From Liturgy to Life – Leader’s Notes

# Week 1: Invited into the Life of God

Each heading below relates to a slide

## Prayer

In the mediaeval liturgy of Salisbury this was one of the prayers used before the service began by the priest for his personal preparation, and Archbishop Cranmer moved it and the Lord’s Prayer (still as the preparation for the ministers) out of the vestry, to be said in front of the congregation. In his first prayer book of 1549 they were still said before formal opening chant. It is a good prayer of preparation for this week and for the whole course.

## Introduction

Run through the order of the coming weeks. Each week is related to one section of the liturgy. There is one key question that to be asked through all the material. *How does what we pray help us think about how we live?*

## Introduction

We’re going to run through the three main areas to be looked at this week.

In relationship. This looks at beginning (and in the blessing) ending the service with God’s name, but also notes the function of the Greeting is to establish relationship.

In three words. Much of our praying can be summed up in three words, sorry, thanks, please, which roughly correspond to the confession, the Gloria, and the collect.

In our Father’s house. Using the story of the prodigal son, this will think a little bit more about repentance.

## In God’s name

The restoration of the traditional opening of prayer, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**.” helps form a Trinitarian bookend to the Eucharist. This is what both Christian worship and mission, praying and living are grounded in: the being and action of God.

Traditionally, these words are often accompanied by the sign of the cross in the Western Church. Even if that physical sign isn’t part of your normal worship, the Christian understanding of God as Holy Trinity is strongly linked with the way God’s love is revealed on the Cross.

## Caught up in the love of God

Some of you may have seen a version of this diagram before. First, there is God, who creates the universe, and, according to various New Testament texts, such as John and Colossians, he does this through Christ. Without going into it in great depth, we can’t separate the making of the world through the eternal word of God, from the remaking, the redeeming of the world, by that same word in human flesh. Creation and redemption are really two sides of the same coin: the love which not only makes the world, but makes it truly good.

But Christ does for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves: truly and wholeheartedly offer the whole of human life and love to God. The sacrifice of Christ is a two-way peace offering: it is the divine Jesus revealing perfect love for the world, and it is the human Jesus revealing perfect love for God.

Telling the story of Jesus is how we begin to recognise that God is love: that is, that God is relationship, is Trinity. It’s why our annual retelling of the story of Jesus culminates after Pentecost with our celebration of God as the Holy Trinity.

## Baptism

(This large walk-into font is in the church of Santa Maria Formosa, Venice). That’s the point of the two fundamental ceremonies Cranmer kept from the mediaeval baptism service, and by stripping out most of the others, highlighted. At baptism we are signed with the cross, and baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The Cross and the Trinity go together, because we are immersed into the love of God, invited into the life of God.

And if those who are baptised are invited into relationship with God, they are also put into relationship with all those others who are in relationship with God. That’s why, following our opening invocation of God’s name, there is a greeting. Through the exchange of “The Lord be with you, and also with you” we recognise that we’re not in this alone. It’s not just “God and me” but it’s “God and me and you.”

## Worship and Mission

Returning to the diagram we were looking at, let’s add two refinements. If we’re drawn into the love of God, we’re drawn into the loving of God. That is, we share in what God is doing, share in how God is loving. Being caught up in God’s movement of love in Christ that creates and redeems the world is what we call “mission”, and being caught up in Christ’s offering of love from the world to God is what we call “worship”. Worship and mission are the two lungs of the church.

To be a baptised person is to be engaged in both worship and mission, loving God and loving God’s world. How our worship and our mission, our praying and our daily life relate together, is what this course is about.

## Groups

Briefly introduce yourselves.

We’ve explored two main ideas: a) the association of the Cross and the Trinity and b) the idea that to be a Christian is to be caught up in the loving actions of God. Do these ideas make a difference to how you understand what you do i) in church and ii) in your daily life? Identify one comment or question you want to bring back to the full group. *(15 minutes total)*

(If on Zoom, note your group number, and be prepared to report back briefly to the whole learning session.)

## Feedback

Each breakout group reports back briefly. Put the slide up if feedback is in a room. Skip the slide if the feedback is on Zoom

## Three words

When we arrive for worship, we will be coming from very different places, had very different weeks. Some may have a great deal they want to be grateful for, others really worried about a particular person or event, others again conscious of a particular failure to do what they should have.

We can sum those different attitudes up in three words: Sorry, Thanks, Please,

The opening part of the service normally gives a chance for all these attitudes to be expressed, so that, whatever you’re feeling, there’s a chance to slot in. The idea being that whether we come with thanks, anxiety or guilt, there’s a chance to get it off our chests before we sit down to try to listen to God. By giving us a chance individually to bring what’s on our hearts and minds into God’s presence, this section, which used to be thought of as the preparation, is doing what it’s new name says: gathering us in, gathering us together.

## A fourth word?

The Gloria in fact combines the “Thanks” word with one other key word: “Wow” expressing praise, admiration, amazement for how wonderful God is. Usually thanks and praise intermingle – they can be hard to separate – and very often one or other or both will also have been expressed in an opening hymn.

## Three (or 4) words

These three (or four) words between them give us the basic ingredients of prayer, they are the same as the ACTS acronym – adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication – but in everyday language, wow, sorry, thanks, please. They’re a reminder to us that in our personal prayer, we need a balanced diet.

## Groups

How balanced do you think a) you and b) your church is, about these three or four basic attitudes of our relationship with God? Which are you most drawn to, and which do you find you do least of? You won’t need to report back from this discussion, so be prepared to keep what you say in your group confidential to your group. *(10 minutes)*

## Penitence

“Why have the prayers of penitence so near the beginning?” Perhaps you’ve heard or asked that question. Of course, it’s not always true. Some churches will have them between the intercessions and the Peace, especially in Lent, but most of the time, most churches have them near the beginning, unless they’re using the BCP.

What we’ve looked at already is part of the explanation. I have heard others “Because it’s always the first thing Christians say: you’re a miserable sinner” or its opposite “To get it out of the way so we don’t have to think about the unpleasant stuff again.” Both can illustrate some dangers about the ways we talk about sin. We can minimise it, when sometimes we need to confront it. And we can, often inadvertently, inflict real psychological damage on those who have depression or low self-esteem, by reinforcing their poor self-image.

But there’s a better way of looking at this. What we are doing is reminding ourselves of the overwhelming love of God, which accepts us, invites us in, and – to use St John’s metaphor – washes our feet.

Let’s explore that idea with scripture: I need four readers, and I’ll put up the slides for you to read from, 1 reader per slide

(If you’re doing this with a physical group, you will find it easier to invite people to do this with a paper handout, and delete these four slides)

## Reading Luke 15: 1-7

## Reading Luke 15: 8-14

## Reading Luke 15: 15-19

## Reading Luke 15: 20-24

## The Prodigal

(The picture is *The Return of the Prodigal*, by Rembrandt)

The three stories are not only put together carefully by Luke, but they are all presented as how Jesus answers those who criticise him because he “welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So, when you go into groups in a minute, I invite you first to keep that in mind: this is Jesus justifying his behaviour towards sinners. Second, look very carefully at Luke’s language. He uses the language of repenting in connection with the finding of the lost sheep and the lost coin, but not directly in relation to the lost son. The first two stories emphasise the action of the shepherd and the widow, not the sheep and the coin (can a coin act?). That suggests the father, rather than lost or elder son, is the primary focus of the third story.

Finally, note that, whether the lost son’s expression of repentance is genuine or not – you could read it “My father’s hired hands are better off than me, if I go back and sound really sorry, the daft old softie is bound to treat me at least as well as one of them” – whether that expression of repentance is genuine or not, he doesn’t get to say any of it before his father has rushed down the road and embraced him.

## Groups

What light do these stories shed on our understanding of what we mean by repentance? Does Jesus hint at the idea that forgiveness comes before a change of heart? Does this mean we need to identify the people we are to go out to and love, rather than inviting people to come to us and to church? What are the groups and communities in your parish / area where you know you have (virtually) no contacts? Be prepared to bring one comment from your group back to the whole gathering. *(15 minutes)*

(If on Zoom, note your group number, and be prepared to report back briefly to the whole learning session.)

## Feedback and closing poem

Each breakout group reports back briefly. Put the slide up if feedback is in a room. Otherwise wait until the feedback is over before putting up the slide for the closing poem / meditation

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
            Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
    From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
            If I lack’d anything.

‘A guest,’ I answer’d, ‘worthy to be here:’
            Love said, ‘You shall be he.’
‘I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
            I cannot look on Thee.’
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
            ‘Who made the eyes but I?’

‘Truth, Lord; but I have marr’d them: let my shame
            Go where it doth deserve.’
‘And know you not,’ says Love, ‘Who bore the blame?’
            ‘My dear, then I will serve.’
‘You must sit down,’ says Love, ‘and taste my meat.’
            So I did sit and eat.

*(George Herbert)*