

Embodied Liturgy - Practices as Catechesis

by Michael Flowers

The sermon emphasizes the importance of embodied worship, liturgical worship, and catechesis in spiritual formation.

Duration: 26:36

Scripture: Genesis 1:31, Romans 6:13, Romans 12:1-2, Romans 12:9-10

Topics: "Catechesis"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of repetition in Christian growth and formation. They highlight the idea that sin has caused a break in communion between humanity and God. The speaker also discusses the need for intentional and liturgical worship, where believers offer their bodies and minds as living sacrifices. They encourage obedience to God's commands, even when emotions may not align, and emphasize the power of community and love for one another in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

Over the past few weeks, we've considered the role that repetition plays in our formation. We concluded last week that anything that is formative requires repetition. From learning how to swing that golf club to playing an instrument, the great discipline it takes in order to minister beauty.

You know, we don't see all of the practice, and that's not what we enjoy, that's not what we take in when someone has become a master and they're doing something second nature, right? But getting to second nature, you know, first nature is like breathing. Nobody has to teach us how to breathe. We come out of the womb, and we take that first gasp, and we wah, and it comes out, and we just know how to do it.

It's first nature. But all of the various disciplines of life usually require a lot of repetition in order to gain a skill. Now, since the Enlightenment at least, we've had a tendency to separate church and spirituality and spiritual formation from the rest of the world, in a sense.

We've split nature and grace apart. But really, it takes repetition for us to grow as Christians, right? Memorization, a remembering of the Lord's death. We have to remember because we forget.

It's just so easy to forget. And so, in the wisdom of the church streaming out of the wisdom of the worship of Israel, really, we get the Psalter, we get the scriptures, we get the idea that creation is good, and that

everything he made is good, and when he made human beings, he said it's very good. Then something happened.

Something happened in that garden that we call a break in communion. That's what sin produces. It's a break in breathing.

Breathing that fresh breath of the Holy Spirit. And so we were cast away east of Eden. We're walking through the journey of Israel and the scriptures and coming into Egypt and going out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea.

All of these are types and symbols of what our life in Christ will be. Because Jesus is that new Moses who is delivering us and bringing us through the waters of baptism into the wilderness and sustaining us with the manna, which is communion, holy communion. So all of this is pointing in the old covenant scriptures to something far greater.

And so out of that, we say matter matters. Our physical bodies matter and what we certainly do with our physical bodies matter. Paul says in Romans six to submit the members of your body, the various parts of your body as instruments of righteousness.

And so he's saying, I want you to connect your body, your physicality and your physical being with the soul and the spirit that we are one united person. Body, soul and spirit. Now, in the wisdom of the church, our worship has been liturgical since the beginning.

Since the beginning, even in Acts two, where it's talking about they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and the plural prayers. It's not just any kind of prayer, but it was liturgical prayer that they learned in the synagogue. The repetition of that prayer followed Peter and John.

They were going to the temple and they saw the layman. It was they were on their way to prayer. Well, it wasn't just any time of prayer.

It was a specific time of prayer that everyone stopped everything and prayed together. There is this rhythm that the early church always had. And we got it from our Jewish connection, our roots in Judaism.

And so we heard this morning out of the second century, a description of worship. That sounds very much akin to what we do and what we're doing this morning. It's been handed down to us.

We're doing what Justin Martyr was describing, even in the second century. So that's not Roman Catholicism. You get that right.

Roman Catholicism really wasn't officially formed until the split of East and West. 1054, the church was undivided and they worshipped as one. The things that we call Roman Catholic are not Roman Catholic.

They're Catholic with a little C, you could say, which means universal. The one church worshipped and was in agreement for the first millennium. And so if you want to romanticize something, we're all romantics and I know it's not right to do this.

But I love first millennial Christianity. I love the unity of the church and the idea that the church is undivided. And so we as Christians and, you know, here we are is kind of semi Protestants.

You know, Anglicans are semi Protestants. Because we've hung on and we've claimed so much of the Catholic church that we can buy into, that we can accept and that has been done everywhere at all times by everyone in the first millennium. So here we are.

And, you know, the prayer of Jesus in John 17 about Father, make them one as you and I are one. I just pray that that would be one of the great burdens of our hearts as we live out our lives in Kansas City and as we relate to other Christians that do things differently than us. As long as they call on the name of the Lord, their Lord and ours.

Amen. Right. We're all one body.

And so we just need to act that way. You know, what we've been talking about is liturgical worship. And so we do have distinctives, but we're not saying that we're better than other people who don't worship liturgically.

That's all we're trying to say. But repetition is the mother of learning and practice makes perfect. And the liturgy, liturgical worship throughout when you open up the calendar year, it's not just what we do on Sunday morning, but it's the commemoration of those who have gone before us on feast days and the various movements of Jesus from his.

We're getting ready to go into Advent and then we'll go into Christmas and Epiphany. And then we'll celebrate the life of Christ as he makes it to Holy Week. And we journey with Christ to the cross and his death.

And then Holy, Holy Saturday, where he is entombed and everything is quiet and somber. And then all of a sudden, Sunday, he's appearing to people. You see, this is not a one off thing for us.

This is the life of Christ that has to be formed inside of us. That's why we rehearse it throughout the year, because if we don't, you can go Sunday after Sunday without hearing the gospel. You can go Sunday after Sunday without understanding that our life is in Christ.

We can get off on these topics that will take us so far away from the centrality of Jesus Christ. And so sometimes when our teaching does that, our liturgy keeps us there. Our liturgy preaches the gospel every Sunday.

Amen. So we want the liturgy, as it were, to become second nature. As long as you have to think about it, it's always going to feel a little awkward.

As long as you're trying to get that swing down and you're thinking about it, you're going to mess up. But once it becomes second nature, then it just flows out of you and you know what's coming and you can put the page down. You don't have to follow it anymore.

It just flows out of you. And you've got morning prayer and evening prayer and compliment Sunday Eucharist, which we we serve the Eucharist every every day now, except Saturday. It's a beautiful rhythm that we're just beginning to develop in our church.

And so there we go. So we feel like the liturgy becoming second nature in us will create this life force in us that will take us out. So that when we're sent out into the world and we're caught off guard, as it were, we've got the word of Christ dwelling in us richly.

Amen. Liturgy means the work of the people. We've said I'd like to think about this.

Liturgy means the worship of the people because worship can be work. It's a good work. And so liturgy as the work of the people, the worship of the people implies participation.

Right. Implies participation over merely spectating, just going to hear this amazing preacher. Right.

Where the you know, this is not here, this is over here and the preacher be the center. Right. I mean, just even our architecture says no to that.

I mean, we love preaching and we want it to be good. But when all else fails, we have the liturgy. Amen.

We have backup and we're participating in more than just a podium. We're participating in the work of the altar and we're restoring the altar in Kansas City by what we're doing. This is a restoration of something very precious and ancient in the worship of the church.

Amen. Thank you, man. I love it.

And so it implies participation. Worship is not like a passive thing, is it? It's very, very active. It's not like watching television where you can just zone out, you know, and sometimes TV is therapy for us because we don't want to think and we don't want to participate.

We just kind of want to do that. But, you know, we can be so trained in that that we come to church like that. It's kind of like it requires participation, it requires paying attention, it requires thinking, it requires worship from the deepest place of the heart.

Right. Are you trying to do all of this and you're reading the script and you're hey, it's got to become second nature. Right.

It takes time. It's just becoming second nature more and more to me now. But it's not always second nature to me.

It's OK. Liturgy calls us to employ our bodies. That's why we call the name of the sermon.

Why liturgy? And this is the third message on liturgy. Embodied practices as catechesis. OK, I'm going to explain that embodied practices as catechesis.

What am I talking about? Another word for catechesis would be discipleship. Another word would be spiritual formation, maybe in certain traditions. Catechesis is the way the faith is taught and caught.

And a lot of times it's more caught than taught. And the liturgy is meant for you in your participation to catch it. What am I talking about? The presence of Christ entering into Jesus Christ as the central player in our lives, leading us forward.

Right. So it's just another word for how we are formed in Christ outside a classroom setting, which there's a place for that. Our liturgy and all of its forms from morning and evening prayer, compliment, baptism, ordination, Eucharist, on and on and on through the prayer book.

Call us to participate in the mystery of Christ. The annual cycle, the liturgical cycle, we call it centered around the life of Christ, which I've already mentioned. It's a powerful form of embodied catechesis, embodied catechesis.

For we learn to center our lives in Jesus, using our bodies, offering our bodies, as Paul was talking about today in Romans 12. Offer your bodies, that means the sum total of who you are, really. It's not a brainless body.

That means body, mind, soul, right. All of your heart, soul, mind and strength. That's how we're to love the Lord with all of it.

And that strength sometimes is not very strong. Sometimes I'm tired, I'm weary, I'm distracted. OK, you offer your body and things begin to drop off.

You offer yourself heart, soul, mind and strength and a new strength begins to come. The joy of the Lord becomes your strength. But unless you enter in by faith into the liturgical cycle, it can be just tradition learned of men.

It can be wrote. It can be just dead religion. But the liturgy is not dead.

We are. The liturgy is not alive. We are.

The liturgy has to be embodied inside of us as this icon here. I mean, this is the icon of the first coming of Jesus Christ, the incarnation, fully human and fully divine. This is the solution to what happened in Genesis three.

It all culminates in this. And yet God loves us so much that Jesus Christ has the DNA, the very flesh of who? Mary, Jesus Christ in his physical body with the conception of the Holy Spirit is deriving his physicality from Mary. He carries the DNA of Mary and he carries our DNA in the resurrection.

We are all gathered up into Jesus Christ. One new humanity, one new humanity in him. Right.

That's where we're headed. That's where we're headed. And so catechesis is the way the faith is taught and caught, embodied.

Our personhood is a unity of body, soul and spirit. The unity of exterior and interior. Wow.

Getting those two things together is the life, right? Where there's an agreement, there's a unification of the exterior self and the interior self. And this happens through worship and listening and repenting. The repentance is a really good word.

It just means to change your mind, have a change of mind. Because when you change that deep heart and you confront that deep heart that's wavered inside of you and you begin to turn to Jesus Christ. On a daily basis, that's repentance.

That's how we live. That's how we walk in the spirit and not in the flesh. We have to repent from fleshly ways of thinking and living and natural ways of thinking and living that are grievous to the Lord.

And we turn, we repent and we receive the life of Christ every time. Romans 12 exhorts us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices in worship, living sacrifices, a paradox, right? A living sacrifice to get in touch with all the senses aimed towards worship of the living God. And once again, Paul connects worship with love.

We've been doing this every Sunday now and I'm seeing it everywhere I go. You see, every time I read the New Testament, especially Paul, I'm seeing worship and love. If you look on page seven, you'll see those things tying in everywhere now.

It's really cool and offering our bodies as living sacrifices. Then our minds begin to become renewed and we are transformed as we not only offer our minds and our thinking, but our bodies, the entirety of who we are. And then grace is given and the spiritual gifts begin to flow through all of you and you begin to serve one another by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit out of your weakness.

A lot of times out of your resistance. A lot of times you just say, I will obey. I will do this.

I will say this. I will serve this person. You don't have to feel like it.

Don't wait to feel like it, because we won't do anything if we wait to feel like we must not be ruled by our emotions. We must be obedient to what we know is right. And so we must be obedient to stuff like this out of that worship experience, out of that body life in the Holy Spirit.

Verse nine, he just goes right into it. Let love be sincere. Let love be genuine.

Poor, what is evil? Hold fast to that which is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. It's beautiful, isn't it? Brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honor. Another word is veneration, honor and veneration are the same meaning. Right.

So we venerate one another because we know that everyone in this place right now and everyone on the face of the earth is made in the image. And what Christianity is doing is that progressive recovery of the likeness. We're not all in the likeness of God yet.

We're made in his image and likeness, but the likeness is continuing to grow Christ like. And we've said that the father is Christ like because if you've seen me, you've seen the father. There is no difference in nature.

And so through faith and grace, we can become like Jesus, not by nature, but through faith and grace. Amen. This happens in the worship experience policy where we learn in the presence of the Lord how to start honoring one another above ourselves.

This is community life in the power of the Holy Spirit. It's liturgical. This is intentional.

You know, you have to plan this. You have to do it. You have to think about it.

You have to like be intentional. Right. It's liturgical.

And the more we do it, the deeper our love will grow for one another. You see, it's so beautiful, so beautiful. I'm seeing this happen.

I mean, I've seen this happen in the last five years in this church. I mean, people getting tremendously loved on. Somebody needed a car the other day.

This happened twice. You know, I put it out to everybody within five minutes. Four offers came up.

Now you can use my car. You can use my car. That's what I'm talking about.

That's good stuff. Amen. Just like Chris said, you know, when they were off on their honeymoon and they came back and their house was painted.

Their bed was made. I guess they put the bed in there. I don't know.

I mean, it's really nice to have a bed when you come back from your honeymoon. Right. Yeah, it's good stuff.

So this is not just about what we're doing on Sunday morning, but how what we do on Sunday morning flows into every day. And of course, the nature of embodied worship isn't limited to offering our physical bodies. It involves the wider realm of creation.

Thus, the use of water in baptism. I mean, we need to be baptized in water. It's important.

You can't be baptized without it. Why? What does water symbolize? This flow of the life from the throne of God, the Holy Spirit himself. And so it has so many primordial like images.

When we think about the nature of water without it, we cannot live. We can live without food a lot longer than we can live without water. And so water in our baptism, oil we use in our healing.

And it's blessed oil from our bishop. If you want some, I'll get it to you. Yeah.

Got a whole vial of it back here. But everywhere I go, I carry this little oil stock. You ought to get one.

It's not just priests that need to be doing this, right? I mean, you know, ordained priests that all of you. I mean, somebody needs prayer for healing or something. Pull it out.

Dab it on. Pray for him. Oil.

It's good stuff. And there's something about having it on you. Will create the potential for you to use it more than if you don't have it.

Bread and wine in communion. To commune with God, we need to eat. How did we lose communion? Through a meal.

How do we regain communion? Through a meal. Do this. Don't don't even think about it.

Just do it. Don't try to figure out how this becomes the body and blood of Christ. Be a good Eastern Orthodox there.

Right. It's a mystery. That's all you need to know.

It's a mystery, but I believe it. It was a mystery to Justin Martyr. Right.

That wasn't just bread and wine. He's talking about there. It becomes.

But he didn't get into Aristotelian language of substance and accidents and all of this like scholastic theology that developed in the high Middle Ages. No, no, no, no. You're into that and it works for you.

Good. It's just too complex for me. I don't need Aristotle to get that right.

And Aristotle's got some great stuff. I mean, I used him last week. Right.

He came up with the word second nature. Aristotle did. That's why we use it today.

And it's through repetition that you develop virtuous habits. That's what Aristotle is talking about. Yeah.

OK, so bread and wine and communion incense. I know. I know.

You know what, though? I ordered from Ethiopia hypoallergenic incense. I paid. We paid extra cash so that you won't go.

No, it's really great. We've been using it at the ministry center and in our morning prayer time. And our guys won't pray without it now.

They love it. I mean, and the rose incense are beautiful. We're going to have them next week.

We'll come through with a thoroughfare with the rose incense and we'll test them out. Right. But no, they're hypoallergenic.

Right. Now, they loaded it up right when I was doing the Eucharist and it was wafting up under me the other morning. And it's like I was really trying to get the words out, but it was too much.

It was too much smoke. Right. So we don't need to during that time, we don't need two more granules, I think.

It was great, though. I love it, man. And, you know, the incense, they actually are talking about transformation.

From the the actual substance of the incense, it's transformed into an aroma. And that's what happens to our lives in Jesus. We're transformed into the aroma of Christ.

It's the incense. Remind us of that. They also remind us of the glory cloud rising up in the temple.

This is Jewish worship. Right. And it got carried over into Christian worship.

So it's good stuff. Smells and bells in a gym. Go figure what makes the sacred space sacred.

That's right. The presence of the Lord as we pray and we set it apart. That that makes it sacred.

That makes it holy. So what makes water holy? We bless it. There's no magic there.

It's just returning it to its original intention. Right. In the garden, we communed with God through eating.

Right. Everything that he made was infused with his presence. And so Jesus restores that in the Eucharist.

Amen. We're dealing with word and table. I've lost my time now, so we'll pick up here next week.

The movement of our liturgy is divided up into two parts. It's called word and sacrament or word and table. And so the first part, all the way up to the piece, deals with.

It deals with matters of the word, scripture, prayer, creed, preaching. We confess our sins, which is under word. And then I bless you with the forgiveness that's in Jesus Christ.

That's word. That's proclamation of his forgiveness over your life. May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

Also with me. Let's share that piece. And that's where we segue into table or altar.

OK, so we'll pick that up next week. But I think we got today that matter matters because of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Father, thank you so much. Lord, you've given us the scriptures. You've given us one another.

You've given us Holy Church. Lord, we bless you. That you are restoring in us the the image of Jesus Christ.

So do that. Lord, we submit to that. We want to be like you.

We want to be that transformed fragrance throughout this city. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Stand together and we will recite the Nicene Creed.

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