

Reshaping Lutheran Service

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My first experiences with Lutheran service dates back to the time when I had my confirmation lessons. Decades ago all Lutheran services in Germany followed the same scheme and order: Kyrie – Gloria – Gospel reading and so on...

You could always tell in advance what comes next - no surprise, no tension!

All was done as a one-man show. Even if somebody else appeared, he read old-fashioned words in a high elaborated church language. The hymns also dated back to the 16th century, they had an old fashioned sound and most texts were not understandable to a young person of my age. It bored me so much, I could have cried! One day it made me angry. Another Sunday it made me terribly bored or tired. No wonder only high educated and old people took part in that strange event, called Lutheran service.

After my conversion, when I became a believer in Christ, I was busy discovering the NT and I suddenly stumbled over a description how services were celebrated in the early church, as you see in 1. Corinthians 14. What I found there was totally different to what I experienced in Lutheran churches before: no strict order, many people participating and communicating; not only one pastor, but many people contributing prophecies and interpretations in their own words - led and inspired by the spirit of God. In these services ruled a tense expectation of what the present Christ would give and say among his people. It was so vivid, so mutual, so alive - just the opposite of what I had experienced in Lutheran services since I was 13 years old. The climax of that description was in Verse 17: "When by chance a non believer comes into the midst of this celebration - he will fall on his knees and confess: God is truly among You!"

That is what I have been longing for: Jesus himself experienced alive within the celebration of his people.

I asked myself: How can we move from the disappointing reality of Lutheran services to that experience described in 1. Kor 14: the risen Christ alive among his people? How can Lutheran services become an exciting, an explosive experience that no one ever wants to miss?

During my studies of theology, I examined what Martin Luther said about different forms of service ("Vorrede zur Deutschen Messe"): He distinguishes three forms: The first is the Latin mass - he still allows it for the clergy and monks. The second form of service is the one he focuses on: the regular Sunday service. He says, the normal service is an "öffentliche reyzung zum Glauben" , what can be translated as "a public call and an impulse to start believing". This is an evangelistic focus. Luther wants every normal service to have an evangelistic impact on the listeners.

Luther insists that the regular service must be held in the language of the people. Therefore it must be understandable and relevant to everyday life. In his concept of Lutheran service, Martin Luther applies the same rule as in his translation of the bible: We must express the gospel in the diction and the idiom of those who listen! This is why the German Missionaries started by learning the Chagga language when they came here.

Luther's Principle is: Speak the language of your listeners! Otherwise you mistreat and hide the message you are obliged to deliver. Comprehensibility is a major criterion: Are you translating the gospel properly or not?

If they don't understand, they cannot believe and learn... and we pastors have done a bad job.

Look at the hymns! Luther collected popular songs that were sung in the streets, and he reused them in the church by giving them Christian lyrics. It's a cultural translation and transformation process: He uses common forms and dressings that were in use at his time and fills these forms with the new content of the gospel. That is exactly what we have to do: Not repeating old forms of medieval

times, but taking current forms from the radio and from the media, and filling them with the gospel of Christ and his teachings. It's not Lutheran to cling to traditional Lutheran forms and orders, but it is really Lutheran to invent new forms and new orders which express the gospel in a relevant and understandable way for our contemporary neighbors. Make them understand! Let them identify with their whole heart!

Another important issue concerning service is the doctrine of priesthood of all believers, which was discovered by Martin Luther in the letter of St. Peter. Luther says: "Whoever is baptized can claim himself to be already ordained as priest and bishop and pope!" Luther reminds us: Take into account what position God gave to the normal believer: everyone is a channel, a mediator, a bridge to the holy God through Christ our Lord.

But if my brothers and sisters are really priests of God - why then do I force them to keep their mouth shut throughout the service? Why didn't I expect the spirit of the Lord to speak through them - as he has done through his priesthood at all times? The Word of God as well as Luthers doctrine gives a mandate to the children of God to participate actively in the Sunday service.

In his concept Martin Luther also mentions a third form of service. He desperately loved to invent a more spontaneous form of service. But he says in a sad tone: "So far I don't have the right persons to start this kind of service." What is so thrilling about reading Luthers plans is: This third concept is very close to what we read in 1. Kor 14 and how the church of the NT celebrated Sunday services! Martin Luther imagines that in this service there is a real communication among attendees. Everybody is allowed to share what he or she has discovered in the word of God, everybody is encouraged to speak out prayers aloud in his own words, everybody shares what the spirit gives him for the whole congregation. All in all, the service is held in an atmosphere where you can feel the love of brothers and sisters one to another.

These are the doctrinal bases on which we have started reshaping Lutheran service in our local church named "Lutherhaus" in Jena.

We invented a new form of Lutheran service, which in fact is not new at all: It dates back to the reformation and Luther's third form of service as well as it dates back to the church of the NT and the way they conducted their services.

We call it "Aufwind" - translated: "a wind that pulls you upwards". And this describes what we pray for: that these services might spiritually pull everyone up into the presence of the risen Christ.

We invented Aufwind services to realize the following – principles of the reformation:

- Contemporary language and music!
- Participation of the whole people of God!
- Openness for the actual influences and promptings of the Holy Spirit!
- Mutual recognition and perception as brothers and sisters who are united in love for Jesus and for one another!

In some way we try to fulfill what the reformation left incomplete.

Some Lutheran congregations in Germany started something similar and still call it their "second program". Widely the first and more respected program is the traditional form. The new one is held only once in a while. You could leave it out when the schedule becomes too full. It's not that important... On the contrary we wanted our "Aufwind" services to be respected as normal and as valuable as the traditional service already is.

Our new kind of Lutheran service is quite different from what people are used to expect when entering a Lutheran service. In the beginning there is a female moderator greeting the congregation, moderating the service and introducing the actual subject for this Sunday. There is a music team that leads us into a worship and prayer section for about half an hour. In between the songs people are invited to say a prayer in their own words. After that we have an intense sermon of another 30 minutes which is interpreting the bible in relation to the daily life of the listeners. The sermon is followed by a time of gentle music whereas everybody can write down intercessions on little papers. These are collected and

loudly prayed in front. Then we have a time of witnesses: The moderator invites everybody to come to front and tell the congregation what the Lord has done in his life. Sometimes these are very deep and impressive stories.

Once in a month we celebrate Holy Communion, also once in a month we have a counselling team which offers personal prayer or confession and blessing during the service. Once in a while we have our theatre team performing a short play that serves as an introduction for the preaching.

So we have opened several doors within the service through which the Holy Spirit might speak to us by means of his people. We also keep some traditional elements that are still meaningful to the congregation as the weekly Psalm, the Blessing and the Lord's Prayer. Our worship bands have transformed some old hymns by a modern interpretation. Now they are performed with drums and electric guitars. But it's not a concert, it's music that leads the whole congregation into adoration and prayer by singing.

We run "Aufwind" services for 15 years now and we are thankful that it is really working out! We see it blessed and upheld by the Lord.

There are about 60 volunteers who are contributing for example in playing music, preparing of food, welcoming visitors, counselling and blessing, operating beamer, sound and lights. Each team is led by a team leader. Twice a year – team leaders gather to evaluate the process. One of our two pastors is responsible for everything around the "Aufwind" services. Every Sunday there are between 50 and 150 persons who take part, mostly Believers but also some non Christians and seekers. Many bring their friends and sometimes we baptize newly converted believers. Attendees are in average about 25 years old, which is quite uncommon in our country. And this shows us that we are speaking the language of young contemporary people.

Besides the "Aufwind" services we still have a sunday morning service with an organ playing and some traditional liturgy. We also slightly renewed that form, but this is another story.

Thank you for listening!