

Bible e-Study - "Living Life Worshipping God" #2
Sanctuary – Nave and Chancel

...in the days of Noah, while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also... 1 Peter 3:20b-21a

NUGGET – Today's nugget verse takes us to how we enter the sanctuary. Only this is the Sanctuary of the Church of Jesus Christ, not just our building. For most of us, we first entered the Church of Jesus Christ through our baptism. Being given the gift of faith there at the font we have grown and matured in that gift and understand that God Himself has made it our own. So we have gained, by His gift, our entry into the ark, or boat, of the Sanctuary.

As we spoke of last week, the nave (Latin for ship) portion of the sanctuary is that part where everyone sits or stands or kneels together. It is the larger part of the sanctuary to accommodate as many people as we can. We always want to invite and gather as many into this 'boat of safety' as we're able. It is the place, like in Noah's ark, where there is refuge from the storm of God's judgment and wrath on sin. So we enter into this place through the waters of baptism and for that reason, most Lutheran churches have their baptismal font somewhere in the nave. I've seen it:

- just inside the entry doors, so you have to walk around it
- just outside the entry doors in the narthex, so you can't enter without seeing it and again walking around it
- and like ours, somewhere near the chancel and the altar railing

There is no just one proper place for the font. It is helpful that it be seen and taken notice of by everyone who comes into the sanctuary. Again it reminds us all of God's gift of being brought into His ark, or boat, of safety. Just as He did with Noah and those souls that were saved along with him when God poured out His righteous judgment on a sinful and perverse world, so He does with us.

Baptism saves us according 1 Peter 3:21c "***It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.***" It is the power of Jesus death and resurrection that saves us from the destruction under God's wrath that He endured for our sakes. We can never be reminded of that too often. The baptismal font in the nave serves to be a physical reminder of that saving truth.

APPLICATION – Baptism is one of 2 sacraments that we celebrate in our sanctuary. As such there is a physical aspect to it that we do well to honor.

1. Sometime find and look over your baptismal certificate and if you still have your baptismal napkin or a candle or a gown get those things out too and let those tangibles help you remember that God has touched you with His work of rescue and safety.

PRAY – Give thanks to God for your baptismal sponsors and their prayers for you. And if you are a sponsor give some time to praying for that person. Above all rejoice in reality that God has brought you into His ship of safety through the power of Jesus' resurrection.

GOING DEEPER

What makes up the sanctuary are:

- b. Nave
 - i. Bibles / hymn books
 - ii. Pews / Kneelers
 - iii. Baptismal font
- c. Chancel
 - iv. Altar / altar railing / cross
 - v. Pulpit / lectern, candles, flowers
 - vi. Communion vessels

A brief reminder that a sanctuary is any place set aside for a specific purpose. In our case we set aside space for the purpose to meet together before our Holy God. A good way to think of our sanctuary is, sacred space. And as we talked about the church is pictured as the ark, the boat which saves us from drowning in God's judgment. So we have both nave and chancel that together form our sacred space.

In the nave we have pews and chairs for seating, though this was not always so in church history. In Luther's day everyone stood the whole time!

Look at Ps 95:6, Matthew 17:14-15 and Acts 21:5b. We see there a position that often referred to scripture, that of kneeling. What is attitude of someone who kneels? In some Lutheran churches they have kneelers with the pews. It is also why I generally, during confession, kneel. It's as a representation of all of us supplicating God to hear us.

Also we have bibles and hymnbooks. The hymnbooks and our case the worship bulletin, serves to guide us in our worship. They give us a common format to use and follow along with. Look in 1 Corinthians 14:26-27 - there St Paul indicates that having a common form is helpful.

Also reading verses 23-25 there we see that those not of the church are to find a welcome. And that God may use His word, proclaimed in the church, to bring them to Himself. Thus having a common form that everyone can use in worship can be helpful to members and visitors alike.

We have bible also. Though we have them on a stand outside the sanctuary, I'd encourage you to take one with you into worship. Look at Acts 17:10-11. Also look in John 4:21-24. Jesus indicates that it's good to know that which we worship. And for us the bible is our source to know Him and the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Bereans were noted for examining the scriptures to see if what Paul and Silas preached made sense with scripture. So also you should be in the Word and checking that your preacher is consistent in his preaching with God's scripture. And frankly if you are in church and find a particular sermon unappealing for some reason, I'd rather you were reading scripture than thinking about the pot roast.

Also in the nave we have banners. Going back to Psalms 20:5 & 60:4. Also Jeremiah 50:2. Banners we're used in war and in peace. They helped to focus the people's attention on what was happening. In war banners have a direction, a sense of purpose and knowing. In peace they served as a focus for proclamation. This also applies to the flags we use in the chancel.

So turning now to the chancel. This is that area behind the altar railing and it includes primarily the cross, the altar, the pulpit and lectern and the communion vessels.

Look at Numbers 21:5-9 and John 3:14. We maintain a cross in our chancel area to remind us of the cost of our salvation. Our peace with God came at a violent and torturous cost to the Son of God. We can have a cross with the corpus (the body of Christ) on it or not. Read 1 Corinthians 1:21-24. The idea is to remember that we preach Christ crucified. Our reconciliation with the living God of heaven came at a deadly price. An empty cross may serve to remind some that Christ has risen.

Remember however, that those who come to our church the first time may not be aware of that understanding and so we need to gently and in love let them know of the hope of salvation that is ours, which the now-empty cross has purchased. That the cross was at one time not empty but bore the body of our savior Jesus, who hung there and died for the salvation of each person who calls on Jesus as the Son of God.

We also have an altar in the chancel. Look at Genesis 8:20, 22:9 and 26:24-25. An altar is there, first to remind us of the sacrifice made for our sins. One source says, "The altar... is a visual testimony that the gospel proclamation of the church centers in Christ who gave His life for the sheep... the altar is a symbol of Christ and His perfect sacrifice for sin."

For us the altar is now a place of remembrance, not a place of sacrifice. It is there to remind us "without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness of sin" (Heb. 9:22). An altar, second, conveys the idea of the presence of God with His people. As Christ was fully present in His sacrifice and death, so in Word and Sacrament God is fully present now, meeting with His people. That is why we bow when we enter the chancel area, to remind ourselves of the solemn sacrifice that God made for us in the death of His Son. As such we face the altar to confess our sins to God and to bring a sacrifice of praise to Him. And from the altar, we hear God's Word of forgiveness and blessing proclaimed to us.

We also have a pulpit in the chancel. It's there to give us a visual cue that the Word of God is the core of how we worship. Without the proclamation of God's Word there is no way to know the forgiveness of our sins. As St. Paul says in Romans 10:14 "But how are they to call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?"

The pulpit stands at the same height as the altar because from the pulpit comes the proclamation of God's holy word. It is the Word of God that gives all that is needed, and is the only source, for salvation. The pulpit is there to put our focus on God's Word alone for daily living and renewal in Christ. "Lutheran worship is not mystical contemplation. It is rather an activity in which God through Word and Sacrament comes to His assembled people in Christ Jesus, an activity in which these redeemed people approach their gracious God in prayer and praise. Pulpit and altar unite in the front of to say this about worship."