

Transcript of the Teaching Eucharist 29th March 2009

This morning's service will take a slightly different form. It will be a teaching Eucharist. Instead of a sermon, there'll be a brief meditation, and throughout the service a commentary on the different parts of our worship.

We come to worship with a sense of anticipation, expecting to meet God, because God has promised that when we gather in his name he will be with us. So I invite you to encounter God today as we worship.

What we do as we worship is not a series of isolated actions, but part of a unity with a distinct rhythm and flow, in which we reach out to God and God reaches out to us. Our worship has a four-fold pattern: gathering, word, table and sending. This pattern shapes who we are as a community, drawing us together, inviting us to attend to God's story, nurturing our response, propelling us out for mission.

First we come together as a community, to greet each other and God. We praise God in song in our opening hymn. And then the minister greets the people in God's name, saying something like 'The Lord be with you'. These are the first words spoken by the minister, like saying hello. And it's very significant that the first words acknowledge that we're God's people and we gather in God's name.

And having greeted each other in God's name, we greet God and make ourselves ready to be in his presence in our prayers of preparation. So let's do that now.

Prayer of Preparation

When we come into God's presence and are aware of his glory and greatness, we're aware too that we are unworthy and fall short of God's loving mercy in so many ways. So we come to God to confess our unworthiness and wrong-doing and thinking, in the certain knowledge that God forgives us when we turn away from our sins and enables us to turn again to the life of faith.

So let's have a time of silence now when we remember before God all the times when we've failed to love him and failed to love each other.

Confession & Absolution

We continue to pray in silence and then the leader collects all our prayers together in the words of the Collect. This is the special prayer for each Sunday and it changes each week. So let's pray.

The Collect

We're a people of book and table. A people who encounter our God in the bible and at this table.

Some people call these parts of our worship Word and Sacrament. Whatever we call them, they are important channels through which we experience Jesus' presence with.

Although some churches have traditionally focused on one or other of these elements, book and table, word and sacrament belong together in worship. This is the ancient pattern of Christian worship, made holy by Jesus in the story of the Emmaus Road (Luke 24) when he opened the hearts of his friends to the scriptures (Word) and then made himself know to them in the breaking of the bread (Table). And that pattern was followed from earliest times by the Christian community – described for us in detail in an early text by Justin Martyr.

Word

God is revealed to us in the words of scripture – the Old and New Testament, and especially the Gospels – the accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It's important in this time that we stay focused on God and be open to what he might want to say to us through his word. First we listen to God's word in the New Testament.

Reading

In a moment we'll sing praise to God to prepare ourselves to meet God in the words of the Gospel. The gospels are particularly important to us and when we gather for worship the reader of the gospel stands in the middle of the people to demonstrate that the good news about Jesus is for everyone. The people stand and face the book of the gospel to show our respect. Either side of the reader are candles to remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World.

Hymn/Psalm

Gospel

After the readings from scripture we try to hear what God might be saying to us today through his word – this is the sermon. The preacher begins by praying that God will be present in the words to be spoken, and then, to use the words of Justin Martyr in 150AD, 'the preacher admonishes and invites us into the pattern of these good things'. Our speaking and our listening, we believe, is directed by God's Holy Spirit.

Prayer

In our gospel reading today some Greeks, outsiders come to meet Jesus. They don't approach him, maybe they are a little afraid or feel daunted about meeting so great a rabbi, maybe they know they are outsiders and fear rejection. Philip, the disciple they approached also needs the

support of Andrew before going to Jesus. And Jesus does not reply to their question directly. We know it's not because Jesus rejects outsiders, remember the stories of Jesus eating with outcasts, touching lepers, taking the side of adulterous women against the religious establishment – no, it was certainly not that Jesus would reject them. But that Jesus was focusing on bigger questions, and facing greater trials. Jesus spoke these words after he had raised Lazarus from the dead, after he had been anointed with perfume by the unnamed woman, after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Jesus was preparing for his passion and death, the final act of the great love story in which God rescues broken humanity from certain death and destruction. And Jesus speaks these words: I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. This is the mystery that we remember and re-create every Sunday as we gather around the Word of God and around this table – the mystery of how the death of one so long ago, can mean life now for you and me. This is the mystery and the beautiful truth of the Christian faith – death is swallowed up in life.

I want to read you part of a reflection on the Eucharist by the liturgist Gregory Dix, and then we'll have a few moments for silent reflection on what meeting God in bread and wine means for us:

Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race in earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacles of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth. ... We have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph, or for a bride and bridegroom in a little country church; ... for a sick old woman afraid to die; for a schoolboy sitting an examination or for Columbus setting out to discover America; for the famine of whole provinces or ... on the beach at Dunkirk; ... one could fill many pages with the reasons why we have done this, and not tell a hundredth part of them. And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unfailingly, across all the parishes of Christendom, the pastors have done this just to make the plebs sancta Dei – the holy common people of God.

Silence

In the sermon, one person speaks about the scriptures; now we all speak about our faith in words derived from an ancient Christian statement of faith – the Creed.

Let's stand to declare our faith in God.

Creed

A story in the gospels remembers some people who brought their paralysed friend to Jesus for healing. Because they couldn't get near Jesus, they cut a hole in the roof of the house and

lowered their friend through it to Jesus feet. In this spirit of faith and trust we bring our prayers of intercession – or prayers of asking God’s help for people and situations we care about. One person leads the prayers, but prayer is a community activity and we all, in our hearts, bring our desires, our thoughts and our concerns to God in these prayers.

So let’s sit or kneel for our prayers of intercession.

Prayers of Intercession

Now we turn from book to table - to the ministry of the sacrament.

Again we start by greeting each other in God’s name and reconciling our differences before we meet God at the table. The Peace is not a time to say hello to our friends, nor a break in the service to stretch our legs. The Peace is God’s Peace, which we offer freely to those around us because God offers it freely to us. Above all this is a time for being reconciled, making your peace with anyone you have disagreed with or felt hurt by. Some people will need to turn to the person sitting next to them, some people will need to make their peace with someone on the other side of the building, some people will need to make their peace with God in quiet prayer, without the disturbance of others wanting to say hello. This is a time for peace-making.

... The Peace of the Lord be with you. ‘And also with you’. Let us be reconciled to each other.

The Peace

We sing God’s praise in thanks for giving us peace and reconciliation. And we offer to God at the table the gifts God has given us. We offer our money to fund God’s mission and we offer bread and wine as symbols of all that God has given to us. These gifts God will use to make himself known to us.

Hymn and offering

As we gather at the table we remember all the times Jesus ate and drank with his friends and with anyone whose heart and home was open to him. Jesus’ table fellowship was criticised by the religious community of his time because it was lax and liberal, welcoming anyone who would share with him. In this spirit of welcome we gather here around this holy table. And all who come here remember and join Jesus in this celebration.

Eucharist means Thanksgiving. The great prayer of thanks we offer here is the prayer for all of us, not only the priest who speaks it. In the prayer, we remember God’s glorious deeds, we remember before God that Jesus came to us and died for us and rose to new life for us; we remember that Jesus took bread and wine, blessed them, broke them and gave them to his friends.

In the same way, as we - the community of Christ - take, bless, break and share the bread and wine, we receive the grace of God which gives us the strength to live the life of faith. We offer ourselves to be taken by God for his purpose, blessed by him in this celebration, to be open to our own brokenness and vulnerability, as Christ himself was broken, and to be given in God's service for our community and our world.

As the Eucharist prayer begins, the priest and people greet each other and remember that God is present. Then all participate, in words or silent prayer, in the great prayer of thanksgiving, ending with a great and resounding shout of **Amen!** from all the people - this loud **Amen** - and I encourage you to be loud about it - is the word that expresses our agreement with the prayer of thanksgiving. **Amen** - let it be so, we shout.

As we come to receive God in bread and wine or in blessing, we come expecting to meet God, because God has promised that he will meet us in this way. Be open, be expectant, call on God. Be aware of the presence of God in bread and wine and in the people around you.

Taking of the Bread and Wine

The Eucharistic Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

Breaking of the Bread

Giving of Communion

In this celebration we have encountered God in Christ, and been united with all who have ever celebrated this feast, and all who ever will celebrate it. Now, as the first Christians did, we keep the great Silence after communion when we thank God for all he has done for us.

Blessing

We are blessed in the three-fold name of God and assured of his peace.

At this point, we get ready for being sent out into the world, strengthened and resourced by our time together in God's presence. So we share notices about our life and work as a church.

Banns and notices

We sing our last hymn of praise and then we are dismissed into the work of God, until we meet again as God's people.

Hymn

The words at the end of the new Baptist prayer book express it well. The minister says: 'Our worship is ended', and the people respond: 'Our service begins'.

In the Anglican church, the dismissal for service is given in the name of God, and the response of the people is in the name of Christ, the one we have met here today and the one whose example of service we follow.

Dismissal

Gill