

PLAY BY PLAY LITURGY

What would John Madden and Pat Summerall Say at Lutheran Worship?

1. First, I give credit to my worship Prof. George Hoyer, for saying there are four actions in worship Catch (from God) Give (to God) Share (with each other) and go Live in the World. The conceit of changing “Give” to “Pass” was the suggestion of my friend, Packer fan Pastor George Krempin.
2. At least some adaptation will be necessary, for example if your first reading is not Isaiah 5. Also if your choir anthem, or Musical Offering, comes at some other place.
3. This will not work well without the Lord’s Supper--but neither does worship.
4. The sermon included in the script, if I remember, is about 6-7 minutes. Without a children’s sermon or the second lesson, and singing hymns that are not longer, this service is no longer than usual, around 65 minutes.
5. Have fun.

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What would John Madden and Pat Summerall say at Lutheran Worship?

(Well before worship begins, say 10 minutes, JM and PS take their places, namely, clearly visible to all, yet at the side. They will need to strike a balance between being just obtrusive enough that worshipers will realize that something is up, and yet not so disruptive as to make it impossible for worshipers to concentrate and pray.

At the appointed time for worship to begin, PS introduces them.)

PS. This is Pat Summerall here with John Madden to bring you this week’s worship of Almighty God by the people of Grace Lutheran Church, Green Bay, Wisconsin. It should be a great worship service, don’t you think, John?

JM Should be. I was talking earlier to a couple of the worshipers: one at the acolyte position and two playing usher, and they said they were ready to give it their very best. After all, this is for God.

PS. The preacher, too, is excited. He said that he has some really good Gospel for the folks, some Good News how Christ’s perfect obedience makes up for our failure to give God what he deserves, so by Christ we will be saved.

JM. I was talking to a couple of other worshipers, a woman whose position is fourth pew and a man playing deep back. They are eager for worship, too. She wants to praise God all she can for what he has done for her. And that man in the back is playing hurt today. It’s harder to worship when you’re down, but his head is in the game and his heart, too. He says his spirit needs to hear again how Christ was willing to die for his salvation.

PS. And here we go. The pastor is coming out to begin the service.

Pr. In the name of the Father and of...

Cong. Amen

JM See, that right there is called a “Pass” play. God is here actually Passing something to his people through the minister, and the worshipers need to Catch it.

PS It’s not just words.

JM No. See, this opening drive of the liturgy is based on the baptism play they have all done. God is here Passing to the people a renewal of all his baptismal promises to them. But here’s the thing, see, it is up to the people to Catch it. They have to Catch what God Passes at them. That’s why they say Amen. I even noticed a few using that old “sip of the cross” play as a way to Catch what God is Passing. You know, Christians have used the sign of the cross for over 1800 years.

PS The Pass is so important a play that we see it in the liturgy over and over.

Pr. If we say we have no sin

PS That’s another Pass, isn’t it John? Through the minister God is throwing the people the promise of forgiveness of their sins.

JM Yeah, and it is probably the most important catch the people can make. The text he just read is from I John, one of my favorite epistles.

PS But John, there is no “Amen,” here. How do people catch this one?

JM By faith. They Catch it by believing what he said: that God will cleanse them from unrighteousness for Jesus’ sake.

Pr. Most merciful God,

Cong. We confess that we are in bondage to ...

Pr. Almighty God, in his mercy, has given ...

PS Another Pass play! Wow, God sure is generous in this liturgy. God just threw them forgiveness. Some of them used the Amen or the cross-sign to signal their catch. But, John, did they in fact catch it?

JM You know, it’s always hard to tell. I mean, sure they say Amen, but do they mean it? Do they believe? - remember that Catching is believing. Do they believe that God has, just now, for Christ’s sake, forgiven them all the sins they have confessed?

PS On the replay you can see some nodding or smiling: they have just made an important grab

and they know it!

JM Yeah, but others may be humbly glad--or just plain relieved--and not show it. It still is a matter of the heart.

Opening **hymn** "All People that on Earth do Dwell" is sung.

PS We've seen a lot of Passes but clearly that song was not a Pass play.

JM You're right. That was the second basic play in the liturgy. It is a Give. Giving glory to God. See, the liturgy is a two-way meeting and this time the action goes the other way: the worshipers give to God. The words of that hymn, by the way, are Psalm 100.

PS Now it looks like another Pass coming up. What will the folks need to do to Catch it?

JM Believe! Believe that God's grace, love and communion are given to them by these words (which, by the way are from 2 Corinthians.)

Pr. The grace of our Lord Jesus ... Cong. And also with you. The Kyrie is prayed.

PS I don't think that could be called a Pass play, John. The worshipers didn't Catch anything. They are pleading with God for help, for badly needed help.

JM Yeah, that's a good point. "Lord, have mercy" is an old plea from the Bible, like the ten lepers or the blind man at Jericho asking Jesus for help. But here's how you know that this play, like all prayers, is a Give play. To both the lepers and the blind man Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well." Get it? To pray the Lord's help is to put trust in him, That's the giving, the worshipers, by praying, are giving their faith to God-provided that they actually DO trust God to answer their prayer for help.

Pr. Glory to God in the highest, and peace ...

Cong.... in the glory of God the Father. Amen

PS The words from "Glory to God" are also biblical: the angels in Luke 2 sing the Christ-child's birth. And this is another Give, right?

JM Sure. But again, it's not just by singing the words. The players need to concentrate on what they are doing, direct their thoughts to God and praise him. Otherwise they aren't doin' the givin'.

You know, there's a funny history to this. The "Glory to God" and the Kyrie didn't always begin the liturgy; it used to start with the Bible readings. But around 600 A.D. in Rome, it took the bishop so long to get dressed, that they added the Kyrie and Hymn of Praise for the people to sing while they were waiting.

Pr. The Lord be with you.

Cong. And also with you.

JM That's a third kind of play, a Share. But I'll talk about that later.

Pr. Let us pray.... Cong. Amen The congregation sits.

PS You can kind of feel a transition here, can't you John?

JM Yeah, the opening drive is over. There has been a lot of Passin' and Catchin' and Givin'. It's a good set up. It gets the play going between and God and the worshipers so they are up for the two main pieces of the liturgy: the Word and the Sacrament.

PS Here comes the lector onto the field. John, Bible reading has always been part of the liturgy, hasn't it?

JM Ok sure, since way before Jesus, even. See, the synagogue service, like at Jesus' time, had three portions from Scripture: a reading from the first five books of the Bible, called "the Law" or even "Moses," then a psalm was sung, then a reading from one of the prophets. Then there was a sermon interpreting the readings, then prayers. As you can tell, the first Christians kept the same order of service they were used to, and it is still used today.

First reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

JM Whoa! What a blitz! I bet Isaiah's hearers never saw it coming! He sets them up with this complaint about the well tended vineyard that produced nasty grapes, then BAM!, he says, YOU are the vineyard!

PS But in the liturgy today, how can the worshipers read such a devastating blitz from God?

JM See, there is a kind of a stunt Christians do to enable them to face a divine blitz like this: they just let it come. We can't defend against God's accusations: he's got us dead to rights. But we believe that his blitz is not his last play: we believe God's last throw to us is forgiveness in Jesus Christ's death. So when the blitz of divine accusation comes, Christians don't scramble away from it, or use excuses to block it, they just let it come and sack them-all the while trusting Christ Jesus to pick them up again. In a way, Christians welcome the blitz: not that it feels good to have our sin pointed out, but it reminds us again to rely on Christ alone, not ourselves, and that is good.

PS Of course it is the preacher's job to help us read a blitz like this.

JM Hey, is that musicians getting ready? This is way too early for the half-time entertainment.

PS No, that is not half-time but part of the liturgy. The musicians are not entertaining the worshipers, the music is to encourage their faith.

JM Oh, I thought it was maybe just entertainment. But it's not.

Musical offering Cong. (stands) Alleluia! Lord, to whom ... Pr. The holy Gospel according to ... Con,- . Glory to you, O Lord.

PS What a tremendous show of respect for this reading!

SM Isn't it great? I mean, they are on their feet! They're cheerin'! These are some of the best fans Christ has! Wow!

PS It sounds like they are talking right TO Jesus.

JM Sure, because he's gonna talk right to them! See, for Christians, hearing Jesus' words isn't I like hearing Aristotle or Shakespeare or one of those dead guys. Jesus is alive so HE is the one talking to them. It's like he himself has just walked in to give them his word for the week. So they stand and sing to him the same words Peter once said to him; from John, my favorite Gospel.

PS So they listen, because they are listening to Jesus Christ through the minister. This of course is another Pass play. So the people have to concentrate to Catch the words in their hearts.

JM Sure, and that standing and singin': that is a Give play.

Pr. reads the Gospel. Pr. The Gospel of the Lord.
Cong. Praise to you, O Christ. Cong. sits.

Pr. This morning's readings are so clear as to need little explanation, except how they speak to us.

They are both about God insisting on his rights: that we return to him what we owe him, and how he destroys people who don't. Isaiah says that the Lord is going to remove his protection from Judah so that it will be looted and ruined by its military enemies. I suppose Isaiah realized that the people of Judah would never believe the Lord would do such a thing. So Isaiah uses this clever parable to get the people to pronounce judgment on themselves. The Lord did everything for his vineyard, but it did not yield back to him what he wanted and deserved.

Jesus' "Parable of the Wicked Tenants" does the same thing, he gets his hearers to pronounce the sentence of "a miserable death" on the tenants. But the tenants in the parable represent those who have just challenged Jesus, the very ones who will kill the Son: the "chief priests" and "the elders of the people." Leaders bear a special responsibility to be sure God gets his due from the people. Jesus' warning today goes especially to us pastors and bishops, and also to parents, governors and presidents of companies.

So, has the house of Israel, has the human race yielded God the good grapes he deserves? There is both a No and a Yes to this. I must tell you the No, first, so we appreciate the Yes. No, we have not given God his due. Not Green Bay, not the USA, not Grace Lutheran, nor the whole race. We do not worship him as we ought with overflowing hearts. We do not endure suffering patiently with unworried confidence in God's care. We do not gladly serve him in all things. We take for granted, neglect and even abuse his blessings: our families, jobs, the earth, our abilities, our bodies. We do not keep the commandments as we owe him to do. We yield too many wild, bitter grapes.

But there is also a Yes answer. At least one of us, one human, one Israelite, namely Jesus the

Christ, did yield to God the good grapes God deserves. He yielded God perfect obedience unto death, even death on a cross. He yielded God perfect trust that he would raise him from death. Sweet, good grapes!

We might say: good for him, but what does that get us? Plenty. We get his reward. Yes. God will treat us as well as he treated Jesus: resurrection to life, glory and seats at the heavenly banquet. Because we, fellow believers, are in Christ. By our believing in him and being baptized into him, what is his is ours. We get full credit for his production of righteousness and obedience. We get to share, just as if we had yielded grapes as sweet as his are.

And it gets even better. We are even starting to yield sweeter grapes ourselves. Yes! For we take Jesus into us, in the Lord's Supper, and he sweetens us. As we receive his forgiving blood, the wine made of his good grapes, God is no longer an impatient landlord but becomes instead our Father. So now we can focus on obeying God not out of fear, to keep up with the rent, but rather we yield him good works, good grapes, for love of his Son who paid all our rent, in advance, by his suffering and blood. We do these good grapes with the same confidence as kindergartners making Mother's Day gifts: they do not trust in the quality of their work for their gifts to be accepted, but trust in their mothers' love. And it is exactly that, our trust in Christ, that makes our worship and service sweet to God, a pleasure to him, as no overdue rent could ever be. That's how drinking Jesus' wine makes us yield sweeter grapes.

God demands his due, the good grapes of obedience. He gets them, not from us, but from the vine of Jesus' cross. Because we belong to Christ by our faith and baptism, we get full credit for what he has done, And as we drink the wine from the cross, trusting Jesus' blood, our bitterness is changed to his sweetness, and how good we taste to God. Amen

JM Wow, that's what I like about worship, it brings you right into the face of God.

PS Which is not necessarily good news. The face of God's impatience with those behind in their obedience was made very clear. Just because that is so biblically true it is hard to listen to.

JM Yeah, but it is just that that makes the Gospel so precious!

See, preaching is for faith. Sermons are not to make people good, but to make them believers (and then the goodness will come, too). There is a Lutheran game plan for preaching faith into people. First you preach God's Law, not only what we should do, but also how the Law condemns us for not doing it. We are not talking about mini-sins that only need a mini-Jesus. The real Law of God puts us to death! And then you preach the Gospel, how Christ died for our trespasses to save us from this condemnation. You preach how his death is good for more than mini-sins, it's strong enough to cover all! We have been reconciled to God by the death of his Son, the same Son who rose to give us eternal life. This is how you preach for FAITH. That is how you preach to make people believers, not merely to make them good.

PS But now the people are standing to sing again.

JM Yeah, I love this part. See the people have just made a Catch, right? The Word in all its glory has been Passed to them, by God through the minister, and they Catch it. Next thing, though, now THEY say it. THEY sing it to God, or to each other. They are repeating, or confessing, what they have just received.

Cong. sings Hymn of the Day, "Salvation unto Us has Come"

Apostles' Creed

PS What would you say, John, is the creed a Pass or a Give?

JM It is definitely a Give. I mean, the folks are giving their faith to the Holy Trinity, putting their trust in him, pledging their allegiance to him. They Catch the Word from him and so Give their faith to him.

Like the rest of the liturgy, the Creed is mostly phrases from the Scriptures. By the way, did you know that the Creed is one of the most recent additions to the Christian liturgy?

PS No, how long has it been included?

JM. Less than a thousand years.

Pr. Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and all people according to their ...

PRAYERS

Pr. The peace of the Lord be with you always. Cong. And also with you. The peace is shared.

PS That must be one of those Share plays you were talking about.

JM Right! The SHARE is where the people are giving to each other. But they are not just saying Good Morning out there! What they Share in the Liturgy is always something divine. It is the LORD'S peace they are sharing here.

PS And what is the privilege it is! No wonder they have such a good time.

JM You know, now we are in the part of the liturgy that the church did not inherit from the synagogue. What the first Christians did was add the Lord's Supper to the synagogue service. And the Lord's Supper begins with the "kiss of peace," that the disciples received from the Lord on Easter, and that Paul mentions in his letters.

OFFERING is assembled.

PS The offering: another Give play, obviously.

JM Yes, but also Share. When the Church began, the offering was bringing bread and wine for the meal, and the leftovers were given to the poor and needy.

But you are right, now it is a Give play. It is an offering, a sacrifice, given to God. It is not a sacrifice to win God's favor: Christ did that for us totally-how could we add to that! This is a sacrifice of thanksgiving, a gift of pure love from us to God.

PS That's why the believers are so generous: for pure joy. What are we going to see next?

JM As the offering--bread and wine and money--is presented, a joyful song is sung, part of Psalm 51 or, this morning, Psalm 116.

PS But isn't there also an important prayer?

JM Sure, and in the offertory prayer these people are going to offer not just things but themselves to Christ and his kingdom. That is a major Give. That is huge.

PS Speaking of big, then comes the prayer called the Great Thanksgiving.

JM Yeah. "Lift up your hearts" has been part of Christian liturgy for 1850 years and may go right back to the apostles! Then comes the Holy, Holy, Holy, which is from Isaiah but includes the shouts of the Palm Sunday crowd: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

PS But the Holy, Holy is prefaced by something the minister says or sings that includes themes from the season like Advent or Easter. What is that preface called?

SM It's called The Preface. Then comes the Eucharistic Prayer. I need to explain this. See, Jesus took bread, thanked God, broke and shared the bread and then said "Do this." So the Church does it. We bless God--the way Jesus and all Jews did that night: for creation and life, for choosing Abraham and Israel and for their whole history, and asking the Lord to come and save them. Of course with that ancient Jewish thanksgiving the Church includes thanks for Jesus Christ's death and resurrection! Then we break the bread and share it, just like he said to.

PS So this is a Give play. Giving thanks to God.

JM Yeah, but you know, I almost want to say that at least by the time the Communion comes it is just everything. See the Communion is the fellowship: the believers, the Father, the Son, the Spirit, they are all together having a great time. You've got Jesus there giving his body and blood and forgiveness and everything. You've got the people there Catching it, but even their act of Catching in faith Gives him praise. And, of course, they are Sharing with each other. I mean, it's great.

PS Any special music coming up?

JM Yeah, they sing "Lamb of God."

That's what John the Baptist, I like that guy, said about Jesus. Starting about 700 A.D. the Pope had it sung at the breaking of the bread.

PS Looks like they're coming with the offering.
Offertory is sung. Offertory prayer is prayed. Great Thanksgiving Lord's Prayer Lamb of God Communion Post-communion blessing (As the table is being cleared) PS Looks like it's all over, John.

JM Not really, Pat. See, liturgy or worship is not just about what happens here. There is one more important play I have to talk about. It is the Live play. That starts now. Now we all go out

and believe what we've been told, and live like we believe it. That's a struggle, but that is why the liturgy has so much Passin' and Givin' and Sharin': to get us ready to live out the whole week as Gods people

You know, a great Lutheran, Soren Kierkegaard said that when he leaves worship he doesn't ask "How was it?" but "How did I do?" That's really what it's about. The Passing, the Giving, the Sharing: it's not just words, it actually happens, it is what we do. That's what makes this a great liturgy.

PS Indeed it has been. And we will all be back again, next week, right here, for another great liturgy between the Holy Trinity and his people at Grace Lutheran Church. Until then, for John Madden, I'm Pat Summerall; have a great Live play this week.

Post-Communion Prayer

Benediction

Sending Hymn

Dismissal

Pastor Todd B. Murken, Ph.D.
Grace Lutheran Church
Green Bay, Wisconsin
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