

THE SHAPE OF GOD PLEASING WORSHIP
Sermon for the 4th Sunday of Easter, 2026
Acts 2:42

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is part of the First Reading from before, Acts 2:42: “**And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Last Sunday, we heard that God does not come to us through our feelings, but through His means: the Word and the Sacraments. That is how Almighty God serves us. Frivolity and entertainment have no place in the worship of the true God. Rather, Christian worship should be characterised by a sense of *repentance and humility* engendered by the Law, and a sense of confident *trust and joy* engendered by the precious truths of the Gospel.

When Sunday comes around, like any other day, we get out of bed, get the chores done, and then get ready for church. It’s pretty much the same routine each week. But have you ever stopped to consider *why* we come to church? Is it just to keep friends or family happy? Did our parents and grandparents all come to church, so we should too? Is it just a *routine* we have fallen into? I hope not. Surely, we come to worship God, understanding how important our worship is, giving thanks to God for His daily and eternal gifts.

Of course, everybody will miss a Sunday or two for various reasons, whether due to illness, holidays, or something else. There is nothing wrong with this. And sometimes there are reasons we cannot attend *at all*. Old age or remoteness can stop us altogether. But that too is okay. Such people can still, according to 1 Thessalonians, “*pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*” (1 Thess. 5:17-18), because the whole of the Christian’s life is a life of worship, a continual communing with God. But what is unfortunate is that many simply do not bother to turn up *when there is no reason they can’t*. It sounds better to sleep in, go shopping, play sports, or laze around at home, rather than finding an hour or two each Sunday to come to the Lord’s house—it’s just not that *important*.

Coming to worship in the Lord’s house is important because not only is He there to meet with us each Sunday, but we receive doctrinal instruction from Him week after week.

When we come to worship in the Lord’s house, He is teaching us. Worship teaches the faith and nurtures the faithful because it is Word-oriented. Worship is a safe learning environment because the Word of God has a primary place in this gathering. The fellowship of believers, gathered in the name of Jesus, fosters the work of the Spirit. When the LORD once called to Samuel, he replied, “*Speak, for your servant hears*” (1 Sam. 3:10). These words are worthy of memorisation by every faithful believer entering God’s house.

Worship is also important because it is where God equips His people to live out their relationship with Him in the presence of the world.

Worship is always evangelism or witnessing. The Apostle Peter says to be “*prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you*” (1 Peter 3:15). Whatever we do in worship expresses our faith and hope so others may see. In this regard, a dynamic interplay is at

work in worship. Our worship affects our witness, and our witness affects our worship. There is a two-way relationship between evangelism and worship. There is a closeness between faith and our worship. True worship has to do with life in faith. In our worship practices, we prepare, proclaim, and enact what ought to happen every day as members of God's family, as we go forth and tell others about the truth of the Gospel whenever we have the opportunity. What we do on Sunday affects our daily lives, and our daily relationship with God affects our expressions of worship on Sundays.

Furthermore, when we worship, we worship as the children of God in Christ Jesus, our Good Shepherd.

Our God comes to us, and through His Spirit working within us, we respond by joyfully receiving Him. In fact, we do not worship Him all alone, but with the "*angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven*," we "*laud and magnify His glorious name*" before receiving Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of all our sins.

No doubt, worship is important and powerful, but it is not entirely up in the air on *how* we should worship. While it is true that there is diversity in the forms of Christian worship, this does not disturb us unduly because we uphold the Lutheran principle that it is not necessary for the church "*that rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike*" (Augsburg Confession VII). However, **God Himself has shaped how we are to worship Him**, and this leads us to our text from Acts. From it, we can see how God guided the Early Church in its worship, giving us a record of how they did so that we could follow.

After Peter had finished his Pentecost sermon, and some three thousand had been baptised, Luke writes how the believers now "**devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**"

Worship always has a shape. It always did, and it always will. Generally speaking, the shape of worship is determined by what you think about worship. If you think it's all about how you feel, then your worship will involve such things as loud music and having a good time in church, for the simple purpose of leading you to a conviction or a decision. Such worship only seeks to build emotions, rather than to build faith. Another example might be when people, leaving church after worship has concluded, say, "*I never really got anything out of that today.*" What do they mean? Quite often, they are referring to the sermon. In other words, the main focus of the worship service was the pastor and how he conducted himself. Again, others will say that worship is boring because we have boring old hymns and an outdated liturgy. Surely we could modernise a bit.

God shapes how we are to worship Him. Although we shall always feel refreshed by worship, it is not about *how we feel* toward God. We are refreshed because God comes to us in Word and Sacrament, to bless us and equip us for the faith and the life of faith, as we are reminded of what He has done for us.

Worship is for the *inner man*, the part of us that loves God. The outer man is corrupted in sin and still hates whatever is holy, and in worship, we must discipline our flesh and make it serve what is right and good and holy. We dare not allow our flesh to shape our worship by its pleasures and feelings, or we shall be shaped by that part of us in which sin rules.

Worship, as we do it today, is still shaped by the same things as it was for the earliest Christians. In fact, the text before us describes *how* they worshipped. If you look closely at our text, it has four elements. Luke writes, "**They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching**" - this is the first element..., "**and the fellowship**" - that's the second..., "**to the breaking of the bread**" - that's the third..., "**and the prayers**," that's the fourth. How simple is that, and yet, how many churches get it wrong. Let's take a closer look at each element.

First of all, the "**apostles' teaching.**"

That is the portion of the service where we read the Scriptures and teach. The lessons we have each week, and the sermon, are part of the worship service. Luther says that a worship service without a sermon should not even take place. It's a little bit like the story of Philip and the Ethiopian in Acts chapter 8. There, we read of that Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. *"The Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." 30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him"* (29-31). Philip then explained to him what he was reading. This is what happens in a sermon. The Word of God is expanded upon, explaining God's words to the hearers. God sends His shepherds to teach His Word to His hearers.

Furthermore, it comes as no surprise that the "**apostles' teaching**" is listed first, because the Word of God is the most important element in worship. If you took God and His Word out of the worship service, it would no longer be a worship service. That is why we give such priority to the reading of Scripture and the preaching of the sermon. A century ago, the Lutheran church had sermons that lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. People had the time and the desire to learn and listen. Today, many people's attitude is that if something can't be said from the pulpit in less than 10 minutes, then you can't say it! Our flesh always struggles against the spirit in this most important element of worship.

Second, we have "**fellowship**."

The Greek word used here for "fellowship" is *koinonia* (pronounced "coin-own-e-a"). This word means fellowship or sharing together in something holy. That fellowship is most clearly seen in the Lord's Supper, but it is also experienced in the confession of sins and the absolution, the confession of faith, the singing of the hymns and so forth. We have fellowship together in something holy — we share in the forgiveness proclaimed in the absolution and delivered personally to each one of us in the sacrament.

Again, we share in something holy when we announce to the world what we believe and when we speak the words of the creeds, whether they be the Apostles', Nicene, or Athanasian Creeds. These creeds have been used since the time of the Apostles, have been confessed by the Church against errors common throughout the Church's history, are believed by everyone who is a Christian, and are denied only by those who also deny Christ.

Third is the "**breaking of the bread**."

This specifically refers to the Lord's Supper. It is, and always has been, an integral part of Christian worship. Until about a century and a half ago, no Sunday or festival service of the Lutheran Church was without Holy Communion. We come to hear of God's grace, and then to receive it in the most personal and intimate fashion, by mouth, as we eat the body and drink the blood of our Saviour in this precious gift.

Except among those who deny God's gift and reject His Sacrament, the Lord's Supper was an indispensable part of regular worship until the age of rationalism and pietism led many Lutherans to mistakenly flee from the Sacrament and receive it only two to four times a year.

The fourth part of the worship is "**prayer**."

We talk to God. We pour out our hearts to Him. He has spoken to us in His Word, and He invites us to come to Him and speak with Him in corporate prayer — the prayer of the body of Christ. We pray about everything that concerns all of us, for forgiveness, to give thanks, and to seek His continued blessings and grace. This is not a time for purely personal petitions, but for the things we all together desire and for which the body of Christ cries out to God with one voice. We lift up our hearts together, calling on God for what we need, and we confidently trust God to hear our prayers and grant our petitions, for we do not seek what God does not want, or those things concerning which we have no

word, but what God Himself has taught us to pray about and promised to pour out on His people when they pray.

That is the shape of worship in Scripture — word, sacrament, liturgy and prayer. And how we do those things is also significant. Just as surely as false preaching is a serious and deadly error, and denying the Sacrament impoverishes a church, worship which does not faithfully follow the shape and purpose which God has revealed, and which God has caused to arise in His Church, is dangerous and even deadly as well. It is through worship that we teach, and we learn. It becomes part of us, shaping our thinking, values, and lives. We refresh our faith in God through the faithful repetition of the liturgy and the shape of our worship, which teaches us of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and the sweet promises of resurrection and life everlasting as God's gifts to us through faith, for Christ's sake.

Therefore, let us continue to meet in worship of the Triune God. Almighty God, our Father, the Good Shepherd Himself, Jesus Christ, and the Sanctifier, the Holy Spirit. For in these, we have our salvation! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.