
Real Presence: Responding to the Word

23 September 2017

Renison College, University of Waterloo

Introduction

The third of Liturgy Canada's five *Real Presence* conferences took place at Renison University College, University of Waterloo, on September 23, 2017. This event, entitled *Responding to the Word*, paid special attention to the things that take place after the proclamation of the Word in the Eucharist, including the Hymn of the Day (Lutheran order), the Creed, the Prayer of Confession (Anglican order), the Peace, and the Prayers of Intercession/Prayers of the People. Presenter John Hill also spoke on "lament" as an often-forgotten expression in Christian worship.

Delegates arrived at 9 a.m. to gather materials for the day and visit over coffee and refreshments. At 9:30 everyone moved to the college's St. Bede's Chapel for Eucharist led by the Rev. Canon Megan Collings Moore, Chaplain of Renison College, Deacon Elizabeth Nelson, Secretary of Liturgy Canada, and musician Scott Weidler, member of the Liturgy Canada Executive. Scott used a paperless music / Music that Makes Community approach for much of the congregational song.



Program leaders for the event were John Hill, Chair of Liturgy Canada, Scott Weidler, Ken Hull, member of the Liturgy Canada Executive and Associate Professor of Music/Director of the Institute for Worship and the Arts at Conrad Grebel University College, UW, and the Rev. Dr. Stephen Larson, Chair of the Worship Planning Committee for the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation.

The program for the day featured two plenary sessions (Hill and Weidler) and two workshops – *Hearing and Singing God's Word: Choosing Music as a Response to the Word* (Hull), and *That Christ May Live in Our Hearts: Repentance and Reconciliation as a Response to the Word* (Larson).



Delegates included seminarians from Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, Lay Readers, those involved in leading the Prayers of Intercession/Prayers of the People in their own parishes, members of parish worship committees, church musicians, and clergy.

Plenary Sessions

Beginning with the record of Justin Martyr (2nd century), John Hill began the plenary sessions

by describing various ways in which worshippers have responded to the Word over the millennia. With reference to changes in practice, he described how the prayers of intercession, the Peace, the Apostles' and Nicene creeds, a hymn of the day, and prayers of confession have appeared and/or disappeared in different eras. And he attributed the present practice of having the prayers of intercession led by a layperson, rather than by clergy, both to early models in the apostolic church and to the liturgical reforms of Vatican II (1962-1965) wherein the company of the baptized are called to share together in Christ's priesthood.

John Hill then explained what he called "the root and flower of common prayer". Prayers of intercession/common prayer, he said, are built on the principle of worshippers desiring to know and cooperate with the ways of God (root), and then longing for a blessedness that they can only imagine (flower). To insure that the *root* is present in common prayer, he continued, we must invoke the story of God's ways when we pray: it is in the strength of the story we have invoked that we dare to ask for God's grace in our lives and in our world. The *flower* occurs, he said, when we evoke our longing for the coming of God's kingdom (what C. S Lewis named as "that inconsolable longing").

He then appealed to the delegates to take seriously the ministry of common prayer. "If intercessions have us intervening on behalf of another," he said, "we must live as we pray!"





Scott Weidler followed John's presentation by laying out some guiding principles in writing prayers of intercession. He then had delegates try their hand at writing petitions for a specific day (three Sunday readings were used) and context (concerns of the world, the community, parish, etc.).

In the second plenary session, John Hill suggested that we rarely hear lamentation in our prayers of intercession, even though lament is the predominant voice of the psalms. With reference to his earlier point concerning the *flower* (longing) in intercessory prayer, he suggested that naming our loss and giving voice to our impatience and anger in prayer is the shadow side of our longing and hope. He gave two examples of how to incorporate lament into petitions –

- “How shall we answer for the destruction we have inflicted on the earth?” and
- “Why are the defenceless heartlessly slaughtered with no one to defend them?”

Ken Hull remarked on how a strong faith in God's goodness is the precondition for a cry of lament in our prayers. He also observed that our questions beg our answers!

Workshops

In Ken Hull's workshop on the Hymn of the Day, he presented some guiding principles and resources in choosing this rather pivotal hymn which occurs in the Lutheran tradition, but remains as an option in the Anglican tradition.

He then gave participants the exercise of choosing a hymn of the day for a specific day in the Sunday lectionary.



Stephen Larson guided a second group of participants in thinking about repentance and reconciliation on a grand scale (e.g. Truth and Reconciliation commissions in South Africa and Canada) and on a personal scale using biblical and contemporary examples.



He then challenged the group to bring the global, personal, and private expressions of repentance into the content of our prayers of confession at corporate worship.

In a sobering review of our shared practices of confession and forgiveness/absolution, he noted that in many ways we accidentally trivialize repentance.

Summary

The conference ended with a short plenary session summarizing the content of the two workshops.

The next in Liturgy Canada's Real Presence series will take place on April 28, 2018. The focus will be on the Meal. The location of this event (GTA) will be announced in February 2018.