

Introduction

Today we celebrate the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, and Jesus speaks a hard truth: **"Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division" (Luke 12:51)**. Did you hear that? The words and works of Jesus cause division.

So the question of the day is *why* – a whole lot of *why*. Not so much *why* does Jesus say it, but *why* are we here to listen to him? And while we are here in church listening to him, *why* do we do what we do while we're here?

That's why today's Service will be a little different and, I hope, special. We will answer those *whys* and get a better understanding of why we do what we do in church. When we gather here every week, our purpose is to put the words and works of Jesus on center stage. We are all about the gospel from the very first minute here to the very last.

Why? Not to divide, but to unite. The gospel that divides also has the most power to do the most important thing for the most people all at the same time.

The order in which we receive God's gospel gifts is called the **Liturgy**. The word *liturgy* means "service." In the Liturgy, God serves us with his gifts, and we serve him with prayer and praise. Let's do that with hymn 590, "O Holy Spirit, Enter In."

Part 1: The Gathering

The first part of the Service is **The Gathering**. What gives us the right to gather together in God's house? Our achievements? Our good works? No. Our baptism. In baptism, God adopted us into his family and clothed us in Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

And so, of course, the first thing that we do in the Service is to remember that we have been baptized. With the **Invocation** and the **sign of the cross**, we name the name into which we were baptized (Matthew 28:19), we remember Christ's death ✠ into which we were baptized (Romans 6:3), and we know that we belong here.

And not only do we remember that we have been baptized, we also reenact our baptism. We take the sinful nature that we inherited from our parents and we drown it in baptismal waters by **Confession**, by speaking the honest truth about our sinful selves (1 John 1:8-9). Then God forgives us and a new person rises out of those waters (Romans 6:4).

And now, absolved, we have the confidence to pray. So we ask the Lord for very big, very important things, and because he is rich in mercy (Ephesians 2:4), we ask him by praying, **Lord, Have Mercy** (Mark 10:47).

And because he answers, true to his mercy, we celebrate, we celebrate the way that heaven itself celebrates. Jesus once said that the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10). So just think how happy heaven must be when a church full of sinners repents!

And so we sing **Glory Be to God**, the song that the angels sang when Jesus was born: "Glory be to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14). We praise God by proclaiming what he has done for us.

Why? Because it puts the gospel on center stage. We celebrate **The Gathering** on the top of page 154 in the hymnal. Please stand.

Part 2: The Word

The second part of the Service is **The Word**. It begins with this **Salutation**: "The Lord be with you. *And also with you.*" That is more than just wishful thinking. It is a statement of fact. As we hear his Word, Jesus is here to bless us. He promised (Matthew 18:20).

So we talk to him in the **Prayer of the Day**, a specific prayer that asks for the specific blessings that God promises in the specific Readings in this specific Service. And all three of the Bible Readings are designed to put the spotlight on Jesus.

The **First Reading** is from the Old Testament. We stand with the people of God who lived before Jesus, we view his work as something to be accomplished, and we sing a song from their hymnal in the **Psalm of the Day**.

The **Second Reading** is from the New Testament, the part of the Bible that was written after Jesus lived. We stand with them and view Jesus' work as something that has already been accomplished.

But then we stand, literally, with the people who lived when Jesus lived, for the reading of the **Gospel**. We **acclaim** him by singing *alleluia*. And after the Gospel we say, "Praise be to you, O Christ," like he's in here with us, because he is!

And week after week, he keeps coming back, as week after week we read from Scripture. So when you show up here, you don't have to worry about hearing my pet topics or what I think is interesting. Instead the collective wisdom of almost two millennia of Christians has given us the **Church Year** and the **Lectionary**, a calendar of assigned Readings that show us each and every facet of Christ's saving work, each and every year.

Why? To ensure that each week the main topic at hand is always the gospel. We celebrate **The Word** on the top of page 160 in the hymnal. Please stand.

The Sermon

I'm sure you have heard someone say that religion causes division. And maybe that sounds harsh, but it's true. Jesus said so himself; you heard him (**Luke 12:51**). Why? Because Christianity is about reality. And because the Christian gospel is real, it will inevitably cause division.

In today's Gospel, Jesus describes what lies ahead for him as a baptism (**Luke 12:50**). What he means is that there is going to be an outpouring of all of God's wrath against all of our sin, and it will all pour onto Jesus instead of us (Isaiah 53:5-6).

This means that there is just one way for someone to be saved from the flood of God's punishment – only by sheltering behind Christ, who absorbs it all. That is how Christianity divides. Jesus divides us from the punishment that we deserve.

But that also means that he will divide us from other people. The gospel about Jesus separates those who believe it from those who oppose it. That division can cut close to home and it can be very painful.

That's why we need the gospel front and center. Because more than anything, Jesus wants us and all people to be part of his heavenly family (1 Timothy 2:3-4). The gospel alone makes that happen. It is God's fire and God's hammer (**Jeremiah 23:29**), the power that gives us true peace with him and with one another. Amen.

Maybe you were happy to have such a short **Sermon** today. Maybe not. But I hope you see that the entire Service is a sermon that proclaims Christ.

In fact, after the sermon we proclaim Christ together in the **Creed**. The Creed is the result of the fire Jesus kindled on earth (**Luke 12:49**). There is only one true religion (Acts 4:12). We confess the faith that is absolute truth, saving truth, historical truth (John 8:31-32). And, by the way, we don't make this stuff up. We confess our shared faith together. The Creed says, "You're not crazy! You're not alone! This is what I believe too. Plus, it's not just us. It's what Christians for the last two thousand years have believed!"

After the Creed comes the **Prayer of the Church**, where we pray for the Christian Church, our congregation, our country, and all people (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Then, in one of the greatest demonstrations of the gospel's power, we open our wallets and our purses and our checkbooks and give to support the ministry of the gospel in the **Offering**.

Why? Because we want others to have what we have and to know what we know. We want the gospel to be on center stage for them too. Let's confess our faith together with the **Nicene Creed** on page 162 in the hymnal. Please stand.

Part 3: The Sacrament

The third part of the Service is **The Sacrament**. Jesus does not just pop into church for a quick hello. He wants to stay and serve as the Host of a Meal. And so it is right to have this **Preface**. To say again, "The Lord be with you. *And also with you.*" Because it is not just wishful thinking, Jesus really is here. So it is right to lift up your heart and show it to the Host, to let him see every sinful bit of it, to let him know that you don't deserve to be fed, but you absolutely need to be fed his forgiveness.

Which is why it is also right to sing **Holy, Holy, Holy** – the song that the angels sing in God's presence (Isaiah 6:3). Two thousand years ago they shouted "Hosanna!" when Jesus came to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to accomplish salvation (Matthew 21:9). Now Jesus is present at Saint John's in Burlington to deliver that salvation!

Which is why it is truly good and right to give him thanks in two back-to-back prayers: the **Prayer of Thanksgiving** for the blessings of salvation that he gives us (Matthew 26:6), and the **Lord's Prayer** for the perfect summary of everything that we need to say to God (Matthew 6:9-13).

Because just listen to what he says to us! In the **Words of Institution** he promises to give us his body and his blood for the forgiveness of our sins (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)! Listen to John the Baptizer: "Look, the **Lamb of God**, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Sing it! He's right here! You are about to eat and drink his mercy, because he gives himself to you in bread and wine.

Why? Because he wants you to feast on the gospel (1 Corinthians 10:16). We celebrate **The Sacrament** on page 165 in the hymnal. Please stand.

Part 4: The Sending

The final part of the Service is **The Sending**, because what's left to do now, other than be sent from God's house in peace? But, before we go, we thank God, once again, for the Meal (Psalm 136:1) and we proclaim our faith in Jesus' death for us (1 Corinthians 11:26).

And then, God has one more gift to give. The **Blessing** is not a churchy way of saying, "Goodbye! Have a nice day!" It's way more than that. This is the protection, grace, favor and peace of the Triune God, pressed upon you one last time. With it we end as we began, with the threefold name of God. With it we end as we began, with the **sign of the cross** ✠, by which every blessing is ours.

Why do we do these things? Because our pattern of worship puts the gospel of Jesus Christ on center stage. Yes, that gospel is a fire that divides, but it is also "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

We conclude with **The Sending** on the middle of page 170 in the hymnal. Please stand.