

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

POP CULTURE AND LITURGY:
EVOKING THE HABITUS OF CHRISTIAN PEOPLE

A PASTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE LIBRARY OF
NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM

BY

TIMOTHY J. BROOKS

SOUTH PORTLAND, ME

MAY 1, 2016

POP CULTURE AND LITURGY:
EVOKING THE HABITUS OF CHRISTIAN PEOPLE

Approved by:

First Reader

Research Consultant

Director, Doctor of Ministry Program

Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	7
ABSTRACT.....	8
CHAPTER 1: POP CULTURE AND THE HABITUS OF CHRISTIAN PEOPLE.....	9
INTRODUCTION.....	9
PURPOSE.....	12
METHODOLOGY.....	21
CONTEXT.....	25
DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE CHURCH, COMMUNITY, AND PROJECT.....	30
LIMITATIONS.....	32
CHAPTERS IN THIS PROJECT.....	35
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	37
EXPERTISE AND THINKING.....	39
POP CULTURE.....	42
CULTURAL LITURGIES.....	47
LITURGICAL THEOLOGY.....	55
SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY.....	63
CHRISTIAN FORMATION.....	72
ECCLESIAL PRACTICES.....	75
CALL TO WORSHIP/SINGING.....	77
READING OF SCRIPTURE.....	78
CORPORATE PRAYER.....	78
RECEIVING OFFERING.....	79

GREETING TIME/PASSING OF THE PEACE.....	79
PREACHING.....	79
RESPONSE.....	80
BENEDICTION.....	81
OTHER PRACTICES.....	81
CONCLUSION.....	82
CHAPTER 3: I UNDERSTAND, THEREFORE I PARTICIPATE.....	84
PROJECT METHODOLOGY.....	85
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	86
PROJECT INTERVIEW.....	91
SERMON SERIES.....	93
CONCLUDING THE PROJECT.....	100
CHAPTER 4: SHIFTING ENGAGEMENTS WITH LITURGIES.....	103
PRE SERMON SERIES INTERVIEW.....	103
SERMON SERIES.....	116
FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW.....	116
TWO NEW QUESTIONS.....	129
STORIES FROM THE CHURCH (POST PROJECT LUNCH).....	133
CONCLUSION.....	139
CHAPTER 5: THE CHRISTIAN <i>HABITUS</i>	140
LOOKING BACK.....	141
ATTENDANCE.....	142
RESPONSE.....	143

EFFECTIVENESS.....	145
MISTAKES AND WEAKNESSES.....	145
LOOKING FORWARD.....	147
EIGHT THESES THAT EMERGED FROM THE PROJECT.....	148
UNPACKING THESE EIGHT THESES.....	148
NEW ENDEAVORS.....	158
ISSUES FOR THE LARGER CHURCH.....	160
FINAL CONCLUSIONS.....	161
APPENDIX A (SERMON TRANSCRIPTS).....	164
SERMON #1.....	164
SERMON #2.....	171
SERMON #3.....	178
SERMON #4.....	186
SERMON #5.....	195
SERMON #6.....	204
SERMON #7.....	216
SERMON #8.....	223
APPENDIX B (ORDERS OF WORSHIP).....	235
APPENDIX C (SONG LYRICS OF SONGS SUNG IN SERMON).....	243
“BEVERLY HILLS”.....	243
“GLORY DAYS”.....	244
“IMAGINE”.....	246
“I’M GONNA BE [500 MILES]”.....	247

“BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS”	249
“FIREWORK”	251
“BAD BLOOD”	253
“MY WAY”	255
APPENDIX D (PROJECT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS).....	256
APPENDIX E (CONSENT FORM).....	257
APPENDIX F (INTERVIEW RESPONSES PRIOR TO SERMON SERIES).....	258
APPENDIX G (INTERVIEW RESPONSES POST-SERMON SERIES).....	273
APPENDIX H (RESPONSES FROM THE CONGREGATION).....	296
BIBLIOGRPAHY	303

Acknowledgements

This project could not have been accomplished without the patience, kindness, and cheerleading of my wife Charryse. I am so thankful to do life with her. My children Claire and Mackenzie also were very patient when daddy needed to leave town or “do homework,” as opposed to playing basketball or riding bikes. Nobody is blessed with three better ladies in their family than I am.

Dr. Brannon Hancock was as helpful a first reader as I could imagine and better than I deserve. He sparked creative thinking, tirelessly copy edited, and responded to manic text messages for the better part of a year and a half. He has been a joy to share similar passion for both pop culture and worship.

Dr. Dean Blevins and Dr. Judi Schwanz were incredibly helpful readers who spurred me on to excellence in the closing stages of this project. Dr. Doug Hardy has been a helpful and collegial D.Min director throughout my time in the program.

Many people demonstrated generosity through different means to help make this project a reality: my mother Mary Brooks, Randie and Marla Blom (my wife’s parents), the people of South Portland Church of the Nazarene, the people of Victory (FL) Church of the Nazarene, the people of Norwood Church of the Nazarene, pastoral staff members that handled my work while I was gone in classes, Dylan Brown who helped me consider pop culture images, and the Lofland family for housing me during NTS intensives.

If there is anything that concluding a Pastoral Research Project and Doctor of Ministry teaches a student it is that accomplishments are never individual. Many people take time and make sacrifices to help you succeed. I am beyond thankful to all of those who have been present in my life as I worked toward the completion of this project.

Abstract

Pop culture and worship are liturgies with power and potential to shape our character and desires. This project examines the formative influence of secular culture and Christian worship on the people of South Portland Church of the Nazarene. The research centered on a didactic sermon series on understanding pop culture and worship. Texts in liturgical theology, sacramental theology, Wesleyan theology and pop culture provide the foundation for this project. Prior to and following the sermon series, one-on-one interviews were conducted with selected congregants of the church, and the entire congregation was invited to share their feedback on the project in an “all church lunch.” The project demonstrated that the people interviewed were not fully aware of what was forming them, but were also interested in the concept of liturgy – both cultural and liturgical.

Chapter 1

Pop Culture and the *Habitus* of Christian People

Introduction

*The devil has had all the best liturgies.*¹

In a recent sermon series at my local church, South Portland [Maine] Church of the Nazarene, I was working through the seven deadly sins. One week the topic was lust, so a tangible tension filled the air. Rather than beginning with “what *you* have done,” as I felt to be so regularly the case in my youth, I made an exegetical decision (both of the text² and community) to begin by pointing to the sort of sexuality that is paraded today in pop culture. I, therefore, began by sharing my distaste for a song that I figured we could all share distaste for: “Blurred Lines” by Robin Thicke.

“Blurred Lines” came to the forefront of American consciousness and discourse when Thicke performed the song at the 2013 MTV Video Music Award show. That performance is most remembered for Miley Cyrus’s demonstration of “twerking” to the world. While the world was reacting either in horror or celebration at Miley Cyrus simulating a sex act on stage (albeit clothed), many overlooked the song itself, which at face value, seems to be about nothing more or less than date rape:

*If you can't hear what I'm trying to say
If you can't read from the same page
Maybe I'm going deaf
Maybe I'm going blind
Maybe I'm out of my mind*

¹ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies vol. 2. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 40.

² 2 Samuel 11, NIV. The story of David and Bathsheba.

Everybody get up

*Ok, now he was close
Tried to domesticate you
But you're an animal
Baby, it's in your nature
Just let me liberate you
You don't need no papers
That man is not your maker
And that's why I'm gon' take a*

*Good girl
I know you want it
I know you want it
I know you want it
You're a good girl
Can't let it get past me
You're far from plastic
Talk about getting blasted
I hate these blurred lines
I know you want it
I know you want it
I know you want it
But you're a good girl
The way you grab me
Must wanna get nasty
Go ahead, get at me
Everybody get up*

*What do they make dreams for
When you got them jeans on
What do we need steam for
You the hottest bitch in this place
I feel so lucky,
Hey, hey, hey
You wanna hug me
Hey, hey, hey
What rhymes with hug me?
Hey, hey, hey
Hey!*

[Bridge]

[Hook]

Hustle Gang Homie

*One thing I ask of you
Lemme be the one you back that ass up to
From Malibu to Paris boo
Had a bitch, but she ain't bad as you
So, hit me up when you pass through
I'll give you something big enough to tear your ass in two
Swag on 'em even when you dress casual
I mean, it's almost unbearable
In a hundred years not dare would I
Pull a Pharcyde, let you pass me by
Nothin' like your last guy, he too square for you
He don't smack that ass and pull your hair like that
So I'm just watching and waitin'
For you to salute the true big pimpin'
Not many women can refuse this pimping
I'm a nice guy, but don't get confused, this pimpin'*

*Shake your rump
Get down, get up-a
Do it like it hurt, like it hurt
What you don't like work
Hey!*

*Baby, can you breathe
I got this from Jamaica
It always works for me
Dakota to Decatur
No more pretending
Cause now you're winning
Here's our beginning
I always wanted a good girl.³*

Most everyone in church that day under the age of 50 knew that song, yet the replies after service were shocking: “I had *never* listened to the lyrics before!” “My goodness, that song is a great song to go to spin to, I had no idea!” “It’s on my workout playlist at home.” “Man, I had always just heard the cool beat...”

³ Robin Thicke, *Blurred Lines* "Blurred Lines," Star Trak Entertainment and Interscope Records, 2013, CD.

A song about date rape, or at the very least attempting to coerce or pressure someone not interested in sex into sex, had made its way into the daily playlist of many holiness Christians who were completely unaware of what they were listening to.

This project was in no way about moralizing pop culture or shaming Christians. It was, on the other hand, about helping Christians become aware of their world, their habits, and their worship. Through this project, I wanted to help the people of South Portland [ME] Church of the Nazarene become more aware of the forces that are forming their lives, both within and outside the church. The goal was to have them see what is forming their *habitus* so that they could become more intentional about their engagement with worship and pop culture.

Purpose

This project takes a particular look at the *habitus* of the people of South Portland [ME] Church of the Nazarene. It is my observation that people are being formed at a gut/instinctual level by their engagement with pop culture: it is shaping us into who we are. And, this is affecting our worship, as we now long to be entertained at church. However, worship is meant to be fundamentally formational as well. Therefore, I explored the connections between the formational power of worship and pop culture: both in terms of how they are able to compliment each other and in terms of how pop culture can usurp, even for the best Christians, the power of worship for formation of Christian living. This focusing on both pop culture and liturgy is meant to help church people recognize how strong the lure of pop culture is to define their habitual life, how Christian worship can take the role of primary formational event in our life, and how the

church can learn how to engage meaningfully with pop culture and not just assume it needs to be avoided.

Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist and philosopher, defines *habitus* as an “embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history.”⁴ Drawing from Bourdieu and other French philosophers, James K. A. Smith takes this idea of *habitus* and runs with it. Smith points to the formation of a soldier as a colloquial example; a farm boy, he notes, joins the military not because it makes sense based on the evidence, but because he has practiced patriotism his entire life. He has come to recognize its symbols as meaningful, and chooses that it is worth the possibility of giving his life to it. This is a decision formed out of one’s *habitus*.⁵

Once in the military, the *habitus* is transformed through practice. Boot camp is liturgical; a new kind of person is made through a specific set of prescribed acts. It takes practice to become a soldier. It takes practice to become a Christian as well. And it is in the seemingly mundane acts of worship that Christians are most strongly and properly formed, at the level that causes us to be rather than to simply think or believe. It takes practice, symbols, liturgies, and narratives regularly forming us at a gut or subconscious level to change the fundamental way we engage with our world.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty speaks of what the body “knows,” and he calls this perception. He is saying that we do not abstractly think our way through the world, but neither are we passive victims of impressions, controlled by instinctual reflexes. Our

⁴ Cf. Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction*. (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 52.

⁵ Cf. James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies vol. 1. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 103-111.

bodies are the vehicles of being in the world, and bodies carries with them an embodied knowledge.⁶

Smith tells the story of engaging the writing of Wendell Berry's book, *Bringing it to the Table*. The book is about farming, eating, and stewardship. Smith seems to be assenting to the theses of Berry's work. When he is finished reading, he sets the book down and remembers that he is eating in a food court at Costco. This scene is precisely the context that Berry is attempting to cut against: food that is full of preservatives, mass-produced, shipped, etc. Smith argues that his mindless trip to Costco – and the habitus that undergirds this trip – overrides his intellectual assent to Berry's work.⁷

This project seeks to probe these connections more intentionally. It was my desire as pastor of a particular people to help them think about how pop culture is trying to form them into a particular kind of people. Upon helping them understand the kind of person that culture is subtly forming them to be, I then worked out how to counter-form those cultural liturgies through narratives and worship that is more theologically and biblically rooted. It will start with awakening our intellect, while attempting also to woo the *habitus* into more robust Christian formation. This is an exercise in the counter-formation – through hearty worship – of a people generally unaware of a battle for their *habitus*.

As Christians, we are interested in the way that the Holy Spirit – whom we affirm as formational – affects the practices of our body. How do we go about allowing ourselves as Christians to be formed in our way of life that is inscribed in our “habit-

⁶ Cf., James K. A. Smith. *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies vol. 2. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 45.

⁷ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies vol. 2. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 8-10.

body?” Or, how can we intentionally allow the Spirit to orient our being in the world?⁸ These are the interesting questions that Smith has posed, that influence the more nuts-and-bolts attempts to tease these theories out in my project.

The work in this project contends that the *habitus* of a person cannot be changed or reformed until they recognize it has already been formed and is already being formed. Therefore, it makes the task of this project to affect the subconscious by engaging the conscious. This paper argues that the average church attendee at South Portland [ME] Church of the Nazarene does not even realize that their *habitus* is being formed by either pop culture or Christian liturgy. Therefore, by helping them see what their *habitus* is, and how it is formed, they will be more discerning about the world they participate in, therefore allowing the work of worship to become the primary act or work that forms them.

This project, however, did not intend to return the Church of the Nazarene, or any Christian person in particular to the dark days of avoiding the theater or “secular” music. Quite the contrary, through this project, I sought to encourage a more intentional and redemptive relationship to pop culture.

It is important, at this point, to define pop culture. When articulating pop culture to the church during the project, I did so through the help of Marcel Danesi, who helps us understand that pop culture is a means of organizing and stabilizing communal life through specific beliefs, rituals, rites, performances, art forms, symbols, language, clothing, food, music, dance, and any other mode of human expressive, intellectual, and communicative behavior that is associated with a group of people at a particular period of

⁸ Ibid., 45.

time.⁹ Pop culture can encapsulate music, theater, television programs, cell phone apps, movies, fads, fitness (P90X, Cross Fit), social media, dating websites, and more.

Pop culture, in itself, is not the problem. The problem is Christians too often engaging it lazily (as per the personal story story of “Blurred Lines”) and bringing that same lazy disposition to their worship. It becomes so that there is no intention in formational practices. As the *habitus* is subconscious in nature, so is our engagement with the world. Success in this study is measured by the very Christian people of South Portland [ME] Church of the Nazarene seeing the narratives of redemption, resurrection, hope, joy, love, and salvation in pop culture, and found those narratives as clearly in such seemingly mundane liturgical acts as standing in line for communion, shaking hands with one’s neighbor in church, and singing a song with the gathered congregation.

In our local setting, it is common to utilize pop cultural narratives in order to illustrate a Christian concept or biblical text. It has had profound impact. In a recent sermon series, our church dug deep into its heritage – well past where Nazarenes are usually comfortable exploring – and studied The Apostles’ Creed. We stood weekly and recited it together, affirming our common faith.

Nazarenes that I have served have tended to get squeamish about The Apostles’ Creed for a number of reasons, but most strongly in the affirmation of “...the holy, *catholic* church.” This required significant exegetical work, both biblically and congregationally. In order to look past the Roman Catholic Church, and instead toward the eschatological church, we turned to a scene in *The Lion King*.

⁹ Marcel Danesi, *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives*. 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 2

The Lion King is a familiar narrative in contemporary American society. Famously, the movie begins with an Elton John song entitled “The Circle of Life.” The scene is set in an African savannah, with all varieties of animals making a common pilgrimage. A discerning listener will note what the song is hinting at: that these animals making the pilgrimage are normally inclined to eat one another! Yet their focus is on something else, something that supersedes even their evolutionary appetites.

That something else is the presentation of Simba, the long awaited child of the king. He has been born to King Mufasa and his mate Sarabi. Word has made its way through the kingdom, and all animals are focused on the celebration, and their journey toward that celebration.

Before the congregation of animals, Simba is anointed king. When the child king is presented, all of the animals bow, and then celebrate. It is a festival. Nothing matters but the king, and all of the animals – who yesterday were hunting and avoiding one another – stand unified with their eyes on the king, hearts full of hope and thanksgiving.

Following a sermon about Jesus mattering more than our differences, when the movie clip ended and the house lights were on, there was not a dry eye in the sanctuary. They got it! They got it because they knew Simba from the movies, *and* because they sing the words from Revelation 4 in gathered worship:¹⁰

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were

¹⁰ Kari Jobe, “Revelation Song,” by Jeanne Lee Riddle, released February 10, 2009, CD.

dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

“‘Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.’”

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being.”¹¹

A sermon that was met with anxiety – both by preacher and congregation – was brought to life by an indelible pop culture moment. If the lions and zebras and wildebeest and giraffe could ignore their appetites because the king was more glorious than what their urges had compelled them to do, how much more glorious will it be when Catholics, Nazarenes, Baptists, Orthodox, Presbyterians, and Mennonites all lay down their theological persuasions and arrogances and see that it is Christ that matters, and his work does far more to unite us than divide us?

This story of the sermon illustration helps us bridge the gap, while also critiquing the false dichotomy between pop culture and worship. First, it demonstrates how tightly

¹¹ Rev 4 (NIV).

interwoven our emotions are with our cultural narratives. We knew *The Lion King* story so well that a simple illustration allowed us to *feel* the parallels with the biblical narratives of eschatological hope. We knew the story of the eschatological expectation of the unveiling of Christ as both king and slain lamb so deeply in our bones through decades of worship that we could, on our own, complete the narrative parallels. No one was crying over Simba; tears were shed because their Christian *habitus* and hopeful expectation was triggered by reaching beyond what James K. A. Smith would call our modern sensibilities of rational thought – explaining facts – into our *habitus* guide for how we navigate our world, and reminding ourselves at our subconscious level why we live and behave as we do.

James K.A. Smith, in his book *Imagining the Kingdom*, tells the story of a middle-aged man named Alex. We are told that Alex's church did not have anything special to its worship. On a weekly basis, Alex and his church would kneel and confess their sins to God. They would then hear the announcement of the good news of forgiveness and pardon. Some weeks the prayer of forgiveness rolled off Alex's lips easy, other weeks he needed to choke them out, as the words were heavy.

Alex did not realize the importance of this weekly act, over decades of practice, of asking for forgiveness and feeling the joy of forgiveness and pardon until his son became burdened with depression and anxiety, leading to acts of defiance and perhaps even cries for help. His son got into trouble and Alex got the call he dreaded. He did not know what to expect when the door to see his son opened. What he saw was what his worship had

trained him for all of his life: a sobbing son crying “I’m so sorry dad, please forgive me!”¹²

Alex’s worship, we are told, was not particularly entertaining. But, we find that it was profoundly formational of his *habitus*. Because he had been trained in worship to understand the profound power of forgiveness in his own life, he was able to give it away to his son when his son needed it the most. “Of course I forgive you,” he whispered to his son. At a gut level, in his subconscious, in his *habitus* this is what Alex was made to be by proper formational worship.

In his TED talk, Simon Sinek argues that very few people know why they do what they do. They know what they do, and how they do it, but neither of those categories inspires people. Leaders, he argues, need to explain to people the *what* and the *how* but that both fail to sell or inspire.¹³ By discovering the *why* of what we do, the hope is that the congregation will be inspired to more fully participate in formation offered in worship; the kind of formation that grabs us at a gut level and not simply invites our intellectual assent. Our intellectual assent is not enough to determine behavior. After all, texting while driving was the leading cause of death in US teens in 2013,¹⁴ and we all know that texting and driving is dangerous. The cultural liturgies of availability and immediacy have superseded our knowledge that texting and driving can be fatal.

¹² James K. A Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 185.

¹³ Simon Sinek, “How great leaders inspire action.” (TED Talk at Puget Sound May 2010), accessed July 12, 2015, https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?language=en.

¹⁴ “Texting while driving now leading cause of US teen deaths” *Auto Safety*. Last Modified July 10, 2013. Accessed July 26, 2015, <http://safety.trw.com/texting-while-driving-now-leading-cause-of-us-teen-deaths/0710/>.

An associate pastor at South Portland [ME] Church of the Nazarene grew up Roman Catholic before Vatican II. She was raised attending the Latin Rite with her grandmother. Her testimony today is that she was desperate for God because of her unfortunate home life. Her argument is that not knowing what was happening was a barrier for her and her neighbors from truly knowing God.

While that is an extreme example for numerous reasons, I suspect that members of the Church of the Nazarene similarly do not know the *why* of their worship. For example, I have been asked numerous times why the cloth drape on the cross is currently green.¹⁵ Clearly, there is more work to be done in educating our congregations. Therefore, this project undertook the act of educating the congregation on formational power of participation in pop culture and liturgy and how to engage each in ways that edify our Christian life.

Methodology

Some of the methodologies have already been hinted at, such as the story of *The Lion King*. However, let us explore the subject with more clarity.

With the help of Mary Clark Moschella's book, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, I designed an ethnographic study for South Portland [ME] Church of the Nazarene where we moved through a sermon series on pop culture, liturgy, and *habitus*. Both before the sermon series and after the sermon series, I interviewed seventeen regular attendees (roughly 7% of an average Sunday morning attendance and 5% of regular

¹⁵ Green is the liturgical color for ordinary time.

attendees).¹⁶ The interviewees were asked to make every effort to attend church for the duration of the sermon series across eight consecutive Sundays. This sample of church attendees was in order to understand the mindset of the greater congregation both before and after the subject was broached.

The interview, which was a face-to-face conversation between myself and the interviewee,¹⁷ covered questions ranging from what their daily engagement with pop culture is, to an assessment of their own level of devotion to spiritual practices, to their understanding of why we do things like have communion more than their church has in previous pastoral leadership. Such questions attempt to engage their grasp of the *why* they do the things they do.

In particular, I was interested in their engagement in different worship practices. Is weekly communion meaningful in their conscious understanding of it? Why do they think we have greeting time weekly? Why is scripture read both for the sermon text and during the liturgical plan?

Following the completion of the project (through sermon series and face-to-face interviews), I opened up opportunity for the whole of the congregation to respond. I purchased lunch for people, inviting them to stay after church the week after the sermon series ended. In order to not bias the congregation in terms of whom I chose or what they said, I assigned my pastoral staff to interview those that participated. This was intentionally done in order to gauge the effectiveness of my project while completely

¹⁶ South Portland Church of the Nazarene does not ever get the same 275 people to our church on consecutive Sundays. Approximately 400 people regularly attend our church at least once a month.

¹⁷ This setting and methodology is more explicitly described in chapter three.

removing any chance for bias on my part. I could not choose who came, and they did not have to answer to my face as they were granted anonymity in their answers.

The hypothesis of this project, then, was that most do not know the *why* of our liturgical plan and movements. Further, I suspected that people judge the service most consciously by whether or not they were entertained. This would be engaging worship with the same qualities of the *habitus* that pop culture engages. It is an unconscious, non-cognitive, mostly criteria-less engagement with worship. Worshippers are not sure of *why* – nor have they ever really been challenged to consider why – they come to church week after week. It is simply “what they are supposed to do” then they judge how it went based on some unspoken criterion of how they felt while they were there factored with how engaged or bored they were. This is, more or less, the same criterion we use to judge the latest single on the radio or movie in the theater.

The church needs a remembering of why we participate in liturgy. This requires a rededication to teaching the liturgy. Gordon W. Lathrop, in his book *Holy Things* (pg. 121), argues that we need to give explanations and reasons that enable participation in the meeting by opening up the symbols and their interactions.¹⁸ The sermon series, therefore, plunged into the *whys*. Why do we call the people to worship? What is the significance of Christians gathering to sing? Why is scripture read so prominently and publicly when we all have a Bible at home? Why do we have greeting time/passing of the peace? Is the offering just to pay the bills around here? Why is there a designated preacher, and why does s/he emerge from the people to proclaim the Word of the Lord?

¹⁸ Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998). 121.

Isn't having communion once a quarter all that the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene requires? Why do we do it almost every week, then?

Having addressed these questions of *why*, as well as other questions, in the eight week sermon series, we turned again to the identical survey previously given¹⁹ to see if worship had become more robust to them – more meaningfully addressing their *habitus* and turning them over to a second naiveté.²⁰ Can an addressing of the *why* of worship as well as the “why” of pop culture allow us to become more cognizant of what is forming our *habitus*? If so, does our behavior change to look more like a Kingdom people living as – to borrow language from William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas – resident aliens in a kingdom to which we do not belong?²¹

The same 17 parishioners were asked to sit with me for an identical interview as before the sermon series. While 2+ months is an incredibly short time over which to track changes in formation, noticeable changes in response allow us to reasonably predict the general trajectory of continued formation. Some speculation is inevitable, but we were able to see how dedicated Christian people respond to an awareness of the cultural liturgies they are subjected to on a daily basis, as well as the Christian formation that they subject themselves to at least on a weekly basis.

The pastoral challenge, coming out of this project if my hypotheses were correct, is to help them nurture their newfound awareness in order to see them become more and

¹⁹ The identical questions will be asked, however there will be two additional questions asked as well. The precise questions are shown in chapter 3.

²⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 350-355.

²¹ Cf. William H. Willimon, and Stanley Hauerwas. *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know that Something is Wrong*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 1989.

more Christian at their gut/subconscious/habitual level. Further, there will be challenges to help them identify the cultural narratives that supplement their Christian faith, and those that are leading them toward modern day idols. This will be explored further in the review of the literature relevant to the concerns this project, helping us understand cultural liturgies in deeper ways.

Gordon W. Lathrop argues that this teaching and making the congregation aware of what is happening in the liturgy must be an ongoing activity of the church. A renewed teaching of the liturgy to the congregation will find them ever more caught in the tension of familiar and strange (the receiving of the body and blood of Christ is normal for a Christian, yet upon further reflection, is actually quite a peculiar act).²² This will hopefully encourage the congregation to not get caught in the trap of thinking the repetition of the liturgy as “boring,” but rather as seeing the repetition as formational, while also appreciating its peculiarities as mysterious.

Context

An important part of the union between the Church of the Nazarene and the Association of Pentecostal Churches of America was the migration of Eastern Holiness people to Southern California. C.W. Griffin, one of the charter members of the APCA congregation at South Portland, Maine, moved to Los Angeles in 1904 and joined the Church of the Nazarene. He regularly kept [Phineas] Bresee abreast developments in the East and reported on the Nazarenes to family and friends in the APCA.²³

South Portland Church of the Nazarene has a fundamental place in the history and expansion of the Church of the Nazarene as a denomination. One of the church’s beloved pastors, Samuel Young, became elected General Superintendent shortly after leaving the pastorate from South Portland. Officially, this church was founded before the

²² Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 127.

²³ Floyd Cunningham, ed. *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene*. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2009), 145.

denomination (1900) – and had close ties with Phineas F. Bresee. It is a heritage church in the denomination, through and through.

The congregation itself has been mostly healthy through its history. It peaked in the high 400s/low 500s during the 1970s with George Whetstone pastoring. In 2015, my first full year as Lead Pastor, the church reported 273 in average attendance, which was an increase of 33 on a given week over 2014 fiscal year.²⁴

Our church is a suburban, multigenerational congregation. We have congregants amongst us who have worshipped in three different sanctuaries,²⁵ some who are not through their first year with us, and everything in between. Many have long Nazarene heritages, some come from other denominational heritages (including the Catholic church, which is predominant in New England), and some are new to the faith.²⁶ We have a slight lean in percentage toward women attending our church because we have many families that come with only one parent (the other parent disinterested in church attendance and faith). On a given week, approximately 20% of our attendance is children and teenagers. The adult ages range from 18 into the mid-90s.²⁷ The church is mostly white – as is Maine – although we do have some a Chinese family and African immigrants who attend our church.²⁸

²⁴ “South Portland Church of the Nazarene,” Nazarene Research, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://app.nazarene.org/FindAChurch/summaryReport?report=churchSummary&orgId=8146>

²⁵ One at the original address, and two separate (one is now our gymnasium) sanctuaries at our current address.

²⁶ A 20 year old woman had her first ever communion on Sunday, October 18, 2015.

²⁷ There is a man who tells me every week that he is the oldest member in the church. He has been attending for 75 years and has worshipped at two addresses in three sanctuaries.

²⁸ This matches the demographic of Maine – a mostly white state with much of the black population coming from recent African immigration.

The church has had both successful and difficult pastoral tenures over the years, which has been manifested in a fluctuating attendance record. This coming and going of people is indicative of the “Mainer” attitude. People from Maine are stoic and non-confrontational. If there is a problem, typically they will bring it up once, but they will not dig in for a fight. If things do not change, they will quietly leave.

There is a rich heritage of SPCN being a “singing church.” Music has long been important, including the removal of the choir because they believed performance could no longer be considered “elite.” In the 1960s and 1970s, the church hosted a radio show called “A Lighthouse on Casco Bay,” where the lead pastor would sing and preach. Currently, a married couple with history in local theater performance leads our church music. The husband is the lead singer in one of the state’s most sought-after wedding bands. Quality music is vitally important to the concept of worship at SPCN.

The church has had two recent peaks in attendance. The first was the era just described, the 1960s and 70s. The second was in the early 2000’s. Both eras saw weekly attendance in the 400-500 range. At the peak of the most recent spike, the pastor left and attendance dropped below 200 by 2012.²⁹

I have been pastor of South Portland Church of the Nazarene since October 2013. Attendance was roughly 240, on average, when I arrived following a strong interim period. In 2015, we reported 273 in weekly attendance. Much of this growth has come through conversions and new Nazarenes.

The congregation, today, is a mixture of traditional Nazarenes with roots in the heritage of the church; Nazarenes who have moved to Maine and joined our church;

²⁹ This is not reflected in the official counts, but is solidly validated by our church’s leaders.

evangelical Christians who have found a home in our particular congregation; former Catholics; and people who are completely new to the Christian faith.

In my time at South Portland Church of the Nazarene, I have strived to bring a liturgical renewal to the church, albeit quietly. The time has come to discuss the perceptions of the people of the church in terms of worship as well as to teach why some of these changes have occurred.

As Ricoeur describes, I had a chance to lead the people out of their liturgical naiveté into a season of deconstruction and criticism. This project was about leading people through a criticism of the liturgies they love (secular and religious) and determining what our future – or second naiveté – will be. For Ricoeur, it was this process of interpreting what we do that allows us to hear again.³⁰

I arrived into this church having followed a difficult period in the church's history. The church struggled for years in terms of numerical decline, morale, and financial regression. These years led to a crisis of identity. In response to this crisis, the church hired a TIPs (Transitional Interim Pastor[s]) who guided the church back into some semblance of health and improved morale. The church was ready to grow in mission and spiritual depth.

When I began pastoring this church, it was clear in board meetings and individual encounters that what the church needed most was an increased focus on discipleship. The church had quality services, an improved morale, financial stability, and a strong heritage. That said, there was little reporting of people developing further in their faith over the previous years. People were hungry to grow, but were not sure how.

³⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 351.

We decided on a vision team made up of leaders in the church and began to ask where we could improve. We consulted Thom Rainer's book *Simple Church*.³¹ In it, he argues for simplifying the church's mission by moving from (over-) programming to a simple, measurable vision that helps people progress in their faith.

Our vision team asked the question: what does a disciple of Christ do? We arrived at three core conclusions: disciples encounter – nay, are encountered by – God weekly in worship, they connect with other disciples of Christ in meaningful ways, and they serve others. Therefore, we tried to eliminate the noise of what it means to be Christian and focus on these core elements of following Christ as disciples: *Encountering* God, *Connecting* with others (small groups are our core thrust for accomplishing this goal), and *Serving* the community. While that is far from exhaustive in terms of Christian disciplines and callings, we felt that the Christian life would be evoked and prodded out of these disciplines (including worshipping in song, gathering around the table at worship, hearing the Word proclaimed, settling into a small group, and serving the poor and their neighbor).

As previously mentioned, our church is in a very Caucasian neighborhood, in a very Caucasian state. Multi-cultural ministry, save for some African immigrants in the Portland metro area, is hardly a realistic option for our church. However, there is still a very real struggle with poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, impoverished single parents, and depression. Our church has found many ways to serve these contexts. One success story that comes out of the core of our church vision is a mother who was homeless with three children. The church helped her get into an apartment and find a job. We also utilized our

³¹ Thom S. Rainer, and Eric Geiger. *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2011).

day care – Lighthouse School – to watch her children while she worked. We did not charge her tuition. She is now a nursing student who is getting all As and Bs and has a very real career path that she is passionate about. She has also found faith in Jesus Christ and one can clearly see her life transforming.

Such a story as this alludes to the shifting context of our church congregation. In the past, the church was family based (everyone was related). Now, the church is shifting to a more missional mindset. Recently, the Barna Group named Portland, ME as the third most ‘Post-Christian City’ in America.³² Therefore, it is important that the church is discipling our people into the right kind of Christians. These Christians would be loving, prepared to tell the story of God and salvation in Jesus Christ, and involved in selfless service. This project contends that “the right kind of Christian” – the kind of Christian we found that Alex turned out to be in a prior story – is formed in worship.

Demographics of the Church, Community, and Project

The state of Maine is a small state by population (1,329,328 in a 2015 census estimate) and population density (43.1 people per square mile).³³ South Portland Church of the Nazarene finds itself in the major metropolitan area of Maine (Portland). Cumberland County (which claims both Portland as the county seat as well as South Portland where the church sits) has 287,797 people per a 2014 estimate with 337.2 people per square mile.³⁴

³² “*The Most Post Christian Cities in America*,” The Barna Group. Last modified August 30, 2014, Accessed July 26, 2015. <http://cities.barna.org/the-most-post-christian-cities-in-america/>

³³ “Maine.” United States Census Bureau, Accessed February 23, 2016. <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/23,2371990,00>

³⁴ Being that South Portland Church of the Nazarene is historically a drive-in church, it is prudent to provide the wider demographics than a South Portland specific demographic.

Maine is a New England state, and the people hold many of the characteristics ascribed to New Englanders: traditional, stoic, and politically progressive. The city of South Portland was incorporated in 1898, having broken away from neighboring Cape Elizabeth. Cape Elizabeth was founded in 1765. Traditions, accordingly, run deep. Americana – the broad stereotype that America is a tight knit series of towns with similar values and goals – is prevalent, local sports lack progressive tactics, businesses tend to be local more than national, and houses are (often) old and expensive. It is unusual to see someone rise to prominence that is not from (read: born in) Maine. Change is rare and difficult for Mainers. That said, the billboard entering the state declares that Maine is “the way life should be.” People are proud, the pace is slow, and the life is good.

Yet, in spite of the tight knit, throwback, classic American feel to Portland, specifically, and Maine, generally, a keen is humanism prevalent. Far from the Bible belt of America, there is a secularity that is nearly unrivaled across the United States of America. Churches in the South Portland community are closing regularly.³⁵ Attendance in our own congregation is often undermined by shifting priorities: children’s sports schedules, summer recreation such as family “camps” or houses north in the state, or sheer exhaustion from overbooked schedules. As such, the general attitude of Mainers toward church attendance is not always enthusiastic. In such a situation, the people are not clearly seeing the competing liturgies in their life. They do not see that they are missing the formational liturgy of the church often at the expense of formation by way of cultural liturgies that are forming them in surprisingly anti-Christian ways.

³⁵ As recently as a decade ago there were four United Methodist congregations in South Portland alone. There are now two, and one is aging and hanging by a thread to survival.

Limitations

The first and largest limitation is that the study took place in one congregation, in one city, in one country. It failed to account for the breadth of the church from other cultures and traditions, due to its specificity for this particular local church.

It is the my belief, on the other hand, that its findings will be broadly useful for any American/Western Christian community desiring to take Christian formation and discipleship seriously in an era of pop culture forming the metanarrative(s) of their American/Western society. The practices that South Portland [Maine] Church of the Nazarene undertakes in its liturgical life are common Christian movements in a worship service. Therefore, while our context lacks regional or national diversity or significant ethnic diversity, its use of common worship acts (preaching, singing, Eucharist, etc.) leads to common places for most Christian traditions and contexts to gather around.

Further, the technique of ethnography, which was used extensively in measuring the effectiveness of the project, can have its own weaknesses as well. For example, people may be more or less honest depending on who is asking the questions, so as to not hurt feelings or not out themselves to their pastor as feeling disgruntled.³⁶ It is concerning that my passion for this project may have influenced the responses of the congregants willing to be interviewed.³⁷ As such, I added the open interview time to congregants where they speak to associate pastors and not to me, attempting to alleviate some bias in the greater congregation.

³⁶ Cf. Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction*. (Cleveland, OH: The PilgrimPress, 2008), 79.

³⁷ In retrospect, the design of the interviews and my role as both interviewer and pastor may have biased the responses. This will be discussed further in chapter 5.

The length of an interview of parishioners could have been a problem as well. If the interview was too short, enough quality information may not have been acquired. If it was too long, the interviewee may have become overwhelmed and disinterested.³⁸ Therefore, asking the right questions was paramount. In order to ask good questions, I considered the direction I wanted to project to move. I hoped that people in the church would see the value of sacramental worship. I hoped that people would understand that they are being formed even when they felt they were relaxing or being mindless. I hoped that people would see the power and saturation of pop culture around them. I was interested in how they thought the church handled pop culture and worship, and if they felt the handling was appropriate or helpful. I began with my theses and asked questions to see if the congregants were able to see, after I attempted to expose my theses, what I was seeing. Having created these questions, I sent them for approval from the NTS faculty in my project design.

Executing this ethnography began with a hypothesis of what one will find.³⁹ While one should be flexible about bending toward the research's findings, it is possible that an ethnographer would look too hard at bending the acquired narratives in the direction of perceived narrative of the hypothesis. It was my hope to avoid this by interviewing a sampling of diverse people one on one as well as offering opportunity for the whole church, if they so chose, to speak with staff pastors about what they were hearing.

³⁸ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction*. (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 66.

³⁹ Cf., *Ibid.*, 45-67.

Observation of other people can be suspect as well. One can never fully enter into the mind of another. Mary Clark Moschella tells the story of a church supper two separate ethnographers both attended. One enjoyed their time and the other held disdain toward it. The woman who is a vegetarian – for reasons related to her Christian faith – was put off that she can only eat Jell-O salad and white rolls. Her carnivore counterpart with a gregarious personality ate well and was impressed with the church’s serving of the local homeless population.⁴⁰

Each came with their strongest Christian convictions and see entirely different virtues and vices by observing the same exact dinner. It is entirely possible to be biased by observation because of one’s inability to completely know the motivations and meanings of what is observed and heard. It would be easy to draw conclusions through under-nuanced and biased lenses. Therefore, it was important, as both pastor and ethnographer, to be discerning beyond my personal biases regarding worship, liturgy, Christian formation, and/or people’s personalities.

Finally, a project that attempted to measure change in people’s *habitus* would demand years – perhaps decades – of careful observation to determine. This project had only a few months of observational detail. Further, what were measurable will only be the responses of the particular people; adequate observation of people’s subconscious behavior and impulses is impossible. Therefore, upon the conclusion of the interviews and ethnographic work, there needs to be continued pastoral work.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 29-31.

Chapters In This Project

Chapter 2: Precedents in Literature

In order to understand the formational power of pop culture as well as the counter-formational power of the liturgical life of the church, I draw from a wealth of, theological, methodological, historical, and biblical readings. My intention in reviewing the literature of this subject matter was to move from pop culture through the practice of the church in a logically organized order. In this chapter I summarize my readings under the following headings: Pop Culture; Cultural Liturgies; Liturgical Theology; Sacramental Theology; Christian Formation; Ecclesial Practices.

Chapter 3: Research Design

In this chapter, I describe how the project was conceived, organized, and conducted. I use ethnographic work – focused around interviewing seventeen selected church members, in order to measure the opinions and inclinations of church people before addressing pop culture and worship. This is measured against the responses from the same people post sermon series in an identical survey.

Chapter 4: Research Data and Results

It is in this chapter that this project's work is teased out, Results of the interview are shared and observations from walking through this process with the church were discussed. This is the meat of the ethnographic project.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

Major conclusions are fully articulated, future plans are laid out, and any changes necessary for the growth of our local congregation are expressed in this chapter. A reader

of this chapter will see where this project suggests South Portland Church of the Nazarene should go in light of this project.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Worship, Culture, and Identity

The arguments of this project are that pop cultural (and other cultural liturgies) are forming people at a gut (*habitus*) level, that it is through the liturgical life of the church that the *habitus* of Christian people is formed into the image of Christ, and that the church can use direction in engaging with pop culture in healthy manners. As we are formed through worship in the holy image of God, we are sent into the world in mission as Christians for the sake of the world. This allows us to participate in the culture while resisting simple consumerism or citizenship in rival kingdoms.

Through the practices of Christian worship – regularly attending to the sacraments, singing, hearing the spoken word, we are formed in Christian holiness over the long haul. It is a slow work. But the slow work woos us into the Kingdom of God. It both lures us away from competing cultural liturgies and allows us to live a life fulfilled that allows us to engage with pop culture in a way that helps us see narratives that illustrate the Kingdom of God, as opposed to being wooed into an ethic of competing kingdoms.

What is at stake in this project is the Christian's *habitus* – how they live and react at a gut level. In order to understand how this gut level is being formed, we must study pop culture, cultural liturgies, liturgical theology, sacramental theology, Christian formation, and ecclesial practices. Special emphasis will be on Wesleyan views of these issues, as the project is developed in and for the Church of the Nazarene.

For the sake of this literature review, I will attempt to take a narrative approach. In particular, as a long time member of the Church of the Nazarene, I have heard about the perils and ills of pop culture time and again. This has been troublesome, as I – let alone other members of the denomination – have often quite enjoyed pop culture. As such, it seems well worth the effort in this project to gauge what the critique of pop culture is, and more specifically, what it should be.

From there, we will consider this critique of what we will call cultural liturgies, a term borrowed from James K.A. Smith, viewing how our engagement with the secular world “as is,” blindly and without critique, is having a powerful effect on our habits and behavior. We will then counter these cultural liturgies with a more robust understanding of Christian liturgies and practices; we will modify that with a theological treatment of the sacraments, and finish by considering Christian formation and ecclesial practices.

I hope that, in this review of literature considered for this project, the reader will take a journey through theology and practice of discipleship, rooted in worship that will encourage the church and its people to again derive its narrative in the Triune God who is worshipped in the Christian church. This is done, in this chapter by surveying precedents in literature undergirding this project. This chapter spends time considering expertise and thinking: how does our brain work, and how does that lead to what we do and what we are? Next, definitions and perspectives of pop culture are considered. Then, cultural liturgies are examined. This concept is heavily connected to the work of James K.A. Smith. Many cultural liturgies are closely related to pop culture, but there is not definite overlap in all places. Liturgical theology and sacramental theology are examined both in the larger scope of the church, as well in the Wesleyan Holiness movement in which the

Church of the Nazarene is a part. Finally, Christian and ecclesial practices are surveyed from various experts in order to imagine their help for discipling church people and shaping the formational parts of the church project.

Expertise and Thinking

In the previous chapter, we explored the concept of *habitus*, which is our unconscious engagement and navigation of our world. While this emerges from French philosophers, there is intriguing work being done to develop this concept. Daniel Kahneman expands this conversation in his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Kahneman argues that we have two systems of thinking: system 1 operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control. System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations.⁴¹

Kahneman wants to direct people away from simply fast thinking. Fast thinking has its strengths, but intuitions are not always reliable or accurate. But, there are benefits to slow thinking as well and that takes time to develop. While humans are not irrational, we often need help with our thinking skills, because our initial hypotheses are not always accurate.⁴²

This project attempted to engage system 2 in the congregation in order to transform system 1. It would be fair to draw comparison lines from system 1 thinking, in Kahneman, to the concept of *habitus*. They are both, after all, considered “gut reaction” thinking. They are how we have been programmed over time.

⁴¹ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 20.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 411.

System 2 is who we think we are, but it can also endorse feelings that were caused by system 1.⁴³ In other words, we can in our deeper, more complex system 2 claim that we are Christian, but allow our gut reactions of system 1 cause us to behave in profoundly non-Christian ways, all while system 2 endorses such behavior. This problem is the crux of this project.

Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Outliers*,⁴⁴ makes the argument that practice is what makes a person an expert. He tells the stories of The Beatles getting practice in Hamburg, Germany, Bill Gates finding free computer time in the middle of the night at the local university, and hockey players getting special privileges for being older and slightly more physically developed, leading to inequity in rink time. These breaks allow them to practice their craft to greater advantage.

While expertise requires more than just practice, having talent or an interest supplemented with advantageous practice can make one an expert. The body no longer needs to think its way through an instrument or a sport: it now reacts intuitively. Gladwell argues that the threshold for expertise is 10,000 hours.⁴⁵

At this point, we may begin to ask important questions about practicing Christianity. If we want to be Christian at the same level that, say, John Lennon writes music or Wayne Gretzky plays hockey [read: their *habitus* takes over while on stage or on the ice because of intense practice over many years], perhaps Christians need to get serious about finding serious practice time. Were a person to live 80 years and attend

⁴³ Ibid., 415.

⁴⁴ Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success*. (New York: Back Bay Books, 2011).

⁴⁵ Ibid., chapter 2.

church every Sunday of their entire life, they would commit to 4,160 church services [these tend to be approximately 1 hour long]. Such a rough guess would still leave a practicing Christian not even halfway to the Gladwell's threshold of expertise. Even if we doubled the length of services to two hours, we would still likely fall well short of the 10,000 hour threshold Gladwell postulates.

Practicing Christianity is vital if we want to live it at a gut, intuitive level. Worship, I will argue, is the most formative way for us to practice. But even our opportunities are short, if we desire to form our *habitus* around Christian practice and worship.

By contrast, we have no shortage of practice when it comes to our participation in pop culture. Culture is an engagement that is near inescapable, and its formational power is perhaps immeasurable. These cultural liturgies are winning the battle for the *habitus* of Christian people. What we must discern is why these secular liturgies are, or seem to be, so much more profound and alluring than those of the Christian faith.

French philosopher Paul Ricoeur can help undertaking this discernment. Being that the project is much about pointing to the gut, the instinct, the *habitus*, it could feel awkward to address this intangible part of our self by feeding people more information. If I am to argue that our life is lived out of our *habitus*/unconscious behavior, how could this project be effectual by speaking to the brain or consciousness? Ricoeur, while focused heavily on textual hermeneutics, gives a framework that may be adapted to this broader endeavor. He suggests addressing our naiveté in our approach to understanding (like seeing a stop sign and not needing to deconstruct what stop means). At some point, we must begin to ask deeper and more critical questions and this can lead us through a

“desert of suspicion” in a process of deconstruction. However, our suspicion through this deconstructive hermeneutic can lead us to see that the stories, words, beliefs, or practices we once held as self-evident can no longer be naively accepted at face value. This naiveté, we begin to see, formed us to be a particular kind of person. Living with acceptance of this is the second naiveté. This second naiveté is what I attempted to evoke and invite our congregation into.⁴⁶

Pop Culture

Pop culture can tell an incredible story. Christians, in spite of the rich narratives handed to us through our scriptures, seem to have lost this ability. Culture is changing, and narratives that were once the domain of the church in Christendom [sexuality, politics, worship, money, etc.] are now falling into the hands of pop culture. Whether this is good or bad is a conversation for another day, but this is happening, in part, because culture uses images and stories whereas the church tends towards propositional truths. In 1981, Stanley Hauerwas was already accusing the church of behaving simply because “that is how Christians do things.”⁴⁷

Hauerwas convincingly argues that stories are profoundly important in the formation of character. In fact, the character that a Christian seeks to develop is correlative of a narrative that trains the self, within a particular community, to be sufficient to negotiate existence without illusion of deception. There are narratives fighting to shape our character, or as we defined in our opening chapter, our *habitus*. Pop culture is winning, even on that front, in providing character and *habitus*-forming

⁴⁶ Cf., Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967, 351-5.

⁴⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 132.

narratives, most precisely because they are telling better stories, and capturing imaginations, better than the church.

The book that was most helpful in terms of helping solidify my thinking was *Creating Ourselves: African Americans and Hispanic Americans on Popular Culture and Religious Expression*, edited by Anthony B. Pinn and Benjamin Valentin. This book welcomed a white American reader into a narrative that was not my own. In doing so, hearing the stories that help shape the world outside of my own experience, I was able to walk away understanding how my world – and theology – is shaped by stories in my environment as well. Speaking from the Latino and African American perspectives, we get glimpses into how religious and ethnic cultures are formed around family table fellowship in Puerto Rico, music by Tupac Shakur and Lauren Hill in the African American communities, restrictive moral lessons taught to Latina women in popular American movies.⁴⁸ We also see how popular television preachers such as TD Jakes, Bishop Noel Jones, and Creflo Dollar blur the lines between authentic faith and superstition for African American Christians.⁴⁹

Seeing how another culture – that both walks through your world and feels distant from your practices and habits – describes how pop culture modifies and creates behaviors within itself is helpful for a white American because it is often easier to see cause and effect in another culture than it is in one's own culture. Therefore, Pinn and Valentin's work helps us take a more generic look at pop culture – the sort of pop culture that is more regularly shaping my world and the world of those in my local church.

⁴⁸ Anthony B. Pinn, and Benjamin Valentin, eds. *Creating Ourselves: African Americans and Hispanic Americans on Popular Culture and Religious Expression* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 97.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

Tracing pop culture from the flappers of the Roaring [19]20s through today, Marcel Danesi ties together pop culture by understanding it to be a populist movement that is a resistance against the dominant groups in society.⁵⁰ His treatment of pop culture as a serious academic considers Marxist theories of pop culture (specifically the important Frankfurt School⁵¹), feminist theories, textuality, intertextuality, moral panic theories, etc. Each provides a lens through which popular culture may be interpreted. Examples of these lenses include feminist reads of Madonna, Michael Jackson redefining femininity and gender, and *I Love Lucy* hiding Lucy's pregnancy and making Desi and Lucy sleep in separate beds as early igniters of the moral panic theory. Whatever lens through which one tries to view pop culture, it is clear that in our era of history, it is setting the agenda of discourse in our world.⁵²

While pop culture sets the agenda for our discourse with the world, the work of this project is theological in nature; namely, how does the Christian narrative and life work its way into our practices when pop culture is driving the day-to-day narratives, discourse, and life?

Kelton Cobb works through specific theological concerns such as human nature, sin, salvation, and life everlasting. Theology, he argues, can offer a language to speak to a reality that transcends pop culture, and can help articulate what is going on in the depths

⁵⁰ Marcel Danesi, *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives*. 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 73.

⁵¹ The Frankfurt School provided the earliest concerted effort to theorize popular culture. It was a Marxist reading of culture that theorized that the masses had so deeply imbibed the ideology of the ruling class that they were operating out of it and sustaining it without protest. Cf. Cobb, Kelton, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Pop Culture*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 45.

⁵² Cf. Marcel Danesi, *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives*. 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 41.

of pop culture. Cultural artists, he argues, get it wrong from time to time, and slowly learned lessons of theology can help society in those moments. Therefore, it is wise for religious communities and theologians to remain open to cultural markers so that they are prepared to speak in those moments.⁵³ Theology works, then, as a rudder navigating culture corporately through the murky waters of pop culture.

Some will say that theology has nothing to say to pop culture. But one of the profound questions of the 20th Century was: Is God dead?⁵⁴ Science was and is achieving previously unimaginable miracles, war was desolating populations with the push of a button; holocaust disgusted us, among other happenings. Jean-Luc Marion argued not that God was dead, but that an idealized version of God was killed.⁵⁵ As replacement, Craig Detwiler argues through his book *iGods*, we have elevated Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Jeff Bazos of amazon.com, and others to the level of our “gods.” Certainly, their products (Apple, Microsoft, Amazon.com) are cultural liturgies (or perhaps even idols) *par excellence*.

The dawn of the 21st century does not seem all that unlike the Babylonian exile of the Old Testament. God withdrew in order to become present and central once again. What is interesting about the exile is that when the people were longing for God to make things right, to show his power, to lead them back to their land – they filled their time with idols. The story of Shadrech, Meshach and Abednego is a story told precisely

⁵³ Kelton Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Pop Culture*. (Malden, MA:Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 294.

⁵⁴ *Time* Magazine had on its cover on April 8, 1966 a black background with bright red letters asking “Is God Dead?”

⁵⁵ Cf. Craig Detwiler, *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013), 36.

because they were the three who refused to bow before the idol. Even as the people of God were crying for God to reveal himself, they bided their time enjoying idols.

I wonder if the technological revolution is not about “iGods” but idols. Steve Jobs makes for an interesting story (played by Ashton Kutcher!), but as soon as the novelty of the iPhone, iMac, and MacBook go away (for that matter Google, Amazon.com, Microsoft, etc.), we are on to something else. I suspect that what we are in danger of worshipping (and hence being so deeply formed by) are the devices we use on a day-to-day basis. Centering iGods on re-told stories of tech wizards does not make as much sense as asking what their products are creating us to be. While he alludes to this, Detweiler overly celebrates the industrial wizardry of Silicon Valley techies and fails to sufficiently consider how we are being shaped by our gadgets, what worship looks like to creations, or what a god truly is. He relies on the personhood of the Jobs and Gates of the world as necessary as the object of worship, as opposed to nature of how we give of ourselves to non-persons like the gadgets they produce.

Tim Gaines picks up where it seems Detweiler missed out. He helps us see that it is the technology itself that is shaping our expectations of this world. Technology itself, he argues, is neither good nor evil.⁵⁶ However, as it has taught us to expect food during droughts, transportation through snowstorms, and medical hope through failing organs, we have learned that technology helps us humans to overcome natural forces, so that we become the master of our world and can set our own course.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Tim Gaines, “Holiness and Identity in a Technological Age” in *Renovating Holiness*, edited by Broward, Josh and Thomas Jay Oord (Nampa, ID: SacraSage Publishing, 2015), 329.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 330.

However, these are not Christian values. Gaines reminds us that this world of technology is urging us to *create* our identity instead, whereas in Christ we *receive* our identity from God: an identity of holiness and love.

Cultural Liturgies

James K.A. Smith is an educator in the Reformed tradition at Calvin College. It is clear from the beginning that he is tired of an approach to Christian Higher Education that forms people to do what everyone else is doing (living in the suburbs, driving SUVs, climbing the corporate ladder) but from a “Christian perspective.” Smith argues that Christianity is an alternative politic oriented toward an alternate polis, yet what its institutions of higher learning provide is not an alternative to anything. Christian universities still tend to seek to build an affluent and influential alumni just as other schools do – then tags the appropriate line “from a Christian Perspective” – to the work that feels all too much like secular academies.

Drawing from the work of theologians such as Alexander Schmemman, Smith makes an argument for a worship service marked by a liturgical narrative that shapes our worldview. Laying out the formational aspects of hearing the call to worship, receiving and giving offerings, baptism, singing, greeting one another in worship, hearing the word proclaimed, and celebrating the Eucharist, Smith argues that these activities do more than cause people to make a mental assent to a set of propositions, but instead are formational of our behavior, pointing us toward the proper *telos* of Christian faith and life.

As a proper counter-balance to what Christian worship forms – or is aiming to form – Smith takes a look at the modern shopping mall. He notes the giant temple and chapels that each sends both overt and subliminal messages. The overt message is: *these*

items can make you fashionable, happy, better. The subliminal message is: *these items, fashions, gadgets, styles could finally make you complete – the best version of you.*

Smith argues that Protestants have so determined that right belief is what makes us Christian, that we have failed to understand what the shopping mall has come to understand; that it is not our brain that needs to be affected in order to woo us, but it is our subconscious life – our heart – that needs to be wooed. Deep within us we have desires and yearnings that are not simply connected to our brains or thinking processes (he notes at one point the “Secret” that “Victoria” is in on), but also what we yearn for or desire. These passions must be affected by Christian worship if we are to be formed as disciples.

Smith looks at the liturgies of patriotism/nationalism as examples of an alternative kingdom that is forming people better than the church is forming people. People stand for the national anthem; memorize the Pledge of Allegiance (which he notes promises realized shalom, rather than a hopeful, expectant shalom), and watch propagandized movies about heroic national figures (*The Patriot, Lincoln, Pearl Harbor*, etc.). Never do these activities ask citizens to give their all for the sake of the nation, but people are wooed into what they perceive to be heroic, selfless giving of their lives to perpetuating the myth of the nation state. It is we who make the decision that this is noble, and as such, we are not compelled to do so. We want to, because our desires have been reoriented to this end.

Smith, then, calls the church to renew their liturgical work of reorienting our desires toward the Kingdom of God. This is not accomplished by convincing people on a simple cognitive level, but by appealing to their senses, subconscious, and habits through

strong liturgical worship. From there, he returns to his original question of the Christian University. His call is for the Christian University to use its unique communities as a space to practice many formational liturgies – in and out of the classroom.

As such, the book leaves the reader with the question as to whether this book was meant for educators in the Christian University or pastors trying to develop a counter-cultural liturgy that forms people against the predominant capitalistic, upwardly mobile, individualistic narrative their people encounter with each changing of the television channel or trip to the mall. The thesis tells us that the book would be prescriptive for the academy, but the writing seems to call the church to something and then, in an appendix, offer how the University could join in. Perhaps that is the explicit purpose, to invite the academy to join the church in liturgical practices. However, it would have been welcome for a more expansive consideration of how the university, if it attempts or desires to be properly liturgical, could implement his general thesis. As such, the book strikes more as a call to pastors with an idea or two for educators to chew on, as opposed to the suggestion that this book is for the academy.

As a pastor, I found the book profoundly useful and challenging. It is a timely reminder that the world is no longer trying to appeal to the brain, but to the appetites of the heart through liturgical practices. It is high time that the church reconsider what it is attempting to form in those who yearn to be disciples of Christ, and ask whether or not its continued appeal to forming orthodoxy as the end in itself is ultimately actually yielding disciples of Christ or disciples of Capitalism and Nationalism (with a Christian Purpose!) This call to action becomes much of the foundation of the project at hand. How can we

again light up the imagination of Christian people so that they desire the kingdom of God?

While this conversation was pushed forward in his book *Imagining the Kingdom*, it would be hard to claim that this book was as helpful or robust as his debut in this “Cultural Liturgies” series, *Desiring the Kingdom*.⁵⁸ Smith spends the first half of the book summarizing the work of postmodern philosophers (David Brooks and Maurice Merleau-Ponty primarily) regarding how humans engage their world. He argues, convincingly and repetitively that we are not simply cognitive beings. The point Smith wants to make is that just because we have our mind made up or convinced does not necessarily mean that we will behave as such. Rather, he argues that we need to engage our *habitus* – our habits or map of the world our bodies engage and live on a daily basis that cause us to behave at a “gut level.” As such, it feels as though he spent too much time on convincing the reader on a point they likely already will grant him, using dense philosophy of others rather than breaking any new ground himself.

In Part 2 of the series, *Imagining the Kingdom*, Smith begins to turn our attention toward imagining which kingdom[s] we orient ourselves toward. What we imagine the kingdom of God to be, look like, smell like, sound like is vital because that is what we orient ourselves toward in worship. A good liturgy would help us more accurately imagine the kingdom of God. When we properly imagine the kingdom, our *habitus* become oriented in proper kingdom behavior. Smith states, “we become a people who desire the kingdom insofar as we are a people who have been trained to imagine the

⁵⁸ There is a planned third book, *Embodying the Kingdom: Reforming Public Theology*, forthcoming as of the publication of this document.

kingdom in certain ways.”⁵⁹ In order to love Christ and his kingdom, we have to know what this King and his kingdom actually look like.

The cultural liturgies in North America have become so strong that they are no longer even noticed as liturgies. They are simply “the way things are.” As such, Darrell Guder makes his readers aware that North America is now a mission field: we have transitioned – or perhaps need to transition – from the senders to the sent.⁶⁰ The church can no longer expect people to behave in Christian ways, which therefore has returned worship to being a political act. The praise and prayer of worship, the reading and preaching of scripture, the fellowship around the table, and the washing of baptism that initiates new citizens of heaven – all these liturgical acts define an alternative community with an alternative allegiance.⁶¹ As James K.A. Smith notes, liturgy is a “hearts and minds” strategy, a pedagogy that trains us as disciples precisely by putting our bodies through a regimen of repeated practices that get a hold of our heart and “aim” our love toward the kingdom of God.⁶² Therefore, Christian liturgy calls attention to the cultural liturgies by proposing a different reality. When we begin to be formed in this alternative reality/allegiance, we live from a different *habitus*.

Before we turn to that section, however, it is important to note that it is not simply people susceptible to cultural liturgies. In *Torture and Eucharist*, William T. Cavanaugh details both the barbaric regime of former Chilean leader General Augusto Pinochet

⁵⁹ James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies vol. 2. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 125

⁶⁰ Darrell Guder, *Missional Church A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 1-3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶² James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 33.

Ugarte, who after a bloodless coup held power from 1973-1990. Just because a bloodthirsty dictator is unopposed as he walks into power does not mean that he loses that thirst for blood. Therefore, a paranoid Pinochet began disappearing and torturing his own citizens. People would be taken from their homes – disappeared – and returned as if zombie-like because of the deconstruction of their identity and agency through continuous and merciless torture behind closed doors. The Supreme Court declined thousands of habeas corpus petitions.⁶³ The citizens of the country were both watching and watched. This was effective because Power is most powerful when it is invisible.⁶⁴

The Catholic Church was the dominant religion in Chile at the time. The bishops assumed that the church and state stood in an organic and cooperative relationship as twin guardians of the national heritage.⁶⁵ Therefore, the church offered little resistance to the torture of its people because it did not know how to resist. To add to the problem, as purveyors of “spiritual goods,” the church tended to view itself as responsible for the *spiritual* lives of her members, with little conception of any claim over their bodies and material realities.

As it turns out, during these years both the torturers and the tortured were coming to the same table to receive the Eucharist. The church failed to see that torture was an anti-liturgy that it was accidentally endorsing because it could not see the power the state had over the bodies of its citizens, who were also members of the Body of Christ called church. The Eucharist, however, is the liturgical realization of Christ’s suffering and

⁶³ William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 51.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

redemptive body in the bodies of His followers.⁶⁶ It not only recalls, but re-presents – *embodies* – the real presence of Christ.

Because of the redemptive, bodily, and political nature of the Eucharist, torture began to subside in Chile when the church began to turn torturers away from the table – which is to say, excommunicating them! St. Cyprian wrote that Christian discipline was an inscribing the body so as to resist the encroachment of the worldly powers against the church.⁶⁷ The church had forgotten this, but when it remembered, it began to re-member the body of Christ it was called to serve, by laying claim once again to those bodies who feast on Christ’s body and blood in the Eucharist.

It is possible that patriotism or nationalism is the most prevalent of our cultural liturgies. Loving where one is from feels like a neutral, or even laudable, act. However, it easily slips into syncretism or even idolatry. In the United States of America, the context of this work, there is a popular attempt by Christians to declare that the United States of America is a “Christian Nation.” Pastor and theologian Gregory Boyd calls this a myth.

Boyd argues that Jesus Christ died on the cross in order to serve the world with love, not in order to rule the world. In other words, Jesus chose to lose according to the kingdom of the world standard so that he might win by the kingdom of God standards.⁶⁸ Even the chosen language of Jesus – *kingdom* of God – should be a clue to us that the liturgies of the nation-state are in contrast to the liturgies of His kingdom.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁶⁸ Gregory Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2005), 34.

Instead, Constantinianism, nationalism, and violent mindsets of imperialistic Christendom have intoxicated us.⁶⁹ We are wooed by the nation's hymns ("God Bless America," "I'm Proud to Be an American," et. al), creeds (The Pledge of Allegiance), liturgies (parades, standing for national anthems, voting in elections), and saints (Presidents, military men and women, etc.). These are powerful symbols, indeed. The power of the nation's political voice is intoxicating, but the political voice of Christ – the one we are called to take up – is found in taking up His cross, not our nation's alluring power. It is in the "weakness" of a crucified Christ that makes following His political so much less alluring than the powers of this world.

This tension exists even in the development of Israel through the Old Testament years. Moses was interested in forming a counter community to the consciousness of Egypt.⁷⁰ David picked up on this as king, leading a nation to justice and praise over affluence and power. Solomon, however, had a politics that stood in opposition to Moses and David.⁷¹ Solomon led Israel into affluence, oppressive social policies, and a static religion. For Solomon there are no mysteries to honor, only problems to be solved. God had no business, in Solomon's vision of the kingdom, other than maintaining the standard of living as well as the myth that we can live as self-made men and women.⁷² These are politics that the church, again, finds itself suckered into.

The antidote for this nationalistic syncretism is Jesus Christ. Jesus announces a new kingdom where compassion for others, the imminence of God, and self-sacrificing

⁶⁹ Ibid., 90.

⁷⁰ Walter Bruggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 21.

⁷¹ Ibid., 25.

⁷² Ibid., 37.

crucifixion are the new rule. These politics counter Solomon's royal consciousness, and frankly they counter our imagination for how the world works.⁷³ We must find Jesus again in the church, and the presence of Christ is encountered in worship.

Liturgical Theology

A common struggle among many Protestant, Evangelical, Free Church circles is any reference to the concept of "liturgy." Immediately, more often than not, that word and concept is dismissed as "Catholic." This is a fallacy and misnomer, because very Protestant churches such as Lutherans, Presbyterians, many Methodists, and other mainline denominations are "high church" in nature. It is more likely a fear of what is different that drives labeling liturgy negatively.

Yet, we human beings are naturally a liturgical species. Smith's work, in particular, is helpful as we try to expand and recover the value of the word liturgy. We know, for example, to celebrate a moment by memorializing it with ceremony. We celebrate national holidays, the opening of new highways, birthday parties, or college football games with ritual.⁷⁴ Christians find themselves in these formative liturgical moments regularly and declare them meaningful, yet can struggle to see the meaning of similar rituals in worship.

John Wesley, in his sermon entitled *A Catholic Spirit*, notes that "while all men necessarily believe that every particular opinion that he holds true, no man can be assured that all his opinions, taken together, are true."⁷⁵ As differences of opinions necessarily

⁷³ Ibid., 81-113,

⁷⁴ Cf., James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 19.

⁷⁵ John Wesley, "A Catholic Spirit," *The Works of John Wesley: Vols. 5-6*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 495.

mean that someone is wrong and someone is right, Wesley notes that there is therefore no ground to stand on in order to impose a certain style of worship on someone else.⁷⁶ What matters is if there is fruit or evidence of Christ's transformation on people's lives through that particular style of worship. Do you believe in Jesus Christ and is that revealed in your soul? Do you love God? Does your worship cause right relationship with neighbor? Is love shown in your works? Do you seek happiness in Him alone? If so, then the worship is good. Issues of Presbyterian government or Episcopal government, infant or believers baptism, traditional or contemporary worship style does not matter at all in relationship to the sort of Christians one's worship is forming.⁷⁷ A true person of a Catholic Spirit, Wesley summarizes, is:

...a man of a catholic spirit is one who, in the manner above-mentioned, gives his hand to all whose hearts are right with his heart: one who knows how to value, and praise God for, all the advantages he enjoys, with regard to the knowledge of the things of God, the true scriptural manner of worshipping him, and, above all, his union with a congregation fearing God and working righteousness: one who, retaining these blessings with the strictest care, keeping them as the apple of his eye, at the same time loves--as friends, as brethren in the Lord, as members of Christ and children of God, as joint partakers now of the present kingdom of God, and fellow heirs of his eternal kingdom--all, of whatever opinion or worship, or congregation, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; who love God and man; who, rejoicing to please, and fearing to offend God, are careful to abstain from evil, and zealous of good works. He is the man of a truly catholic spirit, who bears all these continually upon his heart; who having an unspeakable tenderness for their persons, and longing for their welfare, does not cease to commend them to God in prayer, as well as to plead their cause before men; who speaks comfortably to them, and labours, by all his words, to strengthen their hands in God. He assists them to the uttermost of his power in all things, spiritual and temporal. He is ready "to spend and be spent for them;" yea, to lay down his life for their sake.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ibid., 496-7.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 499.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 504.

It is in our corporate worship that we live into the eschaton. We grow in expectation of eternity as we worship on earth. The liturgy is a doxological act, which expects us to experience Heaven and meet a worshipful people. This practice of eternity demanded that the Methodist people became so practiced that their life was a reflection of such a doxology.

Wesley's concerns for his Methodists attending corporate worship in their local congregation are more soteriological than ecclesiological. Liturgical worship provides, in his eyes, a spiritual nurture that would be a great loss in his Methodists abandoned the parish. Wesley believed there was a connection between repentance and Eucharist – and as he began to tinker with the Lord's Day liturgy in *The Book of Common Prayer* – he highlighted the celebration of the resurrection of Christ inherent in the Eucharist at the expense of somber penance.⁷⁹ Wesley knew that how we worship forms the sort of Christian life we live as we leave church.

It is in worship that we are most fully human, for we were created to worship – not simply meant to worship in services on weekends. The kingdom of God is realized in worship, and that it gives an eschatological hope to Christians.⁸⁰ Such a hope is formational as we experience the gift of this hope in the everyday world. Therefore, if worship is this important – if it gives glimpses into the kingdom of God – the church ought to take seriously this act. There should be excellence, imagination, and intention in the formation of liturgy.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 205-6.

⁸⁰ Brent D. Peterson, *Created to Worship: God's Invitation to Become Fully Human*. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012), 55.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 202.

If Christian worship is about becoming fully human and expecting the eschaton, worship is also very much about our bodies. Therese Lysaught writes a delightful little article arguing that Christian faith is about what our bodies do, even though we tend to get testy about what the faith asks of our bodies, namely what to eat (fish on Fridays, fasting), how to have sex (within marriage, no contraception⁸²), how often to attend worship (weekly), and so on. She describes this problem as “the new Gnosticism.”⁸³

Lysaught compares the need to train one’s body for Christianity to becoming an athlete, musician, and/or military soldier. In each of those instances, in order to become reasonably proficient, your body needs to be adequately reshaped. She argues, further, that good liturgy shapes – or should shape – the bodies of believers. As we worship, we find our bodies taken into a larger body – the body of Christ, the church. It is participating in the liturgy that molds our body into the larger body of Christ and shapes and forms us. Through the liturgy, then, God takes our enfleshed bodies, connects them to the ministering, crucified, broken, and risen body made real and present in the word and in Eucharist, and simultaneously forms the church and acts to incrementally conform our bodies to that of Christ.⁸⁴ This causes us to begin to model the aspects that God needs from this corps⁸⁵ or team (to push the analogy further) such as faith, hope, charity, patience, humility, bearing with one another, prudence, truthfulness, temperance, peacemaking, mercy, reconciliation, a hunger and thirst for justice and righteousness, the

⁸² It is worth noting that Lysaught is a Catholic scholar.

⁸³ Therese Lysaught, “*Ten Decades to a More Christ-like You!*”: *Liturgy as God’s Workout Plan for the Church*.: *Liturgy* 24:1. November 2008., 3-4.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁵ Note the etymological similarities between *corps*, *corpus*, and *corpse*. Cf. Brannon Hancock, *The Scandal of Sacramentality: The Eucharist in Literary and Theological Perspectives* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), xxiv, 92.

ability to bear persecution, compassion, the directing of all things to the Father, and so on.⁸⁶

What is striking, both in its difficulty and accuracy, is that Lysaught reminds us that a musician, soldier, or athlete does not become proficient overnight. It takes time. It takes practice. Recall Malcolm Gladwell's research and theory regarding needing to practice 10,000 hours in order to become an expert. As such, it is in the faithful repetition of the liturgy by which we become molded into just the sort of faithful follower that God desires and is calling us to be.

Christian worship is the best form of practice that the historical church has passed down to us. Liturgy, according to Dan Boone, happens in five acts: (1) the entrance or gathering of the people of God, (2) hearing the bad news, (3) hearing the good news, (4) the people responding, and (5) then receiving a blessing which sends us forth.⁸⁷ Such a plot would cause a person to consider who we are, why we are gathered into a place like *this*, face the hard truths of life, hear the possibilities of redemption from our struggle, acknowledge both the good and the bad with our bodies, and be sent back out into the world empowered to live the story we have just heard and experienced. Moving through these five acts help us weekly practice and remember the story of redemption which has become our story. Remembering the good and bad news, responding to it, then being blessed allows our bodies to be trained at a gut level to behave like this when bad news hits us in the middle of the week.

⁸⁶ Therese Lysaught, "Ten Decades to a More Christ-like You!": *Liturgy as God's Workout Plan for the Church*: Liturgy 24:1. November 2008., 12.

⁸⁷ Dan Boone, *The Worship Plot: Finding Unity in Our Common Story*. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2007), 11-13.

William Willimon describes this similarly: the church, he says, gathers, remembers, listens and then speaks, offers, gives thanks, distributes the gifts of God, and scatters into the world.⁸⁸ Willimon instead helps us to see what the pastor – as priest – does in order to bring this plot to life. Plot is the description of how a story is constructed. Therefore, the worship blot becomes the structure or pattern to how the story of our life is told. Willimon is concerned that there are too many divisions as we come to the Eucharist, and as such, urges that the pastor should spend more of their energies in order to build *koinonia*. Further, the pastor should be a competent interpreter of scripture and teller of the story of God. There should be evidence of prayer: both for the service and beyond congregational needs.

These pastoral acts are so when the church meets in worship, they are also meeting the living Christ, in which the activity of the church would be sacramental, a means of grace, a human act whereby we sign, signal, and point to the outbreak of the kingdom of God amongst us. From there, all of our congregation's life should mirror Sunday.⁸⁹

“Going to church no more makes you a Christian than sitting in a garage makes you a car,” as they saying goes. No doubt, but if you wanted to learn about cars, the garage would be the first place you would head.⁹⁰ So it is with church and Christianity as well. It is through activities such as interceding, breaking bread, giving thanks, giving

⁸⁸ William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 77-79.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁹⁰ Brannon Hancock, “Corporate Worship: More Than Icing on the Cake.” in *Renovating Holiness*, edited by Broward, Josh and Thomas Jay Oord (Nampa, ID: SacraSage Publishing, 2015), 406.

alms, initiating new members, being sent forth for mission that we are able to learn and discern what is truly Christian.⁹¹

For just such a reason, Marva Dawn is concerned that our dumbing down our worship is going to have a negative impact on the Christian mission to the world. For her, it is in a highly formal, highly traditional liturgical style of worship that we are able to maintain depth in worship. While she may be right, I would contend that there are other ways to form deep Christians than a single style of worship.

The culture of egocentrism of the church that had emerged in the 1990s (and still likely plagues the church today, 20 years later) is likely best addressed by two of Dawn's heavy thematic questions in the book: "Do our efforts in worship genuinely praise God?" and "What type of Christian are we hoping to form by and in our worship?" These questions seem appropriately answered not in style, but in substance and through story.

Dawn convincingly argues that instead of starting with questions of depth such as these, the church has begun to dumb down its messages into narcissistic, self-help psychology.⁹² It has been the strategy, especially in the era of "church growth," to help people parent, self-soothe, reflect, etc. and that this strategy would draw people back into the church. Dawn notes that it is not only not working – she cites a study reporting that in any given twelve-month period 2,765,100 worship attendees in Europe and North America cease to be practicing Christians.⁹³ Those

⁹¹ Ibid., 407.

⁹² Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 113.

⁹³ Ibid., 279.

who are left to this dumbed-down church trivialize both God and neighbor because they are no longer properly worshipping. In fact, it could be asked if God is even the object of our worship at all in this new environment.

To answer this problem, Dawn turns to liturgy and hymns of great heritage. Against the common criticism that they are boring and formulaic, she argues that that is because we no longer sing them well or properly appreciate art in worship – let alone the danger we face of losing the church’s heritage.⁹⁴ Liturgy and a robust hymnody, she believes, is the solution to reaching out without dumbing down.

These suggestions are helpful and strong, and it is my project to incorporate liturgical elements into the Free Church worship that my tradition so loves and is conditioned to. This seems to begin to point to a development that Dawn did not make much space for which is finding a middle way (If I am going to allow her to be Lutheran, she must allow me to be Nazarene). When Dawn argues for hymns over modern worship songs, it is rooted in the need for tradition, yes, but mostly it is an objection to repetitive songs lacking in theological coherency. However, there has been a more recent revival – in my estimation – in worship music. Many songs written since her book was published in the 1990s reveal a strong theological framework (“In Christ Alone” and “10,000 Reasons” take hymn structures, yet are both modern songs with strong theology). Further, it could be argued that working a congregation through Lent and Advent, changing the liturgical colors of a sanctuary, deep, exegetical preaching, and discernment in musical choice would allow a church to recapture depth without becoming strictly liturgical in the strict traditional sense.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 144.

While Dawn makes many a strong point, the question must be asked of her: does she see a way forward that does not look distinctly Lutheran in nature? By that I mean that most of her prescriptions for a failing church simply look like her preferences – this she even confesses! Surely we are all guilty of such, but surely free worship traditions (Pentecostal, Baptist, Church of the Nazarene) have the potential to deepen in their worship without compromising their worship convictions. Little space was left for such convictions in this book.

Sacramental Theology

Sacraments are a central part of Christian worship and the Christian life. This seems to be the place of connection between free worship sensibilities and the historical church: the place for a local Church of the Nazarene to develop a robust liturgical life.

Working through Protestant thinkers such as Luther and Calvin as well as Wesley, Rob Staples articulates a way forward for us Low Church Nazarenes. His work on baptism reminds us that baptism is not simply a memorial of something you have done personally at an altar, but that it has actual meaningful effect: bearing the mark of Christ (for God has a history of marking out his people), dying the death of Christ, living the life of Christ, receiving the Spirit of Christ (which is in my estimation an important understanding for a holiness people), and becoming the body of Christ (overcoming the individualistic proclivities of modern Wesleyans).

Further, Staples helps us see how the Eucharist is the sacrament of sanctification.⁹⁵ This, he notes, is against the revivalist nature of the church that understood sanctification solely as a crisis moment as opposed to an ongoing work.

⁹⁵ Rob Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality*. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991), 204.

Staples' understanding of the Eucharist and sanctification as eschatological is particularly strong and helpful. The Eucharist is a foretaste of the coming kingdom and sanctification will be completed in that kingdom.⁹⁶

Rob Staples' work is helpful for the Church of the Nazarene moving forward. In an era when many of our tribe describe the sacraments as "Catholic" and have little-to-no context or grammar with which to speak of sacrament (or liturgy in general), it is profoundly helpful to look so lucidly and with great detail at John Wesley.

Wesley, who was both a high church Anglican priest and is the theological forefather of the Church of the Nazarene, was a minister who had both great usage and understanding of the sacramental life. Many within the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition are beginning to listen again. Let us hope that the richness of these sacraments are re-discovered by a church that desires to be holy, but often struggles to articulate, understand, and define how. But, it is not solely a renewed Wesleyan vision that will help us forward. Many in other traditions are speaking well on the matter for sacramental worship.

Alexander Schmemmann takes sacramental theology a step further – not surprising since he is thinking through a more developed tradition in terms of their sacramental thinking and practice⁹⁷ – proposing a narrative of life that is built around Eucharistic living. Schmemmann is unapologetically Orthodox, but his theology of Christian living is refreshing and applicable no matter one's theological or liturgical bent. This is a helpful conversation with Staples as Staples is trying to awaken a specific tradition to the possibilities in the constant participation in sacrament, whereas Schmemmann is attempting

⁹⁶ Ibid., 248.

⁹⁷ Alexander Schmemmann was an Orthodox priest and theologian.

to bring robust life to the sacraments for his tradition accepts the regularity of it, but may need a reminder of its significance.

Schmemmann notes that as we draw together communally to worship and gather around the table of our Lord, we are formed in ways that empower us to live as the church both in the sanctuary and in the day to day. We emerge from the sanctuary to live unbroken from the worship liturgy. Our Christian lives are a liturgy, lived for the very sake of the world. Eucharist is missional as well as memorial.

Schmemmann's narrative begins when Christians leave their homes and beds and begin towards the table of Christ where the Eucharist is celebrated.⁹⁸ The movement in cars or by foot toward church/Eucharist was seen by the early church as an "ascent into heaven" fundamental and conditional for their mission to the world,⁹⁹ even comparing our being drawn to the table of the Lord as similar to Moses' standing before God. It ends with a reminder that "a Christian is the one who, wherever he [sic] looks, finds Christ and rejoices in Him. And this joy *transforms* all his [sic] human plans and programs, decisions and actions, making all his [sic] mission the sacrament of the world's return to Him who is the life of the world."¹⁰⁰

He notes that as we draw together communally to worship and gather around the table of our Lord, we are formed in ways that empower us to live as the church both in the sanctuary and in the day to day. We emerge from the sanctuary to live a life unbroken from the worship liturgy. The Eucharist for Schmemmann, then, is the central activity of human life. It is the moment we are both drawn to, from our drowsy state in

⁹⁸ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments & Orthodoxy*. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 27

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

bed, and sent out from into mission. It calls us and sends us, fills us and empties us again, inviting us to repeat. Our Christian lives are a liturgy, lived for the very sake of the world.

Another Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas, agrees with Schmemmann's placement of the Eucharist. He articulates a Trinitarian theology rooted in an understanding of the Greek Fathers (Cappadocians, et. al.). His argument is, not surprisingly, that all being is rooted in communion. Life (personhood), the church, ministry are entities that find their very being in participation in communion. Therefore, his entire ecclesiology is rooted in participation in the Eucharist, for there is not person, church, or ministry without it. The piercing question he, thus, leaves his readers is this: how do we encounter our divisions within the church when we step away from the argument to see that our lives are always given by our common participation in the Eucharist? Both Orthodox theologians see the practice of receiving the Eucharist as formative to the way we both come to and leave the table. This moment is formational of our *habitus*.

While Staples attempts to recover a robust sacramental theology for the Church of the Nazarene – and the broader Wesleyan tradition – that Schmemmann and Zizoulas so readily have in their theological and ecclesial toolbox, the Church of the Nazarene need not look too deeply into its own toolbox – indeed, no further than John Wesley's sermon "The Duty of Constant Communion" – were it interested in re-centralizing the Table into its worship.

Wesley argues while some take so literally the warning of the Apostle Paul to not eat or drink unworthily,¹⁰¹ they do not think of the danger of not eating or drinking at all!

¹⁰¹ 1 Cor 11:27, KJV.

Wesley's counterargument to that mis-reading of the Apostle Paul is that Christians should take communion as often as they can.¹⁰² Wesley gives multiple reasons for this, including: the plain command of Christ to do so in his dying words to his followers,¹⁰³ the confirmation of the pardon of our sins,¹⁰⁴ and the continual remembrance of the death of Christ.¹⁰⁵ Further, he sees this as the receiving of the mercy of God, and therefore should be the desire of the Christian – whom Wesley calls weak – to receive this mercy as often as possible.¹⁰⁶ In another sermon, “The Means of Grace,” Wesley notes that the words of Christ are not bare permission to take the bread and juice, but a command; a command to those both filled with peace and joy as well as those whose remembrance of sins are grievous and intolerable.¹⁰⁷ He appears confident that communion is the very salvific and sustaining plan of God for the salvation of his people.

Wesley concludes “The Duty of Constant Communion” by picking apart the fear of receiving communion unworthily. He rightly notes that such a concern begins with the one making the excuse to not regularly take communion, as opposed to starting with God. It is God who ordained this sacrament, it is God who gives mercy, it is God who forgives, and it is God who invites to this table.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² John Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” *The Works of John Wesley: Vols. 7-8*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 147.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 149 as well as 1 Cori 11, NIV.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁰⁷ John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” *The Works of John Wesley: Vols. 5-6*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 194-5.

¹⁰⁸ John Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” *The Works of John Wesley: Vols. 7-8*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 151-3.

He also points toward an objection common in the Church of the Nazarene; namely, that constant communion abates our reverence for the sacrament.¹⁰⁹ Reverence comes in two forms, he notes: (1) a sense of newness to something or (2) such as it is owing to our faith or the love of God. The first is natural, but not properly religious in nature. The second, he contends, does not lessen our faith, but builds and confirms it.¹¹⁰

It is curious, indeed, that a church that freely labels itself as Wesleyan would find itself in such disharmony with one of Wesley's most famous sermons. The Church of the Nazarene would do well to recapture Wesley's vision of the sacrament as sustaining of holiness as opposed to an emotional experience where we "feel" something. Indeed, looking to "feel" something makes us the primary actor at communion, where, as Wesley argues, it is the work of God that is primary at the table.

Dean Blevins helps us see how to understand this work of God as primary actor, but also the doxological nature of the Eucharist. He focuses on holiness of the self in a postmodern world that, at best, has redefined self and at worst has negated self. Wesley, though he was a modernist, was able to capture the authentic self in receiving the Eucharist, for such a move is doxological and locates the self as a theological construct rather than a social entity. Eucharist, then, gives the church the opportunity to find (lose?) itself in God.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 155.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 155.

¹¹¹ Dean Blevins, "A Wesleyan View of the Liturgical Construction of the Self," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 38, no. 2 (Fall 2003), 7-29. 23pp.

The Eucharist is, quite simply, the most distinctive structure of Christian worship.¹¹² It is so because Jesus modeled it, and because there remains a consistency in how it is taken across traditions, years, and contexts. It also breaks down what pop culture is telling us is valuable. Rather than cliques of the young, happy, and worthy who appear in commercials and ads, all are welcomed around the eucharistic table for their intrinsic worth as members of Christ's Body. Against the mythic structures of the free-standing single family home and invulnerable driver in an SUV, the liturgy teaches us that we encounter and are saved by God together, as a community.¹¹³

Pop culture, on the other hand, has a tendency to divide us into solitary individuals: *my tastes, my money, my choices*, etc. The Eucharist pieces us back together as a community. It also counters the culture of commodification by making us participants as opposed to simple observers. These elements of the Eucharist allow the church to see the connections between coming to the table and every day life. We are bound and called together; we learn to resist the commodification of individuals. It is not merely an act of worship, but a formational moment where we are gathered, transformed, and sent.

Much of the sacramental focus for the sake of this work has been on the Eucharist, as that is foundational to the weekly liturgy on which we are focusing. However, we would be remiss to not think also about baptism – the other accepted

¹¹² James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*. 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 229.

¹¹³ Vincent J. Miller, "The Liturgy and Popular Culture." *Liturgical Ministry* 15 (Summer 2006), 162.

sacrament in Protestant churches.¹¹⁴ It is important that we do not simply see baptism as something we check off of the Christian to-do list. It is a moment where God is at work!

The Apostle Paul helps us with a few helpful images in this regard:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. **Galatians 2:20 (NIV)**

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. **Romans 6:1-14 (NIV)**

Paul sees the symbolism of baptism to be in our participating in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. We do not die to this life, but by stepping into the death of Christ we die to our sins. Eucharist, then, is the sustaining of this moment. We eat the

¹¹⁴ Rob Staples does strong work in explaining how the Protestant movement arrived at these two sacraments, as opposed to the seven in the Catholic tradition. Basically, it comes down to the fact that these were the two sacraments commanded by Christ. There is a sense, among some, that foot washing should/could be included as well; however it has been excluded in most traditions as a sacrament.

crucified body and blood of Christ to continually ingest the death of Christ, which is the death to sin.

The Nicene Creed reminds us that there is one baptism. But we are a people who crave symbols and rituals within our bones, so many feel temptations to be baptized again. There is no need, for baptism is communal. When we see new baptisms in our church, we are called to remember our baptism (whether we can actively remember it or not). We are reminded that the good work that God did in baptism he is still doing in us now. He is faithful to his covenantal work in the water.¹¹⁵

William Willimon rails against the Enlightenment view of the sacraments, which views them as human actions we perform in order to remember God's actions in the past. Instead, he reaches to the pre-modern perspective to remind us that the traditional view is to see God as the primary actor. Therefore, baptism should be the enlarging of the family of God by saving them through their identification with the risen Lord.¹¹⁶ In fact, Willimon argues that there are more burdens on the baptizer than the baptized, for it is our role – both as pastor and people – to disciple the baptized into the faith.

Baptism, lest we forget, is commanded and therefore a response.¹¹⁷ Staples views the New Testament as a template for baptism that ties belief, new birth, and justification into baptism, and sees it as the immediate response. We do so quickly because it is in baptism in which the permanent presence of the Spirit is offered to us in the baptismal

¹¹⁵ G. Michael Scarlett, "Holiness Through Water and the Word" in *Renovating Holiness*, edited by Broward, Josh and Thomas Jay Oord (Nampa, ID: SacraSage Publishing, 2015), 416.

¹¹⁶ William Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979), 150-1.

¹¹⁷ Rob Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality*. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991), 143.

font. Baptism or receiving of the Spirit – Entire Sanctification – is not separate from this initial pledge, nor are they separate from each other at least in Wesley.¹¹⁸ It is the initial work of God toward the sanctification of believers here. God does not go back on His pledge, but it is possible for us to remove ourselves from this covenant.¹¹⁹

Therefore, it is at baptism that we begin to address our *habitus* – our world is made new as we are made new. We have declared a new Lord of our life, and it is the same Lord of the community into which we are baptized! The church, through our baptism, lays claim to our *habitus*. Worship, then is the formation of this reality. Eucharist is the sustaining act of this reality. God is faithful to our transformation; we are responsible to this work that God has done.¹²⁰ Tending to it regularly continues the transformative work.

Christian Formation

Michael Gorman, claims that Paul’s soteriology is best described as “theosis,” a transformation into the kenotic, cruciform God revealed in the cross of Christ. By way of the Spirit, this theosis is how we are justified and made holy. Justification, here, is participatory and transformative. It is in our participation in all that God is that we are made like Him, namely, holy.¹²¹

Gregory Clapper locates this holiness in transformation of the heart. Rather than in generic terms as is usually meant by “heart,” Clapper describes what a renewed heart

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 155.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 149-150.

¹²⁰ Cf., Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*. (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994).

¹²¹ Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishing, Company, 2009), .

would look like when it is embodied. For Clapper, seizing Wesley's vision of a renewed heart is not metaphorical, but actually an observable change that alters one's affections. Clapper seizes upon new philosophical work being done in relationship to emotions and applies that work to Wesley's works that still guide many today.¹²²

This ties in closely with the work that James K. A. Smith, mentioned earlier, has done regarding the formational power of cultural liturgies. Clapper brings a Wesleyan perspective to a similar conversation. While Smith is concerned with what the culture is forming in people, Clapper is attempting to describe what the Spirit can form in Christians. It takes an awareness of the cultural liturgies as well as Christian formation that addresses the affections of the heart for us to move forward in the discipleship of this project.

Much as Smith leaves us with practical applications for the Christian College to improve their liturgical life together, Clapper offers practical applications for helping Christians have their heart renewed. These acts are found in teaching, preaching, counseling, and evangelism. It is in the practicing of the faith that the heart is transformed. In fact, as an example, Clapper updates some of Wesley's counseling questions to: Is your heart marked by love? What about joy? Is your peace a simple lack of conflict, or is it the presence of shalom?¹²³

So, is the church ready for a truly Wesleyan paradigm for ministry? Can we refresh our original vocation and mission in our current global context, while being honest and true to our ecclesiology? Such a move requires new attention to the

¹²² Gregory S. Clapper, *The Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church: Wesley's Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 121.

words of Wesley, while asking if we are still serious about his understanding of mission. Is the world our parish? Do we care for the oppressed and poor? Does the message of Wesley matter or still have a place at the table today (even within the so-called Wesleyan movement)? For Wesley, acts of caring for the poor and treating the world as his parish were fundamental behaviors of the fully formed Christian. Yet, these basic ecclesial and Christian acts appear to be far from the *habitus* of Wesleyan churches today.

If we are to return to better practices for Christian life, we are going to find practices that are rooted in ancient spirituality. Richard Foster offers the church a wonderful gift in describing for it many Christian practices that can supplement the gathering for worship. Alongside the liturgical life of the church should be a devotional life. Foster describes twelve helpful disciplines that can help shape us into the character of Christ.

These disciplines are broken down into three categories: Inward (meditation, prayer, fasting, and study), Outward (simplicity, solitude, submission and service), and Corporate (confession, worship, guidance, and celebration). Foster prescribes these acts as a counter formation to today's desire for instant satisfaction.¹²⁴

Yet, Foster warns those who would care to begin to follow the Christian disciplines. The world of technology and pop culture makes it very difficult to attend to the non-material.¹²⁵ Foster still presses on arguing that the disciplines will lead to an *inner transformation*. He is speaking directly to our theses here in terms of affecting our

¹²⁴ Richard. Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* Deluxe Edition/3rd Ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998),1.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

non-cognitive response to the world, but also missing the point by a bit. He seems to fail to understand that these are not simply inner/non-material practices. They are material insofar as they affect the bodies of those who practice the disciplines. They are, then, formational as Romans 12:1-2 argues: that offering our bodies is a *spiritual* sacrifice. The *habitus* can be transformed by counter-cultural practices such as these disciplines. While much of work is located in worship as counter-cultural practices, Foster is right to remind us that devotional disciplines can also be helpful for the transformation of our *habitus* and its desires formed in surprising ways by the surrounding culture.

Ecclesial Practices

Steve McCormick, in an article entitled “The Church after the Likeness of the Holy Trinity is the Church after the *Missio Dei*,” argues for a Spirit-Christology where the Spirit’s role is not minimized – or even forgotten – as we build an ecclesiology.¹²⁶ Without tying in Pentecost as a new step in God’s history, we are likely to continue governing and doing church as if it is simply another social entity in the world. Against that method and mentality, we shall love, as God is love. Recapturing God’s Trinitarian love (*perichoresis*) will serve as a reminder of how the church shall function within itself.

Darrell Guder pushes the church further by reminding us that the *missio dei* is about the character of God – who God is – and that the church exists because of this mission, not the other way around. Citing Karl Barth’s work (particularly joining him in a call to return to scripture and not simply react to society), Guder wants to remind us of

¹²⁶ K. Steve McCormack, “The Church after the Likeness of the Holy Trinity is the Church after the *Missio Dei*.” *Didache*; ed. Dean Blevins, <http://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/volume-6-2/12-gtiie-mccormick/file> Last accessed March 30, 2016, 2-3.

the shakeup he caused on the church, and seeks to push the church to continue to convert itself into who or what we should be. Such a move would cause the church to be incarnational as opposed to institutional. This would make us more (properly) mission-minded and, hopefully, “successful” in evangelism (*evangel* being rooted in “the good news” as its Greek translation suggests).

The best way to recapture the mission of the church is to worship more faithfully. Worship is when the human pathos (or suffering) is drawn to the divine ethos, the self-giving of God.¹²⁷ It is a doxological act in that we experience the glory (*doxa*) of God descending from above to meet our struggle and suffering that we raise up to God. The liturgy, then, is the vehicle that leads us to this moment of God’s in-breaking meeting up with our offerings. Good liturgy, then, disturbs, breaks open, and discloses a new world.¹²⁸ This sort of worship gives us a foretaste of the glory divine that nurtures the fruit of the spirit, promises to hold the future, calls us to taste and see, to work, and to pray.¹²⁹ This sort of participation with the future gives us fresh vision for how to live in mission in the world in between worship services, formed to deal well with the cultural liturgies striving for our *habitus*.

The project, to be described in the next chapter, will focus on eight liturgical movements that South Portland Church of the Nazarene makes on a weekly basis: (1) Call to Worship and singing, (2) the public reading of scripture, (3) corporate prayer, (4) offering, (5) greeting time/passing of the peace, (6) sermon, (7) response (most typically

¹²⁷ Don Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of the Glory Divine*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 23.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 230.

communion) and (8) benediction. These are the particular liturgical acts/ecclesial practices that we will focus on as being formational of the Christian's *habitus*.

Call to Worship/Singing

When we gather as the church we gather to an entrance hymn, a song that calls us toward who this God is, then we follow it with a scriptural call to worship (a favorite is “Enter His gates with thanksgiving in your heart and His courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise His name!”¹³⁰). This is a time both speak pastorally to the people and let God speak to the people. God regularly invites His people to worship Him in the scriptures; we need to help the people be reminded that that is why we are gathered.¹³¹

Singing has long been a Christian mode of worship. In fact, the Psalms are the hymns of the Jews. It is always stunning to remember, as well, that Christ was being crucified, he was quoting on of the Psalms.¹³² The hypothesis is that the poetic section of Philippians 2 is a hymn that the earliest of Christians would sing in gathered worship. Pliny, a second century governor in modern day Turkey attempted to research the Christians because, in his province, the pagan temples were empty. All he could learn was that they gathered before dawn to sing to Christ “as if to a god.”¹³³ Singing has long been an expression of Christian worship, and it remains central today. Singing also has a way of becoming the theology of the generation that sings the words.

¹³⁰ Psalm 100:4, NIV.

¹³¹ Graham Gladstone, “The Call to Worship.” *Worship Leader Magazine*, last modified July 29, 2015, accessed July 29, 2015, <http://worshipleader.com/leadership/the-call-to-worship/>

¹³² Cf. Psalm 22; Matthew 27:46 (NIV).

¹³³ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1.* (Peabody, MA, Peabody Press, 2004), 40.

Reading of Scripture

Even before the canon was decided, the writings that would make the New Testament were sent and circulated, and then read publicly in places of worship. The reading of scripture is the re-telling of the story of God. The telling of this story is a dress rehearsal of the heavenly vision. It is a foretelling of how things should and will be.¹³⁴

Corporate Prayer

Don Saliers tells us that intercession is a fundamental vocation of the church. We are to pray for the world in all of its suffering. This prayer is to flow from the heart of the gathered community.¹³⁵ When we gather, we are practicing the prayer of Jesus Christ, who is the great intercessor on behalf of the world. As we gather to pray in worship, we join Christ who is already praying on our behalf.

Saliers speaks to four aspects of intercessory prayer. First, we encounter dimensions of ourselves and others not otherwise encountered. Second, it can only be in solidarity with others that we can mean what we pray. Third, we gain a moral intentionality when we address the world to God. Finally, we recognize that religious faith must be lived in the world of power, conflicting passions, and in moral ambiguity.¹³⁶ By praying we see the otherness of our culture, and recognize its pull on our *habitus*. Therefore, this prayer of the people is counter formational as it both calls out the powers of the world, and acknowledges the communities for which it is prayed.

¹³⁴ Jeff Barker, "The Church at Worship," in *Essential Church: A Wesleyan Ecclesiology*. Edited by Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2014), 102

¹³⁵ Don Saliers, *Worship As Theology: Foretaste of the Glory Divine*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 126-130.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 133-4.

Receiving Offering

The church takes the opportunity when it gathers to give back to God the bounty that God has given us. Here, the material becomes spiritual.¹³⁷ Serving a savior who became flesh, the church sanctifies the fleshy and material by asking God to transform our possessions and achievements, the fruits of our labor and the works of our hands, into God's gifts.¹³⁸

Greeting Time/Passing of the Peace

Many of our sources – Saliers, Peterson, Boone, Willimon, Wesley – assert the corporate dimensions of Christianity and worship. It is crucial that we understand Christianity to be communal and not individual. Passing the peace – or “greeting time” in less liturgical churches – is the moment in the service when we look one another in the eye and pass on the blessings we have received. We give one another a blessing of peace. We hear one another's stories and give each other hugs. We notice each other and come to understand that we have not come to worship for *my* sake, but we have gathered together in order to encounter God. This also gives us opportunity to reconcile with our brothers and sisters before continuing our worship and coming to the Lord's Table.¹³⁹

Preaching

Perhaps the most fundamental Protestant ecclesial practice has been preaching. While it falls short of the criteria of being a sacrament, it is often seen as the central act in Protestant worship (for better or worse, right or wrong). John Wesley, receiving this tradition from early Protestants, and seeing its place of prominence in the Anglican

¹³⁷ William Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 79.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹³⁹ Cf. Matthew 5:23-24, NIV.

Church he served, would also see it as an integral component of worship. While Wesley was famous for his evangelistic field preaching, his pastoral preaching focused on encouragement and guidance in during worship services for the growth of congregants' saving relationship to God.¹⁴⁰

Charles L. Campbell locates the preaching event as a resistance to the principalities and powers that the Apostle Paul addressed.¹⁴¹ Campbell argues that these powers are legion [many], the powers are material and spiritual, God created the powers, and the powers are fallen.¹⁴² The preaching moment in worship for Campbell, then, is about exposing the powers and envisioning an alternative for the church.

Campbell does not leave us there, however. He notes that the church must have practice resisting the powers between the sermons from week to week.¹⁴³ There must be intentional discipleship that brings to fruition the Christian life that resists the powers named in preaching by living out the vision of a world redeemed.

Response

The proclamation of the word demands a response. Sometimes response is a call to pray at the altar. Other times (though many would argue that this should be the response every time) response is gathering at the table of our Lord to give thanks with the Eucharist. Still other responses can be participation in separate, creative activities. But, there should be a response to hearing the good news of Jesus Christ.

¹⁴⁰ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 208-9.

¹⁴¹ Ephesians 6:12 (NIV).

¹⁴² Charles L. Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 11.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 141.

Benediction

Worship is never about us, no matter how hard we try to make it so. Therefore, receiving the blessing/benediction is about being sent into the world as Christ's body.¹⁴⁴ We are nourished in the preceding liturgical moves so that nourishment can be shared with the world.¹⁴⁵ Our scattering from worship is the great act of confidence in the power of the gospel.¹⁴⁶

The blessing is, therefore, empowering. It reminds people that no matter how beat down they feel, God is at work on their behalf and in their lives.¹⁴⁷ This is the key moment in taking the formational work of the liturgy, and transforming it into a blessing as we carry out the call to be the mission of God for the world.

Other Practices

One such discipline of discipleship that resists the powers in profound manners is the keeping of Sabbath. This is a fundamental command of scripture, yet a discipline rarely practiced. Walter Bruggemann situates Sabbath as a discipline that says "No!" to the culture of immediacy in our world today. Powers such as consumerism, politics, militarism, education, economics, and violence all demand that we be "on" all the time, acquiring more, protecting more, earning more. Bruggemann argues that these powers cause us to struggle with the first command: that we should have no other God than YHWH.

¹⁴⁴ Jeff Barker, "The Church at Worship," in *Essential Church: A Wesleyan Ecclesiology*. Edited by Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2014), 105.

¹⁴⁵ William Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 79.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁴⁷ Dan Boone, *The Worship Plot: Finding Unity in Our Common Story*. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2007), 65.

This makes Sabbath a vital discipline. Taking a Sabbath is a Christian discipline that encourages us to say “NO!” It causes us to resist our anxiety, society’s coercion and competition, exclusivism, and multitasking. It turns our craving from that which the powers say is good, to what God says is good. Sabbath is an antidote from our fallen cravings and reminds us that we live by gift.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

This journey through precedents in literature lays the groundwork for the project undertaken at South Portland Church of the Nazarene. It is clear that there is precedent in the Wesleyan Holiness tradition and the Church of the Nazarene for sacramental and liturgical renewal. Because of this groundwork for sacramental and liturgical renewal, I was able to utilize the tools in our Wesleyan-Holiness/Nazarene toolbox in order to demonstrate the possible power of worship to form our character – our *habitus* – into the character of Christ: reorienting our desires, our longings, our engagement with culture, and our subconscious responses to the world to be in line with what the Spirit is calling the church to be.

On the other hand, without calling the church out of their naiveté, which often causes them to engage with their culture (and its formational liturgies that urge people to be simple and unconscious consumers of money, food, sex, etc.), it was my sense that the cultural liturgies were winning over our lethargic worship/Christian liturgical habits. A careful engagement of what is forming us (are the cultural liturgies more powerful than our Christian liturgies?) as Christian people helped our people reconsider the power of cultural liturgies as well as Christian liturgical practice.

¹⁴⁸Walter Bruggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster-John Knox Press, 2014), 85.

The church was and is, then, well situated to show how such a revival of the liturgy and sacraments can counterform the liturgies of the culture in which they find themselves. Then, the church will, hopefully, be freed to return to living within their culture – ripe with popular culture – in order to engage meaningfully and see narratives of hope and theological depth within the culture. As James K.A. Smith has demonstrated to us, both pop culture and Christian worship are forming us already. It is when we begin to engage culture through a worship-shaped, kingdom habitus, it can cease to be an "either/ or" or an antagonistic relationship. Instead, our engagements with culture become another place where God can speak, reveal God's self, and further form us in Christlikeness for the sake of the kingdom.

Chapter 3

I Understand, Therefore I Participate

The project undertaken was an attempt to understand the struggle for lay people at South Portland Church of the Nazarene to balance their habitual life while both church liturgy and pop culture are battling for influence of their behavior, ethics, and spirituality. As James K.A. Smith has convincingly argued, the world is filled with cultural liturgies telling us what the good life is and that we can become a better version of ourselves.¹⁴⁹ Even the church, with prosperity gospel preachers and the rise of moral therapeutic deism, have co-opted this cultural liturgy and made it a liturgy of their ministries.

At South Portland Church of the Nazarene, the people often seem to value more leisure time, money, their children's activities, political or charity causes, etc. than participating in worship. An identical congregation in attendance at church two services (Sunday morning) in a row no longer happens because the people are "too busy" (an example of a cultural liturgy we love). This project will call to light cultural liturgies to the church, while measuring the power of the liturgical life of the church. This measurement will be taken in ethnographic interviews of a sample of our church people.

Since I became pastor of South Portland Church of the Nazarene in 2013, I have been gradually changing the worship to include more liturgical elements. One forty-year-old life-long member of the church told me "this is the most Catholic that the church has ever been." This was not meant to be an insult or critique, but he lacked a vocabulary to adequately articulate the changes that he had seen in the worship service. We have done

¹⁴⁹ James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies vol. 1. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 21.

significant work to move into a more liturgically grounded worship service,¹⁵⁰ but with little explanation about why we do this. This project came after a healthy season of allowing people to experience the change.¹⁵¹ Therefore, it should be made clear that this project did not rip the rug from under the congregation. I was told, upon being hired, that I could design the worship service as I saw fit.¹⁵² Overall, the conversations that I had had with church members – especially board members – had indicated satisfaction with our liturgical practices. However, I wanted to interview a sample of the church in order to discern their engagement, understanding, participation, and contentment with our liturgical life together.

Through this project, I addressed the cognitive processes of worshipping. Explanation, in my estimation, was to be key to what I planned to do through a sermon series because experience had already been well in process.

Project Methodology

There were four phases of the project studying liturgy, pop culture, and the *habitus* of the people of South Portland Church of the Nazarene. The first phase was selecting seventeen representatives of the gender, socioeconomic, and duration of Nazarene affiliation diversity of our congregation. These seventeen lay people were interviewed in order to understand their perspectives on their engagement with pop

¹⁵⁰ Examples of this work have included reciting the Apostles' Creed, receiving communion more regularly, changing the liturgical colors in the sanctuary to match the church calendar, and celebrating and observing Lent and Advent.

¹⁵¹ I have been pastor at South Portland Church of the Nazarene for 2 years as of October 31, 2015, three weeks into the sermon series in question.

¹⁵² The interim pastor that I replaced had increased communion frequency, and I stuck with that. Typically, communion is served weekly, but there are times that we have another form of response: altar call, financial pledges (Faith Promise), or something creative.

culture, the perceived stance of the church in regards to pop culture, the understanding of liturgical theology, as well as perspectives on worship.

The second phase was to preach a sermon series teaching theological, biblical, and historical perspectives of the liturgy. It's particular focus was gathering/singing, reading scripture in community, receiving offering, corporate prayer, passing of the peace/greeting time, the sermon, response (especially communion, but also baptism and altar calls), and benediction/blessing.

The third phase of the project was to re-interview the original sample of the congregation (phase one). The same questions were asked in order to determine if there had been any shifts in perspective following the sermon series. Two new questions were added to the follow up interview. These new questions would get at the heart of potential changed perception of liturgy and/or pop culture. Each lay person interviewed before the sermon series was re-interviewed after the sermon series as well.

The fourth phase of the project was to invite more people from the congregation to speak about their perceptions of liturgy and pop culture. There was no pre-series interview, but this was a simple attempt to gauge the perception of the larger community to see if their responses supported the finding of the one-on-one interviews. This conversation happened after the series was over in the gymnasium at our church over a pizza lunch.

Research Methodology

In order to help the congregation put a finger on the changes in the church, I preached a sermon series on Pop Culture and Liturgy. There is a clear feeling, especially amongst the older population, that life is changing rapidly – both in an out of the church.

Life is not the way it once was, and while they cannot always put their finger on it, they felt that life is changing for the worse. On the other hand, we have many people who are native to this “changed” world who have not thought critically about what is simply normal to them. This project will heavily utilize a sermon series to name pop culture, analyze it, and discern the narratives of the culture, while also naming and pointing people to the power of the Christian liturgy as formative to our character.

Each sermon in the project included an exploration of different cultural liturgies in which we participate (especially the way that popular culture narrates and promotes these liturgies), as well as the various elements of the Christian liturgy in which we participate. These liturgies were weighed against each other explicitly by explaining and evoking the formational power inherent in each.

Our church band played secular songs (named later in this chapter) that evoked pop culture images that are the inverse to the liturgical moment¹⁵³ discussed as the theme on that Sunday. An example is “My Way” by Frank Sinatra (cultural liturgies of self reliance, pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, and egoism) being weighed against the liturgical benediction, which invites the people of God to love and serve according to God’s call. The weekly sermon sought to reflect on the cultural liturgy of the song as well as the liturgy of worship, measuring what each is attempting to arouse within its participants.

On the given week that a specific liturgical moment in the service was highlighted, I as pastor took time to evoke wonder or thought in connection with that

¹⁵³ These moments, listed later in more detail, will include The Gathering (Call to Worship and singing), Public Reading of Scripture, Corporate Prayer, Receiving Offering, Greeting Time/Passing of the Peace, Sermon, Response, and Benediction/Blessing.

liturgical element. This was done in addition and in conjunction with the given sermon topic of the week. Therefore, on the week of “corporate prayer,” I spoke for a few minutes before prayer about why we pray like this, on the week we did offering I spoke a little about why we receive offering and how it is an act of worship, which was done over and above the sermon of the week. I did this to ensure a highlighting of the liturgical act so that the congregation was able to engage well in the act that week, hopefully creating more spirited engagement with the liturgical element of service. The goal of this added element of speaking to the act before it happened was to invite the congregation to participate fully and be open to the formative power embedded in each activity so that the participation in the liturgy could be as powerful as hearing about it. The desire was to have people experience the fullness of the act and not simply think about it and make a cognitive decision. This helped people more fully experience the focus of the week and not simply feel as though they are only encountering the liturgical moment didactically and homiletically.

In order to understand whether or not the theses of the project were going to be effective, I organized interviews with a sample of the congregation both before and after the sermon series with their foreknowledge and consented participation. I asked to meet with seventeen selected church attendees who represent the diversity of South Portland Church of the Nazarene.

The selected participants in my project were lay people in my church (of varying ages and years at our church). These people represent different generations, many varying lengths of attendance at our church, ½ male and ½ female, as well as diverse denominational heritage (some grew up Baptist, others mainline, still others as Nazarene

pastor's kids). While it is not perfect in representation, it is meant to approximate the diversity of our regular attendees.

It was intentional that the interviewees for this project were a reasonable sample of the church population at large. It was my intention that there would be members for 30+ years, young [adult] attendees, people with children still living at home, people with grown up children, etc. I desired a cross section of people sampling the demographic diversity of our church. As such, I began with 8 men¹⁵⁴ and 9 women from the church. There were no blood relatives or spouses duplicated in the interview (the closest that I came was interviewing the daughter-in-law of another man in our church).

There were two board members and four spouses of board members in the sample, two members of our Sunday morning worship team, three members our tech team, the spouse of a locally licensed minister (who is neither paid nor assigned on staff), and five people who attended – though did not necessarily graduate from – Nazarene colleges.¹⁵⁵ The group averages approximately 16 years of having been a part of the church congregation at South Portland Church of the Nazarene. The range extends from 1 year (which is tied between three people) and 55 years (which is the entire life of that particular man).

Overall the nine ladies averaged 47.55 years old, while ranging from the age of 32-65 years. The median age of women interviewed was 38 years old. The men averaged

¹⁵⁴ Originally I had 9 men as well as 9 women, but one man became unreachable at the time of interviews due to a job change. This was the only person who was approached to help that declined or was unable to help. However, there are slightly more women than men in the congregation, so the skewed number toward women is representative of the congregation.

¹⁵⁵ There is some overlap from category to category. It is possible, for example, to be a board member, part of the tech team, and a Nazarene college graduate. Each person did not fit into solely one category listed here.

46.88 years old, ranged from 32-62 years old. The median age of men was 48 years old. This is reflective of the adult population at South Portland Church of the Nazarene.¹⁵⁶

Each of these people were interviewed before and after the sermon series as a way to assess their understanding of participation in worship before I addressed it, and then to discern if their opinion had changed. The theory is that they have long held beliefs about how worship should be done, but little theological grounding for such beliefs. They are in their first naiveté – unaware or unconscious to the powerful liturgies that are forming them. Further, I anticipate that they see neither the cultural liturgies they participate in on a daily basis, nor the formational power of the worship services in which they participate. This lack of imagination contributes to the lessening importance placed on attendance to church and the sacraments.

The goal is to bring them through the desert of criticism – an invitation to deconstruct what is forming them when they are not paying attention – in the sermon series. This desert will help them criticize their engagement with pop culture, other cultural liturgies, and Christian worship. The congregation is to analyze the meaning and their participation in worship services and in the sacraments during this phase of deconstruction and critical analysis.

¹⁵⁶ The United States 2010 census describes the citizens of South Portland, ME as having a median age of 39.4 years. 20.4% of residents were under the age of 18; 9.7% were between the ages of 18 and 24; 28.4% were from 25 to 44; 27.8% were from 45 to 64; and 13.6% were 65 years of age or older. The gender makeup of the city was 47.7% male and 52.3% female. Therefore, the makeup of the interviewed people in the church is similar to the greater demographics of the city. The major difference is that I interviewed adults rather than including teens and/or children.

Project Interview

This interview, conducted individually with each of seventeen regular attendees of South Portland Church of the Nazarene, was conducted face to face with each one of the approved and willing members of my church. It was done orally and conversationally so that it is as much narrative in nature as it is quantitative. The selection of people was careful in order to consider a broad spectrum of the church. I was careful to select people who were not necessarily my closest of friends and/or confidants as well as those with an assortment of histories, opinions, denominational upbringings and exposure, political persuasions, and generations. Great effort went into making sure that the sample of attendees was diverse and lacked a bias of any sort.

Prior to the sermon series, fifteen of the seventeen interviews took place in my pastoral office at church. One was conducted over lunch in a quiet booth in Panera Bread where the interviewee admitted to being free to answer honestly (this was done because of a busy work schedule). The final of the seventeen interviews took place in the dining room of the interviewee. The interviews ranged in length from 6 minutes to an hour and a half (the shortest gave very declarative answers, the longest was more conversational and in depth). The average length of this first round of interviews was 23 minutes.

The second round of interviews consisted of fourteen of the seventeen occurring in my office. The other three were done at (1) Elevation Burger in South Portland, (2) Nosh Burger in Portland, and (3) in the dining room of the same interviewee as the first time. Every interviewee was asked if they were comfortable to answer freely, and all were.

Each interview of this round was conducted within five days of the final sermon of the sermon series. The longest interview in this round was 50 minutes; the shortest was 11 minutes (the shortest was a different person, but the longest was the same person). The average length of this round of interview was 22 minutes. This is interesting because (a) there were more questions and (b) nearly every single interviewee indicated that they could not remember most of the questions from the first round of interviews. However, it seemed that the content of the sermon series gave them more information from which to answer the questions from, so there was a stronger sense of competence in their answers. This was most particularly evident in the move from struggling through the questions of sacraments in the first round to more simple, declarative, less-conditional answers the second time around.

I had conversations – both before and after the didactic sermon series – in order to develop strong understandings of the subjects’ positions, histories, biases, etc. as well as any shifts in perception about pop culture, liturgy, and cognitive processes after having taught the power of the subconscious engagement with cultural liturgies and Christian liturgies.¹⁵⁷

1. What is your interaction with pop culture?
2. What do you think the church teaches about pop culture?
3. What should the church teach about pop culture?
4. Should pop culture affect the work or life of the Christian church in any way?
5. When you want to do something relaxing or mindless, what do you do?
6. What is the reason that you attend Christian worship services?

¹⁵⁷ These questions are shown, fully; on the interview sheet I used to both ask these questions of the interviewees and take notes as to their responses appear in Appendix C.

7. What is your expectation for what happens to you when you worship?
8. What are the key moments in a worship service?
9. How often should communion be taken? How many times should one be baptized?
10. What guides your ethical/moral life?
11. How do you nurture that ethical life? What forms your response to the world?

For Second Interview Only:

12. What did the sermon series do to change your perspective on elements in a worship service? Pop culture? The power of worship for transformation?
13. Please identify the degree to which the sermons influenced you versus how much the service influenced you.

Sermon Series¹⁵⁸

The following is a brief outline of the didactic sermon series preached to the congregation of South Portland Church of the Nazarene from October 11, 2015 through December 6, 2015. These sermons served to introduce cultural liturgies in pop culture as well as the formational nature of the liturgical and sacramental life of the church.

Sermon 1: “The Gathering”

Scripture: Matthew 27:44-47/Psalm 22: Jesus recalls a song [Psalm] for theological and comforting purposes on the cross.

¹⁵⁸ This section will serve as an outline for the sake of methodology. There are full manuscripts of the sermon in Appendix A and full lyrics of the weekly song in Appendix B.

Pop Culture Song: “Beverly Hills,” Weezer – The song is about desiring for something better out of life, and discovering that you can’t fit into “better.” The gathering is a reminder that we are welcomed into God’s kingdom...this is not a matter of status, but a gathering by grace]

Christian Virtue Developed: We are welcomed into God’s work, we worship in community, and our singing helps form our theology that influences our life.

Illustrative images from culture: Bars have bands playing every night, we sing “The National Anthem” and “God Bless America” at ball games, Commercial jingles so that products stay with us, early childhood education is using music for memorization purposes, video on how we have come to understand singing as performance, as opposed to European soccer culture where they all sing together about players

Movie scene to Illustrate Theme: *Back to the Future*. Marty sings a song that the people are not ready to hear, but it saves not only his own life, but also alters the life of his parents. The future breaks into their lives and salvages their destiny.

Sermon 2: Reading Scripture in Worship

Scripture: Nehemiah 13 – Nehemiah has the book of Moses read and reacts.

Pop Culture Song: “Glory Days,” Bruce Springsteen – The best days are in the past, and they cannot be recaptured.

Christian Virtue Developed: We are invited into God’s future, but remembering the story of His work.

Illustrative images from culture: *To Kill a Mockingbird* foundational for anti-racism generations, *Animal Farm* speaking to why communism is “bad,” *The Scarlet Letter*

teaching how not to label others, TV and movies the new cannon of culture (such as “The Third Date rule”), *The Breakfast Club* as how gathering together and sharing a common story helps us see we are more alike than different.

Movie scene to Illustrate Theme: *The Breakfast Club* where they all leave detention.

Has their experience changed them? They are left to make the interpretation of what has happened that day with the way they live moving forward.

Sermon 3: Corporate Prayer

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-15 – Jesus teaches us to pray, uses 3rd person plural: the expectation is that we recognize prayer – even when alone – is corporate. This is our Father.

Pop Culture Song: “Imagine,” John Lennon. If you can imagine something better, we can make a better world through our own power.

Christian Virtue Developed: Being prayed for by Pastor or fellow church member, seeking God’s kingdom together, allowing others to be prayed for when our prayer life is often about *my* needs. Learning to pray for others.

Illustrative images from culture: The idea of tweeting or facebooking that “I am looking for your good vibes/thoughts” as opposed to “I could use your prayers.” If you mention a no-hitter while it is happening, it is a “jinx.” Distractions of iphone/ipad: we are always plugged in/always entertained/never quiet.

Movie scene to Illustrate Theme: *Glory*. Denzel Washington is invited by Morgan Freeman to pray, but he struggles to pray...but the community meets his words with good reception, even as they are poorly spoken.

Sermon 4: Receiving Offering

Scripture: Genesis 4 – Abel brings generous offerings to God, Cain is mad about this and God suggests that his weaker offering suggests that sin is crouching at his door.

Also used – 2 Chronicles 31 about the people going back into the Temple to bring a tithe.

Pop Culture Song: “I Would Walk 500 Miles,” The Pretenders – We celebrate sacrifice for love (especially eros), but there is little celebration in sacrificing tithe. We are programmed to sacrifice only if we get something tangible in return.

Christian Virtue Developed: Worship through giving, the concept of enough, sharing, trusting God.

Illustrative images from culture: *Hoarders* television show, Bill Clinton’s campaign strategy that “It’s the Economy, Stupid.” Can our bank statement discern what our idols are? *Sister Act* taking the song “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough” to become a worship song...does the seamless transition show us how we worship things in the world? JK Rowling is first ever billionaire to lose billionaire status because they gave away too much money.

Movie scene to Illustrate Theme: *The End* with Burt Reynolds. The final scene is him in the middle of the water negotiating his salvation from death. He offers half of all he earns, but continues to offer less and less as safety is more and more assured.

Sermon 5: Greeting/Passing of the Peace

Scripture: Romans 16

Pop Culture Song: “Boulevard of Broken Dreams,” Green Day – The chorus goes “I Walk Alone.”

Christian Virtue Developed: Unity, hospitality, kindness, connectedness, community, love, empathy, story telling.

Illustrative images from culture: Segmented culture of the iPhone world, *Reign Over Me*: movie about losing contact with college roommate only to be reunited later in life with him being a hollow shell of himself after losing his spouse and kids at 9/11, the American dream is about gathering stuff for one self, seeking peace in financial security, insufficient greetings that are insufficient (i.e. “How are you doing? Without caring for the answer), the place of the bar in the social fabric, the persona social media allows us to put out there. “May the Force be with you” in *Star Wars*.

Movie scene to Illustrate Theme: *The Truman Show*. Truman offers everyone a genuine greeting of kindness, but everyone around him is acting. They are using his life for financial gain and fame. But in the end, when Truman figures it out the show, people become sad to lose him. They found that they truly liked him.

Sermon 6: The Sermon

Scripture: The Sermon on the Mount – while this cannot be broken down fully, it illustrates how a sermon illustrates an alternative way of living. It encourages the hearers to think of a different kingdom, and how to live in light of that kingdom being revealed.

Pop Culture Song: “Firework,” by Katy Perry – the song is an encouragement to be bright, to be great, to light the sky with your worth. You can be great...tell your story! But here, we tell and listen to the story of God. He is glorified, and we are followers.

Christian Virtue Developed: Proclamation, story formation, hearing the past in order to engage the future, learning who God is.

Illustrative images from culture: Rush Limbaugh is an expert because he has an audience, bloggers, podcasts, open source computer programming, “Serial” Podcast makes a radio host into an investigative journalist, everyone has a pulpit on facebook/twitter, Rev. Lovejoy of *The Simpsons* illustrating how preachers are boring people with boring things to say. *Lars and the Real Girl* is a movie about a young man with a delusion about a fake girl who he thinks is real. The community follows a sermon on love to love Lars in spite of all of them seeing his delusion.

Movie scene to Conclude: *Rocky IV* speech. While cheesy, Rocky heads into USSR and after the fight, he urges the Soviet people that if he can change, they can change (regarding their hostility toward each other). The speech is met with applause indicating that his casting of another vision was well received.

Sermon 7: Response [Communion emphasis]

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 - Paul’s instructions for how to take communion as a response to what God has done for them.

Pop Culture Song: “Bad Blood,” by Taylor Swift - a song about revenge, as opposed to the forgiveness found in the blood of Christ.

Christian Virtue Developed: Forgiveness, action, transformation, building/re-membering of the body of Christ.

Illustrative images from culture: “Pull yourself up by the boot straps,” family dinners as meeting place and sometimes as something to avoid, “the comment section” on articles

as ways to lambaste that which you disagree with, A scene from *The Apostle* where Billy Bob Thornton moves from antagonistic to the church to becoming a convert and part of the church when confronted by the love of God. At the end of *Spiderman 3* Peter Parker forgives The Sandman who was an accomplice in his uncle's death.

Movie scene to Illustrate Theme: *Field of Dreams* conclusion scene – son reconciles with father, brother sees and believes, Ray comes to understand that it is all not just for himself.

Sermon 8: Benediction/Blessing

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:11-14; 2 Thess. 3:16-18 – Why did Paul end some of his letters with blessings on the readers and church?

Pop Culture Song: “My Way,” by Frank Sinatra – Rather than living life in our own way, we are called to go under the blessing of God that enables us to find life well lived in him and not solely for our own gain.

Christian Virtue Developed: Now that we have heard, now go and do, a blessing from God on the lives of the people, sending into mission.

Illustrative images from culture: “May the Force Be With You.” In *The Lion King*, Mufasa urges Simba to look to the stars for help from former kings in his work as king. Actors give blessings of remakes/reboots of their famous roles (Mel Gibson to Tom Hardy in *Mad Max*, Bill Murray to female *Ghostbusters*, James Cameron to *Terminator*)

Movie scene to Illustrate Theme: The final scene in *Lord of The Rings: Return of the King*. Frodo declares his book not finished, and hands it off to Sam to continue writing the story.

Concluding the Project

Using Paul Ricoeur's concepts in *The Symbolism of Evil*,¹⁵⁹ this sermon series worked to bring the congregation through a "desert of suspicion." It attempted to name their naiveté, both toward Christian worship and pop culture, by bringing to light the formational power of liturgy – both Christian and secular. The hope is that the deconstruction done in our desert of suspicion will bring them to a new, second naiveté. A new naiveté – one aware of the purpose and power of the liturgies that they participate in,. But also a naiveté more engaged in the liturgies of the Christian church because they now recognize how formational – and therefore vital – they are to the Christian life. This second naiveté will hopefully influence their *habitus*, for they have faced the their biases regarding pop culture and worship, and decided to move forward more firmly aware of the power of Christ and His call and power upon our lives. From there, we will, hopefully, engage more deeply in worship so because we now understand at a gut level that our life is being formed into the character of Christ in worship.

Having concluded the intentional consideration of liturgy and pop culture on Sunday mornings through this sermon series, I invited the entire church into a time of reflection – both with the interviewees and the entire church congregation at large. It began by having a second conversation with the interviewees. We met, again, as with the first interview. There were conversations in my office with all except three of the original sample group. Two of those three met with me in a restaurant, consenting to the location with assertion of freedom to speak, and with final interviewee at their home. This conversation was to discuss any changes in their perspective following the sermon series.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Ricoeur, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 351.

I wanted to discern if addressing their naiveté regarding why we worship in the way do changed their engagement or appreciation of our liturgical life or their engagement with or understanding of pop culture.

Following the second interviewing of the original interviewees of the sample group, I hosted an after church get together for others in the congregation to weigh in. I provided pizza and invited people to sit around a table together and converse. I prepped my pastoral staff to lead the people who attended in a conversation based on the interviewee questions. Therefore, there was not a public forum as if a town hall meeting. Rather, I attempted to make the conversation more intimate so as to allow shy people and bold people alike the opportunity to share in an environment that was – hopefully – less intimidating. This event was specifically designed to overcome any perceived bias of selected interviewees in my original sample. This was designed to increase the amount of stories and perspectives shared as well as ensuring that the opinion of the larger church would be given voice. If there were people who were angry at the direction I was pointing the church or the work I was doing, they had a clear opportunity to share.

The weakness of this strategy is that I was counting on my pastoral staff to share with me exactly what they heard through their own biases. They were not as aware of the whole of my project as I was, so it is possible that they were listening for different cues and clues than I would have been. They also asked the questions with different diction, pace, emphasis than I would have. They also may have made different choices to clarify the questions in different ways than I would have (though I asked them to not clarify as much as possible). One pastor, who has an M.Div, for example, refused to clarify further

any of the questions because he thought they were clear enough and that his clarification could potentially bias the answers.

The goal was to investigate more stories or thoughts on the matter of pop culture and/or worship. It also sought to eliminate any potential naïve bias on my part in selecting a sample to interview. Because everyone was invited to this lunch, I potentially could not escape negative critique or otherwise unwanted opinion. If someone had a strong opinion on pop culture, liturgy, our church, or the sermon series, they had a chance to be heard “on the record.”

Following the conversation both with the interviewees and other congregants in the church, I developed a strategic plan regarding where the church will go from here. Do we get a sense that we need to be more sacramental? Was the way we were cultivated to worship before I arrived as pastor (free worship, less sacramental, preaching centered) the correct way for us to worship as a congregation in our particular context? Should we more aggressively talk about the formational power of the media we are already consuming? Do regular conversations around the church about the themes of these sermons and meanings of the liturgy need to take place?

These are the types of questions that will help us guide what we have learned, and what that shall encourage us to be as a church moving forward. Further, I imagined ways in which my finding can help the Church of the Nazarene on a larger scale.

Chapter 4

Shifting Engagements with Liturgies

This project revolved around me, the pastor, preaching a sermon series about Christian liturgy and pop culture as cultural liturgy. In order to measure its effectiveness with the congregation, I invited seventeen people from my church into interviews with me before and after the sermon series. This chapter outlines the answers – specifically consensus or trends – the church attendees of South Portland Church of the Nazarene who helped me in the project by being open to interviews before and after the sermon series.

At the end of the interview responses of the seventeen people, there were answers given by a wider population of the church. Those answers, again, were provided by an open initiation to everyone in the church to join me for lunch on a Sunday afternoon. Those conversations were had, however, without me present and answers were given to staff pastors at my church, in an attempt to either corroborate statements of the interviewees or demonstrate variance in opinion of the church in case bias of my selected pool needed to be exposed.

Pre-Sermon Series Interview

Seventeen lay people were interviewed before the sermon series about liturgy and pop culture. In this section, we will examine the responses and thoughts of the laity of South Portland Church of the Nazarene before receiving explicit teaching on the matter.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Appendix E gives detailed responses from the interviews.

This section will narratively point to the trends and highlights of each question asked. The point is not to be exhaustive, but to give a flavor of the conversations I had, as well as the people in my church who are going to hear the sermon series. Each question will be presented in order that they were asked, followed by a recap of what the interviewees told me.

1) What is your interaction with pop culture?

This question got us off to a rocky start. Most people were attempting to prove that they were avoiding pop culture, as if that is what Christians do. Save two or three interviewees, I had to heavily prod the people¹⁶¹ into answering this question. Once I got them moving and thinking, they were able to point to many places in their life that they interacted with pop culture. Certainly, there was an age discrepancy in terms of ease of discussing pop culture. Most all watched television programs (though one only watched the news and the golf channel), all but one had a Facebook account, and most people mentioned watching movies. The most difficult person to admit/trace their pop culture engagement admitted that having grandchildren kept them in the loop of what was popular, but that they did not engage themselves.

There was a host of interesting points of engagement with pop culture across the interview, most of these things being mentioned only once or twice at most: CrossFit, Netflix, YouTube, the music genome, The New England Patriots, reddit, Pixar movies, Superheroes (especially DC characters such as Batman and Marvel characters such as The Avengers), NPR, podcasts, Smithsonian Channel, the Sci-Fi genre, hearing fiction

¹⁶¹ I reconsider this moment in the final chapter of this project, acknowledging that this was a bias that created weakness in the project.

novels on their long commute via audio book, *American Idol* and *The Voice*. There was an older lady – a long time Nazarene – that admitted to reading *People* at the dentist.

One person, short of naming their active engagement in pop culture, simply declared that it was “always in the background.” There was even some conversation about what phone choice they made (flip phone v. iPhone v. Android) and what that says about them (one person declared: “I have a flip phone! How involved can I be in pop culture?”)

There was one person who said “pop culture is basically everything you do.” This would become a strong point in my sermon series. This especially grasps the “cultural liturgies” that James K.A. Smith writes about, that I want to help the church see. One person was able to at least allude to the fact that we are immersed in a particular kind of culture, whether we recognize it or admit it.

2) What do you think the church teaches about pop culture?

If I could recreate the looks that this question got, it would be a highlight of this chapter. Eye rolls, exasperated sighs, stares into the distance followed by short bouts of silence, and outright laughter. There were also some that looked at me as if they were discerning if they could trust me with their truth.

There were three basic camps of how people responded, none of them overtly positive: (1) the church teaches nothing, (2) the church teaches avoidance, and (3) the church prepares you to deal with a dangerous world that is evil and bad. Those who grew up in the church recollected the message of the music being bad.¹⁶² Many recollected their teenage years being filled with warnings that the world was dangerous. One person expanded on the “dangers” to note that there is a heavy emphasis on the sexualization of

¹⁶² I remember being a small child when the teen group loved *Guns 'N Roses*. I can still hear the adults talking about their fear of the eternal destiny of their youth group.

pop culture. This person also mentioned profane language as a reason they were instructed to see culture as evil or bad.

There was one person who pointed to the very binary way in which the church has spoken about the culture: good and bad. There has rarely been space for a spectrum. The church has tended to teach in terms of the poles of good and evil.

One person mentioned that we do not hear anymore what creates us to be who we are. They rooted this in needing warnings of what is good and bad; however, the thesis of what they were getting at is productive. Our engagement in culture is shaping and formative. We are not becoming anything – secular or religious – in a vacuum. We are very much formed by the communities we live in, narratives we subject ourselves to, and the messages we are receiving.

3) What should the church teach about pop culture?

This question was met with another quiet pause. Perhaps it was that a pastor had never asked them, before, what the church should be teaching? Perhaps they had never thought about what the church should be teaching, because the church typically positions itself as an authority (especially my ex-Catholics have been conditioned this way, but the long time Nazarenes have a bit of this history, too).¹⁶³ Eventually, the interviewees would get talking, though they struggled with the nature of the question.

There were two respondents that pushed for relevance in the church. They want the church to be relevant, and they want to be freed to be relevant to the world. One person

¹⁶³ Shortly before my project I did the funeral of a longtime member of South Portland Church of the Nazarene [name omitted for lack of permission]. He told me days before his death that his one regret was being too tough on his children: “no dances, no movies, in church every time the building was open. It was all too much,” he said. He indicated he enforced these rules simply because the church told him to do so.

wanted to engage pop culture in order to learn how to be “salt and light” in the world.

One person explicitly declared that the teaching of the church should be to “be on your guard!” This person represents the old days of the Church of the Nazarene where warnings of the culture came from the pulpit regularly.

Perhaps most interestingly, and certainly most overwhelmingly, no fewer than seven declared that, in some way, that they desired to be shaped to live in this world. They hoped that they could have their own discernment evoked so that they could make informed Christian decisions. It was clear that they did not want to live under a strict set of rules (i.e. “do this, don’t do that”), but rather they wanted to condition themselves to make “holy decisions” while living in this world.

4) Should pop culture affect the work or life of the Christian church in any way?

I addressed this question to the people because I wanted to see what connections they could/would make. We live in a world with churches that have laser shows on Sunday morning. Our music sounds strikingly similar to our local FM Christian radio stations. Pop culture, for better or worse, has an effect on how churches worship and exist. Further, I expected that there would be some who would use this time to lament the changes in the church, and to name them as culturally, as opposed to theologically or ecclesiologically-driven. Really, neither happened. There was more of a resignation to the changes in the church and, therefore, the need for pop culture to say something to the church.

One person acknowledged that we do not live in a vacuum, and that sort of tone permeated the interviews. “Social media is a viable usage for the church.” “We are all

living in pop culture and it is all around us, how could it not affect us?” “Understanding pop culture better prepares us, as Christians, for everyday situations.” These are examples of the responses.

Two people situated the need for pop culture in the church in evangelism. They knew that they needed to understand the world we live in if we are going to reach people, especially those immersed in pop culture (these were not among my younger interviewees, interestingly).

Only one person offered a sort of warning in their affirmation. They declared that pop culture should never change or affect doctrine.

5) When you want to do something relaxing or mindless, what do you do?

One of the major theses of this paper is that our behaviors and character are often defined by our habitual actions: the way we act and react without even thinking. These are formed by our liturgical life. I wanted to gauge what sense the people had for what they do without thinking. Then, I also wanted to get an understanding of what was formational to my people when they felt that they were disengaged. My sense was that there would be significant engagement with pop culture during these times of disengagement or conscious decisions to do something they consider “mindlessness.”

Not surprisingly, ten people indicated that what they do is on a screen (ranging from television, to computer, to iPad, to internet). There is a significant sense that who we are becoming is driven by our time watching programming, playing video games, social networking, etc. Our personhood is increasingly extended by our technologies.

There were other answers that were more traditional: reading books, playing golf, sitting in the back yard or by the lake, cooking, and sleeping. Overall, people were

neither defensive, nor embarrassed by their answers, save those that mentioned Facebook. It seemed that “wasting time” on Facebook understood was socially unacceptable, even though all but one of the seventeen interviewed have a Facebook account.

6) What is the reason that you attend Christian worship services?

There were nine people who pointed to the social/communal dynamic of worship. This was certainly well beyond my expectation. Three people rooted it heavily in it being their space and time to learn about God. Perhaps surprisingly, only three people named the music or the sermon as their reason to come to church.

Three people indicated that they attend church simply because it is what you are supposed to do. There was, for them, little reason to attend beyond duty. One such person, almost with a “well, duh!” attitude, said simply “because I am Christian.” Another indicated that it was a “sixty year habit.”

While these answers were helpful in terms of understanding the habitual nature of attending to worship, these answers were not able to connect the habitual nature of their worship to an understanding of Christian formation. My sermon series would attempt to make that connection more concrete. The goal is to connect attending worship services to the formation of our behavior and life into the character of Christ, as opposed to consumerist mindsets into which cultural liturgies are trying to form us.

7) What is your expectation for what happens to you when you worship?

This is the point where my research and sermon series really begins to come into focus. My hope is to help the congregation see how worship is forming who they are in Christ, over and against the cultural liturgies of pop culture that are unwittingly forming them. My suspicion is that the average churchgoer does not think much of what forms

them. They likely have a vague sense of right or wrong, or that their formation happened in childhood. I hoped through this project that they would see that liturgical practices of all shapes and sizes continue to form them, and that specifically we should desire for our worship to be liturgy that most fully forms us.

Interestingly, four people argued that you should have no expectations for worship. Their comments are rooted in a spirituality that expects God to set the agenda. While this is a reasonable answer, it sets the agenda for the sermon series I preached which argues that we should expect God to form us through worship.

Two people spoke of desiring to feel or experience God. The rest of the answers were rooted in a sense that they wanted to hear from God, learn about God, or pause in the presence of God (especially in reaction to the busyness of life).

Not surprisingly, but interestingly, not one person mentioned formation of Christian spirituality, habits, or affections. There was little sense that worshiping is making us into a particular kind of person. Instead, worship is more often situated as something that makes you experience, think, or devise a plan to put God into your life via Christian disciplines, thinking, or restructuring. In other words, worship seems to be for most of the interviewees a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. Preferably, I would have liked them to see worship as the point of the Christian life; that we are created to worship.

8) What are the key moments of the worship service?

The sermon series of this project focused on eight parts of the liturgy: Entrance (singing/welcome/call to worship), scripture reading, corporate prayer, receiving offering, greeting time, sermon, response (especially communion), and benediction. These are the

eight regular parts of our liturgy at South Portland Church of the Nazarene. This question sought to ask the people what they sensed happens in worship, and which parts are the most important or key in their understanding of worship.

Music and sermon were the most mentioned “key” part of worship with nine different respondents pointing to it. One person, however, said you could throw the music out and they would be content (note: this person is not a malcontent over style change). Interestingly, very few people mentioned one or the other, but rather both as the key acts of a worship service. This pointed to a sort of narrative that coming to worship is singing and hearing a sermon.

Other answers that showed up three or less times were: arrival, hearing scripture read, communion, the Holy Spirit taking over, altar calls, testimonies (which was lamented that “we don’t do them anymore”), the way the service ends, corporate prayer, and when someone goes to the altar.

9) How often should communion be taken?

Only one person said every Sunday. The closest anyone else came was suggesting that it should be taken “every other week to once a month at least. More often is ok” and “as often as possible, but at least once a month.” Every other answer was at least every other week or less regularly, with the most common answer being once a month.

Other answers were often rooted in communion’s meaningfulness, where they were the judge and jury of its meaningfulness. The most commonplace answer was a sense that taking communion too regularly diminishes its importance. One person even pointed to the Catholics, specifically, and noted their perceived lack of spirituality as a reason to not take communion too regularly lest it become “mindless.”

I was prepared for this to be the answer – in spite of the fact that our church had been taking it almost weekly for nearly three years through two pastorates. In spite of my preparedness, I became weary and frustrated asking this question through the first interviews. I attempted to be composed, to the point that the interviewees did not sense my frustration with their answers. While no one mentioned my response or demeanor, I am unsure if I came off as calm and unbiased as I wished.

10) “How many times should one be baptized?”

This question was a designed follow-up to the communion question. This was to get a further sense of the lay perspective on the sacrament. Once again, only one person answered in the way that I would, “once.” Many others said, “ideally once,” or “once unless their walk calls for it¹⁶⁴,” or “a minimum of once.” There was an overwhelming sense that the interviewees thought that once was the amount that it should be, but that there were many qualifiers – backsliding, preference, feelings – that could lead a person the baptismal font more than once. In fact, 16 of the 17 saw reasonable qualifiers to bring a person back to baptism. Reading between the lines, this is because they see the baptized as the primary actor in baptism, as opposed to God being the primary actor in the baptism. Sin, circumstance, mistakes and having a past are all things that seemingly and potentially invalidate a prior baptism.

Two people went out of their way – out of the purview of this question – to mention that babies should be dedicated. This is perhaps especially interesting in our

¹⁶⁴ While the interviewee doesn’t see it, at least initially, this is rooted in an individualistic understanding of Christianity. Work needs to be done, moving forward, in helping the church (local and global) in seeing the communal aspect of baptism, as well as acknowledging God as the primary actor in baptism as opposed to the baptized as primary actor.

church because on multiple occasions (at least three) children have asked our Children's Pastor to baptize them. Each time the parents overruled the child's desire to be baptized. The reasoning has, without fail, been that they have not sinned enough for baptism to be a choice of following God or a life of sin. This further gives a sense of what baptism means in our community (right or wrong). Baptism is seen as a cleansing of personal sin and dedication to God. There is little understanding of original sin or prevenient grace in the equation.

11) What guides your ethical/moral life?

Ethics and morals are the principles that govern a person or group's (US citizenship as an example) behaviors. Because this project is explicitly attempting to discern and display the connection between exposures to liturgies (cultural liturgies and Christian worship liturgies) and behaviors, it was important to ascertain what people sense is forming their ethics and/or morals.

Not one person made an explicit connection to worship specifically forming their morals, but many made a connection to their Christian faith more broadly. The question is: what part of the Christian faith is making you this way? Was it Sunday School as a kid? Is it birthed out of continued devotional study? Was it an accidental occurrence of you being born into a Christian house? This is a question, given another chance to re-write the interview, that I would explore and probe further. In the meantime, there were still some substantive answers to this question.

Only three responses were not explicitly rooted in their Christian faith. Implicitly, it could have been there (i.e. "the way I was raised" can refer to "I was raised in a Christian family,") but the connection to Christianity was not made explicit in these

three. However, only one rooted their ethics in their natural self. This person, who was not raised in a Christian home, said that they “always had a strong moral compass” and was “always afraid to end up on the wrong side of bad decisions.” This, he maintains, was not changed upon conversion to Christianity.

Seven people rooted their ethics in past occurrences, either in family dynamics as a child or in their upbringing in church. This indicates a strong sense of moral foundation being rooted in our childhood and adolescence.

Two people cited the old acronym W.W.J.D. (what would Jesus do?). While I had dismissed this as a fad, these two people immediately cited it as the answer. Imagining how Jesus would behave in given scenarios in their life was clearly a guiding and manageable ethic to these people.

The lady who is a grown (late thirties) child of a Nazarene pastor cited the Wesleyan Quadrilateral as a guiding ethic. Another cited how Jesus had affected his small business practices (honesty in pricing, hard work, fairness, quality). Two people cited scripture, one person pointed to the teachings of Christ, and another person argued that their upbringing in a military family dovetailed with their Christian ethic.

12) How do you nurture that ethical life? What forms your response to the world?

Having navigated the interviewees understanding of where their ethics/morals come from, I wanted to understand how they keep their ethical/moral life sharp. This is the part where I hoped that worship would begin to make an appearance. Five people made a direct connection between their church attendance and nurturing their ethical/moral behavior. Only one person specifically mentioned that worship was nurturing (i.e.

worship was the specific act in the life of the church that nurtured their ethical/moral life).

Others cited Christian friends, small groups, daily quiet times, submission to authority, listening to other Christians, and prayer. Parenting was even mentioned as a discipline that has nurtured them. Another simply indicated that it could be because they are the oldest child in their family.

Only one person confessed that they felt that they were in an unalterable state. They didn't see how much would swerve them from who they are at this point. One other person, as an interesting aside, used this moment to simply confess that they struggled to read the Bible. I got the sense from them that they felt that that was how a Christian was specifically supposed to nurture themselves, but that it was hard, as a discipline, for them to thrive.

Overall, the initial interview unveiled a few things about the people I interviewed. First, they lacked a general understanding of formation: what was forming them, how they were formed, etc. They also had individualistic attitudes toward the sacraments, as if these things are done solely to describe or improve *their* personal relationship with Jesus. Finally, they did not see their engagement with pop culture without prodding. With a little prodding, they were able to list engagement after engagement. How much is pop culture narrating their life and shaping what they love if they aren't even consciously aware of how much they participate in and, therefore, are formed in some way by pop culture?

Sermon Series

Following the interview, all of which were completed before the first sermon in my series, I preached a sermon series looking at the formational power of pop culture as well as the formation power of worship. The transcripts of this series are available in Appendix A.

Follow Up Interview

Roughly two months after the original interview, during which I preached weekly on our habitual formation, cultural liturgies, pop culture, and worship, I re-interviewed the same seventeen attendees of South Portland Church of the Nazarene. I re-asked the same seventeen people the same twelve questions, plus two new questions. This repetition of the same questions was to gain a sense of how people were affected by the sermon series and how their views might have changed at all.

The question at stake is whether a local church is capable of a second naiveté regarding their participation of worship and whether or not that naiveté is able to affect our *habitus*. Or, stated differently, can the people of the church relearn the value of Christian liturgy in forming us to be a Christian people in a world that has its own counter-liturgies battling for the core of who we are.

The following is the results of the second interview:

1) What is your interaction with pop culture?

Content of the second interview: The overwhelming response was that there was little difference in the amount of interaction with pop culture. However, there was a growing sense that they needed to be more aware of what was happening in their interaction.

Three people, for example, mentioned that they listened to the lyrics of their music more carefully now.

Two more people came to realize how inundated with pop culture they are now, their awareness of it increased. One middle aged male, a parent to a teenager and an elementary aged child, shared with me that they thought pop culture was a particular kind of music when this project began (think: Katy Perry, Taylor Swift, Justin Bieber), and now they are aware that it encompasses so much more and drives so much of the world around them,

Reflections from the second interview: It had been my intention to help our congregation to both see the saturation and formational power of pop culture. There were some in our congregation who were cognizant of the role and influence of culture in their lives from the first interview (these folks trended younger, but not necessarily so. Some of our younger people were admittedly oblivious and some of our older people were keenly aware of their participation in pop culture).

Any movement that seems to have happened has come in terms of more thoughtful engagement with culture. Having deconstructed mostly benign songs¹⁶⁵ during the sermon series, the people began to become aware of subtle messages in the culture that are inconsistent with the Christian narrative.

There are a few, still, who feel mostly that there are dangerous messages in pop culture and that they will attempt to avoid it at least in terms of music, movies, and television, more or less. This is more evident in the answers to the next question.

¹⁶⁵ And by that, I mean songs that were without swearing or heavy sexual content.

My attempts in the series to demonstrate movie narratives that align with the Christian narrative does not seem to have been as successful as the deconstruction of music. I wonder if this is because we were trained in church to be scared rather than to be inspired or hopeful, and that “old” teaching is still dominating our outlook.

2) What do you think the church teaches about pop culture?

Content of the second interview: One person answered “young and old alike have heard that we are naïve.” This was not meant to be a slam on me, nor the congregation. They heard it. There were many in the congregation who came to me on the week we played Frank Sinatra’s *My Way*, and suggest that they had never thought of that song as opposed to Christian submission to God. They were struck by how they saw that the song was indeed concerning in light of the call to holiness, dying to self, and living according to the call of Christ.

There were some in the congregation that emerged from the series still thinking that the church, at large teaches that pop culture is bad. One person alluded to Jesus’ prayer in John 17:16 that we should be “in the world, but not of the world.”

Nearly every answer received had a qualifier of some sort attached to it. “The church *used* to teach that pop culture was bad,” “we were taught that it was us versus them, *but* we need to look at how it affects our walk with God,” “It may not necessarily be bad or evil *but* pay attention.” There is a real sense that grew among the interviewees that we need to be discerning of the themes with which we are inundated.

Reflections from the second interview: There is definitely a sense that the church teaches avoidance, at worst, and discernment, at best, when it comes to engaging pop

culture in most people's experience. Either way, the interviewees have gotten the impression from the church over their life that pop culture is bad.

I have tried to teach that it is both unavoidable and wide in breadth. It is not inherently bad, but sometimes the messages that alter our Christian life are subtler in nature (for example, the aforementioned *My Way* by Frank Sinatra). Therefore, a major theme was trying to help our people engage the culture in which they live. I wanted to help them see that Christ can be seen in unexpected places, and that that could be as edifying as pop culture can be destructive.

It would be hard to say that the latter objective was overtly achieved. There is a strong sense here that seems to indicate that they still have reservations about pop culture, even as they admit they participate in it. However, headway was made in terms of people desiring to engage the content in the forms of media and culture in which they participate.

3) What should the church teach about pop culture?

Content of the second interview: The answer that I was looking for, and received verbatim from an interviewee was that the church should teach, "pop culture unconsciously affects us." Nearly every interview discussed the overreaction of past years, and sensed need develop a more moderate sense of how to live in the world. Simply ignoring has not been successful or helpful. One person even went so far as to suggest that the church teach, "pop culture is not a dirty word."

Certainly, this question was not met with the uncomfortable silence of the first time. People were ready to talk, and had ideas. Overwhelming the interviewees indicated that they need help and inspiration for living as a Christian in this world inundated with pop

culture. Phrases like “we cannot put our heads in the sand” or that we “need to be critical consumers” are illustrative of this desire.

There were still two people who rooted their answer in classic reservations of pop culture. One suggesting that it was the church’s role to help people understand what is “happening out there.” Another person called pop culture an “idol that demanded obedience.” There were also two people who couched their answer in relevance. Engaging pop culture keeps the church relevant and helps make it relevant to people.

Reflections from the second interview: This question was their chance to sound off. While the last question was a reflection of what they have been told, this question was their opportunity to speak back to the pulpit and tell the church what it should be teaching. They took the opportunity far more readily this time than during the first interview.

I was concerned by the use of the word “relevant” in the answers to this question and the next. I never once used that word in teaching, and it certainly was never a theme. This likely demonstrates two things: (1) it is not solely the church that is formulating the vocabulary and imagination of our people, and (2) while bygone eras of the American Holiness and Church Growth movements are no longer the dominant shaping forces in the church, there is still a residue of their influences in the church. For example, where is there another institution attempting to be relevant? It is hard to imagine people working on a Miley Cyrus album wondering if it will be relevant? I doubt there are meetings at MTV, TMZ, or BuzzFeed asking if their content is relevant. They are the agenda and trendsetters. Asking how to be relevant is a sure sign that you are a reactionary organization and not one that is defining anything.

4) Should pop culture affect the work or life of the Christian church in any way?

Content of the second interview: Every single interview answered affirmatively.

Eleven of those affirmations to this question were rooted in relevance to the unchurched or evangelism capability. Two people were particularly concerned that, while pop culture should affect the church, doctrine should lead the way.

One person answered in the affirmative – that pop culture should affect the church – but only insofar as that it teaches the church “what not to do.”

Reflections from the second interview: There was universal agreement that pop culture should affect the church, but little reflection on how or why outside of “relevance.” It seems to me that pop culture has had the clearest effect on the musical portion of Christian worship. However, it is fascinating that, while people tended to note that the church teaches to be discerning of pop culture, not one person thought that it should not affect the church at all. That seems baffling.

5) When you want to do something relaxing or mindless, what do you do?

Content of the second interview: Not one person changed their answer substantively from the first time we interviewed. Answers still revolved around recreation, golf, screen time, and reading.

Reflections from the second interview: I made the argument many times, in the sermon series, that we make most of our decisions mindlessly – or at least without much cognitive strain. The example I used was that when we go to open a door we do not deconstruct the concept of handle or wonder how the door mechanism works. We grab the handle and walk through. There are more important things to be actively thinking

about. We intrinsically, at a gut level, understand how to navigate our world. Most all of what we do is mindless – and we engage our world in just such a manner. And, as such, we are often formed by cultural liturgies without even thinking through how we are being inundated with messages. I talked about James K.A. Smith’s likening of the mall to a modern day temple.

No one overtly made that connection here. Perhaps the question could have been asked differently, but people only saw mindlessness and relaxation in terms of activity. Therefore, with most people’s answers remained similar or identical, this question did not prove helpful.

6) What is the reason that you attend Christian worship services?

Content of the second interview: The first time this question was asked, the answers were heavily rooted in a community dynamic. There were still seven people who made mention of the communal life at church, but the major thrust this time was more heavily rooted in a need to worship. One person noted that worship nurtures “your relationship with Christ and it flows out to people worshipping him.”

Eleven people, in all, mentioned worship as the reason they attend church (some mentioned the communal aspect and the worship both as reasons). In different ways, five of these people pointed to worship as formative to the way that they live.

Reflections from the second interview: There was still a sense that worship is “for me” in these answers. “I need to be with other believers.” “Worship uplifts me.” However, we began to make a movement in the right direction. Some people began to pick up on the essence of worship as formational, as well.

There was a startling lack of understanding worship as inviting us into the presence of God (breathing in) so that we can be sent back into the world as partners in God's mission (exhaled).¹⁶⁶ However, it would be fair to note that that is a fairly dense theological construct that I presented only once in the sermon series.

7) What is your expectation for what happens to you when you worship?

Content of the second interview: Eight different responses were rooted in God meeting them, speaking to them, or that they would feel God. This was by far the most consistent response. The second most common response was a tie between that “not coming with any expectations” (which was down from four in the first interviews to three this time) and “hoping to be challenged in a new way/with a new perspective.”

In spite of missing any sense of mission in the previous question, one person here said that they sought inspiration in worship to minister “comfortably.”

Reflections from the second interview: Similar to question number six, the answers here are “me”-centered. I would grant that the wording of the question might have lent itself to this sort of answer; however, the sermon series spoke at length – we even focused on this as thesis in the sermon series – about the formational power of worship; that we are formed through the liturgy to be Christian. While there are some answers that hint toward a doxological experience where God's presence descends on the gathered church and we respond with our praise, the overwhelming response is rooted in a seeking of right feeling. While this is not wrong, it is clear that there needs to be a refocus on balancing right feeling with right belief and right action.

¹⁶⁶ Peterson, Brent D. *Created to Worship: God's Invitation to Become Fully Human*. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012), 200.

The perfect example of this is the respondent who is expecting God will make him inspired to minister comfortably. That is rooted in feeling good about the Christian life, but the mission God has called us to can lead to martyrdom. A strong orthodoxy and orthopraxis would help him be aware ministry does not come with comfort, but with the call of God and the selfless response of his worshipping people.

8) What are the key moments of the worship service?

Content of the second interview: Two people made any attempt to recite the eight parts of our worship service that we had just talked about. Both were able to name seven parts, both also missing the public reading of scripture. Two people did not attempt to mention all eight of the parts, and simply said: “they are all key moments, each has a point as you mentioned in your sermons” and “all the ones you talked about.”

There was a small smattering of mentioning communion, prayer, scripture, response, but the heavy emphasis was on music and sermon. Some mentioned both, as if church were a dualistic enterprise (music and sermon). Others mentioned the one that meant more to them (music or sermon). This indicates that there was not much movement in people’s response in this question.

Not many people mentioned offering; however, since the sermon where offering was rooted in worship as opposed to simply paying the bills, there has been a noticeable increase in giving at the church.

Reflections from the second interview: I had hoped to combat the “worship is music and the sermon” understanding in the church. I did this by breaking each of the eight weeks up into highlighting a liturgical act that was part of the larger narrative we were involved in on a week-to-week basis. The hope was that our people would see why

we do what we do in a worship service by casting a vision for how each act of worship counter-narrates who we are and whose we are as opposed to the narratives of pop culture.

There was some headway made; however it was not predominant in the answers. There was still a fair amount of a music/sermon dualistic understanding of the worship service. However, as the answers unfolded, you will notice that some caught the vision of understanding each part as important in the narrative flow.

9) How often should communion be taken?

Content of the second interview: This is the question where the most significant movement can be found. Overwhelmingly, the first time through the interviews, people suggested that we do communion too often, and the heaviest answer was that we should have communion once a month so that it would not lost its meaning. Only one person said every week the first time.

In this round of interviews, ten people suggested that we should have communion weekly. Others suggested a sense of understanding the increase in regularity (for example, one person suggested receiving communion more often around Easter and Christmas).

The most interesting answer was from a former Episcopalian who admitted to waffling the first time. She said that she yearned for the sacrament weekly, but that her time in the Baptist church after college had caused her to waffle a bit. She was quite frustrated that it was Christians that decreased her desire to come to the table of the Lord.

Not everyone agreed with the sense of increase. There were still two people who said that their minds had not been changed. One expounded by explaining their

upbringing in a 98% Catholic community, and her experience had been that the weekly taking of the sacrament had not seemed to make a difference in their life.

Reflections from the second interview: I do not think that I am the most knowledgeable sacramental theologian, nor do I think that I am the first preacher they have ever heard make a case for communion. I do, however, think that a reasonable sermon with an attentive audience that is ripe to think can lead to tangible change. Many of the other questions are more subjective and theological in nature. It takes a deeper level of thought. The simple nature of this question allowed for people to engage with the subject matter, perhaps, a little bit better. My major thesis here is that the Church of the Nazarene is ripe for a sacramental revival if we can articulate to our people why it is important.

10) How many times should one be baptized?¹⁶⁷

Content of the second interview: Fifteen of the seventeen respondents answered this question. Nine of the fifteen answered “once” with no qualifications. This was a huge difference from the first interview when “once” the answer only once. This response was wildly different than the first time it was asked where sixteen of the seventeen interviewees added qualifiers to their answer.

Reflections from the second interview: The subject of baptism and the role of God as primary actor was spoken about in the response sermon, but certainly not at the length that communion was considered. I was pleased to see such movement in response in light of that. As with the reflections over communion, the church seems ripe for a sacramental revival if a sacramental theology is clearly articulated and taught.

¹⁶⁷ This question was asked, in the actual interview, as a part of question number 9. It was separated in this report of the interview for clarity sake.

11) What guides your ethical/moral life?

Content of the second interview: As with the first time through, there was a sense that ethical moral life is rooted in something that has happened. Five people rooted their ethics/morals in their upbringing. Five people mentioned “God’s word” or the scriptures. Another three stated that their morals/ethics were inbred or natural, such as having a strong internal sense of what is right and wrong. There was even one lingering “W.W.J.D.”

Other answers given were cultural norms, traditions of the church, Godly conscience, church attendance, belief in Jesus (which, while vague, at least alludes to a changed or transformed morality/ethic), and two people simply saying “same as last time.”

Reflections from the second interview: I was really hoping that this question would open new avenues in the second interview. I tried to demonstrate how deeply cultural liturgies form our narratives, ethics, perceptions, and life. Not a single interviewee made that connection – or if they did, their answer did not reflect so. It had been my hope that people would see that there are many things – both good and bad – shaping who we are.

While I am overjoyed that our church people are going to the Bible and prayer for their sense of ethics, I am not sure that we are being wholly honest if we say that that is the only place our ethics and morals are being formed. Instead, it becomes tempting to make ourselves the heroes of our own story. Rather than confessing that our narratives and morals can be culturally shaped for both good and bad, it is easier to simply state that we receive our ethics from family and faith.

It is possible, however, they may have been answering in the ideal, as opposed to the actual. When seeing that Christian worship, disciplines, etc. should be the primary formational power in their life their answers drifted in that direction. This would make their answering less of a condemnation of this project, and more of an affirmation.

12) How do you nurture that ethical life? What forms your response to the world?

Content of the second interview: The answers to this question were hardly consistent over the scope of the interviews. Five people connected nurturing their ethical life to the communal aspect of church: the company you keep, accountability, corporate worship. From there, the answer diverged a lot. Other answers included: the urging of the Holy Spirit, coming to church, ethical business practices, listening to God's voice, small groups, bible study, serving, prayer (mentioned by two people), relying on upbringing, listening to sermons, duty, and listening to others (especially on the internet where there are a variety of perspectives in conversation).

While it was hard to pin down any consistent answers in this round of questions, it was interesting to note that people did pick up on much of the scope of the life of the church. There were disciplines such as prayer, service, and study, communal aspects (Bible study, mutual uplifting), liturgical elements such as sermons and church attendance.

Perhaps the most helpful answer was, "I automatically look at the culture through a Christian lens and try not to let pop culture influence me. Especially after this series." While this does not address what or how that pop culture influences – or even whether it

should – it does indicate that at least some people were thinking about the formational power of culture.

Reflections from the second interview: Upon demonstrating that many liturgies create our ethics, morals, and narratives I made the argument that it is specifically through the worshipping via the classical Christian liturgy that we can counterform ourselves from the secular and cultural liturgies we are immersed in. Again, the answers here are fine, but little notice was given to the power of worship in order to nurture our Christian life. In the case of this question, neither the content nor the tone of the answers was changed at all in the second round.

When the questions were asked in an objective manner (for example: how often should we participate in the sacraments), rather than a subjective manner, the answers demonstrated some growth and new perspective from those interviewed. When the question asked the interviewees to reflect, think theologically, or make connections on their own, the answers tended toward church jargon that has been engrained in them.

Two New Questions

Having interviewed again the seventeen lay people; I asked them two new questions (question one had three parts) to reflect upon in light of the sermon series. In the second sitting, this was the first time they were hearing these questions.¹⁶⁸ These were their responses:

¹⁶⁸ The individual answers to these questions are included in Appendix F.

(1a) What did the sermon series do to change your perspective on elements in a worship service?

Content of the second interview: While the answers in the repeated questions left something to be desired for me (i.e. I wanted to see more change), the response to this question was that the sermon series had been meaningful, and that they had been affected by its content.

Six people said that breaking down the service into its parts helps them see the meaning of the worship service more clearly. They were able to see the value of each part of worship, and how it fits together to form the whole.

Three people mentioned their new appreciation for communion, and desire to take it more regularly as a result. The need to respond to a sermon was particularly highlighted by one of these three. Another person suggested that they had not seen the communal aspect of worship before, only the individual nature of it.

Five people reported no new perspective, however, they indicated a sense of enjoying the series and appreciating the “refresher.”

Reflections from the new questions: There is a theme of reemphasizing their new appreciation for communion. There are also other nuggets of interest here: recognizing worship as communal, seeing the narrative flow better, and deconstructing the value of each element. As helpful as this was, there is a sense that I wish I had gotten more out of them. I believe there is something deeply mysterious and spiritual about the acts of worship that we undertake.

Some of the sense that not a lot was learned is confounding to me because, despite my education, I feel there is a lot more for me to learn. I wish there was more of an

openness to see things fresh, to brush off our naiveté so that we can again be renewed in worship.

(1b) What did the sermon series do to change your perspective on pop culture?

Content of the second interview: Seven people indicated that they consume music differently now. Three people specifically cited “My Way” by Sinatra, including the person who said, “[Tim’s] critique of My Way seems self-evident when you break it down.” That sort of self-evidence that had never been before seen was so critical to what I was trying to accomplish. Another impression made that was vital to my guiding theses was the person who admitted that they had not avoided the influence of pop culture as much as they had thought. Two people recognized that pop culture was more all-pervasive than they had thought and two other came to appreciate and recognize that pop culture was not a dirty word, as they had previously thought. Three people suggested that their perspective was not changed (one of those three was “maybe a little.”)

Reflections from the new questions: There is a sense that the deconstruction of the secular songs that we did was profound to many. Many indicated that they did not think about what they were consuming before. Others appreciated that pop culture doesn’t feel like a dirty word anymore.

I do wish that there were a stronger sense of how formational cultural liturgies can be. Much of what we think is true is a result of our participating in cultural liturgies. I had hoped for more of a sense that they would be aware of the temptation to worship gods that are not Yahweh. I will have to accept that discernment of their culture is a good first step.

(1c) What did the sermon series do to change your perspective on the power of worship for transformation?

Content of the second interview: Overwhelmingly, the answer was affirmative.

The two most helpful quotes, that really give a sense that the church “got it” were: “It helped to address how the church works as a viable alternative to the world’s narrative” and “I had not seen church, before, as pushing back on what the world says you should like. It is the one critical place that has the power to shape you like Christ.” In these quotes, you can really see the theses of my project taking root. There was not one negative response to this question.

Reflections from the new questions: Upon asking this question, many people paused as if they did not understand the question, or have the vocabulary to answer. I then proceeded to tell most of the interviewees that what I meant by this question was that I had argued in the sermon series that pop culture was often a liturgical act forming us to be something, and that worship was a counter-formational act that we participate to be formed into Christ. They all agreed that I said that repeatedly, but few expounded on it.

The people I interviewed were fertile ground to hear about the formational power of worship and culture, but the people of the church still need to be cultivated in order to discuss theological categories and concepts. This was high-level critical and theological thinking that I was asking them to do. They were tracking with me, but struggle to verbalize these new and weighty concepts.

(2) Please identify the degree to which the sermons influenced you versus how much the service influenced you.

Content of the second interview: Fourteen people said the sermon was more influential than the service. Three said both were equally influential. Not one said that the service itself was more influential.

Reflections from the new questions: As noted earlier in chapter 3, this more liturgically minded worship service has been in place for two years with little explanation to the congregation. That is seen in a few responses that indicate that worship format was nothing new to them. That helps point to the fact that the sermon tended to be much more influential: they learned something in this series. This learning that took place was a cutting through their naiveté about why we celebrate the Eucharist so regularly, why we greet one another every week, why we read scripture so often when we all have Bibles at home, etc. The sermons broke through things we did not understand as well as things that we took for granted, and invited us into a new place. It is my hope that this new place of discernment of our culture, as well as a new place of appreciation of liturgy and sacrament will help define who we are becoming, through the work of God, as a church body.

Stories from the Church (Post Project Lunch)

Upon interviewing my selected seventeen lay people, I also hosted a pizza lunch open to the whole congregation. Approximately thirty people came to reflect upon what they had learned and heard in the sermon series. Among those thirty people were senior adults, mothers of small children, a younger single woman, a middle aged married

couple, and a young military family. Even my mother came to be interviewed. It was a diverse group representing more of the spectrum of the church.

My pastoral staff, office secretary, and a locally licensed minister who is a Nazarene Theological Seminary M.Div. student hosted round tables where conversations were held around an abbreviated version of the interview that I had given the selected seventeen lay people. These staff members were asked to conduct this round of interviews explicitly to remove my potential bias and provide additional perspective to the original interviews.

With a change in atmosphere, including the huddling in groups to answer, I shortened the interview. There were only ten questions that were asked of those that came to this lunch. The hope was to spur some conversation, prod recollection of the series, and receive feedback from a greater population of the church. My hope was to allow anyone who wanted to speak into this project the opportunity to do so, in order that I would not be unwittingly biasing the response pool.

Recall that this is following the sermon series. They have heard the same sermons and been in the same worship services as the original interviewees. The hope in the follow up interview is solely to hear conversations happening in the church following the series. There is no way to measure any change.

Here are responses to the questions asked:¹⁶⁹

(1) What is your interaction with pop culture?

Selected sample answers: Facebook, interaction with grandchildren (which led to concern about what their grandchildren were watching), internet, radio, and computers.

¹⁶⁹ Full answers are in Appendix G.

One person indicated that after this sermon series, they are more aware of what they are doing.

(2) What do you think the church teaches about pop culture?

Selected sample answers: There was such a diversity of answers here. Some people said the church teaches that pop culture is ok, some say the church does nothing, some suggested that God should be a part of pop culture, some said the church is too tolerant now, and another said that the subject is too emotionally charged to teach.

Beyond that, some people understood the church to teach that pop culture is of the devil, others have heard they should avoid it at all costs, and another understood the avoidance of pop culture to be the modern equivalent of the call of Israel to “Be ye separate.”

(3) What should the church teach about pop culture?

Selected sample answers: One person cited the need to be relevant (which is rooted in evangelism, but still a frustrating answer, as I did not address relevance as a category through any part of my teaching). Most of the rest of the answers were related to the need to know how to live in the world as Christian people.

(4) What is the reason that you attend Christian worship services?

Selected sample answers: To learn about God, to seek renewal, for fellowship and community, and the music/sermon dualism were the most prevalent answers. One person admitted the reason was guilt. (At least they were honest).

(5) What is your expectation for what happens to you when you worship?

Selected sample answers: The overwhelming sense of this question is that people want to know and understand God better. They expect to “feel the Holy Spirit” and “hear from God.”

(6) What are the key moments in a worship service?

Selected sample answers: Across this group of post sermon interviewees, seven of the eight parts of liturgy that we learned about were mentioned (though never all by the same person). What was never mentioned was corporate prayer, which seems bizarre. There was not a sense of worship being simply music and preaching.

(7) How often should communion be taken?

Selected sample answers: Many people indicated that we should receive communion every week (pushing beyond a simple “weekly” answer, one person said that we should receive twice a week, and another “as often as we meet.”). Perhaps the most interesting response was, “My frugality of time and resources used to critique its frequency, but taking it regularly (even before the series) changed my opinion.” This indicates most clearly in the whole project how the participation in the liturgy – and not just an explanation in a sermon – can have a profound effect on someone.

Another important response was from a children’s worker who often teaches during Sunday mornings (typically twice a month). She said that, with the nature of their service, regular communion is nice because it ensures that she has a chance to participate, because if it is once a month (or less) she is more likely to miss out.

Only two people from this group cited the risk of communion becoming mundane or losing it’s meaning if taken too often.

(8) How many times should one be baptized?

Selected sample answers: Roughly one-half of the responses were a declarative “once.” Two people said that the answer should be once, but they have been baptized more times. One of those respondents specifically said that guilt at camp meetings led him to be baptized more than once.

There were still roughly half who believe that baptism is appropriate for restored relationship with God, “every ten years or so,” no limit, or twice.¹⁷⁰

(9) What did the sermon series do to change your perspective on elements in a worship service? Pop culture? The power of worship for transformation?

Selected sample answers: The most affirming answer given was that “it raised awareness of unacknowledged liturgies.” Another great answer was that “pop culture affects more than we think that it does.” Still another answer was “I am reminded to be aware that I’m not a mindless consumer.”

There was a real sense in this group that they were getting it. The answers were overwhelmingly in this positive direction. The people saw the formative power of pop culture, and recognized their place in it. I deeply appreciated the lack of fear in their answers. A great example was the person who said, “it was helpful to learn about whether or not something has redemptive value. I can let God help me find redemptive value in the media I take in.”

¹⁷⁰ Twice has to be the most befuddling answer, because it lacks clarity as to why, but it also lacks the conditions that most answers that are more than “once” come with.

(10) Please identify the degree to which the sermons influences you versus how much the service influenced you.

Selected sample answers: Every answer mentioned the sermon. One answer suggested that it worked together as a whole.

Thoughts on the Stories from the Church: The responses from the greater church population were not very different from the responses of the original interviewees. Overall, the seventeen provided a good flavor for what the church is thinking regarding the subject matter at hand.

This second group of thirty was different from the original seventeen from the interview group in demographic. There were brand new Christians who were about 20 years old and people who have been members of South Portland Church of the Nazarene for 80 years. The younger people were more affected by pop culture, per their answers, the older people were less inclined to see the way the world shapes them (many of them tell me about their favorite news channel or what they have seen on Facebook). There is a lot more fear in the older folks' engagement with the world and lot more optimism with what the world has to offer from the younger crowd.

Either way, there is continued evidence of this sermon series affecting the church. There is a renewed commitment to sacraments, a sense that the sermon is vitally important, an awareness or suspicion of what pop culture is cultivating in us through its cultural liturgies, and a deep sense of community worship.

Despite my efforts, there is still a lack of awareness or at least a lack of expressed awareness¹⁷¹ of the formational power of worship and a deep sense of the whole narrative of the liturgy forming us into a holy people, counter to the liturgies of the culture.

Conclusion

The dual interview process: first with seventeen individuals from the church, then with an open call to the entire congregation were helpful endeavors alongside the sermon series project with the church. In conversing with people who were receiving the sermon series, and opening myself up to hear feedback, I was able to learn a lot about the people of my congregation: what they like, what they know, what they think they know, what they think they do not know, what their preferences were, and how they were effected by the teaching of this sermon series.

The subsequent and final chapter articulates what I heard from these people. It also acknowledges mistakes that were made through the project process and points toward future initiatives to keep the momentum and discoveries of this project alive.

¹⁷¹ What is difficult to ascertain is if the point is not landing correctly, or if the people lack the vocabulary to articulate what this point.

Chapter 5

The Christian *Habitus*

Perhaps it is the ‘off the record’ conversations that were the best part of this project. Whether it was an older man telling me that he was thankful for me finally talking about what the church is for, rather than simply what it is against or the English couple who, on the week of response, walked through my greeting line and heartily affirmed, “Yes, baptism once and communion every week,” there were many moments that made this project a helpful and worthwhile venture. These conversations were so good because when the recorder was stopped, people got to share what they were thinking as opposed to answer what they thought I wanted them to say. Either way, hearing the exuberance in engagement from the whole of the church – even from some surprising corners of the church –brought a certain life to our fellowship.

The best example came from a mother of three in our church. She declared that sometimes, when a show on Netflix ends, and the “recently watched” glares back at her, she wonders if those shows are becoming of a Christian woman. What a great, mature thought to have. It was so encouraging that church people were still thinking through their engagement with the world: “Is my activity that of a person that God is making holy?”

However, it has been typical of the recent history of the church to make a false dichotomy between a simple “good” and “bad” when it comes to the culture that the church finds itself in. I sought, therefore, a more robust understanding that we, especially those of us at South Portland Church of the Nazarene, could see and participate in.

This is why this project was done. It was an attempt to engage our habitual, gut level reactions to the world in a way that shook us out of our lethargic naiveté. That naiveté is seen in uncritical consumption of pop culture, lethargic worship services, and dwindling value placed on church attendance and participation. The naiveté toward pop culture causes us to be formed by powerful cultural liturgies while the naivetés toward the power of participating in worship and attendance to church keep us from being fully grounded in Christ in a way that allows us to exist critically in our culture in a way that keeps us from being formed by its values and narratives.

My argument is that the church needs to again look toward a robust liturgy in order to keep itself grounded in Christ. The liturgy is a counter-cultural practice that calls us to be formed in Christ through the telling of the Christian narrative, the sacraments, Christian community, and prayer. Liturgy of the church will call us to stand firm in Christ and give us a lens to interpret critically the culture of our world.

This final chapter looks back over this project conducted with the people of South Portland Church of the Nazarene, as well as looking forward into the work that this project is now inviting the church to do on behalf of its people. Much of the work of looking back over the project was done in the previous chapter, but there are a few loose ends that need tying up as well as a few facts that are worth considering.

Looking Back

The project at hand was conducted at South Portland Church of the Nazarene from October 11, 2015 through December 6, 2015. November 1, 2015 was a missions Sunday, and therefore the project was not undertaken on that week. It came at a time of struggle in the church. We had very recently had six families move out of the area, which

significantly affected both our attendance and giving. We had also, recently, had two families leave the church over the conversation across the church regarding homosexuality, and feeling that they could not align with the church's beliefs.¹⁷² Finally, we were also affected by a lingering summer. Fall came late and stayed long.¹⁷³ There is a narrative in Maine that because winter is so long and so hard, that you should enjoy the weather while it lasts. There is also a culture of having a house in the northern parts of the state called a "camp." These are for recreational purposes (usually situated on or near a lake) and are usually passed down through generations.¹⁷⁴

That is all to say that this came at a time where church was hard. We had hit a lull in my tenure. I had been here 2 years, and "the honeymoon" was over. The lay people and pastoral staff were tired, attendance and giving were down, and commitment felt fleeting. This project was certainly birthed out of my sense that corporate worship was no longer held in the esteem that it once was, and when it was time for the project to begin, the concerning possibility that people did not see the value in attending worship as strongly as they did was felt as strongly as it ever had.

Attendance

Church attendance had been increasing since I arrived. Attendance in my first year in South Portland (fiscal year 2014) was an average of 240. The second year, FY 2015, was 273. As summer 2015 hit, we were in a decline based mostly on families

¹⁷² Ironically, one family left because they interpreted our – and specifically my – stance as too harsh, and one family left because they interpreted our stance as too lenient.

¹⁷³ Temperatures remained in the 50s (Fahrenheit) through late December 2015.

¹⁷⁴ Which also indicates that there is not necessarily new money in very blue collar Maine.

moving away and recreation after a hard winter. By the time October came around, we were in the low 200s.

Fortunately, engagement with this series brought some renewed enthusiasm around the church as can be seen in the attendance figures. There was a significant uptick in attendance back toward where it had been in the previous fiscal year. This was accomplished through renewed enthusiasm, as well as many new families coming to church through invitation. People were excited to be at church again, and their responses week after week were indicative of that excitement. Attendance totals were as follows:

October 11 – 210 people

October 18 – 258 people

October 25 – 240 people

November 8 – 265 people

November 15 – 280 people

November 22 – 229 people

November 29 – 286 people

December 6 – 277 people

Response

The response to the sermon series was overwhelmingly positive. The official responses in the interviews indicate this, as did the church lunch after the series, and many informal, undocumented interactions around the church. There was a recurring sense that people appreciated hearing what the church was for, rather than what the church was against, that there was an understanding of why we do what we do in worship, and that images, songs, and movie clips that were familiar were used to help

them understand lofty concepts. Often, their responses to my work was couched in the language of vernacular: “thank you for explaining this in ways we can understand.” They were finding that their “everyday” language was being used from the pulpit, and they were articulating it to be helpful to them understanding deep theological concepts.

Further, as demonstrated in the last section, there was a sense of anticipation. People were coming to church to hear the sermon and the secular song the band was going to play. In fact, people were asking me before the service what song was going to be played. People began videoing the song and sharing it on social media.

There were two major instances of negativity on social media, both by people who did not attend the church. One was the sister of a singer who chastised me for playing non-worship music at the church her mother attended. This led to major unrest within the family. The other instance was someone responding to a Facebook post about me quoting Katy Perry, asking “Does your pastor quote Katy Perry in his sermons?” followed by the response: “I hope not.” This was hard to take, as the pastor. Within the church – those who were actually present in the services – there was a great appreciation for the theological and biblical depth of what was happening in the series. However, as people were sharing out-of-context, secular songs from the stage of the church it seemed to those watching from a distance to be concerned by the content.

Interestingly, when I was setting up the series, and especially the secular song “Beverly Hills” on the first Sunday, I told the church that the intention was neither for them to “rock out nor walk out.” The attempt at humor was intended to demonstrate that the song, while fun, was not to be the point. People who did not experience the full content of the sermon alongside of the song could not see that the song was not the point.

Effectiveness

The two most effective parts of this project, per the interview responses, was getting people to become more critical of the cultural liturgies and pop culture they are immersed in and to have an increase in desire to receive communion. There was significant movement in both areas amongst our people.

The series was not as effective as I had hoped in helping interviewees explicitly see church attendance and participation in the liturgy as the formative response to Christ so that we are enabled to live in our world while not being formed by it. I suspect most people who attended the series would agree with me if I said it to them, but there was little sense in the interview process that they explicitly saw worship as the antidote to being formed by the cultural liturgies around them. There was more simply a broad appreciation that they now understood why the parts of worship happen on a weekly basis. They could appreciate it intellectually, now, and participate more enthusiastically. However, I am not sure that I got any indication that they will make worship any more of a priority in their life than it was or was not before the project began. Still, there was indicated a new appreciation for understanding the work of the liturgy which, hopefully, will allow them to be formed at a deeper level as they attend worship.

Mistakes and Weaknesses

There were some weaknesses that scattered throughout this project that deserve to be discussed. For one, while I carefully attempted to select my sample to represent the diverse portions of the church, it is possible that I selected people with bias. There may have been too many related to leadership, they may have been church people too close to me, they may not have represented the diversity of the church in fullness. There was a

real chance at blindness when I controlled the questions, hypotheses, people sample for the interview, and asked the questions in the interview. I attempted to check this possibility by inviting the entire church to a lunch after the project in order to dialogue with my pastoral staff. This removed – or sought to remove – some of the oversights in my methodology.

In the interview process, there were three particular issues that should be considered, were this project repeated. First, when I asked the interviewees about their engagement in pop culture, they stammered. I did not receive their stammering and move on. Instead, I helped them see their involvement. I should have left their reluctance to acknowledge their pop culture engagement alone so that the second interview would have been a more striking change.

The second mistake was a more particular, as opposed to the general nature of the first mistake. While I was exhausted of interviewing on the first round, I had become frustrated at many people justifying multiple baptisms while also understanding communion only in terms of doing it rarely in order to “keep it special.” In the last interview of the day (I had done 8 that day), a man, whom I love and have a great relationship with, told me that “we should not do communion every week because it loses its meaning.” I responded by asking him if he would ever refuse sex from his wife because it would lose its meaning. That sort of response was not helpful. That said, in the second interview, he told me that he had completely changed his mind and that he now understood the need for regular – even weekly – communion.

The third issue is that I used the interview time as a time to teach. I did not simply receive answers, but I engaged with them in conversation. I was unafraid to prod, push,

think, or ask clarifying questions of their responses. Further, when there was confusion or theological weakness I would interject, in conversation. What was helpful to undergirding my final observations was that when we had the all church lunch after the sermon series, my associate pastors were instructed to simply listen and to not engage or answer clarifying questions.

I also think that if I could do it again, I would train interviewers on my hypotheses and let them do the interviewing in order to remove me from the equation. My presence uncovered my passion for the project, and gave me opportunities to influence the interviewees both explicitly (as described above in challenging and shaping responses) and implicitly (by showing my joy and excitement....or even exhaustion on long days).

Finally, I have wondered about the questions that I asked, and how I asked them. I was thinking evocatively as opposed to objectively. Meaning, I hoped that people would put work into thinking about “what they do when they want to do something mindless” in terms of the sermon series. No one was able to make the leap to mention anything about mindless engagement with the world. They simply left their answers in the neighborhood of relaxation. Asking questions more like “Did you understand what I meant when I talked about mindless engagement in the world and how it demonstrates who we are at a gut level?” Such objective questions could have led to more usable responses in those areas.

Looking Forward

Looking forward, it is imperative that we do not simply celebrate the gains made during this project. The gains were especially strong in terms of critical engagement with culture, a renewed appreciation for the sacraments, and an excitement around the

congregation. These are vital gains, I believe, for us to live as a holy people in 2015 and forward. However, leaving us where we ended is not enough. We must continue to refine our theological skills, our understanding of sacrament, and our discernment. Here are my suggestions, moving forward, for South Portland Church of the Nazarene and, to some degree, the Church of the Nazarene more broadly.

Eight Theses That Emerged From the Project

These are thoughts that emerged out of my project, interviews, informal conversations, and post sermon series interviews.

1. Christians are not mindful of what is forming them.
2. People must be made aware of formative and pervasive influence of pop culture.
3. Christians are not aware of how to deepen their Christian lives.
4. Lay people are not trained or encouraged to think theologically.
5. For many Evangelical/Free Worship Christians, emotion trumps intellect.
6. Many Christians desire deeper and more frequent sacramental participation (especially from our younger Christian adults).
7. Pastors (especially in Evangelical/Free worship traditions) have not done an adequate job of teaching and emphasizing the sacraments.
8. The greatest source of change in this project came from the sermon.

Unpacking These Eight Theses

In the previous chapter, I asserted eight theses as a result of having walked through this project with the people of South Portland Church of the Nazarene. These are the basic conclusions that identifying the problem, preparing the sermon series, and

conversing with our people led me to consider. These theses will be the conclusions around which I build the steps for our church to move forward.

1. Christians are not mindful of what is forming them.

This was the theme from the very beginning of this paper, and a part of the original thesis. It was a thesis borrowed from James K.A. Smith in his “Cultural Liturgies” series, and bore itself out on the interview process. In the first round of interviews I had to pull their interaction with pop culture out of them. Consistently, the first answer I received was “very little,” “none,” or “not much.” However, it did not take much prodding to see the way they are shaped by their iPads, iPhones, deep cable packages, Netflix, eating out, online shopping, sports, fitness, consumerism, advertising, etc. As this project is being written during Advent, I think of how the disciplines of the season can help us consider how we are being formed by these cultural liturgies. We are called in Advent to wait, to long, to expect, and to hope. However, our technology increasingly calls us to be demanding, to not rest, to expect efficiency and urgency, and to be placated easily.

On December 18, 2015, a polling agency, Public Policy Polling, announced that it had found that 30% of Republicans planning on voting in the 2016 Presidential Primaries would be in favor of bombing Agrabah.¹⁷⁵ This is concerning because Agrabah is the fictional country in the Disney movie *Aladdin*. However, the liturgy of Republicans has seemed to be inducing fear of Islam, therefore anything sounding Islamic may be a threat.

It will be work of the pastor to help us see the cultural liturgies that are forming us and to utilize the church calendar and liturgical devices to speak prophetically into the

¹⁷⁵ “National Survey Results: GOP Results,” Public Policy Polling, accessed 12/18/2015, <http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/pdf/2015/GOPResults.pdf>

lives of our church people. It will be increasingly important that preachers understand the cultural liturgies that are forming our people – including, but not limited to cable television news, movie themes, music themes, patriotic activities, talk radio, election cycles, “American dream” narratives, television preachers – and cast a different vision for them out of the Kingdom ethics Jesus himself called us to in texts such as the Sermon on the Mount. It will take a concerted effort by the pastor to become and remain aware of the cultural narratives that are being spoken, as well as deeply devoted to the work of biblical scholarship, prayer, and boldness so that the Spirit can work through the pastor to help the church avoid immersion in cultural liturgies in a manner that has their life being formed by the wrong liturgies.

2. People must be made aware of formative and pervasive influence of pop culture.

As noted earlier, people had to be coaxed into seeing their interaction with pop culture through the first interviews. The second time, while not everyone changed their views, many were very surprised about how often they came into contact with popular culture. Even more were outright shocked by the content of media that they had previously consumed mindlessly (this was most seen with regard to lyrics in popular music).

What was particularly interesting were people consuming music by listening for theme or narrative as opposed to particular words we are taught are bad. We have been trained to think of content in terms of gratuitous violence, sexually explicit language, or “cuss” words. When starting in the church by looking at themes of music (hopelessness of becoming rich in “Beverly Hills,” depressing loneliness in “Boulevard of Broken

Dreams,” or even rugged individualism of “My Way”), people were able to then report back to me their seeing of “less Christian” themes in other media they encountered. Many were shocked at the themes of television shows they watched, music they listened to at the gym, etc.

Again, people are able to think critically, but it takes hard and intentional work of the church to supply them with tools to do so. Now, simply assuming that the work is done at South Portland Church of the Nazarene would be naïve. We need to continue helping our people receive tools to critically engage their world. An example of continued work is taking our young adult group to the opening of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and having the Children’s pastor bring them to Applebee’s after the viewing to talk over themes of the movie (e.g. the sacrificial death of a major character – how does this look like Christ? Etc.).

3. Christian people are not aware how to deepen their spiritual lives.

Confusion as to how to be a Christian in this world was a heavy theme that emerged out of conversations – especially those off the record – around the church. This chapter began with the story of a mother considering her Netflix account, and wondering if it was becoming of a Christian lady.

When, during my interview, I asked, “how do you nurture your ethical/moral life?” the overwhelming response was cliché, guilt, or confusion. Some said they should pray more, others leaned on their upbringing, still others asserted it was innate. A few interviewees said things like journaling, praying, or the Bible – but often it was couched in language such as “knowing what it says in God’s word” or “I am not sure that I do nurture it.” There was a definite sense that we should be ethical/moral, and that we are

ethical/moral, but the idea of nurturing it was not met with urgency or deep thought (even though I asked the question in two different interviews).

The argument of the sermon series was that it is through participating in worship that we best nurture our ethics and morals, and that cultural liturgies drown out the story of God told and nurtured in worship. This connection was not explicitly made by any of the interviewees. However, when challenged on it, they saw that that argument was made, and they accepted it.

We live in an age of busy-ness. As such, many people feel overwhelmed and at the end of a packed day would rather turn on Netflix or the evening news than open up their Bible for critical reading or start a journal where they document their prayer life. Many consider that it is work to read the Bible or journal when they could simply watch Netflix.

As pastors, it feels to me that we would rather gather at retreats and suppers and complain that it “is not like it used to be.” While that is clearly true, there is opportunity in what we do to help our congregants navigate this new world and grow closer to Christ by finding themselves radically rooted in Him. We will have to find new wineskins, to borrow an image from Jesus, and while that is hard imaginative work, it is precisely the priestly duty to which we are called.

4. Lay people are not trained or encouraged to think theologically.

I often recommend the television show *Breaking Bad* to Christian people.¹⁷⁶ This is precisely the kind of show that would have been dismissed as immoral television when I was a child – and still would be by many. The show is filled with gun violence, coarse

¹⁷⁶ Note: I am pretty careful about who I recommend this show to. It is not for every “Nancy Nazarene.”

language, and drug abuse. However, there is a grit and rawness to the story that draws people in. Occasionally people return to me, asking if this something that is ok for them to watch. This is a fantastic opportunity for me to help them theologically.

The story revolves around a high school Chemistry teacher receiving a terminal cancer diagnosis while his aging pregnant wife and disabled son are struggling through life. He begins to mourn missed opportunities as he re-encounters a meth dealing former student of his. Using his chemistry knowledge, the main character makes a nearly pure crystal meth that is a hit on the streets so that he can make some money in his final days in order to support the family he is going to leave behind. It is not long before he enters remission, but by then he finds himself engrossed in the drug trade. He transitions from out of his depth into a full-blown drug lord.

As a pastor, I feel the story is rife with descriptions of the seductiveness of sin, the power of sin, the consequences of sin, and the occasional shot at redemption. This story begins with a small, understandable sin: using skills to provide for his family after he dies. However, as the audience we know that this is a poor choice from the start, and it plays out as such.

Many churchgoers are watching movies and television shows like this. I can't begin to express how many church people have let it slip to me that they have read the whole trilogy of *Fifty Shades of Grey* or watched *Magic Mike*. Others still are consuming far more benign material such as the news, public television, or PG rated movies, which are still formational. But it is a hard-to-learn – and rarely taught – skill to think theologically about what we are encountering. Instead, many are in the habit of simply receiving the messages and narratives they are consuming.

As pastors, we need to avoid trying to fit the world into a good/bad dichotomy. This is a unhelpful characterizing of media, pop culture, and cultural liturgies. We need to help our people nuance their world by teaching them to think through the theological issues at play.

But, in order to do this, pastors, themselves, need to be able to think theologically. I am concerned about my own denomination's insistence on church planting through untrained, uneducated people. A bleak view of the future is causing us to imagine that future with lay people as pastors.¹⁷⁷ This, I fear, is a shortsighted mistake based on economics and not ecclesiology or basic faith. Our people need to learn to think theologically, and are going to struggle even further if people who are under-equipped to think theologically lead them. This is going to become a problem for Christians in the information age, when many people will have educated rejections of the faith, and our people will increasingly struggle to articulate their own faith in a robust manner because their church is increasingly unable to articulate orthodox theology in meaningful and creative manners that are deep.

5. For many Evangelical/Free Worship Christians, emotion trumps intellect.

Among the interesting answers I received in my interviews is that people come to church in order to “feel God/the Spirit.” There were some that come to learn about God, but the consensus was that worship was about feeling the presence of God. This is not a wholly unreasonable desire, but God's presence is not heightened in worship. God is present in all of the earth.

¹⁷⁷ Both General Assembly 2013 and USA/Canada's M15 had multiple leaders, including District Superintendents, declare that the future of the church was people moving into neighborhoods, getting jobs at Starbucks, and planting a house church.

Very few people indicated a participation in regular study or reading of scripture. The use of our brain was usually down to “I wanted to learn something [in worship] that would help me through my week.”

I worry that this need to feel God, combined with the history of guilt and binary good/bad thinking will mostly urge people to feel guilty in their world. Sometimes, the ability to think through a situation would allow them to see Christ in surprising places.

Further, neither emotional connection to God nor intellectual connection to God is complete. We should be working toward a balance between right feelings or right affections, with right belief, and right actions. If any of these three become more celebrated than the others, the faith becomes a bit imbalanced. We need to celebrate and develop all three disciplines.

6. Many Christians desire deeper and more frequent sacramental participation (especially from our younger Christian adults).

Our younger people heavily indicated a preference toward weekly communion. While there was more likelihood for older people to use the language of fearing that “it would lose it’s meaning” or “become an empty ritual,” there was an openness from them as well to receiving communion more regularly.

There was a sense around those that desired communion regularly that (a) it was new every week, (b) that their understanding of it being a response – and having to physically move to receive and respond – to the preached word was of importance to them, and (c) that understanding the meaning helped them desire to receive communion more regularly.

The sacrament was instituted by Jesus, and that the history of Christian worship has leaned heavily on the structure of word and table. Therefore, it seems prudent for us to re-emphasize the table in this day – especially as people are looking for depth in meaning and enjoy embracing mystery.

7. Pastors (especially in Evangelical/Free worship traditions) have not done an adequate job of teaching and emphasizing the sacraments.

This thesis ties closely to my concerns in thesis 3. We need to reinvest in clergy education, as opposed to strands of the church that may be underemphasizing theological education. We are entering a time where theological and church historical understanding is at a significant low. We need pastors who are able to hand our laity tools to understand their contexts and worship styles as opposed to finding themselves swayed by television preachers, skeptics, and political commentary.

If my thesis regarding sacramental emphasis is correct, then we need pastors who are able to give historical context for the sacraments matters, and well as make theological arguments for their placement. This study demonstrated that an old, well-established Church of the Nazarene would be open to sacramental renewal if they understand why. The change in perspective regarding how often to have Communion, as well as a growing understanding of why baptism should be done once, should be significant evidence that it is possible to help members of our denomination – we of the free worship/revivalist tradition– see the value of sacramental focus and participation.

Facebook groups such as “Sacramental Nazarenes,” which currently boasts over 1,800 members further show that there is a thirst in our denomination to have a sweeping conversation about the place and use of the sacraments in our worship. It is vital, if any of

this is descriptive of the thirst for sacrament in the church, that we prepare our clergy to make a case for the sacraments as central to our congregational life. Education of clergy will become increasingly important in the coming days of our church.

8. The greatest source of change in this project came from the sermon.

The respondents of the interview strongly indicated that their heightened awareness of culture, its liturgies, and the sacraments was based on the impact of clear, well-argued sermons impacting them. Preaching has long been a central act of worship in the Protestant church, and there continues to be a thirst for good preaching – and even though it may not always feel like it to the pastor – a willingness to respond to the message.

While feeling affirmed in the power of the message, I was a bit disappointed by the inability of my interviewees to make some of the connections I had hoped they would make in terms of the liturgy. Many saw intellectual value of the parts of worship, but few saw the counter-formational power of worship against the cultural liturgies they are subject to without my prodding. Further, when specifically asked about the power of participating in worship versus hearing preaching, nearly all of the respondents leaned toward preaching as more powerful for them in this instance. This could be because of their Protestant tendency to see preaching as the central act of the worship service, but it could also be because we did make the preaching even central (even extended the length of the sermons over the series) for this series.

Either way, it was central to my hope in this project that people would see how the entire narrative flow of the worship service would tell a story that encouraged them understand who they are through worship as distinct from the liturgies of culture. People

seemed to grasp it on an intellectual level (nodding their head at me in affirmation) when I explained the questions regarding “the power of worship for transformation,” but no one made any similar connections on their own accord.

While there is a desire to experience the mystery of the Eucharist, they only seem freed to embrace the mystery after they understood it. This is likely key – based on how these particular Protestant worshippers have been formed by participating in Christian liturgical elements. My people at South Portland Church of the Nazarene seemed to need to understand in order to participate. Understanding may be the necessary precursor to erasing the claim that any liturgical or sacramental act could “lose its meaning” or “become mundane or monotonous.”

New Endeavors

At South Portland Church of the Nazarene, we will immediately begin three endeavors as a result of the preceding theses and this project. First, we will begin instilling the value of the liturgical narrative we follow in our church from membership classes onward. Second, we will begin having regular Faith and Film Nights. Finally, we will make it a practice to regularly indicate why we do what we do during the actual church service.

It is becoming increasingly clear that a strong membership class is necessary for the future of the church. This is the time where we help new attendees see what we believe, who we are as a church, and what to expect in being a member of the church. It is a “tone-setting” time where we invite people to see what they are joining. If we make it a point, as this sermon series did, to explain why we worship in the way that we do, it

will help establish the worship service as fundamental to our church's DNA from the initial contacts with people in the church.

This is especially the case since the Church of the Nazarene lacks a plan for catechism. Membership class is as close as we come. Therefore, articulating a theological understanding for why we worship as we do will become vital in the membership class setting. Currently, I teach a curriculum that I have developed for membership in our particular context. The final strand of the class is a multi-week theological discussion. Working tools of engaging pop culture and an understanding of why we worship as we do will become a part of this class as we continue to educate our people why we do what we do.

Second, we will begin having regular Faith and Film opportunities. For these nights, we will either go to a movie theater or host a showing for our people. We will watch a movie, and then immediately discuss the movie (led by a pastor).¹⁷⁸ This will be a tool to help our lay people put into practice thinking theologically about culture.

The congregation demonstrated through this process a desire to move past the "good/bad" dichotomy of describing culture, but also indicated that they struggled to interpret their world theologically in any categories beyond that dichotomy. That is all, they indicated, that the church had ever taught about pop culture. Also, we learned that they learned better when they were expressly shown how to do or how to understand something. Therefore, working through movies with the people and seeing the theological themes with them will, hopefully, continue to help them develop theological tools to interpret the culture and its liturgies.

¹⁷⁸ We have five pastors on staff, three of which have at least a Master of Divinity degree.

Again, it cannot be assumed that because we did this series and this project that the people are now ready to move forward. Having become intrigued by this conversation, it is now imperative to help them develop their theological skills.

Finally, moving forward, we will continue the practice encouraged by the faculty of NTS for this project. It was suggested, for this project, that I make an effort to explain each act of worship before it happened in the worship service during the corresponding sermon on the matter (i.e., on the week of offering, I gave a short theology of offering before receiving the offering; before the prayer I talked for a moment about why we pray corporately, etc.). While this practice was for a specific reason, it landed very well with the congregation. As such, it becomes important to continue this practice regularly moving forward. The church responded very well to having opportunities to understand why we do what we do.

Issues for the Larger Church

It is encouraging to see professors and pastors in the denomination sponsoring a pre-conference on worship before our M15 gathering as well as the newly forming Wesleyan Liturgical Society. Helping our clergy understand and think through why the classical elements of Christian worship are important (especially the relationship between word to table) is vital to helping our congregations reemphasize that movement. Our 115-year-old congregation was able to remember its value through preaching and education. Following Nazarene theologians such as Rob Staples and Brent Peterson, it was my assertion that going to the table was the sacrament of sanctification.¹⁷⁹ If this is true, this act of responding to the preached word by again eating and drinking the body of blood of

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Brent Peterson, *Created to Worship: God's Invitation to Become Fully Human*. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012), 180.

Christ can fit well into our denominational understanding of becoming a holy people because communion is a means of sanctifying grace by which God is transforming us in holiness.

However, this conversation tends to still exist most regularly among the most educated of Nazarene clergy. An undereducated clergy could collide with a rise in a liturgically and sacramentally focused generation. Bloggers such as Rachel Held Evans are encouraging a younger generation toward the sacraments, and that shift is seen even amongst the younger of those that I interviewed at South Portland Church of the Nazarene.

It is of interest to me to become a part of helping our clergy, especially those who are eschewing the value of regular attendance to the sacraments, see the urgent value in us renewing our sacramental convictions in our tradition.¹⁸⁰ This will require helping them see how this fits into our theological and ecclesial framework.

Final Conclusions

One of my interviewees, upon concluding the project told me that they now see that they are immersed in pop culture like “a fish is in water.” I wholeheartedly endorse this sentiment. It is an excellent metaphor because a fish is not even aware of the water they live in, it is just all around them. They cannot even well interpret the water until they get out of the water, develop a second naiveté, and reenter the water. Now, our choices as

¹⁸⁰ Chapter two of this project pointed to John Wesley and Rob Staples as theologians in our tradition that highly valued and recommended regular attendance to Eucharist, specifically. Add to that, contemporary voices within the Church of the Nazarene such as Brent Peterson, Craig Keen, Brannon Hancock, and Jesse Middendorf, not to mention the recent (cf. *Church Rituals Handbook*) revision to our manual calling for the increased regularity of communion (see paragraph 514.9, page 195).

a church is to either pretend like we can remove them from the culture – “the water” – or we can work to help them acquire tools to navigate through the culture they live.

It has been my argument that the best way to help our people navigate their culture is through robust liturgies that are counter-formational to the powerful cultural liturgies to which we are regularly subjected. Now is the time to renew our worship by returning to the classic liturgies of the church. It is through worship that we will be formed in a way that grounds us in Christ, and will allow us to see Him at work in our world.

The story of the Aeropagus in Acts 17 may be instructive for us. Paul was walking in a Temple of idols and false gods – participating in a Greek cultural liturgy – when he saw and declared the one true God in the most unusual of places – a statue to “an unknown god.” He then described to a pagan people that amongst them was a statue pointing them to the one true God. It is possible for us to live that way today, as well. But, we need to be so firmly grounded in Christ, through the Spirit that we are prepared to see God at work in our culture as Paul was.

A renewal of our understanding and participation in worship will ground us in Christ in this way. We will be free to exist in culture in a manner that helps us see God at work in our world, and give us a vocabulary to name that presence of God at work. This, I believe, will continue to make us open to the breath of life the Spirit gives to the church.

This breath will change our *habitus*. We will no longer be most profoundly formed by the cultural liturgies of consumerism, wealth, happiness, busy-ness, partisan politics, sexual appetites, and patriotism. Instead, our *habitus*, our gut-level responses to the world, will be in tuned with the work of the Spirit that is calling us toward Kingdom

values of peace, joy, forgiveness, community, love, friendship, generosity. These Kingdom values are not always easily expressed. But, if we work toward becoming a people of worship, the God whom we worship will gift the church with a new heart for God that changes the appetites of our heart and our gut. We can become, again, the holy people of God living in an unholy world, but a world that God, nevertheless, has declared “good.”¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Genesis 1:31 (NIV).

Appendix A

Timothy Brooks
South Portland Church of the Nazarene
Sermon #1: Pop Culture
October 11, 2015

Like I said earlier, we are going to be talking about pop culture. So it seems important to me for us to begin by saying, “What in the world is pop culture?” I interviewed eighteen people this week from the church, many of them are here today, and they ranged in a wide range of ages, half male, half female, and what was really interesting is when I asked, “How do you interact with pop culture?” and they all said, “Not much.” And then as we started talking it became clear: quite a bit! In so many ways, it’s impossible to divorce yourself from pop culture. So, what in the world is that? We have a slide up here that’s going to just quickly delve into, “What in the world are we talking about when we talk about ‘pop culture’?”

Here’s a definition for you: “Culture is a means of organizing and stabilizing communal life through specific beliefs, rituals, rites, performances, art forms, symbols, languages, clothing, food, music, dance, and other mode of human expressive, intellectual, and communicative behavior that is associated with a group of people at a particular period of time.” Really, that means everything you do! “Pop culture” means kind of the popular way in which those people do it, all right? So it’s impossible to skip out of pop culture, to miss it. Some are better than others, I will admit. But really, it’s impossible to miss out on what pop culture is.

So there’s three types of culture. There’s “high culture,” and that has more of an impact on human life. High culture would be, like, science, and art museums, and things like that. There’s “low culture” which is anything that is recreational and base. Low culture is like watching cartoons on a Saturday morning, okay? I didn’t say low culture was bad, but you do see the difference between science and cartoon-watching, right? “Pop culture,” it is said – there’s actually people in universities studying pop culture like crazy, and they have come to understand it to have emerged out of the 1920s. Pop culture is a culture that results out of a sort of affluence of people.

The 1920s was a pivotal time in American history, where there became people flush with cash, living in cities, looking for stuff to do. And so 1920s came up with the flappers – you familiar with the flappers? I didn’t want to show any pictures, because, you know... (Laughter) Flappers are a famous part of 1920s culture, and since the 1920s, each generation has seemed to try to “one-up” their parents, right? To become more and more “wild,” see if they can get their parents to react. And it really emerges out of that affluent city culture of the 1920s, and it just keeps kind of one-upping with each generation. Some examples of groups that have done this are flappers, hippies, disco, punk, hip-hop eras – these are eras of pop culture that have happened. High culture, as

opposed to pop culture, would be eras like the Kennedy era, the Nixon era, the Reagan era, the Elizabethan Age, the World Wars. When you're talking about that, you're talking more of an era of high culture, whereas when you say the Disco Era, you're talking more pop culture. And that's sort of a way you can see the difference. I think we have another slide here, as well.

Here are some examples of High, Mid, and Low Culture. High Culture are things like "Time" magazine, Chanel perfumes, "The New York Times," things like that. Mid Culture would be like popular novels like John Grisham, the Harry Potter novels, that kind of stuff, "American Idol," TLC programs, and Low would be anything that has to do with the Kardashians. (Laughter and applause) Next!

So the paradox of pop culture is this, is that it makes no distinction between art and recreation. This is the paradox of pop culture, is that it's so hard to figure out what is high culture and what is low culture, what is base and normal, and what is intellectual and strong. Everything has a way in our world today of sort of melding together and making its way into each other. So it's becoming, the reason why universities are studying pop culture, is because it's getting more and more illusive to define and more and more "just how we live," and it's hard to determine what is good and what is bad.

So, we're going to try to work through that a little bit, and we're going to try to work through it scripturally. And we're going to try to work through what it is we're doing when we worship that combats what the world is trying to pull us towards. And when I say that, I don't want to make it like pop culture is big and scary, or the world is trying to tear you down. This is a much more subtle battle, I think, than we've made it in the church, much more subtle. We have these ways of living our lives that are creating who we are, and we don't think much about it as we engage with it. We don't really discern much about it: "Is this making me more like Christ, or is this making me more like the world?"

And so what I want to do is to sort of unveil it a little bit, to dig deeper, to look into it and say, "What is actually happening when I participate in my world?" There's good, and there's bad, and I think it's helpful for us to affirm both of those things, to say there's good and there's bad, and not just try to rumple it all up and throw it in the garbage. All right?

So, where we're going to start here is by doing this song by Weezer. Now, what you need to know is while we do these secular songs during this time, that this is not supposed to be the point but rather the counterpoint, okay? So you may like it, you may not like it. It doesn't matter. The point is that we're going to be listening to what's happening on the radio in our world today, and your job isn't so much to, like, stand up and rock out, or stand up and walk out. (Laughter) Your job here is just to listen to the medium. What is it about it that people like? The words of the song will be on the screen, you don't have to sing it, you're not even invited to sing it. Let them sing it, and read the words and just think, "What is this song about? What is being sung to us on our radios? What is it that we're experiencing when we turn on the radio and hear a song like this?"

Now, I've purposely not chosen any vulgar songs. All right? So the song is fairly benign in terms of its message, but what is it really saying as you listen to the words? This song is called, "Beverly Hills" by Weezer. Listen to our band play for us.

[SONG]

(Applause)

How many of you have ever been to Beverly Hills before? Yeah? A few of you. Charryse and I went to Beverly Hills one time. We are the type of people that when we go on vacation and have to rent a car, we rent the cheapest car possible. And so we had kind of like a cardboard box on wheels with a motor in it when we were in California. And I remember driving through Beverly Hills, and two things really stick out to me. One is that this very expensive car with a very young man came driving up behind us at about 80 miles an hour in a 25-mile-an-hour zone and drove around us through wavy hills, just as if he didn't have a care in the world. It was kind of terrifying. The other one is this incredible knot in my stomach that I was dodging police officers who were going to kick me out of a place that I didn't belong. All right? Beverly Hills is an exclusive culture in America, right? We all know the zip code, don't we? What's the zip code to Beverly Hills? 90210! We know about Beverly Hills. It is a place that is beyond many of our grasps, right? It's a place that, if we go, we won't even feel like we belong; and this song sort of captures that angst, doesn't it?

For those of you who were following along with the words, this song is about a guy who wants something more out of life, who understands himself to be lower-class and not quite good enough, and how cool it would be if he could just be the kind of person that someone wants to take a picture by the pool of, right? Have that fit body, the well-to-do life, the huge house, the mansion, the pretty people, all those kind of things. He wants to be part of something bigger than what he thinks he is at this time. And as he tries to fit into that culture, Todd sang the last part, "I find I just don't belong." I just don't belong here. So what I'm going to do instead, because I don't belong in this higher culture, I'm just going to sit around and watch the stars play.

That's kind of what we do in society, right? We love our reality television show. We love it when people that are famous subject themselves to cameras, and demonstrate how they just play through life. We have, in a lot of ways, in our own culture today, lost our own ability to play, because we would rather sit in front of the TV and watch other people play. And this song sort of gets at our own angst as people, how we want to be part of something bigger than just the hum-drum sort of everyday life. And yet, our aims are often towards places that we still don't belong.

Now, what's interesting about coming to church – at least how I hope it is – is that it's not like Beverly Hills. It's not an exclusive culture. It's a place where we come to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, but we find that we DO belong, that all are welcome, that everyone has a voice. And that voice is so often easily found in our singing. That in our singing, everyone's voice matters. As we gather together to sing, and

the music plays, and we sing, hopefully we find that we are sort of corporately, together, lifted to a higher place. That higher place is God's pulling us towards himself, and God's Kingdom becomes, I hope and I think, really alive as we worship God. Really, really close and near, and in this place with us. We find that it's not like Beverly Hills, to be a part of God's Kingdom, that that's a kingdom that's drawing near and inviting people who are lowly, who are people like who describe themselves in this song: "I'm just a no-class, beat-down fool." "I don't have any change in my pocket." "I don't have much going for me," but yet God's Kingdom invites people just like that say, "You have a prominent place in this Kingdom." It's not like Beverly Hills that says, "Nooo, no no no no, no, no, no, you don't quite measure up." This Kingdom of God invites us in. And I think we get to experience it well when we're singing.

Singing is an important part of culture, isn't it? I was talking with someone – I think it was Chris Elgee, but I could be wrong – this week about how music is interesting because while you may not "get" the music, while you may not understand what someone in a foreign language is singing, there's a lot of things that may be hard for us to connect to when we hear music, we know music when we hear it! It is ubiquitous in that every culture uses music in some of way to sort of identify who they are. Music is also profoundly important because it is, it sort of speaks from deep within us. And we use music to sort of embed, deep within us, things as well. You think of advertising, if you will, right? Advertising loves jingles, right? Why is it that advertising loves jingles so much? It's because they know when the music gets inside of you, when the music gets inside of you, you will remember it, it becomes part of who you are, and so they use music so that you don't forget their product.

Now, I do have one video of a fairly famous TV show of one time where the guy remembered the song but couldn't remember the product. Let's watch that real fast.

[VIDEO CLIP]

That's right, "Break me off a piece of that Kit-Kat bar!" There are so many other ones that you'll recall, as well. Like, "I don't want to grow up, because baby if I did, I couldn't be a," [congregation joins in], "Toys-R-Us kid!" Yeah! Let's see – I've forgotten my other ones now – but there are so, so many of these songs. We've got another clip of a song that Kat told me about from her childhood that is also really, really good:

[VIDEO CLIP]

That song is from the 1970s. How many of you still remember that ad and that song? Look at that! It's nearly forty years old, and yet the song is embedded in you, right? You remember these things. How about this one? "My baloney has a first name," (congregation responds), "It's O-S-C-A-R," (and Tim says), "My baloney has a second name," (congregation responds), "It's M-A-Y-E-R." Yeah, right? And then Oscar Mayer did another one, as well, right? What's the other Oscar Meyer one? (Congregation responds, then Tim sings), "That is what I always wanted to be..." Right?

So songs have a way of just completely embedding themselves in us, don't they? Songs become very, very important. We use songs to remember things. Even my daughter Mackenzie, when we go and see her Open Houses -- she's in second grade now -- so when we go and see what the school is doing, they will take songs from the radio that all the little kids know, and they will rework some concept that they have in class, to that song. And so what they're trying to do is to use music to help children recall information, to come up with new ideas, to remember what it is they're supposed to be learning. And it's incredible, the power that music has to help us do just that!

And so, this is part of why we sing in church! Because so much of what it is that we believe about God, are things that we sang in our youth. The singing -- of course, when we write the songs we hope the songs are grounded in biblical reality and truth, right? -- but when we have achieved that, we sing the songs to help us remember who it is that God is, and what it is that God is doing, as well. Our Christian walk and our Christian faith become so intertwined with what it is that we sing.

Did you know that Jesus sang in the Bible? Did you know this? Ellen, when she came up here, made mention that the Psalms were the songbook of the Israelites. When they would gather to worship, they would open up what we read as the Psalms, and they would sing them as a part of their worship. Now, there's a very famous line that Jesus had, one that sometimes makes us scratch our head a bit and wonder what is happening here. And that particular moment is when Jesus is hanging on the Cross; He is crucified, bleeding, dying. Lungs just tearing, oxygen disappearing, and He was just suffering. And he says, very famously in that moment, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" It's a hard moment for us to take, I think, if we're reading the scripture honestly. That word "forsaken" means "abandoned," or "left alone," and it's almost like we cry, "Where are you God, where have you been, why aren't you helping me now," and for us as readers of Jesus, we want to say, "Well, goodness, if God's going to help ANY one, it seems like Jesus should be that one that he's helping, right? What's happening here? What is happening?" Well, did you know that Jesus might have been singing when he said those words? Are you aware of that?

We all know Psalm 23, right? "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." The Psalm right before that begins with very interesting words, and if you would, I would appreciate it if you would join with me as we read the 22nd Psalm as our scripture text today.

Now, you'll notice right away that it's the quote of Jesus that it starts with, so you can imagine that while Jesus is on the Cross, he's hearing the words of his youth from this song again, and that these words become a comfort to him. That even while He feels forsaken by God, He understands God's salvation can work through his forsakenness. Listen to the words from the Psalm:

[SCRIPTURE]

The Word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Did you catch the multiple images in that Psalm, written hundreds of years before Jesus' crucifixion, that match up to what's happening to Jesus while he's on the Cross? Multiple images happening in there, including incredible things: bones being broken, people piercing his hands and feet, him being thirsty and his tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth. Many, many images that fit Jesus' crucifixion and suffering. And it's rightfully so, that Christ would say, "My God, why have You abandoned me here? Why have You left me for this?" It's right for Him to feel abandoned, but when He feels abandoned, when He feels forsaken, He remembers a song that He memorized as a child at Temple. And that song finally declares that it is through the suffering of the Righteous One that future generations will learn about God. That the one that suffers is not far from God, it's not that God has turned His back, finally, on the one who suffered. That while we feel as if we are suffering, our suffering is not a distance from God, but that God can work through the suffering. And it's a song on the lips of Jesus on the Cross that recognizes the possibility of the salvation of all people, that while He felt abandoned as He suffered, God's work is not done in this moment. And it's a song that gives Him comfort, and it's a song that pushes Him through, it's a song that helps Him remember who He is and whose He is and why it is that He does what He does. It's a song.

This is why we sing in church. All of these reasons that we talked about today! Because the songs become ways of us remembering, when remembering is hard. The songs become a way for us to remember when remembering is hard. Whether it's because our old age begins taking our memory, or because the suffering in the moment is making it hard for us to see who we are, the songs that help us remember who we are. And they also provide a hope for us of what is to come, as well. They remind us that, in the moment, where we're at now is not the final destination of this Christian life. That we sing about a world that is to come: a world that is coming to us through the death and resurrection of Christ, that God is going to give to us, as our heavenly reward, that we will spend eternally with Him. We sing not only about our situation here, but we also sing about a world in which we have not completely participated in yet.

There's a movie that I think really, really, really helps us to see how this possibility could be. It's a movie series that's being talked about a whole lot now, because "Back To The Future II" suggested that the Cubs would win the World Series in 2015. Right? So people are talking about this all over the Internet.

I want to look at a scene back in the first movie, from "Back To The Future I" – And the particular scene, for those of you – I'm sure most of you have seen the movie – but let's set the groundwork a little, if we could.

Marty has gone back to the future – Marty is Michael J. Fox – he's very concerned that it looks like as though his parents will not get together, and if his parents don't get together, he will cease to exist, thus altering the future. And so lots of things happen, and Marty's parents are about to not have their kiss at the dance that caused them

to fall in love that caused them to get married. So Marty's job is to make sure they have that kiss, or else otherwise he and his siblings will cease to exist.

So Marty shows up – them not knowing that he is their son from the future – and plays the guitar at their Homecoming Dance or whatever it is. So he's playing the song, "Earth Angel" – you guys remember that old song? "Earth angel, earth angel," right? He's playing that song and he's stopping existing, his body is going away, because it looks like his parents aren't going to get together. And at just the right moment, his dad comes over and punches the bad guy, kisses the girl, and Marty stands right back up. And it's interesting that even in the music, he finds his own salvation, right? But upon finding that he has life once again, upon finding that he has life, he wants to sing a song of joy – which is what we do in the church, right? Upon finding that we have a life in Christ that we didn't expect, that we want to sing a song of joy! And so the only song of joy that he could possibly think of to sing there is, "Johnny B. Goode." (Laughter) By Chuck Berry. What a theological praise song that is, right? (More laughter) But, it's a song from another world, the song doesn't even exist yet, the song doesn't even exist. And so he just tells them a couple of chords, and he tells them to play it, and he has fun, and just look and see the reaction that people have to this song. They start dancing, they like it, but the more he gets into it, the more he behaves in a way that's from a world that is yet to come to them, the more the people are put off by it. Let's just go ahead and watch this clip.

[VIDEO CLIP]

There may come a point in your life where you're still singing and the rest of the world has stopped. They may look at you like you're strange. You may wonder if you've become the strange one. But keep singing! Keep singing. Let the joy of the Lord pour out of you as you sing. Don't allow what others – others may love the start of the song, but they may not be ready for the rest of the song. Keep singing. You're singing about a world that hasn't fully revealed itself yet, but it's coming. It's coming. Just like the 1980s finally came, from the 1950s, right? You may be singing and playing from a world that is to come. Not everyone may get it, but keep singing, keep singing with joy, keep singing with happiness, because you'll find that you're becoming who you are in Christ while you sing! It's shaping, it's forming you, it's helping you to become who God is calling you to be.

And today, as we close up this service, Angela is going to come – she's quite a singer, you're going to enjoy her very much – she's going to sing a song that's very important to my childhood, one that I actually have a framed picture of in my office that serves as a constant reminder to me of who I am. The song she's going to sing is, "How Great Thou Art." This is a song I think that I might sing when I'm 85 and struggling a little bit. A song that's been with me since, well, before I was born, and helped rear and raise me and helped create who I am, and whose life I'm living into.

Many of you feel the same way with that song. And so as we come today – our Communion helpers are coming as well – we're going to take Communion here, at the very end of service -- and as you come and "How Great Thou Art" is playing, think about

what this song means to you. Think about how it's helped shape who you are, and helped realize how this song has become an important way of pointing you towards the Cross of Christ, where He bled and died for you.

[SONG]

Timothy Brooks
South Portland Church of the Nazarene
Sermon #2: Scripture Reading
October 18, 2015

We're working on a sermon series right now talking about pop culture and what happens when we leave this place and enter into our world: what kind of person is that world trying to make versus what sort of person a worshipping Christian is becoming as they subject themselves to the process of worship? We're talking about that tension, that struggle, of living in the world that we live in, and also being a Christian person who attends worship, and trying to identify who it is we're supposed to be in this sort of world. And so we've been working through the different parts of worship; why it is we do what we do, and how and why each of the parts of those piece of worship creates us to be certain kind of people.

And today, like I mentioned earlier, we're going to talk about the reading of Scripture, and why it is that we read Scripture out loud, what it is that we do. And so the first thing I want to talk about, before we get into that today, is this idea in our culture that is so prevalent, and you'll know what I'm talking about when I'm saying it, is this: our world today fetishizes Youth. Youth is everything in the world today.

Youth fetishization is why movie stars date people half their age. It's always a little weird, right? Or, why it is that the "Sports Illustrated" swimsuit edition has a new 21-year-old every year, as they cast out 28-year-olds for being just a little too old. It's why people are fired from their job for being 60, and having no cause for termination. It's why television networks make shows that score well with the 18-to-35 demographic, not concerning themselves with any other ages. What youth do matters. What Youth does makes the world go around. And when we get to the point that we no longer feel young anymore, we even get to the point where we look back to our youth and act as if those were the best days of our lives. We have a way of sort of looking back to when we felt better, and saying, "Man, those were good days."

I remember when I was a sophomore in college, I was walking through the mall in the town I went to high school in, and I saw a girl who was in my class in high school and was a cheerleader. Now, I was a sophomore in college, nineteen years old, and she said to me – she was twenty – "Man, I miss high school, those were the best days of our lives." (Pause) She was serious, too! (Laughter) It's crazy how we look back to our youth and act as if those were the "glory days."

Now today, the secular song that the band is going to sing for us, to sort of illustrate the way it is that we see the past, as if those were the best days of our lives, is a Bruce Springsteen song. You all know Bruce Springsteen? So, I'm curious: How many of you were born between, say, the year 1965 and 1980? Anyone? Yeah, you're going to really like this Sunday. This is a Gen X Sunday through and through. This is your pop culture that we're going to talk about today. This song is by Bruce Springsteen and called, "Glory Days." Pay attention to how Bruce Springsteen looks back at his youth and acts as if those were the best days of his life, and think about how often it is in culture that this argument is being made: when you're young is when you matter! The past is the best part of your lives. Imagine that a little bit as they sing this song to us today.

[SONG]

(Applause)

The song is fairly depressing, if you think about it. The days gone by are just boring stories to tell now. There's nothing to do, now that you've had a kid, but to put them to bed and go out and drink and imagine how our days used to be better. It's a depressing song put to exciting music, and so we play that song and think we're having fun, but yet the story is the story of people who are not satisfied any more. They used to be satisfied when they were young, back in their day it used to be cool, I used to be cool. I had a strong arm. People used to think I was pretty. And now I've got nothing but boring stories of glory days. It's depressing. It's sad.

And maybe – maybe – that's even how we become in the church. We talk about glory days from when we were younger. We remember when God used to speak, we remember when God used to rule, we remember when we used to worship "that way," those were the glory days. And we get to the point that...we don't really feel it anymore. We would rather experience the glory days of a relationship with God than to hear God speak fresh and new today. It's another way that sort of the cultural understanding of Youth creeps into our church and sort of grabs ahold of the way that we understand how we do church. Which is too bad.

So, why do we read? The irony here is that when we read the Scripture, we're reading ancient stories of how God used to be! That's the irony of it, right? These stories are 2,000-plus-years-old and we read them as if they matter, when what we're also looking for is a fresh revelation of God. Why is it that we read? Or maybe a better question is, Do we read at all? Not just the Scripture, but have we completely lost the ability to be interested in reading, as a society? John is going to put up an infographic for us that may be a little complicated to read, but the basic idea of it is that 33% of high school graduates have not read another book in their entire life after their graduation. One-third of people. 42% of college grads never read another book in their life after graduation. 57% of books that people open up and read page one of, are not read to completion. 57 per cent. 70% of U.S. adults have not been in a bookstore in the last five years. 60% of U.S. families did not read or

buy a book last year. The more a child reads, the likelier they are to understand the emotions of others. We can go on and on about these facts about reading books, and I can see on your faces about 40% of you can't believe that no one has been in a bookstore in the last five years, and the other 60% of you are, "Don't look at me!" (Laughter) (Tim whistles) You should see your faces, all very, very funny. All very, very funny.

So we elevate reading to an important place in the church, and that in itself is sort of a counter-cultural sort of thing, when we read the Scripture. But if you can remember back to when you were forced to read books, back in high school and middle school, you may recall that the reading of stories and the reading of books were vitally important to your formation and your understanding. In fact, one of the earliest ways that I came to learn about the danger of racism -- and this is probably the case with many of you as well -- and how poor racism is as a way of seeing the world, was in my reading of the book, "To Kill A Mockingbird." How many of you read that book in school, "To Kill A Mockingbird"? Yeah, I thought so. You remember the story of Tom Robinson, and how he was falsely accused of raping a white girl, when she had sort of come on to him, and the whole town got around it, and you saw the world through Atticus Finch's eyes, and you came to realize how terrible the disease of racism could be? We learned to combat racism by reading the story of "To Kill A Mockingbird."

Many of us learned in school the evils of the inequities of Communism by reading the story, "Animal Farm." How many of you were assigned the book "Animal Farm"? Right? And that book was actually written by a socialist who looked into the U.S.S.R. and saw it as a dangerous society, and wrote this book where the famous line is, "All animals are created equal, but some are more equal than others." (Silence) That's supposed to be funny. (Laughter) But that was sort of his criticism and critique of Communism. And a whole generation of young Americans, terrified by the Cold War, came to understand Communism as evil and the enemy through the reading of this book at their level. Not only us, but it was actually written by a Brit to British kids, as well, and so we've come to learn to combat Communism through "Animal Farm."

We learned to combat labeling and the dangers of labeling by reading the book, "The Scarlet Letter." How many of you had to read "The Scarlet Letter"? Yeah, you guys -- see, you guys are good readers, I love it! "The Scarlet Letter" is the story by Nathaniel Hawthorne of having to put a letter to brand young women in their society. We learned about the dangers of labeling, without the full story, in that.

Many of us had to read Charles Dickens. Those are important, very, very important books in Britain, where they see class in a very similar way to us Americans seeing race. And the story of Dickens is always about the class struggle between the rich and the poor, and young Brits read those and come to understand their society very well. We come to understand it, too, but maybe one step removed from how it's read there.

The reading of stories helps formulate the way that we see the world, it helps us understand the world that we live in, and how to react to that. And so it is for us, too, as we read the Scriptures. We gather together to read the Scriptures, so they can be foundational stories for us. These stories that have been passed down of God's activities with humans, these are not stories of history, solely, but they're formational to help us understand the history of how God has interacted with the people of God, and what it is that the people of God do that makes God happy, and what it is that the people of God do to make God sad. The reading of these stories is not just a history lesson for us to look back at glory days and say, "Man, it was really good back when God acted then!", but they're times for us to gather together and hear the Word of the Lord and have a fresh revelation to say that God, who was and is and is to come, is the same God then as He is today. And the way that God was acting and behaving in these stories are indicative of how God acts and wants to be amongst us today. And so God is shaping us in the reading of these stories, as we look back and read the gospel texts, of how Jesus was and how He lived in this world. We don't just say, "Man, Jesus was a good guy!" or even that he was a good God. But we say that Jesus is a God who still lives amongst us, and does things in these sort of ways. We read the story of the Old Testament and we see the balance between sin and repentance and restoration, and we begin to mourn our own sin, and we begin to seek repentance and restoration with God. These stories are living, and they're breathing, given to us so we can see God's activity in our lives and in our community.

Today I want to read a story about a reading of a story in the Bible, and to see how it is the people of God reacted, to the reading of a story, and to see how that impacts the way we should be as we read the ancient stories of God. The story that we're going to look at goes like this: there was a man working for a Babylonian king. The Babylonian king's name was – I've got to read it, because it's hard – Artaxerxes. All right? And he was the king of Babylon in a time when the Israelites had been exiled. You see, God had gotten tired of his people's sin, so He removed His protection and in came the Babylonians, they sacked Jerusalem, and pulled people out of the Promised Land and made them live in Babylon. Some of the famous stories that we have from this time are Daniel in the lions' den; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; Daniel eating vegetables instead of eating the meat sacrificed to the idols of Babylon. These are things that happened when Israelites were taken from their homeland and forced to live in a place where foreign gods were served. And this punishment struck a chord with the Israelites; they knew they were wrong, and they had no idea what to do when they were turned loose in this new land. Were they supposed to make things right with their God? Were they supposed to seek forgiveness and restoration with Him? Were they to understand themselves as Babylonians now that those Babylonians had demonstrated themselves to be powerful? Do we begin to worship those things? And the people just became lost in their society, they yearned for the past where they could live in the Promised Land, where God was God and they were familiar and could worship Him. But they also

felt that they had to get along in this foreign land that they found themselves living in now.

Many biblical scholars look at this Exile and they see today's world so very through and through. Back in the glory days of the church, God was everywhere and people prayed in schools, they talked about God, it was okay to discuss religion in society, and now it feels like we live in a foreign land where things are different. The question is: How does God work in exile? How does God work in exile? If we are in exile today, how do we see God at work, and is God asking us to look back to the glory days, and say, "Gee, I wish it was like that again," or is He asking to raise up a fresh vision to come out of exile? It's an important question to ask. And Nehemiah, that story is about raising up a fresh vision out of exile that leads to repentance and restoration.

And so Nehemiah asks one day to a casual traveler through, how things in Jerusalem are doing, and he's told a depressing story of the Temple in rubble, and people worshipping God-knows-what, being very scared and confused as to who they were. And his heart becomes incredibly heavy, and he hurts and he's depressed and he's sad, when the king sees him one day. Now, Nehemiah was a nobody in the kingdom, he was the guy -- the job that no one wants to have at all -- he was the one who took a sip of the wine before the king did. You know what that means, right? You're expendable! You can go! We're going to check to see if you die or foam at your mouth before we let the king drink it.

Nehemiah was a nobody. And one day the king sees him, and he looks downcast and sad, and he says, "What's going on?" And Nehemiah tells him about his homeland in rubble, and how brokenhearted he is, how he doesn't know what to do. And King Artaxerxes says, "Tell you what, I'll let you go back." And the king gives Nehemiah governor powers; he goes from cup-bearer to governor over his hometown of Jerusalem. And so Nehemiah asks for protection as he leads the people out of Exile into their land. And so they walk through all these foreign cities and towns. People who very much hated Israel and were thrilled to see that they got what was coming to them, and he received the king's protection all the way back into town.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, he casts a vision to the downcast and sad people who feel left out and feel left behind, that they can rebuild the Temple. This is the Temple that Solomon had built, and had just been laid waste. And so the people want to see the Temple rebuilt but they can't imagine it, they can't see how it's possible, they think that this depressing reality of God not being near to them is their new future, and that they're going to have to make their way through it. And Nehemiah keeps pushing with the vision that they can rebuild it, and they start rebuilding the gates. And all the cities and towns and nations around them start rising up and saying, "We're going to come for you, we don't want this built!" and they send news back to Babylon, the all-powerful nation, that they want to tear the Israelites back down, that they had gotten what was deserved to them. But

Nehemiah keeps pressing through this bad news and this opposition until finally he gathered all the people and they built the first wall up. And they built this wall up from gate to gate in 57 days. Now, they didn't have cranes, they didn't have power tools, they built a giant, massive wall of the Temple – and you have to understand, like when we think “temple” we think maybe like a church? This was like, the government center, the financial center, this in Jerusalem is like Wall Street and D.C. and the National Cathedral all rolled into one building. This thing is the center of the town; it is HUUUUGE, and in 57 days, they build up a wall. And the people around them, their response is to say, “There's no way anyone can build a wall that fast unless their God is for them and not for us.” And so they back off the pressure. And Nehemiah says, “We've got to do something about this. God has given us the ability to rebuild our Temple. He has blessed us with protection, and He's given us skill beyond what we deserve, and here we are, we've got to do something about it.”

So he calls his good buddy Ezra over and asks Ezra if he would read the Law of Moses before the people. Now, it's been generations and generations and generations since Moses climbed up on the mountain and God had given him the Law for these people, God's people, should be going forward. And the real struggle for these Israelite people is, is that to read the Law is to read what caused them to go into exile. The reading of this is going to be corrective, it's going to be hard to hear, because the Israelites had so severely broken God's Law that God pulled His protection back. And so hearing the Law again is going to be painful, because it's going to call them to a new life in the world that they find themselves living into. And yet they gather around, and they ask Ezra, the keeper of the Law, to read it to them. This story is found in the very last part of the seventh chapter of Nehemiah, through the first few verses of the eighth chapter of Nehemiah. Now, Nehemiah is a bit hard to find, maybe? And so the words are going to be on the screen for you if you'd like to follow along there. But as we read this story, would you stand as we read the first nine verses of chapter eight of Nehemiah?

[VERSES]

You may be seated.

Imagine their position. They wondered where God was in their society. As they looked at what had happened to them, they wondered where God was. And now God is being revealed to them in the reading of an ancient text, an ancient text that gives them meaning and life. It reminds them of who they have been for generations, and who they will be moving forward. And the only response that they could have to the public reading of Scripture is to cry; just absolute, out-of-control crying, to understand and to hear again who it was God was calling them to be. They did this because they didn't read the book of Moses and think, “God was good back then.” They didn't understand the time of Moses and the Exodus to be the glory days. They understood in the reading of the Scripture that God was calling them to be something moving forward. They had to change, they had to be different. So you know what they did? They began to meet often to read the Law, and when they

would read the Law, they would read it for a quarter of the day, and then they would spend the next quarter of the day repenting. They would repent for the sins of their fathers. They would repent for the sins of themselves. They would repent for the nation of Israel. They would read the Law, and they would respond in repentance. Not because God “was,” but because who the Scriptures told them they were going to be.

One of the interesting movies of Generation X was the movie “The Breakfast Club.” The story of “The Breakfast Club” is the story of a few different kids in a high school who are all very different: the rich little princess, the kid who was always in and out of jail, always in trouble, there was the athlete, the jock. All these different kids end up in Saturday Detention together. None of them think they belong there, of course, and they all have to come together and share their stories with each other. You learn that the “rich princess” doesn’t have it as easy as she seems she does. You learn that the punk that is always in trouble is maybe in trouble this year because for Christmas he was given a packet of smokes by his dad, and that’s it. They begin to share the stories of their lives. They begin to tell the story of their heartbreak, why it is they struggle, why it is they create facades that hide who they are. Why it is they build up false narratives about themselves: to protect the truth of who they are at their heart. They tell false stories to protect themselves. And as the day unfolds, they begin to tear down their walls to each other and demonstrate who they really are. And they find that no matter what society says that they are, they find that there’s a human inside of the people that they’re talking to. They begin to look at each other differently. And as the story ends, they all have to leave Saturday Detention, and they all have incredible nerves that now that they know who each other are, that when Monday comes along and the pressure is on, can they treat each other like they treated each other on Saturday? Can they live out what they learned about each other on Saturday? Can they continue that and be kind to each other, breaking social norms, and be nice to each other in school on Monday? Can they protect each other? Can they remember what it is they learned in the telling of stories in Saturday Detention?

This is also the challenge that we have on ourselves in the church today. When the Scripture is elevated and it’s read, and we’re reminded of who God is and who He’s calling us to be, we allow the Scripture to read us, to look at us, and it invites us to repentance. It invites us to turn around and become the people that God is calling us to be. And the question is, Now that we know who God is, as He’s revealed to us in the Scriptures, can we live that way on Monday? Can we live that way on Tuesday? Or are we simply going to return to the Scriptures next Sunday, without opening it once during the week, allow it to read us again, and act as if these words don’t matter?

These words are transformative, they are life-giving, they don’t want to be just a history text. They want to be something that enlivens and enriches us and invites us to be something new, created by God, as we go from this place. And so it’s awful hard, awful hard, to invite ourselves to be read by a text, to encourage us to be

different than our gut wants us to be, and certainly different than the world wants us to be. It's very hard. But we're not left to do it on our own. We're not left to do it on our own. In fact, the same Scripture that inspired writers to write down what it was that God was doing in their world, that was given to us in this book – that same Spirit is working to fill your life with the very desires of God and the very call of Him, as well.

And one of the most important ways and places that we can be filled with the Spirit is by coming to the Broken Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. And taking the Body and Blood of Christ, reminding ourselves of who God was and what God has done, and allowing the Spirit to fill us, even as the meal of Christ fills us, for us to be different as we move forward into our life.

And so I've got Communion servers who are going to come, and the band is going to come as well and play a final song.

Timothy Brooks
South Portland Church of the Nazarene
Sermon #3: Prayer
October 25, 2015

One of the things that we were taught when we were younger, that comes out of what is called a modern philosophy, is that we are thinking, rational beings. You may, at this point, have met enough people by now who are irrational to know that that is not the truth, right? But basically, what that means is that we are a body that thinks. That's essentially what the idea there is, that we are a thinking creature. But maybe that's not exactly true. Maybe it's not exactly true that what we are is a "thinker" through and through.

Let me give you an example. If you are driving down the street, probably going right at the speed limit and not a mile over, right? Driving down the street, and you see an octagonal symbol that is red with white on the outside with four letters on the inside that are S, T, O, P, what do you do? Stop! Now, if we were rational, thinking creatures and beings, if we are just thinking people, that's what we were, we would have to really process what that sign means. We'd have to deconstruct why the "T" is where it's at. What did I do last time I saw that? What does it mean for future times I see that?

We don't do that at all. We don't process the sign, we see the sign, and we stop. What that shows us is that deep down in our gut, we are a person that reacts. We have information that's just kind of stored, and we're almost programmed to react to the world as it comes to us. We don't make a conscious decision for every last thing we do. We don't, when we see a bowl of candy in front of us, really think, "I wonder how many calories are in that, and is that good for me?" You see free candy, you take a scoop, and you throw it in your mouth! Right? We have desires and gut feelings and programs, the way we behave, the way we act, what we do. We are a person filled with appetites, and often those appetites can even create how it is we respond to our world.

Now, one of the problems with being a person with appetites is that we're not always thinking about what we do, and we get kind of caught into the routine of life. We just get caught into the routine, we don't often think about why it is we do what we do. Now, I've studied way too much philosophy and way too much theology in life, so that in my house, I often question the things that we do, and this just drives my wife up the wall! "Why can't we just live? Why can't we just be? Why do you have to ask? Why do you have to think? Why do you have to always do all this kind of stuff?" And that's probably right because we want to just kind of program our body to be a certain way and then go through life without having to question every last thing and deconstruct every last idea. That's a much more ideal way to go through life.

The question is, though, especially as Christian people, when we become a "programmed person" with appetites, and we cease to question the world that we live in, what becomes a very important question is this: "Is what we're doing actually Christian, or is there something else speaking into what we're doing, and it's become so secondhand to us, we don't even realize that maybe it's not fully Christian to do so?" Now, just because something isn't Christian to do so -- let me make this perfectly clear -- does not mean that we're calling it sin. There isn't a binary world where there's Christian things and sin, and that's all everything could possibly qualify into.

But, there is this thing that I would like to call -- this is a big word, so bear with me -- cultural liturgies. Now, have you heard the term "liturgy" before? Raise your hand, have you heard that term? Now, theologically speaking, that word means, "the work of the people," all right? In churches, for years and years and years they typically met in a liturgical style and it was the way of making sure that the church people interacted with the worship, that it wasn't just a show from onstage being dropped on you. There would be repetitive readings and hymns and prayers and all this stuff, so the whole of the people were participating in worship. And that's really what liturgy means, and it's been co-opted to mean something different, where you read every word off the bulletin and that means "liturgical," and if you go to a church like ours there's no liturgy at all. That's really a false statement that's not particularly fair. Okay?

But liturgy means "the work of the people," and particularly it means something that's formational to people, that the people are enacting and participating in something formational to them. It's creating who they are. Now, in church, we have lots and lots and lots of liturgies. Our basic liturgy is written on a piece of paper every week and handed to everyone who has something to do. It's the order of worship letting us know where we're moving, from place to place, who's doing what, and that sort of thing. There's a set order. Most of you can pretty well predict what's coming next on a given Sunday here, and that's okay.

Now, the culture has liturgies as well. These are the things that we have kind of lost track of, because we've just sort of participated in. For example, someone talked about a cultural liturgy, and they talked about this temple that all of us go to all of the time -- well, some of you are going to claim that you never go, and that's fine. But there

are temples in our society that we go to that we drive our SUVs and our cars to, and we line up, and we don't think about it at all, because it's "normal" for us to go. It's normal for us to go into this place where you park your car, and walk into a place with giant, shiny glass structures and pictures of what beauty is, and a place where you can take your hard-earned money and give it in sacrifice in order to receive the beauty you see there, that each different place that you walk into and you walk the halls of these well-adorned temple buildings, these different places that promise you that they can make your life better for just a small offering. You know what I'm talking about? The mall! (Laughter) The mall! Right? If there's anything that a trip to the mall does, and listen -- I was caught in the mall this week by the Skeltons, so I'm not saying, "Don't go to the mall," okay? That's not what I'm saying at all. But it's become so familiar for us to go to the mall, we don't even really ask ourselves anymore, "What's really happening when we go to the mall?" And part of what is happening when we go to the mall is that we are getting image upon image upon image trying to tell us, "We can make your life better! You can be prettier than you are, you can have a nicer vehicle than you drive now. If you buy this product, you'll be happier because your morning will be quicker. If you buy this product, you can remove those zits that cause such dismay to your very self-esteem! And you can feel like a better person. "

These are the sort of things that are important for us to think about: that sometimes, very benignly, we simply participate in a liturgy that's saying we can be a better person, forgetting that it is in Christ that our personhood is found. Now, that doesn't mean you shouldn't remove your zits, no one really wants to look at them, okay? (Laughter) It's okay, hear what I'm saying, I'm not criticizing the mall! What I'm saying is, we live in a world, we interact with a world, we participate in a world that we've forgotten to engage with and forgotten to ask, "What is it saying to me? And how does that measure up to what Christ is saying to me and who my God is saying that I am?" We've forgotten to ask these questions.

And so, we're working through a process together of looking into what the world has to say, and saying, "What is it telling me, and how is this a competing narrative to what it is that we're trying to find out who we are in the Scriptures and in the revelation of God and the worship in service?"

Another cultural narrative that is completely benign and okay is this: You will grow up going to school, you will graduate high school, you will go to college, you will get a job, you will get married, you will have children, you will buy a house, you will then have grandchildren, and then you will retire and eventually you will die. If you do something out of that order? Man, do you get strange looks! Right? That order, the order that we have decided is the right way to live, if you're going to be an American citizen, and if you start messing with that order? I'll just give you a great example: Charysse and I got married while we were in college, and there were dozens of people lining up to tell us how much of a mistake that was! Why? Well, mostly because they thought that Charysse couldn't graduate college if she got married. I mean, that was literally the reason. And of course, she did graduate college, quite easily, actually. But this is a liturgy

that we just have: “This is the way you operate as an American in our world today.” Throw it out of order and people start looking at you a little strange.

How about this one? This one is a little more concerning, a little less benign, but the “Three Date Rule.” Have you ever heard of the “Three Date Rule”? The “Three Date Rule” is basically the idea that it’s on the third date that you’re now free to have sex with the person you’re dating. Now, where does something like that come from? And if you want to think that I’m just making up something, I Googled just “The Three Date Rule” and there were 308 million results in less than one second. Okay? I found this take from across the pond in Britain on “The Three Date Rule” and their take on where it came from. This is from the newspaper, “The Telegraph,” and this is the British perspective on American culture:

“We also seem to be increasingly taken by the dating propaganda from across the pond.” – that’s us. “Modern-day media has a lot to answer for, but one of the biggest impacts it’s had relates to what our idea of the sexual status quo looks like. In the nineties and naughties” – which means, you know, like, ’07, ’08, not ‘naughty’ – “we had an influx of American programs that told us that A) everyone was beautiful, B) everyone was dating all the time, and C) everyone was ‘having it off’ all the time.

“‘Friends,’ although one of my favorite sit-coms, portrayed the world of nonstop pickups and constant conquests, with Joey’s ill-treatment of women he slept with being rich comedy fodder, a theme that became even a greater inspiration to the god-awful Barney in ‘How I Met Your Mother.’ But it was ‘Sex And The City’ that instilled in us the notion that there was something that was a bit wrong with you if you didn’t want to have sex with someone after a couple of cocktails and a dinner date. Looming large in my mind, to this day, is an episode where Carrie starts dating Aidan, when, after a week and a half, he hasn’t tried to get to bed with her, she decides he’s either gay or unattracted to her. The message is clear: ten days after meeting someone, if you’re not having sex, there’s a Major Problem. Such sexual ‘norms’ have slipped insidiously into our dating culture, perhaps without us even consciously realizing it. And I don’t think it’s doing us any good.”

This is the perspective of someone from England looking into our culture and seeing who we are. And people would read that, most likely – maybe not in here but certainly in our community – and say, “Well, I don’t see what the problem is.” Culture has initiated us into this by vague and simple references on TV shows. And this idea of the “Three Date Rule” is best simply found just from television shows from making jokes about “that’s what it is,” and it becoming the norm for the dating culture in America today.

I don’t say this to be depressing or anything like that, but for us to again say, “What is it that we’re consuming, without really thinking through what we’re consuming? What are the messages that we’re learning that aren’t necessarily bad

messages, but can be bad messages when in practice?” And, some things that seem pretty benign sometimes aren’t very benign at all, they’re fairly malignant and begin to poison our very soul without us realizing it, because we’re subconsciously living in this world and not really engaging at all with what it is, and who it is, that we’re supposed to be.

And so today, we’ve been doing a song from pop culture, and today we’re going to throw it back to the early ‘70s to John Lennon. John Lennon, of course, is famous for his time with the Beatles. One reason that the Beatles seemed to stagnate – not only because they couldn’t get along, and they were on drugs, and all that sort of stuff – but John Lennon famously said that the Beatles had become more popular than Jesus. Right? And so, after the Beatles break up, John Lennon starts this sort of post-hippie movement that, “If we can dream it, if we can imagine it, we can really conquer this world and make it better. And we can do that through our own power, the power of our own mind, the power of our own imagination! Can you dream this with me?” he would say. And it was caught up no better than in the song that Jack is going to sing for us right now – so Jack, would you come up and sing for us? Now, again, again, so we’re clear: the song is the counterpoint, not the point. All right?

So as you listen to it, be critical of what’s happening. What is being said in these words? You’ve heard this song a million times! What is the author trying to say? Is it good? IS there good? I think there is something interesting about this song. Is it bad? I think there’s something HORRIBLY bad about this song! And to try to find the tension of what he’s doing, and begin to think, “What is this world trying to make me to be, as I consume a song like this? What is the kind of person it imagines I am, when I listen to a song like this?” Jack, take it for us.

[SONG]

(Applause and cheering – for Jack)

You may notice that not only was that Jack’s singing debut, but it was also Tyler’s debut on the drums. (More applause and cheering)

So, of course, when you start out a song, “Imagine there’s no heaven,” it might be kind of hard for a religious establishment to sort of swallow, right? So there’s clearly some theological problems with this, let alone the fact that John Lennon has no theology of sin in this whatsoever, that somehow we, just by our imaginations, imagining a better place, can overcome, just by the power within us. If we could just get past religion, and past nationalism, and past all those things, we would see that we have it within us to rise above the problems and just become society the way that society was meant to be. I mean, come on, that’s pretty naïve, right? It’s fairly naïve. We still, at the end of the day, have to deal with a sin issue: that within us, we deeply yearn to take care of Me as Number One. And simply imagining a better world isn’t going to overcome the sin issue.

Now, I also, of course, have a stake in religion being that I’m a pastor, I kind of believe in religion, I believe it’s important. And not simply because of believing in

heaven or hell, but I think that religion is a way for us to navigate this world well so that we end well in the arms of our Savior who has been crucified and buried on our behalf. And so clearly, I stand in opposition of much of this song, but there is something about this song that is fairly helpful for us: this idea of imagining a world that's different from this, and then reacting to that by behaving differently. Now, I think that that's fairly compatible with what Jesus wanted us to do, particularly in The Lord's Prayer, that Jesus Himself – not only The Lord's Prayer, but the Sermon on the Mount that we find it in in Matthew – is this idea of imagining what the Kingdom of God looks like, and upon receiving Christ as our Savior, trying to live into that Kingdom.

And so Jesus has lots of hard words about what that would look like, imagining the Kingdom of God – if you could imagine God the Father sitting on the throne, and Jesus the Son sitting on the right hand of the throne. And angels surrounding the throne, much like we sang about in “Revelation Song” today – if you can imagine this scene, the praise and the prayers, and how wonderful it must be to see people completely lost in worship to the God who created them, standing right before them.

Now imagine that maybe it's possible to look like that on Earth, as well. And Jesus Himself says it in The Lord's Prayer. So let's look at that, if we can. We're going to read from Matthew chapter six, verses five through fifteen. This is, the telling of it here, Jesus tells us the Lord's Prayer in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, which is Jesus' longest recorded speaking that He ever does, and His most famous sermon that He ever preaches. We know so much of this so very well. So, let's read this together, what it is that Jesus is saying to us, and try to examine a little more for ourselves what that could mean today. Would you join me in standing as we read the Word of the Lord today?

[SCRIPTURE]

So, Jesus is telling us that prayer is not for show! It's not to demonstrate how spiritual or how holy you are, how well-spoken you are, or how in touch with God you are. This is not the idea of prayer at all! Jesus reminds us: God knows what you need before you utter it out of your mouth. The Apostle Paul says that the Spirit groans with words that are indiscernible, on our behalf, interceding for us. And so prayer isn't necessarily, or at least it's not solely, about petitioning God. It's not solely about saying, “Hey, here's a list of about ten or twelve things that I need.” And so often, we get trapped in our prayers, both corporate and privately, of saying things like, “My job stinks, my bank account is low, my kids are acting out, a hurricane is about to hit Mexico, help our country by my candidate being elected because they'll surely lead us to a proper future.” We get in the habit of praying for these things!

And listen – that's not bad! It's not bad at all! We are very welcome to petition God with what is on our hearts! And we find that God has already cared for our needs before we even mention them. It's not like God is sitting upstairs in a room with a notebook saying, “Yeah, well, I can't cure that cancer until he asks me to.” No! God knows our needs, knows our hurts, knows our pain, knows our medical concerns, knows our need before we ask them. Prayer is a relational issue, you see. And if you had a friend

who solely told you what they needed all of the time, just always like, “Man, I can’t get lunch today, I don’t have any money. Do you think you could give me five bucks?” And if that were your whole relationship with him, that friendship wouldn’t last very long. Right? It’s a give and take, it a working together, it’s a hearing and a speaking. And so often, our prayer life is all about us speaking, and I hate to say it, treating God a bit as if He’s a genie. That we have our Bible, which is our lamp, that if we rub it good enough, God is going to hear our prayers and respond to it.

That’s not really what’s going on here. In fact, the prayer that Jesus tells us to pray is scandalous in nature, if you really think about it. It scandalizes us and our own perspective – it really, really does! If it didn’t, Jesus wouldn’t need to redirect us to this prayer! Right? And so even the prayer itself has almost become second nature to us; we have it memorized, we’re terrified when we’re saying it that we’re saying it in the wrong order. Right? I know I am! It becomes almost commonplace for us, but the words themselves are heavy and almost difficult, if we really think about it. We even start, after Jesus telling us to pray in quiet, we start with this word “Our” – “Our Father.” Well, He’s already got us, because what we want to pray is, “My Father”! What we want to pray is, “from my perspective it be done, God,” but we begin by saying we join together in praying. “We, Your people, all pray – in our own closet, in our own home, at our own dinner table, in our own church.” No matter what individuality or community you are with, you are praying to a God who is shared by His people across the world and across time, both who have died in the Lord and those who are still to be born. This God that we’re praying to is not concerned about “my” perspective. What about “our” perspective?

“Our Father, who is in heaven, holy is Your name!” “Holiness” is Your name. You are holy, You are hallowed – those are big words. And then we say, “Hallowed be Your name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” That’s what I was talking about with that throne room. And what John Lennon does well for us, I think, is to remind us that we have an imagination. We can imagine beyond What Is. And here, what Jesus is telling us to imagine, is what the throne room of heaven looks like, where it is that God is right now with His Son who is crucified and raised to life, where the Spirit meet and they live together and they dance together and they love together and they live together – where that is right now -- Jesus is saying, “Pray that it comes into your world and breaks through in a mighty way.”

Now, we don’t have to live just in the status quo. We don’t have to look around and say, “Well, can’t wait ‘til Jesus comes back and destroys this whole model that we’ve set up, it’s a mess around here!” And so often, that’s how we talk as Christian people: “This world is a mess, we need Him to come back!” Jesus is saying, “Imagine where God is now and pray that that would become on earth as it is in heaven!” That’s a radical prayer, is it not? Would God become so well-seen in earth that it’s the same for us, for all people, those who are here and those who are not here this morning, as it is for the angels around His throne: “on earth as it is in heaven.” That is a prayer that’s dangerous to pray, and yet it’s the very specific words that Jesus suggests we should pray. Not just wanting to blow this world up because it’s a mess, but saying, “Oh Lord, could you make it here like it is where You are?” Do we have an imagination for what that could even look like?

If you don't, I have a suggestion for you. My suggestion would be that you read the Sermon on the Mount. Because when Jesus is talking in the Sermon on the Mount, He's talking about Kingdom ethics, the way that life is lived in His Kingdom. The way that we will be when we are in His heaven – that is how we should be living now! And so, He's not speaking allegorically when He says, "Love your enemies." Or when He says, "Forgive your neighbor, because your forgiveness from God is equivalent to that." He's not kidding when He says, "Don't worry about tomorrow." He's not kidding when He says, "Do not store up your treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy." He's not kidding when He says, "Do not commit adultery," and He's not kidding when He says that "an eye for an eye" is no longer the way that we should live; instead, we should take the tunic of someone and walk with them a mile further than they asked us to. And if someone wants to strike us on the right cheek, to give them the left cheek as well.

If we're going to imagine what the Kingdom looks like, and we're going to pray the prayer, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," if we have a hard time imagining that, the Sermon on the Mount can re-stir our imagination. And we can stop acting like it's pretty, cute suggestions for a super-hyper-Christian, but not for me. The Kingdom that is coming, that we are praying that God would send to us, is best revealed in the sermon that Jesus preaches.

The whole idea of what we're talking about is praying, today. And praying, for me, the more I think about it, is, in some ways, especially as I read this prayer by Jesus -- imagining who God is, and in relationship, asking God who I am in light of who He is. That I'm speaking to Him, trying to hear from Him. I'm telling Him what my needs are, what my wants are, absolutely – but I'm also working on the ability to hear what He has to say.

Now, the thing about prayer is that it's learned over a lifetime. But yet sometimes, sometimes the earliest and most rudimentary prayers are the most beautiful. Sometimes, when you hear someone pray for the first time, they kind of shrug themselves off and say, "That was terrible! You guys pray so much better than me." But yet, the rawness and the truth of where that person stands is sometimes the most beautiful thing that you could possibly hear from someone. And so, we gather to pray as a church every single Sunday. We gather to pray, to hear the prayers of all of the people. The pastor steps to the microphone and prays for the people, but we pray as one to Our Father, and we learn in that moment to speak to God ourselves. We learn vocabularies to speak to God with, we learn tenses, we learn postures, even – kneeling, that sort of thing. We learn a lot about what prayer is when we're together, but we all lift our prayers together, with one person speaking on behalf of us. But all of us are in different places. Some of us are new to this Christian faith and we're learning new things. We also pray together to encourage one another, to help each other move closer and closer to God.

There was a movie that was done in 1989 called "Glory." The movie was about the 54th Massachusetts Regiment of the Civil War, an African-American regiment fighting for the Union against the South. All right? And they had a white general. And so

this white general led all these African-Americans. And you can imagine the former slaves, they sang in spirituals – you know, you hear about the old Negro spirituals – they would sing that and pray together. And the scene we’re going to watch today is about them before a big battle. They’re all terrified. They’re all scared. They have no idea what is coming, and so they gather together to pray for each other. And the first person that prays is Morgan Freeman, and he just prays this beautiful prayer, as a man who’s known God all his life. And the next person to pray is Denzel Washington. His first line is, “I’m not really much for praying.” You can see that. And yet the community gathers around both of them and affirms both of what they have to say. And sometimes when we come to pray, we come from different places, we come from different spaces, different life situations, different struggles and all that stuff. But when we come to pray in a service on Sunday, we’re all together in this! And in the prayer we learn who we are, who we’re meant to be, and we encourage each other along the way. So let’s watch this to see sort of the difference of prayer.

[VIDEO CLIP]

So, I have no idea if that was actually a prayer or not from Denzel Washington. Who knows? But he spoke what was in his heart, he spoke what was true to him, and what’s amazing is they’ve gathered together, terrified of what’s coming in their life. Terrified of where they are, where they stand, and what’s next, they may be staring down the barrel of a gun tomorrow. They’re terrified. And they gather to pray, and they’ve got good pray-ers and they’ve got bad pray-ers, but they imagine something better than where they’re at, and then they encourage one another in their prayer, as well. What’s amazing is – I love this about this scene – is that after that really awkward, strange, sorta, kinda prayer, they burst back into spiritual songs, singing again. Encouraging each other – they’re in this together! And they seek the help of God in their togetherness.

That’s such a good way for us to move forward as a praying people, isn’t it? Imagining who God is and what His Kingdom looks like, and encouraging each other on the way, and not discouraging. Bringing each other along, helping us each see more clearly what this Kingdom of God looks like, and helping – even sometimes pushing -- each other along to a closer relationship with Christ.

We’re going to finish around the Table today.

Timothy Brooks
South Portland Church of the Nazarene
SERMON #4: Giving as Worship
DATE: 11/8/15

There’s a theological ethicist, a Christian ethics professor, formerly of Duke University named Stanley Hauerwas, who I tend to like, and he writes this famous line that I thought would be interesting for us to share today, especially in light of us looking

at liturgies and church worship and those sort of things. He says, “One of the reasons that we Christians argue so much about which hymn to sing, which liturgy to follow, and which way to worship is that the commandments teach us to believe that bad liturgy eventually leads to bad ethics. You begin by singing some sappy, sentimental hymn, then you pray some pointless prayer, and the next thing you know you have murdered your best friend.” And if you think that that’s speaking over the top, you should see what Rob Soucie is wearing today! (Laughter)

If you don’t want to believe that story, then how about the story of Cain and Abel? What a story that we get right at the beginning of Scripture, we have the story of their parents Adam and Eve. They sin over eating the piece of fruit, the one piece of fruit they were told not to eat, and then one generation later, we have the two of them having grown up and raised in sin and not having lived in the goodness of the Garden of Eden, and the two of them are now about tending to their lives. What we have is Abel who tends to the livestock, and Cain who tends to the land. And both of them know that they are supposed to give gifts to God. So the day comes about when the time is for them to give their offerings to God, and so they gather up what they want to give. And Abel, who is the one who tended to the livestock, he decides that God is so good, and that he loves God so much, that he cares for God so much, and that he understands God’s goodness so intimately, that he’s going to bring the best, fattest livestock that he can possibly bring to God. And so he brings the one that has the best brisket, the finest Porterhouse, the greatest T-bone, he finds the one that would be the most delicious, and he says, “This is for you, God.”

Now on the other hand, Cain gets kind of nervous, he gets kind of squirmy. He begins to think, “Well, man, I have these grains, and I have these vegetables that I have grown. They’re fat and they’re beautiful; they’re even organic so the grocery store would pay big bucks for them! Oh, man! But if I gave away the best, would there be enough for my family to eat? Would there be enough left over for me? How would I survive? If the best are the ones that I’m sure people can survive on around me, and so, what I’m going to do, because I love God – God is great, God is good to me, I want to give an offering – but I’ve also got to take care of me and my family, and so I’ll grab some of the lesser and the middle ones and bring those – the ones that have ugly forms and ugly shapes and don’t look as pretty sitting in the grocery store.”

And so they both come to God. And first goes Abel, and Abel gives his fattened animals, and God is so pleased with the gift. And Cain gives his kind of half-baked, mediocre gift, and God says, “That’s nice. Thanks.” And Cain is a little worked up: “What’s the matter? Why, I don’t even understand why he gave the best. What’s the problem here?”

And God responds with this really fascinating line: “Be careful, for sin is crouching at your door.” Now, what’s interesting about this is that God doesn’t necessarily seem to be saying that a mediocre offering is sinful. That doesn’t seem to be. But that the one who could only imagine to give a mediocre offering has sin crouching at their door, as if they’re the one who is more susceptible to sin. The one who can imagine

that God will provide, that God will take care, that God will cover them, that that one gets no particular warning. But the one who needs to pick and choose what they think they're able to give to God, God says, "Sin is crouching at your door."

Well, sure enough, sin is crouching at his door. It's not long at all before, out of jealousy, Cain decides to kill his brother. He can't imagine his brother being seen as better in the eyes of God. So rather than raising his game, rather than drawing nearer to God, rather than understanding what has pleased God in behaving in that way, he chooses instead to eliminate his brother. So in just one generation, we go from eating an apple on a tree that God said not to eat, to murder.

Sin has a way of crouching at our door.

Now we, in our society today, find ourselves so often honestly, unconsciously, accidentally pursuing things that are not of God, or not from God. Now, very few of us in this room, hopefully none, will ever find ourselves in danger of murder... Ooo! I hope none of us ever find ourselves in danger of murder. Some of us have thought good and hard about it before, right? -- in an office, on a Tuesday morning, something like that, right? -- but hopefully we never find ourselves in danger of actual murder. But the story is still clear to us, is that sometimes the way we give, the way we respond to God, is indicative of whether or not sin is crouching at our door. And as long as we are unconsciously and accidentally pursuing things that are not of God, including Me -- just filling Me up, taking care of Me, putting Me #1 -- we may find ourselves with sin crouching at our own door.

And so that's sort of why we're doing this sermon series in a lot of ways. Is to again look at the things that are unconscious in our lives, the things that we just habitually do, and try to see if we can't look at our lives and say, "Man, some of this stuff is sort of strange." I learned just a little bit about how strange the things that we call "common sense" are just by listening to Cheryl's stories over the last couple months with her Ugandan friends living in her house. Cheryl would come back and tell me stories about the crazy things that Americans do. Now, often these things are just things that you or I would label "common sense." It's the way you do it, it's the way life goes. The Ugandans who were here called us "crazy muzungus" because in their dose of common sense, in their sense of life and humanity and the struggle to live, it was extravagant and bizarre and out-of-sorts and strange. And so this idea of what is "common sense" is really a conversational fallacy. "Common sense" is something that we sort of throw ourselves into so that we don't have to examine ourselves anymore, so we don't have to think about what God is doing and who He is calling us to be. We don't have to change or move, we can just sort of become comfortable. And if there is anything that is more American than comfort, I don't know what it is. We love comfort. In fact, I would dare say that we are bordering on worship of comfort. We want to be comfortable, and there is nothing that we are more interested in than comfort.

One of those things that comes close that we're interested in is romantic love. Oh, we love romantic love, don't we? In fact, if there's anything in our society that we will

talk about, that we will risk our selves for, that we will become uncomfortable for, it is romantic love. I was looking for romantic love scenes this week and the one that always sticks out to me is the 1980s movie, "Say Anything," where John Cusack throws the boombox over his head and stands outside the girl's window. How cheesy is that? I mean, just goofy! And then there are people saying that it's the most romantic scene ever, and the guy just looks like a total doofus! We will risk our comfort if we think that on the other side of it is loooooove. Absolutely we will, right? Think back to the terrible dresses you wore to go to Homecoming, or the terrible matching ties you wore to Prom, or that awful powder-blue tux you have in your wedding photos! We will do silly, silly things, we will do silly things if we think love is on the other side of it. All right? So what becomes really interesting to me is that there's a movie from my childhood, a movie that I loved and love called, "Sister Act." Right? And that movie played off the idea that secular songs that are about "loooooove" could maybe, with just a tweak of your imagination, become about God. And so in particular we have just one of the songs, one of the shorter songs they did, a song they sang in front of the Pope, actually. So, just go ahead and watch this clip real fast, and imagine all the times you've heard this song on the radio, and then think about how oddly worshipful it is, and ask if that's good or bad, okay? So, here's the clip.

"I WILL FOLLOW HIM"

(Applause)

So, the movie's great, the movie's funny, the movie makes lots of interesting points, but I wonder if there's something wrong with the way that we talk about God if we could sing a song that was meant for a boyfriend, and we totally get that it's about God? Is there something wrong with the grammar and the language and even our conception of who God is? It leads to me to listening to K-Love and there's this whole genre that I make fun of that I call the "Jesus is my boyfriend" songs. I mean, really, there's something wrong with our conception of God, our worship of God, our understanding of who God is, if we can take an "oldie" and put it in church and it's a worship song. There's something wrong! We need to reconceive and re-understand God if it fits like a glove so easily! And the issue is, that still, maybe the one place we can imagine anymore, in 2015 America, possibly risking ourselves, is for love. Is for love. And when it comes to risking ourselves, and putting ourselves out there for God, we begin to find all the excuses. But if we think maybe we can have that sweet, romantic kiss under the moonlight, risk could become involved in us.

The song the band is going to sing this morning is a song, another song that I just love, this is another one that kind of from my teenaged years, my middle school years. I just love this song! But it's about, again, a sort of absurdity, the lengths that we're willing to risk our lives, our dignity, even the pain in our feet in order to have love. So go ahead and listen to this song by a Scottish band, there are some words you won't understand because they're Scottish. Just roll with it, all right? But here we go, this is the band singing, "I Will Walk Five Hundred Miles."

[SONG]

(Applause)

Those Scottish people!

There's a line in there that is particularly interesting to me, that "When I bring home money, I'll give almost every penny to you." It's interesting that, again, we will sacrifice even our cash, our beloved money, if we think there's a chance for love. If we think there's a chance for love, then we'll empty the bank account just to show how much we love them. We even have this cultural narrative that if you give the best gifts, then that shows your love. If you give – Christmas -- this one always amazes me when Christmas comes along, and Lexus has these ads where they pull in these \$60,000 cars and put a bow on them. I wouldn't have to work next year if I got a Lexus! I would just sell that thing, it's an annual salary! It's more than that! And people are giving it for Christmas gifts, are you kidding me?! But that's LOVE, that's how you show love in our society, is by dotting, and giving, and handing over money. It's how we show love.

In fact, while we rarely celebrate giving money to God, we celebrate other things that then divert our attention, things that cause us to say, "Well, there's not enough left over for us to give to God." We celebrate some bizarre things, in fact. We celebrate, in our society, the television show, "Househunters." Ever seen the show? Who has seen the show before, yeah? Where 25-year-old people can somehow afford a \$600,000 house? Okay! We celebrate hoarders. We celebrate a television show that shows the spectacle of people who can't get control of holding onto too much stuff. We elect presidents whose chief campaign strategists use the line, "It's the economy, stupid!" Right? You all know who I'm talking about, at least I hope you do. If not, Google it. "It's the economy, stupid!" It's not justice for the poor, it's not care for our widows, right? "It's the economy, stupid!" I don't know.

We read and listen to Christians, and justify what they're saying because they say they're Christians. Where the Christians say their entire telos, or goal, or end to what they're doing is to make you rich! That if you are rich, then you will see that God's blessing has come upon you, rather than teaching the actual message of Scripture which says: God's blessing has already come upon you, do you have eyes to see it? Instead, people are masquerading as Christian speakers and pastors saying that God's blessing is when you are rich. Find me one scripture that argues the telos or goal or end of the Christian faith is that you end up rich. It's not. And so then, these things start filling our lives, we start hearing them, we start doing silly things.

There's one last clip that I want to show you today, it's from a movie called "The End," with Burt Reynolds, and it's a funny, funny scene, one that we'll be able to identify so much with, because the things that we fill our head with, with the idea that when it comes to finances and giving, and God's gift, so becomes This Is Who We Are. The story of "The End" is about Burt Reynolds' character who's diagnosed with a very unfortunate blood disease, and so he's told he has six months left to live, and instead of saying he's

going to live it up for the next six months, all he can imagine is the tortuous, lonely death that he's going to die in his bed. And so the whole movie is about him getting thwarted from trying to kill himself, so he can bring about "The End" before it does. So he keeps trying, and a friend keeps thwarting him, things keep never working out, so he finally decides the only way he can do this is to take it into his own hand. And so he swims out into the middle of the ocean where he's exhausted and there's no chance that anything will happen, but that he will sink. And just as soon as he gets to the point of realizing that he's exhausted out in the middle of the ocean, he has a revelation of all that he has, all that he's been given, how lucky he is, and he decides he wants to live. And this video is about, sort of the postscript, after he decides he wants to live, and what he bargains with God.

[VIDEO CLIP]

REYNOLDS: "I can never make it. Help me, Lord! Please? I promise not to try to kill myself anymore. Save me and I swear that I'll be a better father! I'll be a better man! I'll be a better everything! All I ask is, Make me a better swimmer!

"Oh God, I can't do this to Julie. We can't do this to Julie!

"Oh God, let me live and I promise to obey every one of the Ten Commandments! I shall not kill. I shall not commit adultery. I shall not -- I, uh -- I'll learn the Ten Commandments! And then, I'll obey every one of them! Just get me back to the beach. I'll be honest in business. I promise not to sell lakeside lots unless there's a lake around! I want to see another sunrise! I want to see another sunset!

"There was a mistake, God, I never really wanted to kill myself, I just wanted to get your attention! Help me make it! I'll give you 50% of everything I make. 50%, God! I want to point out that nobody gives 50% -- I'm talking gross, God!

"I think I'm gonna make it! You won't regret this, Lord! I'll obey every commandment. I'll see my parents more often. No more cheating in business (once I get rid of those nine acres in the desert), and I'm gonna start donating that 10% right away! I know I said 50%, Lord, but 10% to start. If you don't want your 10%, then don't take it. I know it was you that saved me, but it was also you that made me sick!"

(Gasps and coughs as he reaches the shore.)

We do, I think -- I know I have -- get in the habit of making promises to God when things are tough, when they're difficult, and when things are good, we assume that we've got ourselves there by our hard work. And so we believe in our own work, and we turn to God only when our work has let us down. And we begin to make promises: "Oh, I'll give you this, I'll start doing this, if you'll just make things right." And then, how often, like Burt here, do we then begin to turn the narrative just as soon as we begin to feel safe again? We don't live as well in cohorts with God when we're living in God's

blessings as we do when we're desperate. But maybe God is a God of more than just our desperation.

I think, all so often, that one of the habits that we fall into is understanding God much like Aladdin understood his genie: that when we need something, we've got about three big wishes from God, and that when things are really bad, if we rub the lamp, God is going to zap it and fix it for us. But God is seeking to do more than that. He's seeking to be in partnership with us, to work with us, and our offering is one of our best ways for us to give back to God in what He's given. The offering really shows three theological issues, I believe. One is it demonstrates, it proclaims, it testifies – out of our heart, not God's – that all of what I have is God's. ALL that I have is God's. I have not attained stuff for my own trust, or my own will, but I have received from God blessings from His material world that He created.

So there's the old joke that says three men were together, and they were trying to decide how much money that they should give to God. And the first said, "What I do is I draw a circle in the middle of the room, and I throw it up in the air, and whatever lands in the circle, I give to God." Well, okay. The second one says, "That's weak! What I do is I draw a circle and whatever lands outside of the circle, I give to God." That's pious and mighty! The third one says, "Well, I throw it up in the air and whatever God wants, he can keep." (Laughter)

That's not exactly how it works, is it?

On the other hand, how much more generous would we be when we understood ourselves instead of receivers of funds, but stewards of God's world? That that which comes into possession of ours was never meant for us to grasp with our cold, dying hands, but on the other hand we were always meant to be stewards, receiving and sending back, receiving and sending back, just the same way we receive oxygen into our lungs? We are stewards of God's world, and what we have is not ours, but God's.

The second theological issue is that we would trust for God to provide. You see, the story that helps us understand this so much is the story of manna in the desert after God sets the Israelites free from slavery. They're walking in the desert, and every morning that they woke up, there was food for them to eat, and they would gather food, and that food, at the end of the day, spoiled so they could never gather enough up for a second day. They could only get what was for today, they would eat, they were satisfied, and they were hungry, and God would provide again tomorrow. So we need to again get an understanding and a trust in God that God will provide us for tomorrow if we trust Him with our today.

And then finally, offering is our placing of our self on the altar. We think of the famous line from Romans chapter twelve that says that we should offer, or we ought to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. And in a world of commerce and funds and cash, one of the best ways that we have begun to understand ourselves is by how much money we have. And while that's a terrible understanding, certainly in a cash society, by giving

up ourselves, our offering to God, we are placing ourselves on the altar as well. We recall the most famous story of placing oneself on the altar is Abraham, in faith, putting his son on an altar to be sacrificed to God, and God showing up at the very last minute with an equal offering so that the boy could be spared. We may find that if we were to test God, with giving our offerings that we can't begin to imagine living without, that there's a ram in the thicket even for us.

The final story I want to tell is one that you may not be familiar with, and that's the story of King Ahaz and his son, King Hezekiah. King Ahaz was a terrible king, maybe the most wicked king in the history of Israel. He had stewardship of the Southern Kingdom, which is where Jerusalem was. By this point, the two kingdoms had split, and so the Twelve Tribes of Israel, ten of them were in one kingdom and they have their king, and two of them are in another kingdom and they have their king. The one with two is the Southern Kingdom, they have Jerusalem, so they're more likely, because they have the temple, and the ability to worship, more likely the one that God is pleased with, whereas the Northern Kingdom is mad, they've left, and they're not coming to worship God. And so, Ahaz's rise to kingship at twenty – at the age of twenty! I'm not sure that I should've been trusted with a bank account at the age of twenty! And here is Ahaz, king of all of the Southern Kingdom, God's favorite kingdom where Jerusalem is. And he becomes the king, he immediately becomes terrified of the Northern Kingdom. He's afraid of them, there's way more people up there, and while he doesn't recognize that God's temple is under his stewardship, he decides that he's got to battle them right away, unprovoked. He's going to set them straight, so Ahaz begins to look around to see who can help him, and he sees the Assyrians – a pagan, and a powerful people. So King Ahaz marches right over there, he talks to their king, and they come to a deal that Assyria can kind of come swing into the Southern Kingdom and do as they please, if they take out the Northern Kingdom. And so Assyria sacks the Northern Kingdom, and suddenly all sorts of altars to foreign and false gods show up on every block in the city of Jerusalem. God's own city becomes a shrine to false, foreign gods, and Ahaz feels protected now because he has seen the Northern Kingdom sacked. You see, sometimes our imagination, when we are in it, we think of things like comfort and safety and the future, and we begin to distance God from our understandings, and don't even see it, because our goals in our society are to be comfortable. Ahaz was comfortable. He had the largest army in the neighborhood watching his back! He was in good shape; no one was coming after him. And he was completely blind to the fact that the people had false god worship all around them. And if that wasn't bad enough, the Assyrians walked into the temple and they removed all the worship for God – Yahweh -- and they began to put their own stuff into the temple, until finally Ahaz's time comes to an end, and he dies, and his son Hezekiah becomes the king. Often, you would think, "Like father, like son," but Hezekiah had a deep desire to make things right, and so he went and found all the Levites and the priests and he brought them together and said, "We need to begin purifying the land." And so they begin taking down altars and they begin changing everything, and the people are like, "We want to worship our God," and he says, "You wait. Just wait." And they keep purifying and they keep purifying and they keep purifying the land until finally, it's time to worship. And so the story comes for us in Second Chronicles chapter 31, verses one through eight, and we'll read the story real fast and then we'll be done.

Second Chronicles 31, verses one through eight. It's amazing; listen as we hear this story today, that a people who have been yearning to worship their God, what it is that they do to worship, when the temple is finally thrown open, and the people are again welcomed in to worship Yahweh. Again, II Chronicles chapter 31: 1-8, the words will be on the screen, if you'd like to follow there, would you join me in standing as we read this morning?

[SCRIPTURE]

You may be seated. You may hear that language of "first fruits" from the very first story we talked about, Cain and Abel. The story was Abel bringing his first fruits, and God being pleased. And here the people bring a tithe, which is, it means a tenth, 10%, the people bring a tithe of all they have because they want to worship God. They felt distanced, they'd been removed because their leadership hasn't allowed them to worship properly, and they're so excited, they don't just bring a small offering, they bring a first fruits, and a tenth, and they come and they give it all to God.

And the story ends with a blessing coming upon them – a blessing. Because this is not a God who is about give and take. This is not about a God who, if you drop your contractual obligation, a tenth in an offering plate, He is pleased and now will not curse you. This is about a God who works in cahoots with us. About a God who gives, and gives, and gives to us throughout our entire lives. And we are to receive this not with cold hands grasping it, but a willingness to give it back. God receives that willingness by having a blessing given upon you. You see, in the end, in God's economy, the way He sees the world, He keeps giving. He keeps giving! He doesn't stop giving when you stop giving, He doesn't stop giving when you give up. He gives, He receives, and He gives back. And this is how God wants to work with His people. It's how God imagines life to be. He gives, we give back to Him, and He blesses us once more.

In this sort of economy, we don't store up, we don't hold back and grasp and cling. We receive and we give back, and we find that God is always giving more than we give. What's interesting about the concept of tithe, one that is wildly overlooked by Christian people, is that God understands Himself to need to give to you ten times more than you need to give. That's God's understanding, that's His economy. In order to make things right for our lives, He will give ten times more what He asks us to give. And I've heard testimonies all my life, and I could testify it's true in my life as well, is that life is far more blessed when we are working in cahoots with God, receiving His gifts, giving back, and finding that He supplies the needs that we imagined we couldn't do without what He has asked for us. Story upon stories about opening mailboxes and finding checks for exactly the amount that God called him to give. Story upon story about new adventures that families have had, new relationships, financial needs being met at just the right time, by a people who trust in God. And I find that those people are regularly the most joyous of Christian people, the ones who take a risk on behalf of their God and see that beyond all imagination, and everything that makes sense -- "common sense" to us -- that God can do something miraculous in our lives when we start to say, "I'm not about

to do it by myself anymore, I'm going to join in with what God is doing and work in cahoots with him. I want to be His co-conspirator. Man, those people are blessed, and happy, and overwhelmingly surprised at how active this God we serve still is in our world today.

Now, I'm going to have ushers come forward to do Communion and the band to do one last song, and we're going to conclude today by celebrating a meal that is completely gift of God. We are told in the scriptures that Jesus didn't need to come and live amongst us, but he did so as a gift. He came as a gift, to give His life, poured out for us. And then, if it wasn't enough that he came and lived amongst us, he gave his life, as well, on the cross, that the blood would give us life abundant, that through his blood we would find forgiveness as well. So today we take this meal, which Jesus says is his body and his blood, and in taking it we receive again a gift beyond what we deserve. And may it remind us today that the gifts of God are never-ending, it is beyond our wildest imagination, and it is calling us to live into His Kingdom, not our own. As the band begins to play, I invite you to come.

Timothy Brooks
South Portland Church of the Nazarene
SERMON #5: Greeting Time
11-15-15

I've talked at different points and different times about my distaste for running and how I run in spite of that. Now normally, in order to suffer through a long run, I listen to a podcast, where someone is talking about something, instead of music. A lot of people listen to music, but music often feels repetitive, and it just doesn't help me. Podcasts engage my brain, so I forget about the fact that my lungs and my legs are killing me. So, podcasts are a beautiful thing to me, but – I try to run the Beach to Beacon every year over here in Cape Elizabeth, and if I forget, one year I forgot to download a podcast and so I was relying on Internet. If any of you have ever tried to use your cell phone in Cape Elizabeth, you know that that's not going to happen!

And so, at about Mile Two, my podcast ran out on me, and I was like, "Well, what am I gonna do now?" And so I dug deep to find some music, and so I was playing music, and music was just playing, and that's not how I usually run, and I was afraid I was going to do very poorly because of this, and at some point, the song that the band is going to play today came on my radio. The song is called, "Boulevard of Broken Dreams" by Green Day. That song is a particularly depressing song, in fact -- (laughter) – oh, it is! You just wait! In fact, I have a friend who is a depressant, who very much struggles with depression, and he literally cannot listen to that song because it can kick off his depression at times, to hear this song.

The song is about loneliness, and it's about hearing yourself all on your own, that it's Just You – and while I was running the Beach to Beacon, it felt quite appropriate, because no one was going to run Mile Five for me. (Unfortunately.) The song starts with, "I walk a lonely street, one that only I have known," and this song really, I think, begins

to encapsulate one of the real struggles of living in modern day, is that while we are as connected as we've ever been in the history of the world, we are also as lonely as we have ever been.

So hear the band play this song, sing this song, that really, really I think, gets at the heart of the loneliness in our culture today, about how people feel when everything is stripped away and often when they're lonely. Hear the sadness of the song as they play for us today.

[SONG: BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS]

So, I told you it was a sad song! It is, and there are different lines in here that I think really begin to point at the angst, especially of young people, who are committing suicide at a an incredible rate, a historic rate.

“Sometimes I wish someone out there will find me.”

“My shallow heart's the only thing that's beating.”

“I walk this empty street on the boulevard of broken dreams.”

“I walk alone, I walk alone.”

These are the words of a depressed generation, and it's a song that was remarkably famous and popular, as well, number one on charts, played on the radio, still. This song's been out for eleven years and you can still hear it on the radio today. This speaks to many, many, many people.

There was a study done recently at Purdue University, a school of tens of thousands of students. One female decided to walk the courtyard of the school and address 428 people, I believe, completely at random, in one of three different ways. One way was to stare right through them as if they didn't exist. One was to make eye contact but nothing more, and another was to make eye contact with them and ask them how they were doing. All right? Three different sets of people, 428 people. And then after this student walked past them or spoke to them or whatever it was, there was a researcher who caught that person on the other side, and immediately asked them how they felt at that moment, and then let them in on that this was a study. There was an exponential increase with each person. The people who were stared right through felt sad. The people who had eye contact made felt a little better, and the people who were asked how they were doing were made to feel even better still. This demonstrates that when we are seen, we are able to feel a sense of more contentment in our lives. We can find a little more happiness when someone else recognizes that we exist. When they see us, that matters to us.

Now also, there's a famous singer right now who I don't particularly endorse, I don't even like that much. She's pretty famous, her name is Lady Gaga – you ever heard of her before? Yeah. I do not like her in any way, shape, or form, but it's interesting that

in all of her fame, at the top of what so many young people want to be -- that is, famous, wealthy, and known -- she nearly quit music, which was what caused her to be so famous. She almost walked away. And so recently, just about two weeks ago, she sat down for an interview, talking about why she almost walked away from all of the fame. I'm going to show just a clip of that interview; but really, what it goes to show is how she was just made to be an image to be looked at, to represent something, and she was no longer seen as a person, and she didn't know how to control that. And so this is her explanation of feeling empty, because people began to ignore her as a person, and began to treat her as if she is just a Thing.

[CLIP]

Lady Gaga: "I have had to make decisions, like, why am I unhappy? Okay, okay Stephanie, Gaga, hybrid person, why are you unhappy? Why is it you want to quit music? -- a couple years ago. So it was like, well, I really don't like selling these, you know, fragrances. Perfumes. I don't like wasting my time spending days just shaking peoples' hands and smiling, taking selfies, it feels shallow to my existence -- I have a lot more to offer than my image. I don't like being used to make people money. I feel sad when I'm overworked, and that I just become a money-making machine and that my passion and my creativity take a back seat. That makes me unhappy.

"So what did I do? I started to say, 'No. I'm not doing that, I don't want to do that. I'm not taking that picture, I'm not going to that event. I'm not standing by that, because that's not what I stand for,' and slowly but surely, I remembered who I am. And then you go home, and you look in the mirror, and you're like, 'YES! I can go to bed with YOU every night.' Because that person? I know that person. That person has integrity, that person has an opinion, that person doesn't say, 'Yes,' that person doesn't get a text from somebody and say, 'Oh my god, they wrote this, they sent this emoji, should I write back? What do you think? Is that okay to say? Are they going to like me if I say that, should I say something different?' This is the age that we live in, we're not actually communicating with each other, we are unconsciously communicating lies."

And what if she's right? What if we live in a world that's so digital that we hide our true self behind a Facebook page, and Twitter accounts, that we aren't actually who we are anymore? The problem with Facebook, most often, is that we put the best of our lives out there, and the truth of the matter is that we don't want to see the negative of other people. When someone goes on a rant about how upset they are about something, we think about blocking their page. Facebook is a false reality. It's not a bad thing -- not at all -- it's often used for very good things. But, we find that slowly but surely, we are beginning to erase out of ourselves the truth of who we are, and trying our best, through our next text message or our next Facebook post, or whatever, that we have it all together, that we are okay, and that you don't need to see at all that I'm human.

And what Lady Gaga found in that was that she was erasing her humanity. She no longer was human, she was an image to have a picture snapped with, or for someone to write a text about: "I met her -- I met her!" We are erasing our humanity, and one of the

most important ways we are erasing our humanity is by no longer being human with each other, no longer sharing our burdens, no longer hurting. No longer taking the time to look someone else in the eye and ask them how they're doing, and hope that they're going to tell us the truth. Often, we ask, "How are you doing?" as we're running on to our next place and heading to our next stop, hoping that they don't actually give us an answer but that they recognize that we cared. Our busyness has become such an idol for us. We have our next place to go, our next thing to do, and we're just checking off boxes, with sort of a false reality of who we really are, deep within our core. And we're losing our humanity as we're doing it. We are slowly becoming something we are not, in the name of an image that looks good to our neighbor.

Now, the problem is, this behavior is patently un-Christian. Christianity is about a relationship with God that slows us down. In fact, this concept of Sabbath that we have that's really, really ignored in Christian circles anymore, is the idea that we work really hard for six days and rest on the seventh day. And in that rest, we have decided to gather together in worship, and part of our worship is then to do it in community with each other. A vitally important baseline belief of the Christian faith is that this is done in community, and not individually.

Now, I've talked at different times about -- a couple of weeks ago, even -- about a Christian who decided to do it on their own in their family, and she ended up interpreting the scriptures to say she needed to kill her children. Now, that's dangerous! So we do this together not only to keep our beliefs in check, and make sure that we're not stepping outside of basic, orthodox beliefs, but also to be an encouragement to each other, to lift each other up, to look another person in the eye and tell them that God loves them and that you love them as an outgrowth of that.

The comedian Louis C.K. talks a little bit about sadness as well, and he says that part of the reason that we're having trouble is because when we say something mean to someone face-to-face, we see their face scrunch up and we recognize how bad that makes us feel. But we feel perfectly okay opening up the Internet and writing in the comments section terrible things because we don't have to see their reaction! And we recognize that that feels good, to speak our mind and our peace. But yet, the Christian faith says to us that we should actually see each other face-to-face, that we should do things that bring joy to the other, that lift them up and tell them it's going to be okay, and that there are possibilities for them in Christ.

I've got a list, real quick, of just some of the quickest verses that I could find in the scriptures that talk very much about this social aspect of Christianity, how we're meant to do it with each other. And so we're going to read just a few of them real fast:

"Live in harmony with one another."

"Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position."

"Do not be conceited." Romans 12:16.

Another one: “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” Psalm 133:1.

“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be being perfectly united in mind and thought.” I Corinthians 1:10.

“For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.” Matthew 18:20.

“Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.” I Peter 3:8.

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. “ I John 4:11.

“And the believers were one in heart and mind; no one claimed that any of their possessions were their own, but they shared everything that they had.” Acts 4:32.

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude and mind towards each other that Christ Jesus had.” Romans 15:5.

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:3.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:24-25.

You see, I could’ve gone on and on. We could’ve sat here for the next hour reading verses about how important the social aspect of Christianity is! It is one of the very fibers or DNA of the Christian faith, and the writers of the scriptures recognized this. And in particular, the Apostle Paul wrote about this a whole lot. He was often planting churches and moving on to start the new church in a new city, and he would write letters, and we have many of them put in our Bible, letters that he wrote back to the churches he began, or formed, or pastored. And one of his major themes, now that the Christian faith is rolling and moving, is unity – coming together – caring for each other – helping each other – loving each other. And one of the reasons, also, that he writes about it so much is because it’s so hard! Right? It’s hard! It’s not just easy! It’s one thing to say this -- to pursue unity, to pursue caring for other people, to take care of them, because it’s hard! Sometimes, there’s someone who comes in and needs help, like, every other week! And it’s hard, after helping someone after six, seven times, to keep on going.

Other times it’s hard to help someone because they disagree with you. They might’ve voted for a different political candidate than you did and they just don’t get it at

all! And yet, they go to your church, and the scriptures tell us to love them, that they're our brother or sister, and we should lift them up in Christ.

Other times it's hard because they're rich and I'm poor. Other times it's hard because we have different color skin than them. Other times it's hard because they're from a different part of town and I don't really understand their culture. There are all sorts of reasons for us to build up walls and have divisions with each other. We can name them, one after another. But none of those, finally, are an excuse to break the command of scripture to be unified with each other. To care for another. To see beyond the things, the constructs we have made up in our own head to become barriers with each other. Political parties, skin color, gender, all of these things are things that are not justifiable reasons to not love our neighbor the way that Christ loves them.

We do greeting time every week as an outward expression of this very important, fundamental belief of the Christian faith: that no matter whether or not I agree with you or disagree with you, whether or not you can drive me crazy or I think you're the coolest person God has ever created, we demonstrate our love for each other. We say that the Kingdom of God that is alive in your life, that Christ is developing in you, is the most important thing that I see in your life. And it's my job, as your fellow churchgoer, to help tend that garden that God planted in you, and I do that by demonstrating love, and by wishing peace upon your life.

The Apostle Paul, I said, did this a lot in the scriptures. One particular place that I find most interesting, although I will confess that on the surface it's sort of a boring chapter, is Romans chapter 16. And we're going to read through that chapter in just a minute if you just want to look through it, and again I confess that it's boring on the surface, but let's really think about what's happening before we read it.

For those of you who are familiar with the book of Romans, this is understood and talked about as one of the most theologically deep books in all of scripture. There are things talked about here that are just, that could just make your mind melt if you really begin to think about it: justification by faith, forgiveness of sins, Jewish vs. Gentile relationships, what is God doing to sinful people? These are big concepts, and Paul is just going at it very, very heavily, he's working very hard through these very deep concepts. But if you ask yourself, for a moment, why did Paul need to write a letter that was so deep and so theological? It was most likely because the people in Rome who were meeting as a Christian church had some pretty significant disagreements with each other. And among those significant disagreements were that there would be people who were meeting in that church that disagreed strongly with Paul, that thought that he was wrong, that thought that he was incorrect, and they were working to correct Paul's incorrectness inside of the church! So Paul writes this thing stating the case for why it is he believes what it is, and why it is he is instructing as he is. And he goes deep, and he raises these heavy, heavy points, these hard, hard concepts to understand. And when he gets to the end of the last chapter, after he has confronted his critics, we have this chapter where he gives greetings to everyone. And as you listen to these names, you should notice two things: one is that Paul is greeting a lot of people; and two is that he is greeting both

males and females who are doing the work of the Lord. And so Paul – this is my side project, this is an important thing to me – Paul understands women to have an important role in the ministry of the church. All right? (It’s one of my big soapboxes. All right?) But listen to all the names of women, but also think of the all people here, and some of them are on “Team Paul,” and some of them are on the rival team, fighting against him. And yet Paul realizes that it’s vitally important to call them out by name and to recognize them, to dignify their humanity, and also their call in Christ, whether or not they’re friend or foe.

So if you would, would you stand with me as we read this very boring chapter, but as we take a moment to imagine the faces and the lives of these people. Imagine if Paul liked them or didn’t like them. Imagine how they would’ve heard it; for the Apostle Paul to name them by name and to thank them for their ministry, and to give them dignity in what they’re doing. Chapter 16 of Romans:

[SCRIPTURE]

You may be seated.

I used to do Teen Quizzing, and we had to do Romans and remember some of those names. I didn’t answer those questions. (Laughter)

So you see here, Paul sees that the greetings are important. Can you imagine for just one moment if you were one of those people named there, probably feeling hard at work in the name of the gospel, working hard, struggling, maybe even exhausted, running your own home church, and Paul sends his greetings. He recognizes them, he points them out and he does so publicly, in front of everyone. It probably gave them a charge that they needed to keep going. It probably, in being recognized for their work, it probably gave them dignity in their work, and felt as though what they were doing mattered, and they wanted to keep going on.

Now, you don’t have to be the Apostle Paul to give that sort of dignity to another. You don’t have to be someone who writes big theological treatises and sends them to multiple churches, instructing on how Christianity is. You can just be you! And just in the midst of a worship service, touch someone on their shoulder, look them in their eyes, and say, “I really appreciate you.” “Thank you for your smile.” “Thank you for what you do with the children.” “Thank you for serving with the teenagers.” “Thank you for your musical skills.” Imagine if we used our energies in the church to build each other up, instead of tear each other down. Instead of critiquing whether or not the band hit the right note or chose the right song; instead of critiquing whether or not your child was taught the right lesson; instead of critiquing whether or not that person over there is dressed in the right clothes that are appropriate. Imagine instead, if blessings came out of our mouths, instead of curses? That we used our moments to give life to each other, instead of pronouncing death upon them? How different would the church be if that was the sort of people that we became again?

Because this idea of greeting each other as a part of the worship service is one that is ancient, one that exists far before even the United States of America came about. It exists long before even the Protestants' part of the Reformation and church came about. This goes back to the earliest of Christian behaviors, and we can even see this idea here beginning to become formed in Paul's writings, that we greet each other, thank each other, and speak life to each other.

In conclusion, I want to talk about a movie that I love that came out years and years ago that I think just shows this very well. The movie was called "The Truman Show" – any of you ever see that movie, "The Truman Show"? – yeah, right. I loved that movie! That movie came out when I was in late high school and just starting to think about the world, really. And one of the real major themes in this show was the idea that a director acquires a baby, and raises the baby to adulthood, where all of America can watch the child, and adult, like a reality show. All right? So his whole life was filmed for all of America to watch, 24 hours a day, on his own channel on their cable news. And he was the only person not in on this, all right? Everyone that was in his life were actors that were paid by this director, so every person that he came into contact with was paid to evoke a certain response out of him.

Everything was manipulated -- the radios, the televisions, his neighbors, his wife – were all manipulated, for the sake of TV. And, in his ignorance and naivete, Truman begins to notice some strange things – but he's always kind to people. And this clip that I'm going to show is just how sort of over-the-top his kindness is. And by the end of the movie, when he finds out that he's been sort of the center of this TV show and wants to leave, everyone around him becomes sad, because they're going to miss Truman. The people who watch the TV show are going to be sad because they're going to miss Truman. The people who worked on the set are going to be sad because they're going to miss Truman, because he's so nice. He's so good to them. So, watch this clip about just how good Truman can be to people, and how everyone is so nice to him and loves him so much, even though they're paid to be there.

[CLIP]

Everyone wants to have their moment with Truman. It's not simply that they're working, it's that they love Truman, and they find this more and more and more as Truman may disappear. They love his happiness and his kindness – it makes a difference to them.

Now, Truman discovers that he's part of another world, and he wants to get outside of that to the real world. And eventually, he does make that escape and he goes – he goes into another world.

Now, we find ourselves, as well, part of another world. Now, in the Christian faith, we are striving to be a part of the Kingdom of God. We want to experience seeing Christ face-to-face; we want to know Him in a way that we can touch Him and hold Him and love Him. And we believe that He is coming, that we will see Him again.

But the issue at play here, one that I hope overarches this entire sermon series that we work on, is that when we come to church, we are practicing the Kingdom of God. Each and every thing we do is a practice for when it becomes our reality, when we see Christ face-to-face. Worship service is not just a time where we give an hour to God and say, "All right, now bless me, because I've given You what's Yours." But these acts are things that we're doing in order to shape in our very, very core of who we are, for us to be ready for heaven. So we practice together. And this practice isn't just simply made for oh, the way far out, out then, but it begins to shape and change who we are now, so that as we leave, we can live as if the Kingdom is real, and we can be an agent for that Kingdom in the world today.

So we do this practice of singing praise so that praise of God is on our lips wherever we go. We practice giving in the offering so that we become a steward of God's gifts that He gives us and also a person who is a giver and not a taker. We also practice this time of greeting time so that we can show the love of Christ to others, both inside the church and outside the church. We demonstrate looking each other in the eye, smiling, building each other up, and telling people that the possibility of peace is real when Christ is in our lives. We do all of these things so that we can be shaped and formed into Kingdom citizens now, so that we're not just practicing and hoping that someday we can live like Christ, but that we're actually in -- like an intense football practice -- practice to become shaped in the image of God.

So each of the things that we do as we gather together, including greeting time, are very specifically for a time of practice and reflection and development, so that we are finding that while the world is trying to make us one thing – and frankly, the world is making us into lonely people with their vision right now – this practice of worship is making us into a different sort of person. A generous person. A kind person. And the hope and prayer is that as we worship together, and we leave from this place, and we receive the blessing, and we go out there, we leave into the world, that what has happened is that our practice has made us a little more like Christ. And so that when we meet Christ in His fullness in who He is, we will behave a certain way at that time.

All the things that we think are so joyful but are sinful now, that we kind of try to hide behind our Facebook wall that no one else can see, that we try to pretend doesn't exist when we shake each other's hand, all those things we will want to be in the past because we will be in the presence of Christ. But as we worship, we find that we're in the presence of Christ now, as well, and that these activities are helping us become a certain kind of people that will be the same kind of person that we are when we meet Christ face-to-face, that we can begin to live Kingdom values now. And in the Church of the Nazarene, we call that holiness; that who it is we will be when we are face-to-face with Christ, is who we can be now in this world. And attending to worship week after week, making that THE priority of our schedule every week, so that we can become now the person we will be when we stand face-to-face with Christ one day.

And as we finish today we will do as we've been doing this whole series, and that is taking the Body and Blood of our Lord. (The ushers and band can come forward.) The thing I'm always reminded of when I come to the Table is that this is a hard thing that Christianity is asking us to be, to be a holy person. I can't do that on my own, I can't just make a cognitive decision right now, to be a better person. It doesn't make sense, it's ineffective, no one has ever been able to do that. But what we can do is to come to the Table of our Lord where He dispenses His grace, and He gives us His Body and Blood which was shed for us, and He says, "I give you the opportunity to have me be a part of your life as a gift." And that gift we can receive, and it's the work of God within us, not our own work, that helps us accomplish the call of Christ.

So as you come to the Table today, don't think about what you can do to be better; think about what Christ has done for you so that you can be complete in Him.

Timothy Brooks
South Portland Church of the Nazarene
Sermon #6: The Sermon
November 22, 2015

As you hopefully know by now, unless you just started coming here, we're working on a particular sermon series that is my work toward doing a doctoral degree, which is not important or anything like that, really what's important is what we're doing here. And you may have hopefully caught by now, one of the undertones or themes that I've not explicitly said but that I've been alluding to is that Going To Church Is Important For A Christian. Have you caught that? All right. Good! It's very, very important, and one of my major theses in what we're doing as we're working across this sermon series is: the world is wrestling and grappling for your soul with ideas and concepts that are anti-Christian, or anti-Christ, and they're pretty subtle. And a lot times they're kind of not that big of a deal, except they're different from what Christ and our Scripture and the Spirit call us to be. So church is the moment, the time, or the place, where we re-narrate our lives inside of who Christ is calling us to be. We do it together so that we are then sent to be Christians in the world.

And so it's vitally important that we go to church. And we're becoming more and more lax about going to church. In fact, today in the Christian calendar across churches across the world, this is Christ The King Sunday. Have you ever heard of Christ The King Sunday? All right. Today is Christ The King Sunday. It's a celebration of the fact that Christ is King. It was instituted in the 1920s – just under a hundred years ago – by the Pope, who looked across the world and said, "The world is getting too secular. We need to remember that Christ is the King; not governments, not politics, not pop culture, not what we want to do, not other activities that we can have. We need to be reminded annually that Christ is the King of our lives, and we need to remember how incredible His sacrifice was on the cross so that he could be named King of the world." And so

today is a celebration and a reminder -- and it's a hundred years in the making, really -- that Christ is the King, and that we've started to lose sight of that.

Now, the Pope's response was particularly to Catholics and Christians, not just the fact that there are Muslims and Buddhists in the world, but he was looking at Christians and the church and saying, "What is happening?!" A hundred years ago. And we're now two or three generations removed from that sort of modern concept of, "Me. I'm important, I'm the center of the world." So today we're going to talk again about this wrestling of pop culture and theology and who we are to be in this world today. And today we're going to talk particularly about the sermon, why it is that we listen to sermons.

I try to set up each of these things that we do in service with an explanation beforehand of why it is we do it. And the sermon, I think, is one of the most interesting things, because it's taken for granted that that's what you go and hear at church, you go and hear the preacher talk. That's part of what happens. Right? But did you know that the idea of sermon as we understand it, or we experience it today, is a fairly modern concept in Christianity? As in, the idea of a 20- to 35-minute sermon is only about 500 years old? All right -- some of you did. Really, it's a by-product of the Protestant Reformation which happened around 1500, the late-1400s. What happened was that Martin Luther famously walked up to the doors of the cathedral in his town and he nailed 95 theses against it, and those 95 theses really had a lot to do with the fact that the Catholic Church was messing up big-time -- messing up religion, messing up people -- and that these 95 Theses were the things that he wanted to call the Church back to.

Now, churches in general don't respond really well to people saying, "There's 95 things wrong with you, now go fix them." And so, predictably, the Catholic Church wasn't very happy with him. Eventually, Luther begins to wonder if he's ruined everything and made it worse, but people rally around him and say, "You know? I think you're right."

And so what happens is a schism -- or a break -- in the Church, and the Protestant stream of the Christian religion begins to form (which we're a part of), and there begins this big battle which happens between the Catholics and the Protestants. This battle still lives strong in some places, especially in, say, Ireland and Scotland and places like that where there are battles and wars over which side of the Christian faith you're on. Which, I mean, I don't want to lay my cards out on the table too early, but many of those people shooting each other haven't read the Sermon on the Mount, now, have they? Right? I mean this idea that we're angry over how to be Christians so we're going to go to battles with each other, I mean, it's kind of missing the point?

But in the Protestant Reformation, they decided that they so desperately needed to defend the schism that they had broken from the Catholic Church, that they started preaching longer and longer and longer to defend what it is they saw, and what it is they believed. And not only did they want to defend what it is they saw and they believed, they wanted to return to the Scripture, and theology, and devotion, and put that back into

the hands of the laypeople. And they also thought that salvation through Jesus Christ was a decisive step in salvation that people needed to place their trust in God in order for it, and not just receive that someone told them that God had saved them. And so, more and more, the Protestants wanted to place the feeling of religion into a belief in the actual mind of individuals in the church. They didn't want to just say, "Well, the Church says it, therefore it's true," but they wanted the Protestant people to actually believe it and own it in their own hearts and their own lives. And so the sermons got longer and longer and longer, because it was a time for instruction and a time of evoking and a time of trying to get people to buy into it on their own. So that's sort of the tradition that we have received, too, today.

Now, during the first 1500 years of the Christian faith, the sermon would be very short, it was called the homily, it was maybe five minutes long -- a quick little retelling of the Scripture that was read that day. And what was really important was the reading of Scripture and the taking of Communion. For 1500 years, that's what Christian worship looked like: Word and Table. Every time they gathered together, they would read the Scripture and then they would receive Communion together. And one person from the congregation -- usually one who was more educated, more trained -- would rise out of the congregation and would share just a few words of reflection on the scripture that had been read that day, and then they would go and sit back down. Ordained ministry in those days often looked like monasticism, where they would go and pray in a convent or a monastery, and study and learn and translate the scriptures into their own thing. That's what ordained ministry usually looked like. Christian worship usually looked like Word and Table.

And so we have sort of received this history of Protestantism where we proclaim and tell -- and there's both good and bad about that. I'm trying not to, really, stand on one side or the other of this; clearly I'm Protestant, so you can get the idea of what side I stand on. And you can also get the idea that I ramble on for, like, EVER every Sunday, so I think that preaching is important. So you get all these things. But there's something I think that we've lost, also, in the early Christian tradition of making the Scripture speak for itself as very important, and then receiving the grace that comes from the Table, week after week. So that's kind of the history of sermon-speaking, where it comes from.

So now let's talk about why it matters to our Christian life. First, you know, we've all kind of had pastors that were maybe a little boring. Right? Some of you may be thinking that right now, and that's cool, I understand, I have bored plenty of people in my time. And so, it sort of gets to the point that the caricature of the pastor is an old, boring man who just rambles and rambles and rambles.

One of my favorite characters in all of pop culture is Rev. Lovejoy of "The Simpsons." He owns this caricature so, so very well, and so we're just going to see this character real quick his preaching style and how this sort of melds --

[VIDEO CLIP, which malfunctions]

(Laughter)

Anyways, the point is that Homer falls asleep, he yells, and the preacher says, “Well, I’m going to start back from the beginning, here are the Nine Points of Constancy,” and then the whole place just (snore) is falling asleep, until he has in his pulpit noises to wake them up while he’s preaching. And then they go home, the Simpsons go home, and they all start pulling off their clothes and Mom says, “What are you guys doing? You’re going to wrinkle your church clothes!” (Moms, you’ve been there before, right?) And the kids and Dad all say, “This is the best time of the whole week, right now, this moment!” “Why is that?” “Because it’s the longest possible time ‘til we have to go back to church!”

(Laughter)

So – yeah, like as a pastor, you’re like, “Oh, man! Ouch! Do people really say that stuff?” But on the other hand, there is this idea in our culture today that church is for perfect people, or bored people, or it’s that thing that Mom makes me do, or – I hear this one all the time – “I’m thirty years old now, I’ve put in my time when I was a kid.” You ever heard that one before? “I’ve put in my time when I was a kid, I don’t have to go any more, I’ve put in my time.” Maybe, as a pastor, I hear wild things about why people don’t want to go to church: “I want to sleep in,” “I want to watch the game.” “Oh, well why don’t you come this Sunday, the game starts at 4:30!” (Pause) “Oh, no, I gotta, I gotta get ready for the game.” (Laughter) The things you hear for why people don’t want to come, to listen to the sermon, are absolutely unbelievable.

But we’re going to talk about what the sermon should function as, and in particular, maybe about how Jesus understood the sermon to function. And we want to weigh that against this cultural concept of, “You’re okay. You’re great! You are perfect the way you are. You are just SO wonderful.”

And so, we took a song that sort of illustrates that, the sort of self-esteem movement, if you will. And it’s a song that I’m going to confess to you that I hate with all of me – I just hate this song so much. So I hope maybe some of you like it better, some of you are going to come up and tell me you love this song. I’m sorry, you’re wrong, this song is terrible! This song is terrible. But anyways, the band is going to sing for us a song by Katy Perry.

Katy Perry is a former pastor’s child, grew up in the church, even tried to break into Christian music, and was told things – also, Jessica Simpson, if you remember her? And she was also told things, they were told they were too pretty to be a Christian singer, they would make young boys lust and stuff like this, really strange kind of stuff. So they were kicked out of the Christian music field, both of them, and they both became secular singers, and Katy Perry has become, like, the icon of, “You are just so great! Just show how great you are to the world.” And so, this song is called, “Firework.” I’m sorry.
(Laughter)

Song leader: That's the worst set-up EVER. Thanks for nothing!

(Laughter)

[SONG]

So, yeah, it's not on them, they did a good job, but that song is just so bad.
(Laughter) Just a bad song. I'm sorry. You can take it up with me, if you disagree, later, that's fine.

So, this song, to me, is kind of the pinnacle of the "self-esteem movement." The Self-Esteem Movement is such an interesting thing to me, because I feel like it really took off about when I was a kid, and I saw the way that kids were dealt with. I was dealt with differently all the way through my growing-up.

The idea of "self-esteem" was first talked about by the psychologist and philosopher William James, in the late-19th century. He began the conversation by noting that there is a lack of, or a direct link, between objective qualities of a person, or that there's no direct link between their qualities and how they feel about themselves. "Some people are equipped with a presumptuous and unbreakable confidence, while others who are equally as able to succeed in life, and are valued by others, do not believe in their qualities and capabilities." So he wanted to study and understand why it was that how people felt about themselves was not proportionate to the skills that they had.

And so that conversation kept building, until the 1970s when governments became convinced by this concept of self-esteem, and began to build it into their public policy. Then from there, education started buying in, then sports leagues started buying in. And so I was born in 1981 and I can piece out, across my childhood, from when there were times that I got a ribbon, at best, when I was a loser, and a trophy for winning first or second place, to then times when I began to receive pretty good-sized trophies just for showing up.

For me, this is best shown in the movies in a movie called, "Meet The Fockers," where a father – his son is now pushing forty years old, and his father collected all of his participation ribbons and made a wall in his house celebrating his son, who was pretty mediocre growing up. So we're going to see that clip real fast, about sort of the pinnacle of this movement.

[VIDEO CLIP]

So there you go. We have this song that we sang today, it has things like saying,

"You don't have to feel like a wasted space, You're original, cannot be replaced."

"Do you ever feel already buried deep, six feet under, Screams but no one else seems to hear a thing?"

“Do you know that there’s still a chance for you, ‘cause there’s a spark in you?”

“‘Cause, baby, you’re a firework, Come on, show them what you’re worth! Make them go, ‘Ah, ah, ah!’ as you shoot across the sky-y-y.”

Once upon a time, American music created, like, “Stairway to Heaven.” I mean -- oh, that was British, wasn’t it? The Brits are always better than us with this stuff.

I mean, I’m all for good news, I’m all for making people feel worthwhile. I’m all for recognizing the value in people. But we’ve gotten to the point now, in this self-esteem movement, that our value comes from within and no matter where we’re at, no matter who we are, no matter what sort of mistakes we’re making, we say, “You’re okay!” and “You’re great!” And your value, we say as a culture, is inside of you. You’ve just got to find the best of you and mine it and work it out, and when you find the best of you that you can possibly produce, that’s when you will be fully actualized! And at that point, apparently, you will, “Boom, boom, boom, like the moon, moon, moon!”

(Laughter)

And again, I’m not against self-esteem. In fact, when I take a “strengths finders” test, usually “self assurance” is my number two strength. Usually that’s what people like to complain about about me: “Who does he think he is?” Right? But self-esteem is an important thing, it really is, it’s really good for people to feel good about themselves, absolutely! And our potential is often linked to how good we feel about ourselves, and I get all of that stuff. But the Christian value that we’re beginning to lose more and more and more is that it is Christ who has done work inside of us, that has made us holy, and that the goal here is for us to become more like Christ, not more like “the best I can be.” And we’re losing that so badly now that if you were to turn on Christian radio, you will hear pastor after pastor preaching a shallow gospel that is just saying, “Hey, God loves you so much that He’ll let you be who you are! He sees good in you and wants you to be your best!” And so little do we anymore preach a gospel of repentance that says that God wants to come in and work with us to remove sin and help us to become holy and like Christ, and find that God loves us as we are, but He wants to work with us for sin no longer to reign in us, and we can become like we were meant to be from the start, not the sinful path that we’re heading down.

And that message has become so predominant, otherwise, in popular culture that people are beginning to leave the church, and pastors are getting nervous about people leaving the church, so they’re reaffirming that message, just saying, “Hey! You’re pretty sweet, be awesome! God loves you just the way you are!” Yeah, God loves you just the way you are, but, like a potter’s project, we’re not finished yet! And what good is going to come out of us, I believe, is the work that God is going to do through the death and resurrection of Christ, that the Spirit is trying to fill us with in the world today. And this is so radically different than this sort of “pop-psychology Christianity” that people are talking about more and more.

And so, just to prove the point of the sort of preaching I think we ought to be doing in the church, I thought it would be important to kind of look at the sort of preaching Jesus did. So if we could, let's turn quickly to Matthew chapter four. Matthew, chapter four, this story Jesus begins to preach, right before He gives us the Sermon on the Mount which we'll kind of poke through in just a moment. But listen to what it is that Jesus understands the preaching event is meant to be when he begins to sense the call that God is sending him out to preach in the countrysides of his home country.

We're going to look at Matthew chapter four, verses twelve through seventeen. Would you join me in standing as we read the scripture this morning?

[SCRIPTURE]

You may be seated.

“Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near, the Kingdom of God is near! Repent!” This is the message that's at the core of Matthew's gospel whenever Jesus is speaking: Repent! Now, “Repent!” we've sort of boiled down to mean this sort of thing that means, “Say you're sorry to God.” But that really misses what the word ‘repentance’ means. The word ‘repentance’ means, actually, that I'm walking in one direction, something has happened to cause me to realize that it's the wrong direction, I turn 180 degrees and begin to walk in the other direction. Now, that's much different than the confused old preacher who used to say, “Repent and turn your life around 360 degrees to God!” For those of you who know geometry, that's not good! (Laughter) It's a 180-degree turn. It's, “I'm heading in one direction, God gets ahold of my heart and my imagination and my life, and says, ‘Move in my direction instead!’” And we drop the direction we're going, which is about ME – about filling my needs and my wants, what I think is good for ME – and saying, ‘I want to give my life and my desires and my imagination and everything to God and go His direction.

Now, “Repent!” is a whole lot bigger of a call than, “Say you're sorry to God.” It's a whole lot bigger of a call. It's a change in direction, it's a change in momentum, it's a change, even, in personality and in what matters to you in life. It's a complete change. And not because, “Hey, I think that option is better for me,” but because Christ has become real to me, that I see Him so clearly, I understand that He lived and died and lives again, that He's calling me and loves me and wants to be in relationship with me. It's not just my own will to say, “Hey, I think this is a better option.” But it's a response to the Son of God who has died for your sins so that you can live life more abundantly.

And so Jesus begins to preach that sort of message; the sort of message that says, “Hey, you're great, but you're not living for what you were designed to be lived for. Why don't you live into your design, your design was relationship with God? Holiness. Sinlessness. How about you live into that direction?” And that's the sort of repentance that Jesus was talking about.

There's another movie, a scene that I think is so incredibly cheesy, but also so incredibly 1980s, and it's from the movie "Rocky IV," where Rocky himself preaches a sermon of repentance. You may remember that he fights Drago in Russia, right in the heart of the Cold War, and he beats the big blond Russian man. And they put a microphone in front of him, and he begins to preach a message of repentance – of all things! – to the Russian people who are there that day. So let's watch this and listen to Rocky's little speech.

[VIDEO CLIP]

I find it pretty hard to imagine kids in Russia kind of changing their minds about America, in the mid-1980s, because of a boxing match – you know? But yet Rocky, he takes the moment to kind of invite the people to repent: "If I can change, you can change. I've come to appreciate your people in spite of the American narrative about the Soviets. Maybe you can appreciate me and my people, and your narrative can change about us as well."

And so, that really is what the preaching event is, as well. Someone stands up from the congregation, moves forward, and begins to tell about the story of how if I can change, you can change. That Christ has so enlivened the preacher with a word to speak to the people, that the idea here isn't that, "Hey, you're okay, keep going in your direction," but that God is moving amongst us and calling us to and for something! And in spite of all of what I want to be, I'm on board with God's movement, and I'm trying to inspire and speak as the preacher about what God's movement in the world looks like, and to say, "Hey! We've got maybe something that we need to repent about today."

Now, not every week is everyone going to have to repent about everything. But from week to week, we never know when that moment in the gospel is going to come, that's going to speak to our heart to say, "Hey, I'm not quite doing it right." And Jesus follows this up with his own preaching as well. I'm going just to poke out a few things from the Sermon on the Mount, but these words when Jesus is preaching – they're hard words! They're words saying to people who are already following Him, remember? Jesus is speaking on a mountainside, to a group of people who have been so moved by His message, by His grace, that they've chosen to follow Him. The people that Jesus is preaching to aren't the sinners! They're the people who are following Jesus, just like we are here today, and he still preaches hard words of repentance to them. He says, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!" Now, "the Kingdom of God is near" doesn't mean that heaven is almost about to happen, "the Kingdom of God is near" means that the King is present, therefore the Kingdom is near! All right?

And that's the case with us today, as well. The King is present with us when we gather together, so the Kingdom of God is near, and Jesus preaches about a lifestyle that the Kingdom of God urges us to live into, and to live out. And so here are some of the things that He says, just for a refresher. The Beatitudes are some of the hardest things to hear:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called Sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you because of me; rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in Heaven. For in the same way, they persecuted the Prophets who were before you.”

Now, none of those things are things that we value to be in American culture today. Nobody is telling you, on the TV shows, or the radio shows, or the podcasts, or the music we listen to, “Gee, you ought to get persecuted, that would be cool.” Or, “Hey, you know what characteristic you should really try out is meekness. Or mercy.” Quite the opposite: we are told over and over and over, “Win at all costs. Win, win, win.” And Jesus is painting a different sort of idea.

How about this part of the Sermon: “You have heard it said to the people long ago that, ‘You shall not murder,’ and anyone who commits murder will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone that is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. But anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ is subject to the Sanhedrin, but anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

How about this: “You have heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,’ but I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other to them as well. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard it said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy,’ but I tell you instead, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward is that to get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.

“Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before of men to be seen by them; if you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites in the synagogue and in the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

Do you hear how this sermon is so counter-cultural? Even then it's counter-cultural, but it's counter-cultural to us today as well. The media that we consume, the free time that we have, the relationships we have – we're trying to win, we're trying to get ahead, we're trying to build a Kingdom where I am the King, so that other people can see how great I am, and worship at my throne!

But here Jesus is saying, as long as the Kingdom of Heaven is near, let's behave like the Kingdom of Heaven. In the Kingdom of Heaven there is peace, and there is grace, and there's kindness, there's helpfulness, there's restoration, there's hope. And He's inviting us in very tangible ways to live into these things, instead of saying, “Hey, I'm going to get what's coming to me.” And the problem with the sort of “self-esteem Christianity” we have today – it's actually been labeled something! When experts listen to the sermons of preachers in America today, they say that the religion of America is most closely related to the idea of “moral therapeutic deism.” All right? So, let me break that out for you, okay? Meaning that, “moral” – if you do good things, “therapeutic” – that God will take care of you and make you feel good about yourself, “deism” – that God is not actually active in our world today, that He's off in a distant place, almost like a bowler who lets go of the bowling ball and hopes that it knocks over all ten pins. Moral therapeutic deism: that a distant, far-off God who's not involved in our world today wants you to do nice things so that you can feel good about yourself. That is the predominant religion in America today. Now, that's experts saying that. Experts who study the sociology of religion. “Moral therapeutic deism.”

And maybe that's why, when we read something like the Sermon on the Mount, that could have been and should have been forming us for 2,000 years now, it still sounds like such foreign words. How do you even live like that? How do you even begin to act like that? How do we live into that? Jesus surely must've been speaking in metaphorical terms, right? He couldn't have been serious, that we should take a punch to the face and then turn the other one and let him get a second strike – who would DO that? That doesn't even make sense!

It reminds me of Barack Obama, when he became President, he was defending his Christianity. You all remember, that was a very big story: “No, no, I'm not Muslim, I'm a Christian.” So, he would often talk about his conversion story. And his conversion story, as he told it, was related directly to the Sermon on the Mount. He said that as he read the words of Jesus here, he recognized that that was who he wanted to be, that he wanted to live into the Sermon on the Mount. And so, that's a really interesting

conversion story, that the Sermon on the Mount deeply spoke to him. And then, when they ask him about his foreign policy, and how that would relate to the Sermon on the Mount, he says, “You can’t run a Defense Department and take the Sermon on the Mount seriously.”

Well. That may be true! But it’s that sort of idea, again, that when we hear the words of Jesus, we want to often pick and choose the ones that work for us in the moment. We don’t always want to live into the fullness of the message and gospel that Jesus is preaching to us, do we? We want to sort of take and pick the parts that work well for us. And so this idea, when Jesus is preaching here, this idea that we should probably listen, we should probably take seriously what He is saying, we should probably hear His sermon, and then we should probably live it out as well. When we gather into the church, we should expect that there’s going to be times when we hear a sermon, that it’s going to step on our toes a little bit. That it’s not just necessarily going to give us a bit of food that’s going to get us through another week -- but that every once in a while the sermon, no matter how Christian we are, no matter how holy we are, no matter how many things we’re getting right -- that sometimes the sermon, or the reading of Scripture, or the enlivening of what Jesus says should seem like a scoped rifle, right at your heart. That has spoken to me and called me out today, and that I recognize that, man, maybe I fall short.

I’ll be completely honest with you, it’s very rarely a week that happens that I get up and preach to you that I have not been completely whacked around by the scripture that we’re going to talk about today. It’s very rarely that I come upon a scripture for the week and say, “Well, I’ve got that one nailed, I can’t wait to get everyone else to get it right!” Quite the opposite. The more I come into contact with the Scriptures, the more I hear good preaching, the more I do good devotionals, the more I recognize how short I fall, and how much more grace I need to keep pulling me in the direction of the Kingdom of God that’s at hand, the Kingdom of God that’s alive and well and moving amongst us; this Christ who was alive, and wants to be seen and known and to grab ahold of us, and is present, I believe, in this place right now. I come to recognize how short I am from that.

And for me, that’s what good preaching is about, is to remind us what the Kingdom of God looks like, that it’s at hand and it’s becoming more and more like Christ was like. And so my hope and prayer is that when you come here, that you don’t come here for the sake of being comfortable, and that I don’t greet you with comfortable words. I mean, I don’t want you to feel like garbage when you leave, you know, but I want the “upliftingness” of the sermon moment to be rooted in the gospel. Not in terms of who we are, that we’re getting it right, that we’re doing okay. I want the gospel to speak so loud to say, “Man! It doesn’t matter how far gone I’ve been this week, because God is still calling after me, and next week, through the grace of God, I can look more like Christ. That it’s through the grace of God that keeps coming at me, no matter how rough last week was, the grace of God keeps coming for me, it keeps calling for more of me, it keeps grasping me, and grabbing hold of my heart and my imagination and my personality in new ways, week after week, as the Scriptures are being read, and as the story of God are being talked about, we can live into the call of who God is.

And so Jesus ends his Sermon on the Mount this way. He says, “If anyone hears these words of mine and practices them, he is like the wise man who built his house upon a rock. And the rain came down and the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation built upon the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand: the rain came down and the streams rose and the winds beat and blew against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Folks, I know myself just well enough that if I’m going to pretend like I’m a firework who can shoot across the sky, that that house of cards is going to fall. I’m not in control of anything. I’m not any extra special than anyone else. The more I try to build up my own kingdom, the pressures of the world that feel so depressing, and so hard, the struggles, my inadequacies, all those things are – the waters and the winds, the streams that rise – all of those things are coming, whether or not I think I’m excellent. But I know this: the more that I build myself, and understand my personality, my personhood, my life on Christ and who He is and what He’s done for me, the more and more that I recognize the winds and waves of life, that I end up okay on the other side. And I don’t need a Katie Perry song to tell me that I’m okay.

Because I am okay. Because Christ is as solid as a rock that this world has ever known, and that even when I feel beat down, even when I’m feeling inadequate, even when I’m feeling not special, when I’m depressed, when I’m sad, when I’m hurt, Christ is there to lean on. And it’s not always fun to submit myself to Christ, it’s not always fun. I know you know that, too – it’s not always fun to submit yourself to Jesus Christ. But I believe we always find on the other side that He is good. That He has our best interests in mind, and that He’s drawing us towards a future that is indescribable in human words. That one day we will sit face-to-face with Him, and all of the times that we’ve been pierced by a sermon or a scripture reading and felt, “Oh! I do NOT want to do that! I do not want to be that!”, it will have all been worth it. Because when we gaze upon Him and see Him face-to-face, we will understand how simple and shallow the things we have had to put behind are, and how great, majestic, and wonderful He is. And it will all have been worth it then.

At this point, though, we get to celebrate His life around the Table of our Lord. Like I said, I wholly believe that Christ is present today –that He’s not just some future God that we’re going to see eventually – that he interacts with us now, that he’s present in this room, in this place, because we’ve gathered to worship Him. And again, no matter where you’ve been this week, no matter what struggle you’ve been through, no matter what’s in your future that you’re afraid of, Christ meets us at His Table and gives us His broken body and His shed blood, and says, “I’m sufficient for you.”

Timothy Brooks
South Portland Church of the Nazarene
Sermon #7: Response/The Sacraments
November 29, 2016

This morning we're going to talk about sacrament. In the Church of the Nazarene -- unlike, say, the Catholic Church, the Catholic Church has seven or eight sacraments -- the Church of the Nazarene believes in two sacraments. These sacraments are things that Jesus Christ himself instituted and did and handed off to the church. We believe in Baptism, and we believe in Holy Communion. And both of these are meant to be, I think, response: response to the grace of God given, response to the message preached, response to hearing what God is saying and seeing what God is doing.

Interestingly enough, I did an interview of seventeen different people in the congregation before this series started, for the project I'm doing, to hear and listen to the thoughts of what people had on the sacraments. And their responses were typical Nazarene responses; so, good for you guys! However: there's a part of me that thinks that our "typical Nazarene response" has been a bit jaded and a bit off-center. Now may be a good time in the history of our church for us to have a renewal of sacramental thinking. Particularly, again, because the sacraments are things that Jesus himself instituted, which gives me the idea that maybe this stuff is pretty important! And so perhaps now -- and I see it across our church -- is a time for us to say, "Hey, let's again jump into this sacramental stuff; this isn't something that just the Catholics own!" We believe that we are a legitimate church in the history of Christ's movement in the world, right? So maybe we should do the legitimate things that Jesus did! I think that's an awesome idea!

And so I asked, for example, "How many times do you think someone should be baptized?" And only one person said to me, "Once." Period. One person. And the thing that came after that that was normal was, "Well, you know, a lot of times people kind of fall away from their baptism, and they spend a season in sin, and if they want to come back and be baptized again, I don't see a problem with that." Well, I mean that's a really well-thought-out, reasonable answer. There's not necessarily something wrong with that. We do, however, confess historically in the Creeds that there is one baptism. And so what is it that's happened between this idea that the traditional, historic faith has said, "One baptism," and we now say, "Well, I mean, if you've had like a meaningful reconnection with God, then maybe you should have another baptism"? What's happened between then?

Or how about this? I asked the question of people -- and again, this is just a sampling of multiple generations, male and female, recent Nazarenes, longtime Nazarenes, I tried to get a real feel for the congregation as it currently is -- and I asked, "How often should we have Communion?" And again, only one or two people said, "Every week!" A lot of people said, "I think we do it too often." Most people said, "I think once that a month is about right." That was the typical sort of response. Okay, again -- reasonable, well-thought-out, grounded in experience, thoughtful answers. There's

nothing inherently wrong with any of those answers; this is really interesting to hear the response of what people think and are thinking about this sort of thing. And so, that began to cause me to think, as we do response. I estimate, when I talk to people that we do Communion between thirty and 35 times a year here, which is heavy in a 52-Sunday calendar year.

Now, I do make sure every week to do some sort of response: at different times we've had a time for you to come up and take Legos, at different times we've had the "One in One Hundred" response, we've had "Faith Promise" response, we've had altar response. We try to do every single week that we have the spoken Word of the Gospel, followed by the opportunity for you all to respond, and I always try to make it so that you actually have to get off your bottom and walk forward to respond. Because I think it's very important that we don't just check off a box in our mind, but that our physical body responds to the gospel that is preached; that we take a stand by literally standing and moving in the direction of God. I think that's very important.

But again, the history of the church, until just very recently, has been Communion is taken every week, it's non-negotiable, it's a part of the service. And so now there is other scholarship asking, thinking about worship service, saying, "What has happened there? Why is it that we don't take Communion every week?"

There are some cynical scholars that say, "Well, music has become the sacrament of choice of many free-church Protestants." I'll give you an example. If I told you in response, "You know, I'm afraid that music could lose its meaning. So let's do it once a month to make sure that it stays special." There would be a riot! But yet, we've come to the point of this very important meal, that Jesus Himself handed on to His believers, and we've begun to sort of think of it as about Me, about what I feel. And if I feel something or don't feel something, that's exactly how I judge whether or not it's important. And so, we have sort of taken this idea of sacrament, the gift that Christ Himself instituted and gave to the church, in both Baptism and Communion, and we have arrived at the place where we have said, "My feeling is king. What I feel, what I experience, validates it – or not."

And yet, it's bizarre in some ways that we do that, because our life is made up, our personality is shaped, our routine is designed after the mundane. So much about our life is mundane, and routine, and boring, and yet if we really had to sit down and describe who we are and what we do, we would have to point to the mundane in order to describe it. "I get up in the morning, I go to work, I have lunch, I go home, I talk to my children, I tuck them into bed, I have a conversation with my spouse, we watch our DVR shows, we go to bed." It's mundane and boring, and yet it's so formative to our story and who we are. And I wonder if we've become uncomfortable, in a world where we're constantly plugged-in, we're constantly able to be entertained, we have more money than people have had in the history of the world, and so we can entertain ourselves for five dollars or less, we expect to feel something with every last thing that we do? And yet, we're so often "who we are" because of what we do in the mundane. It is our meals that give us health, and yet we would never skip a meal because it was boring. It is our interaction

with friends and family -- oftentimes we talk about how we love our friends because we can be bored with them and still feel as though we had a good time! And yet, we would never deprive ourselves of our times with friends and family.

And so, perhaps it's important for us to turn back and look at the sacraments and say, "What if I saw this not so much about Me interacting with the sacraments, but imagining what God is doing to me through it? That perhaps it is we should be baptized once in our lives, because it is God's activity and not mine. I am simply responding to what God is doing in the world. And so, if I stray with my life, I don't need to be re-baptized because God has not moved, God has remained the same, in the same place, in the same sense of covenant that He was when I came to the baptismal font ten years ago, two months ago, fifty years ago. God has remained faithful through it all, it is I who have strayed." And so maybe there's a better way for us to say, "I am back!" than going back to a sacrament that is supposed to be what God is doing, not what I am doing. Perhaps it is coming to the Table, that we should be more excited each and every time we can come to the Table, because it is Jesus Himself, we believe, who has prepared this Table. He has set the feast, hours before He died, for the sake of His believers, to come and sup with Him.

So we come to the Table, hopefully regularly, in anticipation that we get to share a meal with Him. When you go and read the gospels, Jesus is sitting down to have a meal with people all the time, and who it is that Jesus sits with is vitally important to the gospel story. And if you were to start reading through the table scenes, where Jesus is having a meal with people, you will find that most regularly He's with people who are unworthy, who don't belong at His table. The Pharisees and the holy people are upset with Him because they feel that they're good enough to sit at the table with Jesus. But instead they are constantly upset because He is inviting tax collectors, and sinners, people who don't measure up, people who could use a shower, people who are kind of embarrassing, people who keep making the same mistake over and over and just can't get themselves pulled(up by their bootstraps, He keeps inviting them to come to the table to have a meal with Him. And perhaps when it is that we open up the Lord's Table, and we pray over it and read Scripture, we're inviting the actual Presence of Christ, who we believe is alive, to come and be amongst us. Now, the Catholics talk about transubstantiation, that they believe that when they pray over the meal it becomes the actual Body and Blood of Christ – that's not really what we believe here. But what we do believe in the Protestant tradition is that when we open the Table, the Presence of Christ does come to dwell amongst us, that Christ is here, and that He is giving Himself, His Body and Blood, once again to us. That He wants us to come and feast on Him.

Now, there's a saying in our society that "You are what you eat." And many of you look kind of like turkeys today [the Sunday after Thanksgiving]. [Laughter] (Groan, groan, groan, I know!) The statement is really referring to that if you eat healthy foods you'll be healthy, if you eat unhealthy foods you'll be unhealthy. That makes a lot of sense. But what if, when we came to the Table, we owned that statement afresh, and said that when we open this up, and took the bread and the wine, and said, "I am what I eat, and what I eat today is the Body and Blood of Christ"?

So this song is an important song for us, there's a line that I love, that says, "Holiness is Christ in me." And so we recognize that when we come to the Table and take Communion, that it is the meal of sanctification, that upon giving our lives to Christ and allowing Him to save us, and cleanse us, and remove sin from our lives, we come to this Table because we put the Body and Blood of Christ so that Christ can live and dwell in us. We are what we eat! This meal of sanctification is the receiving of His Body and Blood into our body so that it becomes a part of us – a physical part of us. Christ consumes us into His Body and we consume His Body into ours. This is an important thing to understand. If we want to be a sanctified, holy people, I think it's very, very valuable for us to come to the Body and Blood of Christ and invite it into our bodies, reminding us that it is only through Christ that we can possibly become holy. We cannot work harder, we cannot imagine ourselves better and then work towards our goal. We only become holy through the grace of God, and we become holy by receiving that grace. And the Table, I feel, is perhaps the best place for us to possibly do that.

Now, there's another metaphor that we talk about in our society today, one is, "You are what you eat," and another one is the idea of "bad blood" – I've got "bad blood" with him, they've got "bad blood" between each other. We talk about it in a way that says they're angry with each other when they have "bad blood," they're mad at each other, they don't like each other, there's "bad blood" between them. And today when we talk about Communion, in particular, we talk about "good blood" – blood that restores, blood that renews, blood that fixes relationships. But our society likes to talk about "bad blood." They don't like "good blood," they like "bad blood." They like a good scandal, they like it when TMZ lights up with a celebrity feud. We like it whenever there is anger between friends. We like to see cops fighting with people in the streets and pulling out our cell phones and posting it on CNN. We like it when there's "bad blood," we get excited when there's drama and fighting between people. And that idea has been recently captured in a Taylor Swift song called "Bad Blood." So listen to this song that our band is going to play, and think about how our society just loves a good fight – they don't like to fight – but they like to see other people fight. And listen to the drama of this song, the disdain and distaste for each other. Taylor Swift, ladies and gentlemen:

[SONG]

That song spent the whole summer of 2015 number one on every chart. All right? This song was a huge, huge cultural moment of this calendar year in our life. And the idea behind this song is terrible, it's sad, it's awful! "Band-Aids don't fix bullet holes"? OUCH! I mean, seriously, the anger and frustration here in this song is just tangible. And we love songs like this! I mean, people – I just imagine, like, preteen girls listening to this song, thinking about the girl who sent the mean text about them at school – we love rivalry, we love anger, we love being frustrated! And we particularly love seeing other people sort of stir the pot of drama. We love it! Millions of dollars are made every year on drama and peoples' misfortune.

Now, what's disturbing, scary, is that this song could be sung in every church and celebrated. Now, not because they really want to speak it, but so many churches have people sitting in the very same sanctuary where they have bad blood between them. And this is not a new problem! This isn't a problem that has developed in America -- not at all! In fact the Apostle Paul wrote to a church that had very bad blood between it. He had to sort of sort out the issues of how people would treat each other in the church, and then how they would come to Communion. Now, when we do Communion, I will read from I Corinthians 11, and I will be reading those words today, but in a greater context. And to some degree, us today, 2015, we have a great debt to pay to the dramatic church in Corinth because we have developed for us sort of a theology of how the church comes together to take Communion, because they were kind of dysfunctional and had bad blood. So fortunately for us, we can read this and sort of begin to think through how we should take Communion in the world today. So we're sort of indebted to them, but at the same time, Paul is very frustrated, and he sort of lays out three different things that they need to think about, that we then can also think about, as well, when they come to the Table. And so Paul is pretty tough on the Corinthians because of how they are taking Communion. And so if I can set the scene before we read it real fast, I think this is important.

Churches didn't meet in nice cathedrals or even in nice sanctuaries like they do today; they would often meet, often secretly, in someone's house. They would gather together and have a feast together. The meal itself would be understood as Communion, because they would fill themselves with food, and the doing it in love and in sharing with each other, was all sort of a throwback and a reminder to the Last Supper that Christ had where they would sit down and have a full meal, a Passover meal with each other, they would celebrate that week after week after week. They would sing together, they would read some scriptures if they had received scriptures into their church, they would have a short talk and they would leave. This is what they did.

Now, in Corinth, in their house church, they were meeting together, they were getting together, and what was happening was the rich people would bring more food and they would take more for themselves and go to a different room. The poor people would kind of have to scrape together what was left over, they would be sent to another room. There were distinctions being made on class and gender and friendships, and people weren't eating together. And Paul was very frustrated about this because they had missed the point of the supper that Jesus had instituted. So he writes this instruction to them. Now, if you've read I Corinthians lately, you know that Paul is kind of ticked at them in general. But this is sort of one of the peak moments that Paul is frustrated with, where he begins to give instructions. And after this he talks about spiritual gifts and then love.

So he starts from here, offering a prescription to fix the bad blood between the people in this church. And for him, the prescription for the bad blood is the good blood of Jesus Christ, which forgives. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs like the Taylor Swift song does. It doesn't lob accusations and start fights. It's steady, it's present, it's forgiving, and it keeps coming at you, no matter how far you are straying. So if we could, let's read this story together, this letter. I Corinthians 11, verses seventeen to 34. If you would join me in standing as we read the word of the Lord today:

[SCRIPTURE]

There are three basic divisions and instructions that are happening here. The first of this is the Lord's Table must express the community's unity as the New Covenant people of God. You may recall that God, in His first real act of salvation, His major act of salvation, He calls the people of Israel out of Egypt and away from slavery into, or towards, a Promised Land. Jesus, when he has the Lord's Supper is celebrating that Passover, that gift of grace. And so, God didn't call just a few people who seemed the most important to Him. He called the entire community: the good, the bad, the frustrating, the good-looking, the rich, the poor, He gathered them all together and brought them to the Promised Land. And so it is when we have this meal, as well. It's an expression that we are the New Covenant people of God, we are doing this together, and that's vitally important. We should be keenly aware of who it is we take this with, to make sure that we are in unity with them. We don't always have to think they're perfect. But yet we're invited to this meal to recall the deep love of God for us, and imagine how it is that we should be loving towards those around us, as well.

The second is this: the Lord's Supper focuses on the church's memory of Jesus' death. We recall that the Lord Jesus Christ died on our behalf. That He bled, He suffered, and we should take time to remember that as well.

And finally, the Lord's Supper is an occasion for us to ponder God's judgment. That indeed, God is a God who judges. Now, that doesn't necessarily have to be scary, because a judge can judge you innocent, right? So, oftentimes when we think of God's judgment, we get scared: "Oh my goodness, what's He going to say? I'm such a mess, I've made so many mistakes." And when we understand ourselves to be standing in front of the Judge someday, we don't have to cower in fear near as much as we can grasp this cup and this bread, and be thankful for the grace that makes the difference between how far we can get on our own, and where God is inviting us to be. We receive grace, and we understand as we take this meal not, "I don't live up to what God is calling us to be." Guess what? You don't! I don't. We don't.

But as we receive this, we recall just how powerful the grace of God is, that it is shaping us to be like Christ, and that we can't ourselves make a cognitive decision to say, "Hey, I'd like to be more Christ-like!" and then off we go into the sinless life! But on the other hand, we continue to come to the broken and wounded Body of Christ, and receive it, and find the more and more Christ that we receive into our lives, the more and more He shapes and forms us to be a holy person. And the more and more Christ that we receive in our lives, the less and less we desire to sin. That is the work of grace in our life.

One of the best movie moments that I think inspires this idea is the movie "Field of Dreams." I love the movie "Field of Dreams" because I love baseball, and so it's a pretty awesome movie. You likely know the setting of the movie: A man starts hearing a voice call to him: "If you build it, they will come." He begins to build in his cornfield a baseball field. No one lives within like ten miles in any direction of him, and so it's just a

nonsensical call upon his life. He doesn't understand at all why he's supposed to build a baseball field in his backyard, but he begins to plow corn out, and lay sod, and create a baseball field. And as the baseball field is created, out comes Shoeless Joe Jackson, the disgraced baseball player who was kicked out of baseball for being accused of throwing a World Series and accepting money. Finally, Shoeless Joe Jackson, who has now long been dead, has a place to play ball, and he starts to bring other ancient ballplayers, and they play. And then Ray, who is hearing these voices, has to go find this guy in Boston – Moonlight Graham – and he brings him back, and slowly, as the movie goes, more and more, the pieces are beginning to be put together for him for what's happening. And his brother, who has been cynical the whole time, sees the baseball players play and he's just amazed at the possibilities, and suddenly he becomes supportive. And this sort of final game ends up happening where all these people come out and Ray, the man who built the baseball field, sees that one of the men who's come to play is his father. And he's just completely flabbergasted to see his dad as a young man. And he asks his wife, "What should I do?" And his wife says, "Well, I don't know, introduce him to his granddaughter." And so he does; he introduces him to his granddaughter and they have this really sort of awkward exchange, as Ray is just excited and not sure whether his dad recognizes that it's him, his son. So they talk and they talk and Dad turns to walk away, and Ray does this. Let's watch the video clip together:

[VIDEO CLIP]

So that's an exceptionally bad theology of heaven. (Laughter) "The place where dreams come true" – that's Disneyworld, not heaven! All right? However, there's something beautiful about that moment that can help us here. This idea, this moment here where they get lost in the delight of being with each other, of seeing each other in ways that were unexpected, they can't decipher between what is heaven and what is Iowa. They can't decipher between what is real and what is tangible, and about what is the delight of the world to come. And that is the moment Communion should be for us as a response. That we believe that Christ has died and been resurrected and has gone away, and is working to prepare a banquet table to receive us, and to dine with us at this final place, to celebrate all that is, all that God has made, all that Christ is, and our arrival into His home. And when we come to the Table, we get a foretaste of that. We get a foretaste of that heavenly banquet. We have a moment where heaven crashes into Earth, where we no longer know if this is real life or this is God's design. We sit at His everlasting Table and receive His gift of His Body and Blood, and just for a moment, you can begin to wonder, "Am I in Maine, or am I in heaven?"

And the answer will be, hopefully, "Yes! Yes! We are in this world, we are here, we are God's creation, and it is good. It's also hard, and we don't quite live up to all that God desires us to be. However, heaven breaks into our very sanctuary, and the Presence of God comes in a mysterious way, into the bread and the cup that we take, and we taste just a little bit, just a foretaste, almost an appetizer of what heaven will be like, because we experience the grace of God open up, like a wild river running loose, coming and pouring over us, and we feel the Presence of Christ and the grace that is His, and we say, "It's not about me; it's about You. And what You do makes me into something incredible

because of how incredible You are.” This moment of response is an incredible, mysterious, emotional, confusing, exciting, magnificent moment where heaven crashes into Earth and we are lost in the glory of God. And it’s so very tangible and simple, mundane. It may not be meaningful this time but it may be meaningful next time to you. But yet, every time it’s Christ’s invitation for you to come, and an invitation for you to receive His gift to you, and an invitation to go changed, because you have come into contact with the living, breathing, resurrected Lord of this world.

And so, today as we conclude, the band is coming and our ushers are coming, my hope is – I’ve got to admit, I was most nervous about this one, of all the different sermons that I’m going to do – because I’ve got so much to say, and the place that I’ve arrived took like eight years of school to kind of shape me in, so how in the world am I going to make an argument in thirty minutes and that becomes convincing? I have no idea. But I was really excited to talk about this, too, because I believe it’s important. I believe it’s important that we respond to the spoken Word, and I believe that the best way to respond to the spoken Word, most often, is for us to come and receive this incredible grace, for God breaks into our sanctuary and we consume the Presence of Christ into our body so that it would become a part of who we are. And I hope today, that with maybe a slightly different understanding, maybe you heard something that you can grasp on today. I hope that today we can begin to move past some of what we feel, when we receive Communion, and we can begin to focus on who it is that God is, and what it is that He’s doing to us. And we can begin to see that that never loses its meaning – ever, ever.

And so the band is going to play a song. Would you return to your seat and sit down? We are going to do a responsive reading – I used to do responsive readings when I was a kid in the Church of the Nazarene – and so since I read the text I usually read, we’re going to do something different. So receive your elements, go and sit down, and we’re going to do a responsive reading together, before we take the elements.

[The Great Thanksgiving is read together, celebrant and congregation.]

Timothy Brooks
South Portland Church of the Nazarene
Sermon #8: Benediction
December 6, 2015

I grew up in a pretty classic evangelical, conservative Christian family in the 1980s and 1990s. Pretty classic, pretty typical, the whole sort of thing. If we listened, as a family, to “secular music,” as it was called, it was usually the oldies: the 1950s, the 1960s, Buddy Holly, Elvis Presley, that kind of stuff. Back when music was good, right? (Laughter) Oh, man, our over-50 crowd just snickered and smiled – I saw all those looks! And so, I didn’t really listen to very much secular music; in fact, I can still remember, when I was 15, the first time I held my breath and snuck a CD into my house, hoping that my mom wouldn’t see it. [More laughter: Tim’s mother is in the congregation] Yeah, well, I’m just being honest! [Laughter] This was kind of the

way I was raised. And one particular artist that I was aware of, but we didn't really listen to, or I didn't know any songs of, was Frank Sinatra. Frank Sinatra, okay? So, I remember one day, my pastor, when I was a teenager, talking about this Frank Sinatra song during his sermon. And it was very much, VERY much a strong counterpoint to what he was trying to talk about, and that song was one of Sinatra's most famous, "My Way." The song, "My Way," by Frank Sinatra. And I remember him talking about this song, and I'm about 15, 14, something like that, and he's talking about how wrong that song is, how bad that song is, how no one should live this way! And I'd never heard the song before. So I went home and looked it up and found it, and I fell in love with that song! [Laughter] Absolutely! I couldn't think of a better way to go about living life but to live by the very lyrics of this song! And so, that's confession. I was not supposed to do that. But it felt, it honestly felt so much like me, it almost felt like an anthem. And so I came to enjoy that song. And the older I get, and the nearer I try to get to God, the more I recognize what that pastor was trying to say in the very first place. I really do understand it. But today, Leo, our esteemed guitarist, is going to be our lead vocalist [cheers and applause], and he is going to sing, once again – proving that I'm getting old! – he's going to sing it as the counterpoint. So here we go – Leo, sing "My Way" for us, by Frank Sinatra.

[SONG]

I was reminded this morning by Donnie Peters that I should mention how good the band has done through this sermon series, there's a lot of work they've put in. [Cheers and applause] Thank you, guys, thank you all so much.

So, if you ever wonder why people who knew me when I was a teenager didn't like me at all, that song should explain it to you. [Laughter] But I've begun to learn, over the years, that indeed there is some truth in saying, "Maybe that song isn't the way we should do it, maybe we shouldn't just try to express doing things 'my way,' maybe there is a better way. Maybe we should become a people of submission, as opposed to being a people of trying to conquer the world 'my way,' doing it 'my way.'"

And so I particularly began to think this week about Jesus, and doing it Jesus' way, and what that would look like. And I remembered and thought about something that Jesus said that seems pretty important. He says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God." Seek first the kingdom of God. There's even a song I used to sing as a kid about that: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God..." You know that, right? So, I used to sing that as a kid, as a child, and so this idea, "Seek first the kingdom of God" has been something that I've known and I've heard all my life, and yet I struggled on the other hand. "Seek first the kingdom of God" – this is what Jesus says, it's a song I sang as a child – and then this struggle in me to want to do it "my way." To struggle the way that I want to, to win the way I'm capable, to get ahead as I am able to do. And it took me years -- I mean decades! -- to sort of begin to realize that these two concepts can stand in polar opposition of one another. To "seek first the kingdom of

God” is the opposite of trying to build my kingdom the way that I want to do it. It’s impossible to try to do both at the same time.

And so I’ve tried to demonstrate over this sermon series a lot of different ways, hopefully, that sometimes unconsciously or subconsciously, we find ourselves trying to build a kingdom, or participate in kingdoms, that aren’t the Kingdom of God. And it becomes sort of messy and confusing, in the world we live in today, to go to church on Sunday, maybe check it out again on Wednesday night, but then be left with 170-some hours the rest of the week during which we’re being bombarded with images and opportunities and sounds and tastes that, well, seem benign, and may be benign, sometimes they’re inviting us to participate in kingdoms that are alternative to the one that Christ Himself has instituted.

And so, across our lives, things happen that are formational, they are building and forming a kind of person out of you. A song comes on the radio. A movie debuts in the theater. A new iPhone is debuted. FOX News tells us the next political battle, or MSNBC teaches us what to be offended about. The mall is having a sale. A supermodel demonstrates the new “perfect body,” and just how you can get it. “National Enquirer” makes us voyeurs of the rich and famous, when all we wanted to do was purchase a gallon of milk. A dinner party does little to us other than make us less appreciative of what we have and instead turns us jealous of what our neighbors have. Christmas becomes about hustle and bustle and presents as opposed to worship. But we make ourselves feel better about it because we declare that there’s a “War On Christmas,” and we craft the perfect Facebook status about Starbucks cups or an obscure town in the South that I’ve never heard of before that removed their manger from in front of City Hall. “We’re going to win that war on Christmas!”

We get caught up in these things in our lives, and they’re creating us to be a certain kind of person. And what’s interesting is, when you begin to read the stories of Jesus and try to understand who Jesus was, and then try to discover who He is in our world today, too – look at John 13, for example, and Jesus is praying, and what He prays is this, that His disciples would be known by their love. “That anyone who comes after me would be known by their love.” I mean, that’s from the very heart of Christ Himself. And, if you were to go out on the streets today – I encourage you if you feel dangerous! – just ask passers-by what they think of Christians – and then mark how many of them say, “They’re the most loving bunch on the street.” It’s probably not likely. We’re known for bullhorns. We’re known for creating boxes that people need to fit inside of. We’re known for loving Law, which is ironic because Paul wrote that Christ nullified the Law and gave us freedom and grace. We’re known for putting barriers between people and God. And how has it come that, if we were people of Scripture and we -- I mean, we are, right? we make honest readings of the text, our heart is pure in that we want to know God. We are those people and yet, when we begin to actually measure who we are as a people, the simple calls of Christ end up being so disturbingly far from who we find we are in our grading

rubric. We have become something different, in some subtle ways, than who it is that Christ was inviting us to be in His life in this world.

And part of the problem is that there are so many competing messages, so many different liturgies, if you will. You may recall in the first week I talked about that word, liturgy, and the word means “the work of the people,” but it’s come to mean “the work of the people in worship.” And so every single week – I could just show you – I print out a little handy-dandy liturgy, as we call it, right here, that I hand to the entire band, and it’s also called the “order of worship” – that’s another word for it. And what it is is, it’s a very specific plan, week by week, for us to invite the people of God into worship, to celebrate the Presence of God, to invite the Presence of God, and then to leave, having been transformed from having been in the Presence of God. The simple flow of it is basically that we gather, we’re reminded of the bad news in our world today, we’re then told from the Scriptures the story of grace and redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ, we respond to that – we talked about that last week – and then we receive a benediction to go, and to receive the good news that we’ve heard in the Presence of God, and to live out that good news in the world. And so the idea of a worship service is never that it’s the one hour that we put on our calendar to give back to God because He’s good to us, but it’s the time that we are breathed into God’s Presence so that God can swallow us up into Him as a worshipping community, and then God breathes us back out to live out what we have seen and come to know in the Presence of God.

So this is the time that God gathers all of His people in. He exposes His Presence, He descends amongst us. Have you ever heard the word “doxology” before? A lot of you know it, maybe, as a song – “Praise God from whom all blessings flow...” – right? “Doxa” – that word “doxa” means “glory” -- and the idea of doxology is that it’s like this two-way thing, the glory of God is being dropped onto the people and also that we lift our praises up to the glory. So it’s this mysteriously incredible moment where God’s heaven and Presence breaks in and we give back to God, and it sort of meets in the middle, and sort of heaven on earth happens. That the idea of doxology, and hopefully on a week-to-week basis, every time you come here, this is your moment of doxology, when you’re just absolutely lost in the presence of God. And the experience of worshipping in the presence of God isn’t just a moment that on Wednesday, you go and sit at your office desk and say, “Augh! Man, I wish I could have that presence of God again like on Sunday.” But that the Presence of God has been so real that it planted itself in you and sent you out of here to be the people of God.

A great way to think about it, a way that I love to think about it, is that we are “glory-bearers,” glory-bearers who have come so near to the glory of God that it imprints itself on us and as we go, we are the bearers of the glory of God, that the glory of God is seen through us because of our incredible encounter with God. Think, if you will, about the story of Moses in the Old Testament where Moses climbs up the mountain, and upon getting to the top, Moses talks to God, God gives him the Law, and Moses says, “Show me Your glory!” I love that. “Show me Your glory, God!”

and God kind of laughs and says, “Ooohh, if I showed you the fullness of my glory you would surely die.” I mean, how great a God is that, right? I mean, like, the Presence of God is so full that we can’t even handle it in fullness as humans. And yet, Moses persists, he wants to experience God’s glory and His Presence, and so God says, “I will become more than a voice to you, I will pass by you, but you must cover your eyes until I have gone entirely past you, at which point you can see the back side of my glory.”

And when God does this and Moses opens his eyes, his face glows in such a way that when he climbs down the mountains, the Israelites who are down there crafting idols because they were afraid that Moses was gone, they see Moses, and they know physiologically that he has changed. It’s not just that there’s something in his heart that’s a little different, all right? They see in his face that something has changed, and they want to know what has happened. And the Presence of God was so real to him, that people, unexpected, could see that something was different.

Now, imagine if we caught a vision for that again in our worship! That when we came to worship on Sunday morning, we expected – expected! – that the glory of God was going to somehow make its way here, so expected that the glory of God was going to make its way here. And we so expected that the glory of God was going to grab ahold of us as we left this place, we also expected that on Monday morning, people in our office or our school or our route, or whatever it is that we do, would notice, “There’s just something a little different about you.” And I’m not talking about that “normal” little different about you! [Laughter] You know what I’m saying...! “There’s something different about how you are, there’s something different about how you behave, there’s something different about the way you act! What is going on? What is happening in you?” “I’ve been in the presence of God this weekend. And I plan to be in the presence of God again next weekend.”

And then hopefully, hopefully the goal is, is that when we begin to orient our lives around a pattern that begins and ends with us longing to be in the Presence of God, that that begins to color who we are the rest of the week. That when we go to the mall, or watch a movie, we begin to see metaphors of who God is, and we begin to see the presence of Christ, and we begin to see the face of God on people instead of the other way around where they are the force who is creating who we are to be. No longer do we hear a song and allow that to sort of create our world view, but instead, our Christ, who has encountered us in profound ways, helps us begin to interpret the world we live in. It changes the narrative.

I am afraid, as I mentioned, about who we are as a people. I am afraid. And that’s really the impetus of starting this doctoral project. And again I want to be clear that when I say “we,” I’m not talking about you, I’m not talking about this congregation, I’m not talking about anything I’ve particularly seen here, but more of a cultural survey of what it means to be Christian in our world today. So I’m not coming at you, particularly, as a church, in fact I think you’re like the greatest church ever – so really I’m not taking shots at you – but as I watch and pay attention to

what it means to be Christian in our world today, it's not really what it's supposed to be. I don't know that it's a full expression of what the Scripture is saying. And so this week I thought, you know, what are some things, I told you about reading about Jesus before, but I also look back at the Ten Commandments. I think the Ten Commandments are always really interesting. The thing we want to battle, it seems, as Christians in America today is that every courtroom in America has the Ten Commandments up. That seems to be a battle we want to get in, for some reason.

And so, when you look at the Ten Commandments, and I begin to read them, I get a little concerned that maybe what we really want to do is put the Ten Commandments up so it feels like we've done our job, instead of actually asking what this does this mean for how we live. For example, when I used to have to memorize the Ten Commandments as a kid – I imagine a lot of you did in Children's Church, right? You have to memorize the Ten Commandments – I always wanted to start with, "Do not murder." I always wanted to start there because I was pretty sure I could handle that one. (Laughter) Right? I wasn't always sure about, "Honor your father and mother," that one was hard on a day-to-day basis. Right? I wasn't so sure about, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house," or their property – I was always really upset at my mom that she wouldn't let me have a video game system when all my friends did. And so coveting was something that was pretty close to home for me, so I didn't really want to talk about that one. You know, another couple ones were the first few: those ones didn't really bother me all that much, they seemed pretty easy to handle. Uh, "You shall have no other gods before me." All right, you're number one. "Check!" (Laughter) "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven, above or on earth, beneath the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I the Lord your god am a jealous god, punishing the children for the sins of their fathers to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." You shall not make a false god or an idol? All right. There's a story about a golden calf in this same book, right? All right! I'll never find gold and boil it into a calf. "Check!" (Laughter)

"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name." All right. I was always told that meant, You better not say, quote, Oh my God, end quote. I see that our young teens today have found a wonderful way around that problem by just texting "OMG" to each other. (Laughter) Creative, I suppose. So, I just decided anytime I said, "Jesus Christ," it would not be immediately after hitting my hand with a hammer, it would only be in church when I was talking about the guy Himself. "CHECK!" "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son, or daughter, nor your manservant nor your maidservant, nor your animal, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days, the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." Well? My family went to church Every. Single. Sunday. "Check." (Laughter)

And what's unbelievable about this, is that that understanding of the Ten Commandments wasn't just something I made up in a dark room as I was meditating. These are the things that the church was pouring into me and telling me what it was we were supposed to be. And the more and more I grew up, and the more and more I read this, the more and more I began to say, "There's more to it than that!" Maybe there's just a little bit more; for one is, maybe this Law isn't stuff that we're given to make us appear as if we're holy, but it's actually a lifestyle that protects us from the dangers and the snares of this world. Maybe it helps us be something, rather than keeps us from being something. And maybe these words mean something a little more robust than what it is we want to boil it down to.

Maybe when it says, "You shall have no other gods before me," maybe what it really means is those words of Jesus that I talked about: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and its righteousness, and everything else will be added after that." Well, I mean that sounds good in theory but, my kids have a soccer game this Sunday. That sounds really good in theory but I really didn't get enough sleep on Saturday night. I mean, that sounds really good in theory, but do you know how embarrassing it is to tell other about my faith? I mean, it sounds really good to "make God first," but is God REALLY what our life is wrapped around? Is He why our schedule exists? Is He why we work the way we do? Is He why we spend our time and our money and our resources and our effort the way we do? Is God really first, or, as the second one, the second commandment invites us to not make idols, or have we constructed a bunch of idols that aren't made of gold at all? Have we made "success" our god? Have we made "getting a scholarship for little Johnny" our god? Have we made financial comforts our god? Have we made getting a bigger house in a better neighborhood our god? Have we made, "Just getting this one last project and then I'll get back to church" our god? Idols don't come, I've learned, in simple gold packages that we kneel down and meditate before. Idols come in anything that we give ourselves more fully to than we give ourselves to God.

Just a simple example is this: in the Christian church we have a Christian calendar, and it has its ebbs and flows throughout the year. Last Sunday was the first Sunday of the year, did you know that? The first Sunday of Advent is the first Sunday of the year. Now, we as the church don't really celebrate that so much. It's something that happens, we might get an Advent calendar in our house, or we light Advent candles, but really we still orient our lives around January 1st being the first of the year. Gotta get our final donations in because it's tax time! We're going to restart our business this year, we're going to re-begin this. We really focus around January 1st, and that is a secular thing – it's not a sinful thing, it's not a bad thing. It's not at all. But we have really gotten in the habit of forming our lives and telling time around the secular calendar. We don't, so much, tell time anymore around the Christian calendar. I don't know why that really is, I don't know that I've ever heard anyone opposed to the Christian calendar. But it's supposed to be an ebb and flow across the year, times of sorrow and times of feast, times of discipline and times of celebration, where we retell annually the birth, the death, Pentecost, everything that the story of

God, and how God is redeeming the world. Just a little thing. Just a little thing that we have sort of turned our focus from, instead of focusing our life around the calendar of the Christian church.

So then the Ten Commandments continue, right? “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.” Oh, man, here we go, right? It’s bad enough that we’ve talked about maybe God isn’t our number one god, maybe we have idols that we think about in our lives. What about this one? Listen, I say pleasant things when I hit my thumb with the hammer, I don’t fail on this one at all. But maybe this doesn’t just mean the words that come out of our mouth? Maybe it is when we read this and we say, “Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God,” it’s not saying, “Don’t use the name of God as a cuss word”? Now, I highly encourage you to not use the name of God as a cuss word. Highly encourage it! However, maybe there’s something deeper here as well. Maybe it’s saying, do not misuse the name of the Lord your God by saying, “I am a Christian – I am a little Christ,” and then living like that doesn’t matter at all to me. That would be a profound misuse of the name of Christ. Because if our testimony is that we are Christian and trying to be like Christ, we are lifting Christ up and saying, “This is who I want to be like.” And if our life is screaming a testimony that’s completely different than what our words are saying, we are dishonoring the name of God. We’re dishonoring it. We are saying, “All that Christ is, is this mess that my life is. That’s all He is. I am a little Christ, this is how I’m being a little Christ.” Maybe what this means is when you use the name of the Lord, when you utter the words of Yahweh, the God who hung the planets and the stars, who filled this earth with water and gave you life, when you say, “I am His child,” it’s important that our life matches up with words like that.

And then finally, “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” It’s interesting that when I was growing up, that meant, “Go to church on Sundays, that’s what you’re supposed to do.” But yet, it’s longer here, it’s a story of rest. It’s a story of relaxing and delighting. Here, when we’re talking about Sabbath, it’s not just talking about carving out an hour and a half on a Sunday morning. It’s about, God says, “I took six days to create, and then I rested on the seventh. If I, God, can use a little rest, maybe you could use a little rest.” And if there’s any cultural liturgy, if there’s any idol that we have completely fallen in love with, and bow at the altar of, in America 2015, it is Busyness! That is our favorite god in America. I encourage you this week to keep a tab on how much we love the god of Busyness: when you ask people this week, “How are you doing?”, keep a tab on how many of them their answer is, “Busy.” “I’m busy.” This is the standard answer. Ten, fifteen years ago it was, “I’m good (even if my life is falling apart).” Right? It’s, “I’m doing fine, great, great!” And life was terrible! But we didn’t want to unload that on people, right? Now, you ask someone how they’re doing, they are going to say, “It’s busy. Just life is so busy, I can’t believe it.” And it’s not just parents and children, it’s people in retirement, too: “I expected that I was going to, like, spend the last 20 years of my life rich and resting. I’m just going everywhere all the time, chasing my grandchildren, watching them over, I have friends who want to do stuff!” I hear this,

this is one of my favorites that I hear from retired people, although it gives me no hope whatsoever: "I just want to go back to work, I was less busy then." (Laughter)

We LOVE busyness. And here, God is saying, "Be busy for six days, be productive, make a life for yourself! Do stuff! Have activity, have life! Work the ground hard, be sincere and hardworking in your career! But on the seventh day, why don't you take a moment to delight in the creation that I've given for you? Why don't you take a moment to delight in Me, to worship and to rest?" I mean, when I was a kid, you'd go to church on Sunday morning, take a nap, and you'd come back to church on Sunday night. We're too busy even for a nap on Sunday mornings anymore, er, Sunday afternoons. We're busy, busy... (Laughter) I see how many of you sleep on Sunday mornings! (Laughter) So I already know, you know. It's all good.

So that's the bad news, right, is that we're struggling for our identity in this world, and we're struggling for a plethora of reasons. One of the most fundamental is that we're being told a story of who we are to be by sources that aren't God. And when we hear God telling us the story of who we are to be, we want to wave our hand at Him and say, "That's nonsense! Good luck living like that, God, you couldn't do it today! It's different." We don't hear the story of God well anymore, we want to fit whatever pieces of our Christian faith we can into our life and squeeze it in, rather than saying, "Who am I to be, God?" And we get more and more squirmy and uncomfortable about living an alternative lifestyle, to being different, to being in the world but not of it. "Of the world" means something that looks a little uncomfortably like Us. And that's really been the fundamental piece of what I've wanted to talk about through this time, is that we buy in, too often, into the songs that we hear, and the schedules that we're given, and the places we're supposed to go, and the things we're supposed to do, and we have so many people now speaking into our lives. A hundred years ago, the pastor was the most common person to tell a person how to live life. Now, by the end of today, you will have heard a radio show, you have probably turned on the news, you talked to neighbors, and more and more people are telling you who it is you're supposed to be. The voices are getting confusing, and the final product is probably not very pretty.

So how do we recast our lives in light of all this? What do we do now? Now that we know that the Christian church is struggling to the point that pastors are no longer being trained, they're now being told, "Just go start a church and figure it out on your way," churches are closing because they're now financially unviable, the future of the church is assumed to be bi-vocational ministry, that pastors won't exist anymore outside of Sunday mornings because they'll have to work another job, and this is because the church is rolling on a steep hill downwards. And the question is, Are we going to start asking ourselves questions why? Or are we just going to say, "I'm fat, happy, and healthy, what more do I need?" And that's the truth of American life: as long as we are fat, happy, and healthy, we will continue to just let the world go downhill.

So, where do we go from here? What is it that we do now? Well, we live in a world that loves a reboot, don't we? When I was a kid, again, when I was a kid, it used to be sequels all the time, sequel movies. Everyone loved a movie and hoped the second one would come out. We loved "Back to the Future," so we wanted "Back to the Future II," right? We were lucky enough to get "Back to the Future III" and we didn't even ask for it! We loved "Home Alone" – oh man, I loved "Home Alone," but there's an article about doctors who watched "Home Alone" and identified how many times the criminals actually would've died, and the answer was, like, twelve times in "Home Alone," and yet we got a sequel out of it! They didn't die, they thrived and tried to kill him again! "Teenaged Mutant Ninja Turtles" led to "Teenaged Mutant Ninja Turtles II." Sequels are no longer good for us, though, now we need full-on reboots in Hollywood, since they have no ideas anyways, just keep rebooting the same stuff that we asked for. We want something new and fresh, we want a new take on Batman, Christopher Nolan makes a trilogy of who Batman is when he's the Dark Knight. We love Spiderman, so we reboot the Spiderman series once every two or three months. (Laughter) "Ghostbusters," a great movie of the 1980s, is now being remade, "What if it was women that were ghostbusters?" It's going to be awesome, though! (Laughter) James Bond has existed through the Cold War, and when the Cold War ends, we reboot him again! And then when Pierce Brosnan starts looking old, we reboot him again with Daniel Craig. Now they're already asking again, How can we reboot James Bond again, now that Daniel Craig is looking a little old? How can we reboot, reboot, reboot, reboot...? We love a reboot, we love for the story to go on. When the story really grasps our life and our imagination, it really gets to us, we don't want the story to end, we want it to go on.

And hopefully, in every service that we have, we leave in that way that we've come into such incredible contact with the grace of God, we've been reminded of the bad news of the world, and we've heard the grace of God that is good, and is doing something in our lives, that it begins to reboot us again. And we need, again, a reboot. We need a reboot in the church, but we need a weekly reboot as well, right, when we come into the presence of God, and it reminds us of who we are and Whose we are, and how we should live now. My favorite sort of way to think about this sort of idea of reboot is the idea of Benediction.

Benediction is something that I'm not sure you all did before I came here, but we do it now, and it's the final thing we do in the service. When the whole service is finished, we've gone through everything, we've done it all: we've sung, we've heard a sermon, we've had a response, greeting time, all of it is done, and now we say a final word of benediction. "Benediction," Pastor Tim [George] reminded me this week, is the Latin word for "good word." "Good word" – it's a good word at the end, so that no matter what we've heard, no matter what has convicted us, no matter what's been hard, we hear a final good word that sends us. It's the final act of us having been "breathed-in by God," and it's the moment that God "exhales us" back into the world. "Good word." And it's a biblical concept, as well.

I'm going to read to you, real fast – you don't even need to stand today, but the words will be on the screen – benedictions from the Scripture. The epistles of the New Testament – some written by Paul, some maybe not written by Paul, we're not always sure of some of the authors – they end their letters that they write with a benediction, a good word, a reminder of who God is and who God will be in your life as you leave the place. So I'm going to read just two, one from II Corinthians and one from II Thessalonians. So the first one is II Corinthians 13:11-14 – let me just read this for you, and hear the good news, hear how enlivening these words are!

[SCRIPTURE]

You hear the words there? These aren't necessarily easy words, especially when he begins with, "Aim for perfection!" Really, the biblical word "perfection" means more like "completeness," being made whole, as opposed to getting it right, every last decision that you have – being made complete. "Aim for completeness in Christ." But he's, but then we're told, "Hey, it's the God of love who's going to do this for you. He loves you, He cares for you! And you have the saints around, that you can greet one another, you can do this together! "The grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" -- that triune God who is working on your behalf – "will be with you" as you aim for perfection and listen to the appeal of the author. That is good news, that's, that's charging, that can fill my cup as I leave this place, departing from the Presence of God.

The next one is II Thessalonians 3:16-18.

[SCRIPTURE]

We could all use a little peace in our life, right? Can you imagine, the pastor Paul wishing nothing more in your life but that there would be genuine peace in everything that you do. How we receive those good words and we have hope as we go. The blessing and the benediction, in so many ways, is the marching orders by which we are, by God, exhaled back into the world. Now that we have been in God's presence, now that we have been grafted in and brought into God's presence, He sends us out to be His people in the world He loves but mourns in its fallenness. These are the marching orders that we're given, to be His people, lost in His grace, with a task given to us by the sermon and the scripture of that day, to be something on His behalf, until He invites us back into His presence, corporately, next Sunday night – breathes us back in and gives us a taste of His heaven, to send us back out again. It's an important moment in our worship service.

And so, there's this movie trilogy, books, that I really don't like but I understand everyone else likes it, called "The Lord of the Rings," right? I've never watched a minute of it, I've never read a single story, it's just not my thing, but unfortunately I work with multiple pastors who think it's the greatest thing since sliced bread. [Fake cough: Dylan!] I hope he listens to this this week.

Anyways, Dylon was telling me about the ending of “The Lord of the Rings,” and it’s so incredibly appropriate for us this week. So, you know that there’s originally this book called “The Hobbit,” right, and then there’s “The Lord of the Rings,” the three books, and how the two of them are separate stories but kind of the same story – you’re just going to have to trust me here because I can’t explain it better than that, okay? But there’s the end of the movie, the last movie, the third movie, “Return of the King,” where Frodo, the – I don’t know, what is he, some kind of elf or something? (Laughter) Hobbit – yeah, he’s the hobbit – I told you how bad it is, but it’s great! Right? He writes the end of his story, he writes the end of his story, and another one named Sam comes in and sees this and says, “You finished it!” And there’s this incredible excitement that the story has been written. But listen to what Frodo says to Sam as Sam walks away as we watch this clip:

[VIDEO CLIP]

So the end of the story ends with the book being handed to Sam and being told, “Keep writing! Keep telling, the story’s not over!” And this Scripture that we’ve been given is the story of God’s redemption for the world, it’s the story of His grace and His kindness, His benevolence and His care. It’s a story of hope and it’s a story of grace! The Benediction is a moment like that when you’re given the story of God and told, “Keep writing it!” Now, the canon’s closed, we’re not going to add, like the First Book of Ted Bennett to the end of this or something like that, right? The canon is closed but the story of God is still being written, and it’s being written by us.

While we live in a world with all sorts of competing narratives and competing ideals of what the good life is, and so many things that are trying to grasp your heart, your imagination saying, “Be this way! Do this thing!” this is the story, hopefully, that is grabbing our heart ultimately, and that it’s in worship in the Presence of God that we’re most strongly formed to be the kind of person that God is calling us to be, it is vitally important to, week in, week out, be breathed into the Presence of God.

And then the Benediction comes. And you’re sent forth. And you’re told, “Keep writing the story of God with your life. You are invited to be His glory-bearer, having been in the presence of His glory and received His Presence. Go, and write the story of God before all that you meet. And while you’re writing the story, allow that story, the story of God’s redemption, to be what is primarily causing you to be who you are, and don’t let the noise of the rest of the world wrestle you away from the grace of God.

We’re going to take Communion here as we end, I believe the Soucie family is going to come up and help me. This closes our sermon series, talking about the battle and struggle in our world for who we’re going to be. And I continue to believe the best place we can receive grace, to be the kind of person we’re supposed to be, is when we take the Body and Blood into our very body, and we pray, together, that the Presence of God would be made real in our lives through the taking of this meal.

Appendix B

Orders of Worship During Sermon Series

Sunday Morning

October 11, 2015

10/11 10:00A	Length in mins		Audio/Visual	Lights	Person	Vocals
10:00a	3:00	<i>Build Your Kingdom Here</i> [Default Arrangement in D]				
10:03a	2:00	Welcome	Scrolling Announcements	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	None
10:05a	4:00	<i>Your Grace Is Enough</i> [Default Arrangement in G] V1, PC, C1, Inst, V2, PC, C1, C1, PC, C1, C2				
10:09a	2:00	Scripture Reading Psalm 47	Words on Screen	Stage	Ellen Dunn	None
10:11a	2:00	<i>Let It Rise</i> [Default Arrangement in D]				
10:13a	4:00	<i>All Creatures Of Our God And King</i> [Default Arrangement in D] V1, V2, V3, E				
10:17a	2:00	<i>Grace Flows Down</i> [Default Arrangement in D]				
10:19a	5:00	Pastoral Prayer	Background Screen	Stage	Tim Brooks	None
10:24a	3:00	Announcements			Tim George	
10:27a	5:00	Offering and Offertory		Stage	Pauline Lane	None
10:32a	3:00	Greeting Time				
10:35a	3:00	Sermon Introduction Power Point				
10:38a	3:00	Beverly Hills Song for Sermon Demonstration				
10:41a	30:00	Sermon Matthew 27:44-47; Psalm 22 Sermon Title/Text	Various	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	Lapel Mic
11:11a	10:00	Communion				
11:21a	0:00	Special Song with Angela Richardson				
11:21a	2:00	Benediction			Cheryl Curlew	
11:23a	83:00					

Sunday Morning

October 18, 2015

10/18 10:00A	Length in mins		Audio/Visual	Lights	Person	Vocals
10:00a	3:00	<i>The Only Name (Yours Will Be)</i> [Default Arrangement in B]				
10:03a	2:00	Welcome	Scrolling Announcements	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	None
10:05a	3:00	<i>Glory To God Forever</i> [Default Arrangement in G]				
10:08a	3:00	<i>Good Good Father</i> [Default Arrangement in A] Key of A				
10:11a	3:00	Why do we read scripture?			Pastor Tim Brooks	
10:14a	2:00	Scripture Reading Hebrews 7:23-28	Words on Screen	Stage	Chris Miner	None
10:16a	3:00	<i>Because He Lives</i> [Default Arrangement in A]				
10:19a	2:00	Goodbye to Elijah's family and Roseline			Pastor Cheryl Curlew	
10:21a	5:00	Pastoral Prayer	Background Screen	Stage	Pastor	None
10:26a	3:00	Announcements			Pastor Amanda Lawton and Tim&Joely (Mission Trip)	
10:29a	5:00	Offering and Offertory		Stage	Pauline Lane	None
10:34a	3:00	Greeting Time				
10:37a	30:00	Sermon Nehemiah 8:1-9 Sermon Title/Text	Various	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	Lapel Mic
11:07a	10:00	Communion				
11:17a	0:00	<i>Beautiful Things</i> [Default Arrangement in D]				
11:17a	2:00	Benediction			Pastor Tim George	
11:19a	79:00					

Sunday Morning

October 25, 2015

10/25 10:00A	Length in mins		Audio/Visual	Lights	Person	Vocals
10:00a	4:00	Because Of Your Love [Default Arrangement in G]	Intro, V, C, Intro, V, C, Inst, C, Outro			
10:04a	2:00	Welcome	Scrolling Announcements	Stage	Pastor Tim George	None
10:06a	3:00	Build Your Kingdom Here [Default Arrangement in D]				
10:09a	2:00	Scripture Reading Revelation 5	Words on Screen	Stage	Aaron Sires	None
10:11a	4:00	Revelation Song [Default Arrangement in D]				
10:15a	2:00	Beautiful [Default Arrangement in D]				
10:17a	2:00	Prayer Conversation Collect for Purity on screen			Pastor Tim Brooks	
10:19a	5:00	Pastoral Prayer	Background Screen	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	None
10:24a	2:00	Announcements			Pastor Cheryl Curlew	
10:26a	5:00	Offering and Offertory		Stage	Pauline Lane	None
10:31a	3:00	Greeting Time				
10:34a	0:00	Imagine [Default Arrangement]				
10:34a	30:00	Sermon Matthew 6 Lord's Prayer Sermon Title/Text	Various	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	Lapel Mic
11:04a	10:00	Communion			Bennetts/Harris'	
11:14a	0:00	Lord I Need You [Other Arrangement in A]	Intro, V1, C1, V2, C1, B, C2, Outro			
11:14a	2:00	Benediction			Pastor Amanda Lawton	
11:16a	76:00					

Sunday Morning

November 8, 2015

11/08 10:00A	Length in mins		Audio/Visual	Lights	Person	Vocals
10:00a	4:00	<i>My Heart Is Yours</i> [Default Arrangement in A]				
10:04a	2:00	Welcome	Scrolling Announcements	Stage	Pastor Tim George	None
10:06a	4:00	<i>Good Good Father</i> [Default Arrangement in A]				
10:10a	4:00	<i>That's Why We Praise Him</i> [Default Arrangement in C]				
10:14a	2:00	Scripture Reading 2 Corinthians 9:6-15	Words on Screen	Stage	Various	None
10:16a	3:00	<i>Enough</i> [Default Arrangement in F]				
10:19a	5:00	Pastoral Prayer	Background Screen	Stage	Pastor	None
10:24a	3:00	Announcements			Pastor Amanda Lawton	
10:27a	2:00	A Word about Offering			Pastor Tim Brooks	
10:29a	5:00	Offering and Offertory		Stage	Pauline Lane	None
10:34a	3:00	Greeting Time				
10:37a	4:00	<i>I Would Walk 500 Miles</i> [Default Arrangement]				
10:41a	30:00	Sermon 2 Chronicles 31:1-8 Sermon Title/Text	Various	Stage	Pastor	Lapel Mic
11:11a	10:00	Communion				
11:21a	0:00	<i>Take My Life And Let It Be (Hendon)</i> [Default Arrangement in E]				
11:21a	2:00	Benediction			Pastor Cheryl Curlew	
11:23a	83:00					

Sunday Morning

November 15, 2015

11/15 10:00A	Length in mins		Audio/Visual	Lights	Person	Vocals
10:00a	4:00	<i>This Is Amazing Grace</i> [Default Arrangement in A]				
10:04a	2:00	Welcome	Scrolling Announcements	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	None
10:06a	2:00	Scripture Reading Isaiah 55:1-7	Words on Screen	Stage	Zahira Duvall	None
10:08a	3:00	<i>Build Your Kingdom Here</i> [Default Arrangement in D]				
10:11a	12:00	Caravan Sunday				
10:23a	4:00	<i>Hosanna</i> [Hosanna in D]				
10:27a	5:00	Pastoral Prayer	Background Screen	Stage	Chris Elgee	None
10:32a	3:00	Announcements			Pastor Cheryl Curlew	
10:35a	5:00	Offering and Offertory		Stage	Pauline Lane	None
10:40a	3:00	Greeting Time				
10:43a	0:00	<i>Boulevard of Broken Dreams</i> [Default Arrangement]				
10:43a	30:00	Sermon Sermon Title/Text	Various	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	Lapel Mic
11:13a	10:00	Communion				
11:23a	0:00	<i>Just As I Am</i> [Default Arrangement in A]				
11:23a	2:00	Benediction			Pastor Tim George	
11:25a	85:00					

Sunday Morning

November 22, 2015

11/22 10:00A	Length in mins		Audio/Visual	Lights	Person	Vocals
10:00a	5:00	<i>Victory In Jesus</i> [Default Arrangement in G] V1, C, V2, C, V3, C, C				
10:05a	2:00	Welcome	Scrolling Announcements	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	None
10:07a	4:00	<i>Because Of Your Love</i> [Default Arrangement in G] Intro, V, C, Intro, V, C, Inst, C, Outro				
10:11a	3:00	<i>Forever</i> [Default Arrangement in G]				
10:14a	2:00	Scripture Reading John 14:1-7	Words on Screen	Stage	Ellen Dunn	None
10:16a	4:00	<i>Because He Lives</i> [Default Arrangement in A]				
10:20a	1:00	<i>O How I Love Jesus</i> [Default Arrangement in A] Just the chorus-a capella.				
10:21a	5:00	Pastoral Prayer	Background Screen	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	None
10:26a	3:00	Announcements Gift Cards for mission trip table after service; mission trip meeting after service			Amanda	
10:29a	5:00	Offering and Offertory		Stage	Pauline Lane	None
10:34a	3:00	Greeting Time				
10:37a	30:00	Sermon Matthew 4:12-17 Sermon Title/Text	Various	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	Lapel Mic
11:07a	4:00	Firework - Katy Perry				
11:11a	10:00	Communion Skellon's and Sires'			Tim Brooks	
11:21a	0:00	<i>The Love Of God</i> [Default Arrangement in C]				
11:21a	2:00	Benediction			Cheryl	
11:23a	83:00					

Sunday Morning

November 29, 2015

11/29 10:00A	Length in mins		Audio/Visual	Lights	Person	Vocals
10:00a	3:00	<i>Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus</i> [Default Arrangement in F]				
10:03a	2:00	Advent Candle Reading (Candle 1) Please Seat the Congregation	Words on Screen	Stage	Drake Family	None
10:05a	2:00	Welcome	Scrolling Announcements	Stage	Pastor Cheryl Curlew	None
10:07a	4:00	<i>Your Grace Is Enough</i> [Default Arrangement in G] V1, PC, C1, Inst, V2, PC, C1, C1, PC, C1, C2 Stand Again				
10:11a	4:00	<i>O The Blood</i> [Default Arrangement in G]				
10:15a	3:00	<i>You Are My King (Amazing Love)</i> [Amazing Love in D]				
10:18a	5:00	Pastoral Prayer	Background Screen	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	None
10:23a	3:00	Announcements			Pastor Tim George	
10:26a	5:00	Offering and Offertory		Stage	Pauline Lane	None
10:31a	3:00	Greeting Time				
10:34a	4:00	<i>Lord I Need You</i> [Other Arrangement in A] Intro, V1, C1, V2, C1, B, C2, Outro				
10:38a	3:00	<i>Bad Blood</i> [Default Arrangement]				
10:41a	30:00	Sermon 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Sermon Title/Text	Various	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	Lapel Mic
11:11a	10:00	Communion				
11:21a	0:00	<i>In Remembrance Of Me</i> [Default Arrangement in B]				
11:21a	2:00	Benediction			Pastor Amanda Lawton	
11:23a	83:00					

Sunday Morning

December 6, 2015

12/06 10:00A	Length in mins		Audio/Visual	Lights	Person	Vocals
10:00a	3:00	<i>O Come O Come Emmanuel</i> [Default Arrangement in Bm] V1, C, V2, C, V3, C, C				
10:03a	3:00	Advent Reading and Candle			Sass Family	
10:06a	3:00	<i>I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day</i> [Default Arrangement in D]				
10:09a	2:00	Welcome	Scrolling Announcements	Stage	Pastor Amanda Lawton	None
10:11a	5:00	<i>Forever Reign</i> [Default Arrangement in C] V1, V2, C, V3, C, B, B, B, C, C				
10:16a	4:00	<i>Blessed Assurance</i> [Default Arrangement in C]				
10:20a	5:00	Pastoral Prayer	Background Screen	Stage	Pastor	None
10:25a	3:00	Announcements			Pastor Cheryl Curlew	
10:28a	5:00	Offering and Offertory		Stage	Pauline Lane	None
10:33a	3:00	Greeting Time				
10:36a	0:00	My Way				
10:36a	30:00	Sermon 2 Corinthians 13:11-14; 2 Thess. 3:16-18 Sermon Title/Text	Various	Stage	Pastor Tim Brooks	Lapel Mic
11:06a	10:00	Communion				
11:16a	0:00	<i>God Help Me to Be</i> [Default Arrangement in F]				
11:16a	2:00	Benediction			Pastor Tim George	
11:18a	78:00					

Appendix C

Lyrics to Secular Songs in Sermon Series

"Beverly Hills" by Weezer

Where I come from isn't all that great
My automobile is a piece of crap
My fashion sense is a little whack
And my friends are just as screwy as me

I didn't go to boarding schools
Preppy girls never looked at me
Why should they I ain't nobody
Got nothing in my pocket

[Chorus]

Beverly Hills - That's where I want to be! (Gimme Gimme)
Living in Beverly Hills...
Beverly Hills - Rolling like a celebrity! (Gimme Gimme)
Living in Beverly Hills...

Look at all those movie stars
They're all so beautiful and clean
When the housemaids scrub the floors
They get the spaces in between

I wanna live a life like that
I wanna be just like a king
Take my picture by the pool
Cause I'm the next big thing!

[Chorus]

[Bridge]

The truth is...I don't stand a chance
Its something that you're born into...
And I just don't belong...

No I don't - I'm just a no class, beat down fool
And I will always be that way
I might as well enjoy my life
And watch the stars play

[Chorus]

"Glory Days" by Bruce Springsteen

I had a friend was a big baseball player
back in high school
He could throw that speedball by you
Make you look like a fool boy
Saw him the other night at this roadside bar
I was walking in, he was walking out
We went back inside sat down had a few drinks
but all he kept talking about was

[Chorus:]

Glory days well they'll pass you by
Glory days in the wink of a young girl's eye
Glory days, glory days

Well there's a girl that lives up the block
back in school she could turn all the boy's heads
Sometimes on a Friday I'll stop by
and have a few drinks after she put her kids to bed
Her and her husband Bobby well they split up
I guess it's two years gone by now
We just sit around talking about the old times,
she says when she feels like crying
she starts laughing thinking about

[Chorus]

My old man worked 20 years on the line
and they let him go
Now everywhere he goes out looking for work
they just tell him that he's too old
I was 9 nine years old and he was working at the
Metuchen Ford plant assembly line
Now he just sits on a stool down at the Legion hall
but I can tell what's on his mind

Glory days yeah goin back
Glory days aw he ain't never had
Glory days, glory days

Now I think I'm going down to the well tonight
and I'm going to drink till I get my fill
And I hope when I get old I don't sit around thinking about it
but I probably will
Yeah, just sitting back trying to recapture

a little of the glory of, well time slips away
and leaves you with nothing mister but
boring stories of glory days

[Chorus (repeat twice)]

"Imagine" by John Lennon

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today...

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace...

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world...

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one

“I’m Gonna Be [500 Miles]” by The Proclaimers

When I wake up, well, I know I'm gonna be
I'm gonna be the man who wakes up next to you
When I go out, yeah, I know I'm gonna be
I'm gonna be the man who goes along with you
If I get drunk, well, I know I'm gonna be
I'm gonna be the man who gets drunk next to you
And if I haver, hey, I know I'm gonna be
I'm gonna be the man who's havering to you

But I would walk five hundred miles
And I would walk five hundred more
Just to be the man who walked a thousand miles
To fall down at your door

When I'm working, yes, I know I'm gonna be
I'm gonna be the man who's working hard for you
And when the money comes in for the work I do
I'll pass almost every penny on to you
When I come home (When I come home), oh, I know I'm gonna be
I'm gonna be the man who comes back home to you
And if I grow old, well, I know I'm gonna be
I'm gonna be the man who's growing old with you

But I would walk five hundred miles
And I would walk five hundred more
Just to be the man who walked a thousand miles
To fall down at your door

Da lat da (Da lat da), da lat da (Da lat da)
Da-da-da dun-diddle un-diddle un-diddle uh da-da
Da lat da (Da lat da), da lat da (Da lat da)
Da-da-da dun-diddle un-diddle un-diddle uh da-da

When I'm lonely, well, I know I'm gonna be
I'm gonna be the man who's lonely without you
And when I'm dreaming, well, I know I'm gonna dream
I'm gonna dream about the time when I'm with you
When I go out (When I go out), well, I know I'm gonna be
I'm gonna be the man who goes along with you
And when I come home (When I come home), yes, I know I'm gonna be
I'm gonna be the man who comes back home with you
I'm gonna be the man who's coming home with you

But I would walk five hundred miles
And I would walk five hundred more

Just to be the man who walked a thousand miles
To fall down at your door

Da lat da (Da lat da), da lat da (Da lat da)
Da-da-da dun-diddle un-diddle un-diddle uh da-da
Da lat da (Da lat da), da lat da (Da lat da)
Da-da-da dun-diddle un-diddle un-diddle uh da-da
Da lat da (Da lat da), da lat da (Da lat da)
Da-da-da dun-diddle un-diddle un-diddle uh da-da
Da lat da (Da lat da), da lat da (Da lat da)
Da-da-da dun-diddle un-diddle un-diddle uh da-da

And I would walk five hundred miles
And I would walk five hundred more
Just to be the man who walked a thousand miles
To fall down at your door

"Boulevard Of Broken Dreams" by Green Day

I walk a lonely road
The only one that I have ever known
Don't know where it goes
But it's home to me and I walk alone

I walk this empty street
On the Boulevard of Broken Dreams
Where the city sleeps
And I'm the only one and I walk alone

I walk alone
I walk alone
I walk alone
I walk a...

My shadow's the only one that walks beside me
My shallow heart's the only thing that's beating
Sometimes I wish someone out there will find me
'Til then I walk alone

Ah-ah, ah-ah, ah-ah, aaah-ah,
Ah-ah, ah-ah, ah-ah

I'm walking down the line
That divides me somewhere in my mind
On the border line
Of the edge and where I walk alone

Read between the lines
Of what's fucked up and everything's alright
Check my vital signs
To know I'm still alive and I walk alone

I walk alone
I walk alone
I walk alone
I walk a...

My shadow's the only one that walks beside me
My shallow heart's the only thing that's beating
Sometimes I wish someone out there will find me
'Til then I walk alone

Ah-ah, ah-ah, ah-ah, aaah-ah
Ah-ah, ah-ah

I walk alone
I walk a...

I walk this empty street
On the Boulevard of Broken Dreams
Where the city sleeps
And I'm the only one and I walk a...

My shadow's the only one that walks beside me
My shallow heart's the only thing that's beating
Sometimes I wish someone out there will find me
'Til then I walk alone...

“Firework” by Katy Perry

Do you ever feel like a plastic bag,
drifting through the wind
wanting to start again?
Do you ever feel, feel so paper thin
like a house of cards,
one blow from caving in?

Do you ever feel already buried deep?
6 feet under screams but no one seems to hear a thing
Do you know that there's still a chance for you
'Cause there's a spark in you

You just gotta ignite, the light, and let it shine
Just own the night like the 4th of July

'Cause baby you're a firework
Come on, show 'em what you're worth
Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh"
As you shoot across the sky-y-y

Baby, you're a firework
Come on, let your colors burst
Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh"
You're gonna leave 'em all in awe, awe, awe

You don't have to feel like a waste of space
You're original, cannot be replaced
If you only knew what the future holds
After a hurricane comes a rainbow

Maybe your reason why all the doors are closed
So you could open one that leads you to the perfect road
Like a lightning bolt, your heart will glow
And when it's time, you'll know

You just gotta ignite, the light, and let it shine
Just own the night like the 4th of July

Cause baby you're a firework
Come on, show 'em what you're worth
Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh"
As you shoot across the sky-y-y

Baby, you're a firework
Come on, let your colors burst
Make 'em go "Oh, Oh, Oh"

You're gonna leave 'em all in awe, awe, awe

So don't let 'em take your life for granted
You're the only one who needs to rule your world
When life leaves you feelin empty handed
Light up and show 'em what you're worth

Cause baby you're a firework
Come on, show 'em what you're worth
Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh"
As you shoot across the sky-y-y

Baby, you're a firework
Come on, let your colors burst
Make 'em go "Oh, Oh, Oh"
You're gonna leave 'em all in awe, awe, awe

“Bad Blood” by Taylor Swift

'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
You know it used to be mad love
So take a look what you've done
'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey
Now we got problems
And I don't think we can solve them
You made a really deep cut
And, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey

Did you have to do this? I was thinking that you could be trusted
Did you have to ruin what was shiny? Now it's all rusted
Did you have to hit me, where I'm weak? Baby, I couldn't breathe
And rub it in so deep, salt in the wound like you're laughing right at me

Oh, it's so sad to think about the good times, you and I

'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
You know it used to be mad love
So take a look what you've done
'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey
Now we got problems
And I don't think we can solve them
You made a really deep cut
And, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey

Did you think we'd be fine? Still got scars on my back from your knife
So don't think it's in the past, these kinda wounds they last and they last.
Now did you think it all through? All these things will catch up to you
And time can heal but this won't, so if you're coming my way, just don't

Oh, it's so sad to think about the good times, you and I

'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
You know it used to be mad love
So take a look what you've done
'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey
Now we got problems
And I don't think we can solve them
You made a really deep cut
And, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey

Band-aids don't fix bullet holes
You say sorry just for show
If you live like that, you live with ghosts (ghosts)
Band-aids don't fix bullet holes (hey)
You say sorry just for show (hey)
If you live like that, you live with ghosts (hey)
Mhmmm
If you love like that blood runs cold

'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
You know it used to be mad love (mad love)
So take a look what you've done
'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey
Now we got problems
And I don't think we can solve them (think we can solve them)
You made a really deep cut
And, baby, now we got bad blood
(Hey)

'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
You know it used to be mad love
So take a look what you've done (look what you've done)
'Cause, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey
Now we got problems
And I don't think we can solve them
You made a really deep cut
And, baby, now we got bad blood
Hey

“My Way” by Frank Sinatra

And now, the end is near
And so I face the final curtain
My friend, I'll say it clear
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain
I've lived a life that's full
I traveled each and every highway
And more, much more than this, I did it my way

Regrets, I've had a few
But then again, too few to mention
I did what I had to do and saw it through without exemption
I planned each charted course, each careful step along the byway
And more, much more than this, I did it my way

Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew
When I bit off more than I could chew
But through it all, when there was doubt
I ate it up and spit it out
I faced it all and I stood tall and did it my way

I've loved, I've laughed and cried
I've had my fill, my share of losing
And now, as tears subside, I find it all so amusing
To think I did all that
And may I say, not in a shy way
Oh, no, oh, no, not me, I did it my way

For what is a man, what has he got?
If not himself, then he has naught
To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels
The record shows I took the blows and did it my way

[instrumental]

Yes, it was my way

Appendix D

Project Interview Questions

This interview will be conducted face to face with one of the approved and willing members of my church. It will be done orally and conversationally so that it is as much narrative in nature as it is quantitative. I plan to have conversations – both before and after the didactic sermon series – in order to develop strong understandings of the subjects' positions, histories, biases, etc. as well as any shifts in thinking about pop culture, liturgy, and cognitive processes after having brought the power of the subconscious engagement with cultural liturgies and Christian liturgies. My hope is that this spurs conversations and stories, as opposed to retrieving a series of objective answers. The purpose of these questions is to spur conversation.

1. What is your interaction with pop culture?
2. What do you think the church teaches about pop culture?
3. What should the church teach about pop culture?
4. Should pop culture affect the work or life of the Christian church in any way?
5. When you want to do something relaxing or mindless, what do you do?
6. What is the reason that you attend Christian worship services?
7. What is your expectation for what happens to you when you worship?
8. What are the key moments in a worship service?
9. How often should communion be taken? How many times should one be baptized?
10. What guides your ethical/moral life?
11. How do you nurture that ethical life? What forms your response to the world?

For Second Interview Only:

12. What did the sermon series do to change your perspective on elements in a worship service? Pop culture? The power of worship for transformation?
13. Please identify the degree to which the sermons influenced you versus how much the service influenced you.

Appendix E
Consent Form

Date _____

To Whom It May Concern:

I, _____, consent to be a part of Pastor Timothy Brooks' doctoral work by doing the following:

- (1) Attending church as much as possible in October and November 2015 in order to participate fully in his research.
- (2) Answering interview questions with Pastor Tim both before and after October and November.
- (3) Releasing all of my input to potentially be used in his published Pastoral Research Project. I understand that anything I say will be quoted pseudonymously, meaning my recognized name will not be attached to the final published draft, though my quotes may be.
- (4) Allowing Pastor Tim to record our interviews *solely* for research purposes on his part, should he need to return to a quote or thought.
- (5) Upon the conclusion of this project, all recordings will be deleted and never used again.

Signed: _____

(Lay Participant)

Signed: _____

(Pastor Timothy Brooks)

Appendix F

Interview Responses Prior to Sermon Series¹⁸²

1) What is your interaction with pop culture?

- “Facebook, YouTube, Netflix, music genome.”
- “Pop culture is always in my background. I don’t even choose the music I run to. Television is on in the background, I seldom read. I do use Facebook.”
- “Minimal.” Upon a bit more prodding, “movie buff, television, Netflix, Facebook, texting. But no music.¹⁸³”
- “YouTube if for a purpose, some television shows, some pop radio, some movies, some social media, I try to demonstrate discretion.”
- “Easy listening, big band music. I watch sports and the History Channel as well as Law and Order. I use Facebook and learn about pop culture through my grandchildren.”
- “Very little. I watch the New England Patriots and listen to political talk radio.”
- “I enjoy watching New England sports, the television show Bluebloods, the Discovery Channel, and the Smithsonian Channel. I also work in corporate America, helping produce their trade shows and work with talent shows.¹⁸⁴”

¹⁸² All interviews were recorded via iPhone with the expressed consent of the interviewee. These are available per request.

¹⁸³ This person would later confess that they thought of pop culture as synonymous with pop music.

¹⁸⁴ This person is a sound tech for a large company in Maine.

- “Tangential at best.” After a little prodding, “Kid television shows, Christian music, Disney/Pixar movies such as Big Hero 6 or Inside/Out, non-fiction and fiction reading, podcasts, Cross Fit.”
- “I watch a lot of television (*Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, *Gotham*, *Limitless*, *Minority Report*), Facebook, reddit, [A man in our church]’s band, Christian music.”
- “Pop Culture is basically everything you do.”
- Occasional movies, though mostly Sci-Fi. Utilize YouTube to watch Yale lectures on the History of Christianity, football, internet, online games.”
- “What my son brings home from school. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Listening to radio, watching television, seeing billboards, and watching sports.”
- ‘I live in this world....I interact with young people.’ Also, “cable news, local news, movies, Dr. Who, Oldies music.”
- “American Idol, The Voice.”
- “What you put in your mind is who you are.”
- “Listen to NPR, read *People* at the dentist, radio with teenaged sons, British television shows on PBS, Facebook, some television shows such as Bluebloods, NCIS, and Madame Secretary.”
- “I am in a band that performs pop music, I check Yahoo sports, am aware of movies out, watch some television, perform in and watch musicals.”
- “Very little, given I have a flip phone. I’m a channel surfer, it is the kids who watch television programs.”

- “Our family loves our movie nights.”
- “Music on the radio with my teenaged daughters.”

13) What do you think the church teaches about pop culture?

- “Caution, and in some cases extreme avoidance.”
- “Not much. As a teen it was mostly “music is bad.” It is usually a negative teaching.”
- “Most churches are stuck in when they were formed.”
- “That pop culture is evil and bad. That we should then isolate ourselves, which is impossible.”
- “Not much. Mostly silence today.”
- “Doesn’t warn enough about what creates who we are. Used to hear to beware.”
- “Most of it is a waste of time. Choose carefully. Usually focuses on language and sexual content.”
- “That it is bad and impure.”
- “Gives a basis for knowing how to respond so as not to be tempted.”
- “That it can be a bad influence. The world, in general, turns a blind eye.”
- “Some churches say it is evil and therefore isolate yourself, others say to just love Jesus and it will sort itself out.”
- “Our pastor does a good job introducing it to us, especially what we should or shouldn’t handle.”
- “Don’t get too involved because very little of it follows biblical guidelines.”

- “We are trying to reach a younger audience through things like music, and that has helped us make connections. Even introducing drums into our worship space and music led to a young teen coming to our church to practice. He is now an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene.”
- “It is changing in order to bridge the gap. This change is most evident in music played at church on Sunday mornings.”
- “I think it is the good that the *avoid* language is changing.”
- “Nothing.”
- “There is good music and there is bad music.”

14) What should the church teach about pop culture?

- “That it doesn’t matter in terms of kingdom values, but that it does give a clue about the rest of the world.”
- “In order for a church to thrive it has to be relevant. Focus on the three-thirty year olds.”
- “We need to be mindful about how to interact with it.”
- “It should be measured with a Christian standard. Would Jesus do this? Be freer with sex? Advocate violence or drugs? Be a bigot?”
- “That the church can fall into a consumerist view of art, culture, and humans. We should hear more about creativity because God is creative.”
- “How to use our own brains to discern what is ok and what is not ok.”
- “People are not typically able to make their own connections. Teachings should be more explicit.”
- “Be on your guard.”

- “I would like it most if we were prepared to be a little Christ in culture. How to be salt and light.”
- “That certain aspects are fine as long as it does not cross the line morally.”
- “The church should give us an idea of what temptations young people are going through.”
- “Things ought to be talked about in order to make it relevant for teens.”
- “It is not an us v. them, we are the culture, we make up the culture.”

15) Should pop culture affect the work or life of the Christian church in any way?

- “Yes. Social media, as an example, is a valuable usage.”
- “Yes. It should at least be aware, music is a great example because of how it has changed in the church.”
- “Oh, yes, absolutely.” We have to be relevant.”
- “Yes. The church is not in a vacuum.”
- “The question of ‘should’ is irrelevant because it does.”
- “It should not change, intrinsically, who we are. It should not change doctrine. But, we should listen to pop culture.”
- “Yes, because we are a people affected by pop culture.”
- “Yes, because we should understand the world we live in and the people around us.”
- “Yes, because if you know nothing at all and reject it outright you will know nothing of the people you are trying to reach.”
- “Yes.”
- “We can try to see the positives if we can look past the gratuitousness.”

- “We have to understand it if we are going to relate to anyone.”
- “Yes, it has to. Understanding pop culture better prepares us for everyday situations.”
- “It shouldn’t, but I can not see how it can’t [affect us].”
- “The pastor needs to define it so they can have some perspective out there.”
- “It is not possible to avoid altogether.”
- “The movie clips the pastor uses in his sermons are helpful illustrations.”
- “If there is something good coming out of pop culture, the church should promote it.”

16) When you want to do something relaxing or mindless, what do you do?

- “Play a video game.”
- “Casual phone or tablet use.”
- “Golf, though I guess that is not completely mindless. Perhaps, then, it is watching a movie I have already seen.”
- “I play Star Trek online. I used to go for long walks.”
- “Play Candy Crush or watch football.”
- “I read fiction.”
- “I walk or exercise. That is also the time that I pray.”
- “Facebook, watch an old movie, listen to music. In the summer I sit on the porch.”
- “I watch television: The Walking Dead, Gilmore Girls, Call a Midwife, Modern Family.”

- “I do not know how to relax. I guess I put on something in the background and look at Facebook.”
- “Word Shaker or 94% (phone/tablet word games).”
- “Hidden picture games on the iPad, watch television, go sit on a boat on the lake.”
- “Read a book, specifically autobiographies.”
- “Cook, puttering around, fixing things.”
- “Sit in the backyard with nothing but squirrels, birds, and chipmunks.”
- “Sleep.”
- “Golf and sports.”
- “I can get stuck on Facebook and wonder where in the world the last half an hour went.”

17) What is the reason that you attend Christian worship services?

- “To worship God. On one level we are commanded to, on another level I want to.”
- “I’m a Christian.”
- “Community and fellowship.”
- “The sermon. I then leave, rip it open, and try to apply it.”
- “Because I love God and love worshipping God with other people.”
- “To have joint fellowship in worship.”
- “It is a 60 year habit.”
- “We need each other. After my divorce, I pulled away in shame and embarrassment. It made life darker. The church reaffirms!”

- “Active worship, not doing anything else.”
- “To be a part of the body of Christ, reconnecting with God in a corporate setting.”
- “It is the only time I really worship. I do not have a lot of Christians in my circle of friends.”
- “To center myself. It is the basis for everything.”
- “To be around fellow believers.”
- “It is a positive environment for my children.”
- “I can let my guard down in worship at church, and I would miss it if I wasn’t there.”
- “It is how I was raised.”
- “There is a sharpening that comes with attending worship.”
- “To learn how to become a better follower of Christ’s teachings.”
- “There is a social aspect. That is where my friends are at.”
- “Church is like a family and I always learn something.”
- “To get God’s message to me. This often happens through the music.”
- “I am on the praise team, I feel a deeper a connection to God when I am playing. When I first came to Christ and this church, it was the music that kept me coming back.”
- “The sermon. Also liked special music when we used to do that.”

18) What is your expectation for what happens to you when you worship?

- “I expect to grow closer to God, both week by week and over the long haul.”
- “ I do not have an expectation.”

- “When you have an expectation you will be disappointed.”
- “I open myself up to what God would say.”
- “I expect to have a conversation with God. God is always speaking and I am listening.”
- “I am hoping that the Lord will be in it, that I will be in tune, and walk away with something.”
- “Experience the presence of God.”
- “It is almost like hitting the reset button.”
- “I have got to feel it, and music is a huge part of that.”
- “That I would be able to focus enough to hear God.”
- “If I have questions or prayers that I would feel some guidance. I want to learn.”
- “I come with less expectation so that I am not there simply to be entertained.”
- “I try to pray before I come so that God would reveal or speak through some means.”
- “I have no expectations, but I always feel like God is like I am when I am with my [college-aged] kids.”
- “That God would give me something that I could come back to during the week.”
- “Being on the praise team can hindered expectation. Expectation can be rooted in performance quality as opposed to spirituality.”
- “With family, it is hurry, hurry, hurry. It is hard to have the right mindset. You have to come expecting.”

19) What are the key moments of the worship service?

- “Arrival, singing, sermon, communion.”
- “Music and prayer...then, of course, the message.”
- “It is different for everyone. You could throw the singing out for me.”
- “Communion, prayer, music, sermon, offering, greeting.”
- “Music [though lyrics more than music], prayer, communion, sermon.”
- “The Holy Spirit used to take over our service. It has gotten to the point of going by the clock.”
- “Music, hearing scripture out loud, communion, seeing people, engaging in a three sided conversation between God, my husband, and myself.”
- “Music.”
- “Music, sermon, scripture, some form of response.”
- “Music [because it gets the spiritual juices flowing and sets the tone] and the sermon [which makes it personal].
- Communication/announcements, message, musical part, response/prayer time.
- Sermon and the way the service ends [what you remember going out the door].
- “When the sermon gets to the punch line.”
- “Music, when I see people lining the altar, testimonies. It shows that God is working.”
- “I need the sermon. Prayer and communion big moments, too.”
- “When someone gets touched enough to go down front.”

- “The music and the end of the sermon: how it wraps up.”

20) How often should communion be taken?

- “Somewhere between weekly and quarterly.”
- “No opinion.”
- “In Acts it was every day, right? However, every week is a bit too much for me.”
- “As often as appropriate, as long as it is meaningful.”
- “Once a month as a child, too often becomes too commonplace.”
- “Every other week to once a month at least. More often is ok.”
- “As often as possible. At least once a month.”
- “Every Sunday.”
- “At least once a month, though I enjoy more.”
- “At least once a month, no more than every two weeks because it diminishes its importance.”
- “It should be weekly, though I fear it becomes ritual and mindless like I see with many Catholics.”
- “Communion could be seen as intimidating to seekers.”
- “It shouldn’t be done more than once a month in order to keep it special.”
- “Once a month.”
- “We do it too often, it gets to be commonplace. Once a month or once every two months would be sufficient.”
- “My initial reaction is every service, but does it lose its impact that way?”
- “Probably once a month, but how do you rob someone who wants it more?”

- “Ugh. Not every week. If we do it every week, what is special in that?”

21) How many times should one be baptized?

- “Ideally once, but there may be times where a second is appropriate.”
- “Once should be enough.”
- “Minimum of once. First time, mom made me. Second time I did it for myself.”
- “Once with water, once by the Holy Spirit.”
- “If you are paying proper attention, once. Babies should be dedicated.”
- “I did it twice, the first time I did not understand what it meant.”
- “Once.”
- “I think it can be done more than once, but the first time is the most powerful.”
- “At least once.”
- “As often as s/he feels necessary, though there needs to be a reason.”
- “There is something to baby dedication, therefore baptism should be done when you can understand it.”
- “Just once, though it could depend on a person’s walk.”
- “As many as they feel they should. I wouldn’t mind being baptized again.”
- “As often as you feel necessary. It is different for everyone.”
- “Once unless someone falls away from the faith.”
- “Tough question. By water once, by the Spirit many times.”

22) What guides your ethical/moral life?

- “My perception of what God expects, but that makes it easy to get it wrong.”

- “Past learning having grown up in the church.”
- “People I grew up with, having been a part of a military family, Christianity dovetails with these ethics.”
- “Foundational teachings of my youth.”
- “God and His Word.”
- “Surely other people have affected me, such as devotional books.”
- “Faith, God. If I hadn’t become a Christian, who knows where I would be.”
- “Scripture, the Holy Spirit as much as I let him, and the way my parents raised me.”
- “What God would want me to do, W.W.J.D. is more than a tagline.”
- “God’s Word – the bible is where I go to seek.”
- “W.W.J.D. – would this be pleasing to the Lord?”
- “The Scripture, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral; wisdom, reason, practical application.”
- “Christ and his teachings.”
- “Ethics started when I was young. Parents were not religious, but they had strong morals.”
- “My upbringing taught right versus wrong.”
- “I have always a strong moral compass and that has not changed much since conversion. I was always afraid of ending up on the wrong side of bad decisions.”
- “When I found Jesus. This is most seen in business practices I undertake. ”

23) How do you nurture that ethical life? What forms your response to the world?

- “Sharing perspectives with other Christians, sermons, small groups, prayer, prayer with spouse, humbly confessing sin together.”
- “Continuing to come to church, small groups, and reading the bible.”
- “Trying to put yourself into a hierarchy.”
- “Through church attendance, involvement, through uplifting music, by spending time with other Christians.”
- “I nurture it with daily time with Him. It is important that my relationship with God is active and growing.”
- “I try to keep close to God through reading, prayer, worship.”
- “It is important to watch who you associate with.”
- “By paying attention to what people in different areas of the church have to say. I have to check my own biases that keep me from listening.”
- “My core is there and not likely to be altered much.”
- “I struggle to read the bible.”
- “I try to do it, live it, act it out. I rethink how I responded to something, I try to be self-aware.”
- “Through all interactions in the church, being a small group, an active parent in the church, prayer.”
- “Going to church every week.”
- “I try to be as good as I can, I am cognizant that it is never enough.”
- “I journal and reflect a lot.”
- “I am part of a church bible study.”
- “As the world’s moral compass deteriorates, I ask ‘how shall I live?’”

- “Personal devotions/time alone with him.”
- “Church services and small groups.”
- “It is easier as I get older. Parenting made me a better person.”
- “Close friendships with people in the church.”
- “I let things slide more. Less cussing cars out and such. Little things used to bother me more; I suppose some of it is aging.”
- “Surrounding myself with other Christian people.”
- “Being an oldest child? I don’t know, I just do.”

Appendix G

Interview Responses Post-Sermon Series

1) What is your interaction with pop culture?

- “I listen to lyrics better now.”
- “Very little, but more when I am with my kids and grandkids.”
- “Facebook, television commercials, movie trailers, movies, music, reading occasionally. Life would be boring without pop culture.”
- “Basically the same as the first time I was asked. I do pay attention to lyrics of songs more.”
- “I work in it every day. I am surrounded.”
- “It is everything you do, say, or be in our society. It has even affected civic rules over time.”
- “I don’t believe my interaction has changed since the first interview. I am out there, I interact with young people.”
- “Same. It is thoughtfully limited.”
- “It hasn’t changed dramatically.”
- “I discovered that I am more a part of it that I like to think that I am.”
- “Through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, other social media, web, ads, radio, television, newspaper, and fashion. Pop culture is pretty much everywhere.”
- “Lots. Daily.”
- “I have noticed it more, even though it is in the background usually.”
- “About the same amount as the first interview.”

- “I have paid more attention and see it more. It covers a lot and is generation defining things.”
- “I am inclined to hear the tune to songs more than the lyrics. I have learned, as I have come to listen more, that songs are more offensive than I had thought. I prefer country music, because they seem more able to express a religious faith in their lyrics.”

2) What do you think the church teaches about pop culture?

- Not a lot. However, this sermon series taught a lot. Young and old alike have heard that we are naïve.
- Before the sermon series we rarely heard from pop culture. This was a new idea. This sermon series went quite well.”
- “The church has typically taught that pop culture should be separate from us. In this sermon series it was integrated more. Certain parts are bad, but contemporary churches show that some pop culture is ok.”
- “That it is bad. In fact, the teaching of the church is why I am into Contemporary Christian Music. In this series we saw that it is not so bad, and the way the world sees stuff impacts us.”
- “The church used to teach a lot to steer away from pop culture. We are trying to become a church that fits in. This series opened up a lot of eyes about how what we hear or see affects us. We just don’t think about it.”
- “That we should be in the world, but not of the world.”
- “Previously, this church taught that it was bad. Now people are understanding that we are here [in this world] and here for a reason.”

- “Some churches teach that anything to do with the world is evil. Those churches are struggling to be relevant. Then there are other churches on the other end of the spectrum.”
- “That it is not necessarily all bad or evil. Pay attention to the messages being conveyed, especially how it may be different than Christianity.”
- “I think that our church teaches that it is a part of life – there is good and bad.”
- “In general, the church teaches that it is bad, something to avoid. In this church, it is taught that we need to engage it as a Christian. We need to look at how it affects us and our walk with God.”
- “I don’t think that the church does. How can I help my kids if we don’t talk about it?”
- “The church has taught a lot in the last two months: how to interact with it and be present within it.”
- “Our church teaches that pop culture is not inherently bad, but that it needs to be examined.”
- “I had understood pop culture being taught as us versus them. It can be perceived as not Christian.”
- “To be careful about it, to see both sides of it. Where is it leading you? Don’t be a sheep.”

3) What should the church teach about pop culture?

- “Your approach to music has opened our eyes to what we should be looking for. Perhaps we need more avenues to see what is happening out there.”

- “We need to make church relevant. I enjoyed the series, but pop culture does not need to be discussed every week. Perhaps this could be talked about in youth group.”
- “The church should help you be strong in who you are so that you have a good barometer. It is up to us to make decisions.”
- “I liked how we could relate to things, and we saw better how it impacts us. It had always been us versus them before, and this series was so much different.
- “The church in the past was all about keeping us away from the world, but that is not possible. We need to know how to live in the world so that we can let our light shine.”
- “That there is nothing inherently wrong with pop culture as long as it does not interfere with Christian beliefs.
- “Pop Culture is an idol and it demands obedience.”
- “You have to be out there, have to interact. The church can’t label, and just because the church does not understand something does not make it bad.”
- “Be in the world but not of the world.”
- “To stop with the lists of do’s and don’ts. Many in my generation walked away from the church because of the Nazarene list.”
- “It should be taught that you cannot avoid pop culture. It is all around us, so be discerning and do not let it affect your thoughts and actions.”
- “I think the church should cite a couple of dangers without encouraging the extent of burning CDs.”

- “The church should teach that we should be critical consumers. Pop culture does affect us.”
 - “The church can acknowledge that we do live in pop culture and that it does not need to be an us versus them situation. The church cannot just ignore pop culture.”
 - “Same answer as question number 2. How to interact and present within pop culture.”
 - “As was taught in this sermon series, the church should not create a false dualism between that which is Christian and that which is secular.”
 - “Pop culture unconsciously affects us.”
 - “The church should teach that pop culture is not a dirty word. It is in our life and does not have to be a bad thing.”
 - “The church should teach just what it does teach: that we cannot put our heads in the sand.”
- 4) Should pop culture affect the work or life of the Christian church in any way?
- “Yes, so we can approach non-Christians.”
 - “Yes, to show that this is what you do not do.”
 - “Yes, if it is going to remain relevant.”
 - “Non-Christians are in pop culture all of the time. Some of them might read literature [high culture], but the church will not reach people in pop culture if they are not aware of it.”
 - “Yeah, we should be aware. Times change, and the church needs to approach things differently.”

- ““Yes, because if we didn’t we would just have church people here.”
- “It has over the course of history. You [Tim, the interviewer] said that pop culture began in the 1920’s, but I would argue it began in 150 B.C. with Alexander the Great. The Greeks started it, and Jesus had to live in it.”
- “You have to break some rules to exist in pop culture, we must learn to live in the tension.”
- “It should not change who we are intrinsically.”
- “Yes, in the sense that the church needs to know what is influencing people.”
- “I think the church needs to be aware of what pop culture is saying. Something like 1% of life is outside of pop culture, and you did a good job showing the positives of pop culture, as well.”
- “Yes.”
- “Yes, we need to be knowledgeable in order to engage the world.”
- Yes, by not ignoring it. Things need to change with culture.”
- “It should affect what we are doing and how we are responding.”
- “Sure. The church should be aware of pop culture so as to not ghettoize itself.”
- “A lot of people who embrace pop culture are not necessarily Christian, and they need to be ministered to.”
- “There are probably ways that it should. So long as doctrine takes the lead, pop culture can be implemented as such.”

5) When you want to do something relaxing or mindless, what do you do?

- “Usually sit in my backyard.”

- “I watch the news. I do not know if that is relaxing. I also play golf, but that may not be relaxing to some either.”
 - “I watch television, but I am wanting to start a new reading project where I gather recommendations from friends and read all of those books.”
 - “Movies, video games, random Netflix shows. I like visual stimulation.”
 - “I walk.”
 - “I play video games, watch movies, watch football, and play with my grandchildren.”
 - “I put on music and read.”
 - “I have a hard time doing mindless stuff. I like Sudoku, hidden picture puzzles, and journal.”
 - “I watch television or look at Facebook.”
 - “I play casual games on my phone or tablet.”
 - “I play candy crush and watch football.”
 - “I lay in bed and watch television.”
 - “Facebook.”
 - “It has not changed much since the first interview, I play word games on my phone.”
 - “I play on my phone or Chromebook. I am a news junkie.”
 - “In the summer I look out on the lake. I do not do a lot of relaxing.”
- 6) What is the reason that you attend Christian worship services?
- “There are two reasons. 1) I am involved in the service. 2) I come to hear what God has to say to me through the music and message.”

- “I attend for the sermons at this point in my life. I do miss the choir a little bit.”
- “I love to worship God. It is the only time that I feel the Holy Spirit.”
- “I like to be with other believers, especially since I am the only believer in my normal circle of friends.”
- “That is difficult to nail down. I suppose the community sense of the church, and I like being in the band.”
- “The people here are my family.”
- “I miss it when I am not here. I miss the uplift.”
- “We need a common place where we can come together and forget what is happening in the world.”
- “To worship God.”
- “To worship God, I hunger for worship!”
- “Because it is a piece of your relationship with Christ and it flows out to people finding and worshipping him.”
- “Worship encourages a corporate following of Christ.”
- “I have to – it is important to gather as believers.”
- “Because it is a commandment in the bible.”
- “I like worship.”
- “It is an opportunity to share communion with other believers.”
- “I come to worship for a lot of reasons: it is my habit, my joy, I come to attend with other Christians, to serve, to keep God as #1 – the priority of my schedule, and to worship in community.”

- “It’s what I do.”
- “We need to larger body.”
- “Community, renewal, regrounding.”
- “Because when I was in high school I decided to go on my own. It has become who I am for 30 plus years now.”
- “In the best circumstances at church I find what is real and true, and it helps me in the rest of life.”
- “To be around like-minded people.”
- “It is a good environment for my daughters – more positive than lots of things.”
- “I am much closer to God when I worship.”

7) What is your expectation for what happens to you when you worship?

- “I expect that I am going to meet God. When I pray and expect God, he comes.”
- “There is no greater feeling than getting blessed.”
- “I love when I can walk away from a sermon and think ‘I have never thought of it that way before.’”
- “I want to feel God in a present way.”
- “I do not really have an expectation. I do not expect something specific like happy, fluffy emotional experiences.”
- “I try to pray every week that God will help me see something new.”
- “If you come expecting things you are closing doors. Let God meet you as he wants to.”

- “I expect that I will see, hear, and spend time with God.”
- “On the one hand, I try not to have expectations. I do not want to need to be entertained. I, therefore, hope to be renewed and refreshed by the Holy Spirit.”
- “As a singer in the worship band, I have a hard time being focused with music and lyrics on my mind. There are, however, moments that I really get caught up in the worship.”
- “I expect to grow a bit with God and fellow believers.”
- “I expect that I would hear what God would say to me and be used by him when he wants to use me.”
- “I can turn my brain off from other things, I can just come and be refreshed.”
- “I want to focus to be able to hear what God is saying and strengthen for the week ahead.”
- “I expect to be challenged, and not just by the sermon.”
- “I am waiting for inspiration to minister comfortably.”
- “I want to get a different perspective or reinforce what I already know.”

8) What are the key moments of the worship service?

- “The music plays a big part in setting the tone. The sermon plays a big part in what I learn, too.”
- “The music starts it off for me, it can put you in the right or wrong frame of mind.”
- “Fluid sermons where the content is pertinent and it has a clear start and keeps going to a clear point. There is a time and place for everything in the service, but getting to the sermon is key for me”

- “Music and communion. I know the sermon is important, but I am hard to reach because I am easily distracted.”
- “There are very structured services in Maine, very cookie cutter. Music and sermon.”
- “The key for me is allowing the Holy Spirit to work. We have become so concerned about time rather than what God is going to do.”
- “The key moment is when the sermon happens. I am hanging on every word.”
- “Prayer, song, preaching.”
- “Call to prayer, worship through music, message, some other significant thing such as communion or an altar call.”
- “They are all key moments, each moment has a point as you explained in your sermon series. I particularly liked your sermons on the sermon and on communion.”
- “Greeting as people enter the building [at the door], singing, sermon/homily. I have a greater appreciation for communion after this sermon series. I really liked the idea of response [to the sermon].”
- “Benediction, sermon, greeting, prayer, response/communion, offering, music.” [Editor’s note: this was an attempt by one of the interviewees to name each of the parts of the liturgy we had worked on during the sermon series. She got seven out of eight.]
- “Sermon, worship/singing, greeting, response, prayer, offering, benediction. [This woman responded as the lady before her. Both missed the public reading of scripture.]

- “All the ones you [pastor] talked about. I received more insight into the power of each piece.”
- “Music is the call to worship, the sermon, and communion.”
- “The sermon itself. There is also a universal language of music that touches people differently than words.”
- “The start of the actual service. Sermon is number 1. I have also come to appreciate the music better through this sermon series.”

9) How often should communion be taken?

- “Before I said not as often, but I am inclined, now, to say every or every other week.”
- “Every week. I changed my mind purposefully after your sermon on the subject.”
- “I had thought once a month the first time you asked, but I could see more often around Advent or Lent.”
- “Every Sunday.”
- “Growing up, it was not very often in my church. I still do not have a preference, but after this series I can see why we do it more than many churches.”
- “I love what we are doing now [nearly weekly communion], it makes us stop and remember why.”
- “Well, it used to be a full meal in the church in *Acts*. During the plague, it changed to a ceremony. And while I understand what you are saying, how integral it was to a sermon, it has changed.”

- “I heard what you said and your point. Previous answer was something I grew up with. I had thought that familiarity breeds contempt, but it is not so.”
- “I am not sure that my answer has changed. I didn’t think that we took it too much, but I think weekly may be too much. This is probably because the town I grew up in was 98% Catholic. They took it more than me, and I couldn’t see it making a difference.”
- “Every week. It is a sacrament that Jesus instituted, so it is clearly important.”
- “Anywhere from weekly to quarterly. I do not have a strong stance.”
- “As often as it is appreciated.”
- “Very often, I have a new appreciation for it.”
- Every week. This was my answer as a child/teen growing up Episcopalian. I waffled a little bit the first time we spoke. What is hard to believe is that it was Christian communities that caused me to waffle. Christians had ruined the sacraments for me.”
- “As often as possible.”
- “I have a new perspective. Weekly is not a bad thing.”
- “I’m still not sure that Jesus meant for us to do it every time we gather together, but I can see doing it more around Easter and Christmas.”

10) How many times should one be baptized?¹⁸⁵

- “To me, once. But I guess as many times as you personally need.”
- “As often as you feel necessary. I do not think that there should be a limit. If there has been a change, well, it is an outside sign of an inward change.”

¹⁸⁵ This question was asked, in the actual interview, as a part of question number 9. It was separated in this report of the interview for clarity sake.

- “Once.”
- “Once.”
- “Once is enough.”
- “A minimum of once. If my non=practicing son returned to Christ and wanted to be baptized again, I would be right there with him. I was also baptized as a child because my mother made and the rest of the family be baptized. I got baptized again as an adult because the right frame of mind came.”
- “Once.”
- “I don’t know, but I am unsure of infant baptism. I think that choice is significant.”
- “Once, because it is not an act on it’s own. God is doing it.”
- “Ideally once. There are rare circumstances for a second time. I was baptized as an infant, then again as an adult Protestant.”
- “Once.”
- “It is necessary at least once. People need to understand baptism.”
- “One.”
- “Once.”
- “Once is good.”

11) What guides your ethical/moral life?

- “God’s word, attendance at church, and an urgency, at this point in my life, to do all that I can.”
- “Godly conscience and a good upbringing.”

- “It was inbred. Started from my family. I wonder how some people sleep at night.”
- “I try to please Jesus/be in line with Jesus. I want to be as much as I can be for him as I know.”
- “Upbringing in church.”
- “God. The difference before and after I knew God was night and day.”
- “My faith, my duty, my integrity, what my parents are role models are and were.”
- “My relationship with God and what he has told me to do through his word.”
- “First and foremost is the word. Also, being able to think critically and mentors.”
- “It hasn’t changed too much. To act with integrity, a strong sense of right and wrong.”
- “My perception of what I think God’s will and morality is.”
- “The scriptures, tradition of the church, cultural norms, and family expectation.”
- “Truth. Right or wrong. God’s word, which I believe is true.”
- “Beliefs in Jesus.”
- “The same as last time, though I do find myself praying more.”
- “WWJD, I try to emulate Jesus as much as possible.”
- “Even though my dad was not a super Christian, his values were strong. God’s watching makes ethics and morals a part of my life. I am proud of what I do, and would be proud to stand before God.”

12) How do you nurture that ethical life? What forms your response to the world?

- “The urging of the Holy Spirit? I’m not sure.”
- “By listening to God’s voice.”
- “By good Christian friends guiding you.”
- “For me it is most seen in business, so it is in practice. I come across it a lot because I have many chances to be unethical.”
- “By coming to church and Wednesday night bible study. Support and the practice of fellowship helps.”
- “Serving always makes me feel better, especially since I know I can be selfish.”
- “I don’t think that I nurture it. Going to church, small groups, listening to sermons.”
- “Knowing what God says in his word.”
- “By filling my life with people who make a difference.”
- “By living it. My wife was just diagnosed with a disease. I am obligated to the contract to love, honor, and obey until death do us part. Who are you if you cannot keep your word?”
- “By daily communication with God, weekly fellowship with small groups. All kinds of different ways.”
- “Daily study, staying in the word. My father is a pastor and I can tap into him.”
- “I automatically look at the culture through a Christian lens and try not to let pop culture influence me. Especially after this series.”

- “By fellowship with other Christian believers, reading the bible and other Christian authors, attending worship service, prayerfulness, and by attempting to be as Christ would be.”
- “By worshipping by myself, with my family, and my church family.”
- “By my upbringing, what is engrained in me, and by serving.”
- “By not doing what I am not supposed to be doing and staying away from sin.”
- “This is one I gave the Sunday School answer to. One that I think that I am not doing well at all. It is why I think I am having so much difficulty right now. The only element I am doing is going to church.”
- “I am praying more.”
- “Discussions happen more in the age of the internet, and I am trying to listen, actually listen.”
- “It is nurtured by the company I keep. I do not have desires to “go out” with friends. I like being with people who share my same beliefs.”
- “Daily prayer.”

Two New Questions

Having interviewed again the seventeen lay people, I asked them two new questions (question one had three parts) to reflect upon having heard the sermon series.

These were their responses:

- (1a) What did the sermon series do to change your perspective on elements in a worship service?

- “My perspective was changed a great deal. Number 1, for me, was the music. I see what a great deal of influence it can have. Also my perspective on communion has changed. I think I am understanding my surroundings in the world better.”
- “Well, it changed on communion, that is for sure.”
- “It was like a refreshing for me. I enjoyed the context and subject matter.”
- “I was familiar with all of the parts of worship before, but I never knew what each part meant. I had never thought about responding before.”
- “I learned more about communion.”
- “No. I think the series was good, but some elements gave a negative effect to some people.”
- “I found several fascinating. Why do we do the things we do? Learning the why was helpful.”
- “The sermon series gave me a clearer awareness. Some really made me stop and think. Having communion every week is a great example. This made me think more and not just take things for granted. I think about what they mean and what value they have for me.”
- “I see the purpose more now. I like seeing the structure as we take in what God is saying through the music and the sermon then respond. I also enjoyed seeing the purpose of the benediction. We have always had these but I had never thought of the purpose.”

- “My perspective is not drastically changed, but it cause me to think on the parts: recognizing why we do what we do and how it is different than the world.”
- “This sermon series gave me a greater appreciation for communion and response.”
- “It was really good to break it down and think about the meaning of each part of the worship service. We tend to weigh the meaning of one thing over another, but it was great to reconsider why we do the things that we do and see the value of each.”
- “I enjoyed the pointing out of the different elements such as we are not doing communion just because, but it is a response. There is a biblical purpose for each part of worship and there is a reason for each. We are missing out if we miss any of the parts. [Liturgy] is not a checklist.”
- “Picking each part apart helps us see the meaning and power.”
- “I had always seen worship as individual before, I had never thought of worship as how it impacts the group. It also helped me understand Nazarenes more.”
- “I now believe that communion has a part in every worship service.”
- “I am now more aware of the elements of a worship service and how it all works together.

(1b) What did the sermon series do to change your perspective on pop culture?

- “I’m more aware of song lyrics now. I’m going to be more observant to see how culture is affecting me and people around me.”

- “It opened my eyes a little. The Sinatra song [“My Way”], well, your critique seems self-evident when you break it down.”
- “Maybe a little. I do not dissect song lyrics, unless they are obvious ones like “Lucky” by Daft Punk. But, I had never thought about why songs made me feel good before.”
- “The series opened my eyes to pop culture, that it is not evil, I even listen to more secular radio now. I am much more conscious of the messages in songs. For example. I had never seen how depressing “Boulevard of Broken Dreams” was before.”
- “The series made me more aware of how pop culture does affect us. Take Sinatra, for example. I had never really thought of what Sinatra was saying. So many have tried it “their way” and it didn’t work. We looked up to Sinatra!”
- “We aren’t as individualistic as we like to think that we are.”
- “I don’t think that it did. Pop culture is just there.”
- “If anything it reinforced how mindless we can be on things that daily influences us. In some ways, society reminds me of Nazi Germany. People didn’t think through the holocaust, they didn’t buy into Nazism, but also didn’t do anything to stop it.”
- “It caused me to maybe look at things a little more closely, particularly the musical messages even on benign songs.”
- “The sermon series gave me more of a sense that I am in pop culture like a fish is in water.”

- “Nothing.”
- “It didn’t.”
- “I had thought that I had avoided its influence, but I see now that we are all influenced a little every day.”
- “Pop culture is not the dirty word that I thought it was.”
- “For example, I had never thought of “My Way” by Sinatra in a negative way before.”

(1c) What did the sermon series do to change your perspective on the power of worship for transformation?

- “Absolutely.”
- “When I am worshipping regularly, I am a more confident person.”
- “I was given a different perspective than what I grew up with. So, a little bit, at least.”
- “Pop culture songs come and go and are often forgotten. They hymns of the church are remembered and can be drawn on in time of crisis.”
- “It helped to address how the church works as a viable alternative to the world’s narrative.”
- “Every time I come to church it is transformative.”
- “I had not seen church, before, as pushing back on what the world says you should like. It is the one critical place that has the power to shape you like Christ.”
- “Yes, formation happens at church. You have to be transformed in order to express that faith.”

- “I had never thought of worship of being at odds with pop culture, because I thought of worship as the singing part. I see the whole of worship juxtaposed against pop culture a bit better now.”
- “The series helped solidify and reinforce the importance of worship in formation.”
- “It solidified the whole narrative. There is a purpose for every part”
- “Picking each part apart helped to see the meaning and power in each part.”
- “As long as you are open, how could worship not change you?”

(2) Please identify the degree to which the sermons influenced you versus how much the service influenced you.

- “The teaching part of the sermon was far more important to me. I have a quest for meaning.” “The series helped solidify and reinforce the importance of worship in formation.”
- “The sermons influenced me a great a deal. I’d sat 75-80% that it was the sermon influencing me versus the way I was thinking before.”
- “It was somewhat equal for me. As I mentioned before, music changes my state of mind. It makes me more focused on listening, so that the sermon can affect me later.”
- “The point is always the sermon.”
- “I did not think about the songs when I left, but I did toss around some things in the sermon after I left.”
- “I think the sermon for me. I am a “teach me” kind of a person.”

- “I think that the sermons were awesome. There was something that hit home every week for my husband, mother, and I. Even my elderly mother would say, “I never thought of it like that.”
- “I am a sermon oriented person. If I were just given the sermon on a plate and then exited, I would be happy. My wife is different, though.”
- “The services always influence me, but the sermons influenced me more in this time. Particularly because I could see how directly they influenced other people.”
- “Both influenced, if you strip away the sermon it still would have influenced.”
- “The service was not much different, so by far the sermon.”
- “The sermons were more influential. It was nice to see the other elements brought into the sermon. The service itself was our same structure.”
- “It was not much different than I usually feel. However, the week you talked about greeting time and the hope you can give others by offering them the peace of Christ and looking them in the eye, I held the communion trays for the people in church. I took the time to look people in the eye and it made me weep. I have enjoyed looking at people in the eye ever since. I like to run and hide and feel bad for myself, but I am now trying to do better.”
- “The sermons influenced me a lot, but the whole really did come together. It all had my attention a bit more.”
- “I’d say 60/40 sermon to service.”
- “The experience of the whole thing. The sermon is instructional, but the whole thing was important.

Appendix H

Responses from the Congregation Following the Sermon Series

1) What is your interaction with pop culture?

- “I watch with my granddaughters. There seems to be heavy themes of partying.”
- “Children’s movies seem to have very adult themes these days.”
- “I interact when I am with family.”
- “I am aware of shopping trends. I am up on the fads.”
- “I watch movies.”
- “Advertising.”
- “Facebook, Internet, Radio.”
- “Jobs these days are on computers.”
- “I live with a teenager...”
- “Helped me become more cool”
- “The message of “Bad Blood,”¹⁸⁶ seeing that at work in the Church and thinking “this is not how it’s supposed to be!”
- I am now more conscientious of what we are doing.”

2) What do you think the church teaches about pop culture?

- “That pop culture is ok.”
- “The church does nothing.”
- “God should be a part of pop culture.”

¹⁸⁶ Song by Taylor Swift, 2015. This was used as the counterpoint song during communion week.

- “The church is more tolerant now. When I was a kid, there was no cards or anything.”
 - “This sermon series was its teaching on pop culture.”
 - “The church doesn’t teach much on pop culture. It is too emotionally charged.”
 - “It’s of the devil.”
 - “Avoid it all costs.”
 - “We are taught to be in the image of Israel. “Be ye separate.”
 - “These are our similarities, and these are our differences.”
- 3) What should the church teach about pop culture?
- “It should teach children about discerning good from bad.”
 - “Jesus was in his culture. We need to integrate.”
 - “It is ok to be an individual.”
 - “We need to know how to interact with pop culture.”
 - “We need to know enough to ask the right questions, and have the right answers.”
 - “We have to be in the world, but not of the world.”
 - “We need to know how to talk to people in order to be relevant.”
- 4) What is the reason that you attend Christian worship services?
- “Renewal for the week. I have been doing it all my life.”
 - “Community, support, supporting others, fellowship, memories.”
 - “Guilt.”
 - “To learn more about God.”

- “To take part in a community of believers.”
- “I want to. I need to. It is better than the alternative.”
- “To hear the word, to hear music and preaching. I was taught from a early years on what is important.”
- “Because I decided a long time ago that I wanted to.”
- “There are many cultural Christians. People go because it is a thing.”
- “Connecting with others and with God.”
- “When in the right frame of mind, the entirety of the service should “speak to me” or “be meant for me.”
- “When multiple people are involved it ministers in various ways to many people.”

5) What is your expectation for what happens to you when you worship?

- “I expect to feel the Holy Spirit.”
- “To change for the better and to understand God better.”
- “I do not want to leave a service without new knowledge of God.”
- “I expect to get closer to God; to build a relationship with God.”
- “That I would learn something, to be challenged to my life differently, it is an emotional experience to be gathered with others.”
- “To hear from God.”
- “You should be open to what God has for you.”

6) What are the key moments in a worship service?

- “Benediction.”
- “A tone that is set that the church is for and not against things.”

- “Music, sermon, scripture reading.”
- “The sermon should give you things to think on during the week.”
- “Music, greeting, sermon.”
- “Offering.”
- “Call to Worship, Welcome.”
- “Word and table.”
- “Music.”
- “Communion.”
- “Singing, fellowship.”
- “The moments when you are the Body of Christ working in unison.”
- “Preaching, singing, scripture reading, communion.”

7) How often should communion be taken?

- “Every Sunday. It is new every week.”
- “It takes meaning away to have it every week.”
- “It has to match the sermon to make sense.”
- “I am afraid it will be mundane or commonplace.”
- “Every week.”
- “Ever week.”
- “Once a month.”
- “As often as you meet.”
- “Twice a week.”
- “No preference.”
- “As often as possible.”

- “Whenever assembled.”
- “At least once a month, but I can see the validity in eFavery week.”
- “I like having it every week. It gives time to reflect after the sermon.”
- “I thought it was “overused,” but then rethought this through the series and think it should be done often now.”
- “As a children’s worker, frequent is good! Otherwise, I’m more likely to miss out on communion.”
- “I like that we all come forward to take it. It’s a chance to participate.”
- “My frugality of time and resources used to critique its frequency, but taking it regularly (even before the series) changed my opinion.”

8) How many times should one be baptized?

- “Once, but I have been baptized three times. Guilt and fear at camp meetings led me to that.”
- “Once.”
- “Twice.”
- “I have been baptized many times, but the answer should be once.”
- “If you go to a new church, or every ten years or so.”
- “Baptized once as an adult. Or again if your life has been renewed or changed.”
- “Once.”
- “Once, but I have been twice.”

- “Once. You can look back on it if you fall away. I understand if people want to do it again if they were baptized as an infant. I really like the sprinkling to remember your baptism.”
 - “Once.”
 - “Once”
 - “Once.”
 - “Once, and my opinion changed as a result of this series.”
 - “One time in a personal confessional experience.”
 - “No limit, when we experience a change we should be baptized.”
- 9) What did the sermon series do to change your perspective on elements in a worship service? Pop culture? The power of worship for transformation?
- “The series affirmed that all parts of the worship service are important.”
 - “Pop culture affects more than we think that it does.”
 - “This gave me some direction for how to approach my daughter and son-in-law, who are amiss. I never see movies, I wonder if seeing them with good judgment would give me a way to connect.”
 - “It helped me more with how to connect with others.”
 - “This was meaningful, but did not necessarily change my view.”
 - “It raised awareness of unacknowledged liturgies.”
 - “I really like the secular songs we did, and I never had thought about the meanings of them.”
 - “The series made me more aware of what is going on around us. I am now paying more attention to what I am watching and listening to.”

- “We need to be careful with how we approach the elements of a worship series so that it does not become simple entertainment as pop culture can be.”
- “I had a conversation with someone outside of the church that reminded me to be grounded in scripture so that I can recognize the truths that can be seen in pop culture.”
- “I learned about pop culture.”
- “I’m more aware of what my daughter and I and are involved in.”
- “I am reminded to be aware that I’m not a mindless consumer.”
- “It was helpful to learn about whether or not something has redemptive value. I can let God help me find redemptive value in the media I take in.”

10) Please identify the degree to which the sermons influences you versus how much the service influenced you.

- “Sermon, no question.”
- “I related more to sermons because I was tweeting [quotes] throughout them.”
- “I think that the sermon influenced more than the singing.”
- “The sermon along with the special song of the week was more influential.”
- “Sermons more than the service.”
- “It worked together as a whole.”
- “The sermon would not have been as effective without the song.”
- “Sermon was most effective.”
- “Songs kept the conversation going. It was a reference point to talk about the sermon.”
- “Like a jingle to a commercial, the songs helped us remember the sermon.”

Bibliography

- Abraham, William J., Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk. *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.
- Ammerman, Nancy, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley, and William McKinney, eds. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*. Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Auto Safety. "Texting while driving now leading cause of US teen deaths" *Auto Safety*. Last Modified July 10, 2013. Accessed July 26, 2015, <http://safety.trw.com/texting-while-driving-now-leading-cause-of-us-teen-deaths/0710/>.
- Barna Group. "The Most Post Christian Cities in America," *The Barna Group*. Last modified August 30, 2014, Accessed July 26, 2015. <http://cities.barna.org/the-most-post-christian-cities-in-america/>
- Barna Group, "What Are the Least Churched Cities in the U.S.?" *The Barna Group*. Last modified April 24, 2015, accessed February 23, 2016, cities.barna.org/barna-cities-the-top-churchless-metro-areas/
- Blevins, Dean G. "Practicing the New Creation: Wesley's Eschatological Community Formed by the Means of Grace" *Asbury Theological Journal* 57, no. 2 and 58, no.1 (Fall 2002/Spring 2003), 81-104. 24pp.
- Blevins, Dean G. "A Wesleyan View of the Liturgical Construction of the Self," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 38, no. 2 (Fall 2003), 7-29. 23pp.
- Boone, Dan. *The Worship Plot: Finding Unity in Our Common Story*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2007.
- Boyd, Gregory A. *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2005.
- Bruggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*. Louisville, KY: Westminster-John Knox Press, 2014.
- Campbell, Charles C. *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- Cavanaugh, William T. *Torture and Eucharist*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998.

- Church of the Nazarene Manual 2013-2017*. Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 2014.
- Clapper, Gregory S. *The Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church: Wesley's Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010.
- Cobb, Kelton. *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Pop Culture*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- Cunningham, Floyd ed. *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2009.
- Danesi, Marcel. *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives*. 3rd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015.
- Dawn, Marva. *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995.
- Detwiller, Craig. *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013.
- Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Deluxe Edition/3rd Ed. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.
- Gaines, Tim. "Holiness and Identity in a Technological Age" in *Renovating Holiness*, edited by Broward, Josh and Thomas Jay Oord Nampa, ID: SacraSage Publishing, 2015.
- Gladstone, Graham. "The Call to Worship." *Worship Leader Magazine*. Accessed July 29, 2015. <http://worshipleader.com/leadership/the-call-to-worship/>
- Gladwell, Malcolm. *Outliers: The Story of Success*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2011.
- Gorman, Michael J. *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishing, Company, 2009.
- Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity, Vols. 1 & 2*. Peabody, MA, Peabody Press, 2004.
- Guder, Darrell L., ed. *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.
- Guder, Darrell L., ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.

- Hancock, Brannon. "Corporate Worship: More Than Icing on the Cake." in *Renovating Holiness*, edited by Broward, Josh and Thomas Jay Oord. Nampa, ID: SacraSage Publishing, 2015.
- Hancock, Brannon. *The Scandal of Sacramentality: The Eucharist in Literary and Theological Perspectives*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.
- Heitzenrater, Richard P. *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995.
- Hempton, David. *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*. Yale University, 2005.
- Jobe, Kari. "Revelation Song," by Jeanne Lee Riddle, released February 10, 2009, CD.
- Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.
- Lathrop, Gordon W. *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998.
- Leclerc, Diane and Mark A. Maddix, eds. *Essential Church: A Wesleyan Ecclesiology*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2014.
- Lysaught, Therese. "Eucharist as Basic Training: The Body as Nexus of Liturgy and Ethics." In *Theology and Lived Christianity*, ed. David M. Hammond, 257-286. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2000.
- Lysaught, Therese "Ten Decades to a More Christ-like You!": Liturgy as God's Workout Plan for the Church.." *Liturgy* 24:1, November 2008.
- Maddox, Randy L. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994.
- McCormack, K. Steve. "The Church after the Likeness of the Holy Trinity is the Church after the Missio Dei." *Didache*; ed. Dean Blevins, <http://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/volume-6-2/12-gtiii-mccormick/file> Last accessed March 30, 2016.
- Meeks, M. Douglas (Ed.). *Our Calling to Fulfill: Wesleyan Views of the Church in Mission*. Nashville: Kingswood Books 2009.
- Miller, Vincent J. "The Liturgy and Popular Culture." *Liturgical Ministry* 15 (Summer 2006), 161-170.

- Middendorf, Jesse. *The Church Rituals Handbook: Second Edition.* Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2009.
- Moschella, Mary Clark. *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction.* Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008.
- Nazarene Research. "South Portland Church of the Nazarene," Last modified 2015. Accessed December 15, 2015, <http://app.nazarene.org/FindAChurch/summaryReport?reportchurchSummary&orgId=8146>
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society.* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989.
- Peterson, Brent. *Created to Worship: God's Invitation to Become Fully Human.* Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012.
- Pinn, Anthony B. and Benjamin Valentin, eds. *Creating Ourselves: African Americans and Hispanic Americans on Popular Culture and Religious Expression.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009.
- Public Policy Polling. "National Survey Results: GOP Results," Public Policy Polling, accessed 12/18/2015, <http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/pdf/2015/GOPResults.pdf>
- Rainer, Thom S. and Eric Geiger. *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples.* Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2011.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.
- Saliers, Don. *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of the Glory Divine.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994.
- Schmemmann, Alexander. *For the Life of the World: Sacraments & Orthodoxy.* Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973.
- Sinek, Simon. "How great leaders inspire action." (TED Talk at Puget Sound May 2010), accessed July 12, 2015, https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?language=en.
- Smith, James K. A. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation,* Cultural Liturgies vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009.
- Smith, James K. A. *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works,* Cultural Liturgies vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.

- Staples, Rob L. *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991.
- Thicke, Robin, *Blurred Lines* "Blurred Lines," Star Trak Entertainment and Interscope Records, 2013, CD.
- United States Census Bureau. "Maine." United States Census Bureau Quick Facts, Accessed February 23, 2016. <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/23,2371990,00>
- Wesley, John. "A Catholic Spirit." *The Works of John Wesley: Vols. 5-6*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002.
- Wesley, John. "The Duty of Constant Communion," *The Works of John Wesley: Vols. 7-8*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002.
- Wesley, John. "The Means of Grace," *The Works of John Wesley: Vols. 5-6*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002.
- White, James F. *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3rd ed. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000.
- Willimon, William H. *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002.
- Willimon, William H. *Worship as Pastoral Care*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979.
- Willimon, William H. and Stanley Hauerwas. *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know that Something is Wrong*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989.
- Zizioulas, John. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985.