**Introduction and How can we practice reverence? Revd Becky**

**Why go to church?**

Habit?

Obligation?

Transformation?

An act of faith?

If we take the image of Christians as a family, then as a member of a family we are often obliged to attend family events to support each other, to celebrate with each other, to share in life joys and sorrows.

If we take the image of friendship- Christ called his disciples to sit and eat with him because they were friends. At the end of the gospel of John we hear Jesus words- I no longer call you servants but friends. And what do friends do but enjoy each other’s company.

It would make no sense to practice a Christian spirituality and have nothing to do with other Christians. As one theologian put it ‘It would be like playing football on your own.’

We are given the image of Community, by the word church, which in Greek means gathering and by the word ‘body’. I won’t talk much on this image but it is a foundation of our worship because I am sure this image will come up again and again in another talk on the peace, however when we gather as a church we are bodily present to receive Christ’s body. ‘We can no more substitute for our bodily gathering together than can emails and phonecalls can be a basis of marriage’ (Timothy Radliffe)

It is more than an individual getting a bit of Jesus. As we gather to say Yes to the body of Christ, we are transformed in how we belong to one another and God.

**What is liturgy?**

Liturgy is the name given ever since the Acts of the Apostles to the taking part in worship as part of the body of Christ.

Liturgy does not mean the prayers of individuals but worship which is open to and offered by all who are members of the church.

It is intended to be a corporate action: The work of the people.

And we take this from Jesus command- ‘Do this in remembrance of me’. It is written in the plural in Greek and is taken to mean the sharing of the body of Christ- though we are many we are one body because we all share in one bread. (Gregory Dix.)

We are all with Christ we are united as his body with him and through him to God. So in our worship we are united to each other and to God through Jesus Christ.

Since the first Century, AD 96, Saint Clement of Rome wrote that all have a special place – and reminded the church of Corinth that each person should follow the rule of worship of ‘the liturgy.’ (p1 chapter 1 Gregory Dix) All of us worship as part of the holy priesthood who offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (p2 Gregory Dix)

Or as Timothy Radcliffe states in ‘Why go to church?’ (Introduction) the Eucharist is the foundation for gathering- *Jesus at the last supper with his disciples before he died the community was breaking up -Judas had betrayed him -Peter was about to deny Jesus- the rest would be scattered and at this moment of dispersion and disintegration Jesus gives them the community of his body*.

In early Christianity, church life was very different than our own. There is only brief verses connected to the celebration of holy communion and the New testament gives the meaning of it rather than instructions of how. It is given in 1 Corinthians 11 and then custom grew around it but those customs are very similar to today’s liturgical practice.

Descriptions in the bible suggest the Eucharist has many meanings

1. Proclaims the death of Christ
2. Fulfilment of scripture
3. True and secret manna from heaven
4. Sacrificial offering to God
5. Truth of all Passover feasts
6. Foretaste of the heavenly banquet
7. A foreshadowing of the welcome of Christ’s own people when he comes again
8. A fulfilment of Jesus miracles
9. A gift of the holy spirit
10. Way to eternal life
11. Cause of unity in Christ’s church

(See Gregory Dix p4)

What does the Eucharist mean to you?

What I find amazing is the fact that from Syria to Rome to Egypt that by the third century AD the shape or order of the service is relatively similar, and the content of the prayer at the Eucharist is in a similar arrangement. (see Gregory Dix p5).

**Why does this matter?**

1. When we pray we have not randomly made it up, it has been a tradition for nearly two thousand years that is rooted in the early experiences of the Apostles.
2. When we pray the liturgy we are united not only with our church now, but with all those who have tried to follow Christ in the past and who are now praising God beyond this world.
3. We are celebrating the Action of God that is continual- God acts, he to save us, it is a huge event. Showing us the entirety of his love and the words and actions of the liturgy works in the depths of our minds and hearts as a very gradual transformation of who we are. The order of the liturgy allows us to respond and be led deeper into God’s love and to know God.

Timothy Radcliffe suggests that there are three acts-

**Act of faith** Listening to God’s word helps us proclaim the creed and ask for what we need.

**Act of hope** Belief leads to hope- this is my body given for you- faced with failure, death and violence, we are given hope in repeating the Lord’s prayer

Preparation of the gifts- signs and wonders-

**Act of love** -hope culminates in love as we encounter the risen Christ and his victory over death in the Eucharist so we are sent on our way as a sign of love in the world.

But I’d like to start today with our opening statements of the liturgy which we pray together-

Grace mercy and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ be with you

And also with you

At the beginning of each of the letters to the early churches , there is always a greeting. This particular greeting is taken from 2 John.

And the greetings were based in both Jewish and Christian origins.

The Lord be with you… is of Jewish origin which was often used when someone in the community would call his companions to remember the Law.

Or peace be with you… a greeting that comes first which has the significance of being one of the first greetings of the risen Christ to his disciples shown in John chapter 20.

And so right at the beginning in our greetings we use words that show us that God comes to us first and we respond. Our relationship is dependent on God’s invitation to meet him/her.

Grace mercy and peace be with you.

To me this is where reverence begins. To know that we are only human- we are not God- we are dependent on God. AS Paul Woodruff a philosopher states- to act like God that is the opposite of reverence.

We live in a culture that reveres, money, reveres power, reveres education but reverence cannot be for anything we make or manage by ourselves. We have to recognise that reverence is the recognition of something greater than the self.

There is a story of a Native American leader who teaches people reverence- he says to those he is showing around his reserve- did you know that you didn’t make this tree?

You know and I know that if we actually pay attention to nature then we are reverent.

There is a peanuts cartoon ‘I was praying for patience but I stopped.. I was afraid I might get it.’ A

We are called at the beginning of worship to marvel at God and ourselves- how is it that we are here by God’s grace mercy and peace- us- yes simply us- and God is here too and we are with each other. But not only that- that just as the disciples met the risen Christ and were filled with awe and wonder of God and also the intimacy of God (see Mary Magdalene in the first Easter - her response to Jesus and his response to her was awesome and holy but also intimate in his calling of her name) - so we right at the beginning of our worship are invited to meet the risen Christ in our words and actions of the liturgy as we gather.

We begin our worship with reverence yet really God begins our worship with an invitation…to grace mercy and peace

I AM- meets WE are as we gather together. We are a community of faith, hope and love. God is the gift him/ herself and the giver.

I hope that in this Lent series we can take time to notice the worship we practice together and to become more aware of God. The liturgy is a gift to us from God and I pray that together we can learn more of God through our understanding of it.

EXTRA

The liturgy is a huge event- in the middle ages the moment of consecration was a moment of intense excitement the priest lifted up the host wafer and people shouted out that they saw God and begged the priest to hold up the host for Longer. In some places a black cloth was lowered at this moment so that the white host would appear more dramatic. An alderman in Hull paid for a devise so that little wooden angels could ascend on the altar during the consecration.