

Article: The Divine Service is where God gives us His Gifts

Lutherans, like the early Christians, believe that Christ is bodily present through Word and Sacrament, offering His people the gifts of heaven. The liturgy is, first and foremost, the activity of God, who is serving us with the gifts. But it is also the Christian assembly whose right and privilege it is to stand in God's presence and receive His gifts for the sake of the world. Christians are agents of God in the world, for no one else in the world could do this service! And as Christians respond to the Word and Sacraments, they respond in Christ, that is, their songs of praise, their prayers, and their confession of faith are not their own, but they are from the Christ who is in them, responding back to the Father through Him. And so both the gifts given and the gifts responded to are in Christ.

Here we see the origin of Luther's word for worship, *Gottesdienst* - God serving the world with His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation through Word and Sacrament. The liturgy is the context in which God acts to save His people and in which God's people respond. First, they receive the gifts God pours upon the world through the Christian liturgy; then, as representatives of the world, they respond to the gifts in acts of worship. The liturgy is where God is present in Christ to save us from sin, death, and the devil. This definition of liturgy may well have been endorsed by Luther, whose sole principle in renewing the liturgy was justification by grace through faith.

Luther's reforms could also be described by the criteria of faith and love. Here is expressed the two different perspectives on worship. When described in terms of justification, it is from God's perspective, what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ, His objective acts that are present and proclaimed in the liturgy. The supreme expression of justification is in the liturgy. If our liturgies are to be Lutheran, they must be understood in the context of justification and justification in the context of the liturgy. God's solution to the fallenness of creation is now present in the Christian assembly. The end is here and celebrated because Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, is present offering the gifts of the wedding feast for His Bride, the Church, through His teaching at the table and His presence in the meal. God proclaims to the world that the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ is present among us through Word and Sacrament.