

Author: Paul F. Bosch [pbosch@golden.net]
Series: Worship Workbench
Issue: Essay 120 + October, 2007



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“COUCH POTATO PRAYERS” ~ PART TWO

During the course of the now-more-than -fifty years of my adult life, I have been an amateur student in three life-changing University classes.

The first set of classes was in drawing and painting. As a result of these studies, I began to perceive trees, for example, as lovely two dimensional patterns against the blue field of sky.

The second class some years later was in sculpture. To my surprise and delight, I now began to notice trees in a totally new way. Trees now became three dimensional. They now seemed to me to be enormous sculptures, inviting an exploration from the front, from the back, from the side.

The third class, still later in my life, was in yoga, movement, and dance. And again my perceptions changed. To my surprise and delight yet once more, trees to me were now vibrant, living, moving entities, sharing not only my three-dimensionality, but also something of my kinetic inheritance. They moved. They swayed in a breeze. They positively rocked and rolled in a gale.

I tell you all this as an extended parable. The world of nature — including our world of human beings — is a world that moves. Human beings especially: We are meant to move. Stasis is deadly and deadening.

This present posting is therefore a continuation of my argument in [Essay 7](#) in this series. I admit it: [Essay 7](#) reads now to me like something of a screed. I was really passionately ticked off when I wrote it. But if you haven't read it, stop now and catch up. This posting will make a lot more sense if you can understand the back-story in [Essay 7](#). I'll wait...

OK. We're all up to speed? On the same page?

I'll argue today that everything I said eleven years ago in that rant in [Essay 7](#) is still valid. But this time, in Part Two, I'm not bewailing that dreadful habit of sitting during Christian worship, sitting for hymns, sitting for prayer and praise, sitting for ritual responses. This time I want to address another related ritual pathology: Standing rooted in the pews instead of moving.



I've described before in these postings the lovely little baptistery we created at our local Lutheran Seminary now more than twenty years ago. See [Essay 75](#), point 4. Yes, I have a proprietary interest in seeing that baptistery used, having been one of its creators. I'll include two photos.

But too often during daily worship throughout the school term, the team in charge of worship for the week will elect to move that font out of the baptistery and into the nave "so the

people don't have to move from the pews" when the team has chosen an Order for Thanksgiving for Baptism as part of the liturgy.

I admire the sensitivity of worship planners who elect to use that Order with some frequency. We're living in an age that's re-discovered baptism and its richness, so it's all to the good when seminarians are exposed to those rites surrounding this primary symbol of Christian faith. Our new North American worship resource, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, suggests a simple rite for remembering baptism that could be used in congregations as an alternative to Confession and Forgiveness as often as every Sunday. And of course a similar rite was available in our predecessor worship book. It's not unfamiliar to us.



So when that rite is used, I ask, why not expect the people to move to the font, to the baptistery? Instead, that is, of moving the font to them?

But the font at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary is moveable. And worship teams have

taken advantage of this portability when using that rite, on too many occasions, and moved the font into the nave, most often to the head of the aisle at the narthex doors — an otherwise excellent position for a font, at the entrance to the worship space as Baptism itself stands at the entrance to Christian life. But the lovely baptistery is neglected.

There are two issues at stake here. The first is ignoring the attractive architectural resources of our Seminary in moving the font to the people, instead of the people to the font. We've actually got a separate and splendid baptistery here in Waterloo. What other Lutheran Seminary in North America can make that claim? Let's treasure our resources by using them!

The second issue is even more critical, and it's related to my opening parable. People move. It's one of our glories. Nature moves. We live in a world that dances. From jaguars to jellyfish: marvelous movement, life-defining, life-enhancing.

And you could argue theologically that Christian people ought to think of themselves always as on the move, a pilgrim people. On a journey. Never still. Never content with stasis.

Canon Richard Giles of the Philadelphia Episcopal Cathedral makes the case that we should design our Churches so as to provide three distinct worship spaces: a space for the Water, a second space for the Word, and still a third space for the Meal. And congregations should be trained to move from one space to the next during the time of Christian worship. Read his *Re-Pitching the Tent: Re-Ordering the Church Building for Worship and Mission* (1999 Liturgical Press, ISBN 0814627099). Better yet, buy it and keep it in your parish library. His arguments have convinced me. Christian discipleship is a journey. We are a pilgrim people. We should model that in our worship.

But, I hear you saying, what of those in our assemblies whose movements are proscribed by age or infirmity? The arthritic? The handicapped? I've acknowledged in [Essay 7](#) that all of us are already only temporarily able-bodied. We're all of us on the way to debilitation and decrepitude!

The simple answer to that is forbearance, sensitivity to the disabled. Perhaps every church should provide wheelchairs for their incapacitated members. Perhaps for some, all that's needed would be to lean on the arm offered by a sturdy neighbour without embarrassment. Perhaps for some others, what's needed would be a gracious word of permission to remain exactly where they are, and not to move at all.

But the rest of us should move, I say.

To the font. To the Table.

Most of us Lutherans already are accustomed to that second movement: to the Table.

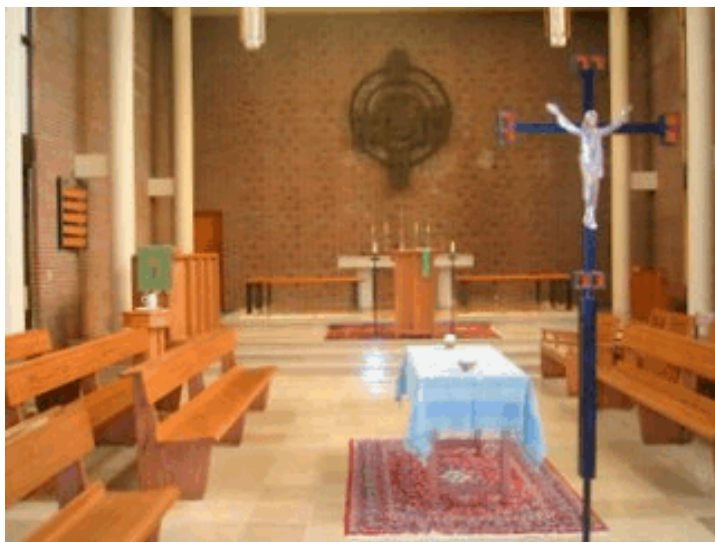
Thankfully, Lutherans in North America have never had the dreadful tradition of remaining rooted in the pews at Communion, like some other benighted Protestants. We're accustomed to moving to the Table, at the Meal. Why not also to the Font, at the Washing? And also at the Thanksgiving for that Washing?

A footnote: Consider little kids. They love to move. We should let them be our teachers, in this as in some other ritual matters. As a friend maintains, a child is a "miners' canary" in worship. If a little kid is restless or bored or dis-engaged from worship, it's probably not the kid at fault. It's the worship. And the worship planner.

The bottom line: Find occasions to move, in Christian worship. If you're a worship leader or planner, search for such occasions. Invent them, if you must. Do anything to get worshippers plucked up from their roots in the pews, and moving, walking, changing location, locomoting, processing. (Dancing?)



That could mean a modest trip to and from a baptistery, if you have one. If you don't have a baptistery, try to discover one, arrange for one. Remodel your spaces so as to provide for one. Most of our worship in most of our First World churches is much too static.



I'll close out this posting — this rant? — with some photos of our Chapel's worship space at WLS. They're before-and-after shots. Note that the "before" (above) is a very handsome mid-Twentieth Century modernist eastward-facing nave-and-chancel space. Quite rightly a modest local architectural prize-winner. No one needs to be ashamed of that space.

But look what we've done with the pews unbolted from the floor — without spending a dime! We've re-configured the space into a handsome antiphonal or choir or collegiate arrangement. Yes, there's the font, in an entrance alcove at the base of the old pulpit — for one

occasion, “for the sake of the weak”. But it will return to its baptistery in due course, and the entrance alcove will remain.

Yes, it will take worshippers some getting used to the new arrangement. And we’ll no doubt have to work out some kinks in our choreography, especially after a few weeks of experience with communion.

No architectural arrangement is without problems. “There’s no free lunch!” Not even in ritual matters. And no new architectural arrangement should be given less than four to six weeks of trial. It would not be fair to presume to judge it after only one week.



And if I were boss, this would remain the Chapel’s default arrangement throughout the years.

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