

Discipleship Moment

Text: Acts 18:24-28

It's easy to invite people to something we're excited about. For example: your favorite restaurant, or fishing, or a sporting event. And we heard about the power of invitation yesterday during Pastor Ben's sermon. So, here's the question: What are we inviting people to?

We may think, "Oh, I'm inviting them to hear a great speaker or great music." And certainly, the speaker and the music, if done well, make it easier to invite friends, family, and neighbors. But I want to explore today how much more we are inviting people to.

During our services (in the Lutheran tradition, we call worship services "Divine Service"), we do a number of things: we confess our sins and hear about our forgiveness, we hear the Scripture read and preached, we say the Creed, we take Communion, and we are sent with a blessing into the world. It is easy to become sleepy to this order of service, but, once properly understood, it makes us sit up and say, "Oh man, I had no idea God loved me like that."

The reason we call it the Divine Service is because our worship services are not us (the congregation) going to God for his benefit and praising him. But rather God coming to us. It is the Divine Service. The Divine (God) is serving us. You may not have heard this before, but hear this Scripture, "He is the one you praise, and he is your God—the one who performed these great and awesome acts that you witnessed with your very own eyes" (Deut. 10:21). Overwhelmingly in Scripture, when the people of God are called to praise and worship it is because of something God has done for them. It is not simply because I feel like worshiping that I worship but because God has done something to and for me. When we gather together we celebrate God serving us, saving us, and loving us.

The first thing we do is confess our sins and receive forgiveness, we hear that for Jesus' sake, God forgives us. Not has forgiven us, and we need to shape up, nor do we hear that God will forgive us once we get our life together. Rather, we hear that *God forgives us. Presently, perfectly, and eternally.* God forgives us. We do not forgive ourselves, or commit to doing better, we only hear the unconditional forgiveness God gives us *simply because he is God.*

The next major part of our Divine Service is the Word and the sermon. We hear God's Word read out loud, and then the pastor preaches the Word: explaining, expanding, exploring, and applying what God has said in the Word to our congregation. The Pastor should not be doing anything new in the sermon, rather, they should be remaining faithful to the Word and exploring it with the congregation. This, again, is not something we do, but it is something *God does to us.* God speaks to us through the read Word and the preached Word.

The next thing we do is the Creed. The Creeds are very, very old poems that outline basic Biblical doctrine about Christ, the Father, and the Spirit. Here again, the Creeds are not something we have come up with, but rather they are poems that have been given to the Church by the Spirit in order to train us and teach us Scripture. This is a tool *God has given us* in order to know Scripture better.

Then we take Holy Communion. Holy Communion is the crowning achievement of worship. Communion is the space when God gives us forgiveness and sustenance through the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The body and blood are given to us through the bread and the wine. The bread and the wine are the vehicles through which Christ is given. Communion is the summit of the worship service. We have received forgiveness, heard the Word, agreed with the Christian Church about the nature of the Trinity, and now we are receiving the very person of Jesus.

Jesus said in John 6, "unless you eat the flesh of the Human One and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me lives because of me." Jesus leaves very little room for interpretation: unless we eat and drink his body and blood, we have no business with him. We have nothing to do with him. So we eat and drink Jesus every week, because this is the way that *God has given us* to take part in Jesus' life.

And then we are sent with a blessing. It is not a blessing for prosperity or from humans, but rather a blessing from God, "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace." As we go throughout our life, it is the Lord who is blessing, sustaining, and keeping us. It is God who is doing everything of substance in the Divine Service. We sing songs and praise God, but it starts with God (confession and forgiveness) and ends with God (the sending and Benediction). We may respond here and there with praise, but *God is the one serving, God is the one saving, and God is the one bringing us into Christ* for salvation and eternal life.

When we invite people to come to one of our worship services, this is what we are inviting them into, we are inviting them into nothing less than the presence of the living God who loves us and serves us.

If you want more information about our Divine Services. Pastor Ben walked us through the service in our Podcast, the New Life Lutheran Podcast earlier this year. Check it out on iTunes, Apple Podcasts, Google Play Music, Spotify, Podbean, or at nllutheranpodcast.com.

Going Deeper

Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once.

1. When was the last time you attend a Divine Service? Did you notice all these elements highlighted (confession and forgiveness, the sermon, the Creed, Holy Communion, and the Benediction) in it? What do you think about all these parts of the service?
2. Have you ever noticed that during the service God is doing everything of substance to us, and we are only responding? Why is this important?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, do these words sound familiar? Why are these words important? What does Jesus say the bread is? What does Jesus say the cup is?
4. Read John 6:53-58. What does Jesus say about his body and blood? Why is eating his body and drinking his blood important? What does this tell us about Communion?
5. Why is it important to invite people to a Divine Service? Why is it important for you to go to the Divine Service? Think of 2 or 3 people you can invite. People you know who might be willing to hear Christ and receive his forgiveness. Make a plan to invite them to Service on an upcoming Sunday. Meet them here, sit with them, and take them out to lunch afterward.