

“The Flow of Worship”—Amos 5:21-24

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Flow of Worship”, is Amos 5:21-24 → Thus says the LORD: *I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer Me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Tradition and ritual play an important part in the flow of your worship, both individually and corporately as a congregation. Your worship life in personal devotions will usually flow in a consistent manner, even including the manner in which you may structure your prayers. Generally prayers will include confession (i.e. repenting of your specific sins and trusting in the atoning work of Jesus for you); intercession (i.e. praying for others, bringing their particular needs before the Lord and praying for their well-being); thanksgiving (i.e. giving God thanks and praising Him for His gracious blessings, spiritual and physical); and petition (i.e. bringing your own specific requests to the LORD). The order of each of

these elements of prayer, and even your prayer postures (e.g. folding your hands; closing your eyes; etc.), will usually be expressed consistently for each individual.

While the flow of corporate worship varies from congregation to congregation, our worship generally follows the flow of liturgical worship with the various orders of worship from our hymnal, parts of which have been used by Christians for centuries. Let's look at the flow of our worship today:

- We begin with the Invocation (“In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.”). It's a reminder of our baptismal identity in Christ as children of the Triune God we have gathered together to worship and praise.
- Recognizing we are sinners in the presence of our holy God, we flow directly into Confession & Absolution, repenting of our many sins and receiving His forgiveness in the pronouncement of that forgiveness in the Person & Work of Jesus.
- Forgiven, our worship flows into the Introit which introduces the theme of our worship that particular Sunday in the Church Year and connects us to the Old Testament “hymnal” (i.e. Psalms).
- Then our worship flows into the Kyrie where we pray that God's peace, which we have just received, would be realized amongst all people with the prayer “Lord, have mercy,” especially as we worship

together.

- Our worship flows into ascribing *to the LORD the glory due His name* and worshiping Him *in the splendor of His holiness* (cf. Psalm 29:2) with a Hymn of Praise.
- As our worship continues to flow we greet each other in the Lord and join in a short prayer of reflection on the Sunday's theme called a Collect.
- The Holy Spirit speaks to us as God's Word flows through our ears and minds into our hearts in the Readings from the Scriptures and as it is proclaimed in the Sermon.
- We respond to His inspired Word by confessing our faith with the Creed and coming to Him in the Prayer of the Church (i.e. His people united in prayer together) and by Offering a portion of His blessings to us in the flow of our worship.
- While worshiping together God's grace and forgiveness flows into our lives through partaking in Holy Communion together according to His command and promise.
- The flow of our worship continues as we burst forth in praise for having experienced His presence among us, bringing us to receive the Benediction of Yahweh's blessing so we leave this place in His peace. The service is ended . . . or is it?

Where does the flow of your worship lead you as you leave this

place? Into your home, your work place, your relationships, your conversations, into the presence of every person and task you face in life. How does the flow of your worship reflect itself in the aspects of your everyday life beyond these walls? It is very easy to compartmentalize the flow of our worship in such a way that we can gather together, read through the words of the liturgy, and leave them in the sanctuary to take them up again at another designated time. Does the flow of our worship affect how we act in our everyday lives?

In our text the prophet Amos spoke on Yahweh's behalf to His people, condemning the flow of their worship which Yahweh Himself had put in place for them to follow. He said in verse 21: *I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies*. It is a reference to the feasts which the LORD had put in place for His people to assemble before Him in recognition of and thankfulness for His physical and spiritual providence. The LORD commanded them to offer *burnt offerings and grain offerings . . . and the peace offerings of . . . fattened animals* (verse 22) in the flow of their worship. Now the LORD said He would *not accept them or look upon them with favor?* That their songs were merely *noise* and that He didn't want to *listen . . . to the melody of their harps* (verse 23) anymore?

Them's fightin' words! Just criticize somebody's worship style preferences and see if it doesn't raise their dander. This surely is great

boldness on the part of the prophet, who dared to condemn works that appeared to be so very holy and done in obedience to God's institution. Why? Why God's condemnation upon the flow of their worship?

Ephesians 4:27 says: *give no opportunity to the devil*. Unfortunately the devil is constantly looking for every opportunity to get a foothold on your faith and draw you into the sin of hypocrisy. Jesus described it in connection with the flow of worship in Matthew 15:8 → *This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me*, describing it as vain worship. In other words, they approached God with vain (i.e. prideful) hearts, confident that their worship was good, right and proper. However, in vanity the flow of their worship did not carry into their everyday lives as they continued to disobey His will. In their affluence (cf. Amos 6:4-6) they indulged in idolatrous immorality and worship; they abused and used the less fortunate for personal gain; they lived in the passions of their lustful flesh and selfish desires. Amos' contemporary, the prophet Isaiah, rebuked them because they turned *things upside down* denying Yahweh's authority as Creator over their lives (cf. Isaiah 29:16). He said in Isaiah 5:20-23 → *Woe to those who call evil good and good evil . . . who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight . . . who are heroes at drinking wine, and . . . mixing strong drink, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!* Quite a description of God's Church in their daily lives.

Thus the LORD said in verse 24 of our text: *let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream*. The flow of worship is intended to bring **and reflect** peace with God with sin forgiven in **His** *justice* and **His** *righteousness*, not bring peace with continuing in sinful behavior. His *justice* demands a payment for your sin. Jesus made that payment by His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead **for you**. By faith in Jesus God credits Christ's righteousness to you as Romans 4:24-25 says: *Righteousness will be counted to us who believe in God Who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, Who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification*. The flow of our worship brings you the reassurance of your forgiveness and righteous standing in God's sight.

We do not simply perform the motions of worship, no matter how sacred we may consider those motions. The Holy Spirit empowers us to continue the flow of our worship into our daily vocations, relationships and conversations. So, what does the flow of worship look like as **God's** *justice and righteousness flows like an ever-flowing stream* through us into the actions of our daily lives?

While Scriptures are replete with descriptions, just a quick scanning of Ephesians chapters 4 and 5 describe this flow: *to speak the truth with your neighbor; to quit stealing; to share with anyone in need; to let no*

corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up (i.e. not putting others down, bullying, etc.); to get rid of *slander, bitterness and wrath . . . along with all malice*; and all kinds of specific behavior instructions are given to husbands, wives, children, fathers, and so forth. The Scriptures are filled with guidance on how the flow of our worship flows into the lives of others because we've experienced God's peace with sins forgiven in Jesus and new life bestowed by the Holy Spirit! Thus, you can *be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you* (cf. Ephesians 4:32). May the flow of your worship reflect the flow of God's grace in the Lord Jesus Christ into your heart and life daily. Amen.

*Do not present your members to sin
as instruments for unrighteousness,
but present yourselves to God
as those who have been brought from death to life,
and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

(Romans 6:13)

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