How Congregational Worship Shapes Christian Character

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 October 2017

Preacher: Dr. Jeff Greenman

[0:00] But now, for why you're all here, we are blessed today to have Jeff Greenman, who is, I can say, one of the most modest speakers I've ever met, because when I asked him for a bio, he said he studied at Regent, he left, he came back again.

Which, while true, it doesn't speak to it all. Jeff is a well-respected academic. He's the president of Regent College. He has spearheaded the new direction and negotiated through some really challenging times.
And when I asked him to speak, the topic that he raised is something that other people have been talking to me about, congregational worship. And I think it's just such a timely issue to look at how does that influence our Christian life.
So I can't think of a better person to speak on this topic, so I just want to take this opportunity to thank him for being here. Thank you.
Thank you.
[1:57] There's no clock in this room, which is slightly dangerous. I do have a watch here. The clock, when I came in, it was there, we took it down, because it's two and a half hours off, and that's very disconcerting.

So this project, in academic terms, my interest has been in theology and ethics. And this project that I'm going to talk about here is really all about that.
It's about a theology of worship and what's going on in worship, and how it shapes our lives and the way we live our lives, and Christian character. And sometimes people think about worship, particularly in Anglican tradition, as a liturgical experience.
But they don't necessarily think through, what are we really doing, step by step by step. So I want to frame this for you in some introductory comments to see the kind of big picture of worship, and then look at specifically what does a liturgical service look like.
Now, when I talk about this topic in other audiences, they don't necessarily follow this so well, particularly the second half of this talk, because the bits and pieces of liturgical worship are not really familiar to them.
[3:17] And in many evangelical circles, the pattern is, sing a few songs, have a sermon, sing a few songs, go home. And that pattern is rather, well, yeah.

I'm going to show you today what you're missing out on if you opt for that pattern, which you, by virtue of being at St. John's, have not opted for. So I am preaching literally to the choir here. But let me plunge in, and you'll see where we're going.
So the really high-level question, we're going to start from a very high level and kind of move down, is the larger question of our Christian lives, and what does and how does Sunday connect to Monday?
And for many people, there's a very big disconnect between the life of coming to church on Sunday and doing something on Sunday in fellowship with others, and then heading off into a completely different world, and what is it that creates a link between those?
What is it that shapes us in Sunday experience for the sake of Monday through Saturday faithfulness in all of the different realms of life that we have, all the different responsibilities that we have in our families and our neighborhoods and communities and jobs and all the rest of that?
[4:33] So that has been an ongoing question that I have been chipping away at and trying to understand and trying to mine the Christian tradition to speak to.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

How do we connect Sunday and Monday? Which is really the question of how is really Christian character formed? How do we become people who can live out a deep and integrated faith in Christ, the kind of faith that we pursue in congregational worship and are nurtured for in congregational worship?
How do you live that out the rest of the week? What's the connection? So those are my kinds of questions. And in particular, it seems to me, as somebody who spent a lot of time on topics of Christian ethics, that one of the things that Christian ethics types don't talk about very much is worship.
And the fixation of ethics just on decisions and should you do this or that or is this or that right or wrong, all that's great stuff to talk about.
But behind all of the decision making and choices that we have to make in our lives comes something that steps, in a sense, behind that, which is who we really are as people, what our values are, what our attitudes are, and how we've been shaped to have a certain kind of character.
[5:46] So decisions and choices don't come out of nowhere. They actually are an expression of who we are. What shapes who we are? I mean, I argue that what shapes really who we are profoundly is the experience of worship.

And that is God's design for us to be shaped according to worshiping him. So point C on my outline, point C, what is Christian character? Personal qualities of heart and mind expressed throughout life that reflect the character of Christ.
So Christian character, to be Christian, has to have something to do with Christ. There's a certain kind of quest here for Christ-likeness of heart and mind and attitude and relationship.
That's another whole talk, exactly how to fill all of that out in great detail. But you'll get hints at what I'm thinking about that as we proceed. So it is an all-engaging, all-encompassing kind of transformation towards becoming like Christ.
That's what I'm interested in. How would something as ordinary to us and familiar to us as Sunday worship impact that? So point D on my outline here, I say worship in the fullest sense.
[6:57] If we start from these very high-level levels and try to work down a little bit. Worship in the fullest, deepest sense, as the beginning of Romans 12 puts it, is present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

So there's deep Old Testament roots, of course, to that image. The idea of sacrifice is the core of the Old Testament model of worship. And I would argue it's the core of the whole biblical pattern of worship.
It's still about sacrifice. Because you remember it's the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. And then our own, in a sense, mimicking of that or echoing of that in our own offering of ourselves as living sacrifices.
Paradoxical, as that is, living sacrifices. St. Paul knows what he's doing. It's deliberately so. It gets you to think about a life of self-offering and self-giving that is not just once, but is ongoing and is in fact daily.
A daily offering of yourself. So the idea of offering and sacrifice is at the heart of the whole enterprise of worship. In biblical terms. So, worship in the fullest, deepest sense is about every area of life.
[8:05] And what it is to lead a life that is offering yourself to God in sacrifice. And self-offering and self-giving in response to his own giving of himself to us.

Yes, good. Big, high-level concern. And then congregational worship fits under that wider category. Right? It's a subspecies of the wider self-offering to God in response to his offering to us.
And I want to plow into congregational worship. Notice in my title it's really congregational worship to talk about. Not, in a sense, the self-offering worship of everyday life.
You could ask how doing the dishes can be an act of worship. And actually, I think, biblically, that makes perfect sense. It's not a bizarre idea. And that's one of the insights the Reformation brought back to the fore.
That, as Luther said, God smiles whenever a father changes a diaper. And so dirty things.
[9:07] Diapers, dishes, other things. Diapers, can be caught up in this idea of offering ourself and all that we have and are to God in worship. But I want to focus particularly on congregational worship.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

So this quote here in the middle of the page in the italics is one of my favorites. Horton Davies was a scholar at Princeton who studied the history of Christian worship.
Passed on a few years ago. But tremendous work on this. And this is one of his little summary statements that captures a huge amount. And as I read this to you, I say, notice the whole person emphasis.
This definition is marvelous because it opens up the vista that congregational worship in the church's great tradition, I'll call it, to use a J.I. Packer kind of word, is a glorious and all-encompassing and very well-rounded experience.
So listen to this. Listen to how much of ourselves congregational worship is really meant to engage. Worship is the glad homage of mind, heart, imagination, and conscience offered by the body of Christ to its Lord as a response to revelation.
[10:19] This is a response. The mind is open to the truth of God in scripture and sermon. The imagination is enthralled by the majesty of God, creator and redeemer, in symbolism, architecture, music, and the sacraments.

The heart is overjoyed by the forgiving love of God and by the fellowship of the redeemed in heaven and on earth. The conscience is opened and purified by the commands of God and the example and teaching of our Lord.
The entire personality in community is educated in the prayers of adoration, confession, petition, intercession, and consecration, so that we are elevated, abased, judged, and driven forth in sacrificial service to the world.
What do you make of that? Well, there's a sense in which I could just sort of sit down and just we could be done.
Because it's really, in a sense, it's all there. It's a very rich statement, a very dense statement. But it is trying to sort of open up mind, imagination, heart, conscience, entire personality in community, which pushes against our inherent individualism of our culture, is educated in prayers so that we are elevated, abased, judged, driven forth in sacrificial service.
[11:43] It even has the sense of being sent out at the end of this, right? So gathering in response, transformed through encounter, and then sent out again. That's the basic liturgical pattern of the church's history.

He captured it beautifully, beautifully well. So bear all that in mind, because what I'm interested in is a whole person transformation. Christian character is going to be whole person transformation, heart, mind, soul, and strength, to love and serve the Lord.
And this is going to open up that vista for us. Now, a little bit more on worship before I go into the sort of elements of a service. Particularly here, I'm using some categories from our friend Aristotle, who might have been a pagan, but he's very helpful sometimes.
And Aristotle was very helpful to Thomas Aquinas, so he can help me too. And this is kind of an important little piece of the puzzle from my standpoint, because it's important to get clear what we're actually doing on Sundays.
As congregations, our congregation, and those of countless others around the world, what are we actually doing when we're together on Sunday? Well, thankfully, this is not a church where the worship leader stands up in front and says, Well, great to see you.
[13:06] Hope everyone has a really good time today. Nobody here says that at St. John's. And I'm so glad, because I have endured many places where I've gone, and sometimes attended, and often been a guest preacher, and people have said stuff like, Hope you have a great time.

Well, I don't think gathering on Sunday is to have a great time. That buys into the whole idea of worship as a kind of entertainment, as a kind of consumerist product.
You're meant to sort of fill out your evaluation at the door and turn it in, and whether you liked it or not, or whether the sermon was amusing enough, or this was loud enough, or whatever.
So that's not it. So if that's not it, what is it? And more of what's it is over here on the right-hand column of my little chart.
The purpose, the end, the goal is ultimately to glorify and honor God. And the thing to underline four or five times in your handout is the God part.
[14:12] So one of the things that I'm going to be resolutely insisting upon is that it's not about us. So despite the fact that congregational worship and pursuing congregational worship week by week by week and year by year by year, and many of you have been at this for year by year by year, is good for us, the point of it is not that it's good for us.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

The real point of it, the overarching point, is that it gives glory and honor and praise to God, who is worthy of glory and honor and praise. And this is a God thing. Now in the process, the byproduct is that that experience of giving honor, praise, and glory to God is really good for us.
And it has a deeply shaping form, force in our lives. But we don't do it in order to be changed. We do it in order to give glory, honor, and praise to God. That's why we come together Sunday by Sunday by Sunday by Sunday, year after year after year after year.
And as much as it is good for us, and I'll show you how and why more as we proceed, it's really got to be all about God. So that this is not just another way for us to pat ourselves on the back, or prop ourselves up somehow.
But it is to glorify God. How does that happen? What are the materials that are used? This is the analogy of making a statue, right? So famous four causes of Aristotle. The materials that are put together in order to do that are, and I say here, songs, prayers, sermons, a liturgy, an order of service, bits and pieces, that gives a shape to it, right?
[15:48] A certain sort of shape, a design. Just like if you're building a statue, you have to sort of design it, you have to draw it out, you have to have a blueprint for building a house. There is a certain blueprint that is our liturgy, quote-unquote, to use our word that is a familiar Anglican word.

And what actually brings all of this into being is not actually ourselves. If you put the analogy here with building a statue, ultimately there is a sculptor that, according to a certain design and with certain materials, achieves something by putting together a certain kind of statue, statue in honor of some great war hero or something like that, you know, you want to give glory and honor to the war hero, you're going to take your bronze, and then you're going to, according to a certain design, a sculptor is going to sculpt it.
Well, if that's the analogy, and we're thinking of congregational worship, who would the sculptor be? And again, I want to underline many, many times that it is not us, and that it is actually the work of the Holy Spirit.
And this is deep in the tradition of the Church for all of our 2,000 years or so, that, again, worship is not about us, and ultimately it is the work of the Spirit in our midst, by His grace and goodness, to enliven us and transform us so that we might be true worshipers of the true and living God.
And most all of this really is straight prayer book stuff, and you'll recognize certain elements of the prayer book service that incorporate some of these insights along the way.
[17:25] So, this is a work of the Spirit to take the bits and pieces, humanly ordered, and together enliven them and make them worthy of honoring and glorifying God.

So, are you with me? Good. It's a God thing. If you remember nothing else from this talk, Jeff said it's a God thing. We over-anglican, so...
Yes, but it's important to hang on to things. So, congregational worship. Roman numeral 2. Congregational worship is not for us, it's about God and for God.
I've outlined that five or six times. B. Congregational worship, quote-unquote, is more than singing. I don't need to probably convince this audience of that point, but that is very definitely the evangelical tradition that is out there all over the place.
I see Ed just looking at me with sorrow. So, Ed is hardly an anti-musical guy, but a kind of devolution of, well, now we're going to have the worship, and it's a kind of worship band doing something.
[18:37] I go like, oh, cringe. There's got to be more to this than that. So, I'm not against it, but I'm against the reduction, right, of worship simply to singing songs.

Congregational worship follows a particular order and pattern, even if it's not written down in many traditions. Now, the Anglican tradition is a written tradition. My wife, who's not able to be here right at the moment, she's down the hall doing something else.
Janet, many of you know her, brought up in the Plymouth Brethren. Well, the Plymouth Brethren is a non-written tradition, but as I remind her all the time, it's definitely a liturgical tradition, because there's an order and there's a pattern, and you pretty much follow the same sort of order and pattern every week.
It's just not written down. So, and Pentecostals, my Pentecostal friends, I remind them of their liturgy, even though they have rebelled completely against the idea of liturgy, contrary to the work of the Spirit, flowing wherever the Spirit blows.
But actually, there's a very set order of how things happen. So, there always is. And so, as Anglicans, we just come clean about that, and we're a friend and unembarrassed. But there's

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

always an order and a structure.
[19:46] And my point is that people from different, and some of you may be from different traditions, having come to a place like St. John's, or interacting with others in other traditions, the point that I want to make, and I talk about these things at a place like Regent, which is very multidenominational, we've got sort of all the different spectrum from Protestants and beyond in our community, is that whatever tradition you may actually be from, O worshipper, there's going to be an order and there's going to be a pattern.

There's going to be a beginning and a middle and an end. And my question is, well, where do you begin and why? And what's in the middle and why? And where are you going and why? And how does this whole thing hold together?
And what's the story and the path that gets you from A to B to C to wherever you're going? And have you really thought about that? Now, the Anglican tradition from Cranmer onward has thought deeply about that whole order and pattern and that sequence.
It's like we're going to begin in a certain way, and the middle is going to be a certain thing, and the end is going to have a certain shape. It's very well thought through. The non-liturgical, non-written traditions have a bigger task to actually think that through because they're not, in a sense, guarded by having a text like a prayer book that has an order of service.
They're more free to flow with, well, how they decide themselves as a leadership group or as a pastor or as a congregation or whatever. But my point is there is a logic. The logic is intensely important, the beginning, the middle, and the end, and why the flow is the way it is.
[21:16] And we need to be very intentional about it. That leads me to point D, 2D. And this is a point where I wish Dr. Packer were here because the one who taught me this point was J.I. Packer.

And he's written some wonderful articles, maybe some of you have seen them, on the shape of Anglican worship. And what J.I.P. argues is that if you actually think about, particularly the communion service and the Anglican tradition, there are three cycles within the service that are the same cycle of sin, grace, faith.
So what that means is a confession of sin, some sort of affirmation of the grace of God in forgiveness, and an affirmation of faith and trust in God as a response.
So it's a sin, grace, faith cycle. And his analysis is brilliant, and it's very simple. It's actually totally obvious once you see it. If you actually think about the communion service, there are, as the way Cranmer designed it, there are three cycles.
You do that same cycle three times in service. Just because we're all slow learners, and so that over time, we absorb a certain kind of rhythm and a certain kind of self-understanding that is built on a sin, grace, faith pattern.
[22:45] Who is God? And so I begin this by saying that the thing that I bring out and my little supplement to Dr. Packer's work on this is to say it actually all begins with God and ends with God.

So you start out, I mean, in a service like the one we're going to engage later on, you start out with some sort of declaration of who God is and God's praise and glory and honor. You start out by recognizing God is God and we are not.
Which is the real point of coming on Sunday morning. Right? Because if you are, you know, like me, in other words, a sinful, fallen human being, we tend to get that mixed up.
Right? We tend to think that somehow we are God or gods and we run our own lives and we should actually sort things out according to our own wisdom and judgment because we're so wonderful.
And Sunday morning reminds us, actually, God is God, we are not, and that is immensely valuable.
So, that's where it starts. But in recognizing who God is, then we recognize our own sinfulness, dreadful word, I hate to use that nasty little three-letter word, sin, largely banished from even the Christian vocabulary these days.
[23:58] You notice that? No one ever talks about sin, or I've sinned, or you're a sinner, or I don't know. It's a word worth hanging on to, actually. That's another whole lecture, probably. But we recognize who we are in light of the glory and honor and majesty and perfection of God as not God and as not worthy of coming into the holy presence of God.

Therefore, we recognize who we are. Right? In need of people, in need of forgiveness and grace and redemption. And what do we hear? You hear, then, a declaration of the gospel in some way, shape, or form.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Right? Whether that's in words of absolution, whether that's in a reading of a gospel passage. What you encounter, again, is the grace of God, which brings forgiveness and healing and redemption. And then we respond with an affirmation of faith and trust and obedience. Right? Same cycle as within, actually, the liturgy for communion. Right? I don't know if this is a communion Sunday or not. Is it? It is? Okay. I've been traveling in a way a bunch of Sundays. I don't know quite where we are in the cycle here. You'll see that at the beginning of the service. You'll see that cycle in the communion service.
[25:06] And you'll see that at the end of the service. Right? That's the way the logic goes. So within the communion service itself, you've got the same cycle. Right? Listen carefully to what you're saying as you go through this. It's there.

Point E. So are you with me? There's a certain kind of cycle. It's a theological cycle. Okay? It's very formative. Deeply formative. And for some of you, you've been at this so long, that is just really ingrained in your soul.
And I want to say that that's actually a wonderful thing. And that's how the overall transformative long-term effect is so important. Point E. Congregational worship can positively or negatively impact us.
This can be a positively transformative, deepening our lives of faith as we become like Christ kind of experience. Or other kinds of worship, which are built on other patterns, patterns that are less robust theologically than this, actually can deform us.
If you have a, for instance, a kind of liturgical pattern where there is no mention of sin, where there's no confession of sin, I think that is deformative to us.
[26:15] And I say that really as a point of critique of a lot of evangelicalism these days. I travel around a lot, and I'm familiar with lots of different traditions, and I go to many, many services where there is absolutely no thought of confessing any sin.

It just never comes up. And I ask people, you sort of notice there was no confession of any kind of sin. It's like, oh no, we never do that. Well, I think that's very dangerous, actually.
There's something good for all of us together to hear one another saying that we confess our sins to God. I don't particularly want to hear your sin and your sin and your sin individually spoken out for everyone else.
I don't think that's appropriate, and our tradition has never done that. But on the other hand, it's really good for us together to say we as a people recognize who we are. We are sinful, broken, fallen people who fall short of God's holy and righteous standards.
That's who we are. That's really good. So, in other words, there's something spiritually deformative when you're missing out major elements of all of us. That's a little cautionary note without trying to be too triumphalistic as an Anglican.
[27:26] I'm only slightly triumphalistic about that. And congregational worship has a powerful modeling function. My point there, before we go into some of these individual bits, is that for any congregation, what actually is modeled in a Sunday service is tremendously important.

What is modeled up front becomes the model for the spiritual life of the congregation. So there are some churches that have very little liturgical content, but really it's only a preaching-based congregation.
It's a preaching-based service. You sort of, as quickly as possible, get to the sermon, and as quickly as possible, end after the sermon. Well, what that does is that models something for the congregation, which is, well, what this is all about is the sermon.
And if you want to be spiritual, it's got to be about sermons. And if you want to serve in the church, what you will want to do is preach a sermon. So it's a narrowing, but it's a focusing on what's important.
So you will always model up front for a congregation what's important by what you do on a Sunday. So different traditions have slightly different shapes for what Sunday looks like, and that's fine and good.
[28:40] Finding good by my light, so long as it's a God-centered experience where we recognize the point of this is honor, glory, and praise to God. But how are we going to model?

So there is quite a lot that is modeled on Sundays for the life of the Christian. Whether we know it or not, that's going to be happening. So if things are important to the congregation, and they're never demonstrated demonstrably on Sunday morning, then it's not going to ring true that it really is

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

important to the congregation.
What is important is going to be modeled and up front in the congregation on Sundays. So what we do on Sundays has that powerful impact. One of the points that I'm making there is that apart from official teaching, per se, it's what you do that has a transformative impact.
Right? Children learn what they live. Right? You familiar with that phrase? You use that? Yeah? Remember your children? Any of you?
Children learn what they live. You can have a great, you know, sort of theory of being a family, but it's what you really live as opposed to the great theory written off, you know, somewhere in the, you know, doctrinal realm.
[30:00] It's what you really live that makes an impact on people. Right? So here, it's what you do together. It's how we live together. It's what we do week by week by week.

What we do has a huge impact. Okay? So, I say that partially as a qualifier for all of you very intellectual types out there. I'm a very intellectual type and I like theories of things.
I like outlines with many points. You know? I think what we think about stuff matters. It matters a lot. I even write books about this stuff.
But the point I'm making is that it's not just a theoretical exercise. It's what we do that shapes our lives. It's how you live your life. And especially as far as forming faith, yes, think deeply about that faith, but live that faith.
My whole quest in my career has been to bring thinking and doing together into one integrated whole. So, children learn what they live. What do you learn if you live out this liturgical pattern?
[31:09] That's what I want to say something about now. So, Roman numeral three. This is just the sort of standard flow. Some of these bits are not quite in exactly the order that we do them here on Sundays, but I won't worry too much about lining it all exactly chronologically.

Generally speaking, this is the chronological flow through a Sunday. And I want to get you to think about what is the shaping formative impact of these practices as you do them week by week by week.
Because it's not just our affirmations intellectually or cognitively that make a difference to us, it is actually our practices and what we do. Gathering, greeting, call to worship. Certain ways that we do this here at St. John's.
But think about what we're actually doing as we begin. Okay? Well, one of the things in gathering is recognizing that we're gathered not just by ourselves, by our own volition, but we're actually gathered by God and gathered by God and for God.
And we're gathered with a bunch of people that we would not otherwise gather with. Right? And the great thing about any congregation, really, if you stop and think about it, is that we are thrown together with a whole lot of other people that we haven't chosen.
[32:25] Right? I didn't vote any of you into this congregation. It's like, oh, I'd like to hang out with them. Right? No. That's something that God does. And so, what I say here is my little second part of this outline here, opposes narcissism and individualism.

There's something quite wonderful in gathering with other people that you've not chosen. Right? It says that they're a part of something that's bigger than yourself.
It says you're not able to live this Christian life on your own. You actually need to be a part of a body. You need to be a part of a group of people. People that are just as messed up as you are, actually.
They might look all nice and well scrubbed for Sunday morning the way we do around here. But you know what? They're people just like me. They've just got the same issues and problems just like me.
So it gets us a bit out of our own sense that this is all about me because I'm coming to do something with other people and this is about giving honor, praise, and glory to God. It gets us out of our narcissism.
[33:32] We have some fairly large narcissistic personalities marching around the world stage these days. And maybe that should just remind us it's not all about us and it's about us.

It's about us. It's about us. Right? There's something really, really good in recognizing one another and saying we have been gathered by God to give honor and glory to God with a whole bunch of people we didn't choose. The point I want to make, I want to make a couple of sort of larger social commentary points.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

One is, where is it in our world that we do gather with people that we have not chosen? It's parts. Look. Yeah. Well, you're thrown together with people at work you don't choose.
We better learn how to work with them, right? But otherwise, in our free time, that's a sort of obligatory thing. You go to work, you show up, whoever's there is there. Whether you like your, you know, cubicle mate or not, you're stuck with them, right?
You have to make it work. But in a lot of our discretionary time, like Sunday morning is discretionary time in our culture, we do with whom we choose and with whom we want.
[34:40] And we pick our friends. And, you know, if you don't like playing ping pong, you don't join the ping pong club. But this isn't a club. It's a people of God.

And God picks the people, not you and I. There's just something really, really good about that. And it's the discipline, actually, of learning to love and appreciate and honor people who are different from you.
right? That's what you're actually doing in something called church. How about that? Where else do you learn that? Isn't it valuable in our culture that people know how to love, honor, and value people who are different from them?
Where would you learn that skill? You'd learn that skill on Sunday morning. You'd learn it by being a member of a people like this, that you haven't chosen that's full of people who are odd and different and people who are not like you.
How about that? Point B, praise of God. Developing a God-focused sense of self. I've talked about that already. Confidence in God, humility before God. This is the God-centeredness of this.
[35:50] And this is the great thing about the Anglican tradition. It keeps it resolutely focused upon God's start to finish. And that's what, actually, I think, spiritually all of us actually need. It's probably not just my own personal spiritual struggle.

Am I in charge of my life or is God in charge of my life? Right? Am I running the show or is God running the show? Any of you identify with that a little bit? Where do you learn that?
Where do you learn that as a skill? Where does that become a part of your character? Where does that sort of take deep root kind of inside of you? That this is actually about God and that I have confidence and trust in this great and mighty and wonderful, majestic God?
Where do you encounter that? You encounter that Sunday by Sunday by Sunday. You encounter that in song and in prayer and in creed and in sermon and in all the ways. So this turning out of ourselves into the praise of God, toward the praise of God, for the praise of God, is at the heart of the whole exercise.
And part of this Christian character thing, whatever that might mean as we flesh it out, it has to be God at the center of our lives. If you want to talk about becoming like Christ, and if you look at the example of Jesus, Jesus says he only does what his Father tells him to do.
[37:04] He does not do his own thing. From start to finish, Jesus is not doing his own thing. Jesus is doing what he is told to do, what he is called to do. He only does.

His food is to do the will of his Father. If ever there is a God centric, a Father centric person on earth, it's Jesus. If we're becoming like Jesus, we're becoming as God centered as Jesus.
How is that going to happen? It's going to happen as we gather together and together lift our voices, our minds, our hearts, our souls to God and praise to recognize who he is in his greatness, glory, majesty, holiness, and so on.
In light of all that, point C, the repentance bit. Repentance and confession of sin. I've already said how important I think that is, and it's tragic to lose it out along the way.
I say here, requires and builds a capacity for self-examination, self-awareness, personal accountability. It's actually a fairly sophisticated skill, spiritually speaking, and character-wise, to be able to recognize yourself as a sinner, to be able to examine yourself and say, oh, I think I have fallen short.
[38:16] We all are wired as sinful creatures for self-justification and rationalization and for a kind of watering down of our own sinfulness.

That's, I take it to be, reality. Yeah. The good thing here about the liturgical pattern is it calls us out on that, and it gives us ways actually to access the deeper reality about ourselves, where we have to actually reflect on how far short we have fallen, and that God is God and we are not, week by week by week.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Where else do you learn a capacity for self-examination or self-awareness? Who else brings to your life accountability for how you're living your life, and whether you're living your life in a way that is pleasing to God or not?
It's the liturgical pattern. It's being reminded that there's a confession to say together. Partially, I think we probably blaze through all of that a little too quickly, even at St.
John's, honestly. I think we could slow down a little bit, offer a little bit more time for self-examination along the way, because it's a profound part of this whole cycle that I'm talking about.
[39:35] The creed, so in terms of one step that I just want to finish my own story there, which is this pattern of sin, grace, faith, right?

Sin, grace, the announcement of the gospel and the absolution that the priest announces, right? Is the grace and good news in response to that, right? Followed by our own affirmation of faith and trust, right?
Creed. Well, the creed. We say the creed week by week. Apostles' creed or Nicene creed in our own tradition here. Tremendously important.
What is the creed doing? The creed gets you into a fairly cognitive kind of mode now. But it's at the level of affirmations, and notice what the creed is all about. The creed has a triune God structure, Father, Son, and Spirit.
It is the core belief of the Church over time, over all these years. The creed goes back to the early centuries of the Church, of course. What is it meant to do? It is meant to be an anchor for our believing.
[40:35] It is meant to be the common ground upon which we stand together. It's meant to articulate the core truths of God, Father, Son, and Spirit, and what we believe. And so it is a framework, as I say here, a framework for thinking.

And it says, this, we believe, this community is gathered in this place at this time according to these beliefs. Every community gathers in light of a certain set of beliefs or affirmations. Right?
These are ours. And these are not the world's. This is what we actually believe. Right? How important that is, is hard to overstate.
It is the ballast for the whole enterprise, an affirmation of who God is. And it is all about who God is and what he has done. So this service, point by point by point, is reminding you, who is God?
Oh, that is God. What has God done? Oh, that is what God has done. Because that's what we forget week by week by week. That's what slips through our minds and hearts and fingers Monday through Saturday.
[41:38] What do we need to be reminded of? Oh, that's who God is. Ah, that's what God has done. Right? Centered on what? The cross. Scripture.

Scripture readings. Notice I've distinguished that from the sermon itself, identifying with God's story foundational for community. Every community gathers around stories and a story, and it's the story of God and Scripture that we rehearse week by week by week.
Again, if I can pick on some of my evangelical friends, in the wider evangelical world, it's often that this element is also dropped out of services. Typically, there are not readings of any length at all, other than what the preacher may be speaking on.
Sometimes it's not even read at all. The preacher just stands up and starts into something. The historic pattern of the church is lots of Scripture reading. It goes back to Paul saying to Timothy, do not neglect the reading of Scripture.
Certainly, that has the synagogue's liturgical pattern in mind of standing aloud and reading the Scriptures. Jesus himself, Luke chapter 4, reads a scroll from Isaiah and then says, now this is fulfilled in your hearing.
[42:52] Which is a stunning, absolutely stunning, world-shaping, turning upside-down moment. But the point is, it's the reading of Scripture. To me, the most important moment in the entire service is reading the Scriptures and us listening to them.

Because that's when we're really attentive to the Word of God spoken by God himself to us. We have wonderful preachers here at St. John's, but they're not perfect.
The perfect, infallible Word of God is what's read to us from the lectern over there. Some of you are readers. Hear and receive the Word of God.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Where else do you go when someone says, okay, hear and receive the Word of God? This is our story. This is the truest truth of the world. It's what God is going to say to us.
Allow that to soak into your souls. Sermons, right? Sermons, shaping the vision, values, priorities, according to God's Word, challenging us to think differently than the world thinks, of course.
[43:54] It's hugely important. Sermons can be vastly important. The Anglican tradition has never put all of its marbles in the basket of a sermon, however. As great as preaching is, and as wonderful as the preaching of St. John's here is in so many ways, we don't put all of our marbles in that basket.

There's a lot of other stuff going on. And there's a reason for that. The Anglican reformers, English reformers who led us to the Anglican tradition are no slouches of preaching.
And they elevate greatly in the Reformation tradition the value of God's Word heard and preached. Absolutely. But the way that Cranmer and the tradition has set this up is word and table, right?
And the balance of the both of them together in the Anglican tradition is part of the genius. Being a listener, too. Where else in our culture do we are expected to sit and listen to something?
20, 25 minutes, 30 minutes, 40 minutes? If you're a Puritan, an hour and a half? I wonder whether we think enough about what it takes to listen well to a sermon.
[45:06] We don't talk about that much. But given how important it is, the Lord's Prayer, I rejoice that we say the Lord's Prayer in our tradition so much.

I think it's tremendously important. It is resetting of our priorities, as I say here. That's the way that I read that. It's saying, okay, you are God and we are not.
Our Father who art in heaven, I am in relationship to you. Here's the priorities of life, thy kingdom, thy will, thy name, kingdom, and will. That's what I live for. That's the point of life.
Name and kingdom and will of God, not name, kingdom, and will of Jeff Greenman. And what do I need to live out a person who is living for God's name and kingdom and will? I need, what do I need?
I need daily bread. I need forgiveness. I need protection. That's what you need to live out a God-centered life around God's name and kingdom and will. It's, in a sense, the whole Christian life boiled down into one prayer.
[46:07] It's incredibly important. A lot more that could be said about that. Expresses dependence on God, of all things. Where else do you learn dependence upon God for all things?

Intercessions. Well, marvelous tradition in this church around that. Where else? And notice what's being modeled. What's being modeled is a concern for other people.
And a recognition that those other people are just as needy of God's grace as you are. It's a place to model what? God's sufficiency for every possible need.
Right? Spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, everything. Everything. Everything. Nothing. Nothing is too small, too unimportant or off limits for bringing before God and seeking God's grace and blessing and provision.
Marvelously important. Over time, that shapes you. Right? We're people who pray for other people. And everything can be prayed for. Communion. That's another whole talk on communion alone, probably.
[47:15] But just to say some of the obvious things, it is a recollection of who we are. It is a memorial. It's more than a memorial, but it is certainly a memorial. It's a participation also, I would argue.

But it's certainly a memorial. It's remembering Jesus. Right? Do this in remembrance of me, says Jesus. At the very least, what we're doing is we're remembering this amazing moment in the life of Jesus when he fed his disciples as he was going to the cross.
Stunningly important. What is it? It's Jesus himself teaching us what's important. And what's important is doing what he did. Modeling obedience to God.
Hmm. There's one. Why do we do what we do? We do this because we're commanded to do it. Because Jesus said, do this in remembrance of me. That's why we do it.
It's not something we've made up. It's not something that we've chosen in a sense. It's not something that we've generated. It's obedience. It might look silly to the world's way of thinking, but we're doing it out of obedience to Christ.
[48:23] And it's good, I think, and good for our souls to do some things simply because we're hearing the word of Jesus and trusting in that word that this is what we are to do. And this is good

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

for us.

Dependence. There's a marvelous sense in which this is an embodied experience. This is a meal. Right? We often forget that this is actually a ritual meal. That the little bits of bread and the little bits of wine are symbolic of a bigger bread and wine, which is the body and blood of Christ.
But it is a meal. We're eating a meal together. It's very interesting. We're embodied creatures. And the way to speak to our hearts and souls and minds powerfully of our dependence upon Christ to be the one who feeds us is with a literal token ritual meal.
Very interesting. We don't think about that very much. We're embodied creatures. There's something really good about getting up out of your seat and going and moving. And then particularly good about coming with open hands.
To me, the most powerful moment of the communion service is receiving into an open hand. So I have to say, this Lord is who I am. I am a needy beggar person. I have open hands.
[49:35] And you need to fill these hands with something of your own grace and goodness to feed my soul. That's who I am. And that's where I'm looking for food.

Who am I? Just a hungry guy looking for food. Now, that experience, week by week by week, year by year by year, I want to submit, if you actually think about it carefully, is very formative at the level of our hearts and attitudes and minds and desires and aspirations.
And our identity of who we are. We're the people with open hands. We're the people that God feeds by his grace. Isn't that marvelous? The offertory.
Ah, hmm. I'm coming to the end here. Money. Ooh, man, money. This is so all-encompassing that you even have to do something with your money in worship.
How about that? Money is what strikes close to all of our hearts as fallen, sinful, materialistic creatures. Right?
[50:44] But there's something really quite wonderful in saying part of our worship, right, in the context of our worship, a self-offering of all that we have and are to God as a response of faith.

Notice where the offertory happens. Response of faith, right, is giving actually over our material substance. Why do we do that? Because you can actually trust this God, the God that we have celebrated, the God whose story we have heard, the truths about that God that we have rehearsed, and even the one who has fed us, we can trust this one so much that we can actually give our money away.
How about that? So, the modeling of this, I think, is really important. The passing of a plate is a communal exercise. And, how else do we in the Christian tradition reframe our whole attitudes and practices about what we do with our money?
It's the most powerful thing that we do. It's to say that we think of money in terms of worship. Worship is now reframed for us in terms of our money and money is reframed by our experience of worship.
That's the extent of the claim of God upon us and the extent of our trust and obedience to God in response. How about that? That's all built into this.
[52:04] So, when there's no sense of offering at all in a service, many services don't do what we do here. There's just a sort of plate at the back or something or it's all online.

There's no ritualized, this is now happening, yeah, it is happening. There's no ritualized sense of part of this offering of ourselves includes our money. I wonder what we're missing out on. I think we're missing out on something really important, especially given the super elevated value of money in our culture.
So, interesting, huh? And then the blessing. The last thing is the last words being words of blessing are tremendously important because the last words are not our words, they're God's words to us. This could be the Aaronic blessing, may the Lord bless you and keep you and make his face shine upon you or whatever words of scripture it is. But if we begin by declaring God's praise and then hearing God's word to us, I mean the way we do it at St. John's is first you hear a word of God to us, right?
Remember that? You notice that? It's brilliant. It's absolutely the right thing to do. But the last word is also God's word to us. It's not our word to God, right? It's God's word of grace and blessing to us and it's a word of empowerment and it's a word of sending, right?
[53:20] The liturgical pattern of the church over all these 2,000 years has always concluded with a sense of sending. You know, go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Those kinds of things.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

There's many Anglican formulas of this and many other traditions too.

But the important thing is some sense that we have been gathered together, yes, to be built up, to be edified for this fixation, I'll call it, with the true and living God and now the time has come for us actually to step out and go and go back to work, go back to the dirty dishes, go back to the diapers, go back to the kids, go back to these rangy neighbors, go back to wherever it is, right?
So this idea that God will speak a word of blessing and a word of commission so that we will then go, right? That forms identity. That says, well, who are we?
Who are we? We're the people that God has sent out into the world on his behalf. Where are the servants of God in the world? I guess that's us. Here we go. Let's go change some diapers.
Wash some dishes. Do some taxes. I don't know. Create some software. Whatever you're doing.
See the whole pattern?
[54:34] See, my point is that all of these elements have their own kind of ingredient and if you put the whole thing together into a big stew, it's actually a very, very rich stew. If you think about what are we doing each step along the way, there's a point and purpose to each one of those steps along the way.

The cumulative power over time of that as a practice shapes heart and mind and soul and imagination and sense of who we are. Character always flows out of a sense of who we are deep down.
Who are we? That's the root of this character stuff. This tradition, this liturgical tradition shapes all of that sense of who we are. It is meant to. It will.
Not by being the direct object of that pursuit, God being the object of the pursuit. Right? But the byproduct of the practice is going to be transformative of our sense of who we are.
So to shortchange these elements means that we're going to be missing something out. That's my critique of a sort of non-liturgical, emptied, or slimmed down version of this.
[55:43] But the combination of all of these elements put together is a very, very rich mix. And it is very good for us if we attend to it. And so my suggestion is just to think through what we're doing and how we're doing it because in it are really the roots of a shaping of Christian character that is unlike any other resource for them.

I'll leave it at that. I will say that if you're interested in the little book and it's a little book thanks to Bill and his partnership on this, my little 91-page book along the lines of this called The Pedagogy of Praise I'd be glad to equip you with.
How much? Ten dollars. If you're interested in more along these lines where I go into this argument in a bit more detail that could be helpful to you then I'd be glad to see you afterwards.
Yeah. Wonderful, wonderful presentation. It's so rich and terrific and you've really laid out things that were sort of in my heart but explored literally and thank you for that very much.
You mostly were focusing on the deficits of other conversations that might be a bit sparse in the things that the Anglicans had nailed. However, I was talking to a Nigerian girl in an Anglican church in Kyoto who thought this was her first service there this English speaking service we got through the end of it and she came over to me at coffee and said well gee that was kind of nice but when do we start the cursing?
[57:27] And I said what? And she said oh well at church at home we have an Anglican service and in the afternoon it's pretty much given up to cursing out evil in people that we know or situations that we had and there's a good chunk of cursing it's great oh yeah gee I didn't know about that how interesting and I just thought well isn't that interesting that in some cases perhaps people are adding things in to congregational worship that we might not be aware of or I don't think that's going to be pretty good into St. John's anytime soon but I just wonder if you would speak to that perhaps too yeah no that's I'd be interested to know what all that cursing's about persons seem to really go for it that's great I haven't seen that but yeah I mean in the Anglican tradition the basic liturgical pattern has been adapted in various cultures in different places around the world provinces according to some local customs the Kenyan liturgy some of you might be familiar with is really quite wonderful in this way that it's indigenized certain elements it hasn't done the cursing thing but they just tell the story in ways that resonate with African ears but it's very distinctively the same shape right the same kind of overall theological shape so

I would certainly think that there can be contextualized adaptations along the way could be quite great depending upon their circumstances yeah over here I thank you so much Jeff it was really

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

great I cannot deny anything you said I actually agree with pretty much everything you said I'd like to push back into a specific point and I'd like to use a model that could be criticized but it's helped me to be just like Aristotle is to you that is the idea of temperament and temperament distribution and I'd like to push back a little bit because I recently saw a statistic that's a little bit old but I believe it's still quite true that church and school environments are pretty much dominated by a specific temperament that is more formal and duty oriented and I'd like to question how much of our liturgy has it developed in different traditions whether
Pentecostal I've been the three of them and I've suffered the three of them to be quite sincere are more shaped and are quite efficient to shape Christian character for those who are specifically oriented in a certain way that is the majority of this group when I don't believe that God's kingdom or the gospel is more efficient for a specific temperament rather than others why do we have isn't it actually I don't know how to phrase that I've been thinking how to phrase that well and don't take too much time but I think you got most of my idea right isn't it there's isn't it actually a miss point that missing the point that we have been so efficiently shaping Christian character in a specific kind of group temperament wise and saying that is the majority of our congregations when we might be missing the point when people come to faith and do not state maybe because we're not managing to shape their character similar way for different temperaments and isn't that maybe because how liturgical goes in many different traditions is mostly oriented to and designed by people of a specific group and temperament possibly but I'm not too sure about that the pattern that this reflects is actually the ancient pattern it goes way back it goes back to the early centuries of the church probably long before sophisticated understandings of temperament and personality and other things we have today and yeah there's a certain kind
I mean different traditions I'm not an Anglican triumphalist in the sense that I think the Anglican way is the only or the best way and there are different traditions that do appeal to perhaps different temperaments or different personalities yes that's fine with me and I don't think that this pattern necessarily is fitted only to a certain kind of temperament because you actually find it very broadly I mean this is very broadly the Catholic pattern of worship it's very broadly the magisterial reformation pattern of worship these elements and ingredients really are very very broad very broadly the Eastern Orthodox pattern so there's nothing that's particularly temperamentally rooted in the Britishness of Anglican-ness per se so I think it actually could appeal and work with people of many different temperaments or backgrounds but that said Anglicanism has a certain kind of ethos about it that is perhaps not conducive to everybody who might be more contented anyway in another tradition I don't know in the back and then and then yeah just a follow-up thought on that I mean I think that it is a valid point and
I'm not implying any anti-anthorism here either but I think that there is broadly speaking maybe two categories if you will of church types so you have the geographical slash historical type churches but then you also have the theological type churches so those ones I think are more tempted to that type of a problem where birds of a feather flock together so Pentecostals are all much more into the emotionalism side of it and the expressive side of it and then you get the heady churches and they've got like a you know an hour-long sermon and just a little bit of singing and it's kind of stodgy and and and and people that are attracted to that want to go to that church because they're very heady people or they're very emotionally driven people I think that what's refreshing about Anglicanism and these other ones that you mentioned not to put it over and above but is that it was always had an eye to look we're all one people I'm not necessarily going to hang around with these people you know on a Friday night but it's not because I'm not doing this because I specifically like it like I've told this to my kids what's on my iPod is not what I think is going to be played in church and you you do have to be molded by liturgy and I think that the historical geographical churches do a better job at that than this what he's referring to which I think is a valid point but I think it lends itself more to other mothers in that way so yeah I don't know in my wanderings musically I've often reflected on the fact that the church worship formation that seems to in a brilliant way accommodate so much of these differences and yet hold a center is in fact our Catholic brethren in an article in First Things it was a book review actually that the man spoke of the fact that the church had been flailing around for half a century trying to establish relevance and community he said in fact the focus for a
[64:48] Catholic is the host on what they would call the altar the front the children may or may not have a table to play at you may be late you may be early too bad mass is being celebrated I know huge objections to these things I know but I think there's some richness in that it's a kind of set

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

aside your preferences for this period of time here's the focus of the front but now you so often go into a church I can think of one in particular there's a bright red it's basically the altar there's a bright red drum set it's a kind of the front of the church has become a stage the convocation has become an audience and the front has become instead of place administration a place of entertainment and your point about the drum set yeah makes me want to make the point about architecture the Horton Davies quote talks about architecture too it also matters right visuals matter a lot and what are you actually looking at and why the space matters so again if children learn what they live we're the children what are you actually being shaped by by the space by the visuals by what you're looking at or not looking at right I'm delighted that we don't have screens here right because most services now in most traditions including most Anglican traditions are screen oriented you're looking at a screen actually I'm old-fashioned I admit this totally confess it

I actually rather would have words in the page in front of me than on a screen and then you're looking at the shaping of visual culture and what that's doing to us in the way that we're wired and everything else but the the physical setup and where you are also matters and what you're looking at right makes a huge difference that's part of the shaping experience of the whole yeah somebody yeah right as you work through all of the bits and pieces I was waiting and watching to see and was very gratified by and appreciated the place that you gave to scripture on an experiential basis I have to say that what you discussed today I would put into one pan of a balance and into the other scripture because the entire Bible is formative in a way that this assemblage of things in the weekly service is not right absolutely so I'm not saying that this is the only means of growing in Christian character I'm saying this is a neglected overlooked and really rich resource we need to think about but there's lots of other things in terms of private piety and in terms of scripture reading and in terms of community and service and other things as well but to put the whole thing together this is one of the pieces that's gotten a bit less and a lot less attention hardy yeah instructive about do we inherit the synagogue or do we inherit the temple or do we inherit both and did the liturgical tradition think temple I mean Israel is told approach me this way not your way this way right so are we are we synagogue plus are we temple plus the mystery of Jesus I my mind goes back and forth there my imagination goes back yeah no it's a great question takes a lot of thinking about really but there's elements of both right and the synagogue service course doesn't have a sacrifice right this is really post destruction of temple and so on and is a word-oriented service and you hear the word of God written in the scriptures and then expounded which is what Jesus is doing and yet there is the element of approach God this way on the count of cross and resurrection which looks a bit like yeah we've got a sacrifice again and you know the Catholic tradition still uses the language of the sacrifice of the mass so it's kind of blend of the both yeah interesting isn't it yeah your point about sin being a dirty word yeah I'm not exactly quoting you no pretty close pretty pretty close the three-letter word thou shalt not speak him yeah Eric Byrne did a terrible disservice to our lives I think it was the late 50s he wrote his book called
I'm okay you're okay and suddenly sin disappeared guilt oh nobody needs that you know I mean if you haven't sinned you don't need to feel guilty and yet everybody is plagued with guilt at certain times and others know that daily and I think we I have spent two-thirds of my life as a Baptist and the last third here is an Anglican and one of the things that appealed to me about the liturgy was the fact that it was not a general confession it it was something I had to say about me after thinking about where did it apply and where was it real and and I think that that is tremendously important I couldn't actually understand the appeal that the liturgy had for me when I first came here but it does have an appeal and I certainly came from a sermon-based culture in a lot of ways and and ministers were hired on their ability to attract people with their preaching and you know some of those people I went to
First Baptist and the idea of participation and being much more a part of the service here than I was there and then of course Harry Robinson said if he spoke more than 17 minutes he'd hear about it from the trustees so I like that too shorter sermons but I think that the idea of sort of reintroducing or or hanging on to perhaps the better word of the idea that this is a place where you are reminded yeah about yourself and your relationship with God yeah no very good to do beautifully said thank you for that the thing about about sin and the neglect of this sort of confession repentance confession forgiveness pattern is you know what why I'm a bit peeved by that really is in the broader practice of the wider church out there not true of the Catholic tradition Ed not true of us given our liturgy but but broadly something that's happening is it just leads to a very truncated

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

gospel so if
Jesus does not die for the sin of the world and our sins are not forgiven on account of cross and resurrection of Jesus then you just have a much different different gospel than the way the church has ever understood the gospel what happens then is you wind up with a kind of therapeutic approach which is well I might not be a sinner but I need a little bit of help so you wind up with a kind of sorry to be a little you know academic now Pelagianism this is Pelagius in the early church which is I'm not really a sinner but I'm just weak and I need some help right so I'm kind of weak and I need some help and the gospel is a kind of booster pill to help you do better right and there is a form of gospel out there in the world that that's what it is yeah we're okay but we need a little bit of help and take this booster pill and you'll be fine it's like no wrong right all of sin and fall short of the glory of God right that's the word of the Lord you are dead in your sins and you are made alive in Christ that's the gospel so my ultimate passion is let's get the gospel straight and let's not water it down and therefore that what we do liturgically is an expression of that it's an expression of that gospel this is a Packer point I wish she was able to be here today that what Cranmer thinks he's doing is putting justification by faith into liturgical form right that's what he thinks he's doing which means that is a gift of God's grace to us that we receive with these open hands and cling to by faith and then live our life on that basis it is not anything that we have earned it is not anything that we deserve it is not just a little booster pill to help us get on better right that is not the gospel right so Packer's point is brilliant which is okay look at what
[73:39] Cranmer does he wants to set that pattern into our hearts and minds and souls every week week by week by week that sense of gospel it's all about gospel gospel gospel and then what you want to do is hear that word of God spoken to you which is gospel on that note well I feel like I could just go home and reflect on just one of the comments I want to just thank you again for a wonderful talk that allows us to not only reflect on what we do on a week by week basis but a better for me understanding of the tradition and and valuing where we came from and why we're where we are thank you so much

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host