Introduction

What is worship? What are the necessary elements? In the "free church" tradition of which I am a part, I have found that these are not simple questions to answer and it is easy to envy those who have more formalized ideas about liturgy and worship. However, I believe that it is imperative for those of us in the "free church" to enter the discussion, recognize our own liturgical traditions, and engage in a process of thoughtfully reviewing our customs and perhaps recovering some practices that we have abandoned along the way. In this paper, I will offer definition and clarification of basic ideas and terms that are necessary for such a discussion. I will then highlight four elements that I believe are mostly overlooked in evangelical "free church" circles. These key elements are: form, the role of planning and facilitation, location and truth-telling. Finally, I will suggest what I see to be the fundamental actions of a worship service and will offer some description and explanation of each.

Worship defined and clarified

In the interest of clear discussion, there are a couple of terms and ideas that I would like to begin by defining and clarifying. In fact, what is often most closely associated with the word "worship" ranges so broadly and varies so much depending on tradition and experience that I believe clarification is foundational to this paper. For some, the word "worship" immediately conjures images and feelings associated with singing songs of praise to God, sensing intimacy with God, or expressing what one feels or thinks before God. I would suggest that while these things may be involved in some way in our worship, they should not be the central or fundamental elements.

It is my impression that many people consider worship to consist of an individual's action of singing praise to God as an act of self-expression while expecting that the church will present them with information that is helpful for living and possibly do so in an entertaining or need-meeting manner. Instead, I believe that worship should be thought of as a God-centered activity in which the Trinitarian God acts as "receiver of, perfecter of and prompter of our worship."[1] God invites human beings to actively participate in the divine life, offering back their whole selves, body, mind, and emotions. It is of course possible for individuals to encounter God while alone or apart from a gathering of the local church; however, in this paper I will focus on the worship of the Church, which by definition takes place in the gathering of God's people.

One may wonder whether any differences between and individual's worship and that of a gathered people need to be identified. Ecclesiology is a key factor in this because one's view of the Church will greatly affect one's view of why the Church gathers and how it ought to gather. Chan, in his book *Liturgical Theology*, points out that in most evangelical settings the assumption is that the Spirit is at work primarily in individuals as opposed to the Body of Christ as a whole and this results in a substandard ecclesiology in which the Church is a volunteer society of individuals held together by overdependence on charismatic leadership. Shared participation creates a safeguard against worship that degenerates into *my* expression of *my* experience of *my* conception of who God is. Torrance warns that this kind of worship is much like that of the Israelites who got impatient while Moses was up the mountain and so formed the golden calf. He writes, "Instead of their worship being an ordinance of grace and a covenanted way of

[1] Van Dyk, 3-4.

response, it becomes a rebellious, idolatrous form of self-expression and self-assertion."[2] The Church has long been working to form and re-form its worship to reflect the God revealed in Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ. By so doing, individual experience and expression is normalized and interpreted by the Church, rather than used as the basis for worship. When individuals participate in worship, they should be invited to see their experience and understanding of God in light of a larger story. In this way, an individual's experience and conception of God can be confirmed by the biblically-rooted norms established by the Church, or corrected and informed by them.

In order for people to gather to worship God in the presence of one another, they must agree upon ways in which this happens. When we discuss the ways in which groups of people have agreed to worship together, we are speaking of liturgical structure. Unfortunately, the word "liturgy" has for many evangelicals become a word that means highly formalized worship practices. This results in confusion between the general rules or norms of a community and the structure that underlies their worship. People are creatures of habit, and generally approach their gatherings with some sort of agreed upon norms that have evolved over time, whether spoken or unspoken. In many evangelical churches, the basic order of a worship service consists of a time of singing, primarily focused on praising God, followed by exposition of the Word. In my opinion, this is just as liturgical as a full Anglican service, the liturgies are just vastly different both in degree of formality as well as theological grounding. These blueprints for services are sometimes reflected in a printed order of service. Chan describes liturgy as "worship expressed through a certain visible structure or order."[3] He goes on to say that liturgy is

[2] Torrance, 62.
[3] Chan, 62.

"people's common response to [God's] word, their acceptance of the Word, which constitutes them as the covenant people."[4] The blueprint of the service can be compared to a journey planned on a map. There is a vast difference between a route plotted on a map and the lived experience of taking the trip. The map does not account for all the factors, but does provide the travelers with some sense of development and destination. While I would never advise planning out every detail and refusing to budge from the plan while facilitating a worship experience, I have come to believe that giving the congregation some sense of where the journey is headed is helpful in allowing their level of engagement to be at the highest point possible.

How do these ideas work in an actual setting? At Regent College, I inherited the practice of using a 'map' for Chapel services from my predecessor. The map is both a printed order of service and a way to put song lyrics, readings, etc into the hands of the congregation. Many participants find this strange and foreign at first, especially if they are accustomed to having little idea what is going to happen in a service, and then only ever seeing four to six lines of text at a time projected on a screen. What I hear over and over again from new members of the community is that as they use the maps for the Chapel services they begin to pay attention to the words they are going to sing, the words they have already sung or spoken. They begin to discover links between elements in the service that they might never have noticed had the visual and verbal cues not been printed for them. Ultimately, they find new ways for meaningful participation in a worship service. The 'map' is allowing them to engage in a different way than they may be used to. For those coming from more spontaneous traditions, the struggle is often with the idea that everything has been planned beforehand, possibly leaving little room for the Spirit to

[4] Chan, 41.

guide things during the service. In response, I try to point out how often things happen in the service that are not on the map, or, how many times things turn out very differently than what I had in mind when planning the service.

Thus every worship service follows a liturgy. Within the general concept of liturgy there may be degrees of formality and the liturgy can be expressed within various norms of worship practice, but to call a worship service "liturgical" is redundant. The adjective "liturgical" does not mean formal, but rather is used to describe a structure, however rigid or flexible, that enables a gathered people to worship together or is used in the course of the gathering. Therefore, I dislike using the term "liturgical service." I would, however, welcome using the phrase "liturgical music," in that every service is liturgical, but not all music can be used to enable the gathered people to respond in worship to the Triune God.

Having clarified what it is I mean by the terms worship and liturgy, I will now move on to discuss four key elements that I see as necessary components of any corporate worship gathering, all of which I believe that the evangelical church has mostly lost sight of and would benefit from rediscovering.

Worship involves form.

In a culture that prizes freedom of choice above almost all else, it is no wonder that we are rediscovering form and ritual as valuable for worship after almost a century of equating spontaneity with the work of the Spirit. For many evangelical congregations, God's presence marks an event by some spontaneous expression or change of plan, while the act of planning is viewed with suspicion. Christians in the twenty-first century are showing a rising interest in linking modern practices to ancient ones and thus forms of

liturgy more usually seen in Roman Catholic or high Anglican services are on the rise within evangelical circles.[5] I think that much of this process of rediscovery has been motivated by the realization that our "free worship" is actually a very rigid form, and that it has been developed on a foundation of pragmatic concerns rather than theological or liturgical ideas. In rejecting anything that looked or smelled like the Roman Catholic order of Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei, churches needed to come up with something new. Unfortunately, what we have generally ended up with is a liturgy that has more to do with convenient times to make announcements and dismiss children than with preparing and enabling people to hear the Word of God and respond in ways appropriate to a corporate gathering. We have de-emphasized the Sacrament, elevated the preached Word - often neglecting the reading of the Word throughout the rest of the service - and made musical choices based on tempo and key ahead of content or purpose. When we realize that our worship services will inevitably be structured, we must consider the theological and pastoral aspects of that structure.

Worship involves preparation and facilitation.

What, then, is the pastoral role in the worship service? What is a "worship leader?" What is the role of the "emcee" or person giving announcements? Who decides what songs will be sung, what scripture is read, what text is preached and how are these choices motivated? If the service order has some flexibility, who makes decisions about the order each week, and on what basis? I would like to suggest that the term "worship leader" is not necessarily a helpful one, as it tends to put the focus on one very visible

[5] See Robert Webber's *Ancient-Future Faith*.

person, when their role is really to direct the attention of the gathered people toward God. Often, I think what we intend by the term is simply the person who has chosen the music and will lead it. This may be a reflection of the all too common reality in churches where the sermon is prepared by the preacher, the music by the worship leader, for the most part independently. In cases like this, the word "worship" seems to be used to refer to either just the music, or everything that is not the sermon. In other churches, there may be several different people guiding and facilitating the service, and, this makes the term "worship leader" more properly "song leader" which I think is an unfortunate title as well**.** Instead of sharply delineating these roles, I would suggest that the different facets of the pastoral functions should ultimately be shared between those who prepare for and facilitate a worship service. The way in which the preparation and facilitation is shared will depend on the people involved, and take into account their gifts, interests and abilities.

Planning and facilitating a worship service is indeed a pastoral act. The planning and facilitating may or may not be done by professional "pastors" but it is crucial that those who are working to prepare the worship service understand that their role is not just one of choosing songs and leading singing, but of guiding, shepherding and equipping the people who gather. In my experience, there is a certain amount of terror that is appropriate when you realize that you are involved in choosing the words that a group of people will use to address the Living God and in choosing what kinds of words they will hear from the Divine Word. Scripting this dialogue between humans and the Divine *should* be an act that is seen as important and one for which theological training and reflection is an integral part. When a young person or new Christian who happens to be a

good musician is drafted to "lead worship" without any instruction, collaboration, or mentoring, we show that we do not understand what ought to go into such work. When we hire someone as a Worship Arts Pastor who understands worship music and the arts, but does not necessarily have any training (or calling) as a pastor, we show lack of understanding of this role.

An example of a church that has opposed this trend is New Life Community Church in Duncan, BC. Every member of their three worship teams is required to take a six-week class on worship before serving on the team. The pastor teaches this class, which means that every drummer and bass player has been introduced to basic concepts of "what we're here to do" beyond playing songs together. Then, when a team member's leadership potential is recognized, they are required to take a second class that takes them further on in their reflection of the theology of worship. Planning for worship services is then carried out through collaboration between the pastor and lay leaders. New Life Community is a medium sized church with no "worship arts pastor," but with a lead pastor who cares about the whole service, and several lay worship facilitators who are using their gifts more fully as they grow in their thoughtfulness about how to use them.

There are two metaphors that may help in exploring the work of planning and facilitating worship services. The first metaphor is the idea of a "liturgical architect" which enables those who are involved to see their role as one of creating a space in which people may gather to be reminded of who God is, and to respond with praise, lament, prayer and surrender, which, as we will see below, are essential components to a worship service. This metaphor is particularly helpful because of the way in which it highlights the need for imagination. Just as an architect of a building should take into account those

who will use the building as well as the purposes for which the building will be used, a liturgical architect must pay attention to those who will assemble in the space and seek to plan in such a way that they will find that their needs have been anticipated in the planning stages. I have found that this metaphor helps me when I seek to plan in such a way that space for silent reflection and contemplation are built into the service, to be used as needed and in response to what the Spirit seems to be doing in the moment. In this way, a spontaneous decision is enabled by planning in such a way that time does not dictate facilitation. Time consideration in advance enables a relaxed pace when the event occurs.

The second metaphor is that of "liturgical dietician" or chef. I owe this to John Witvliet who explores these ideas in his book *Worship Seeking Understanding*. The metaphor invites us to view the music used in worship in terms of spiritual nourishment and the participants as those gathered at a table. I have found this idea particularly helpful because of the way it invites me to view my preparation and facilitation as an act of hospitality. What is more, in a similar way to the architect metaphor, I am invited to pay attention to who will be gathering for the "meal" and to offer them a liturgical diet that is both accessible and nutritious. I can take into account not only what a particular group of people would naturally *want* but also what I know from my training and reflection that they *need* in order to be nourished and to grow. This keeps me from feeling like a "short order cook" and allows for the possibility that over time and with experience as a pastoral musician, I may be able to introduce new foods and flavours in such as way as to expand the tastes of a group of worshippers. Witvliet asserts that "the highest purpose of liturgical music is to enable full, conscious, and active participation at the deepest level

possible for people of all sorts."[6] The metaphor of "liturgical dietician" is helpful in envisioning how this can actually be accomplished.

As we have seen, planning and facilitating a worship service is a highly collaborative act. This collaboration occurs among pastors, preachers, musicians, technical people, and many others. Planning should take into account the ways in which different aspects of a service must fit together, and how decisions about one aspect affect the others. Ideally, this happens most effectively if the people planning have a good understanding of the way in which the pieces fit together and have an opportunity *afterwards* to discuss how the interplay worked or conflicted. In my experience, it is more difficult to facilitate feedback sessions than planning sessions as feedback is often limited to that which people "liked and disliked." This creates a consumer-oriented mentality in which a successful worship service becomes one that elicits more positive comments than complaints. In my years at Regent College, I have had the privilege of serving on the Chapel committee both as student participant and then in leadership as the Music and Worship Coordinator. One distinct highlight of these years has been the opportunity to reflect on the services with a group of people using a process that is unlike anything I have encountered in the churches in which I have served. In this process, feedback is offered in the form of "values and concerns."[7] This format invites people to go beyond stating what they liked or disliked, as it requires reflection on the reasons behind their personal response. It also means that it is possible to value some part of the service that was difficult or to be concerned about a lyric in a song that is well-loved. Personal taste is accounted for, but not made central to the feedback process. Members of

[6] Witvliet, 240.
[7] This is another inherited practice for which I owe a large debt of gratitude to Donna Dinsmore.

the committee also become great listeners and grow in their ability to tease out the values and concerns expressed by their peers in casual conversation. The reflection on a previous service impacts planning for future services and offers useful information about how certain elements are received and perceived by those who participate. This feedback process keeps the planning from becoming insulated from the actual experience of worshippers. It requires time and patience, but is well worth the effort.

The final facet of planning and facilitating a worship service is discernment. In fact, discernment is foundational to all that has been previously discussed. It is essential to making decisions about liturgical music, readings, and orders of service. It is of highest importance for selecting liturgical leadership and equipping liturgical musicians to use their gifts for the good of the gathered community. It is a key component to creating liturgical "space" and crafting "meals" that are both nourishing and appetizing. Finally, discernment is crucial to the collaborative act that planning and facilitating worship is and should be.

Worship involves location.

When we gather together in response to God's invitation and prompting, the gathering occurs in a physical location, with particular participants who bring with them their social and cultural realities. This is why we can visit a church from within our denomination and feel both at home and far away from home simultaneously. Urban or rural location makes a difference. Educational and economic factors play a role. The gathering is shaped by social and cultural conditions. I once heard John Stackhouse

challenge a room full of pastors[8] to use basic principles of cultural anthropology in their churches much the way we would assume that cross-cultural missionaries would have to in their fields of service. Western culture is not homogenous and so although people may see the same ads on television and hear the same music on the radio, life in the university district of a city is very different from life in a small farming village. Ethnic diversity or homogeneity impacts the culture of a worshipping community. Economic conformity and disparity create vastly different contexts. A local church must be aware of these factors and of how they interact with the worshipping life of their particular congregation so that their worship is authentic to both their geographic and cultural realities.

As an example, I recently heard about a church that shares property with a seniors' care facility. The church is located in a suburban context where there are many young families, but also a large population of retired people. Sadly, some of the issues this church faces have to do with unwillingness on the part of the leadership to recognize their particular location and accompanying realities. For instance, due to the high population of people over the age of fifty-five in the community, there are a large percentage of folks in this age category in the church. Add to this that the seniors' facility ensures a steady stream of parishioners in their last years and their aging population never actually decreases, but rather stays consistent, or possibly even has the capacity to grow. This is unique to this church due to the particular geography of the community. Unfortunately, the leadership insists that they want to be a family church with a thriving ministry to children, youth and young adults and so are possibly ignoring the incredible resource and gift of their retired and still healthy folks, and treating the older and more frail members as if they are only a temporary part of the congregation. This refusal to

[8] This was at the Regent College Pastors' Conference in 2007.

accept the true nature of their location and social situation is detracting from the health of the body and is proving to have some damaging consequences for staff and parishioners alike.

Local churches also need to locate themselves within the Church historic and global so that they are able to see the links between their current experience and practice and those of the wider Christian community. Understanding their distinctiveness, it is then imperative that they also see themselves as connected to the family of God that exists around the world and that has a long history. For some, the first step in this process is to be aware of their denominational links to other congregations historically and globally. One practical way to foster this kind of balance between particularity and universality is to encourage the use of 'local' music and other liturgical resources while freely borrowing from the global and historic resources. This means encouraging the musicians in a local church to write or arrange songs for use in the service. Wordsmiths can be invited to help craft prayers or readings for particular occasions. Then, adding to these local elements, one can borrow a hymn of Charles Wesley or sing a simple chorus in another language to help affirm unity and continuity in the Church. Sometimes these elements will cross-fertilize such as when a songwriter finds new melodic ways to express and old text, or when the chorus of a song is discovered to be easily singable in a variety of languages.

The final way in which a church can locate itself within the global and historic church is by intensifying its participation in the liturgical calendar. I use the word "intensifying" because most churches have Christmas and Easter firmly established in their yearly cycles and so it is not that evangelical churches ignore the calendar

altogether, they just choose to participate in only a small portion of what it has to offer. I have been a part of two church communities that have attempted to expand their awareness and increase their level of participation in the liturgical calendar. An easy step for any local church to take is simply to see how the parts in which they are accustomed to participating fit into the larger yearly cycle and perhaps to choose to add one or two elements to enhance their community's participation. For instance, if a community is already celebrating Good Friday and Easter Sunday, they might investigate how observing Lent serves as preparation for these important days. In an effort to invite people into this practice, an Ash Wednesday service might help to mark the beginning of this journey. A simple addition like this can help to link a modern day church to not only the benefits of participation in the historic celebrations, but also to the Church worldwide, as it consciously enters into a liturgical season with fellow believers around the world.

Worship involves truth-telling about ourselves and our world.

In most evangelical settings, I observe that it is usually agreed upon that worship should include a reminder of the character of God as revealed in Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ. This happens through reading the Word, singing songs that describe and affirm God's character, and in praying and preaching. What is less often recognized is the need to be honest in our depiction of our own condition and character and that of the world in which we live. Darrell Johnson affirms that when we come to worship "We come having forgotten the Gospel" and "we are not ready to worship."[9] The good news of the Gospel is irrelevant if we are not being honest about our sin and its effects. A favourite confession of mine says it well, "We confess to God and in the

[9] From a lecture at Regent College for "Preaching and Worship" given March 10, 2009.

company of all God's people that our lives and the life of the world are broken by our sin."[10] Without such an admission early on in the service, we are more likely to feel like frauds as we declare our love for a God we know we have loved poorly. Without such an admission, the good news will not ring nearly as good as it should. Without such an admission, speaking to God about the needs of the world during a time of prayer will not be linked to our own need for wholeness and healing. In fact, it might even foster a sense of being 'above' the chaos and clamor of the world when, if we were to tell the truth, it is a chaos and clamor that we know all too well. Refusing to name the reality of sin in our lives and in our world creates a disconnect between the actions and words of our liturgical life and that of our everyday experience. This disconnect can only be mended by recovering the practices of confession and lament.

Confession is a necessary component of worship because it neutralizes the underlying human fear that if we were to admit who we really are, God (and other people) would not be interested in us anymore, let alone willing to associate with us. By including an admission of our brokenness and need for forgiveness early in the service, worshippers are both relieved of their fear of the truth as well as corrected should they have managed to walk in to church feeling righteous and holy. God is affirmed as the Holy One and we are able to see any glimpses of holiness in our own lives as proof of divine action and faithfulness rather than as the result of our own efforts to please God.

Lament is the act of expressing grief or sorrow over the brokenness that we see in our own lives and in the world at large. It is not just complaint, but it is complaint directed to God as the One who has the power to make a difference. In lament, we join with psalmist in asking God, "How long?" and cry out on behalf of others for God's

[10] From the Iona Community.

provision, reign and justice to break into situations of need, destruction, chaos and injustice.

"Free churches" often view confession and lament as optional parts of worship or neglect their practice altogether because they are seen to be too negative. This is evident in the conspicuous absence of regular confession within the weekly liturgy and by the lack of honest description of the injustice in our world and the pain in our own lives. Truth-telling about God should be matched by truth-telling about ourselves. In this way, we can then also tell the truth about the need and brokenness of the world, giving lament its proper place within our liturgical activity as well. Without confession, lament is improperly detached from our own experience. In conjunction with confession, lament is an appropriate response to the ways in which the events and realities of the world in which we live seem to lie at cross-purposes with divine promises and revelation.

Practically, confession should find a regular place in our weekly worship. Lament should be our natural response to news of injustice and oppression, as natural as joy at news of new life and reconciliation. In the liturgical calendar, there are a few key places where confession and lament are particularly important. These include Advent, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and All Saints Day.[11] I believe that these seasons and celebrations can inform and deepen our participation in confession and lament during the rest of the year.

The actions of a worship service

There are many ways to analyze the fundamental actions of the corporate worship service, from the basic ordo of Word and Sacrament to the four-fold structure that

[11] For more on how these seasons and days can be celebrated, see Robert Webber's *Ancient Future Time*.

bookends these basics with the actions of Gathering and Sending Out.[12] While both of these structures are helpful, I think that the average evangelical ``free church`` requires more specifics as to what should be included, because its leadership often seems to be working from a rather blank slate. This liturgical freedom can be paralyzing, which I think accounts for the result that many services that are merely divided into "Singing" and "Sermon." I would suggest that this is the two-fold movement that many churches see as the basic structure of their service. We need to recover Word and Sacrament as the central actions of worship. In the time of the Reformation, it was Word and Sacrament that were seen to both define and realize the Church as the Church. I do not think that they are any less important today, although many of our churches have simplified the sacrament of baptism and grossly neglected the Eucharist. Singing is not likely to be removed from most churches' services, nor would I ever suggest it, but much work is needed to recover the underlying reason for our songs, and to expand the liturgical actions of the gathered people from simply singing songs of praise to having a more developed interaction with the God who has called for and enabled our worship in the first place.

In order to encourage development of this kind, I suggest the following actions are important to include in a worship service:

Gathering
Truth-Telling about God, ourselves and our world
Retelling the Story (WORD)
Response and Reminder of Mission (SACRAMENT)
Sending Out

[12] Chan, 62.

In the Gathering, we respond to God's invitation to worship, and we join in a "grand processional"[13] from our various places of work, living, and relational existence – to remember who the Prompter of our worship is. When the truth of God's character is spoken or sung, it inspires our praise and adoration. As discussed earlier, this early part of our worship may well set up an inner tension as we recognize the incongruence between the truth of who God is and the reality of our broken lives. In some settings, the pain and burden of our brokenness is something we are invited to "leave at the door" as we enter a place of escape from such petty and earthly distractions and seek to spend time contemplating higher and better things. It is precisely this kind of thinking that I wish to speak against. When a person enters a service like this, they may find a place of escape for a time, but unfortunately the things they left at the door will be waiting for them as they exit. The disconnect between their religious experience and their daily reality is only heightened and they have not had the opportunity to view their life in light of God's character or Word. They may leave worship relieved to have spent an hour of escape, but, much like a substance-induced high, this feeling will wear off, and they will have to face the reality of their world and life once again. I would suggest that truth-telling worship allows real human beings to encounter God as revealed in Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ. As John Witvliet rightly points out, "Guided by a liturgy, in a worship service, we renew the promises we made (and often failed to keep) to God, and we hear again the promises God has made (and kept!) in Christ."[14] The person leaving a truth-telling worship service faces the same realities, but perhaps has obtained an adjusted perspective, and has perhaps also had an encounter with the Divine in which they have

[13] Van Dyk, 10.
[14] Witvliet, 39.

been invited to be honest about who they are. The liturgy has highlighted the goodness of the gospel, pairing an admission of human failure with affirmation of God's ultimate faithfulness and forgiveness. Telling this truth inspires praise from the deepest and most broken places in human lives and prepares those same lives to hear the transforming Word and respond with admission of need and hunger at the sacramental Table. Leaving the service, they are not only re-oriented towards wholeness, but also leave with an awareness that the good news they have received and been reminded of is for the whole world, including all whom they are about to encounter as they leave the walls of the church building. In this way, truth-telling about God and ourselves is directly linked to Mission.

I have expanded the basic four-fold structure to include the action of Truth-telling as I think it is perhaps the most neglected and thus wish to highlight it. It could be argued that Truth-telling pervades the whole service, underlying the other four actions, but in the interest of highlighting the need for confession and lament in conjunction with reminders of God's revealed character, I suggest that it be given its own separate action.

I see three essential elements to Truth-telling in worship: rehearsal of God's character and actions; confession of sin and brokenness; and prayers of thanksgiving and lament. All three of these are modeled for us in the Psalms. Mentored by this ancient prayer book, we find that "doubt can be expressed as an act of faith"[15] and that it is possible to acknowledge the tension between the two without being pulled apart by it.[16] God's character and actions can be rehearsed by a simple quotation like,

[15] Witvliet, 44.
[16] ibid, 62.

"The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.

He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbour his anger forever;

he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;

as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us."[17]

Confession may be formal or informal, specific or general. Prayers of thanksgiving and lament may occur at several different points in the service, but I see great value in acknowledging at an early moment that we arrive at a worship service with a variety of joys and sorrows, burdens and celebrations, fears and expectations, and that we are invited by God to bring all these things with us. We come in response to God's invitation, and are free to be honest about our weakness, sin and need because we recognize that Jesus Himself stands as our High Priest, offering a perfect sacrifice, interceding on our behalf, and we are invited to join Him in offering ourselves to the Father.

Due to an emphasis on preaching in evangelical circles, it would be easy to think of the "Word" part of the liturgy as consisting solely of the sermon. While the sermon is an important part of this action within the liturgy, it is only a part and I think it is important to reclaim the other ways in which the Story of the gospel is retold. The two primary ways is through the reading of Scripture and the rehearsal of salvation history. In my experience, often the only Scripture I hear read in a service is the text of the sermon, and this reading most often occurs within the message itself. The Psalms offer a good place to start if a church desires to incorporate more Scripture into other parts of the

[17] Psalm 103:8-12 TNIV.

service, as they can function as calls to worship, the basis for prayers, and great examples of bringing all parts of human experience before God. Rehearsing the events of salvation history is another important part of retelling. This can be done through use of Scripture, but also through recitation of the creeds or by songs that tell the story of creation, fall, and redemption through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and point us toward the coming of the new heaven and the new earth. Remembering the sweep of history helps to remind us of God's great acts and to orient us towards the ultimate consummation of all things. In this context, the preached Word proclaims the good news already heard with specificity into the lives and contexts of those gathered.

"The Word proclaims, the sacrament accomplishes."[18] They go together and ought not to be separated. Eucharistically-oriented preaching must proclaim the gospel or it will be essentially disconnected from what the sacrament proclaims. Good advice or practical tips for living better lives will be seen for the paltry offerings they are when set alongside the Gospel made tangible at the Table. Positively, the preacher may find herself drawn along towards a Christocentric view of the text when she knows that her words will be connected to the celebration of the Eucharist. At the Table, we are given opportunity to "come to know what the proclaimed Word is by actually entering into communion with the Real Presence effected by the Spirit in the Lord's Supper."[19] I would add that through Communion we are also afforded the opportunity to respond to the Word in trusting submission and with an acknowledgement of our need and hunger for God. The Word may point out our places of unwillingness to trust and our misguided attempts to satisfy our hunger, but then at the Table we can repent and submit ourselves

[18] Chan, 68.
[19] ibid, 66.

once again, receiving the nourishment we so desperately need. It is in this tangible encounter that we are also reminded of our mission, and enabled to carry it out. We arise from the Table filled with thanksgiving, which is concretely expressed in service to the world.[20]

This brings us to the final action of Sending Out in which "God's transforming work in us is to be lived out in the rest of lives, to the glory of the Triune God."[21] This final section may include a word of blessing or benediction in which the divine action of the Triune God is proclaimed and spoken over the people. Often times this word of blessing comes from Scripture in one of the great Trinitarian statements, or from the Mosaic or Abrahamic blessings of the Old Testament. Worshippers are sent out in the presence of the same One who called them to this time and has enabled their interaction, providing both Word and Sacrament for those gathered. Now each of them is invited to join in the divine action of offering Christ to the world.

Conclusion

Worship is a God-centered activity in which human beings are invited to gather in the presence of their Creator in order to be reminded of the truth about God, themselves, and the world in which they live. The liturgy enables the people to gather together and offer their common response to the Word of God as revealed in Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ. The four key elements this paper has sought to highlight are form, the role of planning and facilitation, location and truth-telling. Finally, I have suggested that the fundamental actions of a worship service should be Gathering together, Truth-

[20] Chan, 77.
[21] Van Dyk, 153.

telling about God, ourselves and the world, Retelling the Story, Response and Reminder of Mission, and Sending Out. It is my hope that the "free church" might mature and deepen its liturgical practices by engaging with the ideas represented in this paper.

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