

Play-By-Play Liturgy, Part One

Colleagues,

This week's guest writer is Pastor Todd Murken of Holden Lutheran Parish in Wautoma, Wisconsin. If you've followed Crossings for a while you'll recognize the name. Todd edited our quarterly newsletter from 1999 to 2004, having been summoned to the task by prior editor Bob Bertram, who was his PhD advisor at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. It's been a while since we've heard from Todd. We're delighted indeed that he responded to a recent nudge from Cathy Lessmann in the Crossings office and sent us the item we pass along today.

Google's search engine helped us learn that Todd studied dramatic arts at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. You'll see that background reflected in this present piece, which he wrote for Sunday-morning use in a worshiping congregation. Combining whimsy and seriousness in a nice ear-catching mix, it aims to alert the saints to the evangelical substance in the unfolding action of the liturgy. The assumption is that Christ gets busy when two, three, or more come together in his name. So much the better if the gathered ones notice what he's doing. We'll leave it to you to decide if Todd succeeds in opening eyes. Saying that, we urge you to hold your conclusions until next week when we send you Part Two.

A quick word of explanation for readers outside the U.S.: John Madden and Al Michaels have been top-tier sportscasters in this country for the past few decades, with NFL football as a particular specialty.

I should mention, by the way, that Todd turned his PhD dissertation on Eucharistic theology into a book entitled *Take and Eat, and Take the Consequences*. It was published in 2002 by

the Peter Lang Publishing Group as Volume 220 of their American University Studies, Series 7, Theology and Religion. A quick look at the publisher's [synopsis](#) reveals an obvious connection to the work he presents here. Intrigued? You can get a copy at Amazon.

Peace and Joy,
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

PLAY BY PLAY LITURGY

What would John Madden and Al Michaels Say at Lutheran Worship?

Introductory notes:

1. First, I give credit to my worship prof, George Hoyer, for saying there are four actions in worship: Catch (from God), Give (to God), Share (with each other), and go Live in the world. The conceit of changing "Give" to "Pass" was the suggestion of my friend, Packer-fan Pastor George Krempin.
2. At least some adaptation will be necessary, for example if your first reading is not Isaiah 5. Also if your choir anthem, or Musical Offering, comes at some other place.
3. This will not work well without the Lord's Supper—but neither does worship.
4. If I remember correctly, the sermon included in [Part 2 of] the script is about six to seven minutes. Without a children's sermon or the second lesson, and singing hymns that are not longer, this service is no longer than usual, around 65 minutes.
5. Have fun.

PLAY-BY-PLAY LITURGY

What would John Madden and Al Michaels say at Lutheran Worship? (Well before worship begins, say ten minutes, JM and AM take their places—clearly visible to all, yet at the side. They will need to strike a balance between being just obtrusive enough that worshipers will realize that something is up, and yet not so disruptive as to make it impossible for worshipers to concentrate and pray.

At the appointed time for worship to begin, AM introduces them.)

AM This is Al Michaels here with John Madden to bring you this week's worship of Almighty God by the people of Calvary Lutheran Church, Green Bay, Wisconsin. It should be a great worship service, don't you think, John?

JM Should be. I was talking earlier to a couple of the worshipers: one at the acolyte position and two playing usher, and they said they were ready to give it their very best. After all, this is for God.

AM The preacher, too, is excited. He said that he has some really good Gospel for the folks, some Good News. He said that Christ's giving us not just things, even wonderful things like family and health, but giving *Himself* helps us to pray always and not lose heart.

JM I was talking to a couple of other worshipers, a woman whose position is fourth pew and a man playing deep back. They are eager for worship, too. She wants to praise God all she can for what he has done for her. And that man in the back is playing hurt today. It's harder to worship when you're down, but his head is in the game and his heart, too. He says his spirit needs to hear again the great love of Christ, how Christ was willing to die for his salvation.

AM And here we go. The pastor is coming out to begin the

service.

Pr. In the name of the Father and of...

Cong. Amen.

JM See, that right there is called a "Pass" play. God is here actually Passing something to his people through the minister, and the worshipers need to Catch it.

AM It's not just words.

JM No! See, this opening drive of the liturgy is based on the baptism play they have all done. God is here Passing to the people a renewal of all his baptismal promises to them. But here's the thing, see: it is up to the people to Catch it. They have to Catch what God Passes at them. That's why they say Amen. I even noticed a few using that old "sign of the cross" move as a way to Catch what God is Passing. You know, Christians have used the sign of the cross for over 1800 years.

AM The Pass is so important a play that we see it in the liturgy over and over.

Pr. If we say we have no sin...

AM That's another Pass, isn't it John? Through the minister God is throwing the people the promise of forgiveness of their sins.

JM Yeah, and it is probably the most important Catch the people can make. The text he just read is from 1 John, one of my favorite epistles.

AM But John, there is no "Amen," here. How do people Catch this one?

JM By faith. They Catch it by believing what he said: that God will cleanse them from unrighteousness for Jesus' sake.

Pr. Most merciful God,
Cong. We confess that we are in bondage to...
Pr. Almighty God, in his mercy, has given...

AM Another Pass play! Wow, God sure is generous in this liturgy. God just threw them forgiveness. Some of them used the Amen or the cross-sign to signal their Catch. But, John, did they in fact catch it?

JM You know, it's always hard to tell. I mean, sure, they say Amen, but do they mean it? Do they believe? Remember that Catching is believing. Do they believe that God has, right now, for Christ's sake, forgiven them all the sins they have confessed?

AM On the replay you can see some nodding or smiling: they have just made an important grab and they know it!

JM Yeah, but others may be humbly glad—or just plain relieved—and not show it. The Catch happens in the heart.

Opening hymn, "All People that on Earth do Dwell," is sung.

AM We've seen a lot of Passes but clearly that song was not a Pass play.

JM You're right. That was the second basic play in the liturgy. It is a Give. Giving glory to God. See, the liturgy is a two-way meeting and this time the action goes the other way: the worshipers give to God. The words of that hymn, by the way, are Psalm 100.

AM Now it looks like another Pass coming up. What will the folks need to do to Catch it?

JM Believe! Believe that God's grace, love, and communion are given to them by these words (which, by the way are from 2

Corinthians).

Pr. The grace of our Lord Jesus...

Cong. And also with you.

The Kyrie is prayed.

AM I don't think that could be called a Pass play, John. The worshipers didn't Catch anything. They are pleading with God for help, for badly needed help.

JM Yeah, that's a good point. "Lord, have mercy" is an old plea from the Bible, like the ten lepers or the blind man at Jericho asking Jesus for help. But here's how you know that this play, like all prayers, is a Give play. To both the lepers and the blind man Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well." Get it? To pray the Lord's help is to put trust in him. That's the Giving: the worshipers, by praying, are Giving their faith to God—provided that they actually DO trust God to answer their prayer for help.

Pr. Glory to God in the highest, and peace...

Cong. ...in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

AM The words from "Glory to God" are also biblical: the angels in Luke 2 sing the Christ-child's birth. And this is another Give, right?

JM Sure. But again, it's not just by singing the words. The players need to concentrate on what they are doing, direct their thoughts to God and praise him. Otherwise they aren't doin' the Givin'.

You know, there's a funny history to this. The "Glory to God" and the Kyrie didn't always begin the liturgy; it used to kick off right with the Bible readings. But around 600 A.D. in Rome, it took the bishop so long to put on his elaborate uniform, that

he added the Kyrie and Hymn of Praise for the people to sing while they were waiting.

Pr. The Lord be with you.

Cong. And also with you.

JM That's a third kind of play, a Share. But I'll talk about that later.

Pr. Let us pray...

Cong. Amen.

The congregation sits.

AM You can kind of feel a transition here, can't you John?

JM Yeah, the opening drive is over. There has been a lot of Passin' and Catchin' and Givin'. It's a good setup. It gets the momentum going between and God and the worshipers so they are up for the two main pieces of the liturgy: the Word and the Sacrament.

AM Here comes the lector onto the field. John, Bible reading has always been part of the liturgy, hasn't it?

JM Oh, sure, since way before Jesus, even. See, the synagogue service, like at Jesus' time, had three portions from Scripture: a reading from the first five books of the Bible, called "the Law" or even "Moses," then a psalm was sung, then a reading from one of the prophets. Then there was a sermon interpreting the readings, then prayers. As you can tell, the first Christians, who were Jews, kept the same order of service they were used to, and it is still used today.

First reading: *Isaiah 5:1-7*

JM Whoa! What a blitz! I bet Isaiah's hearers never saw it coming! He sets them up with this complaint about the well-

tended vineyard that produced nasty grapes, then BAM!, he says, YOU are the vineyard!

AM But in the liturgy today, how can the worshipers read such a devastating blitz from God?

JM See, there is a kind of a stunt Christians do to enable them to face a divine blitz like this: they just let it come. We can't defend against God's accusations: he's got us dead to rights. But we believe that his blitz is not his last play: we believe God's last throw to us is forgiveness in Jesus Christ's death. So when the blitz of divine accusation comes, Christians don't scramble away from it, or use excuses to block it, they just let it come and sack them-all the while trusting Christ Jesus to pick them up again. In a way, Christians welcome the blitz: not that it feels good to have our sin pointed out, but it reminds us again to rely on Christ alone, not ourselves, and that is good.

AM Of course it is the preacher's job to help us read a blitz like this.

JM Hey, is that musicians getting ready? This is way too early for the half-time entertainment.

AM No, that is not half-time but part of the liturgy. The musicians are not entertaining the worshipers, the music is to encourage their faith.

JM Oh, I thought it was maybe just entertainment. But it's not.

Musical offering

Cong. (stands) Alleluia! Lord, to whom...

Pr. The holy Gospel according to...

Cong. Glory to you, O Lord.

AM What a tremendous show of respect for this reading!

JM Isn't it great? I mean, they are on their feet! They're cheerin'! These are some of the best fans Christ has! Wow!

AM It sounds like they are talking right TO Jesus.

JM Sure, because he's gonna talk right to them! See, for Christians, hearing Jesus' words isn't like hearing Aristotle or Shakespeare or one of those dead guys. Jesus is alive, so HE is the one talking to them. It's like he himself has just walked in to give them his word for the week. So they stand and sing to him the same words Peter once said to him; from John, my favorite Gospel.

AM So they listen, because they are listening to Jesus Christ through the minister. This of course is another Pass play. So the people have to concentrate to Catch the words in their hearts.

JM Sure, and that standing and singin': that is a Give play.

Pr. reads the Gospel.

Pr. The Gospel of the Lord.

Cong. Praise to you, O Christ.

Cong sits.

The Divorce of Sex and Marriage: Sain Sex, a new book by Robert Bertram, is now available for a \$10 donation to Crossings. Please include \$3 for shipping and handling, and send your request to clessmannATcharterDOTnet.

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