

## Worship, It's the Same But Different

If I showed you a green apple and a red apple you would see they are similar, but different. If I peeled both of them, they'd really appear to be the same. As we reopen our church for in-person worship, you will see it's similar and different. When you look under the skin, however, you will see it is the same. God is still present and this is still worship.

We leave our home, our jobs, and we come together. We gather together in our church to give God our thanks and praise. We come to be reminded of our baptism. We come together to hear the Word of God. We come together to pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need. We come together as a congregation to celebrate the Eucharist. We come to together to remember we are loved. Church helps us to remember who we are, who God is, who are neighbor is, and our relationships which each.

It's been awhile since we gathered together inside of our church. Our world has been facing a Pandemic. In order to slow down the spread of Coronavirus, businesses were closed, this included our Church. People were told to shelter in place, we were told to wear masks and maintain a physical distance from one another. As Christ followers, in order to show our love for one another, we followed these mandates.

Many businesses are now reopening, including churches. They have to follow CDC guidelines, maintain physical distancing, and wear masks – again to protect lives and to halt the spread of the virus.

This brings us to this time. Our doors are open. Somethings may look differently, but it's all the same. We are opening in phases. We're not sitting shoulder to shoulder. We're wearing masks. We're not singing out loud. But, Praise God, we are together, and this Sunday, May 24<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate that fact.

Some things will be a little different. First of all, we will sanitize our hands, have our temperature taken, and don our masks. Our service will be a little shorter. There will be more reflection. Less speaking. Less movement. We will reflect on the words of our hymn, listen to what God and the author have for us today. How the words of the hymn tie to the Word read and proclaimed.

To protect the vulnerable, we will be seated from the front of the sanctuary first. We will place our tithes and offerings in a basket as we enter or leave. We will be dismissed by pew, starting at the back of the sanctuary. We will not celebrate communion in Phase I. We do this to fulfill Christ's new commandment that we love one other.

We are being Church, even if we do look a little different.

"Nothing's the same. I don't like it," one may say. Well, let's see if anything is the same.

As we settle in our pews, we quiet ourselves as we listen to the prelude. Then the bells call us to worship and we recall Psalm 100:4, "to enter the Lord's gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise."

We will be gathered together in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As we end Easter Season, we prepare ourselves for worship by giving thanks for baptism, remembering we are marked with the cross of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit. After Pentecost we will again begin our worship with the confession of our sins before God and one another. Then we will hear those words of love and acceptance, telling us that in Jesus name, our sins are forgiven. What freedom, what joy. Oh, to be in the House of the Lord.

Then a gathering hymn will set the theme of the day. We will call upon God to be present with us as we hear the words, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." The familiar reminder we worship the Triune God. Our response, "Amen," means, "So be it, it is true."

Our worship continues with the Prayer of the Day, as we center ourselves before God, the main thoughts of the day are collected, or summarized in a short prayer. We continue the Service of the Word, as the Living Word of God is brought to us through readings from the Old Testament, the Psalms, the letters to the early church, and from the Gospel. We stand for the Gospel – to show honor to the presence of the Word in our midst. The Pastor then proclaims God's Word and applies the word to our modern world. We hear from the Word the Law - what God demands of us and Gospel - what God does for us through Christ.

The sermon is followed by a Hymn of Reflection, which follows the theme of the readings and sermon.

After hearing and reflecting on the Word, we respond by professing our faith in the words of the Nicene or the Apostles Creed. A creed is a statement of one's basic beliefs which guides their actions. When we speak these words, we tell others and ourselves what we believe. Some days our faith plays hide and seek. On these days when we are not sure what we believe, if we believe; we stand among our brothers and sisters and allow their profession to lift us up and renew within us the reality of God.

After we acknowledge our faith we pray for the church, the world, and those in need, through the Prayers of the People. We lift up our church and the wider church, those who worship and those who serve. We pray for the work of the church as it ministers to those in need. We pray for God's creation - all which grows, provides food for nourishment and enjoyment, for animals, we lift up life-giving waters. We remember those who are ill, shut-ins, those in recovery and those who mourn. We remember those who have died. We, as a collective body, lift these requests up to the Lord. We respond to the petitions asking God to hear our prayers.

In preparation for the Great Thanksgiving, the Presider says to the people gathered, "The peace of the Lord be with you." There is a special action done as the words are spoken, it's like tossing a beachball. The people catch the blessing and toss it back, saying, "And also with you." Now everyone is blessed and we then greet one another, offering to them the peace of the Lord. It's more than just being friendly, it is an intentional time to reach out, to accept, to forgive, and to welcome one another. It is a time to make things right with others, as you prepare yourself to go to the Lord's Table as a community. Passing the Peace will be added back into our service in later phase. It may not look the same as it did in the past, but will still be the time to set things right, so we can go to the table cleansed.

We have confessed our sins, received forgiveness. We have heard the Word proclaimed and applied to our world. We have prayed for the church, the world and all of those in need. We have received and shared the Peace of the Lord. The next section of our worship service is the Meal.

The serving of the Meal begins with the offering of our tithes and gifts as a response to God's blessings to us. As God has gifted us, we offer back to God our gifts, time, talents, and treasures. Our gifts support God's mission for our church and the work of the greater Church. They enable the church to provide the written and spoken word of God, Christian education,

and pastoral care, food, clothing, shelter, and a helping hand to those in need, in our community and in our world.

Both God's gifts to us and our gifts to God are brought forward as we sing an offertory to express gratitude for all God's blessings, dedicate ourselves to God, and request His continued blessings.

The meal continues with Communion itself. We give thanks for the meal to be served. We hear the words Jesus spoke when He instituted the Supper with His disciples in the Upper Room. We will pray in the words Jesus taught us, and we will be invited to dine.

We come to the altar to receive the meal. The meal is a gift given. We come with open hearts to receive God's forgiveness and open hands to receive the body and blood of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

We realize God is preparing our hearts as we sing a short hymn while the table is set. The usher leads us to the altar. There we place one hand over the other with palms facing upward to receive the bread, as we hear the words, "The body of Christ, given for you." We take and drink the wine as we hear the words, "The blood of Christ, shed for you." Our response to receiving each is, "Amen."

The table is then cleared, the elements covered. Hymns of joy and thanksgiving are sung throughout this portion of our worship leading us to reflect on the message and the meal. A blessing of thanksgiving is given at the end of the meal.

In normal days the usher leads us to the altar. We come forward to eat and drink and then return to our seats. But these are unusual days. As we celebrate our gathering during Phase 1, we will not have communion. Starting on Pentecost Sunday, we will celebrate the sacrament of communion again. How sweet the bread and wine will taste following our fast.

Out of love, to protect the vulnerable, we will remain in our seats and we will be served a wafer and small cup of wine which have been sealed. We will all eat and drink together as the same, familiar words are spoken.

After all have partaken of the Lord's Supper, we again give thanks to God for the meal. We receive a benediction and sing a sending hymn to commemorate our time of worship. With the sending we receive our commission to go out and reflect the love of God, which we do by loving God and one another.

Blessings to you who gather to worship within the church and blessings to you who continue to worship from home. You are all welcome to our worship service, it looks the same - but different.

I bid you peace  
Pastor Tonia