

복음 Matthew 12:3-9 씨를 뿌리는 자가 뿌리러 나  
새 더러는 길 가에 떨어지매 새들이 와서 먹어버  
= 흙이 니하므  
나오나 으므로 말  
= 가사 라서 가  
그 더러는 좋은 땅에 떨어지매 흑 백배, 흑 육십배  
개의 결실을 하였느니라 귀있는 자는 들으라 하시니  
mer went out to sow his seed. As we was scatterin  
some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate  
fell on rocky places, where it did not have much s  
g up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But whe  
ame up, the plants were scorched, and they witi

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# Singing Life at Full Stretch to God

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Keynote address for 12<sup>th</sup> Korean Worship and Music Conference, August 3-6, 2009

## **Introduction**

The history of Christian faith is a history of the human eye, the ear, the voice singing, the mind imagining, and the human body and soul at full stretch before God. The history of Christian liturgy is also the history of how the Church *practices* seeing, hearing, singing, praying, and sharing the feast of God's love. Each distinctive culture brings distinctive gifts to the history of these practices. At the same time, "culture" is never static or monolithic. Drawing on the dynamism of cultural gifts, Christian liturgy both shapes and expresses faith in God; it may lead us to re-imagine the whole world, including our own habitual ways of conceiving worship. At the heart of all such practices of seeing, hearing, singing, and sharing the meal with Jesus, the Church comes to pray for the Kingdom of God in all its fullness.

We begin with Scripture. In Deuteronomy chapter 6, God calls out: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one." Later St. Paul says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. The "Good News" is proclaimed in words that tell the stories of Jesus. But the Psalms also invite us: "O taste and see the goodness of the Lord." Miriam and Moses join in song and dance at the crossing of the Red Sea." (Exodus 15) Isaiah sings, "Arise, shine! For your light has come." (Isaiah 60:1) John's gospel speaks a witness: "And we beheld his glory!" (John 1:14).

Revelation 21 and 22 teaches us to see what the Holy Spirit is revealing—a “new heaven and a new earth.” A new Jerusalem comes down from heaven. A crystal river flowing from the throne of God, with trees whose leaves are for the “healing of the nations.”

Wherever human beings hear and encounter the living God, the results are poetic, visionary, metaphoric, parabolic, revealed in images, sound, silence and ritual actions. Luke cannot get through the first two chapters of his gospel without breaking into song four times: the canticles of Mary, of Zachariah, and old Simeon combine with the angel’s song: Gloria in *excelsis deo* (“Glory to God in the highest!”). The living Word of God calls us to our senses. This means that we Christians must come to worship God with all our senses open to God’s truth and grace.

In this lecture I wish to address how Christian faith is both formed and expressed in our worship over time. More specifically I wish to explore how communities of faith can deepen our participation in the mystery of God’s grace in Word, prayer and sacramental actions. This requires that we examine together the relationships between the many “symbolic languages” of Christian worship. I begin with three definitions of Christian liturgy, and then propose four theses.

### **Three definitions of Christian liturgy**

The classic definition of Christian public worship is: **“the glorification of God and the sanctification of humanity”** This definition reminds us that worship is first and foremost “God-centered.” The point of our gathering about the Word, the Font of baptism, and the Table of the Lord is to praise, to bless, to thank and to glorify God. God alone is the Holy One of all creation. Yet God wishes human beings to share in that holiness. This is why the definition links the adoration and praise of God to “sanctification.” But this is directly related to “sanctification.” The deepest mystery of Christian liturgy is that we are called to participate in the very life and holiness of our Creator. This means that when we bless and praise and thank God, we are—in those very actions—being called to holiness of life. We might say that true worship introduces us to our fundamental vocation (“calling”) in this world. As I Peter speaks to the first-century church in Asia Minor: “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s won people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of the one who called you out of darkness into the marvelous light of God.” (I Peter 2:9)

This call to holiness is a call to life in this world. The glorification of God is found in how we are to life fully in all our relationships. As the second-century theologian, Irenaeus observed: “The glory of God is the living human being” We shall return to this theme of the inner connection between God’s glory and the call to authentic holiness—to our humanity at full stretch before God and neighbor.

A second definition of Christian public worship is given by my close friend and colleague, James F. White (now of blessed memory). He once defined Christian liturgy as “**speaking, listening, and touching in God’s name.**” This is a minimal definition to be sure. Yet it calls our attention to worship as something the Christian assembly *does together*. We gather together so that God may speak to us, and we may speak to God and to one another. We gather together around the Book, around the water bath of baptism, and to share in the Lord’s Table. In this sense to “touch” the things that God offers us, and to “reach out” to touch one another lives in prayer and in acts of mercy.

This definition begins with what we can observe of the human means of communication: the language of space and time, the language of sound and sight, the language of gesture, of the use of ritual signs and symbols with bread and cup, water and oil, light and the laying on of hands. We shall return to this in speaking of how congregations may grow into these “languages” of worship (verbal and non-verbal) every more profoundly.

The third definition of Christian worship is one I have written elsewhere. This is a Christological definition. “**Christian liturgy is the on-going Word, Prayer and Action of Jesus Christ in and through his Body (the Church), made alive by the Holy Spirit.**” This definition reminds us that all our efforts are Christian worship are dependent upon Christ and the Holy Spirit. Or, we might say, The “liturgy” is Jesus’ liturgy before it is ours. It is his whole life in word, deed and prayer. The basis of Christian worship is the “liturgy” of Jesus Christ—incarnate, crucified, risen, and reigning at the right hand of the Father. Our worship of God is rooted and grounded in God’s self-giving to the world in Jesus. And it is the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete that empowers the church to remember, to proclaim and to enact the mystery of salvation. Christian liturgy is thus both a remembrance of all that God has done, and it is a “foretaste” of what God has promised for the world, the power of the Kingdom for the sake of the whole world. Indeed, of the whole cosmos.

## **Four Theses: Verbal and Non-Verbal Aspects of Christian Liturgy**

I ask you to keep these three definitions in mind as we turn to four proposals that lead to the heart of our topic.

First: **The meaning and point of words used in worship to proclaim and celebrate depends radically on “non-verbal” forms.** This means that we must attend to the way time and space, sight and sound, gesture and movement, call us to participate in the mystery of God in Christ.

Second: **Christian liturgy depends upon deep biblical memory that “opens up” our lives to the primary symbols of faith.** Authentic worship requires that we bring the story of our lives to the narratives and images of Scripture. But it also requires that we bring the narratives and images of Scripture to interpret our patterns of life.

Third: **Christian liturgy is faithful and relevant to the extent that it contains a series of permanent tensions:** the already and the non-yet, the words and actions, the “hearing” and the coming-to-see,” the proclamation and the transformation. The need for cultural identity and the universality of the whole church of God, “at all times and places.”

The fourth thesis is: **Christian liturgy is an eschatological art, grounded in the incarnate life of Jesus Christ and God’s faithful promises to the whole world.** Here we must explore how every act of prayer, each baptism, every Lord’s Supper, are all “foretastes of glory to come.” Christian worship must draw us more deeply into our humanity as it draws us more deeply into the life of God—here and now, and in the Kingdom to come.

Each of these proposals leads us to think about how to deep the participation of our congregations, as well as to appeal to those outside Christian faith who may be seeking faith and renewal of life.

I. From the beginning the gospel takes on human form. The word became flesh, and thus human means became the audible, visible Word. The *imago dei* (“image of God”) became the source for true human identity. St. Augustine of Hippo, even in his ambivalence toward the human body and the sensual aspects of eye, ear, and imagination, sets the stage for reflecting on how the words of faith depend radically on non-verbal “languages” for their meaning and point. In a famous passage in Augustine’s *Confessions* (Book X, 6.8) he asks:

*When I love you, what do I love? Not the body's beauty, nor time's rhythm, nor light's brightness...nor song's sweet melodies, nor the fragrance of flowers, lotions and spices, nor manna and honey, not the feel of flesh embracing flesh – none of these are what I love when I love my God. And yet, it's something like light, sound, smell, food, and touch that I love when I love my God – the light, voice, food, fragrance, and embrace of my inner self, where a light shines for my soul ...that's what I love when I love...God.*

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No one can fail to sense how deeply the sensible joy and imaginative perception of creaturely things are woven together with the love of God. Here is a sense for what is beautiful that is also steeped in the language of doxology born of the psalms and Christian scriptures. In proclaiming his faith in the Christian God of incarnation, Augustine becomes the poetry, the singer, and the painter of verbal icons. Whether intended or not, Augustine cites the very sensible stuff of liturgical rites. The language of faith is formed in us by the sight, sound, taste, touch, and movement of the liturgy. His “and yet it’s like” could well be the description of the rites of baptism, eucharist, and healing. He could well be describing the exchange of peace, and the welcome hospitality given strangers and sojourners that Justin Martyr had described in his Apology some two hundred years earlier. Speaking about the love and grace of God in Christ seems to require these things in worship and in life.

We know that some words are most deeply understood only when they are sung. Melodies and harmonies carry the force of faith and trust and hope in those words. We may say we believe in the communion of saints, but only when we stand in solidarity singing with tears in our eyes and cracked voices “For all the saints, who from their labor rest,” do we come to receive it as real for us. We may say that the Word of God is free; but when the reading of Scripture is by someone who has suffered deeply for the gospel, it is “heard” as if for the first time. We may say that we believe in God the Father Almighty; but when those words are spoken from the waters of baptism surrounded by God-seeking people, then the death-and-resurrection of that believe becomes visible and bodily present. Words about God, about Christ, about faith...these required human embodiment as the Word of God. Can we say that the poetics of the Gospel are not mere ornaments, but are necessary to our understanding God? As Hans Urs von Balthasar remarks, this is “because it is on God’s own initiative and independently of man’s own particular anthropological structure that God takes form and allows himself to be seen, heard and touched.”

What does all this mean for us? It means that we must pay attention to the non-verbal languages: music, images, architecture, movement, poetry, gesture, space and time. Christian faith needs beauty, and it needs strong symbols and signs of the grace of God. The arts can speak and show and sound the connection between God and humanity in worship.

II. Christian worship in all its forms requires biblical memory. The Bible is a library of stories, poetry, song, prayer, and witness -- all pointing toward something beyond human language. The Bible is a witness to the memory of what God has done. When the bible comes to the worshiping assembly it gives us the form and the spirit of “remembrance.” But the act of the worshiping assembly is to recall, retell, and to enact the memory of God. Liturgy is the live act of recalling who God is and what God has done, and who God has promised to be. Fred Craddock, who taught preaching at Candler School of Theology for many years, always said, “If you aren’t old enough to remember with the whole of the Bible, then you are too young to preach.”

The Dutch poet and theologian, Oosterhuis, has put this point well:

*“When the Bible prays, the whole of creation is listed and the whole of God’s history with man is brought up again. When we pray with the Bible we appeal to creation and to the covenant, we call God to mind and remind him who he is and what he has done. What God means in the past includes a promise for the future, the promise that God will mean something for us as well, that God will be someone (to save) us.”*

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The powerful thing of the act of remembering with words is that it is an act of trust and vulnerability. We cannot say words about God presumptively—assuming that we know fully and completely the reality of God. So the act of worship does a strange thing. It takes the biblical memory to remind us that we don’t remember with fullness of truth. Rather the act of worship points toward the astonishing fact that God remember us! This is what trains us to enter into the depths of our human frailty, our mortality, our weakness, and our self-deceptions – yes even our “religious” ones (the most dangerous of all).

The Bible functions to give us words to speak to God in metaphor, image, sign and symbol. But it also opens us to what God speaks to us...a reality not simply “contained” in the words—



but a grace and justice and mercy transcending our language. Christian worship remembers Christ. We do in the Word and the Holy Meal his *anamnesis*. We participate in the Holy Communion “in remembrance of him.” Since what Christ said and did is a unity, our worship must hold together both his words and his deeds and his on-going prayer. He himself is both Word and Act. This is why we need to recover the unity of Word and Table, of the Word read, sung, prayed and preached together with his self-giving to us in sacrament, especially in the baptismal bath, the holy meal of the Lord’s Supper (or Eucharist), and the range of acts such as healing, foot washing, and the laying on of hands for commissioning of ministries of the laity.

But the biblical memory also gives us a vision of a community together, acting in the world. The gospel of John is especially clear: Jesus declares, “As God has sent me, so I send you.” The gospel of Matthew, chapter 25, reminds us that Christ is present when the cup of cold water is given, when the hungry are fed, when prisoners are set free, when we honor all human beings as children of God. Christ is present not only in our words, but in the deeds done in his name.

This is why it may be important to allow persons who do specific ministries to become readers and leaders of prayer. That the diversity of gifts in the community should become audible, visible, and palpable in our worship. Worship is not something done for us, nor is it something done to us.... rather it is the whole assembly brings its life and suffering and joy and sorrow to the remembrance of God in Christ. The Holy Spirit thus enables us to use words in order to understanding the reality beyond the words: “God with us.” And “our lives are hid with Christ in God”.

III. Vital and faithful Christian liturgy is possible when a series of permanent tensions is present. To deepen our participation in worship we cannot avoid the tensions between doxology and lament, between the beauty of God and the tragic disharmony of the world, between the joy of faith and the sorrow that comes with suffering. There is a great gap between the world as it IS and the world as God created it to BE. We live in the gap, and when our worship is dishonest to this, we are diminished. When our worship settles only for judgment and not grace, the gospel is diminished. When our worship seeks only excitement, upbeat music, and an avoidance of human injustice and suffering, the gospel is diminished. When our worship becomes too verbal, and never allows silence, the gospel is diminished and we are not fed with the full grace of God in Christ.

Perhaps the idea of three interrelated levels of participation can be recovered. The first level concerns the phenomena of the worship as human activity -- that is, the listening, singing, prayer and ritual actions. At this level we must assess the actual forms and languages we use. Here is where the search for adequate music and art and spiritual environment is crucial. Some so-called “traditional” worship is too culture-bound and held captive by a narrow vision of God. Singing only the same hymns and songs’ may limit how we remember and hope, lament and praise. Ritual actions performed with no warmth or hospitality can block the congregation’s participation. Lack of good teaching that informs the congregation of the meaning of the actions often prevents participation at this very first level. Often time “traditional” worship suffers from a lack of deeper tradition, especially when it is not linked with deep and sustained biblical study. Often “contemporary” worship lacks the sense of connection with the longer history of worship which brings a cultural-transcendent element forward.

The second level of participation is in and through all the means of the first level—but **as** Church, **as** the Body of Christ. This refers to the solidarity with the whole assembly as an act of the whole church, not simply a group of individuals. This requires being able to “rejoice with those who rejoice” and “weep with those who weep.” Only this way does the meaning of being the Body of Christ avoid “spiritual entertainment” at the first level. I am convinced that the deepening of sacramental participation is essential to this being the Body of Christ. This requires “experiential teaching” and attention to the primary symbols of faith—light, water, food and drink, oil, ashes, as these “offer Christ.”

The third level of participation builds on the vitality of both these other levels. This is the encounter with the divine mystery—with participation in the very being of the Triune life of God (as Wesley was fond of saying “partakers of the divine nature”). This could be called the “mystical” dimension, but it is also the profoundly ethical dimension of worship. A new generation is looking for this—sometimes in odd places outside the church.

Worship should open up our vision of the world as the “arena of God’s glory” (John Calvin’s phrase). But more it must compel us to serve that world, joining in God’s on-going redemptive purpose. All three levels of participation are thus interrelated. And perhaps we must find ways to focus on the “liturgy after the liturgy” as a starting point. This leads us to the eschatological character of all faithful worship. It sends us into the tensions of the world, bearing the words and

the non-verbal actions of Christ. This is an Advent Gospel: yearning for the world yet to be what God created and re-created it to be.

IV. My fourth thesis is that Christian liturgy—in its whole range—is an eschatological art. It images a redeemed world, and engages in the mission of God still struggling with the resistances to the good, the true and the beautiful. Worship that addresses the world's beauty and terror, its joy and its sorrow, its promise and its peril – this is the worship that finally will address the broken heart and the yearning for God.

This is why we must continually ask certain questions. Here are some of mine for our further discussion:

Does our worship shape us in the social vision of the Kingdom of God?

Does our worship arouse, sustain, and deepen our sense of awe and wonder?

Does our worship arouse, sustain, and deepen our human compassion for one another  
--for our neighbor as well as for the stranger and even the enemy?

Does our worship bring to life and to our senses the biblical hope of what God has promised?

Does worship lead us to humanity at “full stretch” before God? The arms of God in Christ have been stretched out in love to embrace the wounded world, and to be our “way, our truth, and our life.”?

These are the theological and pastoral questions that should be before us, in whatever cultural context we find ourselves. These questions will also allow us to see the relationship between the verbal and the non-verbal dimensions of authentic Christian liturgy, rooted and grounded in the liturgy of Jesus Christ. At the same time, the challenge facing Korean congregational life is how to use cultural inheritance in the face of cultural forces that surround the very images we have of God-incarnate in Jesus Christ. We must support one another in the challenge of holding deep memory against the forces that might well turn worship into entertainment or into parochial forms of Christian life. We will continue always in the tensions between Christ and culture, but with new imagination and new connections between treasures both ancient and new.