the Pauline blessing the pastor had included in most of his benedictions over the past six years at Church A: “the love of the Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you, now and forever” (2 Cor. 13:14 paraphrased). The service was followed by a time of fellowship for personal expressions of gratitude and farewell.

Summary

The service served as a sort of bookend with Pastor S's service of installation six years earlier. In the installation service he and the congregation were bound in a new covenant with witnesses from T Association. In this service both the pastor and congregation were released from that covenant, again with the witness of T Association.

The worship service was planned with various songs and liturgical acts written, borrowed, or adapted for the specific purpose of helping the pastor and congregation say what needed to be said and do what needed to be done before God as their time together came to an end. During the time leading up to this service and continuing for a short time afterwards, there were opportunities for the pastor and individual members of the congregation to say their good-byes in a more personal way. This service, by contrast, was designed not for individual expressions, but to help the congregation and pastor express themselves in a corporate way with clarity and deliberateness. In this way, pastoral care was offered.

In the shadow of events leading to the pastor's departure that had become ugly and painful, this order for worship neither dwelt on those events nor treated them as though they had not occurred. Forgiveness was both sought and extended by both the pastor and the congregation. And, in the midst of this, the gospel was preached.

Response

All of the focus group participants were present for the final service. Most agreed that it was a "powerful" service. One member identified the sermon that Sunday as the one that "touched my heart the most" (EE, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 318). In the group

interview she said, “I loved that service. It really made an impression upon me. It just said a lot. I just absolutely loved that service” (EE, Group Interview, Appendix C, 339).

Others were moved by the liturgy of release. CC appreciated how it “gave all of us in the congregation an important role by speaking the words.” CC worried, though, that some of the leaders who were eager to see the pastor leave may have been simply going through the motions without respecting the meaning of the words they were saying (CC, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 315).

The fact that the seventh service was a “combined” service (in which people who normally worshiped at an early service worshiped together with those who normally worshiped at a later service) seemed to have been a contributing factor to people experiencing it as a powerful service (GG, Group Interview, Appendix C, 339). For some, the service evoked strong emotions: “I remember at the last [service] a feeling of sadness, I guess that we had known this was coming for the last seven weeks and now it’s here” (DD, Group Interview, Appendix C, 340).

As with the healing service, focus group members appreciated being able to actively participate in the liturgy:

The [services] that have stuck with me the most are the ones that I felt active within. I felt “active” when I could write feelings down and shred them. I felt active when the healing balm was placed on foreheads. I felt active at the last service when we read a litany that released [Pastor S] from the pastorate at [Church A], where I could feel a part of the service, rather than just sit and absorb—where I could actively participate. (GG, Group Interview, Appendix C, 339).

Another added: “Those were the services that tended to stick in my mind where I could actively participate in some way” (CC, Group Interview, Appendix C, 340).

In different ways, participants described the service as clearly demarking the end of one phase in the life and ministry of Church A and the beginning of a new one. One was struck by the sadness and finality of it all (DD, Group Interview, Appendix C, 340), while another felt better able to move forward: “I felt I felt that I have a job to do and that is sharing God’s love not only by words but by actions” (FF, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 317). Yet another spoke of it in terms of doors closing and new doors opening:

For me that was finality. One door closed and you wondered what door was going to open next. For me it put the perspective back on that it is all about God and it is our job to go out and make disciples. (GG, Group Interview, Appendix C, 339).

It was clearly experienced as a watershed moment between what had been and what would be.

Focus Group General Responses and Observations

In addition to their responses specific to each of the seven worship services, members of the focus group shared thoughts about the series of worship services as a whole. Their responses can be categorized as they support the following six general observations: 1) Healing is a process, 2) Everyone responds differently, 3) Worship *can* be part of the healing process, 4) Worship does not guarantee healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, 5) Active participation enhances the effect, and 6) Character counts. Each of these six observations will be explored below.

Healing Is a Process

Two participants spoke of the services in terms of “planting seeds” for healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness. The seed metaphor suggests that it will take time for healing to take place just as it takes time for seeds to mature to fruition. It also implies

that healing might not come, just as seeds that are not properly cultivated and sufficiently nourished might never come to fruition. The process is a fragile one and one that takes time.

Another participant spoke of the process as “a journey of learning and letting go (FF, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 323). As the focus group members shared their stories, it was clear that there were different degrees of healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness, and that at any time each person might be in a different place in her journey toward them.

Everyone Responds Differently

In the midst of crisis, people tend to fall into three main groups: those who favor one course of action, those who favor an opposite course of action, and those who choose neither extreme, but remain neutral waiting to see how things work out (Nissley, 2013). Most of the participants in this focus group identified themselves as belonging to the group clearly opposed to the dismissal of Pastor S. One even described himself as being a part of the “opposition party” (BB, Group Interview, Appendix C, 340) as he expressed his sense of isolation.

One focus group member confessed of being very optimistic at the beginning of the seven worship services; she thought people would be free to share their feelings with one another in an open and honest way that would lead to healing and greater understanding. “The services brought the necessity of healing to all of us - but I came to find out that we each heal in our own time, and in our own way” (GG, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 314). In fact, the participant was disappointed to find many people did not respond in kind to his overtures to seek a deeper understanding of one another’s feelings.

Of those who participated in the focus group, only one ultimately chose to stay at Church A. That participant credited the seven services with helping him come to decide to do so:

As a new member of [Church A] the easier course to take would be to just walk away, find another church, or several other churches. Especially when the main reason for joining this church, was being taken away.

The "Seven Services" encouraged me to stand by my commitment not only to God, but to His church [at Church A]. I've worked on committees, lead a small study group, and offered to serve on a pastoral search committee. If not for the "seven services" I would have probably just moved on. (DD, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 319)

His faith and his experience of the seven services led him to stay. Another focus group member was led by his faith to do the opposite, partly because she had found the environment at Church A to be toxic to her:

I have decided to look elsewhere and seek out other places of worship and fellowship. As of right now, I have given myself permission to leave and realized that Church A is just a building. I don't need to be there to have a relationship with God and there are other places to worship and enjoy discipleship with people of true faith.

I have experienced great healing by removing myself from the negative environment that existed in Church A and I am involving myself in more positive surroundings that include positive people with positive attitudes and influences. I choose not to be involved with or have anything to do with the ministry at Church A at this time. I will not allow anyone there hurt me in any way any longer. (CC, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 317)

This participant suffered the loss of business and personal relationships because of her decision to leave Church A, but deemed it to be for the greater good. She sees God's will being worked out through her decision.

Another focus group member learned about himself through the process:

I chose to separate myself from Church A and attend [another church in the same town], where I was able to 'worship' and have my hurting soul be nurtured by a [caring pastor]

In total hindsight, I am learning much more about myself in worship! I am learning that there are different styles of leading a worship service I am now

learning to listen to what God is calling me to do more than ever before. I trust Him to lead me to where my spirit and soul will be fed. (GG, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 326).

Though they chose different paths, in each of their journeys the focus group members seemed to have come to a deeper sense of self and a deeper expression of faith through the process of going through this time of upheaval.

Worship *Can* Be Part of the Healing Process

It may seem to go without saying, but it is important to state that participation in corporate worship planned and lead with pastoral sensitivity can contribute significantly to the process of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation for a congregation as well as for individuals within that congregation. One of the greatest gifts of corporate worship is that it draws the focus away from that which is not God and redirects it toward God himself. Members of the focus group testified to the part worship played in their own experiences of healing:

By the end of the seven sermons, I felt somewhat reconciled. I feel that I became more "God" focused, than focused on a brick and mortar church building. (DD, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 314)

It took a long time before I could understand *it wasn't about me*. That was a light bulb moment for me. The sermons helped me to understand where you were coming from . . . (EE, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 324)

For me, the services brought things immediately into a focus, even though I continued to feel confusion inside. The services provided me a way to actively move forward with the others in the congregation. (GG, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 313-314)

Significantly, corporate worship not only strengthens the connection between the worshiper and God, but strengthens the connection between the worshiper and other worshipers as it reinforces their relationship with one another in the body of Christ.

It also became clear from the responses to the questionnaire and the group interview that the sermon, music, prayers, and liturgy of the worship services worked together as an organic whole. When asked to differentiate between the effects of the sermons from the effects of the worship, they struggled to separate them:

In view of the “instructions” where it explains the differences in the two sections of questions, I feel that I would have to answer the same for both sections. (CC, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 321)

My response is basically the same to this question as in question 2 -b. While I enjoy every aspect of the services, to me the heart of a church service is the sermon. The hymns and Scriptures enhanced the sermons. (DD, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 321)

Furthermore, it became clear that all seven services worked together as a whole:

All of Pastor S’s sermons are interesting and have helped me to understand the ways of the Lord. (Ms. A, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 323)

It is hard for me to differentiate these three categories with the seven sermons. For all three I would have to say that the sermons provided a focal point for all of us. (GG, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 321)

Although there were highpoints and moments of personal epiphany for the focus group members, overall the effect of the services and sermons was cumulative.

Worship Does Not Guarantee Healing, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation

While participation in corporate worship planned and led with pastoral sensitivity *can* contribute significantly to the process of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, it does not guarantee it. There are many other factors that can contribute to or undermine the effect of a worship service planned and led with pastoral sensitivity.

Focus group members testified to the temporary effect of the worship services on their experience of healing:

As a whole in the beginning, it wasn't easy to think about healing, it helped to hear the sermons, but after church the other feelings would return. (EE, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 313)

Initially I thought I could forgive, and I thought the services made the need to forgive each other clear. But forgiveness is hard! (GG, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 318)

Not only did they feel the effect of the service wear off for themselves in a weekly cycle, but they also became disappointed and disillusioned when their expectations for healing and reconciliation in the church as a whole were not met:

Initially, the services made it easier for me to be open to hearing all points of view, but that feeling did not last after Pastor S's final Sunday. Once reality set in - and Pastor S was gone, healing became harder for me. (GG, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 314)

Together the sermons and services provided me with initial feelings of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation so I could in turn be receptive to others. Yet division within the church family already seemed to be in place. Although I felt like I reached out, it was not reciprocated. (GG, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 323)

I felt very encouraged initially to move forward – and to help others do so. I became a listener, hearing both positive and negative comments. Perhaps the services had given me a positive boost – a “we can get through this” feeling. I expected things to get better – to have the church (the people) reconciled, but it didn't happen. I tried to phone people and share. That, however didn't seem to be enough. Communication within the church seemed to fall apart. My high expectations never seemed to gel. At this point, it became harder to reach out to others. And, those who reached out to be a listener for me were so few. I truly believe we all wanted to receive and be agents of God's healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, but with no strong leadership, no one knew what to do, and our small efforts were feeble. (GG, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 319-320)

There may be many reasons why healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation were not manifested to the degree the participants had hoped to realize. As GG mentioned, lack of consistent leadership was a factor. Perhaps the divisions were too deep. Perhaps the expectations were too high. Certainly human nature and the inclination toward sin was a

factor. In the group interview, one participant reminded the group that there was another spiritual force to consider:

We have to remember we're dealing with Satan. Right out in the open, Satan is there. And he is trying to destroy and disrupt every good thing that the Word is trying to do. You get someone who comes in and starts preaching closer to the Word than what has ever been preached in that church and Satan says, "This is not going to happen." And this is a result of what Satan did. (BB, Group Interview, Appendix C, 342)

Indeed, there are probably many unknown factors that conspired together to thwart efforts intended to build up the body of Christ at Church A.

Active Participation Enhances the Effect

As we have seen above, focus group members felt most connected with God in worship when the liturgy called for active participation rather than passive reception:

Perhaps the sermons and services that were the most helpful to me were the ones where I was actively involved - putting thoughts 'to death', receiving healing balm, and verbally releasing Pastor S from his pastoral role at Church A. They were all excellent starting points for me, in my own personal healing, as well as being able to listen to others as we shared together. (GG, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 323)

The three most powerful moments that emerged in the seven services were the three described above (the sacrifice at the altar (by way of the paper shredder) in the second service, the anointing in the sixth service, and the liturgy of pastoral release in the final service. Perhaps this illustrates the importance and the power of being "doers of the word, and not merely hearers (James 1:22 [NRSV]).

Character Counts

Over and again the focus group members testified that the way Pastor S behaved and handled the stressful situation was *as* important as or *more* important than what he said. Beyond speaking about healing, he sought to be a healing presence:

I thought Pastor S exhibited a lot of poise and grace, in a valiant effort to heal our congregation. (DD, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 313)

More than just preaching about forgiveness, he extended it:

I was encouraged by [Pastor S], the last seven sermons had to be very hard for [him], but still [he] preached on forgiveness, over & over, to all of us. Even [to] the ones who had turned on [him he] preached love. [He] showed God's Love. (EE, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 319)

The focus group members were watching their pastor closely:

I saw immense courage and strength in the way that Pastor S picked himself up by the bootstraps and faced each of the people and the seven Sundays ahead of him. I do not believe that I could not have done the same. He showed his strong convictions toward his beliefs and strength in the way he handled the entire situation, week after week, head held high. WOW!! What an amazing man to have handled that situation with such grace and integrity!! That is truly the sign of a great leader!! (CC, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 315)

The members were willing to follow a leader who, in their minds, was leading by example:

As a pastor, [Pastor S], went further than I have seen anyone go to be "Christian." [He is] a very good and a very stellar example of how to act, conduct business, and be a Christian during a situation like that. [He is] an example I would pattern myself after, encourage my children to follow. To say, "Hey, come listen to this man—he speaks the truth." (BB, Questionnaire, Appendix C, 323)

During the group interview, one of the participants made a statement that sparked a conversation about the leadership by example they observed in Pastor S during the communion service. Since Pastor S was also present (as the interviewer) at that group

interview, in the transcript of the interview presented below, participants refer to him in the second person:

EE: I think all the services had a lot of connection for me because it seemed like, here we were—we were all hurt—we were all angry—we were all upset—but there you were and you were up there telling us “This is what you need to do and get past it. You heal and you love.” And actually you are the one who was wounded the most—you were cut right down. So here you are trying to get this all across to us so we would feel better. And then with communion it’s just reaffirming...and that’s how I thought about it because I thought, here you are putting this all out for us and we were feeling bad for ourselves. Of course we were feeling bad for you, but you were the leader and you were, you know, being tough about it and all that and that alone really impressed me, I mean, with the faith that you have that you knew everything was going to be okay. We had to know that. You had to impress that upon us—that we’ll work through this. That just really got to me.

GG: I think throughout all of those services . . . as EE was saying, you were a model. And you served as a model the entire time. And hard though it may have been for us, it had to have been equally hard for you, but your model of . . . you can go through each service of putting on love, of sharing communion at a communion table where everyone is welcomed and everyone is present—that idea spoke volumes of your faith.

EE: And he did continue to welcome everyone . . .

Others: Everybody.

EE: There was never no animosity: nothing like that. Never an edge in his voice. Never.

CC: We were all equal.

EE: Right.

CC: Everyone was included. Nobody was excluded.

BB: An emulation of Jesus Christ. A living emulation.

EE: And didn’t you just kind of think, if he could do that—wow. I mean, didn’t it just kind of—oh my gosh—this is really happening to him!

BB (joking): We didn’t get to see the side that [his wife] saw.

EE: No, we didn’t.

[Laughter]

EE: And I'm sure there had to be more.

BB: A lot of trepidation, I'm sure.

EE: Sure, but he didn't let us know that, certainly.

Interviewer: I'm hearing you saying, maybe the sermon was good, maybe there were things, but it was *modeling* on [the pastor's] part that was as important as anything.

Several: Yes/yeah/right!

BB: If not *more*, because you see more than you can hear. And when you see (Oh how do I want to say this that sounds smart?)

FF: Well, he showed us the way that we should be acting . . .

BB: Yeah—and is still.

DD: Leadership by example.

FF: Yeah—good way of putting it. (Others agreeing)

EE: I mean, even if we weren't ready to do it—he was doing it. He was showing us how it should be done. (Group Interview, Appendix C, 332-333)

The conversation above was took place about halfway through the group interview. At the end of the interview, after all seven services had been discussed, the interviewer asked the focus group what advice they would give to a worship leader leading worship in the midst of congregational crisis. Several quickly responded by recommending that a worship leader lead by example.

After a little more conversation the interviewer asked for last comments. As if to underscore the importance of leading by example and the importance of integrity on the part of the worship leader, one participant offered this last bit of advice:

Yes—the pastor should definitely keep himself or herself in tune with God and with their own personal journey. Because I don't know how [the pastor] could have led with example like [he] did unless [his] own faith was strong and getting support. (GG, Group Interview, Appendix C, 342)

One must be a worshiper to lead worship.

Summary

Though the focus group was small and probably did not represent the full range of perspectives and responses of all those who participated in the final seven services at Church A, the members of the focus group were thoughtful, candid, honest, and articulate about their own experiences. They shared valuable insights that are helpful for understanding the ministry of preparing and leading corporate worship in the midst of congregational crisis.

Six key observations were made based on the responses of the focus group members. The observations are: 1) Healing is a process, 2) Everyone responds differently, 3) *Worship can* be part of the healing process, 4) Worship does not guarantee healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, 5) Active participation enhances the effect, and 6) Character counts. Each of these six observations was explored in this chapter.

In Chapter Six the research project will be summarized and findings will be presented with special emphasis on two discoveries presented in this chapter: the power of active participation in worship and the role the pastor's character plays in worship leadership. Conclusions based on this study will be presented with a focus on developing a "pastor's heart." Finally, recommendations for seminaries, for the United Church of Christ, and for pastors will be made.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We never know the trials that await us in the days ahead. We may not be able to see the light through our struggles, but we can believe that those days, as in the life of Job, will be the most significant we are called upon to live.

—Robert Collyer

Introduction

This research project began with an examination of the pastor’s holy work as a preacher and as a worship leader—two tasks most visibly associated with the role of pastor. Early in the first chapter it was affirmed that worship and preaching are most effective when they are prepared with a particular congregation and its particular situation in mind. The wise and pastorally sensitive pastor takes into consideration where the worshipping congregation has been, where it presently is, and what it might face in the future as the pastor prepares to lead the congregation in worshipping God.

This project was designed to explore the dynamic by which a pastor prepares to lead a congregation in worship and to preach God’s Word to the members of that congregation in their specific setting. It has endeavored to explore that dynamic by means of a case study that examined the way one particular pastor served one particular congregation for seven particular Sundays as together they faced the crisis of their ministry together coming to an end. These seven Sundays would become the “laboratory” in which ideas would be tested and new truths might be discovered.

Summary

The pastor ministering in the situation that comprises this case study quickly came to realize that the members of the congregation under his care deeply needed pastoral care. Specifically, they needed pastoral care that would allow them both to receive for themselves and, in turn, to offer to others the gifts of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Since the need was too great for the pastor to minister effectively to the entire membership one on one, he sought a liturgical solution to a pastoral problem: he would respond to their pastoral needs through the ministries of preaching and worship leadership.

The pastor drew on his own pastoral instincts to craft liturgy that he hoped would be effective in helping the members of the congregation receive the care they needed. The scope of this research project has been limited to seeking to address the problem that *it is not always readily apparent which liturgical elements might be employed most effectively in the context of corporate Christian worship to offer pastoral care in a given situation.*

The purpose of this project was to identify which liturgical actions were most effective in expressing pastoral care as this pastor sought to minister to a congregation as they faced their final seven Sundays together in June and July of 2008. In order to achieve this purpose, the following three research questions were formulated to guide the rest of the study:

1. What is the purpose and substance of Christian worship?
2. In what ways are worship and pastoral care related?

3. What liturgical actions or elements are most effective in helping worshipers to receive pastoral care?

The first two questions were addressed in Chapters Two and Three respectively. The third question was answered in the form of a case study presented and analyzed in Chapters Four and Five. A brief summary of the answers to all three questions is presented below.

What Does Worship Look Like?

The first question: “What is the purpose and substance of Christian worship?” could comprise an entire doctoral level research project. Today worship is a hot topic in the church. There is a profusion of books about worship addressed both to the worshiper and to the worship leader. Many of these books, however, begin by assuming the reader shares the author’s working definition of worship without adequately spelling out the definition for the reader.

Fortunately, a number of scholars of worship stand apart from the others by their thoughtful analyses of the phenomenon of Christian worship. David Peterson’s biblical study of worship in his book, *Engaging with God* (2002) was a particularly helpful guide for this research project. Peterson explores a theology of worship as it emerges in the Old Testament and develops in the New Testament. In his book verbs like “sacrifice,” “serve,” “pour out,” “fall down,” and “edify” coalesce as foundational concepts in a biblical understanding of worship.

Another concept that shed light on the meaning of worship in this research project was Harold Best’s concept of “continuous outpouring” presented in his book, *Unceasing*

Worship (2003). Best explains that, for the Christian, worship should be a continuous whole-self, whole-life response to God.

This researcher hoped to synthesize the ideas of Peterson, Best, and others into a single, straight-forward working definition of Christian worship. That definition was to be vexingly elusive. As D.A. Carson demonstrated with his long and cumbersome 160-word definition of worship in *Worship by the Book* (2002), any definition of worship is doomed to be either too long or too inadequate. Consequently, the goal of Chapter Two was changed from exhaustively *defining* worship to adequately *describing* it. Twelve theses about worship were presented in Chapter Two as a biblically-informed description of Christian corporate worship:

1. Christian corporate worship is an extension of personal worship.
2. Christian corporate worship is a gift.
3. Christian corporate worship is about God.
4. Authentic Christian corporate worship is shaped by Scripture.
5. Authentic Christian corporate worship is Trinitarian.
6. Authentic Christian corporate worship instructs believers in the faith.
7. Authentic Christian corporate worship shapes believers into the body of Christ.
8. Christian corporate worship has a symbiotic relationship with pastoral care.
9. Authentic Christian corporate worship is the work of the people.
10. Authentic Christian corporate worship rehearses and retells the story of God's
11. Through worship, and particularly through the sacraments, Christians are invited into a new world and a new "time zone."
12. Our Christian corporate worship is imperfect, yet it can still be authentic.

The twelve theses became the foundation for understanding corporate Christian worship for the rest of the research of this project.

How Are Worship and Pastoral Care Related?

The second research question asked about the symbiotic relationship between worship and pastoral care was briefly addressed as the eighth thesis in Chapter Two. This became the driving question of Chapter Three. The most helpful voice in answering this question was that of William H. Willimon, the preeminent modern day pioneer in the exploration of the relationship between worship and pastoral care. He literally wrote the book on the subject.

In *Worship as Pastoral Care* (1979), Willimon argues that pastoral care and worship historically went hand in hand, but through the Protestant Reformation and by the widespread adoption of a medical model of pastoral care in the 1920s the two came to be seen as having little to do with one another. He contends that pastoral care is not simply one-on-one counseling done in the pastor's office with individuals or couples. Rather, it is, as Susan Jorgensen defines it, "the awareness and expression of the essence of God that permeates and informs all areas of ministry" (1996, 245). After building a case for using worship as a primary means of offering pastoral care, Willimon demonstrates how this might be done through various liturgical events including funerals, weddings, baptisms, and the Eucharist.

While advocating the use of liturgical leadership to offer pastoral care, Willimon also warns against losing sight of the primary focus and object of worship: God. Thomas Long takes up his argument and amplifies it when he warns in *Accompany Them with Singing* (2009) against treating funerals primarily as a means of dealing with grief. In

fact, focusing on being pastorally sensitive, according to Long, ultimately renders funerals shallower in meaning. While it is true that funerals can bring comfort to those who are grieving, that comfort is a byproduct of true worship in which the focus is on God. The power of the funeral to be a locus for pastoral care comes from the way it reconnects people with God, the story of God, and the community of God.

Through the works of Willimon, Long, and a host of others surveyed in Chapter Three of this research project, the nature of the relationship between worship and pastoral care became more apparent. On one hand, the pastoral instinct to care for people in their lives and in their struggles informs and influences the pastor in her role of leading people in worship. In fact, pastoral care is most effective when the pastor knows the people, their struggles and their pain, and prepares the liturgy and sermon with a “pastor’s heart” (*cf.* Howard 2005, 14). On the other hand, liturgical and homiletical leadership remind the pastoral care giver that the purpose of all pastoral care is to place people in the loving hands of God. Even outside of the context of corporate worship, pastoral care expressed through a look, a touch, a prayer, a shared Scripture, or a listening ear can communicate the presence of God to the receiver.

What Was Most Effective?

The final research question was specific to the case study presented in this research project. It had to do with identifying liturgical actions or elements, which were most effective in helping worshipers to receive pastoral care in the context of this study. In Chapter Four the methodology for developing and executing the case study based on seven worship services was presented. In Chapter Five the results of a pastoral/literary

analysis of those services and the responses of seven focus group members questioned and interviewed were presented.

While ethical and practical constraints in some ways limited the pool of potential participants for the case study, nevertheless the study yielded some valuable insights. The study showed: 1) that healing is a process, 2) that everyone responds differently, 3) that worship can be an important part of the process of healing, and 4) that worship does not guarantee healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The study led to three more discoveries that will be examined more closely in the following section.

Findings

The research led to three major discoveries: 1) the importance of participation, 2) the importance of the character of the pastor, and 3) the absolute importance of the presence of God. These became the research gems of this research project. Each will be explored in turn.

The Importance of Participation

The effect of worship on people when they play an active rather than passive role as worshipers is one of the keys to the dynamic of the symbiotic relationship between worship and pastoral care. Willimon noted that Protestant worship all too often tends to be “congregationally passive and pastorally verbose” (1979, 110). As a remedy he advocated the recovery of symbols and symbolic actions which minister to people in times when the effectiveness of words alone is diminished.

That being said, there *were* “special” liturgical actions that did, in fact, capture the imaginations of the focus group members in this research study. In particular, the time of

sacrifice, the anointing with oil, and the liturgy of release were three liturgical actions that were viewed as especially powerful vehicles for experiencing God's healing presence by the focus group members. Part of the reason for the power of these actions seems to be that they were designed for active participation by the worshipers. As one participant explained:

The [services] that have stuck with me the most are the ones that I felt active within. I felt "active" when I could write feelings down and shred them. I felt active when the healing balm was placed on foreheads. I felt active at the last service when we read a litany that released [Pastor S] from the pastorate at [Church A], where I could feel a part of the service, rather than just sit and absorb—where I could actively participate. (GG, Group Interview, Appendix C, 339).

This reinforces William Willimon's notion that active congregational participation in worship can be strengthened through the recovery of symbols and symbolic actions as a means through which to minister to people when words alone are insufficient.

It could reasonably be expected that when baptism and the Eucharist are observed or celebrated that these sacraments as symbolic actions given by God for the people of God would likewise have a powerful effect on the worshipers. Though there were no baptisms during the seven Sundays, on the fourth Sunday the Eucharist was celebrated. Surprisingly, the focus group members did not seem to be particularly moved by the sacrament that Sunday. It should be noted that while the Eucharist was not singled out and remembered as particularly moving when the participants were interviewed nine months later does not necessarily mean that the Eucharist was not effective at the time it was shared. Neither does the fact that the seven interviewed did not find the Eucharist remarkable necessarily mean that none of the 180 others who worshiped at Church A that day were there felt the same way.

It should be noted that the Eucharist was shared on a Sunday immediately following a week in which a western-themed vacation Bible school program had been conducted. Large colorful panels and props had been installed in the sanctuary and were left in place as backdrops for a musical presentation by the VBS students that Sunday morning. Unfortunately, the panels and decorations completely obscured the communion table so that the pastor had to move the elements to a makeshift box during the service in order to serve the Lord's Supper.

Did these obstacles distract from the dignity and solemnity of the celebration of the Eucharist? Was the Lord's Supper such a commonplace observance at Church A that the focus group members did not perceive it as anything out of the ordinary? Was the sermon that Sunday ineffective at inspiring a sense of wonder at the power and grace of God, disguised in a humble meal? Were the members of the focus group raised in a religious tradition that did not assign a high place to the celebration of the Eucharist, thereby predisposing them not to see it as a powerful and mysterious channel of God's grace? To what extent could the congregants be considered active participants in the Eucharist? It is beyond the scope of this project to answer these questions conclusively. Any one or more of a number of different factors may have conspired to cause the focus group members to be relatively unmoved by the celebration of the Eucharist that Sunday.

In the end it seems that liturgical actions that called for more active participation on the part of the worshipers were overall the most effective in helping worshipers receive pastoral care. For reasons unknown and perhaps unknowable, however, the experience of the Eucharist in this case did not follow this general rule.

The Importance of the Character of the Pastor

There was, however, an unexpected reaction to the sharing of the Lord's Supper that was identified by at least one focus group member. He was markedly moved by the hospitality he observed in the pastor's act of extending to all members of the congregation the invitation to share in the Lord's Supper. This focus group member's observation sparked an extended conversation within the focus group about the role the pastor's character played in enabling worshipers to experience God's healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation in the seven services (see pages 189-191).

The fact that a worshiper found it noteworthy that the pastor served everyone without discrimination at the Lord's Table came as a surprise to the researcher. Although in some Christian traditions there is a "fencing" of the table so that it is made clear that only those who meet certain spiritual or religious requirements are welcome at the Lord's Table, in all Christian traditions it is understood that the Table belongs to the Lord. In the UCC tradition, it is not for the pastor or anyone else to decide (outside of theological designations) who should be allowed to come to the table and who should not. Nor should the pastor accept people at the table begrudgingly; God's grace extends to all who would receive it.

Martin B. Copenhaver, in a book about ministry called *This Odd and Wondrous Calling: The Public and Private Lives of Two Ministers* makes the curious statement: "Being a pastor has made me better than I am" (Copenhaver and Daniel 2009, 58). By that he means that he has been challenged in playing the pastoral role to do things he might not have done were he not a pastor. In so doing, he believes he has become a better person. He shares, as an illustration, an incident in which he was called upon to visit a

parishioner who had always been particularly disagreeable and critical of him. When a situation arose in which that parishioner needed a pastoral visit, there was no question of whether Copenhaver would visit the man. As a pastor, one simply visits parishioners in need. And in the process, one finds oneself becoming, as Copenhaver did, a better person. Just as running improves a distance runner's endurance and efficiency and practice improves a musician's tone and articulation, acts of care-giving seem to make a pastor's heart more compassionate and empathic.

Inasmuch as what a pastor says and does in the context of worship leadership is important, the *way* the pastor speaks and acts may be even more important. As the focus group member's observations about the pastor's expression of hospitality above illustrates, the eyes of the congregation are ever on the pastor, constantly scanning for subtle clues about him. Does the pastor really believe what she preaches? When the pastor offers the peace of Christ, is he offering it sincerely? As the pastor prays for the sick in the congregation, does she really care about them? When the pastor calls the congregation to worship, does he join in worship, too? These are important questions for parishioners who put themselves in the hands of their pastor.

Jesus declared himself to be the Good Shepherd and contrasted himself with thieves, hired hands, and false shepherds. He said his sheep recognized him and could distinguish him as the true gatekeeper from the imposters:

The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers. (John 10:3-5 [NRSV])

The truth applies to pastors and congregations as well. Congregation members have a way of sensing whether their pastor is sincere and whether she cares for them. This has a direct bearing on how they are able to receive their pastor's leadership in the midst of worship.

The Absolute Importance of the Presence of God

As important as the worshipers' active participation and the worship leader's integrity are to worship, these two factors would be completely meaningless and ineffective without the real presence of God in worship. Worship is not the gift of the people to God, but the gracious gift of God to his people. Authentic worship is impossible apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in the people of God.

One of the beautiful things about worship is that as the Holy Spirit enables people to commune with God in a vertical relationship, the Spirit also enables worshipers to commune with one another on a horizontal level. It is a mystery, but in a very real way, communing with God transforms worshipers and strengthens their bonds with one another, thus building up the body of Christ.

All works consulted agree that worship leadership is not about using techniques and formulas to "conjure up" the presence of God. It is, rather, a ministry of helping people open themselves to the work of the Holy Spirit, thereby enabling them to receive the loving, forgiving, healing, and transforming presence of God. As such, worship leadership is at the core of pastoral ministry. A worship leader is like a midwife who has a small role in the miracle of childbirth. Like the midwife, the worship leader is not the focus of the event, but merely plays a supportive role in what is happening.

The worship at Church A during the final seven Sundays shared between Pastor S and the congregation was not perfect. It was a dim reflection in a mirror (1 Corinthians 13:12) compared to the glorious on-going worship taking place in the heavenly throne room. Some sermon points did not “hit home” as well as they might have. Some hearts and minds were distracted by thoughts and desires that were less than noble. There were awkward moments. There were miscues. The worship was far from perfect. And yet, by the grace of God, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, people communed with God and one another and found some degree of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Conclusions

In this section there are three areas of focus. First, the seven services will be evaluated. Were they a failure or a success and by what measure were they so? Second, the research project itself will be evaluated. Did the project deliver what it set out so to do? Third, if the project did not deliver what it promised, what did it in fact actually deliver?

Did the Seven Services Succeed or Fail?

The “success” of the seven services was not an issue directly addressed by the research questions, but was only indirectly addressed by the question of which particular liturgical elements were helpful in helping worshipers receive pastoral care. Nevertheless, it is fair to ask whether the seven services were successful in accomplishing their goals.

An evaluation of the success or failure of the services is dependent upon what the intended purpose of the services was. In fact, the services can be judged according to their success in achieving a number of different possible purposes. If the purpose was to

allow people to worship God, then they were successful because people came together and worshiped God. If the purpose was that the services would stand as faithful expressions of the twelve theses about corporate Christian worship described in Chapter Three, then they can be judged to be mostly successful. The worship focused on God, was Trinitarian, and was shaped by Scripture. The services may not stand as perfect textbook examples of each of the twelve theses of corporate Christian worship, but on a pass/fail basis, the services could reasonably be judged to be successful.

How else might the seven services be judged? If Pastor S had any illusions that if he “performed” well enough, the hearts of those who wanted him to leave might have been changed and that an invitation would be extended to him to stay as pastor, by that measure, the seven services were a huge disappointment. Fortunately, the intended purpose of the seven services was not to change the course of action that had already been set in motion.

Pastor S had a different purpose in mind as he prepared the final services. He had a sense that the church was in a delicate state and that if the pastoral ministry were not handled with care, the church could become a house divided. If the situation was mishandled it could easily have devolved into nasty in-fighting which could have caused irreparable damage to the body of Christ. The pastor had a sense, then, that the deeper purpose of the services was to keep the church together. His hope was that all of the members would remain faithful members of Church A after he left. By this standard, the seven services failed. But, to paraphrase Alfred, Lord Tennyson, perhaps it is better to have tried to hold a church together and lost than never to have tried at all.

Ironically, it was only because some members left Church A that Pastor S was allowed to contact them for this study. Though he is no longer in touch with all of the focus group members, he has learned that after the group interview was held one family represented in the focus group went back to Church A, four more families or individuals represented in the focus group became active members of Church C, and two other families or individuals represented in the focus group have become active in two other churches: one in the UCC and one in another denomination.

Furthermore, he has learned that in the years following his departure from Church A, a number of formerly active families or individuals in that church have also left to join other churches. Contrariwise, even as some members left Church A, it is also likely that over the years Church A has also received a number of new members.

What do these church migrations suggest? For any number of reasons, families and individuals come and go from local churches. Some join while others drop out. Some move and others transfer their membership to new churches. What is significant here, however, is that none of the families or individuals involved in the focus group dropped out of church participation altogether. While the pastor may have thought the purpose was to keep all of the members active in Church A, perhaps God had a different purpose. It is important to remember that the Holy Spirit is not predictable and that our own purposes, however noble, are not always in line with his.

Perhaps God's greater concern for members at Church A was not that they remain members of Church A, but that they continue to grow in their relationship with him, even if that relationship would best be nurtured in a different congregational environment. If this was God's greater purpose in these seven services, it seems God's purposes are being

worked out. While many participants in the focus group attested to feeling angry about what had happened at Church A, their anger did not turn into bitterness that drove them away from the church altogether.

Unfortunately, there are many things this study could *not* measure or study. It could not offer a controlled test to see what would have happened with those seven focus group members had things been handled differently. Had the pastor led worship differently, would some of them still be at Church A? Or if he had been *less* pastoral in his leadership, might some of those seven have become so bitter that they would never be a part of a church family again? These questions cannot be answered without speculating.

Similarly, it would have been very helpful to have interviewed those who had remained at Church A about the role the seven services played in convincing them to stay. At least one focus group member later heard a member attest that she had stayed at Church A because that is what she heard Pastor S telling her to do through his preaching on those final Sundays.

It also would have been extremely interesting to interview the leaders at Church A who had called for Pastor S's dismissal. Did they see Pastor S's leadership during those last weeks as pastoral and helpful or did they judge his leadership and pastoral concern to be insincere? Some of them came forward during the paper shredding and during the anointing with oil. Did they do this because they trusted Pastor S's leadership at that time, or did they come forward because they knew others were watching them? Most importantly, did they sense the working of the Holy Spirit in the midst of corporate worship even though they were convinced that Pastor S was no longer the right pastor for their church? These are questions that cannot be answered by this project.

No List and No Methodology

In fact, the fundamental problem that this project sought to address was that *it is not always readily apparent which liturgical elements might be employed most effectively in the context of corporate Christian worship to offer pastoral care in a given situation.* Expressed that way, the problem statement insinuates that a solution to this pastoral and liturgical problem might be the generation of a categorized list of helpful prayers, songs, readings, and other liturgical elements a pastor might include in planning a worship service designed to offer pastoral care. Another implied solution might be the development of a methodology by which a pastor might identify specific liturgical elements and incorporate them into a plan for worship. In other words, the framing of the problem statement set up an expectation that this research project would attempt to generate either a master list and/or some kind of a “how to” resource that would help pastors craft worship services that would effectively offer pastoral care in a number of potential congregational situations. But that is not where the research led.

This project did not in the end generate a categorized list of liturgical resources that could be used in specific pastoral situations. (e.g., Scandal rocks the congregation? Sing this hymn. Devastating tornado demolishes the church building? Say this prayer. Financial hardship leads to reduction in church staff? Use this call to worship.) Certainly a number of liturgical resources appropriate for use with congregations facing a variety of challenging situations are available to worship planners willing to search for them. Many worship planning resources offer prayers and liturgies that may be used or adapted for use in times of distress. The Internet is a rich source of highly specific lyrics, prayers, and liturgies for highly specific circumstances available to anyone who can use a search

engine. A thoughtful worship planner may even be able to craft new hymns or liturgies or prayers for specific congregational situations. But cataloging such resources was not the purpose of this project.

Similarly, this project did not develop a “how to” methodology for finding, adapting, crafting, and utilizing such liturgical resources. Perhaps there is a logical progression of steps for preparing worship services that are pastorally sensitive to the needs of a congregation. Perhaps there is a formula that can be applied that will result in wonderful, engaging, vibrant worship designed to offer pastoral care. But developing such a methodology was not the purpose of this project, either.

Designing a worship service is a skill that can be learned. There is a flow from the call to worship at the beginning to the sending and commissioning at the end. The task of the worship designer is to link together conduits and connectors to enable worship to “flow” from one point to another. The design of the service may be elegant or it may be rough, but if in the end it is serviceable, it has done its job. In this way the vocation of designing worship is not unlike the trade of a plumber. Just as a plumber may choose from a large array of pipes and fittings with an infinite number of possible combinations to move water from point A to point B, so a competent worship leader may put liturgical components together in an infinite number of possible combinations to move the worshipping congregation from point A to point B. While the components of a service may be combined in an infinite number of different combinations, in the end, they are usually combined in fairly predictable patterns.

Preparing Worship with a Pastor's Heart

Rather than generating a list or presenting a methodology, the research in this project has pointed to a different kind of response to the stated problem because, in the end, this project had less to do with the shaping of worship services and more to do with the shaping of the worship leader. If this researcher were to go back in time and speak with Pastor S as he was about to embark on leading his final seven services with Church A, he would acknowledge that the task before him would not be an easy one. He would affirm that *it is not always readily apparent which liturgical elements might be employed most effectively in the context of corporate Christian worship to offer pastoral care in a given situation*. He would encourage Pastor S to use all of his skills to the best of his ability to select hymns, craft liturgies, and prepare sermons that would be helpful to the congregation. But most of all he would advise him to be pastoral. He would tell him to pay attention to his pastoral instincts and draw on the pastoral skills he had been honing through all his years in ministry up to that time.

How does one practice being pastoral? Are there guiding principles for being pastoral as a worship leader? What things might a pastor do to ensure that pastoral care is offered in the context of worship? This project will conclude with seven recommendations for pastors seeking to prepare and lead worship that offers pastoral care. In addition, recommendations will be made to seminaries training pastors and to the United Church of Christ as it cares for pastors serving in congregational settings.

Recommendations

Inasmuch as this project has pointed to the importance of the shaping of the worship leader, the following recommendations are made to three parties, each of which

shares a vested interest in facilitating this process of developing a “pastoral heart” in the worship leader: pastors themselves, seminaries, and the United Church of Christ.

Recommendations for Pastors

1) Listen to the people. There is no shortcut to knowing what is going on in the congregation without spending time with the people and listening to them. “Better listeners are potentially better presiders, for they know the needs of their people well” (Ramshaw 1987, 18). When Pastor S chose a liturgical solution to a pastoral situation he believed he could offer pastoral care more effectively to a greater number of people by reducing his face to face time with church members and by doing most of his pastoral care from the pulpit and the chancel. Instead, he discovered that the time he invested in offering pastoral care face to face with members shaped him, put him in touch with members’ feelings, and honed the instincts he needed to offer care in the worship context.

2) Listen to God in prayer. The prayer of every preacher should be, “What do you want to say to your people through me?” The prayer of every worship designer should be, “What do your people need to say to you or offer you in worship?” Pastorally sensitive worship emanates from the vibrant prayer life of the pastor. There is no substitute.

3) Listen to God in Scripture. Authentic Christian worship is shaped by Scripture. Every aspect of the liturgy should represent a transposition of the Word, from the call to worship to the benediction. Liturgy’s beauty lies in its allegiance to the Word. Sermons and worship services that are biblically rich are a direct reflection of the pastor’s personal study of Scripture. God’s word nourishes God’s people.

4) Build on the shared repertoire of the church. “The pastor’s role is to assist in the people’s creative task, through her knowledge of the church’s liturgical tradition and

the people's ritual needs" (Ramshaw 1987, 22). The congregation already has a foundation of familiar hymns and liturgies. Sometimes the use of a well-known creed or lyric will resonate deeply with a congregation because it is already part of the shared language of that community. Sometimes a Scripture, song, or prayer will take on deeper meaning for worshipers as it is used during a time of great need. These texts constitute the formative grammar of the church.

5) Use imagination to create new liturgies or customize existing ones to speak to the congregation's new circumstances. Designing worship is not *entirely* like plumbing; it is also an art that takes time and imagination. Russ Mitman speaks of liturgy that transposes the Scriptures in much the same way as music is transposed (2001, 59). He also celebrates worship that engages the five senses noting that "what seems to be emerging is not a quest for more multi-media worship but worship that is multi-sensory" (2007, 8). In this research project, the use of the paper shredder on the second Sunday represented a creative use of a non-religious object re-imagined for a liturgical purpose. In a novel way it engaged multiple senses as it reinforced the ancient connection between sacrifice and worship.

6) Harness the power of collaboration. Trust members of the congregation to do their part and offer ideas. On the sixth Sunday studied in this research project a soloist sang "Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace" based on a prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. This song was not selected by the pastor, but by the soloist who had been internalizing the messages of the previous Sundays. The singer had approached the pastor offering to sing the song for the healing service. Of all the hymns, songs, and featured music in all seven services, this was the musical piece that elicited the most positive

feedback from members of the focus group members. They felt moved by the music or rather, felt moved by God *through* this song. If the pastor had not been open to input from others, this opportunity might have been missed.

7) Be a worshiper. Leaders cannot lead where they are not willing to go because potential followers are disinclined to follow them. The worship leader must be a worshiper himself. In this research project the pastor showed that he was a worshiper by fully participating in the worship each Sunday. He sang the hymns and took part in the ritual actions both as a presider and as a recipient in the Eucharist, in the anointing with oil for healing, and in the act of sacrifice using the paper shredder.

Recommendations for Seminaries

This research project has revealed that a pastor's personal character and integrity play an important role in her ability to lead congregational worship authentically and for parishioners to receive her leadership and to receive pastoral care offered in the midst of worship. This discovery has important implications for those who are involved in training pastoral leaders and those involved in designing curricula for pastoral training.

First, effective pastoral training must include a component of spiritual formation. This might be offered academically through required classes in spiritual formation, but can and should also be nurtured through communal spiritual practices. These might include, but should not be limited to, chapel services, spiritual retreats, and time for prayer, singing, and devotional Bible study shared during academic class time. Spiritual formation can also be nurtured by providing sacred spaces on campuses such as prayer chapels and prayer gardens. Spiritual life can also be nurtured through relationships with professional and student chaplains, spiritual directors, and others.

Academically, it is recommended that within courses on worship leadership a component on pastoral care through worship be included. Likewise, within courses on pastoral care a component on liturgical leadership as an important means for expressing pastoral care should also be included. Well-prepared graduates should have a good understanding of the symbiotic relationship between worship and pastoral care.

Recommendations for the United Church of Christ

The UCC as a denomination has generally been a leader in providing liturgical resources for its clergy. Both *The New Century Hymnal* (1995) and the *UCC Book of Worship* (1986) are treasuries of wisdom and of liturgical resources for use in a wide variety of situations. The introductions to most of the sections of the *Book of Worship* demonstrate great pastoral wisdom and sensitivity in helping clergy and other worship planners navigate subtle issues in worship leadership. Pilgrim Press, the publishing arm of the UCC, has produced many fine books, many of which were cited in this research project, which seek to meet liturgical needs in specific congregational settings.

All of these fine resources exist and yet new situations continue to emerge which call for creative, pastorally sensitive responses through worship leadership. At times events transpire that transfix an entire nation: children are gunned down in their school in Newton, Connecticut, bombs are detonated at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, and devastating and deadly tornadoes rip through Oklahoma neighborhoods. In the midst of the ensuing shock and confusion, pastoral leaders struggle to find words for their congregations to express their feelings to God in worship. Sometimes the prayers or hymns written in response to these situations are quickly disseminated to working pastors by electronic means: by e-mails, websites, and social media. Often these resources are

offered freely or limited rights are given to reproduce the materials for one-time use in congregations.

These quickly-prepared, mass-distributed, highly-specific worship resources are very helpful to local pastors for two reasons. First, they fill an immediate need for pastors who may not have the time or skill to prepare new lyrics to a hymn or a prayer that is able to say what these resources say as well as they say it. Second, these resources are highly instructive as examples of pastorally sensitive worship elements. They provide both an example that pastors can adapt and a model for creating new liturgical elements that can be used in their unique setting and circumstances.

The UCC should continue to support the work of gifted liturgiologists who prepare worship resources for use in local congregations. The UCC should continue to publish books with these resources and should continue to encourage pastors to create specific resources for emergent situations that call for pastoral care and sensitivity and should continue to make them readily available and reproducible through established electronic dispensaries.

Ongoing liturgical training for pastors is also recommended. When Russ Mitman, the author of *Worship in the Shape of Scripture* (2001) and advocate for worship renewal in the church, served as Conference Minister for the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference of the UCC, he regularly offered a two-day worship leadership seminar to new clergy serving in the conference. Unfortunately, these were discontinued when he retired in 2010. More seminars like those taught by Mitman should be offered to clergy serving UCC churches and a component of pastoral care through worship leadership should be included in such seminars.

APPENDIX A

SEVEN WORSHIP SERVICES AND SEVEN SERMONS

Appendix A.1.a:

Liturgy for the Worship Service on June 15, 2008

Gathering Music

- *Call to Worship (sung as a round) Hymnal 742
 All: **Gathered here in the mystery of this hour,
 Gathered here in one strong body,
 Gathered here in the struggle and the power,
 Spirit, draw near.**
- *Opening Hymn *This is My Father's World* (see back page)
- *Prayer of Invocation **Lord God, we have come to worship you as sinners
 in need of your forgiveness.
 We come tired from our work,
 in need of refreshment and re-creation.
 We come with worries, in need of your guidance.
 But first, please lift us out of our preoccupation with our own
 needs.
 Allow us to see you with the eyes of faith,
 and to hear with the ears of understanding what you say to us.
 Make us thankful for all the good we have received from you.
 Awaken in us a longing to do what is right.
 And make us aware of the great company,
 past, present, and to come,
 with whom we join to worship you. Amen.**

A Time for our Children

(After the children's time, children are excused to go to Summer Sunday School)

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

- Time of Prayer *Pastoral Prayer*
Silent Prayer
The Lord's Prayer
- Statement of Faith *UCC Statement of Faith* Hymnal 885
- Hymn of Lament *O God, My God* Hymn 515
- Scripture *Colossians 3:12-17* Page 201
- Sermon *Put on Love* Pastor S

Offering	<i>Offertory</i> <i>*Doxology</i> <i>*Prayer of Dedication</i>
*Closing Hymn	<i>They'll Know We are Christians by our Love</i> (see back page)
*Benediction	
*Postlude	

Sharing our Joys and Concerns: Announcement of Resignation

This is a time when we share our joys and our concerns. Some of you received a letter yesterday in the mail—a letter of resignation from me. Some of you might have even known a couple days before. It's sort of like “the elephant in the room.” I'd like to talk about it in a little bit and I'd also like to talk a little bit about the wedding yesterday, but I want to make sure we don't miss other important things. Are there other joys we need to share right now?

[A teen shares that it is his father's birthday. A member shares that family members are visiting. A member thanks people for prayers as she recently had cancer surgery and asks for prayers as she has chemo therapy. A member shares an update on someone to which her Sunday School class has been ministering. The cancer patient stands up again to thank me for how the pastor has been ministering to her in the past few weeks through my sermons as she has faced the recent surgery.]

The pastor shares about the wedding that had been conducted the day before and a conversation he had with the bride's grandmother (a well-respected member of the church). She had confided that she found weddings to be sad occasions because the bride and groom have no idea what lies ahead of them. She had taken care of her husband as an invalid for ten years before he died.

As I reflect on that there are similarities between [the marriage relationship] and the relationship between a pastor and a congregation. I remember six years ago I was out in the “dating pool.” I was out talking with churches and this church was talking with different potential pastors and I met with this church's search committee. That's the process we have in our denomination. It's sort of like going out on a date: you want to

dress up and put your best foot forward and try to make a good impression. So I did that. I felt good about what I was seeing in the search committee and what they were telling me about the church. They were likewise feeling good about what they saw in me and the gifts that I brought. I had gotten “smart” enough by that time in my life that I wasn’t trying to pretend to be what I thought someone wanted. I could say, “This is who I am—and if that’s not what you need, then this might not be the right call for me.”

That’s not where I was early in my career. But [at the time of this interview] I could say that I believed I had strengths in preaching and teaching, worship leading, and music, and [that I was] *not* as strong in the pastoral care and visitation department. But I was really glad that, at least at that time, this church had people who *were* strong in that department. We had [P N] as a parish nurse and we had [C D] as a Christian Ed. Director. I said, “I don’t feel like I’m in a place now where I want to focus on youth ministry.” I was excited about focusing on where my strengths were.

Some of you know that fourteen months or so later because of budget concerns, we were not able to continue to keep either of them on staff. At the time there was an attitude that we were going to tighten our belts and do the best we [could] and [that we would] all fill in and help with the work. But the truth is that after a few months the attitude had changed to, “Come on, pastor, we need you to do more visitation and more youth ministry.”

About two or three years ago, as I met regularly with the pastoral relations committee, I requested they give me a written evaluation. This would be a few paragraphs. I gave the committee a sample from another congregation to show them what I was looking for. I said this would be good for me: it could reaffirm my strengths and perhaps show some places where I could grow. What came out of it was a little different from what I had asked for. They decided to do a survey of the congregation and they asked me to write the questions for it.

What came out were some strengths that weren’t a surprise as well as some places that needed growth that weren’t a surprise. Some members had expressed that they wanted more visitation from me or wanted to feel more open with me. You always want to build on strengths and to minimize weaknesses, so we worked out a plan to address the perceived weaknesses.

One of the things that we found was that on Sunday mornings I was doing a lot of rushing around. I'd sing in the choir rehearsal, then I'd go to my office to get my mic and my robe, then I'd run back and remember I had to talk with someone about something. I did a lot of running around and I kind of did it with blinders on and often I'd walk right by people. Although some people understood where I was coming from, for other people, Sunday morning was the only time when they would see me and it was hard for them to deal with. One of the strategies the pastoral relations committee worked out with me was very simple: I made a point of leaving choir rehearsal early so I would have time share time with people arriving for worship.

I was just reminded of something as I've been thinking about what my strengths and weaknesses are. Way back in kindergarten my teacher wrote in my report card when I was five years old that I was her "absent-minded professor." There are strengths with that and there are weaknesses with that. There are some things I see and can focus on and there are other things that I miss because of where my focus is.

So for the last two years, I felt we were making some progress in that area and I felt people were feeling more open with me. Some of you know that a couple months ago we conducted another survey. I asked that they only would go to those who were active in leadership in the church: those who serve on committees and boards and those who were on the original search committee or on staff with the church. Those were the people whose input we were soliciting.

From the surveys that were turned in, as the committee looked at those, their feeling was that there wasn't progress in the last two years. And they were feeling that people were not comfortable with me. There was also a concern that there were people that had left because of an issue with me. Therefore the committee said in effect, "this is a hard place to come to, but you might not be the right person for us anymore."

I learned that eleven days ago on a Thursday and it was devastating to me. I didn't let on about that with those of you who were here last Sunday. In fact, I was going to call in sick and say I just can't preach. But then I thought, "Who am I? What do I do?" I'm a preacher: I share the word. And it wasn't about who *I* was: it was about what God's word says. So last Sunday I preached a message that, in fact, before this situation arose, I was

kind of worried about how to preach on submission. But I found that, there's this grace of God that flowed through me.

I was able to attend the annual conference of [the H Conference of] the UCC over the next couple of days. During that time I was able to share my situation with a few close colleagues who were very supportive. I also had some good conversations with our Association Minister, [the Rev. G]. Some of you might remember that he spoke at [a former member's] ordination here a couple of months ago. He has also preached here on a couple occasions. I was able to have some good talks with him and get some good clarity and understanding about this situation.

Things led to three meetings this past week. I was just talking with [our young organist] and you (addressing organist) said you were here rehearsing and you wondered what all these cars were here [in the parking lot] for. Three nights in a row for at least three hours each night people were here in meetings: intense meetings, difficult meetings, painful meetings. The end result is that on Wednesday evening I handed in my resignation because I felt that at this point that was the best thing for the health of the congregation. So we worked out some of the details of that.

The next morning we started to put the letters together to go out to the congregation. Unfortunately, the copier went down for a little bit. There were four hundred households that the letter was going to go out to. That's a lot. We did the best we could. They weren't all ready by Thursday by the time the Post Office closed, so they went out Friday morning. I apologize to those who didn't know about this before [coming to worship this morning]. I'm seeing a lot of people did get the letter, but a lot of people are shocked. A lot of people don't know what to think.

We're kind of a "mixed bag" right now. There are a lot of people who are saying, "No! This is not how I feel and this is not what should happen!" There are other people who are saying, "From what we understand, from what we've seen, this is what needs to happen." And there are a whole lot of people that just like, "What? I didn't know. I'm still in shock." And people are trying to deal with that.

There's a part of me that—I'll be very honest—there's a part of me that says, "Okay, I'm a 'lame duck.' I'm on my way out. I'm just going to recycle some old sermons, do absolutely the minimum, and get out." There's *part* of me that wants to feel

that way and there's another part of me that says, "[Pastor], you've been called by God to be a preacher of God's word and a leader in worship, and it *could* be that these last seven Sundays—these last fifty days—might be the *most* important, the *most* prophetic in which to preach so that we can work together and find reconciliation among ourselves, that we can find forgiveness, and that we can find a sense of hope in God.

Some of you know that I've been studying at seminary and my focus has been on worship. There are books that talk about worship as pastoral care or preaching as pastoral care. I understand the efficiency of that: I could have one-on-one counseling with one hundred individuals to offer pastoral care or I can preach one sermon from God's word, and the Holy Spirit can apply that to [one hundred people's] hearts and minds. I love that kind of "efficiency" and that's more of where my gift is, so that's what I've focused on. It just is becoming crystal clear to me that this is the time for me to use the gifts God has given me and to lift them up in faithfulness to God for his work. This is not a time for me to try to hammer some point to try to prove myself right. This is a time for all of God's people to hear what God is saying.

I was thinking of switching the Scripture [I had originally planned to preach] until I looked at it again and I thought, "How incredible! God had this planned for this time. Later on I will share some ideas that I feel God has given me about some creative different things to do in worship that will help people work through feelings of loss or maybe a sense of anger at me or whatever people are feeling. I believe God is revealing some things that we can do. So I'm looking at this as a mandate: 50 days/7 Sundays for God to do some amazing things in this congregation.

I don't have more to say right now, but later we're going to hear what God's word has to say about this and a little about *how* to do that.

I wanted to catch people up because it's not fair to have to listen [without knowing what is going on]. So I wanted to share with you the framework of what I understand has happened to this point. I believe God is at work in this congregation and has been moving in this congregation. There are some kinds of growing pains and we're trying to sort out where we are through that. If we get to a point where we take an "us against them" kind of stance or if we get to a point where we want to stomp off and leave because we're angry, I don't think that is going to serve God very well. The Deceiver is

very wily and knows that if Christians start fighting each other, we've lost the cause. We need to love and forgive and repair what we once had.

I felt like was an important enough concern that I wanted to talk about this separately from the word [and the sermon] as part of our time of sharing joys and concerns. I don't know at this time where [my wife] and I will end up eventually, and that's a scary place to be. But at the same time I know that God has taken care of me and [my wife] (and this congregation) in the past. And because of that—not because I *know* exactly what is going to work out—but because I know *God*, I have faith and I have hope. And I wanted to share that with you if that gives you a little bit of encouragement.

So, we have all these things to lift up to God. Let us approach God in prayer...

Hymn of Lament: Spoken Introduction

Our middle hymn is called a “Hymn of Lament,” or a “Hymn of Protest.” We're accustomed to thinking of our worship as a time of celebration, but if you look at the Book of Psalms you'll notice there are quite a few sad psalms in there. Sometimes the psalmist will say, “God, where are you? God, how come things don't go the way we think they should? Why does evil always seem to prevail in the world? Are you there? Don't you care? Don't you know what's going on?” It almost seems sacrilegious to say something out loud like that, but Scriptures tells us it's okay. Scripture itself is an example. It shows us that it is all right to express that feeling of “God—I don't understand” or “God—where are you?”

John Bell is a leader of the Iona Community which is a community on the Island of Iona off the coast of Scotland. It is a wonderful Christian community which has a special gift of worshiping God in song. They are developing a body of worship music somewhat like the music from the Taizé community in France that we have also used in worship. John Bell has written a song of lament that takes up some of the themes we see in the Psalms of Lament. Let's make it our song. It is not going to be very familiar to us at first, but I believe that if we stick with it, we'll find there is power in this song. Let's sing Hymn 515 . . .

Hymn: O God, My God

Refrain: O God, My God, O gracious God,
 Why do you seem so far from me,
 O God, my God, O gracious God?

1. Night and morning I make my prayer:
 Peace for this place and help for there;
 Waiting and wondering, waiting and wondering, does God care? Does God care?

Refrain

2. Pain and suffering unbound and blind
 Plague the progress of humankind,
 Always demanding, always demanding, does God mind? Does God mind?

Refrain

3. Why, oh, why do the wicked thrive,
 Poor folk perish, the rich survive;
 Begging the question, begging the question, is God alive? Is God alive?

Refrain

4. Turn again as you hear my plea:
 Tend the torment in all I see:
 Loving and healing, loving and healing, set me free. Set me free.

Refrain

John Bell. 1988. *O God, my God*. The Iona Community. G.I.A. Productions.

Appendix A.1.b:

Sermon for the Worship Service on June 15, 2008

PUT ON LOVE

Scripture: Colossians 3:12-17

¹²As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Sermon

A question came up at Consistory the last night we met (on Wednesday) as we were talking about how we need to pull together; we need to be the body of Christ; we need to find healing; we need to move forward; we need to forgive. And someone asked, "How do we do that—how do we do what God is calling us to do?"

I think the Word is in Scripture. I think our Scripture today talks about it.

Someone the next day told about a church (that is not so far from us) that has had some struggles. By my count, since the time I have been here they've had four different pastors. The person said she could see some similarities between our situation and theirs. But I said there is one big difference: they've had all these pastors come through. What would be different here?

I think we have an opportunity to do something different. From my understanding of that church (and I'm not there—I don't know all of the details) I think they haven't had a healthy good-bye . . . and they're not able to say a healthy "hello" to anyone. And it may sound like a simplistic approach, but I think we need a healthy good-bye—I need that myself: to be able to say "hello" someday to another congregation. If I leave here all upset and hurt and just kind of "fuming" am I going to be any good to another congregation?

And if this congregation is in the midst of feeling ripped apart, is there any way that it can say a healthy “hello” to someone who might be just the right person that God is bringing here?

So every time I look at Scripture trying to prepare a sermon and I think, “Oh—I don’t know what to say,” I say to myself, “Dummy—look back in the Word.” The Word will always have something to say because it is God’s word. And Scripture even says that God’s Word doesn’t go out and come back empty; it always accomplishes its purpose. And if I was to try to try to craft some perfect sermon that would speak to every person in every situation, I would fall flat. That is the work of the Holy Spirit—to speak to people where they are.

Like we said, there might be people who are angry with me, there might be people who are angry with the situation (of me leaving), and there might people who don’t really care (you know, “Easy come, easy go—we’ll find someone else—no big deal,” but maybe they’re struggling with something else). For me to try to figure out “What can I say that will answer every issue”—that’s not up to me. That’s up to the Holy Spirit—to find a way to apply the Word.

So let’s look at what the Word says. It’s kind of simple: we can go verse by verse today, starting with verse 12 and if you want to open your pew Bibles again and follow with me, we can do that.

“As God’s chosen one, holy and beloved . . .” What a great introduction: you’re God’s *chosen* ones. You’re holy—that means “set apart.” You’re beloved—can anything be better than that? God *chose* you, God *loves* you, and God is making you holy. What should you do? *Clothe* yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. *Clothe* yourselves with those five things.

And that’s why we have a picture on the bulletin of a guy adjusting his tie. It’s sort of a visual pun on the idea of father’s getting ties for Father’s Day. But also it’s about putting something on. I had wished I could find a picture where there was someone putting on a tie that had a big heart on it. You know—like putting a heart on their sleeve. If you’re going to wear your emotions on your sleeve, wear a heart.

Put on these things. Let’s see—what are these things again that we are supposed to put on? Think of them like clothes that we put on in the morning. Clothes yourselves with compassion—think of the “socks of compassion.” Kindness—the “underwear of kindness.” Humility—put on the “pants” or the “skirt” of humility. Meekness—the “shirt” or “blouse” of meekness. And patience—put on the “hat of patience.” I’m just kind of making up stuff, but think of putting those things on and what it would be like.

Do those five words kind of sound to anyone like another list that's in the Bible? I hope they sound to you sort of like the Fruit of the Spirit. They're found in Galatians 5:22-23. Nine things are found: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, humility, faithfulness, and self-control. Put on those things. This is not exactly the same list, but they're very similar.

We're told that you can identify a Christian by his or her "fruit." It is by the fruit they are bearing if they're bearing the Fruit of the Spirit. It's not by whether they're dressed up on Sunday. It's not by how big their Bible is. How do you tell if someone is a man or woman of faith or a child of faith? It's by the Fruit of the Spirit coming out in their life.

And so on one hand the Apostle Paul can say, "*bear* the fruit" like you're a fruit tree, and on the other hand he can say "*put them on*" like they're socks or pants that you can put on. Either way—you're showing who you are.

You know, I mentioned the "underpants of kindness" or whatever—do you remember the Fruit of the Loom guys and there was a guy dressed as an apple and a couple of other guys and there was a guy wearing a grape suit? I loved that grape suit. And if there was someone right here today who was wearing a grape suit, I'd have him come up and stand in front of us and I'd like to pick a grape off of him. Wouldn't that be cool? That would be a perfect illustration of wearing your fruit on your sleeve and on your body—to wear the Fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The Word says, "put these things on." How do you put them on? I think that was the question that someone asked the other night—"How do you do that? How do you put them on?" One leg at a time, right? That's how you put them on. And it's kind of hard, but we have to do it.

You know, I've put on different clothes. I have a couple Carhart shirts, a Carhart jacket, and Carhart jeans. I put those on and I feel like a rugged guy, "I'm gonna put me on some Carharts!" Yet there are certain other things I put on and I *don't* feel quite so rugged. I put on other things and I feel kind of spiffy. There is something about when you put on different clothes that makes you feel different. Think about it—any of you who have put on any kind of uniform. You feel different when you put that on. The Apostle Paul is saying, "Try these on for size—put on the compassion and the kindness and the humility.

I think of people going into a dressing room to try on some things, looking in a mirror. Have you ever watched a woman trying things on in front of a mirror? There is all this stuff that she's not even aware she's doing [I demonstrate primping in a mirror—brushing off imaginary dust and smoothing wrinkles]. And some men do that, too. But

when you put it on, you feel a little different. And even if you *don't* feel it—you need to put it on. Practice putting it on.

Earlier in the joys and concerns [a young woman] shared that her boyfriend, just got his driver's license. Think about it—those of you who drive—the first time you drove your feet were so uncoordinated and you jerk on the brakes and you stop like that [demonstrate coming to a jerky stop] and your parents or whoever is driving with you think you may never get it, but eventually with practice it becomes second-nature. And now most of you, when you drive, you're thinking about what's ahead, maybe thinking about what's on the radio or who you're talking to and you're not thinking, “Right foot—gas, left foot clutch, right foot-brake.” You're not thinking that. It's automatic because you've practiced it. There are certain things that become habit. At first they're awkward, but they become habits; they become part of you. And I think putting on compassion and kindness is all a part of that.

Sometimes I use this passage in weddings and I talk to the bride and groom and say, “You two really look great dressed like that today. What if for the first year of your marriage you wore that wedding dress every day?” That would be kind of cumbersome, wouldn't it? Probably you would have a lot of stains on the dress before long. Maybe you would have lots of rips and tears. What if the guy had to wear a tuxedo every day? That wouldn't be very comfortable or practical, would it? But would you kind of live up to what those clothes signify about your marriage? Would you step up to it?

Well, we're not really talking about physical clothes today. We're talking about putting on the fruit of the spirit—putting on compassion and kindness.

But there is something else we are told right here in the next verse—in verse 13—“Bear with one another (bear with one another) and if anyone has a *complaint* against another . . . *really let them have it!*” No—what does it say? “If anyone has a complaint against another, *forgive* each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive.” That verse has the word “forgive” or “forgiven” three times in it. It says you need to forgive (you need to forgive) because God forgave *you* and that's why you should forgive. So twice in that verse the “forgive” is what *you* need to do.

Dang! That's hard sometimes! (sorry to sort of cuss). Dang! That's hard sometimes—to forgive—but this puts us in our place—it reminds us why we have to forgive. Not a *single* one of us is here because we are “so great.” Not a single one of us has been welcomed into God's family because we have earned it.

There are lots of images that are used in the Bible to describe the Kingdom of God or God's realm or heaven. And one of those—besides the “New Jerusalem” or the “City on the Hill”—one image that we're given is the idea of the Wedding Feast (why do I have weddings on my mind?) or a banquet to which we're invited. You've probably

heard of “wedding crashers,” people who go for the free booze or free food or free entertainment.

Imagine you’re going to a banquet (wedding or otherwise) and there is a *maitre d’* or a hostess and they say, “Oh—let’s see if you have a reservation” or “Let’s see if you have a ticket.” If you go to God’s banquet and say, “Here’s my ticket—I went to church all the time!” and they’ll say, “No, that’s not a ticket as far as we’re concerned.” “Oh—well, I’m here because I did a lot of charity work—I volunteered with the Peace Corps—I worked with underprivileged kids . . .” “No—that really isn’t what gets you in.” What if you just say, “I have nothing to give, my pockets are empty and I didn’t earn it.” “Ah—you’ve got the idea, come right in.”

We’re forgiven. Everyone sitting around God’s banquet table will be there not because we earned a place, but because we were forgiven. And when you are at a place where you think, “I don’t really need to forgive others. I’m going to hold that back.” You’re reminded that you don’t have a place at God’s table except that you’re forgiven. Hard words. Not my words. God’s Word.

After that it says, “Above all (above all), clothe yourselves with love which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Clothe yourselves with love or “put on love”—those are the three simple words on the front of your bulletin. I think that is something—just those three words, “put on love”—that would be worth meditating on—all of us—everybody. Sometime this week [each of us] should make a time. Take a bulletin home as a little reminder. When you see it and ask yourself, “Why did I bring this home—what am I supposed to do with it?” remind yourself when you see the words, “Put on Love” and just close your eyes and meditate on what it means to you. What does it mean for you to “put on love?”

It says, “Love binds all things together.” So we’re told to put on a bunch of the fruit. And then love is also one of the nine Fruit of the Spirit. Put on that. It says it is what binds everything together. Maybe it’s like a big sash—or a belt—that holds it all together. Don’t forget the love. Don’t forget to put it on. Don’t leave home without it! Put on that love.

What does it mean to put on love? What does it mean to love when you don’t feel like loving? What does it mean to love when you feel like you have a right to be mad? What does it mean to put on love?

Next verse: “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in the one body (we’re one body).” We talked about that before: Christ is not served by Christ’s people fighting against one another or turning against one another. So it is really a matter of *sacrifice* to say, “Whatever anger I think I deserve to have [turning toward altar] I give it up.” I give it up as an act of worship.

In fact, throughout the Bible, I'm starting to learn through some of my studies that *worship is sacrifice*. Sacrifice your Sunday morning. Sacrifice your claim on things that you thought were more important and say, "No, God is more important." The altar is a very important symbol, especially in the Old Testament. The way they worshiped was by making sacrifices. As I've been reflecting on that, I have an idea that I would like to share for next Sunday. And this will take preparation for people to do.

I know there are some people visiting today and often we say, "We're glad you came to worship with us today," but today there's a part of me feeling like, "I don't *know* if I'm glad for people for the first time coming and being a part of a real difficult day." But then I started thinking about that. What if there was someone who came today (for the first time) and said, "Wow—they love each other . . . and they're willing to work through their pain and their disagreements. That's the kind of church I want to be a part of." Maybe this is a *great* day for people to kind of listen in and see how we're working things out. I don't know. . .

The altar. What I want to suggest for you to do is to think of something in *your* life that *you* need to sacrifice. For some people it might be a kind of an attitude that says, "I *really* want to let somebody have it." Sacrifice it. And what I want to ask you to do is something concrete about that. And next week symbolically I'm going to invite everyone to have a chance to come up and lay it on the altar (or in front of it).

And it may be that for some of you, all of the stuff that I'm talking about with the issue of whether I'm staying or not (I mean I *am* leaving in seven weeks), maybe that is not an issue for you. Maybe you really feel that "God is in control and I'm not worried about that." And that's good if you are there, but God has some issue that you're working through—maybe something that *you* need to give up.

For example, maybe you idolize television and God has been speaking into your heart, you know, you watch *way* too much television and you let all that stuff into your head and not *nearly* enough of God's Word into your head and you need to sacrifice that. And if that's who *you* are, maybe you would come up, symbolically, and put a video tape here [indicating the altar] to say, "God, I give that up." But if you do, you don't get to take it back at the end of the service. This is not just a *prop*—it's something you actually give up.

And if it's a good video, we'll find someone to give it to. If it's a *porn* video [there is some nervous laughter from the congregation]. I know that sounds funny, but what if that is what someone realizes that God is showing them to bring to the altar? That video will be destroyed.

Maybe what you'll do is *write* something on a piece of paper—of all your feelings—all the things you think you have a claim on—and you bring it up to sacrifice. You put it up there and say, “It’s done.”

I was talking about TV—maybe you would actually put your TV *remote* up there—and you don’t get to have it back. What if someone brought a whole TV next week and sacrificed it? Now we won’t throw *that* away. We would give the TV to somebody that could use it and use it in a godly way.

Maybe you’re addicted to caffeine and you need to bring up your cappuccino maker and we’ll get that to a nice home.

Maybe you realize that you idolize money . . . and you need to sacrifice it. Maybe God will put on your heart to put a huge amount on the altar and say to God, “I sacrifice it to You because it’s worthless to me if I don’t have You in my life.” Maybe that is what God will call someone to do. And I don’t know—this is the glory of how the Holy Spirit works in our lives. For some people, it might be something they *write* because they are more verbal, so they’ll write something, put it in an envelope and bring it up. Now if you bring a remote or a video or something else, we’ll sort that out and figure where to donate it.

If you bring an envelope, that may be kind of scary—if your deepest darkest secrets are written there and someone might open it later and read it. You might be afraid that someone will see it when the custodians go through the things Monday morning. So I’ll tell you right now about something our secretary suggested; we could have a paper shredder up there. And if you have something that needs to go in there—you shred it yourself.

The sound of a shredder is kind of an ugly sound, but it’s sort of like the loud jarring sound of a 21-gun salute that—BAM—shocks you, but in this case it would be good if we hear that ugly sound of sin being crunched up—of things being offered on the altar for God.

By the way, if you were going to bring a check for \$10,000 or especially if you are going to bring an envelope full of *cash*, please *don’t* put it through the shredder.

And I have no idea—maybe there will just be three people who feel moved to bring something to sacrifice on the altar next week. Maybe every single person will come forward. There are some folks who are not here today that won’t hear about it until then. Maybe you’ll see them and you can tell them what we’re going to do. Maybe you can share with your family, “You know what? This is what I’m going to share.”

You know how people come forward at the Billy Graham Crusades? There is a *reason* for the way they ask people to come forward and give their life to Christ and ask someone to pray with them. By coming forward they have a time and a date that forever after they can look back and say, “I know that God—at least by that date—was welcomed into my heart and moving in my life.”

Sometimes that’s what we need to do: something very demonstrative; something very visual. And so we’ll work out a time to worship God by making sacrifices and each person will be making a different sacrifice. So I give that to you to look at over the next week: “God, is there something I need sacrifice to you as my act of worship?”

I’m not sure myself what I’m going to put on the altar, but I know that I need to model what I’m talking about and I need to sacrifice something at the throne of God—the altar of God.

So—that will be part of what we have been talking about today. We’ve been talking about “putting on” all these things: the love, the patience, the kindness. Put them on: wear them on your sleeve. Let the *peace* of Christ rule in your hearts. Above all, put on *love* and forgive. Forgive. Forgive. Jesus forgave you—you need to forgive others.

But does it strike you that if you’re putting on all these things—what else do we need to do? We need to take some things off. You know what it’s like when you’re real sweaty and smelly? You can’t wait to get out of those horrible smelly clothes? The first part of this chapter (in Colossians 3) verses 1 through 11—you can look at it ahead of time—talks about what we need to get rid of. It talks about it in a couple of ways. One way is peeling it off or getting *rid* of it. Another way is just *killing* it. So the tentative title (of next week’s sermon) is “A Time to Kill.” We’ll be talking about “killing” the wrongful desires—killing those things that are *against* the Spirit of God.

So as we’ve been talking about putting things on, *practice* that this week. Practice putting things on—putting on love. And next week we’ll talk about taking off the things that need to go.

God help us through this time. May God bring us healing and peace, forgiveness and love.

And now let us present our tithes and offerings. They are also a sacrifice that we make as a sign of our willingness to give, not just a tithe, but our whole selves to God.

Benediction

No truer word could we say today: "They'll know we are Christians by our love"

So go in God's love.

Go in the Spirit's power.

Go in the Christ's grace. Amen

Appendix A.2.a

Liturgy for the Worship Service on June 22, 2008

Gathering Music

- *Call to Worship (sung as a round) Hymnal 742
 All: **Gathered here in the mystery of this hour,
 Gathered here in one strong body,
 Gathered here in the struggle and the power,
 Spirit, draw near.**
- *Opening Hymn *Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer* Hymn 18
- *Prayer of Invocation **Great Redeemer,
 guide us in these challenging days.
 Lead us, we pray to Your fountain
 where Your healing waters flow.
 You call us into Your church
 to accept the cost and joy of discipleship.
 Help us accept that cost.
 Help us find that joy.
 Guide us today, we pray,
 to a deeper experience of Your grace
 and a deeper willingness to surrender all to You.
 This we ask in the powerful Name of Jesus,
 through the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen.**

A Time for our Children

(After the children's time, children are excused to go to Summer Sunday School)

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Time of Prayer *Pastoral Prayer*
Silent Prayer
The Lord's Prayer

Statement of Faith *UCC Statement of Faith* Hymnal 885

* Hymn	<i>Not My Brother, Not My Sister</i>	Hymn 519
Scriptures	<i>Ecclesiastes 3:1-8</i>	Page 616
	<i>Colossians 3:1-11</i>	Page 201
Sermon	<i>A Time to Kill</i>	Pastor S
Acts of Sacrifice		on the altar
Offering	<i>(worshippers are invited to come forward and make an offering to God)</i>	
	(no offertory music)	
*Doxology		
*Prayer of Dedication		
*Closing Hymn	<i>Sent Forth by God's Blessing</i>	Hymn 76
*Benediction		
*Postlude		

Appendix A.2.b:

Sermon for the Worship Service on June 22, 2008

A TIME TO KILL

First Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

¹For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: ²a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; ³a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ⁵a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; ⁷a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; ⁸a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

Second Scripture: Colossians 3:1-17

¹So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. ⁷These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life.

⁸But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

¹²As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ

rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This is the word of the Lord, [thanks be to God].

Sermon

The first week of this month, we looked specifically at verse 16 which says to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” How do you do that? By *teaching* it and *encouraging* people in it. And then it says, “by *singing* it:” singing psalms, singing hymns, and singing spiritual songs, hymns, and spiritual songs. That reinforces it. If you are singing the songs of God the singing will reinforce God’s Word in you. We talked about that on what was choir Sunday. But it wasn’t really all about singing; it was about letting Christ’s word dwell in you richly. It’s not an easy thing to do, but that verse gives us some ideas about how to do it.

The week after that, we looked at a hard passage that talked about wives being subject to their husbands and husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the Church (also hard words for us to understand). I’ve been talking with my friend, [Pastor W at Church E] and he says that sometimes he’ll preach on something and people will get mad at him and he’ll say, “You know, it’s not me you’re mad at—it’s God’s word and I’m trying to preach it in an undiluted way and if God is working in your heart and you hear it—maybe your struggle is with God. So we talked about how we are called to work out this love in different relationships: marriage relationships, family relationships, and workplace relationships.

Last week (our third week in this chapter) we looked at some of the earlier parts of this chapter in which we are told to “put on love.” In fact, Paul said to put on several things, so let’s look again at verse 12:

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

And as we looked at that list as well as what it said in verse 14: “*Above all, put on love,*” we saw that though the list of things to put on is not *exactly* the same as the list of the nine fruit of the Spirit that we are to bear, it is pretty similar to it. In Galatians Paul talks about bearing fruit: be like a tree that has all these beautiful fruit coming out. Then Paul uses a *different* metaphor in Colossians, talking about Christian living in terms of *clothes*: putting on the “socks of humility” and the “coat of compassion” and so forth.

Toward the end of the message last week we considered that if we're putting on *new* clothes, what else do we need to do? We have to throw out the *old* clothes! So today we will look at the very beginning part of this chapter where it takes about what to "take off" or what we need to "get rid of." It talks about it in several different ways. In some ways it's like taking something off. In other ways it is like throwing something away. In other ways it talks about putting things to death. So our title today is "A Time to Kill."

About a month ago when I was planning this sermon series I was looking for images to print on the bulletin covers and I found a scary picture. I found an image of this executioner—one of those big, burly guys holding a huge battleaxe that he seemed ready to use to decapitate his next victim. We printed a small version of the picture in the newsletter with the phrase, "a time to kill" alongside it, which comes from the passage in Ecclesiastes that we heard earlier today. This past week I looked at the image again and decided it was just a little too violent to use on a bulletin cover. It didn't communicate exactly what I was looking for as I prepared this message, so we chose this image of a sacrifice on an altar instead.

You're still welcome to hold that image of the executioner in the back of your mind, but we need to alter it a little. Instead of an executioner ready to put a person to death, think of it as putting to death the things of the flesh.

What kind of things are we supposed to be putting to death? There really are two lists in this passage. Verse 5 says:

Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).

A little bit later Paul talks about getting *rid* of such things:

anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. (3:6)

These are not complete lists, (as though anyone who got rid of these ten things would thereafter have smooth sailing). They are more a representative list. The lists don't specifically include gossip, but it seems clear that gossip would also be one of the kinds of things to put to death or rid oneself of. Hatred, too, should be put to death.

It's interesting how the Holy Spirit works in guiding us to the passages we will look at. Often I will go with a standardized list of recommended readings called "The Lectionary." But for some reason last month I felt moved to spend some significant time looking at Colossians—even looking at the same chapter for four weeks in a row. As things began to change, I wondered, "Should I change the text? Should I use a passage that speaks more to the situation we are going through?"

But then as I looked at this chapter again last week, I wondered, “What speaks more clearly to our situation than this text with the idea of ‘putting on love’ and forgiving one another?”

Well, if it is the prerogative of a woman to change her mind, then it is the prerogative of a preacher at the last minute to change the scripture passage and the message for the day. I saw a television show recently in which a pastor changed the passage for the Sunday at the last minute. In fact, the pastor changed the passage to exactly the passage we’re looking at today. Let me tell you about how it developed.

In this television show there was a woman who admired her pastor and wanted to get some advice. She agreed, perhaps stupidly, to go to a restaurant to talk with him about it. While they were there, someone whom she wanted to make jealous came into the restaurant. She asked her pastor to do her a favor and hold her hand so that the other person would become jealous and leave. Unfortunately, when the pastor took her hand he felt some kind of “electricity” and hoped that it meant something more. Later that evening when he was dropping the woman off at her house he made a pass at her. Of course, she was totally unprepared for his actions and his attractions, but she did her best to fight him off and get away, leaving him angry because he had misread the woman and had mistakenly thought she had been leading him on. The next Sunday he planned his revenge. He announced that he was changing the text to Colossians 3:5 which talks about fornication, passion, and evil desire because, he said, there was a Jezebel in the congregation and she needed to be exposed!

Well, I don’t think that’s a good example of being a shepherd. A pastor who fears God and respects God’s word does not use the pulpit as a “bully pulpit” to speak out of his own anger or to push his own personal issues.

As a shepherd; as a pastor, I must constantly ask myself about my motives in preaching. Am I preaching as a way to advance my own agenda, or am I a servant of the most high God submitting myself to *God’s* purposes? Part of the Minister’s Code says (in so many words), “Lord, I submit to you. Whatever gift you’ve given me for preaching, whatever insight you’ve given me for understanding your Word, and whatever position of authority you’ve given me to speak on your behalf, I must *never* abuse that and use it for my own personal gain or to make my own personal point.” I must never use your pulpit as my own personal “soap-box” from which to push my own issues.

I’m reminded that at all times . . . at *all* times I am called to be a shepherd to all the people: people who might be in support of me, people who are not in support of me, people who are confused, people who are upset, and even those who wonder what the big deal is. I need to share God’s word with all of them. And the beauty of God’s grace of it is that the Holy Spirit *uses* that word and speaks to different people in different ways.

The passage today talks about putting to death/taking off/ getting rid of all those sinful things in which we've wrapped ourselves. The passage talks about those sinful things by referring to them as *earthly things*, or (if we were to look at the King James Version,) "the things of the *flesh*." We must always be careful to understand that when we read in the Bible about the things of the flesh we are not talking about the body or physical things as though the physical world or our physical bodies were inherently sinful or that our bodies need to be punished. When the Bible talks about "the flesh" it is talking about things that are opposed to God or to the Spirit. Therefore, if God is love, then "the flesh" is about hatred. Likewise, if God is for peace, then "the flesh" is about enmity.

So these two lists here: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed and later on the list of anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth—those are things of the flesh that we are supposed to get rid of.

We read in Ecclesiastes that there is a time for everything: a time to speak . . . and a time to keep silence. Today we will have a time when we will keep silence (though right now is a time when I am speaking). There is a time to be born and a time to die. We often read this Scripture at funerals. Somehow it gives us a sense of peace: there is a time to die. There *is* a time for things to begin . . . and a time for things to come to an end. Ecclesiastes even says there is a time to kill.

The picture you have on your bulletin cover from 2 Chronicles 29:31 depicts an offering being made at the altar. Throughout the Bible we see people making offerings at the altar. In Genesis we see Cain and Abel making offerings to God. When Noah comes safely through the flood, the first thing he does when he gets on dry land is make and offering to God on an altar.

[A lay member in seminary] preached in our Lenten series about what an altar is. It doesn't matter what the altar is made of or how it looks. What matters is that it is a place for making an offering to God. What matters is where your heart is. It is a matter of *sacrificing* something to God.

Throughout Scriptures there is a theme of *sacrifice*: giving up something *valuable* to show that God is even *more* valuable; laying something down before God. We have the story of how Abraham was ready and *willing*, even to offer his son as a sacrifice until God provided a ram that was caught in the thicket for the offering. Something about making a sacrifice is pleasing to God. Offering a sacrifice is at the core/the center of what worship is.

When we bring our offerings forward—that is a sacrifice of *money*. It is a way of saying, "God, we recognize that our money is really yours to begin with." When we come on Sunday morning and give of our time we're saying, "My time really belongs to God and so I sacrifice this portion of my time to show that *all* of it belongs to God.

There are some things that we sacrifice to God together. And there are other sacrifices that we make to God much more privately. And those are also acts of worship. Many of them do not take place in a sanctuary.

For example, there may be a point when you are working on your taxes when you *could* “fudge” a few numbers so your taxes would be lower. Maybe some of you do this. Maybe some of you have never done it. Probably most of us have at least been tempted to do that. If you go through a thought-process in which you say to yourself, “God calls me to be honest. And it is unlikely that anyone could catch this. But I will still be honest and write the correct number on this form even though it will cost me more (in my taxes).” That is an act of worship. It sacrifices what you could have gotten with nobody else knowing except for God because you honor God.

Sometimes you have a piece of information about someone that you could share with someone else that could hurt them. Sometimes that’s called “gossip.” To say, “I will not use that. I will hold it in.” That is worship. You may have heard people remark, “Well I *could* say something . . .” in that case that person already *has*. Keeping your mouth shut at times like that can be an act of honoring God. When you deliberately do *not* use power that you potentially have to hurt someone else, that is an act of sacrificing power—and an act of worshiping God.

There are all sorts of things that we could do which, because we fear God/because we honor God, we say, “No, I won’t: I revere God. So I will sacrifice any right or claim to use that or take that or think that or feel that or use that.” That is an act of worship. It might happen in the sanctuary, but very often these things happen our daily lives as we have opportunities to live out the Christian faith in ways that are costly.

Remember we said this in our call to worship this morning and again in the UCC Statement of faith? We said that “God calls us to accept the cost and joy of discipleship. Discipleship isn’t cheap; it isn’t easy; it isn’t free. There are things that we let go of or give up or sacrifice to God as a way of worship.

What I’m going to do today (I shared with those of you who were here last week) is to give you an opportunity to come up and make a sacrifice to God of something on the altar. Last week I suggested that you might consider bringing some sort of object to sacrifice (I’m not sure if anyone did). Someone might have brought an object that symbolizes something they need to let go of for God.

Some people may have *written* something that they know is very personal between them and God—something that they are going to give to God and say, “This is yours. I don’t have a claim on it. I sacrifice it to you—or kill it before you.” You’ll notice that you have blank sheets of paper before you in your bulletin. If you haven’t brought something with you or written something beforehand and would like to, you can use the

pens provided and write something down. Then you can come forward and lay it on the altar. It's a way of saying, "God, I worship you specifically with this gift—with this sacrifice—with this thing I'm taking off or getting rid of or putting to death."

I'm aware that it may be scary for you to think of writing your deepest, darkest thoughts on paper and leaving it on the altar. What if someone else comes by later and reads what I wrote? What if the custodians take them tomorrow and read through them and see what I wrote? If you are worried about that, I want you to notice we have a paper shredder next to the altar this morning. [I turn it on]. If it is appropriate for your act of worship to bring something forward and place it here in the slot of this paper shredder, let this be a way of making your sacrifice to God.

I'm sure that in the temple in the Old Testament when people came with their sacrifices, there were all sorts of noises that accompanied those acts of worship. They were bringing animals to be sacrifices. The sounds may not have been too pretty, but that was a part of the experience. Today we will hear the sound of sacrifice when we hear the sound of the paper shredder.

This is not something we normally do. Perhaps none of us have worshiped quite in this way before. What I ask is that if you feel moved, come forward and worship God through an act of sacrifice. I was going to have [our accompanist] play some music during this time, but on second thought, we agreed that this is not a time for pretty music, but a time for silent reflection interrupted only by the sounds of sacrifices being made.

If and when you feel moved you can come up. We'll form a line right here and we'll respect the space of the person or persons ahead of us making a sacrifice at the altar. After that person exits the chancel the next person can come forward and worship at the altar. You can bring up your tithe and place it in the offering plate. And if you have written something to be sacrificed you can put it in the shredder. Please, however, don't use the shredder for your monetary offering [there is some laughter]. We wouldn't want that to be torn up.

Some of you may have something very specific that you need to write down and sacrifice to God. God is calling you to do that. If you don't feel led to sacrifice something like that, I hope at the very least that you would bring your tithe and offer it in this way. We will not be sending ushers with the offering plates today, so this is the way for you to present your tithe or gift.

Last week I suggested that someone might bring up a TV remote to sacrifice as a way of acknowledging, for example, that they need to sacrifice to God how much time they spend watching television. If you bring it up—you leave it—you don't get it back after the service. Maybe someone would want to bring up a video tape. If it is something that can be used by someone else, we'll give it away.

On the other hand, if someone brought up a video with pornography on it—that will be destroyed. That may be the struggle that someone is having today. When you bring it up you are saying, “I will not use that. I will not look at that. I will honor you, God, with my eyes and my heart.”

I don’t know what God may be calling you to sacrifice. But use this time to give it up to God. Sacrifice it on the altar to God. Worship God by putting it to death. We’ll stay as long as it takes for everyone who wants to come up here and make an offering.

I’ve already written down here what I am sacrificing to God, so I’ll go first.

[I knelt before the altar in silence for a few moments, then I stood and placed my written sacrifice in the shredder. I stepped away and found an empty pew near the front of the sanctuary and began to pray while others came forward to make their offerings. After about 11 minutes everyone had come forward. I returned to the chancel and announced the closing hymn.]

My Sacrifice

I release/let go of using my anger to fuel sermons

-using the pulpit to advance my own agenda

-using sermons to advance my own point

The pulpit belongs to the LORD for His word, not mine.

I am the shepherd for all the people called

-not just of the ones who like me or want me to stay.

Benediction

We’ve been called to make sacrifices to God. We’ve been called to take off the things of the flesh and put things on. May we wear—may we wear as *fashion models*—that *love* and *grace* of God which he wants to *clothe* us with. May *walk* in his ways. May we *love* as he loves. May we even *forgive* as he forgives us. And now may the love of the Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of us now and forever. Amen.

Appendix A.3.a:

Liturgy for the Worship Service on June 29, 2008

Gathering Music

Welcome, Greeting & Announcements

*Call to Worship (sung as a round) Hymnal 742
 All: **Gathered here in the mystery of this hour,
 Gathered here in one strong body,
 Gathered here in the struggle and the power,
 Spirit, draw near.**

*Opening Hymn *For the Beauty of the Earth* Hymn 28

*Prayer of Invocation **Creator God,
 guide us in these challenging days.
 We call to you out of the depths.
 Lead us, we pray to Your fountain
 where Your healing waters flow.
 You call us into Your church
 to accept the cost and joy of discipleship.
 Help us accept that cost.
 Help us find that joy.
 Guide us today, we pray,
 to a deeper experience of Your grace
 and a deeper willingness to surrender all to You.
 This we ask in the powerful Name of Jesus,
 and through the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen.**

A Time for our Children

(After the children's time, children are excused to go to Summer Sunday School)

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Time of Prayer *Pastoral Prayer*
Silent Prayer
The Lord's Prayer

Hymn for Healing	<i>Out of the Depths, O God, We Call</i>	Hymn 554
Scriptures	<i>Colossians 4:1-18</i>	Page 202
Sermon	<i>Grace be with You</i>	Pastor S
Offering	<i>Offertory</i> <i>*Doxology</i> <i>*Prayer of Dedication</i>	
*Closing Hymn	<i>I Need You Every Hour</i>	Hymn 517
*Benediction		
*Postlude		

Appendix A.3.b:

Sermon for the Worship Service on June 29, 2008

GRACE BE WITH YOU

Scripture introduction

We have been looking at the third chapter of Colossians all month. We didn't look at the first two chapters but they were written by the Apostle Paul to the Colossians because he had heard that there was a heresy—some kind of wrong-thinking about Jesus and the Gospel—that was going around in Colosse. We don't know exactly what it is, but we know that Paul wanted to make sure they held on to the truth that he had taught them.

Then in chapter three we have seen a number of things. In the first verses it talks about *taking things off*—those dirty, nasty, stinky clothes—and getting rid of them. What needs to be taken off? The things of the flesh—anything that is against God: anger wrath, malice—all those things. In the verses right after that we saw on another Sunday that we are to *put on*: things like compassion and patience and above all, *put on love*. It also talks about forgiving because God has forgiven you. We also hear that we are to let the word of Christ dwell in our hearts richly. How do we do that? We teach God's word to one another, we exhort each other in it and we *sing it*: we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. In the end of the chapter we hear specific ways we are supposed to live this out in the realm of specific relationships: wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters. Only, we didn't get to hear about how this applies to masters—only to the slaves. Somehow the part about masters got pushed into the next chapter.

This illustrates for us that chapters and verses were not put in by the original writers of the books and letters of the Bible. Paul didn't write a little and then say, "Now I'm writing the next chapter . . ." "He just wrote a letter and much later chapter and verse divisions were assigned. Usually they got them right, but once in a while, as in this case, it seems clear that the chapter ended in the wrong place.

So our passage today will begin with the verse relating to masters, and then it will go on to some very specific details as we will see. We invite Margaret to come and share the word . . .

Scripture: Colossians 4:1-18

¹Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

²Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. ³At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may

declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, ⁴so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.

⁵Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. ⁶Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

⁷Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here. ¹⁰Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him. ¹¹And Jesus who is called Justus greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

¹²Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. ¹³For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. ¹⁴Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you. ¹⁵Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea. ¹⁷And say to Archippus, “See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord.” ¹⁸I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

This is the word of the Lord [Thanks be to God].

Sermon

Now I'm sure some of you had your favorite memory verse in there, right? Maybe your favorite verse is “And say to Archippus, see that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord.” Is that anyone's favorite verse? Did anyone use that as their confirmation verse? Probably not.

In fact, when we think of our favorite verses we think of verses like Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd,” or John 3:16, “God so loved the world that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” Or we might think of “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth” from the Sermon on the Mount or “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10) or Behold, I am coming soon: I am the Alpha and Omega” from Revelation (22:12-13).

Those verses are familiar to us, but the verse about telling Archipus to do his work is probably not in anyone's top ten passages. In fact, what we notice about this passage is that it seems to be sort of an alphabet soup of hard-to-pronounce words. (You did a great job reading that, [lay reader]). We hear Tychicus and Archipus and Justus and Demas and all the other “-us's” that were in that passage.

It is very specific to that situation and yet I think there is also something in it for all of us today. If you opened your Bible before, you may want to open it again to follow along because today we're going to look at this passage verse by verse. Even if you didn't open your Bible before, you may want to do that now. So let's look at how this starts:

Masters treat your slaves justly and fairly for you know that you also have a master in heaven. (4:1)

We talked about how this really should have been part of the previous chapter, but since it's here, let's look at it. “Masters love your slaves.” No—it doesn't say love your slaves. In that day and age, slavery was a normal part of everyday life. Lots of people—maybe even half of the people you might have seen on the streets might have been slaves. It was different from what we understand to be slavery. Still, it was not a very just system. But what does Paul say to Christians who are slave-owners—that they need to treat their slaves with *love*? No. He doesn't say with “love.”

Why? Because there were many slave-owning families who may have thought, “Oh, we love our slaves. We treat them like part of the family.” But if they were part of their family, they wouldn't have been talking to them the way that they did. They may have even been *fond* of their slaves, but that is not the same as treating them with justice. So Paul's concern was not with treating slaves with love, but with treating them with justice. Justice would be a higher standard.

Does this apply to us today? Well, if you're an employer, the way you treat your employees says a lot about your faith. Did you get that? The way you treat your employees says a lot about your faith.

One more point about this verse: why should the masters treat their slaves well? The verse says it is because *you* have a master, too. You have a Master in heaven. It is similar to what we saw in chapter 3 (verse 13) when we are told to forgive—on what basis? Because God has forgiven *you*. You should treat people fairly—why? Because God has treated you well.

In fact, at the end of this passage we will see that God wants to treat you *better* than fairly: God wants to treat you with grace. In fact, that is the title of the sermon, “Grace be to you.” I was going to ask you to greet each other this morning with a

greeting of grace. I was going to begin by saying, “Why don’t you turn to someone next to you and say, ‘*I hope you get what you’ve got coming to you!*’” [laughter] But we didn’t start that way because Paul reminds us that we wish for one another *not* what we *deserve*, but something much better than that: we wish God’s grace for one another. Grace is always better than what you deserve. Paul knew a lot about grace and getting much better than what he deserved.

Let’s move on.

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. (4:2)

Alert. Alert. In our second service, [GGregory] will be our lay reader and it’s fitting that he will read this passage because the Greek word that is translated, “alert” is *gregorountes*. Greg’s name is derived from this word, *gregorountes* which can be translated, “alert” or “awake” or “watchful.” The Apostle Paul is saying to pray being watchful. That may not be a word we often associate with prayer. We think of praying as something we do with our eyes closed as we quietly meditate in a contemplative way. So what does it mean to pray wakefully or alertly?

In our confirmation class at the beginning of the year when we ask different students to pray at the beginning of class they often pray in very predictable patterns, “God we’re glad we’re together, thank you for this day, Amen.” Later on in the year, however, their prayers become more watchful and wakeful as they include more details in their prayers. They lift up concerns for classmates who are going through difficult times. They may draw in concerns that they have heard about in worship on Sunday. Their prayers become more detailed and specific.

If you are praying for someone in the hospital, it is always good to pray for healing, but you can pray for so much more. Pray for God to guide the surgeon’s hand if the person is having surgery. Pray for the medical personnel working with the person. If you know the person is frightened, pray for comfort and courage. Pray for the specifics. Watchful prayer is a prayer of detail.

So how should you pray? Pray watchfully. And the verse says to pray with *thanksgiving*. Sometimes we don’t *feel* like praying. Giving thanks is a way to “jump-start” our prayers. If you’re not sure what to pray about, look around and find something to thank God for. If you can’t think of anything else, thank God for Creation. That’s why our first hymn this morning was a hymn of thanksgiving for Creation. We sang, “For the beauty of the earth.” If you can’t think of anything else, thank God that the sun came up today. This is the day the Lord has made—right there, that’s something to be thankful for. Let that prayer of thanksgiving be a *ramp* to get to other prayers to God.

At the same time, pray for *us* as well, Paul says. “Us”—that’s a hint that he’s talking about more than just himself,

At the same time pray for us as well that God may open to us a door for the word that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison. (Oh—note that he’s writing from prison) so that I may reveal it clearly as the Gospel as I should. (4:3)

There was a concern for getting the word out very clearly to the people. Paul is giving specific instructions to “pray for us.” This is not a selfish request for a blessing. Why is he asking for prayer? He realizes God can open up opportunities for him to share the Gospel.

If you remember when we were looking at the Book of Acts a couple of summers ago, we saw that Paul—even when he was in chains—chained to a jailer, he didn’t complain about his rotten luck. He looks at the situation and thinks, “Okay, God had a purpose for this. I’m chained to this guy. Maybe God wants me to talk with this guy. Maybe God wants me to tell him about Jesus.” And so he would convert people that he was chained to so that eventually the authorities didn’t want to chain him to anyone else because they would become Christians, too. Every situation—everything he went through—was an opportunity for God’s word to go out with more power; more strength—for people to come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

So Paul was asking these people at Colosse, “Pray for me. Pray for those opportunities.” And later he’s going to talk about Tychicus telling them that Tychicus is going to fill you in on the details of what is happening here. So Paul doesn’t say here whether he has yet had a chance to share the gospel with anyone in the jail where he is being kept. But Tychicus is going to tell you the details so you can pray more alertly, more specifically, and more “awake-ly.” So Paul is telling the people to pray with *thanksgiving*, pray in *detail*, pray for *us*.

Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone. (4:5-6)

Paul knows that as he is writing to the Colossians they are a religious minority in a pagan world. As Christians they were misunderstood. People at that time thought Christians were atheists and cannibals. How could they possibly think that? In that culture, most people were polytheists: they believed in all sorts of gods that everyone bowed down to, but the Christians would say, “Nope—I’m not going to bow down to those false gods.” The pagans would say, “What? You don’t believe in the gods? You must be some sort of atheist!” The Christians would try to explain, “We *do* believe in the one true God and his son, Jesus Christ, and he’s the one I worship.” “Oh—so in other words, you don’t believe in gods!” “No, no—you don’t understand.”

So they'd have this kind of argument with people all the time. And Paul is telling them, "be careful with your language. Salt it. Be careful. Understand who you're talking to, so that *you* might have an opportunity to share with them—so that *you* might share a good reflection on the Gospel and on your savior, Jesus Christ.

And why did pagans think Christians were cannibals? Some people would overhear what was going on in Nympha's home, or some other gathering of believers. They'd hear words like, "Take and eat—this is my body broken for you," and they would conclude they must be cannibals. "They're eating flesh and drinking someone's blood in there." So people misunderstood Christians. Paul is trying to tell them how to live their real Christian lives in a hostile environment.

Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister (a faithful deacon), a fellow servant in the Lord. I sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and how he may encourage your hearts. (4:7-8)

Do you see that? Paul is telling Tychicus all the details so Tychicus, as a *courier* of this letter—as a mailman to the Colossians—can share more details. It's important for us to understand that is not Paul writing advice from an ivory tower telling the people to pray with a thankful heart and try to feel close to God. He's talking to them about very specific people and very specific situations and how to live out the gospel.

So Tychicus is coming, (verse 9) with Onesimus—"the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you."

Now part of this chapter becomes a sort of "Who's Who" in the New Testament. It mentions a number of people about whom we wouldn't know much about if they weren't mentioned here.

Onesimus. Does anyone know where else Onesimus is mentioned? [someone says "Philemon"]. Yes—Philemon. Onesimus was a *slave* of Philemon's. If you read Philemon, it's only one-chapter long. It's a letter Paul wrote to *one* person—to Philemon. He says, "You know what? This guy that was your slave and he ran away and if you wanted to, you could really give him a hard time, but I'm pleading with you: he has become a Christian—he's a Believer (it looks like Paul helped him to become a Christian). And he says, "I'm just pleading with you to treat him well." In fact, he's kind of hinting, "Would you let him stay with me and become my helper—my servant?"

It's interesting—Onesimus is a former slave, but does Paul mention that at all? No, he describes him as "a beloved brother—he is one of you." It's a little, subtle reminder. What he *doesn't* include in the letter is interesting, isn't it? He doesn't say anything about his past. It's all about the fact that "he's one of you," "he's one of your

brothers,” “he’s here with me—he’s a good guy.” They will tell you about everything here. It goes on,

Aristichus, my fellow prisoner greets you. (We don’t know much about who Aristichus was). As does Mark, the cousin of Barnabus. (4:10)

What do we know about Mark other than that he’s related to Barnabus? Have we ever heard of a “Mark” in the Bible? Sure—this is the guy who ended up writing the Gospel of Mark.

...cousin of Barnabus, concerning whom you have received instruction. If he comes to you, welcome him. (So maybe Mark will be coming as well). And Jesus who is called Justus” greets you. (4:10b-11a)

Now that is not Jesus the *Christ*—Jesus the Messiah—the Jesus we know. Before Jesus was born, lots of people had the name, Jesus, or “Joshua,” so he’s just another guy named Jesus, just like there are lots of people named John and Mary in the Bible. Later on Christians stopped naming their children Jesus because it became confusing, but at this time there were still plenty of people with that name. So this particular guy goes by a nick-name or a second name, “Justus” so as to avoid confusion. We don’t know much about him, but he sends greetings, too.

These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the Kingdom of God and they have been a comfort to me. (4:11)

Now that’s a strange thing to say: “the only ones of the circumcision.” Why on earth would Paul want to single out who was circumcised and who wasn’t? “These are my circumcised friends . . . and these are my uncircumcised friends.” Who on earth cares? Well, for Paul, that was a way of saying, “These are my Jewish friends who are with me, and the other ones would be non-Jewish or Gentiles or Greeks.”

Paul was Jewish. In fact, he was a devout Jew who, in his early days, zealously persecuted Christians until God saved him and changed his heart. Then he started to see that the Gospel was not just for people like himself—the Gospel was for everybody. So Paul became a great Apostle (a “sent-one”) to the Gentiles. Sadly, some of his Jewish Christian friends didn’t see things that way. They wanted to keep the Christian faith as something only for Jews and so Paul had to part ways with some of them. That was very disheartening for Paul. It must have caused him a lot of pain. And yet there are three guys here: Aristichus, Mark, and Jesus Justus, who are Jewish—and Paul wants to say, “they are a comfort to me—the few who stayed with me.”

So that means that logically, everyone else Paul mentions, will *not* be Jewish.

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. (4:12)

Epaphras, we think, was the first pastor of the church at Colosse. After Paul got things started there, Epaphras was the one who took over leadership. Now, for some reason, their pastor is *not* with them and Paul says, “He’s praying for you. Epaphras is *struggling* in prayer for you. He loves you and he’s praying,” because Epaphras, like Paul, knew that there was a *heresy*—a wrong thinking—going out in Colosse that did not put Jesus where he ought to be. There was a wrong teaching going around and Epaphras was praying against it. Perhaps he was praying, “Lord, may this letter teach the people the right way and lead them to the straight and narrow.”

For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those of Laodicia and Hierapolis. (4:13)

Now those were a couple of other towns that were within 6 or 10 miles of Colosse.

Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you. (4:14)

Now, Demas—we don’t know another thing about him. He is mentioned in another place, but as he is mentioned here, nothing more is said about him. What did it just say about Luke? [he’s a physician] Yes, he’s a physician. What else do we know about Luke? [he wrote the book of Luke] Yes, he wrote the Gospel of Luke. Do you know what else he wrote? Acts. He wrote Luke and Acts. Together they are sort of a volume 1 and volume 2: one is about life with Jesus and the other is about life with the Holy Spirit.

Luke is there in prison with Paul, so he knows a lot of what is happening with Paul. If you read the book of Acts, it begins as a third person narrative, telling about what the apostles are doing: they did this—they did that, but somewhere in the middle the language changes to say *we* did this—we did that. At that point Acts is written in the first person plural as Luke includes himself in part of the story—not to make a big deal of himself, but to show that from here on, he’s knows first-hand about what is going on with the Apostle Paul. He knows Paul; he loves Paul; he wants to get the word out, so he writes Acts and he also writes the Gospel of Luke.

Once in a while when we talk about Luke, we mention that he was a physician. When he writes the Gospel of Luke, he gives a little more medical detail, to the extent that he can, about what is going on. Why? Because that’s his mind-set: he’s a doctor. So, it is because of this verse right here that we know he’s a physician. He doesn’t tell us that in his own writing in Luke or Acts.

Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicia and to Nympha and the church in her house. (4:15).

There are two churches here: one in Laodicia. By the way—where else do we know about Laodicia? It's one of the churches mentioned in Revelation. Chapters two and three contain seven letters—or messages—within the letter of Revelation addressed to seven different churches. Of all those churches, it is Laodicia that receives the harshest criticism. That church is told that because it is only luke-warm, God wants to spit it out of his mouth. Interesting, but still, this is a church that is mentioned here in Colossians.

The other church mentioned is the church “at the home of Nympha.” That's her name. She has a house. And there is a church that meets there. We need to remember that the word church does not mean “building” but “gathering.” At this time of the Apostles, there are no church buildings like we think of churches, but just *people* getting together where somebody has a big enough house. Nympha is apparently a Christian and apparently has a big enough house, so there is a church that meets there.

And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodicians; and see to it that you read the letter from Laodicia. (4:16)

Oh, isn't that cool? Tychicus is the mailman bringing a letter, “Here's a letter from Paul. He wrote it in prison. You're supposed to read it out loud to one another.” So the next time they get together for worship they should read this letter. And he says, “Oh—and Paul also wants you to read the letter that he wrote to the Laodicians.” That letter was not written *specifically* to them or specifically about their situation, but Paul knows that there will be enough encouragement for them in there that *that's* also a good letter for them to hear, too. And he says, by the way, make sure *your* letter gets copied and gets sent to them.

Have you ever noticed that in the New Testament we don't have an epistle to the Laodicians? Somehow that letter got lost. Maybe they didn't follow through and copy it and send it on. Maybe they *did*, but it got lost after that. Or maybe it was a letter that God had a purpose for right then and there, but it wasn't one that we needed to have in our canon of 66 books of the Bible. So it was lost. There are references to other letters that have also been lost to us, but we know that God gave us the word that we need to have to get encouragement. Even this letter that has all these silly details—they're not really silly, but they are so specific—so detailed, that we may wonder what they have to say to us today.

And say to Archippus, “See to it that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord.” (4:17)

This is the verse we joked about in the beginning. Why would anyone want this verse as a memory verse? Who was Archippus? We're not sure, but we think that he

might have been the son of Philemon. Remember, Philemon was the slave-owner of Onesimus. “Tell Archippus to complete the task.” Does that mean that he *wasn't* completing it—he was doing something wrong? Or was it a way to say, “He has my full support”? Maybe Archippus was the Associate pastor or the new pastor at Colosse now that Epaphras can't be there. We don't know for certain who he was, but Paul is making sure that that person has a little bit of encouragement from him.

And now the final verse:

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. (4:18)

We have a picture on our bulletin cover of Paul with a nice little table, a nice little oil lamp (it looks like a gravy boat with a wick in the end), and he has a nice sheet of paper and is sitting in a little chair with a little pen in his hand. Probably it wasn't like that at all! In fact, we believe the Apostle Paul used stenographers. We think that he had secretaries that took dictation from him. Secretaries in jail? Jail was very different in that day and age.

Basically, if you had rich friends who could bring you food, you got fed. If you didn't, you probably would die in jail. And the jailer had very little to give you. He knew that if you were to break out of jail, he'd be in big trouble, so he made sure you stayed in your cell or in chains. There probably was not much light there. If there was a window, perhaps there was a friend outside calling in and asking, “What do you say next, Paul?” And Paul was calling out to them, “Say to them, ‘Put on love’ . . . and say to them, ‘Let the word of Christ dwell richly in your heart . . .’”

We don't know whether Paul had to shout through a window. Maybe his friends were allowed to come and visit in his cell with him. Maybe Paul's arms were chained so he wasn't able to write. Maybe he was crippled with arthritis because of all the time he spent sitting in jail. At any rate, it looks like he didn't do a lot of the hand-writing himself, but at the end he would sign it, saying something like this, “I, Paul, write this with my own hand.”

If you were to have read the original letter, you would have noticed that most of the letter would have been written in very neat script, but down at the bottom the hand-writing changed into big letters.

Paul finishes basically the way he began this letter by saying, “Grace be with you.”

So this passage that is all about specifics to this particular church with mention of Tychicus and Archippus and Demas and Onesimus and all the others—what in the world does this have to say to us? How does this relate to our lives?

I think for one thing this chapter shows, for one thing, that the Gospel is lived in very specific circumstances. You don't live it somewhere in a monastery or on a mountain-top or somewhere secluded from everybody: you live out the Gospel among real flesh-and-blood people, some of whom you may not get along with. Nevertheless, you need to live with them and encourage them in the faith and bless them and extend to them God's grace. You don't live the Gospel in a vacuum.

And how you treat others says a lot about your faith. Paul was concerned about that throughout his writings. He wants to show them how to live among others.

What is Paul's overriding concern? He's there in chains. Is he saying, "I want you to write to the authorities and get me released! This is an outrage! I won't stand for this!" No—what's his concern? He asks the Colossians to pray for opportunities for him to share the Gospel: "Pray that I would have the right words to say to my jailer . . . or to the magistrate that comes to visit." His overriding concern is not for his own safety, for his own health, or even for his own reputation. His concern is that the Gospel goes forth.

Wouldn't it be amazing if for all of us our overriding concern was that God's word went forth in power? Wouldn't that be amazing?

God opens for us a window on the specifics of that church so long ago in Colosse. And God provided for those words somehow to be preserved for us to read today, so that we might reflect on how they speak to our present-day circumstances.

What should our overriding concern be? The Gospel going forth. The Body getting built up. Is it for our own reputations? Let the word go out. What should we do? We should be praying that God will direct our speech, giving us opportunities, even in the nuts-and-bolts lives that we're living, to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's our call today.

We need God to do that. We need God's grace. And so we finish this time with a song in which we say to God, "We need you every hour." Let us sing that hymn . . .

[sing hymn, "I Need Thee Every Hour"]

Appendix A.4.a:

Liturgy for the Worship Service on July 6, 2008

Gathering Music

Welcome, Greeting & Announcements

*Call to Worship (sung as a round) Hymnal 742
 All: **Gathered here in the mystery of this hour,
 Gathered here in one strong body,
 Gathered here in the struggle and the power,
 Spirit, draw near.**

*Opening Hymn *Lift Up Your Hearts!* Hymn 38

*Prayer of Confession **Most merciful God, we confess that we are in
 bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.
 We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed,
 by what we have done,
 and by what we have left undone.
 We have not loved You with our whole heart;
 we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
 We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
 For the sake of Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.
 Forgive us, renew us, and lead us,
 so that we may delight in Your will,
 and walk in Your ways,
 to the glory of Your holy Name. Amen.**

(Silent Confession)

Words of Assurance of Pardon

People's Response to God's Grace: the *Gloria Patri*

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy

Ghost

**As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,
 World without end, Amen. Amen.**

A Time for our Children

School) (After the children's time, children are excused to go to Summer Sunday

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Time of Prayer *Pastoral Prayer*

	<i>Silent Prayer</i>	
	<i>The Lord's Prayer</i>	
*Hymn	<i>Bless God, O My Soul</i>	Hymn 549
Scripture	<i>Revelation 5:1-14</i>	Page 248
Sermon	<i>Worthy is the Lamb Who was Slain</i>	Pastor S
Offering	<i>Offertory</i>	
	<i>*Doxology</i>	
	<i>*Prayer of Dedication</i>	
Sacrament of Holy Communion		
	<i>Invitation</i>	
	<i>Words of Remembrance</i>	
	<i>Communion Prayer</i>	
	<i>Sharing of Bread and Cup</i>	
	<i>Prayer of Thanksgiving</i>	
*Communion Hymn	<i>As We Gather at Your Table</i>	Hymn 332
*Benediction		
*Postlude		

Appendix A.4.b:

Sermon for the Worship Service on July 6, 2008

WORTHY IS THE LAMB WHO WAS SLAIN

Scripture introduction

When we look at the Book of Revelation one of the first things we have to figure out is what kind of literature are we looking at? On one hand the Book functions like an epistle; a letter. In fact, chapters 2 and 3 are a collection of seven different letters or messages to seven different churches. On the other hand, the Book of Revelation seems to be a glimpse into future events, so in another way, the book seems to be akin to the Old Testament Prophets with their concern about prophecy. From yet another perspective, the Book of Revelation seems to be full of hymns or songs of praise. In fact, we will hear three different hymns in the chapter we will read today, so in this way, the Book of Revelation is like the Book of Psalms. An epistle, a book of prophecy, a song book—the Book of Revelation is a little of each of these, and yet it is also altogether unique in the Bible. Today our passage describes a scene of worship in heaven.

Scripture: Revelation 5:1-14

¹Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; ²and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” ³And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁴And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

⁶Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. ⁸When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹They sing a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; ¹⁰you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.” ¹¹Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹²singing with full voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and

wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the elders fell down and worshiped.

This is the word of the Lord [Thanks be to God].

Sermon

Are there any comic book aficionados here today? Do you know the fancy term for comic books? [graphic novels] That’s right—graphic novels. Even if you don’t frequent comic book stores, I think you have some idea of what comic book art looks like. I’m not talking about regular Sunday newspaper cartoons where everyone is the same size in each frame. I’m talking about those creative pieces of art wherein you can see the characters from all sorts of different perspectives and in which there are a lot of shadows. One frame may show a close-up of a conversation between two characters while the next frame may show them from the far end of an alley—or from a birds-eye-view. Often you can’t see a character’s whole face. It is that sort of spooky, strange artwork that I’d like you to think about as we look at the Book of Revelation.

We’ve talked earlier about Revelation being a letter, about it being prophecy, and about it being a songbook. Think about it as a *graphic novel* that gives us different kinds of *windows* through which we can see what is going on.

In today’s passage, what is going on? We’re looking at worship in the heavenly realm. In Revelation we see things taking place on three different *stages*: on earth, above the earth (in heaven), and under the earth (in the abyss). We will find there is also an emphasis on *numbers*. For example, the number three is a divine number. It has to do with time: past, present, and future, with space (as we have seen): earth, above earth, and below the earth. Of course it has to do with the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three is a big number for God.

Four is a number associated with earth: we have the four corners of the earth, the four winds, and any time we see the number four in Revelation, it seems to have something to do with earth being in harmony with other things. And then when you put the divine 3 together with the earthly 4, you have the number 7, which seems to speak of heaven and earth being in harmony with each other. We have already seen and heard the number seven several times in today’s passage: we have seven bowls and seven eyes and seven horns.

If seven is such a perfect number, what number do you think would be almost a pretender to be seven, but not quite? [six] Right—the number six. Six-six-six—that’s the *false* number *pretending* to be *almost* perfect, but it really isn’t. That’s just a little clue about what the number 666 is all about, but we’re not going to get into that today.

Numbers are big in this book. Earth and heaven are big. And *worship* is big. Our chapter today is a continuation of the previous chapter in which the emphasis is on “the one seated on the throne.” It is talking about God the Father, but it never says “father.” Every time he is mentioned here, he is called “the one seated on the throne.”

In chapter 4 there are four creatures which are flying around the throne praising God, day and night, all the time, 24 hours a day. These are not just any old creatures: they are strange *hybrid* creatures each of which has something of earth and something of heaven in them. One of them has the face of a *lion*—the king of beasts. Another one has the head of an *ox*—the strongest domesticated animal. One of them has the face of a *man*—a human being. And the fourth one has the head of an *eagle*. They all have multiple wings. They all have multiple eyes—front and back. And they all go around the throne of God, continually singing and praising the One seated on the throne.

What do those creatures represent? It’s hard to peg down something definitive, but it seems they represent something of earth (with the faces of the lion, the ox, the man, and the eagle) and something of heaven (with the wings, the all-seeing eyes). Somehow these creatures speak to us of heaven and earth joining together in praising God.

If we were to have read more in chapter 4, we would see that around the throne of God there are 24 smaller thrones on which 24 elders are seated. They seem to be playing instruments like harps or lyres. This is where we get the idea of sitting on clouds playing harps in heaven. (Personally, I think we’re going to have guitars!)

At any rate, there are these four creatures flying around God’s throne praising God and around them are 24 elders playing instruments and praising the One who is seated on the throne. Then we move into this chapter (chapter 5) in which John is sort of a “fly on the wall” taking it all in. He is so amazed! He sees all these creatures worshipping at the heavenly throne and he doesn’t quite know what to make of it.

We can imagine him peeking out from behind one of the elders to witness this event as he whispers to this elder asking what is going on. The elder fills him in on what to look for.

So what does John see in this chapter? He first sees a “body-builder” angel. The text describes a mighty, powerful, strong angel who asks, “Who is worthy to open the scroll?” What scroll? Well, it seems there is an important document that is sealed with seven seals. Everyone looks around and nobody is found worthy to open the seals.

So what? So what if they can’t open this scroll? Well, apparently it’s a big deal. It could be that this scroll is the Book of Life mentioned later in the Book of Revelation with the names of all the people who will be saved. Or it could be that this scroll has the “end of the story”—the end of history written in it. All these people are gathered here anticipating what is going to happen. They’re ready to have the scroll opened and the story read, but no one is able to open the scroll.

John is so beside himself, he begins to weep: “I wept because no one was found worthy to open the scroll.” He’s having a horrible time dealing with this, but then one of the elders seems to whisper to him, “hold on—you’re going to see something amazing here: you’re going to see the Lion of Judah or the Root of David.

Those are both Messianic images from the Old Testament—images of the strong Messiah who would one day come and release all the people. The Israelites had known what it was like to be slaves in Egypt and what it was like to be captives in Babylon. And now they were under the iron foot of Rome. They couldn’t do anything without Rome okaying it. They had Roman soldiers all around who were badgering them, giving them a hard time, oppressing them. They hoped and they yearned and they prayed, “Lord—send the Messiah, riding on a strong white horse to come and do away with all these Romans.”

Their hope was in this Lion of Judah who would roar a mighty *roar* and vanquish all his enemies. So when the elder told John, “There’s going to be someone coming and you’re going to see this Lion of Judah—someone who comes from the lineage of King David, our greatest king! Someone is going to come and he is ready to do battle!”

Again, think of a graphic novel. Think of someone marching in, powerful like a lion—someone even stronger than Aslan from the Chronicles of Narnia—this strong lion is about to come in, and suddenly (in this graphic novel) the spotlight goes to center as all creatures collectively hold their breath as they await the entrance of the much-anticipated Messiah . . .

Do you see a lion? No you don’t. Stepping into the spotlight you see . . . a little *lamb*! A tiny little lamb—not just any old lamb, but a *young* lamb. And not just any young lamb, but an *injured* lamb, a *weak* lamb.

This is it? This isn’t what we were expecting. We wanted a *strong Lion of God* and we get a little lamb.

But the thing is, the creatures who are there—the beings who are there—don’t scoff and say, “Bah! It’s just a little lamb!” No—they see this lamb for who he really is. And those winged creatures start to fly around him and they begin to sing a new song with their harps. And as the twenty-four elders gather around them we begin to see concentric circles of praise around this Lamb. And they begin to sing the first hymn of praise to the Lamb:

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation . . .”

That is another “trademark” of the Book of Revelation: John doesn’t use commas—he uses the word “and” for punctuation, so we hear him say, “every tribe *and* language *and* people *and* nation . . . you have made them to be a kingdom *and* priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.”

So they are singing this song to the Lamb. What does the Lamb look like? The Lamb has seven eyes. (That's a little weird! But then again, think "graphic novel.") The Lamb also has seven horns and we are told that these eyes represent the seven spirits of God.

What does that mean? Mrs. P [indicating a member of the church sitting near the front], you helped me understand that when you created a fabric altarpiece we now use every year at Pentecost. When you created it, you made sure there were exactly seven tongues of flame to represent the Holy Spirit because in Revelation here we read that there are "seven spirits of God." At the time when you created the beautiful altarpiece, I didn't understand why Scripture would say there are seven spirits of God, but now I understand how this was all part of John's highly symbolic language. The number seven for him is "code" for the holy and the divine. Nowhere in the Book of Revelation does John use the term, "Holy Spirit" that we're accustomed to hearing today, but when he says, "seven spirits of God" we know that is what he is talking about.

So again, John here describes the Lamb as having seven horns and seven eyes. Let's not take that too literally, but again think of it as a depiction in a graphic novel. It is like a dream sequence.

Next it says there are these seven bowls of these prayers that are being lifted up by the elders like incense to God. And all four winged creatures and all twenty-four elders for a total of twenty-eight beings are worshiping the Lamb. They certainly don't think, "Oh, what a disappointment: we were expecting a Lion and all we got was a Lamb." They know! They see the power of God.

And it is not power like we would normally think of it. It's not the power of a mighty lion roaring and slashing at its enemies in battle. Somehow God's awesome power is manifested in this weak and vulnerable-looking lamb.

You see, the Lamb is Jesus. As this story unfolds, it becomes clearer and clearer that we're talking about Jesus who *is* the Lion of Judah and who *is* the Root of David and who *is* the Lamb who was slaughtered. In Jesus all kinds of images came together.

One of these images was a Passover Lamb. In the Book of Exodus the Children of Israel were slaves in Egypt and God brought about one plague after another to try to convince Pharaoh to let the people go, but over and over again Pharaoh chose to keep the people in slavery.

Finally, God planned to bring about the tenth plague. It was to be the worst one—the hand of death on the firstborn of all in Egypt. And there was *one* way in which a person could be saved: by acting in faith according to the instructions God gave the people. What were the instructions? They were told to slaughter a lamb—a Passover Lamb—and take the blood from the lamb and put it on the doorframe of their homes as a *sign of their faith* that God would "pass over" the home and not strike down the firstborn.

Huh! Some neighbors might laugh at you and ask you why you had blood all over your doorpost, but you could say, “Because we trust in God to save us.” They were also told to take that lamb and roast it and eat it that night. Furthermore, they were told, “Be dressed and ready in their traveling clothes—and you will see the power of God tonight.”

That night the angel of death came over Egypt and struck down the firstborn of every family that did not display the sign of faith on their door. But all the families of the Israelites who had on their doorposts the sign of their faith were spared as that hand of death “*passed over*” them that night. That was the first Passover.

From then on, every year, whether they were travelling or whether they were settled in the Promised Land, they would observe the Passover and remember the night when God spared them. Even to this day, Jewish people still observe the Passover. That was the central positive saving event in the history of the people of Israel. The lamb was sacrificed and the people were saved.

Jesus was sacrificed. Jesus gave himself for us on the cross at the time of Passover. He became for us, *our* Passover Lamb; our feast; the one sacrificed for us. And so all of that history in the Old Testament speaks to what was going on in Revelation. The slaughtered lamb was the one who brought salvation. It hearkened back to Exodus, but it also was a point of view of the cross.

Again, we’re talking about this being a graphic novel. Let’s think about the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Some people would say Revelation is a fifth Gospel. It still tells the Good News about Jesus, but it does it in a completely different way. It looks at the cross and the crucifixion from a different point of view from the other Gospels. If those Gospels are written from the perspective of the foot of the cross, then Revelation looks down from heaven at the cross. Through Revelation we see from a heavenly perspective that Jesus was the Lamb of God being sacrificed to save the people.

We see what looked to most people like the weakest point for Jesus when he was vulnerable and hurt and dying and unable to save himself, it was actually the point of tremendous victory and power.

If we’re looking from a graphic novel’s point of view here, we may start with one frame that is a close-up of the Lamb from above. In the next frame we pull back farther and see those four creatures surrounding the Lamb in a song of praise. Pull back farther and we see another concentric ring around the Lamb: the twenty-four elders. Continuing to zoom out in verse 11, we see myriads and myriads and *thousands* of thousands of angels singing with full voice ““Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power *and* wealth *and* wisdom *and* might *and* honor *and* glory *and* blessing!” (Rev. 5:12). Notice there are a perfect seven attributes that describe the perfect Lamb.

Finally, the final frame pulls back to show the entire world—every living creature—the whole universe united in singing praise to the Lamb, “To the one seated on

the throne and to the Lamb be blessing *and* honor *and* glory *and* might forever and ever!” (Rev. 5:13). And the four creatures say, Amen!

That’s worship. That’s *cause* for worship. That’s heavenly worship as the creatures all recognize and glorify Jesus for who he really is: the Lamb who was slain. The one who was in the most pitiful weak position is now seen as the powerful victorious redeemer, buying us back, saving us, winning us for his Kingdom!

We can see this from the perspective of the four Gospels. We can read about how Jesus saved us in the letters of Paul and in the letter to the Hebrews. And we can see from a slightly different “graphic novel” perspective in the Book of Revelation.

There’s another way we can look at this: from the perspective of the Lord’s Supper—the sacred action given to us by Jesus through which we can participate hands-on in the saving work of Christ. It is another window through which we can see who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Amen.

Communion words of Institution on July 6

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he gathered with the disciples in the upper room and after giving thanks, he took the bread and broke it saying, “This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” Likewise he took the cup and said, “This is the new covenant in my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it.” And we proclaim our Lord’s death until he comes again as often as we share in these elements.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, the Lamb who was slain: to you belongs all power and wisdom and wealth and might and honor and glory and praise. We praise you; we worship you by following your instructions to share in this bread and this cup. We know that in it there is far more power than an outsider might see. We know that there is power to save lives; to renew us; to give us new hearts. Give us your heart of love. And so, in obedience, we share in your supper.

We pray that as we share, remembering what you have done for us in the past, as we look forward to the communion we will have with you in your kingdom in the future, we also share in this supper in the present, knowing that this signifies your abiding presence with us; that you are with us in a special way when we share in your supper.

We pray that each one of us would experience your love and your grace. We pray that each one of us will have a sense of your power: the power as of a lion expressed in a wounded lamb. We pray that we would partake of this meal in a worthy manner that would honor and glorify you. We pray for these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Anyone who would identify himself or herself with Jesus—who would say: “That’s the power that I connect with: Jesus, the Lamb who was slain,” —is invited to partake of this meal.

These are the gifts of God prepared for the People of God. Come, for all things are ready.

[sharing of the bread]

The body of Christ broken for you—take and eat.

[sharing the cup]

The Blood of the Lamb who was slain—take and drink.

Let us pray. Lord God, we give you thanks for inviting us to your table—another picture; another window that helps us experience how you have loved us—the way you were willing to be vulnerable, expressing your strength in weakness that we might be saved. As your creatures, we are humbled. We are grateful and we thank you. Amen.

Benediction

We have shared in the banquet of the Lamb who was slain. And we are called on, then, to go out with changed hearts: to live and to love and to serve and to honor Christ in our living. Let us do that and as we do, may the love of the Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of us now and forever. Amen.

Appendix A.5.a:

Liturgy for the Worship Service on July 13, 2008

Gathering Music

Welcome, Greeting & Announcements

*Call to Worship

from 1 Peter 2:9-10

Leader: People of God, lift up your hearts
 People: **We lift our hearts up unto the Lord.**
 Leader: You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,
 a holy nation, God's own people,
 in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts
 of him who called you
 out of darkness into his marvelous light.
 People: **Once we were not a people;
 but now we are God's people.
 Once we had not received mercy,
 but now we have received mercy.**
 Leader: Let us proclaim God's goodness in song.

*Opening Hymn *You Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim* Hymn 305

*Prayer of Adoration **Sovereign God—you rule from on high.
 Though at times we fail to see you,
 that does not diminish in the least
 the fact that you are Lord.
 Though at times we may be tempted
 to weep in despair,
 you are still on the heavenly throne.
 This morning we join with the angels in heaven
 in praising you, O Lion of Judah.
 Today we join with the heavenly host
 in proclaiming your mighty deeds:
 "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb
 be blessing and honor and glory and might
 forever and ever!" Amen.**

A Time for our Children

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Time of Prayer *Pastoral Prayer*
 Silent Prayer
 The Lord's Prayer

Special Music	<i>Waters of Babylon</i> sung by [organist, choir member, and pastor]	
*Hymn	<i>Waters of Babylon</i>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By the waters, the waters of Babylon 2. We sat down and wept, and wept, for thee, Zion 3. We remember, we, remember, we remember thee, Zion 	
Scriptures	<i>Psalm 137</i>	Page 576
	<i>Daniel 5: 1-9, 25-28</i>	Page 825-6
	<i>Revelation 17:1-14</i>	Page 256
Sermon	<i>How Can We Sing the Lord's Song?</i>	Pastor S
Offering	<i>Offertory</i> <i>*Doxology</i> <i>*Prayer of Dedication</i>	
*Closing Hymn	<i>We're Marching to Zion</i>	Hymn 382
*Benediction		
*Postlude		

Appendix A.5.b:

Sermon for the Worship Service on July 13, 2008

HOW CAN WE SING THE LORD'S SONG IN A FOREIGN LAND?

Scripture introduction

We have three Scriptures today. That's out of the ordinary for us. We're going to read a psalm, and then to help understand the *question* raised in the psalm, we're going to read from the Prophet Daniel. Then, to help understand the *answer* to the question raised in the psalm, we'll read from Revelation. It sounds a little complicated—and it is. So pay attention today; this will be a little challenging to all of us, but if you stay with me, it will be worth the reward of understanding at the end. Our first passage is Psalm 137. This is the Psalm that we just sang.

First Scripture: Psalm 137

¹By the rivers of Babylon— there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.

²On the willows there we hung up our harps.

³For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

⁴How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

⁵If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!

⁶Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

⁷Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall, how they said, “Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!”

⁸O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us!

⁹Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!

This is the word of the Lord, [thanks be to God].

Sermon

This is a strange psalm because it ends by asking for babies to be dashed upon the rocks. It is a psalm of lament and sorrow. Sometimes it is called a psalm of *national* lament as the People of Israel are in Babylon and they are so tormented: they are captives there and the Babylonians are taunting them.

They're saying to them, "Sing one of those little Jewish songs you sing. Do a little Jewish dance—we want to be entertained. Perform for us." And the Jewish people are asking, "How can we sing the Lord's song when our hearts are breaking? How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? How can we sing songs that are all about how we love the mountain of God—Mount Zion where Jerusalem is—where the temple is? How can we sing these songs about this place that we'll never get to go back to? We've been hauled off like cattle in chains and in ropes and now we have to live in this land that is not our home and they're telling us we need to sing these happy songs. How can we sing these happy songs?"

Let's look at another passage to help us understand something of the Babylonian captivity experienced by the People of Israel. In the year 605 B.C.—so that is over 2600 years ago—King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came in and ransacked Jerusalem and took away many of the people as captives. Instead of massacring the people, he took them captive so they could make his empire stronger. He was also the first ruler of a superpower nation who had the idea of allowing the people to hang on to their religious idols. Their homeland they had to kiss goodbye. Their language, their dress, and their food would all be replaced by Babylonian language, dress, and cuisine, but their "gods" they could keep. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar himself would sometimes bow to the gods of some of the people he had defeated.

All these different people came into Babylon with their idols of their gods, but of course the Jewish people didn't have idols; they worshiped the One true God—the God of Israel, whom they worshiped at the temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. That is where they made sacrifices on the altar to God. A few weeks ago we talked about how worship even to this day is essentially a sacrifice made to God. We sacrifice things that are valuable to us to show that God is even *more* valuable.

In the temple in Jerusalem you would find priests making sacrifices, and you would find an altar and all sorts of utensils and pieces of furniture that were used by them for making these sacrifices. Because God was worthy of the best, many of the cups and bowls and chalices and knives and other items in the temple were made of the finest gold crafted by Israel's finest craftsmen.

When Nebuchadnezzar ransacked Jerusalem and the temple, did he find idols to take back to Babylon? No, he didn't, but nonetheless he found many cups and bowls and utensils of great value. Those were stolen from the temple and put into a storehouse somewhere in Babylon.

We could choose from a number of different stories in the Book of Daniel to illustrate what life was like for Israelites in captivity in Babylon. We could read about how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to worship the image of the

king and how they were thrown into a fiery furnace. We could read about how Daniel himself refused to worship the king and how he was thrown into a den of lions. But today we're going to look at a slightly less known episode that has to do with writing on the wall and a king known as "Belshazzar."

Belshazzar was a descendent of Nebuchadnezzar. As we said, King Nebuchadnezzar came into power around 605 B.C. He ruled for about 43 years. During that time God caused this arrogant man to go insane for a while. Daniel tells us that Nebuchadnezzar ran with the wild donkeys and ate grass like an ox. After about seven years of this he was humbled enough to acknowledge that God is Lord and so God restored him to some power. He was not Jewish himself and he was not a man of God, but he was a man *used* by God in a very specific role in the life and the history of the People of Israel.

After reigning 43 years, Nebuchadnezzar died and his son reigned for a couple of years in Babylon. After him, one of Nebuchadnezzar's sons-in-law reigned for another four years. After him came a weak king who only reigned for two months and then a man named Nabonidus came to power for about 14 years. Actually, it was the reign of "Nabonidus & Son." This son of Nabonidus was Belshazzar. And he is the main subject in our next Scripture reading.

Now clearly Nabonidus (Belshazzar's father) was the go-getter of the two. He chose to do most of his ruling out and about in his empire. He was usually off traveling, trying to reestablish the trade routes through his land so that his empire could become wealthier. While he was out and about, he left Belshazzar, his son, in charge within the city of Babylon.

And as is often the case with young rich rulers, Belshazzar's power went to his head and he began to think he could do anything he wanted to do. We're going to look at 9 verses in Daniel 5 to get a taste of what Belshazzar was doing and what he was about.

Second Scripture: Daniel 5:1-9

¹King Belshazzar made a great festival for a thousand of his lords, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. ²Under the influence of the wine, Belshazzar commanded that they bring in the vessels of gold and silver that his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. ³So they brought in the vessels of gold and silver that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. ⁴They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. ⁵Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the wall of the royal palace,

next to the lampstand. The king was watching the hand as it wrote. ⁶Then the king's face turned pale, and his thoughts terrified him. His limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. ⁷The king cried aloud to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the diviners; and the king said to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever can read this writing and tell me its interpretation shall be clothed in purple, have a chain of gold around his neck, and rank third in the kingdom." ⁸Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king the interpretation. ⁹Then King Belshazzar became greatly terrified and his face turned pale, and his lords were perplexed.

This is the word of the Lord, [thanks be to God].

Sermon (continued)

This is the story about "the writing on the wall" that has become a catchphrase for us. We are familiar with the phrase, but this story is not quite so well-known to most people.

There he is with all of his high-ranking officials and they are celebrating how powerful he is and what does he do? He takes the chalices from the temple of God in Jerusalem and thinks, "these will be fun to drink from at my big party," so he is using them almost as party decorations and getting drunk on wine, utterly desecrating these holy items which were dedicated to the service of the Lord.

Well, God notices and God sends a message. It comes in a few words which are written on the wall by a hand which mysteriously just appears before everyone there. The words are "*mene, mene, tekel, parsin*" and no one there is able to interpret them, so they call for experts to come and decipher them for the king.

The whole episode reminds me of the story in Genesis in which Joseph is called upon to interpret a troubling dream that the king or pharaoh of Egypt had had. Nobody can understand or interpret it, but eventually Joseph is brought in and he is able to interpret the dream.

Here Daniel is brought in to interpret the mysterious writing on the wall. Now Daniel is about 80 years old at this time. At the beginning of the Book of Daniel, Daniel himself is a very young man—perhaps 20 or younger, but now he is 80 as he is brought in to advise the king. The king makes all sorts of promises to Daniel, telling him if he can interpret the writing, he will give him clothes and a gold chain for his neck and will make him third in power in the Babylonian Empire. Belshazzar himself is, of course, second in power only to his father. (This is also similar to the story of Joseph in Genesis).

Daniel knows that there is a danger for whoever interprets the writing. You've heard of the phrase, "Don't shoot the messenger"? Well, they used to do that. If you brought bad news to the king, you might be killed simply because you brought bad news. But Daniel doesn't care. In fact, Daniel is told that if he interprets the writing he will be given gifts and power, but he doesn't care about that, either. He's 80 years old and he knows that that wealth and power aren't going to do him any good. Nevertheless, he will tell the king what the writing means.

Daniel talks to Belshazzar about his ancestor, Nebuchadnezzar, and how God had humbled him for those seven years until he had finally acknowledged that God was king. And he said, "You *knew* about this, Belshazzar, but you didn't heed the lesson. In fact, you've just *flaunted* your power and thumbed your nose at God. So here is the meaning of the writing on the wall" says Daniel:

Mene, mene means "Your days are numbered." *Tekel* (which rhymes with shekel) means "You've been weighed in the scale." (A shekel was a measure of money, but it was also a measure of weight.) "You've been weighed in the scale and found to be lacking." *Parsin* means "Your days are numbered and your kingdom will be given to the Medes and the Persians."

Now Babylon was centered in the area of modern-day Iraq whereas Persia was in what we today would call Iran. So in a way, we could characterize the message as saying that because of Belshazzar's foolish arrogance, Iran was about to overthrow Iraq.

The king was frightened by the message, but nevertheless he called for the things he had promised to be given to Daniel. But the text also tells us that "That very night . . . Belshazzar was killed." (Daniel 5:30). That was the end of his reign. In fact, that marked the end of the reign of the Babylonian Empire (which lasted about 70 years) and it was the beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire which lasted a little over 200 years. That Empire eventually was eclipsed by the Grecian Empire as the world superpower for almost another 200 years.

Who thinks they know what Empire came after that? After the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, and the Greeks came what? [the Romans] That's right—the Romans. They would reign for about 600 years, so they are the ones who will be in power when Jesus is born and all through his life. They will still be in power when John writes Revelation. We're going to look at Revelation in just a little bit.

But this story of the hand-writing on the wall illustrates the arrogance of the Kingdom of Babylon right up until the end. It shows us the arrogance of Belshazzar who has no problem taking items that were dedicated for *God's* use, and using them for his *own* drunken revelry. That is the kind of attitude that the Jewish people were dealing with all the time in Babylon and that's why they could write a song like Psalm 137 that says,

“By the waters of Babylon . . .” (that may mean the Tigris River or the Euphrates River) “. . . we took our harps and just hung them up . . .” (it says “on the willows,” but a better translation would be “poplars” because those are what grow there). And they ask, “How can we possibly sing?”

They go on to say, Jerusalem, if we ever forget you may our arms dry up and wither (so that we lose all our strength) and may our tongues dry up and cleave to our mouth (so that we lose our power of speech). They loved God; they loved the land of God; they loved the mountain of God, and they loved the temple of God and they are basically bearing witness to how *important* God and God’s land was to them—even though they probably will never see it again.

Now it is true that a few years after Belshazzar dies and the Medo-Persians come into power that eventually some of the Israelites will be able to go back to Jerusalem. They will start to rebuild because the city and the temple are in ruins. But those writing this song didn’t know that.

This song follows a group of songs in the Book of Psalms known collectively as, “the Songs of Ascent.” These songs were sung by pilgrims as they were “marching to Zion”—as they were going up the mountain—Mount Zion—and up the steps into the temple of God. If you go to Jerusalem today, you can see exactly where people would have walked up the mountain and up the steps which would have led to the temple. They would sing these wonderful songs about going to worship God. Psalm 137 comes at the end of all those beautiful psalms. Psalm 137 is sort of the *opposite* of all those psalms as it stands as a Psalm of National Lament, crying out, “How can we *possibly* sing a joyful song while we are in Babylon?”

That is the question that gives today’s sermon its *title*. We will go to Revelation to find the *answer* to this question. We looked at Revelation last week: chapters 4 and 5 and in them we saw scenes of heavenly worship of the Father (who is referred to as “the One who sits on the throne”) and scenes of worship of “the Lamb who was slain.”

Just when you think you are going to have this powerful, ferocious Lion of Judah to worship, instead we see this little Lamb who was slain, but somehow that Lamb *is* powerful and victorious. The Lamb is victorious—not in a *conventional* way that says, “I’m going to grab all the power and control everyone,” but in a different way. Somehow the Lamb’s victory came from *dying* for sinners; from dying for the people and then redeeming them.

The Book of Revelation is not easy to understand. It is a book that many Christians avoid. Other people seem to be obsessed with it and it is all they want to read. We’re going to look at a *strange* chapter—chapter 17—and we’ll look at verses 1 through 14. Listen to the word of the Lord. . .

Third Scripture: Revelation 17:1-14

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls (*remember I told you last week that numbers were important in Revelation*) came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore who is seated on many waters (*now other translations will say, “harlot” or “prostitute”*), ²with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk.” (*Does that sound a little similar to the revelry of King Belshazzar?*) ³So he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; ⁵and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth’s abominations.” ⁶And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly amazed.

⁷But the angel said to me, “Why are you so amazed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. ⁸The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. ⁹“This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, ¹⁰of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while. ¹¹As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. ¹²And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. ¹³These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast; ¹⁴they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

This is the word of the Lord, [thanks be to God].

Sermon (continued)

This is a *hard* word of the Lord: it's full of all sorts of strange imagery and repeated numbers of 7 and 10. Some commentators try to figure out exactly who these seven kings might be. It seems to be talking about the time when Rome was in power.

We're not going to get into that discussion today. That is not important for us to try to figure out right now. What is important is the figure of the woman who appears on the beast, covered with abominations. This woman is obviously very arrogant. She is arrayed in a most decadent ostentatious way, and she is holding in her hand a golden chalice full of abominations and the impurity of her fornication. There she sits, high and mighty, or at least haughty and brazen. Remind you of anyone?

Remember how Belshazzar desecrated the chalices that had been robbed from the temple of God in Jerusalem? He had absolutely no regard for the fact that these were holy items dedicated to God as he used them for his own drunken revelry.

Now when King Nebuchadnezzar conquered other nations and incorporated the people into the nation of Babylon, he allowed the people to keep their household idols and to bring them along with them when they were forced to evacuate their homeland. When he came to Israel, he found a nation that did not worship idols, so what did he do? He robbed the temple of the implements that were used in the elaborate sacrificial system practiced there. Apparently he had no immediate use for the items, so he storehoused them in Babylon for a while. Later on, this would be the storehouse Belshazzar raided for his fateful party.

There are echoes of this story in Revelation as we see this woman sitting on a filthy beast, apparently very pleased with herself in her wickedness. Her cup is said to be full of the impurity of her adulteries. Now, that is not referring so much to a literal adultery, to sexual immorality, as it is to spiritual adultery—being unfaithful to God by “playing the harlot” with other gods. These kings have bowed down with her to other gods instead of submitting to and worshiping the one true God. This passage is talking about impure worship. It is talking about people who have not been “faithful” to the Lord.

In this passage we see some very powerful figures. And yet, who is going to win in the end? It will be the Lamb. And this gives hope to people who are living in a foreign land. Sound familiar?

For John, as he wrote Revelation, he could draw from events in Israel's past in just the same way that we as Americans can draw on our own past. If we say, “The British are coming! The British are coming!” it would be clear that we were talking about the American Revolutionary War. All we have to do is mention the name “Pearl Harbor” and we remember a day that will live in infamy—the day of the unprovoked Japanese attack on the American fleet that launched our nation into World War II. Similarly, the

cry “Remember the Alamo” resonates with us, even though none of us were actually there and the numbers 9-11 are forever etched on our psyches as we remember the horrible terrorist attack that forever changed the way we see the world. Mere mention of that number can evoke in us powerful feelings of sadness, and anger, and patriotism.

It was the same for the People of Israel. As they were confronted by the insidious and inescapable power of the Roman Empire all around them, it wasn’t hard for them to recognize that this was just Babylon—or even Egypt—all over again, only with a different name. Either way, it was another false system of belief imposing itself upon them, expecting them to conform to it. [The culture was pervasive. The political system was imposing and inescapable. The economic system was all-encompassing. Together they conspired to form all who came under their control] To stay true to Jesus in the midst of this was no mean feat. But throughout the Book of Revelation, God was reminding his faithful people to *stay* faithful—to *stay* with the Lamb.

That message of nonconformity with the world comes to a head in the next chapter. Let me read just one more verse, chapter 18, verse 4:

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,
 ‘Come out of her, my people,
 so that you do not take part in her sins,
 and so that you do not share in her plagues. (Rev. 18:4 [NRSV])

For the people of God, this is a reminder from God that “you’re living in a foreign land, you’re living in a foreign culture, and you’re living in a whole context that doesn’t honor me. You can choose to stay with them, be identified with that culture, and be corrupted. Or you can choose to stay with the Lamb. What are you going to choose?”

Now I’ll give you a hint: the Lamb is going to win. It may not seem that way right now, but part of the reason Revelation was written was to assure us that God will prevail. So choose your side carefully.

Let’s go back to our original question: “How can we sing the Lord’s song—or worship God—in a foreign land? Through Revelation God is telling us that until we are on the “other side,” we are in a foreign land. This world is not our home; we are sojourners in a foreign land. Forget about yearning for going back to the way it *used* to be: “Oh, if only we were back in Jerusalem . . .” The fact is you are *always* in a foreign land.

So how can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? By remembering that God is still on the throne and by remembering that ultimately, *the Lamb will win*. And we will be saved. And we will be in the *new* Jerusalem. And everything of Babylon and of Rome and everything of whatever culture tried to draw us away from God will be gone.

That can give us hope . . . here and today . . . to sing the songs of God.

Introduction of the final hymn

After we share in the offering, we will have a chance to sing a song written in the style of the Songs of Ascent from the Book of Psalms. It is about marching to Zion, going up to the City of God. The song by the great English hymn-writer, Isaac Watts, also draws heavily from the Book of Revelation. You might notice some of that as we sing.

Introduction to the offering

But first let us present our tithes and offerings. Our giving is a counter-cultural statement that says, "Rome, Babylon—they're not what I belong to. I belong to the Kingdom of God and I give to God's work." In such a way, let us present our tithes and gifts.

Benediction

We're marching on to Zion—the beautiful City of God. And we *know* where our hope is. We know where our *destiny* is. And it gives us strength for today to sing Zion's song, *even* in a foreign land. So let us witness to that power that we know and the Lamb that was slain. Let us worship him. And as we do, may the love of the Father, the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of us now and forever.

Appendix A.6.a:

Liturgy for the Worship Service on July 20

Gathering Music

Welcome, Greeting & Announcements

Call to Worship

Pastor: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

People: **And also with you.**

Pastor: The apostle Paul said:

Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind.”

*Opening Hymn

Crown Him with Many Crowns

Hymn 301

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, the Lamb upon the throne, we worship you, crowning you the Lord of Love, the Lord of Grace, and the Lord of Truth.

We join with the heavenly voices in worshipping you for who you are and for what you have done.

As we worship this morning, we invite you to change us.

Transform us, we pray, from the ways of the world to the ways of your kingdom. Help us to live your grace, embrace your mercy, share your forgiveness, and experience your healing.

We pray for ourselves and we pray for our sisters and brothers.

We pray for your church that among your people there may be reconciliation, healing, and forgiveness.

For your glory we pray these things, Amen.

A Time for our Children (10:30 service only)

Conversation with two young children who grew up in the church who are about to move to Kentucky

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

-Prayers for the two young children moving to Kentucky

-A member asks for prayers for her grandmother going into surgery

- A visitor asks for prayers for his family for healing
- Prayers are requested for a member undergoing—chemo therapy
- Remembering [a long time choir member who just died]

Time of Prayer	<i>Pastoral Prayer</i> <i>Silent Prayer</i> <i>The Lord's Prayer</i>	
*Hymn for Healing	<i>There is a Balm in Gilead</i>	Hymn 553
Scriptures	<i>Jeremiah 8:18-22, 46:11</i> <i>James 5:7-9, 13-16</i>	Pages 709, 749 Page 231
Offering	Offertory (10:30 service only) *Doxology *Prayer of Dedication	
Sermon	<i>There is a Balm in Gilead</i>	Pastor S
Call to Confession		
Pastor:	Jesus said: Ask, and it will be given; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.	
People:	For everyone who asks receives, and those who seek find, and to each who knocks it will be opened.	
Pastor:	Friends in Christ, God knows our needs before we ask and in our asking prepares us to receive the gift of grace. God ministers to us not as one who is absent but as one who is present in human hands, voices, and lives full of the Holy Spirit. Let us open our lives to God's healing presence and for sake all that separates us from God and neighbor. Let us be mindful not only of personal evil but also of our communal sins of family, class, race, and nation. Let us confess to God in silence whatever has wounded us or brought injury to others in body, mind or spirit that we may receive mercy and be come for each other ministers of God's grace.	
Corporate Confession		
All:	Eternal God, in whom we live and move and have our being, whose face is hidden from us by our sins, and whose mercy we forget in the hardness of our hearts, cleanse us, we pray from all our offenses, and deliver us from proud thoughts and vain desires, that with lowliness and meekness we may draw near to	

you, trusting in your grace, and finding in you our refuge and strength; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Pastor: If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Brothers and sisters, I announce with joy that we are forgiven.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

Time of Anointing with Oil and Laying On of Hands

Prayer of Thanksgiving

All: **We give praise and thanks to you, O God! In Jesus Christ, you have given us life; brought ministry, forgiveness, healing, and peace; commanded the disciples to heal the sick; and continued the healing ministry among us to this day. Keep us mindful of your love and mercy that we may be faithful throughout all our days, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

*Hymn for Healing *From the Crush of Wealth and Power*

Hymn 552

*Benediction

*Postlude

Appendix A.6.b:

Sermon for the Worship Service on July 20, 2008

THERE IS A BALM IN GILEAD

Hymn: There is a Balm in Gilead

Scripture introduction

Our Scripture this morning is the one that the song we just sang is based on. It's an obscure little reference to a "balm" in "Gilead." The words "there is a balm in Gilead" do not actually occur in scripture, but they seem to be an answer to a question that is asked by Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was known as the "weeping prophet." He almost *never* had any good news to share. He lived in a time that was roughly a hundred years prior to the era that we looked at last week. We looked at a time when the people of Israel were a captive people in Babylon.

Jeremiah's job was to warn the people that if they didn't change their ways, they would be going into captivity in Babylon. He warned them, but for the *most* part they did not listen. There were several kings who reigned in Israel and Judah during the time of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry. During that time there was one good king who was "righteous" in the eyes of the Lord. His name was "Josiah" and he is the one after whom [a young couple in the church] named their first son.

Josiah brought some reform during his reign, but, unfortunately, there wasn't much lasting effect. The people turned away from God and eventually God allowed them to have what they deserved and they were taken into captivity in Babylon.

Jeremiah warned the people of the consequences of their turning away from God through a series of twelve sermons that are recorded in the Book of Jeremiah. Our passage today comes from one of them. It is just a passing reference to a balm which is part of a rhetorical comment. It comes from Jeremiah 8:18-22. Listen to the word of the Lord . . .

First Scripture: Jeremiah 8:18-22, 46:11

¹⁸My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. ¹⁹Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?" ("Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their foreign idols?") ²⁰"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." ²¹For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.

²²Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

Several chapters later, Jeremiah, not being content to speak only to Judah; he speaks to other nations, beginning with the people of Egypt. Egypt had been a very powerful nation at one time: powerful enough to have enslaved the people of Israel, but Egypt was about to fall, too—about to fall to the hands of Babylon. Almost as a taunt, Jeremiah once again refers to the “balm of Gilead” in Jeremiah 46:11:

¹¹Go up to Gilead, and take balm, O virgin daughter Egypt! In vain you have used many medicines; there is no healing for you.

Our more “positive” scripture reading today comes from the Epistle of James—the one letter that James wrote. The last chapter has to do with healing. We’ll look at a few verses, and then a few more in that fifth chapter. James 5:7 to 9 and then 13 to 16 , , ,

Second Scripture: James 5:7-9, 13-16

⁷Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!

Continuing at verse thirteen,

¹³Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

This is the word of the Lord, [thanks be to God].

Sermon

Sometimes a psalm or a hymn can ask a question. Last week, for example, we looked at Psalm 137 which asked the question, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” We looked at the fifth chapter of Daniel to understand the context in which the 137th Psalm was written. In that chapter we witnessed the arrogance of the Babylonian king, Belshazzar, and the kind of disrespect he showed for the God of Israel

that the People of Israel regularly had to endure. That story ended with the famous “writing on the wall” which basically told the king, “You blew it, buddy!” That very night the king died. This story gave us a little taste of the pain the people experienced when their tormentors told them to entertain them by singing one of those “happy Jewish songs.”

Then we looked at the Book of Revelation which helps us understand that we are *always* in Babylon, we’re *always* in Rome, we’re *always* in a foreign land, and we’re *always* in a place that is *hostile* to God. And *yet* we *can* sing the Lord’s song because we have *hope*. This is not the end of the story. We will one day be with him in glory. It is because of that hope—not because we believe in progress and believe that things are getting better and better here and now—but because we know that in God’s time and in God’s place we *do* have a home. Because of that we can sing praise to God.

So that was an example of where a psalm asked a question and the Bible answered it because “Scripture interprets Scripture.” But today we have a passage that asks a question “Is there a balm in Gilead?” and the song that we sang gave an answer: there *is* a balm in Gilead.

So where is Gilead? It was in the region just east of the Jordan River. In Gilead there grew a thyrax tree which produced a resin which could be used to make a balm which was considered to have healing properties. It’s kind of an odd reference, but Jeremiah knew about it and he used it rhetorically in a couple of different ways.

First of all, as he’s weeping for his people, “Why is there not healing for my people? Why don’t they change their ways? Is God in Zion?” Well, we know, yes he is. “Is there a balm in Gilead?” The answer is yes there is, but they’re not using it. They’re not taking it.

Later on he uses it in a negative way against the Egyptians. The Egyptians were known their healing arts. They had lots of physicians. They had studied and figured out some of the medicinal properties of many different herbs. In fact, as the medical sciences began to develop, it was from India and Egypt that much of the wisdom was drawn. Egypt was known for its use of medicine and for its tremendously effective embalming work with mummies.

So as Jeremiah spoke to the people of Egypt, he says, “Yeah—maybe *you* need to go and get some balm from Gilead, too.” He knew they had all sorts of balms, but they weren’t going to do them any good. They were also about to come under the iron fist of Babylon.

I have a few balms here: bag balm, and other balms you might have in your own medicine cabinets.

Max Lucado—the author of the book our 3:16 groups have been reading—tells a story in *A Gentle Thunder*, about a time when his daughter, Andrea, got a sliver. She came to him crying with the sliver, so Max got out tweezers and ointment and a band-aid. Andrea said to him, “No, no, just the band-aid, Daddy, just the band-aid.” She wanted to skip all the surgery of having the sliver removed and putting something on it that might sting or cause it to heal. She wanted to go straight to the band-aid. And sometimes we’re like that, too: we want something to cover the wound and make it look nice, but we don’t want to go through the trouble that it sometimes takes to find healing.

The people in Jeremiah’s time did *not* avail themselves of the healing God had for them. God was ready to forgive and to heal just as the song [our substitute accompanist] played earlier as a prelude says, “If my people, who are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray, then I will hear from heaven and will answer them and I will heal their land.” The people in Jeremiah’s time didn’t heed that. They didn’t find that healing and they were taken as captives into Babylon.

There’s still hope. As we read in James, what should we do if we’re having trouble? Pray! What should we do if we’re happy? We should sing. What if we’re sick? We should call on the elders, James says, to come lay hands on you and anoint you with oil. Oil was used throughout the Old Testament to anoint kings and to signify blessings. In fact, the word, “Christ” means “anointed one”—“one who has been blessed with oil.”

So James says if you need healing, you should pray for it. Somehow forgiveness is all wrapped up in that. If the people of Jeremiah’s time had been humble and had prayed and had asked for forgiveness, things would have worked out very differently. James tells the Christian believers to pray for one another. Is there a problem? Bring it to God.

In my first year here I worked with our parish nurse and another member of the church to plan healing services in the chapel. We made them sort of an “extra” thing. Rather than holding them Sunday mornings they were held on Friday or Saturday nights. Just a few people came: people who were very ill or had cancer and were looking for healing. They’d come forward after we read the Word and had a short message and we’d lay hands on them and anoint them with oil. We’d take a little healing balm like this I’m holding here and put a little on their forehead and pray for them. The people who came to those services very much appreciated them.

I regret now that we treated the healing services like an extra-curricular thing. It was as if we were saying, “If you’re *really* into this healing thing, come to this special service. As I look at our *UCC Book of Worship* and the order that it contains for “Healing for a Congregation,” it doesn’t say it has to be done as a special service by itself at a different hour. It could be incorporated into a Sunday morning worship service.

Knowing that our congregation needs to work through some things and that we need healing and reconciliation and forgiveness, it makes sense that we would do something like this today. So I invite you—if you feel led, if you are looking for healing—come forward. In a few moments I'll ask for [two respected elders in the congregation] to come up and assist me. And as long as it takes for as many people who want to come forward, we'll have prayer with them and we'll lay hands on them and anoint them with oil.

So, what should you do if you're not coming up? Pray for the people who are there, so it is not just the three of us who are praying for them, but the whole congregation focusing thoughts and prayers on that person. And pray for your neighbor. Pray for those around you. Pray for the whole congregation. Pray for everyone. Begin with prayer and end with prayer. And again, if you feel moved and led, we invite you to come forward for prayer as well.

In his epistle, James talks about confessing our sins. We have an order for doing that. Jesus said, "Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you will find. Knock and it shall be opened to you."

Appendix A.7.a:

Liturgy for the Worship Service on July 27, 2008

Gathering Music

Welcome, Greeting & Announcements

*Call to Worship (sung as a round) Hymnal 742
 All: **Gathered here in the mystery of this hour,
 Gathered here in one strong body,
 Gathered here in the struggle and the power,
 Spirit, draw near.**

*Opening Hymn *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name* Hymn 304

*Prayer of Invocation **God of all power and might, God of healing,
 God of love, God of peace,
 guide us, we ask you, in these challenging days.**

**Lord Jesus, the Lamb upon the throne,
 You call us into Your church
 to accept the cost and joy of discipleship.
 Help us accept that cost.
 Help us find that joy.**

**Holy Spirit,
 in the midst of the transitions we are experiencing,
 help us to know your deep and abiding grace
 even as we direct our focus and our worship to you.
 In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
 we pray, Amen.**

A Time for our Children

(After the children's time, children are excused to go to Summer Sunday School)

Special Music *Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace*
 (Solo)

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Time of Prayer *Pastoral Prayer
 Silent Prayer
 The Lord's Prayer*

*Hymn	<i>They'll Know We are Christians by our Love</i> (see back page ♪)	
Scriptures	<i>John 15:5-12</i>	Page 109
	<i>Matthew 28:18-20</i>	Page 34
Sermon	<i>The Great Commandment and the Great Commission</i>	Pastor S
Offering	<i>Offertory</i>	
	*Doxology	
	*Prayer of Dedication	

—TIME OF FAREWELL—

Introduction

T Association Rep: Your church family is constantly changing. People come and go. Babies are born. Children grow up. People commit themselves to one another. Loved ones and friends come to the end of their lives. Individuals move into your community and church life. Others leave you, moving away to new places, new experiences, and new opportunities. It is important and right that we recognize these times of passage, of endings and beginnings. Today you share the time of farewell with friends who are leaving.

Ending of an Authorized Ministry

T Association Rep: On August 18, 2002, this local church called [Pastor S] to serve as pastor and teacher. The following year he married [his wife] and she also became a valued part of this faith community.

Pastor S: We thank [Church A], its members and friends, for the love, kindness, and support shown us these last six years. I ask forgiveness for the mistakes I have made. I am grateful for the ways my leadership has been accepted. As I leave, I carry with me all that I have learned here.

People: **We receive your thankfulness, offer forgiveness, and accept that you now leave eventually to minister elsewhere. We express our gratitude for your time among us. We ask your for your forgiveness for our mistakes. Your influence on our faith and faithfulness will not leave us at your departure.**

Pastor S: I forgive you and accept your gratitude, trusting that our time together and our parting are pleasing to God.

Vows of Release

T Association Rep: Do you, the members and friends of [Church A] release [Pastor S] from the duties of pastor and teacher?

People: **We do, with the help of God.**

T Association Rep: Do you offer your encouragement for his ministry as it unfolds in new ways?

People: **We do, with the help of God.**

T Association Rep: (addressing Pastor S)
Do you, S, release this local church from turning to you and depending on you?

Pastor S: I do, with the help of God.

T Association Rep: Do you offer your encouragement for the continued ministry here and on the relationship with another who will come to serve?

Pastor S: I do, with the help of God.

Witness of the T Association

T Association Rep: On behalf of the [T Association] and the United Church of Christ, I witness to the words spoken: words of thankfulness, forgiveness, and release. The member churches of our association and conference hold each of you in prayer. We pledge our support in the transitions signified in this service.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

Prayer

T Association Rep: Let us pray.

All: **God, whose everlasting love for all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. We thank you for the moments we have shared with [Pastor S] in worship, in learning, and in service. The time we were together in your name saw our laughter and tears, our hopes and disappointments. We pray that you will open up new opportunities for [Pastor S] and [his wife and his children]. We pray that they will be aware of your Spirit's guidance as they move to new and unknown places. Guide all of us as we hold these cherished memories but move in new directions, until that time to come when we are completely one with you and with each other in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.**

*Joining us this morning and representing the T Association of the United Church of Christ is [Mr. M]. [Mr. M] is a member of [Church D] and a member of the [T Association] UCC Church and Ministry Committee.

*Closing Hymn *Go, Make Disciples* (see back page ♪)

**Go, make disciples,
Baptizing them, teaching them
Go, make disciples
For I am with you till the end of time.
Go, be the salt of the earth.
Go, be the light for the world.
Go, be a city on a hill,
So all can see that you're serving me.**

(repeat)

Last time: **Go—make disciples.**

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♪ (sheet music is available for the middle and closing hymns—see your usher)

*Benediction

*Postlude

Appendix A.7.b:

Sermon for the Worship Service on July 27, 2008

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Scripture introduction

We're going back to the basics with our Scripture today and the first one is sometimes called "The Great Commandment." You'll notice the word "abide" appears in this passage seven times, [and] the word "love" appears seven times. Other key words include "joy," "commandment," "fruit," and "disciples."

[The Great Commandment] can be found John 15, verses five through twelve. This is part of a long extended conversation Jesus has with the disciples on his last night—the night on which he was betrayed and the night before he was crucified. Usually we look at John 14 in which Jesus says, "Do not be troubled because I am going to prepare a place for you." This is the next chapter in which Jesus continues the conversation so he can let them know what they can expect to come.

Scripture: John 15:5-12

⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. ¹²"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

This is the word of the Lord, [thanks be to God].

That was the Great Commandment. Our other passage is sometimes called. "The Great Commission" and it is found in the end of the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 28, verses 18 to 20. Listen now to God's Word.

Scripture: Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

This is the word of the Lord, [thanks be to God].

Sermon

There is a kind of a *pattern*, a *flow* to worship. It always begins with “gathering” in one way or another. It might begin with singing a song like “Gathered Here in the Mystery of This Hour.” It might start with a *call* to worship: “Let us worship God.” It might start with a song—there is something about singing an opening hymn together. As everyone comes in together it focuses people’s attention. It is part of our gathering. The announcements and the opening things we say are also a part of this time and process of gathering as God’s people. These are all ways we have of reminding ourselves that “Here we are: we’re here to worship God—we’re gathered as God’s people.”

Anywhere you go in a Christian church, worship will start with some kind of act of gathering. It may be with the ringing of a bell. It could start with a chant. It could start with a prayer. But in one way or another, there is some kind of signal that says, “Here we are—we’re going to join together now in worshipping God.”

Now, it is true that you can worship God anywhere and anytime. Individually, you don’t need a formal liturgy to begin praising God. But when we do it together, we have to coordinate our efforts. So we put words on a screen or in a bulletin so we can use them together in our worship. But we always start with an act of *gathering*.

And then, we encounter God. We encounter God through God’s Word—the reading of the scripture, also through the *sermon*, also through the *music*. Through music we worship God both by praising God and by *listening* to what God has to say to us. And we are *changed* by that. Or at least we *should* be. As we hear God’s word and through that experience, we *encounter* God, we are changed.

But it doesn’t end there. Sometimes we continue in our worship with a *sacrament*: with the Lord’s Supper, or some other kind of sacred act in which we *experience* God. Or we *celebrate* what we’ve just heard. Or we *respond* to it. In fact, that’s why we usually present our offerings right after the sermon: it’s a way of *responding* to what God has said. God says, “Do this.” Or God says, “Remember this.” Or God says, “Believe this,” and we respond with our offering as a way of saying “Okay, Lord, we’re with you on

this. We're sharing what we have as a sign of what is in our hearts and where we are going."

But it doesn't end there, either, does it? The service always ends with some kind of a "sending out." And we don't just say, "Okay, everybody get out of here—scram—beat it!" The dismissal always has some kind of a "charge" attached to it. "You've heard, you've encountered, you've shared—now go out and share it with others." Or "You've been changed by God—now go out and live out that change." Or "You've been affected by God—now live out the Gospel." Some people would even say that the "exit" or dismissal or "scattering" is the most important part of the service. It's a way of living out Jesus' call to "Go now and do likewise."

Just as we see that in every individual worship service there is that pattern of *gathering* together as the People of God, of *encountering* God through His Word, spoken, preached and sung, of *responding* to God, and of *being sent out* to share it with the world, we see the same pattern throughout the whole of the Bible. That is really the story of the Church and it is the story of God's People.

Think about how God called and gathered Abraham and his family and said, "I'm going to make a great nation out of you." It was a long process. Eventually they went down to Egypt and became slaves in that land. But again, through Moses God *gathered* the people, led them to *encounter* Him through His Word—the Ten Commandments, and through His amazing saving acts time and time again. Eventually (it took forty years) they were *sent out* by God, this time, to go into the land He had promised them. Before this, the people were just a bunch of uncoordinated, undisciplined slaves, but by the time they completed God's spiritual "boot camp" in the wilderness, they were well on their way toward living and acting and thinking like a true People of God.

This is the same thing that happens in the New Testament, isn't it? Jesus gathers twelve people together—twelve disciples: "Come, follow me. I will make you fishers of men. You know how to fish for fish—I'll teach you how to fish for people." Jesus gives them a hands-on sort of training program during the three years or so that he is with them. After demonstrating how to minister to people, he sends them out two by two to do the same things in the villages that they have seen him do. "You two go here, you two go there, do what you've seen me do share what I've shared with you and try to learn something from it." Some of them come back and say, "The people didn't want to listen." Jesus says, "That's okay: you were faithful—you did what you were asked to do." Others came back saying, "Wow! We saw all sorts of amazing miracles." That's good, too. Some came back and said, "You know, Jesus, some people are out there performing miracles in your name, so we tried to stop them." Jesus said, "Don't stop them: if they're not against me, they're for me."

These twelve disciples had all sorts of learning experiences as Jesus would send them out on little missions and they would go and do things and come back and report on what had happened and what they had learned. This happened over and over for them. And *finally*, they are given a *final* send-off; a final commissioning. And that was our first passage today (from John 15). It was that last night that he spent with them. He told them all sorts of things. He told them how the Holy Spirit would come and direct them because he wouldn't be with them in the same way he had been. He tells them how they are supposed to do their work: everything they do they should do in love. Back to the basics: do it in *love*.

He said, "Abide in me. Just as you've seen me and I've done it in love and I've abided in the Father, so you should abide in me. Abide in my love. Just what you've seen—you go out and practice. Now I've given you a commandment, to love."

That's a strange thing: to command someone to *love*. We tend to think of love as something we don't decide to do, we just feel it or we don't. But Jesus seems to think it is something we can be commanded to do. I dare you, husbands and wives, to *command* your spouse to love you. See how far that gets you. And yet, Jesus commands us to love one another. How odd. But we gotta do it. It's not a negotiable with him. That was his final command.

And then, as we know, he was crucified, died, was buried, and on the third day he rose again. Hallelujah! And as the resurrected Christ, Jesus had just a little bit more time to spend with the disciples. But eventually the time came for him to ascend to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. *Just* before he ascended, he had *one more thing* to say to the disciples. The record of what he said was read as our second passage today and it is called the Great Co-mission. It is a *co*-mission, because we share the mission with each other and with God.

The Commission is to make disciples. "Go and make disciples." How do you do it? By teaching. How do you do it? By loving (you've already heard about loving). How do you do it? Jesus says, "By showing them everything I have commanded." How do you do it? By baptizing. Gather people in. "You've been gathered in by me, now you're called to gather other people in and to make disciples.

There are two aspects of making disciples. One is *inviting more people*. "Have you heard the story? Have you heard Jesus loves you? Have you heard Jesus has a plan for your life? Let me share it with you." And as people respond to this message, in a way this becomes their first "call" to worship. The first call to worship is to know God and to live your life for Him.

I've been reading one person who writes about worship (Harold Best) and he says there is really only one call to worship in your life. Once you've *started* (to worship God)

every time we have a worship service together and begin it with a call to worship, it's really a call to *continue* worshipping once you've started in that joyful life of knowing the Lord and worshipping Him.

So making disciples is partly about inviting more people in (which is another way of saying disciple making is partly about evangelism). It has to do with inviting people, with sharing the Good News with them and with baptizing them. But making disciples is also about helping people to *grow deeper* in their faith. It is about sharing the depths of God's Word as we continue to encounter God and to be changed. Transformation—that's what discipleship is about.

Discipleship is *not* about coming and being exactly who you've been. If you are open to God in worship, you are open to the Spirit of God working in you; you're open to transformation.

This past Monday I had an opportunity to have an exit interview with members of the staff-parish relations committee and a few others who were invited to be a part of that. It was a good time for me to share a little bit of my perspective.

[The remainder of the sermon and the remainder of the worship service cannot be transcribed as the recording is missing.]

APPENDIX B
THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction

The following documents were used with participants in the study outlined and described in Chapter Four:

Letter Inviting Potential Candidates to Participate in the Study	page 300
Instructions for Participants in the Study	page 303
A Review of the Seven Sundays	page 304
The Questionnaire	page 306
Participant's Release Form	page 308
Pastor's Letter of Release	page 309

Letter Inviting Potential Candidates to Participate in the Study

March 16, 2009

Dear _____,

You have been selected to participate in a focus group as part of a study that will be incorporated into my doctoral project at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. My project explores the relationship between pastoral care and preaching as well as between pastoral care and corporate worship. Specifically, I am using my final seven sermons at [Church A] as well as the seven worship services in which they were preached as the focus of the study. The design of those sermons and services developed out of my pastoral concern for the congregation to find God's healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

There will be six to eight members of the focus group. Your participation (should you choose to be involved) will consist of two phases. In the first phase you will be asked to answer a written questionnaire with written answers. You will be asked to reflect deeply on the worship services and on the sermons and the role they played (if any) in your life in bringing healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation. You will be asked to share something of your own spiritual journey through the time of upheaval at [Church A]. You are free to answer with hand-written responses or by typing, if you prefer. You may send responses by email or by regular mail. You will have about four weeks from the time you receive the questionnaire to complete it and return it to me.

The second part of your participation will be in a round-table discussion (group interview) with the other members of the focus group. As a group you will be asked the same questions as you are being asked in the questionnaire. Each participant will be provided with a copy of the answers they gave to the questionnaire, but no one will be asked to share with the rest of the group any part of any of your answers they do not wish to share. No member of the focus group will be given any *other* member's written answers and I will not share your answers with the group so it will be completely up to you how much you share at the round table discussion. I will make a recording of the round-table discussion for my own use. Specific quotes may be used in my project, but I will be careful to disguise the identity of each focus group member.

It is important for me to remind you that though I once was your pastor and that I preached the sermons and planned and led the worship services we will be discussing as an extension of my pastoral relationship with you and others, I am no longer your pastor. In our final service together at [Church A] on July 27, we formally and ritually released one another from that relationship. My interest here is only in knowledge and understanding. My approaching you should in no way be construed as an overture toward continuing or resuming my former relationship with you as your pastor.

It is important for me to respect the terms of my release of covenant from [Church A] as I engage in this aspect of my research. Furthermore, any research I conduct in ministry must be done with integrity and with respect for the continuing ministry at [Church A]. One of the stipulations of my release was that I would not initiate contact with any individual members of [Church A] and that if I did have any reason to initiate contact with the church that I do it through the pastor serving [Church A] at the time. Honoring the terms of the release of that relationship with you, I met with [Church A's interim pastor] last week. I shared with him my proposal for my doctoral project and let him know that while it would be very helpful to me to have direct input from members of [Church A] who participated in the worship services, I would not contact members any members of the church without his permission.

[The interim pastor] shared with me his concern that *some* members or leaders at [Church A] *might* become very uncomfortable to learn that I was conducting interviews with members of [Church A] and that they might be prone to misinterpret my intentions. Therefore, he asked me to limit my "pool" of potential interviewees to those members and friends of [Church A] who have "already been worshiping at [Church C]" where I am currently serving as interim pastor. Because of [the interim pastor's] request, I must ask that, as a condition of your participation in my study, you keep your involvement in this study in strict confidence. I ask that you do not share anything about your participation in this study with anyone except with the other participants or (in the case of those who are married) with your spouse. Please ask that your spouse also keeps this in confidence. If keeping this in confidence will be a problem for you, please let me know.

Speaking of spouses, some of you may wonder why you were chosen for this study while your spouse was not. My original plan was to invite a good cross-section of the congregation to participate in the study: both men and women, young and old, new members and long-time members, commuters and those who live within [the town of Church A], and people who have chosen to continue to be involved with [Church A] and those who have chosen *not* to continue to be involved. I was asked by my professors to limit my focus group to 6 to 8 members. Your spouse may also have valuable insights to share, but I felt I could get a better cross-section of the church by selecting only one member from each family.

Be assured that I am genuinely interested in learning how a variety of different people processed the events that happened at [Church A] last June and July and what role the worship services and sermons had in the way they were experienced by different individuals. Please give some prayerful thought to participating in this study, asking God how your specific insights may help me with my project (which I hope will eventually translate into helping more pastors) and how being involved in the process may be used by God in your own *journey* of spiritual growth and development. Some of you may even want to share the questionnaire with your spouse as a way of "jogging your memory" and clarifying your own thoughts, but remember, I am interested in *your* responses.

I have tried to be thorough in this letter, but there may be some details that I failed to mention. Feel free to contact me if you need more clarification in any area.

I will be following up with you in a few days to see whether you have decided to participate.

Very sincerely,
Steven Simpson
[email address]

Doctor of Ministry Research Project Team:

Dr. John Nissley	Dean of Winebrenner Theological Seminary, and Doctor of Ministry Program Director
Dr. Michael Malanga	Pastor of Bowling Green Covenant Church (BG, Ohio) and Project Mentor for Steven Simpson's Doctoral Project
Dr. David Coffin	Pastor of St. Mark Lutheran Church, Ada, Ohio and External Reader for Steven Simpson's Doctoral Project
Mrs. Jeannine Grimm	Adjunct Faculty member at Winebrenner Theo. Seminary Writing Stylist for Steven Simpson's Doctoral Project

Instructions for Participants in the Study

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of a focus group for my doctoral project. There will be two phases of your participation. The first will be your responses to this written questionnaire. You may type your answers and email them to me (in fact, I would be happy to send you a duplicate of this questionnaire by email to make it easier for you). You also may hand-write your responses directly onto the survey and return it to me with the enclosed envelope. Feel free to use additional pages for your response. I would ask that you return your responses to me by April 8.

The second part of your participation will be in a round-table discussion with the other members of the focus group. This group interview will be conducted on Sunday, April 19, 2009. I will be contacting you with details about exactly when and where we will meet.

Before you respond to the questionnaire, please look over the brief review of the Seven Sundays and my brief description of sermon and worship services from each of those days. See if you can remember what you were feeling and thinking as you participated in those corporate worship services. Feel free to put the questionnaire aside for a while if that is helpful to you. Perhaps later during some “down time” you will recall something significant that you missed when you initially read the question. Feel free to add more insights later.

Please note, too, that while the second cluster of questions are very similar to the third cluster, one asks about your responses to the *worship services* (including songs, prayers, sacraments, and other liturgical acts) while the other asks only about your responses (an active listener) to the *sermons*. While the *questions* in the two sections may be similar, it is possible that your *answers* to those questions may not be.

Please feel free to continue on the back of the questionnaire or to use more paper if you have more to say. Detail is helpful.

At the end of the questionnaire is a release form allowing me to use your written and oral responses to the questionnaire and the group interview in my doctoral research. Please sign and date it and bring it to the group interview session.

A Review of the Seven Sundays

June 15, 2008 **Resignation Announced**

Sermon: *Put on Love*

Text: Colossians 3:12-17

This was the first worship service after I turned in my resignation. In the first half of the service during the announcement time I took about ten minutes to announce my resignation to the congregation and explain what had happened over the past week. In the sermon, which was a continuation of a sermon series in Colossians, I talked about the importance of the daily habit of “putting on love” in much the manner we daily put on clothing. One of our hymns that Sunday was a “song of lament” from the Iona Community called, “O God, My God” (hymn # 515).

June 22, 2008 **Sacrifice at the Altar**

Sermon: *A Time to Kill*

Texts: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, Colossians 3:1-11

Moving from the famous passage from Ecclesiastes about there being a time and a season for everything under the sun (including a time to “kill”) I related it to the Colossians passage that talks about “taking off” the filthy clothes of sin and sacrificing (putting to death) those sinful things to God. At the end of the service, each person was given an opportunity to come to the altar and to “put to death” or “sacrifice” something before God. The following notice appeared on the back of the bulletin that day:

Today in worship we will be invited to worship God by sacrificing something to God on the altar. Worship is sacrifice. Worship is laying down something valuable to us (our time, our treasures, our sins, our hearts, our lives) as a way of showing God that *He* is far *more* valuable to us. Some people may have brought something with them today that they will lay on the altar as an act of worship. For those who may not have a physical object to “sacrifice” but never-the-less want to present something today, blank sheets of paper are provided in this bulletin. They may be used for writing sins, grievances, grudges, preferences, or anything else we may feel moved to “sacrifice” to God on the altar today. A paper shredder is available for making the sacrifice.

June 29, 2008 **Grace is Extended**

Sermon: *Grace be with You*

Text: Colossians 4:1-18

In the fourth and final chapter of Colossians Paul gets very personal. Though the names are hard to pronounce and not very familiar to us, each one was important to Paul and had had a role to play in his ministry at Colossae. The blessing, “grace be with you” was not just a generic religious platitude, but a very real blessing by Paul to very real persons. We sang a hymn for healing called, “Out of the depths, O God, We Call” (hymn # 554).

July 6, 2008 **The Feast of the Lamb**

Sermon: *Worthy is the Lamb Who was Slain*

Text: Revelation 5:1-14

Using the idea of a graphic novel, in this sermon I talked about the “surprise effect” of all the build-up in Revelation 5 to the appearance of the powerful Lion of Judah. When

the worthy one appeared, at first he seemed to be a big disappointment: just a small, helpless, mortally wounded lamb. But he was a surprisingly powerful, victorious hero after all. As we shared that day in the Lord's Supper I talked about how Jesus' sacrifice initially *seemed* to be a sign of great weakness and vulnerability, but turned out to be a great victory. I invited people to participate in the supper as a way of identifying with the Lamb who was slain.

July 13, 2008

How to Sing in Babylon

Sermon:

How Can We Sing the Lord's Song?

Texts:

Psalm 137, Daniel 5: 1-9, 25-28, Revelation 17:1-14

Answering the question posed by the Jewish refugees in Babylon who asked, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land," we looked at the context of their misery as the King Belshazzar of Babylon used sacred drinking vessels plundered from the temple in Jerusalem for his irreverent drunken party. We looked at a parallel image in Revelation as the "Whore of Babylon" similarly drank blood from a golden chalice. We learned that until we are finally in God's kingdom, we are *always* in a foreign land, but we can still sing the Lord's song in a foreign land because we know that in the end, the Lamb wins and his kingdom overcomes all others. Keith Norwalk, Casie Dietrich, and I sang a song, "By the Rivers of Babylon" and then the congregation sang it as a round.

July 20, 2008

Healing Service

Sermon:

A Healing Balm

Texts:

Jeremiah 8:18-22, 46:11, James 5:7-9, 13-16

We sang the African-American Spiritual, "There is a Balm in Gilead" and looked at the texts in Jeremiah from which the song was based. We also looked at the passage in James' epistle in which he called those who were sick to have the elders of the church, "pray over them anointing them with oil in the Lord's name." Later in the service, members were invited to come forward as the pastor and two respected elder members at each service prayed for them and anointed them with oil. During the service Keith Norwalk sang a version of the Prayer of St. Francis ("Make me an instrument of thy peace").

July 27, 2008

Farewell and Official Release

Sermon:

The Great Commandment and the Great Commission

Texts:

John 15:5-12, Matthew 28:18-20

On my final Sunday, I preached from two passages that had been foundational to my ministry at [Church A]: the Great Commandment that tells us to love one another and the Great Commission that tells us to "go and make disciples." Our middle hymn, "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love" reinforced the Great Commandment. The service included an official order from the United Church of Christ Book of Worship for the "Ending of an Authorized Ministry." During that time, over which a denominational representative presided, I thanked the members for their love, kindness, and support over the past six years. I then formally asked for forgiveness for my mistakes and asked the congregation to release me. The congregation expressed forgiveness and asked (and received) the same from me. The congregation released me as their pastor and asked that I release them (which I did). The service concluded with the singing of a rousing song called, "Go, Make Disciples!" which we had often used over the years as a benedictory song reminding us of the Great Commission.

The Questionnaire

- 1) **Initial Feelings.** How did you feel when you first learned that Pastor S was leaving [Church A]? What feeling was strongest?
- 2) **The Seven Worship Services.** The seven worship services were designed to help bring healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
 - a. In how many of those worship services did you participate as a worshiper?
 - b. As a whole, how helpful were those services in leading you toward:
 - i. Healing
 - ii. Reconciliation
 - iii. Forgiveness
 - c. Did any services stand out in helping you find healing, forgiveness, and/or reconciliation? Please explain.
 - d. To what extent were you encouraged by the services not only to *receive* healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, but also to *be* an agent of God's healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation for others? Please explain.
- 3) **The Seven Sermons.** The seven *sermons* were also designed to help bring healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
 - a. As a whole, how helpful were those sermons in leading you toward:
 - i. Healing
 - ii. Reconciliation
 - iii. Forgiveness
 - b. Did any *sermons* stand out in helping you find healing, forgiveness, and/or reconciliation? Please explain.

- c. To what extent were you encouraged by the *sermons* not only to *receive* healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, but also to *be* an agent of God's healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation for others? Please explain.
- 4) **Now.** At this point in time, how do you feel about the longer term impact of the worship services and sermons? Do you feel more healed, forgiven, and reconciled or less in the six months or so that have passed since [Pastor S] left [Church A]? What factors have contributed to this? Please explain.

Participant's Release Form

I understand that [Pastor S] (Author) is preparing, writing, and will publish a Doctor of Ministry Project (the Work) that will explore the relationship between preaching and pastoral care as well as between corporate worship and pastoral care. Currently titled "50 Days/Seven Sundays: Offering Pastoral Care through Worship and Preaching," the Work will eventually be published by Winebrenner Theological Seminary.

In order to assist the Author in the preparation of the Work, I have agreed to complete a questionnaire and to participate in a group interview and to provide information to be used in connection with the Work, including my remarks, recollections, and reflections.

I hereby grant permission to the Author to quote or paraphrase all or any portion of my written responses in the questionnaire and my verbal responses in the group interview. Permission granted is for World rights in all languages and editions of the Work. I understand and acknowledge that the Author or Winebrenner Theological Seminary will be the sole owner of all copyright and other rights in and to the Work. I understand that the Author will take care to disguise my identity in the Work.

I acknowledge and agree that I am not entitled to receive any form of payment from the Author or Winebrenner Theological Seminary.

Agreed and confirmed:

_____ Date: _____
Signature

Name (print)

Comments:

Pastor's Letter of Release

I understand that [Pastor A] (the Author) is preparing, writing, and will publish a Doctor of Ministry Project (the Work) that will explore the relationship between preaching and pastoral care as well as between corporate worship and pastoral care. Currently titled "50 Days/Seven Sundays: Offering Pastoral Care through Worship and Preaching," the Work will eventually be published by Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I understand that an important component of the Work is the Author's analysis of the final seven worship services he led and sermons he preached at [Church A], including remarks, recollections, and reflections to be gathered from a focus group made up of 6 to 8 members of [Church A].

As the Pastor of [Church A], I hereby agree to allow the author to contact up to eight members of [Church A] for the purpose of inviting them to participate in his study. Furthermore, I hereby approve the following list of church members (and friends) he intends to contact:

[Names of seven members and one regularly attending non-member are listed.]

Moreover, I have read and approve the specific questions to be used in the questionnaire he intends to use with the focus group. I understand that I am welcome to attend the focus group interview as an observer and/or to read the transcript of the group interview.

Agreed and confirmed:

_____ Date: _____
Signature

Name (print)

Comments:

A copy of the above letter was signed and dated (March 13, 2009) by person who was serving at that time as the intentional interim pastor of Church A.

APPENDIX C
FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

Appendix C.1:

Written Responses to the Questionnaire

1) Initial Feelings. How did you feel when you first learned that Pastor S was leaving Church A? What feeling was strongest?

AA: Shocked. Disappointment.

BB: Anger, Pain—as losing a friend. Betrayal! Strongest—betrayal.

CC: When I first learned that Pastor S was leaving Church A, I was shocked! What had just happened? I couldn't believe it! I was also feeling very hurt, sad, betrayed, and angry. How could people I would have called "friends" at the time do this to him?

I would have to say that anger ended up being my strongest feeling. I just couldn't believe that the body of Christ that I was a member of could do something so horrible to a Pastor without there being some kind of prior awareness to the congregation as a whole. I also couldn't believe that whatever the issues were, that they couldn't be worked through and resolved.

I believe very few people really knew what was going on and why Pastor S was leaving. Many probably thought that he had found another "calling" at a different church when that wasn't the case at all. There are probably still many people to this day who are totally unaware of the whole truth regarding the situation at Church A and how the cards were "stacked" against Pastor S.

As I look back on it and see who actually sat on Consistory when this whole thing took place, it really makes me think that this truly was a highly orchestrated plan. It could also appear that many of those people who had "beefs" for one reason or another were asked to sit on Consistory since Church A only uses a "slate of officers" now instead of actually holding an election. Was this an effort to get the numbers they needed in order to do a dastardly deed without people knowing what was coming down the pike? I think so! It also concerns me that it takes a vote of the Congregation to "call" a Pastor to service and only a few can remove him. That just doesn't seem right!

The Consistory and Pastoral Relations Committee hid behind a veil of confidentiality. What a joke! I cannot understand how they can look at the Pastor as an "employee" instead of being our spiritual leader. Individuals were allowed to come to the Pastoral Relations Committee anonymously and lodge complaints.

If there was a problem, there should have been a face and/or name put with the issue and it should have been addressed and put to rest once and for all. However, time after time, complaints were lodged and according to meeting minutes they were resolved, only to be brought up again at a later date. It seems to me that if the problem was resolved it should have been dropped. It amazes me that minutes can show something being brought up and resolved, only to be brought up again and again. Obviously, the Pastoral Relations Committee failed miserably handling issues brought before them. If something was "resolved" then

it should not have been brought up again. There is no good reason to keep beating a dead horse!

- DD: I was stunned. The announcement was a total surprise to us. Felt some anger and sadness. Strongest feeling was surprise, as I was unaware of the circumstances.
- EE: I couldn't believe it (Maybe it could be fixed) (a misunderstanding) until I went to meeting on Monday night. Then I felt anger, along with being sad, deceived by church members, and loss of someone we had come to love.
- FF: When I first got the resignation letter I was deeply saddened. I truly enjoyed coming to worship service and felt I had learned so very much more about the Bible and Jesus' teachings since he had been our Pastor. I thought that perhaps they had been called to serve at a Church much closer to New York where the kids were at and I could understand them wanting to be closer to those kids. Then when I learned what had actually transpired I was angry, extremely angry. We had a vote to accept Pastor S as our Pastor and I felt we should have had a vote on whether or not he remained our Pastor. I talked with other early morning members who felt the same way that I did. So I made a call to [one of the persons in leadership at Church A] and basically was told the job had changed, there was nothing that I could do to change the decision, that we didn't get to vote on this because that isn't what is listed in the Church bylaws (which I told her were wrong) and basically told that I could join a committee. Why would I do that? The committees over at Church A are made up of people that are not going to listen anyway. They had their mind made up and nothing anyone was going to say would change that. This happened at the same time that I was experiencing troubles at my job where I had been 15 years and in this industry for over 30 years. I was being told the "job changed" and I couldn't do anything to suit the team leaders/managers who were running my office. Basically when then want to get rid of you they find a way and no matter how hard you try or do what they want you to do, they find something else to complain about.
- GG: When I initially heard that Pastor S was leaving Church A I felt shock, confusion and total disbelief. The feeling that was strongest for me was confusion - I didn't understand why.

2) The Seven Worship Services. The seven worship services were designed to help bring healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

a) In how many of those worship services did you participate as a worshiper?

AA: All seven.

BB: 3 or 4

- CC: If my memory serves me correctly, I believe I attended at least six of the seven Sunday worship services designed to bring healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
- DD: I believe we were present for all seven services.
- EE: I think all of them (not positive).
- FF: I attended all 7 of those worship services. I always tried to attend every worship service unless I was unable to get there due to a broken ankle or picking up the boy scouts from an event. I never wanted to miss a Sunday.
- GG: I participated in all seven of the worship services.

b) As a whole, how helpful were those services in leading you forward toward:

i. Healing

- AA: [no response]
- BB: -as in a broken bone that is not set right
-as in a relationship where trust is broken and not rebuilt
- CC: [no response—see below]
- DD: Not very healing for me, because I was learning from, and enjoying the Sermons, knowing that they would quickly come to an end. I thought Pastor S exhibited a lot of poise and grace, in a valiant effort to heal our congregation.
- EE: As a whole in the beginning, it wasn't easy to think about healing, it helped to hear the sermons, but after church the other feelings would return.
- FF: I basically knew that I had to let go of the frustration and anger I was feeling since this happened. I knew I had to change my attitude and to act how God would want me to act even though I disagreed with what had transpired. This was not at all easy for me. I was dealing with the same type of issues at work as I was with what was happening at Church. I listened to the sermons and the music and knew that the answers were in God's word. In each of the following sermons I tried to pick out the messages of healing and forgiveness and letting go of the anger and frustration I felt. Grace be With You, Worthy is the Lamb who was Slain, How Can We Sing the Lord's Song, A Healing Balm and the Great Commandment & Great Commission.
- GG: I knew that healing was important, and the services were somewhat helpful in leading me toward healing. For me, the services brought things immediately into a focus, even though I continued to feel confusion inside. The services provided me

a way to actively move forward with the others in the congregation. At that time, I felt an openness with all in the congregation, where we could share with each other and not have to hold feelings and thoughts inside. The services brought the necessity of healing to all of us - but I came to find out that we each heal in our own time, and in our own way. Initially, the services made it easier for me to be open to hearing all points of view, but that feeling did not last after Pastor S's final Sunday. Once reality set in - and Pastor S was gone, healing became harder for me.

ii. Reconciliation

AA: [no response]

BB: No

CC: [no response—see below]

DD: By the end of the seven sermons, I felt somewhat reconciled. I feel that I became more "God" focused, than focused on a brick and mortar church building. I believe God has a reason for everything, and "reconciled" myself to find out what his PLANS were for Church A.

Was this a test of our Congregation, a test of my commitment, or a mistake by the leaders of our church? Only time will tell.

EE: At this point—no way, I thought about what I was going to lose, and whether I would be able to continue to walk with God, without you.

FF: [no response—see below]

GG: Looking at reconciliation from the viewpoint of restoring the congregation, the services were not so helpful as I would have liked them to be. For me, reconciliation is a process - and all people need to want things restored, and in a state of harmony. Rather than promote reconciliation, I felt more of a feeling of the congregation being split. During a worship service we all were together for a common purpose, but away from the service, I felt all of us wanted peace and harmony, but none of us knew what to do. With no consistent leadership, it became easier to bury the issues, as if nothing had happened than to try to work together to promote harmony.

iii. Forgiveness:

AA: I can forgive to some extent, but not fully.

BB: It is very hard to look at those people and see Christ. Some of them, yes. "Forgive" is Christ's command. To do is hard. To do we must!

CC: Overall, I feel that the services were very helpful in leading me toward healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Although, at that very moment, I may not have been totally ready to receive it because the initial feelings were still very “raw”, but it did start the process and gave me guidance, courage, and strength as well. I saw immense courage and strength in the way that Pastor S picked himself up by the bootstraps and faced each of the people and the seven Sundays ahead of him. I do not believe that I could not have done the same. He showed his strong convictions toward his beliefs and strength in the way he handled the entire situation, week after week, head held high. WOW!! What an amazing man to have handled that situation with such grace and integrity!! That is truly the sign of a great leader!!

I felt that those instances where “hands-on” actions were taken were the most beneficial, especially the Sunday where people were asked to sacrifice things at the altar. Although I did not personally offer up anything that day, I could relate very well to the concept. I found that using the shredder was a very good example and even though I was not ready that day to participate, I was able to do that on my own at a later date using my personal shredder at home. It was a good lesson in letting go of those things that can hurt us and giving it up to God.

Another service that was also very meaningful was the healing service where members were invited to approach the altar and receive a blessing and the anointing of oil. I have always enjoyed those services and have participated in many of them especially prior to a surgery I had several years ago. That is truly a “healing” moment where you offer it up to God!

The song “Prayer of St. Francis” that [Member KK] sang that day was very appropriate comparing its words to the situation at hand. Its wording held a huge parallel to the situation. Great selection! The line “Where there is hatred, let me sow love” ... comes to mind now which also makes me think of the first service in the series of seven in which it was referenced about “putting on love” such as we dress ourselves each and every day. We should love one another which also lead me to something I say so often. Why can’t we all just get along!?! The world would be a much better place to live!

The final service titled “Farewell and Official Release” allowed for the reconciliation process with the use of the “official order” from the United Church of Christ Book of Worship for the “Ending of an Authorized Ministry” which was administered by a representative of Northwest Ohio Association of the United Church of Christ. To actively participate in that “release” gave all of us in the congregation an important role by speaking the words of the “official order of release”, however, I sincerely hope that the leadership of Church A truly meant every word that they recited. Too many times I think that people just say or read the words and don’t respect the true meaning behind them. They just go through the motions. The service definitely reinforced the two messages that were integral to Pastor S’s ministry at Church A. It tied together the “Great Commandment” telling us to love one another by using the hymn “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love” and the “Great Commission” by singing of the song “Go, Make Disciples!” The song is wonderfully, uplifting and truly gives the responsibility of making disciples to the congregation as a whole. It is not and

should not be solely the Pastor's responsibility to do that --- it is up to each and every member of the congregation to make disciples!

I think everything that was presented during the last seven Sunday services was geared toward starting the process of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation in many, many ways. I believe the seeds were planted with positive guidance sending them in the right direction, but my concern lies with the leadership of the church and how they choose to run the church. My main concern is that they operate the church via a "business" approach instead of something that is scripturally and spiritually based. Where is God in the running of the church?

I have a life history at Church A. I was born, raised, and confirmed there, however, this incident has caused me to re-examine if and why I should continue to remain an active member there. I, for one, had recently started growing in my faith. I have a long, long way to go, but believe I am headed in the right direction. With the help of some very special friends, I hope to continue learning about my faith and the Bible through the study of scripture. It is a very difficult and personal journey for me for many reasons and will continue to be somewhat hard for me as I cannot "talk" about my faith or easily put into words what it means. I am still learning.

Over the years, I have felt many things there at Church A and I have stayed on and continued to be a part of it because I thought that it was what I was supposed to do. The most significant thing I felt while at Church A was being judged for anything and everything I did there and shamed into doing things that I didn't really "feel" like I was ready to do at the time. I did it because that was the way it had always been done or because someone else wanted me to do it. All because I didn't have a close relationship with God in order to ask Him what He wanted me to do and not to make waves where family was concerned. This incident has caused me to grow stronger and gain courage to take a stand for what I feel is right and I feel better overall for it.

Since Pastor S's leaving, part of me wanted to stay at the church and see what direction they were heading because of my life history in the church, however, the other part of me could not stand beside those people who called themselves Christians yet would turn on their "spiritual leader" because they didn't get their way. It's very hard to walk away, but IT IS NOT ABOUT US!! Many of the people there just don't "get it". It's NOT about US! It is supposed to be about GOD!! Instead, it's all about them and what they want when it should be about God and what He wants for us.

I believe that the leadership there at Church A should set a positive example as should the current Interim Pastor. Unfortunately, their insensitivity toward those of us who were hurt by this entire process speaks volumes and the fact that those of us who have decided to leave or choose to go elsewhere continue to be the target of articles in "The Echo" stating that we can run, but we can't hide shows me that they don't care about anyone but themselves. They don't get it! Where is the love and compassion? Did they hear about "putting on love"?

Absolutely no amount of ridicule or shame tactics will ever get those of us who were hurt by what happened and have chosen to leave to come back. It just makes matters increasingly worse as they pour salt into open wounds. It makes

the angriness grow. They got what they wanted and now they need to let it go and try to re-group and re-build with what they have left instead of worrying about those of us who have left ever coming back and what is happening at neighboring churches. They need to mind their own business. At this point in time, I have no desire to go back.

It is apparent to me that they don't care about anything but what they want and they did what they had to do to get it. More than likely, they will continue to do that in the future. What is "Christian" about that? It appears that they think the "do good" mentality will get them everything they could ever need. How shallow is that thinking?

In light of that, I have decided to look elsewhere and seek out other places of worship and fellowship. As of right now, I have given myself permission to leave and realized that Church A is just a building. I don't need to be there to have a relationship with God and there are other places to worship and enjoy discipleship with people of true faith.

I have experienced great healing by removing myself from the negative environment that existed in Church A and I am involving myself in more positive surroundings that include positive people with positive attitudes and influences. I choose not to be involved with or have anything to do with the ministry at Church A at this time. I will not allow anyone there hurt me in any way any longer. Challenges abound all around us and I have found that the personal business that I lost over this has allowed me to gain new friends and new clients.

I also believe that there are many ways to heal and I have found that I have many friends who are also in the same boat as I. Together we share that bond and at some point in the future we will discover the road God chooses for each of us to travel remembering that we need to simply follow Him. Right now I am content knowing that I have good friends who are not quick to judge.

- DD: God forgives me. How can I not forgive others? While still upset after nearly a year, there is no one to forgive, just a hope and a prayer that all parties involved can move forward, and learn from this experience.
- EE: Still working on it.
- FF: The sermon *How Can We Sing the Lord's Song?* helped me realize that though things were dark now there is something better waiting for each of us in the future. I just had to have the faith to believe things would work out no matter what happens. The sermon "A Healing Balm" really got to me. This is when I felt that I finally let go of some of the anger and frustration that I had been carrying with me. I felt that I had come thru the grieving process and turned the corner. I felt much, much better after this service. And then the sermon the Great commandment and the Great Commission – I felt that I have a job to do and that is sharing God's love not only by words but by actions. Sometimes a smile or a kind word or opening up a door for someone makes their day better. My thoughts and attitude has to be to continue what I learned from my Pastor and God's word now and in the future.

GG: Initially I thought I could forgive, and I thought the services made the need to forgive each other clear. But forgiveness is hard! I was able to shred my feelings of dislike for the church leaders, and for the way Pastor S's dismissal came about. Again, hearing about this during services, and actively ridding myself of the sinful thoughts was a good start. But once Pastor S was gone, the situation was really not openly talked about, and forgiveness became harder. I do realize that time is a healer. And, with God's help, and with time, forgiveness has become easier. I wonder now, if Pastor S had not planted the seeds for the importance of forgiving, if I would be able to. Although I can forgive, I also feel that the leadership thinks they did nothing that needs forgiveness. So, even on the issue of forgiveness, the congregation seems split today.

c) Did any services stand out in helping you find healing, forgiveness, and/or reconciliation? Please explain.

AA: [no response]

BB: Mostly time is healing. The new pastor wants us to join. I cannot yet. I cannot trust them.

CC: [see above]

DD: I thought all seven services were very good. While none of the services made me feel good about Pastor S's departure, I was more prepared for the final parting. I remember praying daily for our church (still do) and praying for Pastor S and [his wife], and that the will of God would prevail.

EE: I was impressed with all the sermons, and the message behind them. I guess the last one touched my heart the most: "Go and make disciples" and I like the sermon about putting on love like clothing.

FF: I think all 7 had some aspect of healing and forgiveness. Again I have to say the sermons *How Can we Sing the Lord's Song?* and the Healing Service really seemed to help me let go and look forward to what God had in store for all of us.

GG: Two services stand out for me in the process of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. The first one was June 22, where we were all given the opportunity to shred our feelings. To actively engage in not just writing down my feelings, but also to destroy those feelings was powerful, and cleansing. I don't remember what I wrote, but I do remember feeling the weight lifted off my shoulders when those feelings were torn to shreds.

The other service that helped me was the last one, July 27, when we released Pastor S from being our pastor. That service reminded me of our focus: we need to be about God, and go about God's business and continue to make disciples. For me, that service closed the door on this chapter of my church life -

and usually when one door closes, God opens another. When? In God's time! I am still waiting!

d) To what extent were you encouraged by the services not only to receive healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, but also to be an agent of God's healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation for others? Please explain.

AA: [no response]

BB: That is because of who God is and of what Christ's Death on the cross means . . . eventually . . . the example you (Pastor S) have set forth, the rest us of (me) can actually see the healing and forgiveness.

CC: [see above]

DD: As a new member of [Church A] the easier course to take would be to just walk away, find another church, or several other churches. Especially when the main reason for joining this church, was being taken away.

The "Seven Services" encouraged me to stand by my commitment not only to God, but to His church [at Church A]. I've worked on committees, lead a small study group, and offered to serve on a pastoral search committee. If not for the "seven services" I would have probably just moved on. Being new, and not knowing very many in the Congregation, I do not feel I was an agent of forgiveness, healing, or reconciliation to others.

EE: I was encouraged by you, the last seven sermons had to be very hard for you, but still you preached on forgiveness, over & over, to all of us, even the ones who had turned on you, you preached love. You showed God's Love.

FF: That I had to let go and let God help me get through these troubled times and just keep praying and having faith. I wasn't alone going thru this same struggle. What doors have opened up for me since I put my troubles in God's hands? I have shared my journey to my new job with one of my co workers and they told me about their journey to their new job. In both of us, we put the matter in God's hands and look how much better we are now. Prayer does work.

GG: I felt very encouraged initially to move forward - and to help others do so. I became a listener, hearing both positive and negative comments.

Perhaps the services had given me a positive boost - a 'we can get through this' feeling. I expected things to get better - to have the church (the people) reconciled, but it didn't happen. I tried to phone people and share. That, however didn't seem to be enough. Communication within the church seemed to fall apart. My high expectations never seemed to gel. At this point, it became harder to reach out to others. And, those who reached out to be a listener for me were so few. I truly believe we all wanted to receive and be agents of God's healing, forgiveness,

and reconciliation, but with no strong leadership, no one knew what to do, and our small efforts were feeble.

3) The Seven Sermons. The seven sermons were also designed to help bring healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

a. As a whole, how helpful were those sermons in leading you toward:

i. Healing

AA: [no response]

BB: The sermons as per *standard* were excellent!

CC: [no response—see below]

DD: [no response—see below]

EE: At this point, as a whole, yes, I've had healing. I'm still working on it.

FF: I feel they were very helpful. We were going thru a very dark time. Listening to God's words was comforting to me. I tried to pick out something from each sermon to help me change my attitude towards that had happened at Church as well as in my job. I knew that God had something else planned for me as well as all of us.

GG: [no response—see below]

ii. Forgiveness

AA: [no response]

BB: My inner self, because of the anger, hurt, betrayal . . . couldn't accept at the time, any of these things.

CC: [no response—see below]

DD: [no response—see below]

EE: I was so impressed by your forgiveness, that the sermons were full of forgiveness, it was able to help me which I didn't think I would be able to do.

FF: I knew that I had to let go of the anger and forgive because that is the only way I was going to heal from all this. I really like the idea of the paper shredder we used at the June 22, 2008 service. I wrote down the things that were bugging me and watched the shredder destroy my list. Now it was up to me to think positive

thoughts not the helpless ones that were bringing me down. Again, I had to let go and let God.

GG: [no response—see below]

iii. Reconciliation

AA: [no response]

BB: As time passes/can begin to heal, forgive, and *maybe* reconcile.

CC: In view of the “instructions” where it explains the differences in the two sections of questions, I feel that I would have to answer the same for both sections. Also, considering that I cannot remember exactly what was said during those sermons and given the amount of time that has lapsed since their deliverance, except for the brief reviews that were given, I would have to say that I have the same feelings for both sets of questions.

DD: My response is basically the same to this question as in question 2 -b. While I enjoy every aspect of the services, to me the heart of a church service is the sermon. The hymns and scriptures enhanced the sermons.

EE: I don’t know on this one. I think I’ve come a long way with your help and God’s, of course (But I don’t know).

FF: The June 29, 2008 sermon: *Grace be with You*. Continue God’s work in prayer and in thanksgiving. And again, the sermon on July 13, 2008: *How Can we Sing the Lords Song?*, the July 20, 2008 service: *A Healing Balm* and the July 27, 2008 sermon: *The Great commandment and the Great Commission*. Again, I have learned so very much over the past 6 years. Just because the leaders at Church A or my former bosses acted and treated me the way that they did, I am still a better person for coming thru this and knowing there is something better for me out there.

GG: It is hard for me to differentiate these three categories with the seven sermons. For all three I would have to say that the sermons provided a focal point for all of us. If anything, the seven sermons were so well done, and so meaningful that I personally marveled at how Pastor S was able to put aside his own feelings of hurt, and present sermons meant to help all of us! That is the mark of a true shepherd! The sermon is one part of the actual service for me, so this is hard to answer.

b) Did any sermons stand out in helping you find healing, forgiveness, and /or reconciliation? Please explain.

AA: [no response]

BB: [no response]

CC: [see above]

DD: The first of the "Seven Sermons" about putting on Love was important to me, as I wasn't feeling a lot of love toward our church leaders at that point. The healing service of July 20th was important to me also. Being anointed with oil had a big impact on me.

EE: Once again the last sermon, touch my heart the most, you were strong, it showed in the sermon. You wore love, you showed you were a true Christian full of forgiveness, I was very proud to call you Pastor.

FF: Yes – I loved that healing service that was done on July 27, 2008. I came away from that feeling so much better than I had for awhile. I knew no matter what transpired that God would show me the way and all I had to do is trust him.

GG: The sermon, *A Healing Balm*, on July 20 stands out for me. Hearing how people who were sick could receive a healing balm while being prayed over was calming. Then, to actively participate in receiving the healing oil was special. I was one of the people who helped at that service, so I not only received the oil, but also felt like I was being an agent in helping others.

The sermon, *Sacrifice at the Altar* on June 22 stands out as well. Again, this was a way for me to connect the sermon with action. To hear about altar sacrifices and then to be able to put thoughts in my mind 'to death' made a solid connection for me. Also having time to meditate as other people participated was helpful, as I was able to allow God's presence to calm my heart and soul.

c) To what extent were you encouraged by the sermons not only to receive healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, but also to be an agent of God's healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation for others? Please explain.

AA: [no response]

BB: [no response]

CC: [see above]

DD: Response would be the same as response to 2-d.

EE: To the extent that when I run into someone whom I know was part of the group, I can put on God's love and be kind and not lash out in anger for what they were part of.

- FF: I have shared my experiences not only with some of my church members but also with my former co-workers on how prayer power worked for me. It has helped me to move on and not dwell in the way I was treated at my former employer and that though they are also going thru some hard times, there is a better life ahead for everyone after working at this company. There is a power that comes from prayer and prayers are answered. It is a journey of learning and letting go.
- GG: See comments above. Perhaps the sermons and services that were the most helpful to me were the ones where I was actively involved - putting thoughts 'to death', receiving healing balm, and verbally releasing Pastor S from his pastoral role at Church A. They were all excellent starting points for me, in my own personal healing, as well as being able to listen to others as we shared together. Together the sermons and services provided me with initial feelings of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation so I could in turn be receptive to others. Yet division within the church family already seemed to be in place. Although I felt like I reached out, it was not reciprocated.

4. The Longer-term impact:

- AA: All of Pastor S's sermons are interesting and have helped me to understand the ways of the Lord.
- BB: [Pastor S], as a pastor, you went further than I have seen anyone go to be "Christian." You are, and I'm not trying to "brown nose," a very good and a very stellar example of how to act, conduct business, and be a Christian during a situation like that. You are an example I would pattern myself after, encourage my children to follow. To say, "Hey, come listen to this man—he speaks the truth."
- Now, you must understand that every time I have become friends with a pastor they suddenly leave. This is no exception. The manner in which your termination was conducted did not help endear me to the congregation. I hope we can stay in touch after you've moved back "east."
- Do not give up hope, for what you are doing is very important.
- CC: At this point in time, I feel that I have continued to heal and grow and have turned my focus elsewhere to find a more positive influence in my life. This change has also allowed me a "break" from the pressures of family. The more time that passes, the better I feel. However, I do not see that as the same path for [Church A] as a whole. I feel that even though the seeds were planted, they have shown their true colors. Church A was growing through the ministry of [Pastor S], but that has come to a screeching halt.
- I believe they will revert back to a stagnant church. They have already started. I think they feel that this will all just disappear with time and maybe it will. The people will get comfortable once again with their "lazy religion" and they will slide backwards into that simple, "feel good" place again. There will be no spiritual challenges and things will once again lack true meaning as it did years

ago with the long seeded reign of Pastors past. I mean no personal disrespect to those Pastors, and even though we had some “fun”, I now question the impact of their ministry on my personal life versus the impact it could have had if it were more scripturally and spiritually based. The leadership has crossed their arms and stood their ground as if they have done nothing wrong. They are choosing to do what they want, if and when they want to do it.

I met with the current Interim Pastor. I understand that the he is presenting training sessions geared with a certain purpose and that the leadership is “required” to attend these sessions. I told him that I knew the people involved. I have grown up through the years with most of the people there and have many years of life experience with them and that it was my belief that his training was going to be a waste of time.

I believe that they already have a plan. The leadership will more than likely be “going through the motions” trying to make him believe they are truly interested only because they are told they have to do this before they can move on with the search process. In other words, they may be thinking, let’s get this part done quickly so we can move on.

I told him that when all is said and done, they will do whatever they want regardless of his training efforts. I have a gut feeling that they already know what is going to transpire and it was part of a carefully orchestrated plan. Based on my life experience with that church and its people, I doubt their thinking will change. To them, it truly is all about them and what they want, and NOT ABOUT GOD! How selfish and how sad to think that God plays such a small role in the life and journey of that church!

S made great strides in changing the outlook and direction of Church A, but it appears that the leadership got scared and decided to go back to the less challenging, feel good ministry of an era gone by.

DD: Because of the "Seven Services" I still feel committed to see this process through. I feel Pastor S worked hard to heal and reconcile this church, and if I give up on it, it would negate those efforts. I still think God has a plan, and I am receptive to it. Time heals all wounds.

EE: I have to admit; at the start of all the upheaval it was terrible. *What was I gonna do?* That question went through my head a lot. I was pretty much the one who was gonna be lost. It took a long time before I could understand *it wasn't about me*. That was a light bulb moment for me. The sermons helped me to understand where you were coming from, the kind of person you were. You put yourself in the sermons, that projected onto me & others I’m sure. The love, kindness, healing & forgiveness all come through you and your sermons. Jesus said on the cross, “Forgive them Father they know not what they do (I know that’s not word for word). Maybe that’s how we should think when people do so wrong to one another in many situations. Bless you for being the person you are, and helping me to see things more clearly.

With Love, EE

Thank you for helping me to heal and to forgive and I'll have to keep working on it.

FF: Myself, I feel that I have not only healed but grown more spiritually. The day that I got pastor S's resignation letter I had run into him up at the Farmers Market in [town]. I expressed my sorrow in his leaving and wondered where he was going and what he would do. Pastor S told me that though we didn't know at that point in time but that it was a leap of faith. I have held onto those words as I continued thru the rough times at my former employer and continued praying. My prayers were answered and I was able to obtain a wonderful job doing what I have done for years but working from home. I had believed that there was something better waiting for me as Pastor conveyed in his sermon, *How Can We Sing the Lord's song?* I think by letting go of the resentment I felt at the leaders of [Church A] and my former managers that I was able to heal and move on to a better and healthier life. I feel much better. My blood pressure which had been in stroke range, is now down to a reasonable range. I attribute this to letting go and letting God work in my life. I think that the sermons that Pastor S gave helped me thru this journey to a happier and healthier life. Thank you Pastor S!

GG: Reflecting on the services/sermons now, it is hard to know the lasting impact. Even though I truly believe everyone in the congregation wanted healing, forgiveness and reconciliation to occur, without consistent pastoral leadership to hold things together, church life for me became difficult! In fact, no matter who was in the pulpit, be it pulpit supply or the current intentional interim, everyone spoke about healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, and I actually felt I was hearing 'over-kill!' Everyone would just 'talk' about it, but nothing (in my own mind) was being actively 'done' about it.

Communication became a major problem. Without communication, I felt disconnected - like no one cared. And without communication, I began to feel like I didn't know what was happening. I attended Consistory meetings (as a visitor), in hopes of learning what was going on in the church, and in an attempt to show leadership that I could be present with them, and respect their viewpoints. I wanted to learn about the progress in finding an intentional interim, as again, my hopes and expectations were high! But three long months passed before things were in place. In that time, much changed. In my opinion, the church leadership were going on with the church life, without seeming to realize that many others were hurting. And, no one talked about Pastor S. I needed to do that yet.

I chose to separate myself from Church A and attend [another church in the same town], where I was able to 'worship' and have my hurting soul be nurtured by a caring female pastor. When I went back to Church A, I was always greeted warmly but mostly because I was the one initiating conversation. When the intentional interim arrived, again, I was full of high hopes! I naively thought that everything would be better! Instead, for me, things became worse! Although I feel that the interim is a man of God, his approach to the situation is not one I gravitate to easily. He seems comfortable with sermons on Christian living principles, and that left my soul empty.

In total hindsight, I am learning much more about myself in worship! I am learning that there are different styles of leading a worship service. I know I thrive on Scripture and the Word. I thrive on Bible study and time in prayer. Those are the elements which are important to me in continuing to grow in my relationship with the Lord. I am now learning to listen to what God is calling me to do more than ever before. I trust Him to lead me to where my spirit and soul will be fed.

All in all, I do feel more healed, forgiven and reconciled now. If it is because of those services/sermons, from seeds planted during those services/sermons or from time, I am not sure. More importantly, I feel more sure of myself, and what I need in my spiritual life to worship our awesome God with all the glory and honor He deserves! I need to be with a fellowship of believers, who share a desire to grow in their faith. I need to be in a place where God's Word has a prominent part in the service. But most of all, I need to be where I can bask in God's glory and not feel condemnation from others.

My options right now are still open. Although I am not being called to attend Church A right now, I know it is still evolving. Whether it will continue to be my permanent church home, I can't say. The direction it may take may be a direction that isn't where God wants me to be. I have not given up on church at all. I am finding places to continue to grow in my spiritual relationship with the Lord.

**Appendix C.2:
Group Interview Transcript
April 19, 2009**

Int.: All right, it is Sunday, April 19, [2009] and we're gathered here for our group interview. I'd like to begin by going around having each person introduce himself and then I will explain what we're doing today.
I'm Pastor S and I'm conducting the group interview.

[Each of the seven interviewees introduces himself or herself.]

Int.: Very Good. All of you have turned in the questionnaire that I sent you a few weeks ago.

I'd like to look at that partly as a warm-up for what we're doing today.

I was able to look through what everybody had written and what came through the strongest was feelings—especially the feelings you had when you first found out I was leaving as well as feelings you have now about how things are being handled now at Church A. That is important and I'm glad this gave you an opportunity to give voice to those feelings.

For this project, it will be more important for me to focus on the worship services and how you saw God working through them in your life and in the life of the community.

Several of you, when you came to the part of the questionnaire that asks about where you found healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation said you had a hard time differentiating those concerns and identifying specific acts in worship or specific worship services. Some of you also indicated that you had a hard time delineating between how you were affected by the worship from how you were affected by the sermons and said you were going to write about those things all together because they were all mixed together for you. This is probably normal. This is one of the things I'm learning.

So what I'd like to begin by reading again the summaries of those different services to help you recall some of the specifics of what you experienced those seven Sundays. As I read, please reflect on how, through these sermons and services, you felt God was close to you or working in you or working in other people.

I have given you copies of your questionnaires so that if you want to refer to what you wrote in the questionnaire you have that option. No one has to speak if they don't want to. Nobody has to read what they wrote and nobody has to know what anyone else wrote.

I will be recording this group interview. Later I will type a transcript of our conversation today. I'm recording you so that if you say something I may want to quote in my project I will have an accurate recording of what you said.

Again, our concern is not with decisions of the leadership at Church A, but with your experience during the seven worship services last June and July and how you saw God working through them in your life then and now.

Let me begin by reading about the first sermon and service of that series of seven.

Worship Service 1: June 15, 2008: The Announcement

Int.: This was [June 15] the first worship service after I turned in my resignation. In the first half of the service during the announcement time I took about ten minutes to announce my resignation to the congregation and explain what had happened over the past week. In the sermon, which was a continuation of a series in Colossians, I talked about the importance of the daily habit of “putting on love” in much the manner [that] we daily put on clothing. One of our hymns that Sunday was a “song of lament” from the Iona Community called, “O God, My God” [and you might remember it went like this (sings): “Oh God, my God, what dah dah dah...”]

So, was there anything specific where you felt God or experienced God or saw what God was doing through that service?

EE: I just felt that it was aptly put—that you make an effort to “put love on.” I guess I took it literally: you put your clothes on, so therefore you can put love on whether you necessarily at the time feel like it. You would still do that; you would still *need* to do that.

Int.: So did any of you mentally visualize how you would “put on” love?

[No verbal response. 3 participants nodded their heads.]

Int.: Is there anything else? About that service? Or that hymn? Or anything else? Did that hymn give expression to what you were feeling in a way that you could say it to God?

DD: I think that the announcement at that service for me finalized the fact that you *were* leaving. Prior to that (I won’t say rumors or nothing) but I guess it didn’t quite sink in until you were up front and announced your resignation. That’s the service when it finally sunk in.

EE: I agree

GG: I agree with that, also.

CC: It kind of really made it “official.”

CC: I agree. Maybe up until that point I felt it wasn’t really happening.

Int.: Should I go on to the next one? [Nods of yes]

Worship Service 2: June 22, 2008: The Sacrifice

Int.: The second service was June 22: the Sacrifice at the altar. The sermon was entitled, *A Time to Kill*. The texts were Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and Colossians 3:1-11.

Moving from the famous passage from Ecclesiastes about there being a time and a season for everything under the sun (including a time to “kill”) I related it to the Colossians passage that talks about having to “take off” the filthy clothes of sin and sacrificing (or putting to death) those sinful things to God. At the end of the service, each person was given an opportunity to come to the altar and to “put to death” or “sacrifice” something before God. The following notice appeared on the back of the bulletin that day:

Today in worship we will be invited to worship God by sacrificing something to God on the altar. Worship is sacrifice. Worship is laying down something valuable to us (our time, our treasures, our sins, our hearts, our lives) as a way of showing God that *He* is far *more* valuable to us. Some people may have brought something with them today that they will lay on the altar as an act of worship. For those who may not have a physical object to “sacrifice” but nevertheless want to present something today, blank sheets of paper are provided in this bulletin. They may be used for writing sins, grievances, grudges, preferences, or anything else we may feel moved to “sacrifice” to God on the altar today. A paper shredder is available for making the sacrifice.

I had announced it the week before and let people know that if they wanted to bring something, but I didn’t find anything on the altar afterwards, so I don’t think anyone actually had an object to bring. I don’t know how many people wrote something beforehand or how many people used the time in the service to do that.

Again, nobody *has* to, but I’d like to go around the table now and give each person a chance to say, if they remember, whether they wrote something down that day to bring forward and sacrifice at the altar.

GG: I do remember that I wrote something. What I wrote I’m sure was probably more feeling based. And it was a *good* feeling for me to be able to get rid of those feelings. I recall very distinctly the sound of that shredder during the service. I’m not sure it was a *healing* sound, but it was a “getting rid of” sound, like you really could get rid of thoughts that were going through your mind.

FF: I did write something during the service on a piece on my little piece of paper and I did go up and shred it, but mine was more about getting rid of the anger.

EE: Well, the Sunday before about the “putting on love.” But then as you go through the week you’re thinking about things and it’s all ...

FF: Building back up?

EE: ...building back up again, so it’s like you’re starting over. And I really don’t know if at that Sunday I was ready to get rid of it. I mean, I wanted to, but I don’t know if I was ready to because it was so upsetting and I was angry and

disappointed. It was feelings that I had and I just wasn't sure that I was ready to be done with it.

Int.: Can I ask, did you do it, whether you were ready or not?

EE: I don't remember if I did or not.

DD: I remember writing on a blank piece of paper what my thoughts were that I really wanted to get rid of. I kind of agree with you that you know you need to purge those, but at the same time you're not quite ready yet.

GG: Maybe when you have an opportunity to shred those thoughts it's an *initial* thing, but this whole healing thing is a process. And you have to start with one layer and work down and work down and work down.

DD: ...as a layer comes off...

GG: ...as a layer comes off there still is a layer there.

DD: You deal with the next layer.

GG: Yes—and that you said very well, EE.

Int.: I so much want to comment and say, “Good,” but I'm trying not to because it's my purpose now to hear what you have to say. In fact, I want to tell you what I wrote, but I'll do that after we're done with the thing if you remind me. And afterwards I share with you and any family members that are here what is going on [with my search process].

CC: I kind of feel the same way that EE did and I personally did not offer anything up that day. But the concept was there and I understood that part of it and was able to do that later at home using my own shredder.

BB: That's cool.

CC: I think it was a good lesson in turning things over to God.

Others: Yeah.

BB: I became more guarded at that point. When I first learned what was going on, I made a bunch of phone calls to find out why and nobody would say anything. Hence I had a lot of guardedness there. And some real anger that we had to deal with. I didn't offer anything up to be shredded because I didn't know at that time who to trust or who to even shake hands with. When you have snakes in the woodpile you usually go and get a bigger stick and try to get the snakes out. And as far as I can see, even at this time the snakes haven't been routed out of the

woodpile. If I go back further in my history with what I did in the questionnaire, I've gone through several 12-step programs: Emotions anonymous, adult children of alcoholics, and al-anon. And a lot of the things that I saw there were flaming alcoholics, but being a part of those programs I've learned that you can't accuse or point out that those are their problems. You have to let them [come to that on their own] and let them heal that way. That was one of the three or four [services] that we did make. We didn't make the first one. Once you've begun to be guarded, it's really hard to lower the guard.

AA: I don't think I offered anything then. I was just in shock and disappointed. I didn't feel I was ready to offer anything at that point.

Int.: Thank you for sharing. I'm glad people have jumped in. If you want to [affirm] something someone else has said, go ahead. There is Irish soda bread and chilled filtered water for you if you'd like.

Worship Service 3: June 29, 2008: The Blessing

Int.: The third service was June 29, 2008: Grace is Extended. The sermon was entitled, *Grace be with You*. The text was Colossians 4:1-18.

In the fourth and final chapter of Colossians Paul gets very personal. Though the names are hard to pronounce and not very familiar to us, each one was important to Paul and had had a role to play in his ministry at Colossae. The blessing, "grace be with you" was not just a generic religious platitude, but a very real blessing by Paul to very real persons. We sang a hymn for healing called, "Out of the depths, O God, We Call" (hymn # 554). [Interviewer sings a little bit of the song]. Does anyone remember this particular service?

CC: I think I missed one week and that was the one.

GG: Maybe we were focused on all those [strange] names.

[Laughter]

Int.: To do seven services and have every one of them really hit a new point... That one didn't connect with people as much. That's okay.

Worship Service 4: July 6, 2008: The Lord's Supper

Int.: The fourth service was July 6, 2008: The Feast of the Lamb. The sermon was entitled, *Worthy is the Lamb Who was Slain*. The text was Revelation 5:1-14.

Using the idea of a graphic novel, in this sermon I talked about the "surprise effect" of all the build-up in Revelation 5 to the appearance of the

powerful Lion of Judah. When the worthy one appeared, at first he seemed to be a big disappointment: just a small, helpless, mortally wounded lamb. But he was a surprisingly powerful, victorious hero after all. As we shared that day in the Lord's Supper I talked about how Jesus' sacrifice initially *seemed* to be a sign of great weakness and vulnerability, but turned out to be a great victory. I invited people to participate in the supper as a way of identifying with the Lamb who was slain.

Did anyone connect communion in a new way through that sermon or that service? In a way Jesus' death seems like weakness, but there is great power in it. And so somehow sharing in the Lord's Supper connects the paradox of the strength and the weakness of God. Did any of you see communion in a different way through that?

DD: I just remember it being a very good sermon. At the time I don't think I connected it too well with the seven-week program of healing and reconciliation. It was just a really good service that I enjoyed that day.

EE: I think all the services had a lot of connection for me because it seemed like, here we were—we were all hurt—we were all angry—we were all upset—but there you were and you were up there telling us “This is what you need to do and get past it. You heal and you love.” And actually you are the one who was wounded the most—you were cut right down. So here you are trying to get this all across to us so we would feel better. And then with communion it's just reaffirming...and that's how I thought about it because I thought, here you are putting this all out for us and we were feeling bad for ourselves. Of course we were feeling bad for you, but you were the leader and you were, you know, being tough about it and all that and that alone really impressed me, I mean, with the faith that you have that you knew everything was going to be okay. We had to know that. You had to impress that upon us—that we'll work through this. That just really got to me.

GG: I think throughout all of those services. It's easy to say that was an excellent sermon and you don't often hear about Revelation, so it was really good in that respect, but as EE was saying, you were a model. And you served as a model the entire time. And hard though it may have been for us, it had to have been equally hard for you, but your model of ... you can go through each service of putting on love, of sharing communion at a communion table where everyone is welcomed and everyone is present—that idea spoke volumes of your faith.

EE: And he did continue to welcome everyone...

Others: Everybody.

EE: There was never no animosity, nothing like that. Never an edge in his voice. Never.

CC: We were all equal.

EE: Right.

CC: Everyone was included. Nobody was excluded.

BB: An emulation of Jesus Christ. A living emulation.

EE: And didn't you just kind of think, if he could do that—wow. I mean, didn't it just kind of—oh my gosh—this is really happening to him!

BB (joking): We didn't get to see the side that [his wife] saw.

EE: No, we didn't.

[Laughter]

EE: And I'm sure there had to be more.

BB: A lot of trepidation, I'm sure.

EE: Sure, but he didn't let us know that, certainly.

Int.: I'm hearing you saying, maybe the sermon was good, maybe there were things, but it was *modeling* on my part that was as important as anything.

Several: Yes/yeah/right!

BB: If not *more*, because you see more than you can hear. And when you see (Oh how do I want to say this that sounds smart?)

FF: Well, he showed us the way that we should be acting...

BB: Yeah—and is still.

DD: Leadership by example.

FF: Yeah—good way of putting it. (Others agreeing)

EE: I mean, even if we weren't ready to do it—he was doing it. He was showing us how it should be done.

GG: Maybe this is going to sound kind of bad, but you got to the point where it was easy to show that to people who were feeling the same way that you were, rather than extend it beyond that.

BB: It's really hard to go beyond that. I have friends living on my block that attended that church. They haven't been back since Pastor S left.

FF: I tried to go back one day and then I picked the wrong day to go. The sermon was about forgiveness. I wasn't even there five minutes and I had someone sitting next to me saying, "You should forgive—you shouldn't have left the church." I haven't really left anywhere. I'm still attending church since the day he left. Maybe not there, but I've been at the Presbyterian Church, I've been here. I'm good. I was happy with it.

EE: And that's your choice. It's not for somebody else to tell you...

FF: No!

EE: ...what you should do.

FF: But then right after that sermon was done, my golly! Instead of just leaving me alone, he was right there, starting in again and I thought, "That's it!" Now, I'm stubborn. I mean, you know I'm stubborn, EE. And now I'm mad.

CC: Maybe he should have...

Int.: Okay thanks. [Laughter] I totally appreciate your feelings.

BB: We need to keep with the program. [Laughter]

Int.: I want to validate your feelings. I'm not saying you shouldn't feel that. But I'm trying to keep us focused...[Laughter]. Anything more about that communion service or about that sermon?

BB: It's hard to take communion. In fact, I haven't taken communion since before the announcement for you leaving and the way it was handled because of the anger. Somewhere, maybe Romans 9 or 10 or maybe it's in Corinthians about not taking communion when you have anger towards somebody or something. Or you have disagreements--that it brings illness and pain and suffering. I can't do it anymore because of those feelings and until I can reconcile those feelings in my heart, I can't take communion.

Int.: [Help yourself to the soda bread.]

Worship Service 5: July 13, 2008: The Lord's Song

Int.: The fifth service was July 13, 2008: How to Sing in Babylon. The sermon was entitled, *How Can We Sing the Lord's Song?* The texts were Psalm 137, Daniel 5: 1-9, 25-28, and Revelation 17:1-14.

Answering the question posed by the Jewish refugees in Babylon who asked, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land,” we looked at the context of their misery as the King Belshazzar of Babylon used sacred drinking vessels plundered from the temple in Jerusalem for his irreverent drunken party. We looked at a parallel image in Revelation as the “Whore of Babylon” similarly drank blood from a golden chalice. We learned that until we are finally in God’s kingdom, we are *always* in a foreign land, but we can still sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land because we know that in the end, the Lamb wins and his kingdom overcomes all others. [A choir member, the church accompanist, and the pastor] sang a song, “By the Rivers of Babylon” and then the congregation sang it as a round.

[Interviewer sings the song—CC joins in.]

Int.: To me that was a tricky sermon because we had three different scriptures, and I didn’t want people to get lost in them, but what I wanted to answer the question, how do you sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? ...my whole point was that we are never really in our homeland till we get to heaven.

GG: I remember the song now that you sang it again.

BB: Was that the part of Daniel where the hand comes up on the wall and does the writing?

Int.: Yes. So [King Belshazzar] in the middle of that drunken orgy... [The writing comes—Daniel is sent for—the message is that you will die]. I used this scripture to show that wanton disregard for God and how it has been experienced in other ages.

BB: Well I wonder. All of this stuff is part of our journey through life and we’re supposed to learn. Is this even bigger than just in this room? Is this something that is coming through to our country or our community? Or is it just for the area here?

Int.: What do you mean?

BB: Well, Scripture was written to foretell things. God over time continued to teach the Children of Israel things and they didn’t learn. Is that the same for us?

[No answers]

BB: Maybe I’m on a different page. Scratch that then.

GG: I think there is a certain amount of truth that things happen and you do have to learn from them. The one thing I do hear from a lot of people is that, “I *never* want to have to go through something like this again.” So if there’s a lesson there

to learn, let's pray that we can all learn it so something like this doesn't have to occur again.

Int.: So that relates, BB, to what you were saying: Did we learn a lesson?

BB: Yes, it does.

Worship Service 6: July 20, 2008: The Anointing

Int.: The sixth service on July 20, 2008 was the Healing Service. The sermon was entitled, *A Healing Balm*. The sermon texts were Jeremiah 8:18-22, 46:11, and James 5:7-9, 13-16.

We sang the African-American Spiritual, "There is a Balm in Gilead" and looked at the texts in Jeremiah from which the song was based. We also looked at the passage in James' epistle in which he called those who were sick to have the elders of the church, "pray over them anointing them with oil in the Lord's name." Later in the service, members were invited to come forward as the pastor and two respected elder members at each service prayed for them and anointed them with oil. During the service [Member KK] sang a version of the Prayer of St. Francis ("Make me an instrument of thy peace").

CC: I [wrote] that I thought that song was very appropriate for the situation, especially the line that says, "Where there is hatred, let me sow love." [CC's voice starts to crack as she shares here]

Int.: Let's go around the room and share whether we came forward and what we experienced.

GG: I was there that Sunday, and I was one of the ones who got to help with putting the oil on. For me it was a very meaningful time and it was one of healing. Not only for me, individually, but also for me to have the opportunity to participate in maybe others' healing as well.

FF: I was also there that Sunday and I did come forward. But it seems like that was the sermon that really seemed to help me let go, and look forward to what was going to come on in the future because I truly believe there is something better for us out there. For me, I was switching jobs. And this is much better than what I had. I just think that that one really helped me to put things aside.

Int.: I didn't know until later that you were losing your job as the same time and facing things that didn't feel fair. You just said that it was the "sermon." Did you mean the sermon more than actual coming up for the anointing with oil?

FF: I really enjoyed the sermon, but it really did help coming up to do that.

- EE: I did enjoy that service and I did go up for the anointing. And it moved me: the sermon and going up for the anointing. And it really moved me and it helped more so than the other like the first one where you're putting on the love. When we got to this one with the sermon and the going up—yeah this one helped me a great deal.
- DD: I think that was for me of the seven services probably the most powerful in that prior to this time I had an awful lot of confusing thoughts. Thoughts about-- is this church just full of politics? Are the leaders of this church not really thinking about the needs of the people? An awful lot of different things. I was holding a little bit of anger and a little bit of angst and a little bit of this and that. I thought that when we got to this one—maybe I was just kind of ready to let everything go and just heal, forgive and say, “Well, it's gonna be God's will—let's make the best of it.” But when I went up for the anointing it just...kind of brought everything home. It really made a big impression on me. I had never been through that before. And I remember going up and GG was there and Mr. ...
- GG: Mr. WW.
- DD: Yes. And going through that I just [realized] now it's time to let go and accept the inevitable that Pastor S is going to leave now.
- EE: It's gonna happen.
- DD: It's gonna happen. Make the best of it. [my spouse] and I had been through and awful lot of talking and praying and we came to the conclusion that there's a reason for everything and even if you disagree with it, you can't dwell on it. You gotta make the best of it and accept it and move on. So I think that was the Sunday when all of that came to a head for me. It really was. I thought it was a very powerful service.
- CC: I agree with DD. And I've participated in other of the healing services that you offered there prior. I think it was a step for me to get past some judgment (emotions coming through here) that I felt in that church for years.
- BB: I don't remember if we were there that Sunday or not. The last two weekends in July were fair week and I don't know if we made those two Sundays or not.
- AA: I believe we was there, but I can't remember if we actually went up or not. But [my spouse] and I think all of your sermons are good and kind of moving for me and I'm just kind of getting back into it and are just kind of beginners I guess you might say. And that's kind of one of the reasons we joined the church. As we was as I say really starting to get back into going to church and having faith in God and just more believing and stuff then.

- Int.: Yeah. That's one of the things that's especially hard for a pastor: to see people who are just starting to come along in their faith or people that have been involved for a long time, but just finally there's a difference between going to church and walking with the church and people starting to connect with that.
- EE: And you don't really realize till you actually do that and you start attending and you go to meetings. There's a big difference, where beforehand, "What's the difference?" well, you learn there is a big difference.
- Int.: At the same time I need to recognize that it wasn't I who did it, but that God did it through me because I was a willing vessel. God has a hold of each of you and God has plans. If I'm so full of myself that I think, "They can't grow any more if I'm not here." I mean that's not honoring God. God has a plan. God has a way of ... I used the Scripture at the end today that we are more than conquerors. John Piper asks, "How do you become *more* than conquerors?" He uses an illustration of a warrior coming at you with a sword in hand and you cut off the arm and use it to beat him. So if Satan is using something to try to defeat you and you turn it around and let it glorify God in the end, then you're more than a conqueror.
- It would have been nice if everything had been settled and things had continued as they were and we all kept on growing, but I think even using adversity to let God do his thing: that is what really glorifies God.
- EE: Good can come out of bad. It's like all day long you have to be on guard for the things that come against you. People stumble and fall. I do that every day and it's like, gee whiz—am I gonna get any better at it? Am I gonna be more upright than I am stumbling and falling and picking myself back up? And some days I don't know. Some days seem worse than others, but then you get back up anyway and you start all over again and go on.
- BB: There's an analogy: God uses a smelter's pot to refine the gold. Each one of us is a piece of gold being refined through this. [uses an analogy of a glass leaking water: is our faith "leaking" out and spreading to others, or is the "chaos" from all of this trouble what is spreading and leaking out of us to others?

Worship Service 7: June 27, 2008: The Release

- Int.: The final service on July 27, 2008 was the Farewell and Official Release. The sermon was entitled, *The Great Commandment and the Great Commission*. The texts were John 15:5-12, and Matthew 28:18-20.

On my final Sunday, I preached from two passages that had been foundational to my ministry at Church A: the Great Commandment that tells us to love one another and the Great Commission that tells us to "go and make disciples." Our middle hymn, "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love" reinforced the Great Commandment.

The service included an official order from the United Church of Christ

Book of Worship for the “Ending of an Authorized Ministry.” During that time, over which a denominational representative presided, I thanked the members for their love, kindness, and support over the past six years. I then formally asked for forgiveness for my mistakes and asked the congregation to release me. The congregation expressed forgiveness and asked (and received) the same from me. The congregation released me as their pastor and asked that I release them (which I did). The service concluded with the singing of a rousing song called, “Go, Make Disciples!” [Interviewer sings a bit of it] which we had often used over the years as a benedictory song reminding us of the Great Commission.

EE: I loved that service. It really made an impression upon me. It just said a lot. I just absolutely loved that service.

GG: For me that was finality. One door closed and you wondered what door was going to open next. For me it put the perspective back on that it is all about God and it is our job to go out and make disciples. It’s nice to have a leader who helps guide you in that way, but bottom line: it is up to each and every one of us.

DD: But we still need to be fed.

GG: Right. But that was a powerful service.

Others: Yes! It was.

GG: And that was a service where we were all combined. It wasn’t just an early service and a late service. That was a combination of everyone being together. So it was a charge for all of us to go out and do God’s work in his world.

CC: And another reminder that it’s not strictly the pastor’s responsibility to do that.

GG: Right

EE: And don’t you find yourself still stopping and thinking about that, especially when you start having doubt. Or wondering what’s the next step?

FF: This is what you do.

Int.: So what kind of things from all of those things have stuck with you that you’ve come back to?

GG: The ones that have stuck with me the most are the ones that I felt active within. I felt “active” when I could write feelings down and shred them. I felt active when the healing balm was placed on foreheads. I felt active at the last service when we read a litany that released [Pastor S] from the pastorate at [Church A], where I could feel a part of the service, rather than just sit and absorb—where I could actively participate.

CC: Those were the services that tended to stick in my mind where I could actively participate in some way.

FF: I just felt I was more in tune with those last few services.

Int.: The last two or three of the seven or the last seven overall?

FF: The last seven. Every single one of them—there was some message of forgiveness and reconciliation and continuing on with what God really wants us to do. But the last two really got me.

DD: I remember at the last one a feeling of sadness, I guess that we had known this was coming for the last seven weeks and now it's here—and kind of a sense of facing the unknown. And that church is still facing the unknown. It's been almost a year.

EE: And we're getting better and they're still...

CC: ...sitting in there stagnant.

BB: Well, today is helping me a lot.

DD: Talking about it...

BB: Yeah, well, I think each of us felt isolated there because we were on the opposition party. We were not on the side that was trying to “get rid of” the minister. We were isolated. It's hard to put because I don't know all the words I want to use. I have a partial grasp, but I don't have a full grasp yet. Like Paul said in chapter 13 of First Corinthians, today we know in part, but then in full. I can't voice all the things and say all the words I want to say today because I don't know all the words I want to say. But it's good to have this discussion today because I feel not so alone. And when I taught Sunday School for those six-seven weeks back in Church A—nobody came. You came a couple times and there was another family that came and [Mr. B] and I and that was it. A deacon or an elder came up and asked me to do it because they thought that I'd be good at it. Well, if they thought I was so good at it, why didn't they come? More isolation.

GG: I think when you initially started talking about this you said you became very guarded.

BB: Oh yes!

GG: And I think we all became very guarded and I think an opportunity like this to be in true fellowship with each other and be able to talk freely and to know that whatever we say with whoever is here is respected.

BB: Yes.

GG: And I think that is what is missing.

BB: And that's the important thing: you know, to be able to respect our ideas and our thoughts. You know, I know today in all the climates that are out there, if you have a differing view with somebody that you're there, automatically, you're put down. You know, especially if there are two or more of that side. You know, if you have an opposing view you are just nailed right up on the cross. I guess that's a good analogy. [Laughs]

CC: And that's the judgment aspect that I was talking about.

BB: Exactly—and that's what you feel.

Int.: I'm going to wrap up. It's natural that it breaks into feelings and stuff like that. I'm glad that this has ended up being ... I *hope* that this is a part of your process besides that it is helping me get some information.

One final thing: keeping in mind that my project is to help me to be a better pastor and possibly to help other pastors who might be in a situation like this, are there nuggets of truth or wisdom or advice on what worked well or what didn't work or what you would advise another pastor going through something like this to do?

BB: Make as many friends as you can.

[Laughter—more talk]

Int.: Not that! This is about leading worship! ... What I'm asking for is advice for someone that is in a situation of trying to people in worship that are going through a painful time like this.

FF: I think the leading by example.

Others: Yes, yes

BB: I like that. The example you set was a stellar example. As Christ himself would have done.

Others: I agree.

EE: But did everyone see it that way?

BB: No. We have to remember we're dealing with Satan. Right out in the open, Satan is there. And he is trying to destroy and disrupt every good thing that the Word is trying to do. You get someone who comes in and starts preaching closer to the Word than what has ever been preached in that church and Satan says, "This is not going to happen." And this is a result of what Satan did. I got off-topic. I'm sorry.

GG: I think another thing that someone who might be going through this would be to realize that it is a process. It's not going to happen with the snap of a finger. It's not going to happen overnight. And the more—just from the services that I remember more—the more actively a congregation can participate within that setting, the more fellowship you feel with each other, but the strength that you can draw from each other at a time like that is helpful. I'm not sure if I made myself clear.

BB: I understand it. It's like going through a bad divorce.

Int.: Any last comments?

GG: Yes—the pastor should definitely keep himself or herself in tune with God and with their own personal journey. Because I don't know how you could have led with example like you did unless your own faith was strong and getting support.

DD: Exactly.

FF, BB, and others: Agreed.

Int.: Alright, anything else?

CC: It's all about God.

Int.: Hallelujah!

GG: Our two cents worth is over!

[Laughter]

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