

The Lord Calls Us, The Lord Cleanses Us

Sunday School - Covenant Renewal Worship: Class 01

The Lord Calls Us

Being a part of the Church means being a part of the “*ekklesia*”. This means that we are “called out”. The Church is precisely those people who respond to God’s call to “Come, worship, and bow down.” (Psalm 95:6-7)

In many ways the “Call to Worship” is not a part of the divine liturgy. It is the summons to God’s people (and the world) to come and be fully human in their worship of God. Of course, this doesn’t mean that it’s okay to show up after the Call to Worship, but this does help you understand what we are doing in that point of the service.

In our liturgy, our Call to Worship is preceded by two things: (1) a Prelude and (2) a Processional. The prelude serves as a moment to prepare one’s heart to worship. David teaches us that God is enthroned on His people’s praises (Ps 22:3). In the processional, we welcome God into our praises, trusting that He is enthroned on our praises. This is one reason why the processional is always a hymn or psalm of praise.

The next three parts in the Lord calling His people to worship are: (1) The Call to Worship, (2) the Doxology, and (3) the Invitatory (the Venite, Psalm 95). In the Call to Worship, the celebrant declares the purpose of the gathering (in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) and gives greetings of “Grace and peace” to God’s people from their God as an authorized herald of the Lord. The Call to Worship concludes with responsive quotations from Psalm 122 and Psalm 124.

In the Doxology, there is a proper response to God’s call for His people to worship Him. The Doxology serves as this response of praise as well as a testimony to the surrounding world that “all creatures here below” should respond to God’s call to worship Him in Christ. So in some ways, the Doxology is both the response of the church to God and the call of the church to the world.

Finally, in the Invitatory, the congregation then sings the *Venite*. *Venite* is Latin for “O Come”, which is the first words of the Psalm 95. This, like the Call to Worship, serves as a call, from God’s word, to come and worship and sing to God.

Summary: The Lord calls His people to worship Him. He does this through His authorized herald. The herald assures that God comes to His people in “grace and peace”. God’s people respond appropriately by singing praise and calling on one another and the whole creation to come and worship God.

The Lord Cleanses Us

The very first thing to do when preparing to meet with God is to confess one’s sin. This is what we do next in the liturgy. The minister calls upon God’s people to confess their sins, trusting that God is merciful. In our liturgy we sing a portion of Psalm 51. This is a prayer to God asking God to restore us to Himself despite our sin.

Our actual confession takes the form of a corporate confession. While many churches do silent, individual confession or both corporate and silent confession, Christ the King only does a corporate confession in our Lord's Day liturgy. This is not because we deny the role of individual confession in the life of the Christian. Rather, this is because we gather as a people on Sundays to worship. Our confession is a corporate one because we are a single body. Yet because we are a body made up of many members, the confession is wide in its scope. It covers all sins that God's people commit on a weekly basis. Sins of thought, word, and deed. Sins of commission and omission.

The cleansing of the Lord concludes with the Declaration of Absolution. Absolution is related to resolving. In God's forgiveness, the Christian is released from the guilt and obligation of their sin. The Declaration of Absolution is one of confidence, not one that serves to insight possible doubt. You have confessed your sin, therefore, as a herald of the gospel, the minister stands to assure you that your sins are forgiven!

How to Think About All This

As modern people, we tend to operate in very secular ways. We don't know how to think symbolically. In fact, we tend to think the opposite of symbolically by thinking mechanistically. Baptism is a prime example of this dilemma. If you go back 1,000 years, the idea that baptism makes someone a Christian is a totally uncontroversial statement. That is because 1,000 years ago, people had a much more symbolic view of the world. Because we have a mechanistic view of the world, we want to know how baptism works at a mechanistic level. This either tends toward people taking a weird approach to the water in baptism, or to people emptying baptism of all its significance ("it's just a symbol").

But if we can remove ourselves from this mechanistic way of thinking, whole new ways of thinking about worship are opened to us. When the minister stands before you on the Lord's Day and says, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." how do you understand those words? Is that just Pastor Hansen saying that to you? Or, is this an ambassador of God Himself saying this to you? We must attempt to return to realism in our worship. We aren't playing church. We aren't shooting blanks. This is real.

Finally, next week we will move into the "Ascent". After the Confession and Absolution, we "ascend" into heaven. What does this mean? Does this mean we haven't been in God's presence up to this point? These are all questions that we will look into next time but I want you to ruminate on this fact over the next week.