

“Worship”

Chapter six of Barbara Brown Taylor’s

The Preaching Life

The structure of a Rochester CRC communion service

(Hymns and songs are interspersed, a tool rather than a structural element.)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Opening of worship</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. God’s greetings, and our mutual greetings2. <i>Confession and Assurance</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Call to confessionb. Prayer of confessionc. Assurance of Pardon (optional: Guide for living)3. <i>Hearing God’s word</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Children’s message and prayerb. Prayer for illuminationc. Scripture readingd. Proclamatione. Prayer of applicationf. Congregational prayer | <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. <i>Celebrating the Lord’s supper</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Institutionb. Distribution of the elements5. <i>Responding to God’s word</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Congregational prayerb. Ministry reportc. Offertory litany, offering and offertory6. <i>Departing to serve</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Benedictionb. Pastor’s charge to the congregationc. Moment of silent reflection |
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The structure of the Anglican mass

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Gathering of the community</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Trinitarian greeting and collect¹ for purityb. <i>Gloria, kyrie eleison</i> and/or trisagion2. <i>Proclamation of the word</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Collect of the dayb. The lessons (from the lectionary; including a reading from a gospel, and generally also a reading from the OT, epistles, and psalms or canticle)c. The sermond. The creed (Apostles’, Nicene or Athanasius)e. Prayers of the People: general prescribed prayers for the Church and the world, often including time | <ol style="list-style-type: none">f. Confession and absolutiong. Passing of the peace3. <i>Celebration of the Eucharist</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. The offering and offertoryb. The institution, called the Great Thanksgiving<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Includes and introductory prayer, the institution, the <i>sanctus</i> and benediction, institution, Lord’s Prayer, Prayer of Humble Access and/or <i>agnus dei</i>c. Distribution of the elementsd. Post-communion prayer of thanksgivinge. Trinitarian blessing and dismissal |
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¹ A collect is a short prayer comprised of an invocation, petition and conclusion.

Questions:

1. BBT is from a tradition which celebrates seven *sacraments*, and pulls out baptism and the Eucharist as “the primary patterns for the Christian life” (70), and recognizes that only the Eucharist “was given to us directly by our Lord” (72). Our tradition certainly participates in all seven practices (the others being confirmation—corresponding to our profession of faith, ordination, marriage, penance and healing), but only refers to baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments.

Since so much of what BBT has to say about worship is tied into her view of sacraments, it’s worth asking: Do you find the difference in terminology is a stumbling block when considering her views? Does it matter, for instance, that she refers to marriage as a sacrament? Why or why not? Is there a term you would prefer?

2. What, according to BBT, are the three things the sacraments teaching about our relationship with God? (Cf. 70-71.) What other elements of Christian life in community might also teach us these lessons—and what elements of *worship* in particular?
3. Referring to worship, BBT writes,

Sacraments are our road maps home. God may not need them, but we do, and while they cannot make something happen, at least they make sure that we are in the right place if it should... Sacraments lead us directly into the precincts of heaven, which the language of earth has always found tricky to describe...

At every step, we practice some discipline of the church. From the opening acclamation to the dismissal, every element of the service has something to teach us about our life with God and one another. Practicing them over and over again, we build up the muscles of our hearts, souls and minds, exercising our ability to respond to the presence of the holy in our midst. (72-73)

How much of this depends upon our awareness of what’s going on? I.e., do you have to be a “sacramentalist” to fully benefit from the sacraments in this way? In which elements of the Rochester CRC worship service are you most aware of God’s grace? Can you think of a time when some element of the worship liturgy has taught you about Christian life?

4. In an essay on the NT view of worship, Don Carson writes

But what is striking about the NT is not only that Jesus is explicitly worshiped and that the theological impulses of the NT documents draw many OT strands into Jesus himself (thus he is the temple, the priest, the Passover lamb, the bread of life) and thereby necessarily transmute OT patterns of worship, but that worship *language* moves the locus away from a place or a time to all of life. Worship is no longer something connected with set feasts, such as Passover; or a set place, such as the temple; or set priests, such as the Levitical system prescribed. It is for all the people of God at all times and places, and it is bound up with how they live (e.g., Rom 12:1-2).

...One of the entailments is that we cannot imagine that the church gathers for worship on Sunday morning if by this we mean that we then engage in something that we have not been engaging in the rest of the week. New covenant worship terminology prescribes *constant* “worship.”²

Now contrast this with Taylor:

² From his essay “Worship Under the Word,” ch. 1 of *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Zondervan), 2002.

Worship is the ongoing practice of faith, and not only the practice by the actual experience of it. Whether it takes place around a kitchen table or the carved marble altar of a great cathedral, worship is how the people of God practice their reliance on their Lord. Though liturgies of word and table... we do what we were created to do. We pray, we listen to God's word, we confess, we make peace, we lift up our hearts, we hold out our hands, we are fed, we give thanks, we go forth. We practice the patterns of our life together before God, rehearsing them until they become second nature to us. Through [liturgies of Word and Eucharist] we expand our images of what it means to be human and what it means to be divine, so that we are better able to live into the fullness of our heritage as sons and daughters of God. (68)

5. Each denomination of Christendom has its strengths and weaknesses. The Reformed tradition embraces study and depth of understanding of Scripture and doctrine to a degree which is unusual in the Church universal. The Anglican tradition tempers Protestant doctrine with a depth of liturgy which is waning in the Western church.

Taylor embodies the best of this depth when she concludes, with her anecdote about her time as a young ballerina. She finds in this an analogy for the movements of liturgical worship. If we can take the liberty of replacing the terms from the Anglican service with CRC's liturgy, we read:

That memory sustains me in worship, where I practice the basic positions of faith. They are named Call to Confession, Prayer of Confession, Assurance of Pardon. They are named the Prayer for Illumination, Proclamation, and Congregational Prayer. Each one requires my full attention and best efforts; each one teaches me a particular way to move, so that when God invites me to put them all together, I may jump with joy to joint the dance.

What can you and I learn from her example, as a member of a richly liturgical tradition? How can we experience what she experiences?

6. Taylor writes, "Nor is it the preacher's job to send people home with good advice ringing in their ears, but with the tools they need to discern God's voice speaking to them in the particular circumstances of their lives" (75). To what degree and in what ways are you equipped by Pastor Fluit with tools to "discern God's voice?"
7. BBT speaks eloquently of the strengths of the lectionary:

Frequently it leads us into territory we would never thought to have entered or would have preferred to avoid, but that is the beauty of the walk. We do not elect the parts of Scripture we hear any more than we select the daily events of our lives. Both are given, and by accepting both we learn to look for God in everything that comes our way and not only in the things we like. (74)

What are your thoughts on use of the lectionary in Sunday-morning worship?