

THE ROAD WHERE FAITH IS FOUND

GRAIN OF LIFE AND GRAPE OF LOVE

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN WORSHIP • 735

WORSHIP WHICH INSPIRES THANKSGIVING AND
ATTENTION TO STEWARDSHIP



Mothering God, you gave me birth
in the bright morning of this world.
Creator, source of ev'ry breath,
you are my rain, my wind, my sun.

—*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 735, stanza 1*

The text for this hymn is by Jean Janzen and is based on one by Julian of Norwich (c. 1342 - c. 1413). The music is by Carolyn Jennings.

Fred Ludolph writes...

In Advent 2006, I began considering this essay. Very early in the season I encountered a radio discussion about men's gift-giving habits. A woman described three "soul-destroying gifts" she had received from a former boy friend. I admit the gifts described were not brilliant ideas. However, the thought that a Christmas gift could be "soul-destroying" indicated to me that our culture has big problems discerning the difference between *things* and *relationships*;

discerning the meaning of things *within* relationships; discerning the meaning of relationships *to* and relationships *within* a world that is both material and created.

How can we sort out a situation in which a season celebrating the gift of life through a humble birth has become the celebration of something rather ill-defined and overdone through the lavish purchase and distribution of *stuff*?

We need to be off to church, to worship in an incarnational setting, so that we can sort out our difficulties relating to and within a material world. How fortunate we are to have a Creed and a new material thing, a worship book, to help us with the task!

One of the first things that catches the eye in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* is the artwork. A cosmic Christ precedes the Church Year section. The image, page 11, shows Christ both within the figure of a tree and, at the same time, embracing the



cosmos. The image provides a context for Christian worship. Christian worship is located within creation—We believe in God, *creator of heaven and earth!*— as a locus wherein we both perceive and receive the grace of God. This is not a limitation. It is, rather, our reality as God's creatures and a gift of God's giving.

I had this truth brought home to me when I was a guest at a feast hosted by aboriginal Canadians at Camp Edgewood. At Edgewood's summer camp we regale campers with an elaborate and entertaining presentation about how to separate the leftovers from their meals into compost, recyclables and garbage. Campers frequently laugh heartily at the presentation, and then forget or ignore the instruction—given only moments earlier— when it is time to clean up. At the feast to which I was invited it was explained that we had given thanks for the food we were sharing—the food was sacred—and anything left was to be set aside to be returned to the earth out of respect for the Creator who gives us all things. *Anything left was set aside and returned to the earth!* The act of emptying bowls of leftovers into a pile of forest litter was accompanied with prayers and the offering of a pinch of tobacco. It was deliberate, dignified and reflected a living relationship with both creation and Creator. By comparison, our elaborate Edgewood composting shtick came to seem trite, and, given what turns up in the garbage can, less effective. This year I think we will have a cabin group take out the compost after every meal and have them pray in thanksgiving for the gifts of the creation.

What moved me about this experience was the realization that I had been a banquet guest *in my own home*, in the presence of the Creator, in communion with the Creator's children and creation.

Our Prayers

Our worship books have always provided us with a section of prayers which offer us models for prayer on a variety of subjects. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (pages 72-87) includes prayers for the gifts of agriculture; the poor; stewardship of natural resources; the proper use of wealth. In addition, there is a section of Creation-related prayers around agriculture; thanks for the harvest; scarce rainfall; creation and new creation; and creation's praise (page 81). Some of these prayers are borrowed from earlier Lutheran and ecumenical sources with minor editorial changes. The prayers on "creation and new creation" and "creation's praise", however, explore some new territory through the use of cosmic images which help us reflect on this planet as our incarnational home—the only place we can be, and yet also the place of God's creative and redeeming activity. This is an important—critical— theme for our time and generation given the contempt we have shown for the Creator's work and damage we have done to our environment. This being the case, one might have expected more in the way of prayers having specific reference to *aspects* of creation—ranging from the microbial to the cosmic—and addressing our tendency to *use*, rather than *relate to*, creation. Still, these are areas that can be addressed by worship leaders in crafting their Sunday prayers—prayers of intercession, offering prayers and prayers after communion.

Beyond the section of model prayers mentioned above, there are prayers and texts suggested for a service with a Stewardship of Creation emphasis (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 63) and Good Friday's Bidding Prayer contains a prayer for God's creation absent from earlier versions.

Offertory Prayers

Evangelical Lutheran Worship provides us with three different Offering Prayers (repeated in each setting) in addition to six seasonal Offering Prayers which appear on page 64. The prayers in our new worship book have a more direct and more clearly creation-centered quality than did previous choices. The shift in emphasis is helpful, but the shift in associated rubrics does raise some concern for me.

As with most of the rubrics in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, the rubric attached to the Offering Prayers has shifted from “is said” to “may be said”, from directive to permissive. At the same time, the prayer has been placed on the lips of the assisting minister rather than on the lips of the congregation. (*Lutheran Book of Worship* placed this uniquely Lutheran prayer on the lips of the congregation.)

My concern is this. There has never been a more urgent time for Christian people to be engaged in prayer for and about creation: prayer which acknowledges our dependence upon creation as God’s continual gift. I plead that these words would come to life in the mouths of all of our worshippers so that they would enter our hearts and emerge as a personal and communal voice of holy intention and redeeming action. Never before has it been so important, that we understand ourselves to be “dedicated to the care and redemption of all that God has made.” Never before has it been more important that the Christian people be seen as an assembly that is profoundly aware of its dependence on creation, its power to destroy creation, and its calling and power to participate in the redemption of creation.

I would have preferred that we pray such important matters out loud, together, consistently, in the midst of our chief act of worship. Nonetheless, the variety of model Offering Prayers, including the six seasonal possibilities, is helpful to those who might take up the pen to reflect immediate concerns and to craft locally-created alternatives.

Congregational Song

Evangelical Lutheran Worship offers us more hymns than did *Lutheran Book of Worship*. There are now more hymns that reflect themes of stewardship, justice, and creation. It is not possible to review every new option that is available in this brief essay. However, there are many new compositions as well as many worthy standards. The following chart provides an interesting comparison. Note that both *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and *Lutheran Book of Worship* provide hymn sections where similarly-themed hymns are gathered together: Easter, Gathering, Healing, Harvest... A number of these sections touch on matters related to stewardship of creation. Note that both books also make additional recommendations in their indices. See the Topical Index of Hymns in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 1178-1188,

Theme	Evangelical Lutheran Worship		Lutheran Book of Worship	
	Section	Additional Suggestions	Section	Additional Suggestions
Creation	730-740 †	18	-	14
Daily Labour	†	12	-	-
Harvest	†	-	-	4
Hunger	-	11	-	-
Offering/Offertory	†	17	-	4
Praise, Thanksgiving	819-886 †	41	-	-
Day of Thanksgiving	-	-	-	8
Praise, Adoration	-	-	514-551	24
Society	†	-	413-417	12
Stewardship	678-696 †	7	404-412 †	5

This chart indicates hymn numbers where there is a whole section devoted to a particular theme, and the number of additional suggestions where suggestions are offered.

† Indicates a referral to related sections and suggestions.

While a complete review of the all the hymns in the above chart would yield some duplications, the value

of the exercise is in noting the subtle shift in categories and the not-so-subtle shift in emphasis. Humans are categorizing creatures and our categories reflect our contemporary understandings and the things to which we are giving our attention.

The chart indicates, in broad-brush strokes, that we are now giving greater attention to stewardship of creation than we have before. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* offers a wider range of allied themes that encompasses creation, justice, hunger, daily labour, harvest, and more. I believe that one of the primary vehicles for this shift in emphasis has been our embracing songs from southern-hemisphere countries where struggles with oppression, distorted access to creation's resources, combined with a hope in the God who longs to see healing justice, have produced hymns that both inspire us and challenge our North American culture.

I want to make note of several songs that I hope will speak to you as they do to me. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 554, Lord, Your Hands Have Formed (*With One Voice* 727) is a composition of Filipino origin. Its haunting tune and stripped-down poetry reflect a profound Haiku simplicity. The poem reaches to the absolutely critical truth that we are dependant upon God and on all of God's creation. The poetic themes and music also provide a reminder that ancient Asian cultures are the ancestors of the first peoples to live in this land and that people from all corners of the globe have come to this land in search of a home where "you (God) make all things new".

Two other hymns that reflect the first cultures of our home are *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 837, "Many and Great, O God" and *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 284 "Twas in the Moon of Wintertime" (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 72). "Many and Great" speaks with simple language that is both creedal and poetic. We are—and always will be—a people of the First Article of the Creed. We are created from beyond our own power and understanding and that is the first and primary act of God's grace. We have no claim to life other than it is a gift given to us by the Creator.

"Twas in the Moon" has a Second Article focus. It is refreshing to see that this translation of the hymn is closer to the imagery of the original text. Jesus was no more likely to have received "gifts of fox and beaver pelt" than was he to have been born "in the beauty of the lilies ... across the seas." (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 890, Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory). Still, the universality of the message of the Creator incarnated in our midst who brings salvation through the Good News that the creator's will toward us is beauty, peace and joy, can hardly be missed. I recommend that people listen to versions of this hymn recorded by Bruce Cockburn—who sings in a manner that approximates the original language—and by Tom Waite—whose musical interpretation evokes the creation our aboriginal forbears knew in a powerfully haunting way.

I would also invite people to read *The Iroquois Book of Life: White Roots of Peace* by Paul Wallace (Santa Fe: Clear Light Books, 1994). This brief publication recounts the epic / history of the Six Nation Confederacy now based on the Grand River in Ontario. Though relations between the Confederacy and the French Jesuit culture issued in a tragic clash, *The White Roots of Peace* is nonetheless a *gospel* story. One can only hope and pray that, in the hymns inspired by First Nations / aboriginal language and tradition, the cultural veils which blind us to the face and realities of our sisters and brothers will begin to lift, such that we will see the gospel in one another—all children of the same Creator, stewards of the same gift of life.

Thanksgiving at the Table

There is significant new creation imagery contained in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship's* eucharistic prayers (thanksgivings at the table) III, IV and IX. (Forms I-IV are located in Settings One and Two of Holy Communion; forms V-XI are contained in the front-matter, pages 65-70.) We bless the God who

creates using words that recall the birth of creation out of chaos. We celebrate the miraculous breadth of creation from cosmic dust and the microscopic order of cells, to the largest creatures with whom we share the Earth. In this language we are invited into the mystery of creation and redemption.

Mothering Christ, you took my form,
offering me your food of light,
grain of life and grape of love,
your very body for my peace.

—*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 735, stanza 2*

The creation language is welcome. A review of eucharistic prayers in general reveals an interesting progression. The ELCIC's *Gathered for Worship* (ELCIC, 1995) included a eucharistic prayer labeled *Eucharistic Prayer A for General Use*. In that prayer, God was praised as *sustainer of the universe*. The prayer recalled the coming into being of "the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home." It also reminded the community that "from the primal elements you brought forth the human race, and blessed us with memory, reason, and skill; you made us stewards of creation."

This prayer is a revision of a prayer from the *Book of Alternative Services* (Anglican Church of Canada) itself revised from the *Book of Common Prayer* (Episcopal Church in the United States). The earlier versions were less poetic and read more like a science text. The prayers in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, for their part, have a less elaborate creation imagery. While it is my view that the *Gathered for Worship* prayer might still do with some editing, it invites us into a deep sense of awe and wonder, inspired by the gift of creation, as gracefully as any eucharistic text I have prayed. I miss that prayer!

Our new prayers speak of how our feast will strengthen us to live the gospel in the world as "living trees", "prophetic speakers", "healing hands" so that the gospel might come to life through us. This is Third Article of the Creed business. The gospel comes to life in community through the work of stewardship. And stewardship is people discovering, offering, spending; gifts of the earth, gifts of the spirit, and gifts of talent, for the healing and care of creation, nations and individuals. These are life-giving and soul-restoring acts of giving inspired by the Spirit.

Considerations and Possibilities

Mothering Spirit, nurt'ring one,
in the arms of patience hold me close,
so that in faith I root and grow
until I flow'r, until I know.

—*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 735, stanza 3*

So far, I have offered a brief review of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and the obvious places that one might look for imagery and resources to inspire reflection and action with regard to Christian stewardship, and the stewardship of creation in particular. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* represents a few steps forward in offering inspiration and example around questions of the stewardship of creation. Clearly, I might have wished for more. I believe we could have had significantly more creation imagery without displacing other important themes. Then again, the words we put or receive on paper—words which give shape to our worship—are never the full communication of the grace we seek, receive, or offer in our worship. A worship book is but one of many incarnational expressions from a list that includes our worship space, furnishings, hardware, musical instruments, and our very selves—and all that we do

with all of these things.

By now it should be clear that I see worship as fundamentally an act of stewardship. It is both the experience and expression of the relationships that exist between God, us, and creation. The primary elements of this experience/expression are water, word, wine, bread, the community gathered around these things and God. With that in mind let's consider a few things.

What is the focal centre of our worship space?

Does it look like a place where a community will be sharing a meal? Worship spaces today can present themselves as sound studios, media sets, conference rooms, and as places where people gather around word and sacrament. It depends on what is most prominent: screen and overhead projector or a table for the meal? ...bread and wine or a tangle of cables, speakers and amps? Our stewardship places most importance on the joyful duty of sharing word and sacrament. Technology may support this sharing, but should not be the apparent and overwhelming focus.

Do the "things" we use in worship reflect a reverence for creation?

I read somewhere —don't remember where— that disposable purificators are "a sign of a culture that has lost respect for creation" or words to that effect. The point is this, we use cheap disposable dishes at fast food restaurants, not at a gracious banquet. Disposable individual communion cups, prepackaged individual communion "elements", paper purificators —any single-use disposable item should be viewed with suspicion in worship. And in daily life! These things are frequently a sign of our love for convenience and a misplaced belief that disposable is cleaner or healthier. The use of "things" well-made and well-cared-for by devoted and faithful hands is a better sign of a bountiful creation that, treated reverently, has the capacity to provide for all. Here is an example.

In a congregation I served, a parishioner donated money to provide new paraments for an altar that was being brought back into more frequent use. The gift was in memory of his wife who had recently died. The paraments would go on the altar at which they had been married many years before. A talented member of the congregation was recruited to design and sew the paraments. On an appropriate Sunday the donor and the sewer presented the paraments at the time of the offering. The paraments were dedicated and the congregation celebrated Holy Communion around them for the first time. This event reflected —and strengthened!— relationships in the congregation and our relationship with the saints gone before us. The event gave us the opportunity to experience the talents and riches available to us, and to give thanks to the God who provides all of these things to us.

Presenting such gifts at the congregation's weekly offering expands our understanding of the offering beyond cash on the plate to encompass the gifts of talent, time and relationship. It models the honourable and careful use of creation's gifts. What else might appear at the offering? Many congregations gather food items for local food-banks or other service agencies. Similar offerings of clothing, school supplies, quilts and other items are also common. Bringing them, or at least a significant representation of them —a basket of canned goods can be very heavy— forward at the offering helps to model the reality that our offerings are many and varied. Our offerings do more than pay the congregation's bills. Our offerings also participate in the healing of the world and the restoring of relationships distorted by the sin that lurks in our business, commerce, and politics.

Is there anything living in our worship place?

A well-placed font with water in it is a symbol of both baptism and creation. Water is necessary for life and was the birth place of, and cradle for, created life. There is room for more evidence of creation in our worship. Cut flowers are common in worship as offerings of praise or as memorials. Again, someone has suggested that cut flowers are most appropriate to worship as they are a symbol of sacrifice. Still, I

have no problem with potted plants, large or small, as permanent residents in a worship space if the space provides appropriate conditions to keep them in good shape. Even dried —But please, no plastic!— plants and arrangements are appropriate.

It is quite common for even urban congregations to create elaborate fruit and vegetable harvest displays at Thanksgiving. I am suggesting it would be appropriate, especially in light of a modern technologically-based society's tendency to distance itself and us from creation, to deliberately and lavishly surround ourselves with creation in our worship spaces. I have heard one pastor suggest having an aquarium in a worship space: a symbol of creation and a soothing and engrossing distraction for young children. What else could be added to the list?

- Place recycling bins for paper bulletins in your narthex or at the exits. Reduce the use of bulletins and printed matter if you can.
- Is the bread used at communion *real* bread, perhaps made by the hands of congregation members?
- Are the talents of your congregation evident in worship through the participation of members of all ages in leading, assisting and serving roles?

I have mentioned situations and possibilities that may seem quite disparate, including the aforementioned experience of hearing about “soul-destroying Christmas gifts” (which, apparently, people of my gender are prone to choosing for significant others). However, all of life's situations reflect the basic truth that we always live and act in a web of relationships which expresses our understanding of stewardship. That same web of relationship also expresses our bondage to sin whereby we fail to live out our call to Christian stewardship. That's why we go off to church and to worship.

Worship is the place where we seek to immerse ourselves in the relationship God intends there to be between creation, creatures, created and Creator. Bread, wine, water, people, and place are representatives of all of these categories. They act as sacramental connection between creature and Creator with every bit as much reality as they participate in our daily sustenance. As everything in creation is an expression of God's being and intention it can be no other way.

Words and concepts such as justice, peace, stewardship, reconciliation, healing and so many more all flow from this one basic, yet profound relationship. We are beloved creatures, part of a beloved creation, created by a just and benevolent Creator. Thanks be to God!

It is now 1:30 p.m. on April 3, 2007. I wonder how many shopping days are left to find several gifts in the category of *something less than soul-destroying*?

Fred.

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Worship Matters: The Road Where Faith Is Found

Borrowed from the poetry of United Church of Canada pastor Sylvia Dunstan (1955-1993), author of



Bless Now, O God, the Journey (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 326), *The Road Where Faith Is Found* is the title of a series of pastoral essays published beginning in December, 2006. The authors include our national bishop and five synodical bishops together with a number of other ordained people serving in a variety of ministry settings. The essays are designed to support the reception and exploration of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* in the context of a church *In Mission for Others*. Each essay title is drawn from a hymn in our new worship-book.

The entire series of *Road Where Faith Is Found* essays is available on the ELCIC + Worship Matters page at **Lift Up Your Hearts** www.worship.ca.

Worship Workbench: Greening Christian Worship

See also the essay "Greening Christian Worship" in the popular **Worship Workbench** series, where retired ELCIC pastor and liturgy professor, Paul F. Bosch, CWA, offers practical teaching about Christian worship and the preparation of liturgy. The entire series of *Worship Workbench* essays is available on the ELCIC + Worship Workbench page at **Lift Up Your Hearts**.