

## INTERPRETING OUR MAY 1 WORSHIP SPACE

Sermon preached at Christ Church / Waterloo / Ontario / Canada

Paul Bosch / the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year C / May 1, 2016

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I'm going to preach two sermons today – three, if you count those extended announcements before worship began!

First, here's a sermon just for Oz. But the rest of you can listen in.

Today is May First, May Day, when much of the world remembers the great contributions of the international labour movement.

Trade unions are in big trouble these days, world wide. And it's a pity. My feeling is, if you've got enormous international corporations with enormous power, then you simply have to have trade unions with an equal power, to keep those corporations honest. And we need government regulation to keep them both in line. Oz – and Bernie Sanders at least – would agree.

Sure, unions can become corrupt. But so can corporations! And so can governments! We don't live in a perfect world. That's not news to you I'm sure.

So let's remember with thanksgiving today the tremendous contribution of the international labour movement to improving the lives of all of us. Two things in particular: the weekend, and the eight hour work day. We have trade unions to thank for both. So I say, thanks. And I say, we should remember that gratitude regularly.

OK. That's for Oz, but the rest of you should pay attention too. Now here's a second sermon, and Oz, you can keep listening.

I think I owe it to you to tell you a little more about why I made the changes I did in our worship space.

First, it's great to have a worship space as flexible as ours is. My feeling is we are living in a time of transition, and we in the Christian churches should be experimenting with new stuff all the time. It would be crippling to settle

on one permanent, unchanging, static space arrangement, when we have a golden opportunity to find out what arrangement suits our purposes best. We're not going to learn much about Christian worship if we don't experiment a little.

So Pastor Olavi has indulged me in my old age and he's let me play around a little with our space here at Christ Church. We've run all this through the Worship Committee too, and they agree it's OK to try this, at least once.

But that brings up my second point: It's not really fair to assume you can intelligently judge a new possibility – of anything! – in just one try. You're simply not well enough informed. People say, "I know what I like!" They really should say, "I like what I know!"

So you've got to give any new possibility a chance to work its work in you. You've got to live with it for a while. In the case of any re-arrangement of a worship space, I'd argue it takes at least four weeks to get used to. Like for example the entire four-week Advent season. Maybe six or seven weeks, like the season of Lent or the season after Easter.

So I beg you: Don't be too quick today to say, "I don't like it. I want the old way back again." We'll put things back the old way after this morning's worship. But today – one Sunday – is simply not enough time to make an informed and educated judgement.

OK, this is third: a little history. Our Sunday Service – you can call it Holy Communion, as we do, or you could call it the Mass, as Roman Catholics do, or the Eucharist, as Anglicans do, or the Lord's Supper, as Presbyterians and United Church people do, or the Divine Liturgy, as Orthodox Christians do – different churches call it by different names, but it's all the same: Baptised people hearing the Gospel proclaimed and participating in a symbolic Meal of bread and wine.

Now you should know that that Service – Holy Communion or whatever – I think Holy Communion is the best term, incidentally – is made up of two historic roots.

There's the first part, the Service of the Word. And that comes from the synagogue worship of Jesus' day. In the synagogue, even today, people

gather to pray and praise God and also to hear Good News. That's the Gospel, Good News. And this part of our Service includes prayers and hymns and Readings from our Bible. And a Sermon, a kind of Teaching Moment, when your pastor – your teacher, your rabbi, educated and set aside for the job: that's me this morning! – tells you something about the Good News, interprets what our faith is saying and applies it to today's living. Some kind of pulpit or lectern or ambo is the symbol of this, a Service of the Word.

Now, lots of Christian churches stop right there. That's the whole of their worship on Sunday: praying, singing hymns, and hearing a kind of lecture – a sermon that presumably relates the Good News to your life today.

So we've pushed the furniture around to show that. Here in the old chancel is the new Place of the Word. The pulpit or lectern or ambo is the symbol for this part of our worship. Ambo: That's a Greek word that means "a raised place". So our ambo is raised up a couple steps, chiefly so everyone can see and hear the Readings and the Sermon.

But there's a second part of our Sunday Service at Christ Church, and at other churches that share our view of things. That's the Meal.

The Meal began separate from the synagogue worship that I've just talked about. In antiquity it was an actual full meal around a table in someone's home. And there are some Christian groups to this day who celebrate the Holy Communion sitting around an actual dining room table, in a kind of Agape Meal. St. Paul writes in one of his letters to Christians who were abusing this meal, the rich gobbling food before the poor could eat.

Our Meal today is simply an extension of Jesus' meal with his disciples, when he said, "Do this in remembrance of me". You often see that Bible verse carved or embroidered on the Tables of many Christian churches.

Now, as you might expect, to sit down every Sunday to an actual five course meal got a little complicated for the early Christians, so, as often happens in such ceremonies around the world, the Meal got condensed and simplified and concentrated and ritualized. No longer a full meal, but a symbolic meal with just Bread and Wine: the two basic foods even today in societies around the world.

Anyhow, we've arranged our space today so as to suggest a Place of the Meal as well. The Place of the Word, raised up in the old chancel, with the Ambo front and centre. And the Place of the Meal down here, on your level, with a Table front and centre – just like the dining room table in your own home.

Note that the Table is on your level. You are gathered around it, facing one another across a wide aisle. You're not looking at the back of someone's head, as in a really long narrow church. You're looking at a human face across the aisle. And the Table is in between you, at the centre.

You're looking at your neighbour, that is, through the chief symbol of your faith: the Table of our Holy Communion, our Holy Community. I think that's neat!

Well, enough said. If we were to use this arrangement again, we'd probably have to tweak, to refine, the choreography of comings and goings during our Service: Your comings and goings to the Table when you receive Bread and Cup, perhaps.

Sermons like this one – teaching Christian people about their own worship, helping worshippers to worship – is quite legitimate. There's a long history of this kind preaching in the Christian church, especially during the Easter season. It's called mystagogy: helping worshippers to understand "the mysteries" of Christian worship.

And I love this kind of preaching. It's my favourite way to preach. You probably knew that.

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Let's take a moment of silent reflection.