

# THE LORD'S SERVICE



CORNERSTONE  
REFORMED  
CHURCH

A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE  
LITURGY OF  
CORNERSTONE REFORMED  
CHURCH

## *Introduction: Our Liturgy & the Gospel Story*

The gospel is a story about God's creation and re-creation of man and non-human creation in Christ, uniting heaven and earth in perfect communion of peace. This story is not relegated to a few Scriptures here-and-there that can simply be strung together. The gospel encompasses the whole of Scripture. Throughout the Scriptures God gives us various aspects of this story told from different angles, emphasizing different things. One thing remains the same: they are all telling the same story which culminates in Christ and accomplishes God's purposes for all of creation.

Our worship, patterned by this story in Scripture, proclaims and brings us into this gospel week-by-week to encounter the living God and be re-created in Christ by the Spirit. The condensed patterns of this story are told in the events that happen at Mt. Sinai and God's calling out a people for Himself to be the worshipers for which He seeks (John 4:23). This same gospel story is told in the worship of the Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple. There, in the sacrificial system—worship established and outlined by God Himself—we see God's prescribed patterns for worship. Understanding these through their fulfillment in Jesus Christ aids us in comprehending the shape of our worship and, thus, the shape of the gospel itself. This worship has a distinct pattern and involves man holistically. Every aspect of who we are as images of God participates in and is affected by our worship. For this reason, the worship of God calls us to participate as a community in speaking, thinking, singing, kneeling, raising hands, standing, sitting, eating, and drinking.

The pattern of this singular gospel story can be laid out in at least five distinct aspects. First, there is the call to worship. The gospel is, first and foremost, God's call for us to enter His presence. Everything we do is a response to God's initiative of grace. God Himself comes to serve us first and foremost. Our initial response to this call is that we come into His presence, presenting ourselves before Him. God's presence reveals the fact that we are sinners. Therefore, before we can fellowship or commune with God—the goal of the gospel—we must begin with confession. Here we readily acknowledge and confess that we are sinners, deserving of God's wrath and curse. In Christ, God has provided the means for forgiveness. Believing God's promise, we confess our sins kneeling humbly as His people. Once we have confessed, we hear God's promise of forgiveness through His appointed representative in worship, the pastor. The gospel is more than the forgiveness of sins. It is also about conforming us into God's image. Therefore, confession and forgiveness are not the end. God will mold and shape us. He does this through His word read and taught. In this God consecrates us, or sets us apart, telling us what it means to live as His people. We respond to His Word with confessions of loyalty: our tithes and the confession of our faith in the Nicene Creed. Once we confess our loyalty to God, we are drawn near to God in communion. In this weekly meal God seals His promises to us in Christ, by His Spirit. This feast is a time of celebration, so we sing, rejoicing in the goodness of our God. This is a weekly practice because, without it, the story of the gospel is not complete. God desires that we draw near to Him. This is the goal of the gospel. Having been renewed by God, we are then commissioned to go back into the world to bring others to God's feast (Luke 14:16ff); to bring others to participate in God's wonderful grace.

### *Ascending Into God's Presence*

Now that you have the big picture about the liturgy, let's take some time to walk through the various stages of our journey in drawing near to God.

As you will notice when you worship with us, there is a large amount of congregational participation in spoken and sung responses. The word "liturgy" means "the service of the people." God's people are engaged with him throughout worship in a dialogue through Christ's representative, the pastor. The worshiper is not an observer but a participant who draws near to God in Christ and by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:18).

## THE LORD CALLS US

### *The Call To Worship*

Standing at the entrance to the sanctuary, the pastor calls the congregation to “Rise” and “draw near to God in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The congregation responds, “Amen.”

“Drawing near” is the way the Bible describes worship.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

Our worship is distinctively Christian, and, therefore we worship in the name into which we have been baptized: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We worship the Father, in union with the Son, and by the power of the Spirit.

The “Amen” we use here and throughout the service in response to prayers said and sung is what God calls for when he speaks to his people (see, for example, Deuteronomy 27). The word is a covenant oath that commits the worshiper to what has been said. He agrees with the proclamation and will respond in obedience.

### *Hymn of Procession*

The procession by the pastor as Christ’s representative embodies, not only Christ’s entrance into worship, but the worshipers who are in Christ. We enter God’s gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise (Psalm 100:4).

Psalms and hymns throughout the liturgy are responsive to what God says and does. As we walk through the gospel story, what God says and does he says and does for us, his people, to draw us ever closer to him. The response to God’s work for us is singing. When God delivered Adam from his alone-ness, he sang (Genesis 2:23). When God delivered his people from Egypt, they sang (Exodus 15). When God confronted David with his sins, moving him to confession and forgiveness, he sang (Psalm 51).

So, at each of the readings of Scripture, which reflect different times and occasions in history when God acted for his people, we respond with singing. This is why singing is interspersed with the dialogue.

For most every Psalm or hymn we sing, we will stand. Psalms and hymns are sung prayers, and postures for prayer in Scripture are predominantly standing or kneeling. At times these postures are accompanied by uplifted hands (see Psalm 141:2). Only on one occasion do we find someone sitting for prayer. David “sat before Yahweh” to pray (2Samuel 7:18). We incorporate all of these postures for prayer, but we predominantly stand while singing our prayers.

### *Salutation*

The pastor greets the congregation with, “The Lord be with you,” and the congregation responds, “And with your spirit.”

“The Lord be with you” is a biblical greeting that is used in some form or fashion throughout Scripture. It is a prayer-greeting that the Lord’s presence will be with the congregation to strengthen, encourage, instruct, edify, and draw them near to himself as the service progresses.

The response, “and with your spirit,” is the prayer of the congregation for the pastor that acknowledges his spiritual gift as pastor and prays that the Lord will empower him to do what he is called to do in leading them to draw near to God.

The dialogue continues through some portion of Scripture that is used according to the season of the liturgical or church year.

### *Collect*

The collect is a prayer by the pastor that gathers the people and our prayers together and petitions God.

## THE LORD CLEANSSES US

### *Call To Confession*

Having entered into the presence of our holy God, we must confess our sins. The congregation is called to confession by the pastor using some appropriate portion of Scripture. The initial response is a song of penitence. Then we are called to take a posture of humility in our plea for mercy.

### *Confession*

We confess our sins corporately; that is, as a church and on behalf of the church. The conclusion of our prayer is the sung “Kyrie” (pronounced: kee ree ay), which the first word of a longer phrase “Kyrie eleison,” “Lord, have mercy.” There is a Trinitarian shape to the plea for mercy: “Lord, have mercy; Christ have mercy; Lord, have mercy.”

### *Declaration of Absolution*

In Christ’s authority, the pastor announces God’s promise of forgiveness to those who have confessed their sins, trusting Christ.

## THE LORD CONSECRATES US

### *Hymn of Ascent*

The forgiveness of sins provokes the response of praise as well as moving us ever closer to God. So, we sing!

### *Sursum Corda/Lift Up Your Hearts & Sanctus*

Lifting up our hearts speaks to our conscious self-offering to God to be raised to commune with him. Lamentations calls God’s people to “lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven” (Lamentations 3:41). In this we offer ourselves living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable act of worship (Romans 12:1). We do so as we respond to the call to lift our hearts and then sing the Sanctus (“Holy, Holy, Holy”), lifting our hands. The Sanctus echoes what the angels constantly sing around the throne of God (Isaiah 6:1-3).

### *Prayer of Adoration*

Following the Sanctus and in its spirit, a prayer of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving is offered which focuses on a particular attribute or act of God.

## *The Scripture Lessons*

Before the Scriptures are read and taught, the pastor and congregation ask to be taught by God himself and commit themselves to obeying what is read and taught.

What follows is the reading from the Old Testament/Covenant, Epistle, and Gospel. We sit for the first two readings and stand for the Gospel. Why this order and these postures? Rich Lusk answers the question succinctly:

*Why is the gospel reading given “special treatment”? Because Scripture is a story, and the climax of that story is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The events recorded in the gospels are the fulfillment of the old covenant Scriptures and the foundation of the other new covenant Scriptures. The gospels are central because Jesus Christ is central. By giving special emphasis to the gospel reading, we highlight that we are a Christocentric community.*

*Standing for the gospel reading does not detract from the other readings; rather it reminds us that those other readings all point to the incarnation of the Son of God, and his death and resurrection for our salvation. We stand for the gospel reading like an army standing at attention to hear its Commander-in-Chief speak. We respond to the gospel with a declaration of praise. Christ receives special praise in the lectionary readings because we are disciples of Christ in a way that transcends our discipleship to other prophets and apostles.*

After each of the readings, the congregation expresses its gratitude to God for Scriptures. Gratitude is a discipline that is to characterize God's people. The revelation of God is a gift. Through the ritual of giving thanks at the Scripture's reading, our minds and hearts are being shaped to be grateful people.

### *Prayer of Illumination, Sermon, Prayer of Consecration*

God's Word continues to be proclaimed as the pastor teaches from the Scriptures just read. Before the sermon, the pastor petitions God once again to provide light to our minds and hearts so that we may hear, understand, and willingly conform our lives to the Scriptures. The sermon is preached and the pastor prays that what has been heard will shape the way we think, what we love, and what we do.

### *The Creed*

The Nicene Creed is an ancient confession of faith that pledges allegiance to the God who has revealed himself in the Person of Jesus Christ and by the Spirit in the church. “Creed” comes from a word that means “I/we believe.” In the Creed we swear our loyalty to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in the way he has revealed himself through his Word.

### *Giving of Tithes and Offerings*

From the beginning of time, God gave man the privilege and responsibility to develop his creation. Our tithes (ten percent of our income) is the biblical portion that is a tangible expression of our work the past week that declares our loyalty to our King; that all that we are and do are for his kingdom purposes. When we come to the worship feast, we are not to appear before God empty-handed (Deuteronomy 16:16). Our tithe is portion of the fruit of our dominion that expresses our faithfulness in our God-given task.

Offerings are those gifts that we give beyond the tithe to relieve the distress of others or for some other special occasion.

The tithes and offerings are brought forward with the bread and wine of the Supper because they are all a part of the gifts we present to God. While the offering is being brought to the Table, we sing the Doxology with hands raised, symbolically raising our gifts with ourselves to God.

The pastor then prays that God will use these offerings for the advancement of his kingdom.

## THE LORD COMMUNES WITH US

### *Hymn of Feasting*

The time of feasting is entered with song and characterized by singing throughout. Feasting is a time of rejoicing (see, for example, Deuteronomy 16.11, 14), and rejoicing is expressed well through singing.

### *Pastoral Prayer for the Church and the World/Prayers of God's People*

Having ascended into the courts of heaven, we talk with God about the church and the world, interceding for both. In this we join with Christ himself who ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).

This prayer is concluded as we pray together "The Lord's Prayer."

### *Declaration of Peace*

God has brought us from the tension of confessing sin to rest at his Table where he declares his peace with us. This is the peace that each of us shares with God and the rest of his family. We are to approach his Table having done all that we can to make peace with our brothers and sisters (see Matthew 5.23-24). We declare that peace with one another as we exchange signs of peace, a handshake or a hug, while saying to one another, "Peace be with you," or "The peace of Christ be with you."

The proclamation of our faith, the foundation and hope of what we celebrate in the Supper, is joyfully proclaimed in the three phrases, "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again."

Because Christ is our Passover who was sacrificed for us, we now keep the feast. This meal is a thanksgiving meal, so we express our thanks for God's gifts of bread, wine, and fellowship with the entire family through them. What we have offered to God He now shares with us at this Table. We enjoy together what has been done in our mission.

### *Eucharistic Meditation*

As a continuation of the sermon, a brief meditation on how what has been taught is also being communicated in our feast.

### *Bread & Wine*

We give thanks for the bread and the wine separately, just as Jesus did. The bread is eaten first, and we are formed up into a (re)new(ed) body. We become one body because we share in one loaf (1Corinthians 10:17). Once the body is re-made, the wine, the cup of blessing, then fills us, animating us as the body of Christ. We are made new and ready for the mission to which God is sending us in the world.

## THE LORD COMMISSIONS US

Having been re-created in union and communion with God, we are now ready to be sent out in the power of the Spirit to take dominion of the creation.

A Scriptural commission is given, and we sing a hymn of dismissal.

The benediction God commanded to be used in Numbers 6 to put His name on his people is pronounced: "The Lord bless you and guard you; The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace." The worshiper departs from the service at peace with God.

The service closes with the singing of the Song of Simeon, the song he sang after seeing the baby Jesus (Luke 2:25-32). Having "seen" Christ, the salvation of God, in worship, we are now ready to depart in peace. We raise our hands in praise as we sing, "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!"

During the Song of Simeon, the pastor recesses to the entrance of the building, marking the end of this worship time.



# CORNERSTONE REFORMED CHURCH

1201 S. Giant City Rd. Carbondale, IL 62902

618-549-3333      [cornerstonecrec@gmail.com](mailto:cornerstonecrec@gmail.com)

[cornerstonereformedcrec.org](http://cornerstonereformedcrec.org)