

Ancient Ways, Future Paths:
A History of Christian Worship

Part 2: The Body

*A History of Christian Worship: Ancient Ways, Future Paths
The Body: Baptism and Christian Community*

Fade from black. Introduction.

Narrator:

To be fully human is to share the experiences of life with others. For followers of Jesus Christ, these shared experiences, and the idea of a sense of community as part of worship, date back to the foundations of the Christian church. From the practice of baptism that welcomes an individual into the body of Christ, to the local church that unites and connects individual believers to the larger body of faith, the celebration of community is essential to the worship experience. It is this sense of belonging, acceptance, togetherness, and shared participation in the story of God that can be found throughout the history of Christian worship.

Fade to opening credits: Ancient Ways, Future Paths: A History of Christian Worship. The Body: Christian Baptism. Fade to black.

Fade from black.

Narrator:

There is within Christian worship a divine paradox. Christian worship is extremely private and personal: a demonstration of individual devotion and reverence. Yet, it is also explicitly collective and communal: a joint celebration of God's story and the person of Jesus Christ. Although practices related to worship may vary, there is unity among all Christians in recalling God's story as told in the Person of Jesus Christ.

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Rev. Dr. John D. Witvliet (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship):

. . . The beautiful thing about the Christian faith is this wonderful paradox in that when we really are directing ourselves towards God wholly, it is in that action we are strengthened and blessed. When we turn away from ourselves we find ourselves strengthened. And so, worship is for the glory of God, it's for the building up of the body. And beautifully when one of those two things happens the other's strengthened and vice versa, so they go together.

Narrator:

One way the body of Christ is built up and strengthened is through the practice of water baptism.

Lester Ruth, Ph.D. (Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies):

In baptism I think of our own bodies as almost a canvas upon which God paints. And the baptismal waters paint the biblical story on our bodies. And because they're watercolors they seep all the way through into us.

Narrator:

Just as art is a celebration of the human experience, baptism is a celebration of the Christian experience when an individual makes a public declaration of faith.

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Dr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, C.P.P.S. (Institute for Liturgical Ministry):

What is unique about Christian baptism, of course, is that while the use of water would be shared with Judaism and other faith communions, but the unique words of ours – that we baptize in the name of the Trinity – that we respond to the great command in Matthew’s gospel where Jesus says, “Go, and baptize all nations in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” that would be unique to us. What also is unique to us in baptism, and different from, say, John’s baptism – which was a baptism of repentance and forgiveness, though that surely happens in Christian baptism – is that Saint Paul tells us in Romans chapter six, we are baptized into the death of Christ. We are plunged into Christ’s dying in baptism, in that being plunged into the waters.

Narrator:

Although water baptism as a means of ritual cleaning and purification pre-dates Christianity, it quickly became a vital part of Christian worship among the early followers of Jesus Christ.

Lester Ruth, Ph.D. (Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies):

You go to the end of the Gospel of Matthew and you see the formula for baptism. And what sort of Divine name is appropriate there? “Go and baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit.” You read the book of Acts and what does Luke talk about? They were baptized in the name of – Jesus. Okay, which is it? Did the apostolic church baptize with the Trinitarian formula or baptize in the name of Jesus? The best answer is that probably that in the earliest years, one was the practice in one place, the

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other was the practice in another place. And uniformity tends to be worked out over time in Christian worship and tends not to be in place at the outset.

Narrator:

The method of baptism, like other communal and worship practices, differed from church to church among the earliest Christians.

Lester Ruth, Ph.D. (Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies):

. . . we really shouldn't speak of worship of the early church: we should speak about the worship of the early churches. What you're looking at in the 1st century is a rapidly expanding missionary movement, crossing a variety of people groups and geographic regions and cultures. And that's just a formula for diversity, not uniformity.

Narrator:

Methods of baptism developed over time through biblical interpretation and denominational traditions. But what about before such traditions were established and prior to when the New Testament was compiled? How did these Christians baptize? The answer may be found in an ancient document used by early Christians known as the *Didache*.

Rev. Dr. John D. Witvliet (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship):

The *Didache* is a remarkable document that goes back to roughly 100 years after the life of Christ. Scholars debate the dating; some date it in roughly 95 AD, others a bit later,

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but in any case it is a very early document. The document that was shaped before the New Testament, as we know it, was compiled. And so, as we encounter this document we sense these early Christian communities struggling to identify what faithful discipleship looks like, what faithful worship looks like. The document is full of concern about faithful morality; deep concern, much like Psalm 1, in distinguishing the way of righteousness as opposed to the way of those who refuse to acknowledge God. And for those of us who study worship, the document contains references to baptism practices, Lord's Supper practices, reference to the Lord's Prayer and its significance in daily prayer. We know that these early communities did not have many explicit liturgical instructions to go on. And so we sense them working toward articulating what faithful Christian worship looks like: what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus and to worship God in a faithful way?

Narrator:

According to this document, there was both a preferred method of baptism and an acceptable mode of baptism.

Female reader:

Concerning baptism, baptize thus: Having first rehearsed all these things, "baptize, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," in running water; But if thou hast no running water, baptize in other water, and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water three times on the head "in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost." And before the baptism let the baptizer and him who is to be baptized fast, and any others who are able. And thou shalt bid him who is to be baptized to fast one or two days before. – *The Didache, Chapter 7*

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Narrator:

The *Didache* confirms that in the early church, the method of Christian baptism was not as important as the baptism itself. Thus, there was a great variety and creativity in the way early believers practiced water baptism.

Rev. Dr. John D. Witvliet (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship):

Early baptismal fonts give a sense of the early church using its imagination. There are early baptismal fonts that look like washbasins. And that makes sense, the waters in baptism in part convey meaning to us a symbol of cleaning, and so we are washed at the font. But some early church fonts look instead like tombs; they are cut out of the ground. And that makes sense, too, if we remember in scripture, we remember the powerful imagery of how baptism is for a chance to identify with Christ's death and resurrection. Just as the people of Israel went down into the waters of the Red Sea and came out the other side, just as Jesus Christ went down into the tomb and rose again, so in our baptism we are identified with these events. So, the early Christians read these texts and designed some fonts to look not like washbasins but like tombs cut out of the ground into which the candidate for baptism and the presider would go down and come up again, imitating this movement of dying and rising. There're even some early church fonts that resemble wombs. The imagery, the texts associated with these fonts very clearly suggest the image of a womb. And that makes sense too; there are New Testament texts that speak about the waters of rebirth. So water, for washing, for drowning, and for birthing, and fonts that correspond with each of these scriptural images. It's really remarkable to see the early church's imagination at work.

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Narrator:

While fonts were used in the early church, baptisms were also performed in rivers and creeks, in the open or in secluded places, and with a great deal of water or very little water. But perhaps the most surprising fact about early baptism is that according to several ancient documents, orthodox Christians in the early church were baptized *in the nude*.

Lester Ruth, Ph.D. (Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies):

Jerusalem, for example, had the practice of having everyone disrobe before they were baptized. Now afterwards people would go, “Humm, what was that all about? They had us standing there with no clothes on.” But the bishop there in Jerusalem would say, “Oh, the meaning is obvious. When you were standing there, before God and everyone with no clothes on, you were with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, as they stood before God, naked with no shame. “Ah, and similarly” he would say, “just as our Lord had no clothes on as He was crucified, you were being joined with Christ as you were taking part of that part of baptism.”

Narrator:

The practice of nude baptism was common in the first few centuries of the Christian Church. Early 3rd and 4th century documents such as *The Apostolic Tradition* and the *Didascalia* speak of this practice.

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Female reader:

When they come to the water, the water shall be pure and flowing, that is, the water of a spring, or a flowing body of water. Then they shall take off all their clothes. The children shall be baptized first....After this, the men will be baptized. Finally, the women, after they have unbound their hair, and removed their jewelry. – *The Apostolic Tradition, 21:2-5*

Dr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, C.P.P.S. (Institute for Liturgical Ministry):

Baptism was so important at this time in the church that often it took place actually in a separate place, dedicated simply for baptisms. If we go to Europe we can still see some of these baptismal spaces. The space would be largely empty. Those to be baptized would be brought in...Because I'm a woman, I'll talk about a woman's baptism. And I'm going to give myself a little bit of a promotion right now to being a deaconess. Because the documentation suggests that the deacons would take care of, or preside or facilitate, the water bath part of the baptism for the men and the deaconesses for the women. So I'm a deaconess and someone to be baptized is there. What I would do, first of all, is strip the individual perfectly naked...The way the early church writers talk about that being stripped leave us to think that these catechumens were not particularly comfortable with being stripped naked...For one thing, you are standing there bare. You are standing there, symbolically, with no pretext, with no pretenses. You are simply there, or as the deepest part of the symbolism suggests, standing there perfectly naked takes us back to how we came out of our mother's womb. Where we have nothing of the trappings of living in society we are simply there as God created us.

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Narrator:

In the early Church, when Christianity was a small and often persecuted sect in a hedonistic society that worshipped many gods, the need to scrutinize an individual's commitment was essential. Preparation for baptism was often a lengthy process, as it was important to make certain that the person being presented for baptism held to apostolic teachings concerning God and the person of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, C.P.P.S. (Institute for Liturgical Ministry):

The early Church, I mean the very early Church, really thought of baptism in terms of an absolute and total commitment.

Lester Ruth, Ph.D. (Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies):

One of the things that really shifted over time, and going hand in hand with the other changes, was the type and amount of preparation that someone had to get in order to be ready for baptism. You can see as you're baptizing infants more and more and as you're disconnecting baptism from the rhythms of the church year, then the amount of preparation that somebody went through in order to be baptized became less and less. So that it became very typical for baptism to come fairly quickly after birth. Now you ought to contrast that with the typical way the 2nd, 3rd, 4th century churches, where the preparation might take months or even years. And it was not just dogmatic sort of, "You gotta learn all the right ideas" sort of thing. They were asking questions like, "Can this person visit the sick?" "Do they feed the hungry?" "Do they tend to the poor?" "Will they

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visit those who are in prison?” Where did the Church get the idea that such things were important? Well, straight from the teachings of Jesus.

Narrator:

With the legalization of Christianity in the 4th century, the process of preparing for baptism adapted to the seasons and rhythms of Church life and the newfound public expression of the Christian faith.

Rev. Dr. John D. Witvliet (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship):

I often like, with my students, to imagine what it must have been like to be a church leader in the 4th century after Christianity became the public and accepted religion it became after Constantine. Suddenly, thousands of adult citizens could now be baptized. And imagine the pastoral challenge of having that many people move through the process of initiation. This is the context for a period in which the rights of initiation, including baptism, change dramatically. And this is also a period in which we have for the first time significant records of what happened. And for most Christians today, what would strike them about this practice is just how rigorous this seems to be. Christians would participate in a group known as the catechumenate: a catechism class. The season of Lent was a particularly intense time of preparation for baptism. Strong moral codes were imposed on these new Christians. Mentors would be asked to vouch for their commitment to the gospel and their willingness to live as disciples of Jesus. They would be taught the scriptures, the Apostles' Creed. And so the whole constellation of practices that are part of the Christian life: prayer, and moral faithfulness, and worship, and

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learning, and witness to new Christians came together in this process. Finally, in the catechumenate process, new believers were baptized, often on Easter Day, in a way that identified them with Christ's death and resurrection. And we have a strong sense that those baptism celebrations really focused on their new identity. There was a profound change in identity that were celebrated on those Easter baptism services.

Narrator:

In addition to the time and preparation necessary for baptism, the age at which a person is baptized has retained significance as part of the baptismal rite. One very old text of the Eastern Church, dating to the 8th century, reveals that infants were anointed with oil, baptized forty days after their birth, and given the wine of the Eucharist. Concerns over the rite of baptism and the Eucharist for infants and children were first addressed, unsuccessfully, in the 12th century, and again in the 16th century, by Roman Catholics in the *Catechism of Trent*. The *Catechism* put an end to infants receiving the Eucharist, but continued to allow infant baptism.

By the time of the Reformation and the rise of Protestantism, infant baptismal practices still widely varied. Some Protestants reformers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Thomas Cranmer supported infant baptism, indicating that baptism was a sign that the child has joined the Body of Christ and is being raised in faith. Others such as Menno Simons and the Anabaptists rejected infant baptism, reasoning that this practice is reserved for those who can knowingly profess faith. Today, this debate continues and

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the age at which a person is baptized varies according to the traditions and beliefs of the individual Christian denomination. Some churches find value in both traditions.

Kim Miller (Creative Director, Ginghamburg Church):

We honor that some people will want to actually baptize their infants, and as well as honor that some feel that baptism is for a grown person and so that they would just like to dedicate their children to the Lord. And we honor both, and offer a one-time class for parents and announce that ahead of time. And then, we baptize babies – lots and lots of babies – twice a year. Once on the Sunday weekend before Christmas, and the other time is on Mother’s Day. And becomes just a great part of our actual worship celebration then, where we kind of organize things and set up about four different baptism fonts and actually baptize or dedicate these little ones. And we have music, and pictures on the screen and everyone is allowed to participant just through the experience in the room: music, great music. Together, as a village, we give our children to God.

Narrator:

Historically, baptism as a rite of passage in the Christian life unites believers to the body of Christ. But did it also have a greater significance? Was baptism also a necessary step to achieve eternal life? The answer was yes, according to ministers Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone, who formed the Restoration Movement during the Second Great Awakening in the late 1700 – early 1800s. The movement placed an emphasis on Baptismal Regeneration, which refers to adult baptism by immersion as a means to gain salvation. The Restoration Movement produced several Christian communities such as

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the Churches of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Other groups, such as Baptists, rejected baptism as a means of salvation, but embraced immersion. These groups likewise benefited from the renewed emphasis on baptism. On the American frontier, rivers often became baptismal fonts, allowing a connection among these Christians with Jesus' own baptism in the river Jordan.

Take me to the water

Take me to the water

Take me to the water

To be baptized.

Narrator:

One group, the Brethren, who originated from the German Baptists, practiced tri-baptism – immersing a person three times, once for each Person of the Holy Trinity. This echoed the baptism practice of the Orthodox Church and is found in several ancient documents such as the *Didache* and *The Apostolic Tradition*.

For Catholics, the rite of baptism changed slightly in the 20th century. While most Catholics are baptized by pouring, also known as infusion, the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s allowed for Catholics to accept other ancient methods of baptism such as immersion. However, this is not unusual, as many Christian communities recognize and accept other modes of baptism.

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In the 21st century, baptism is still a central rite of public worship. The expression of this rite may vary from church to church, but its symbolism is consistent throughout Christendom.

Dr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, C.P.P.S. (Institute for Liturgical Ministry):

One common thing that almost all Christian denominations would share is an approach to baptism that includes the ritual action of using water, rather than submersion, immersion, sprinkling, but water we understand is essential.

Dr. James R. Hart (President, Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies):

The three models of baptism that are commonly used in the church today are: immersion, pouring, and sprinkling. All three of those practices have a specific symbolism attached to them. The symbolism, of course, of immersion is death and the identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus: our death and resurrection, identifying with Jesus death and resurrection through being buried in the waters of baptism and being raised to new life. The symbolism of pouring reminiscent of a covenantal idea of the drowning deluge from above, somewhat reminiscent of Moses going through the Red Sea with the people of Israel. It is the idea that we are, that the grace of God keeps us from drowning through waters that would normally kill us, that instead bring us new life. And sprinkling is symbolic of the cleansing of sin, which is reminiscent of the blood being sprinkled on the altar in the Old Testament.

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Narrator:

One challenge confronting the Christian Church today is how to observe baptism as a significant event in the life of the believer and of the congregation.

Dr. James Abbington (Candler School of Theology, Emory University):

Baptism, and the whole purpose of baptism, and being one of the two ordinances that most Protestant churches celebrate, seems to be so trivialized now. Baptism happens when it's convenient, or perhaps if there's an 8:00 and an 11:00 service, we'll try to get them in between ten and before devotions start for the 11:00 service. So, I remember years ago at a church where there were thirty-some candidates for baptism, and the folk were concerned that this was going to really lengthen the worship service. And I thought, 'Well, what does baptism mean?' We preach, we pray, we sing them down the aisle, and then tell them, 'Well, we don't have time to watch you get baptized. That's gonna take too much time.' But we want them to come across the front of the church and we applaud the fact that they have chosen to be united with God through these waters. But somehow, baptism seems to be becoming a lesser priority in some churches. Oh, they do it. Well, we have baptism, but we just don't put a lot of emphasis on it. We've gotten so large, we've gotten so busy that it's not important. I think that's probably why there's a very casual or carefree attitude about baptism, because the church has probably succeeded, in a very negative way, of making them feel that it's really not that important, something we do, but if we have time.

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Narrator:

Baptism must retain its importance in today's Christian church as it affirms the continuing story of God, both in the signs and wonders of the past and in the anticipation of those things yet to come.

Lester Ruth, Ph.D. (Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies):

You can also look at baptism in a forward-looking way. Almost use a gardening image, that what's taking place in baptism is the planting of our bodies into, immersed in a substance, and when we come up out of the baptismal waters, it's kind of like the first inkling of the seed coming up from the soil. But the full flowering of it is going to wait until the Lord comes again, and then we'll be a huge bush bearing lots of great fruit.

Narrator:

The waters of baptism have flowed since ancient times, welcoming generations of believers into the family of faith and becoming a universal symbol of a person's public proclamation to follow Christ.

Fade from black to middle credits: The Body: Christian Community. Fade to black and then to narrator.

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Narrator:

Worship is essential to the human experience. For Christians, worship also allows individuals to build on their relationships with God and one another. Such worship reaches across denominational barriers and extends itself throughout Church history to unite all believers in the story and person of Jesus Christ.

Michael Pasquarello III, Ph.D. (Asbury Theological Seminary):

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, said there is no such thing as a solitary Christian. Because at the heart of our faith is the great commandment that we love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbor as our self. Well, that neighboring, that love for the neighbor as well as our love for God, by its very nature draws us into a way of being and living that is communal, it is not solitary.

Fr. Robert Reed (Network Director, Catholic TV):

Worshipping God helps me, helps us, to experience our humanity more fully. And to attach our human experience to the many who have gone on before us in faith. And we are fortunate when we have a ritual, a way, a pattern if you will, to help us in our prayer for it is so integral to our experience as human beings.

Brian McLaren (Author, *Finding Our Way Again*):

In Scripture, and in church history, spirituality is a team sport. It's not a solo sport. It's something that we learn in community with other people...some of us are very scholarly,

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some of us are very experiential, some of us like complexity and depth, others of us like simplicity and clarity. Well, in a way by being together in community, we expand one another's horizons. Even the word "consciousness" – the "sci" of consciousness is "knowledge" and the word "con" is "with." There's a sense that we become fully conscious of something when we know it with other people.

Narrator:

For some people, the earliest memories of church life are of the sense of community found within a body of believers.

Mike Slaughter (Pastor, Ginghamburg Church):

My earliest memories were of the community. You know, the affirmation of the people. And for some reason, all of my memories of church – cause I had some struggling years in school, and some kind of turbulent teenage kind of years, in places where I don't remember a lot of affirmation, but my earliest memories of church are affirmation of community, and I remember fun things like potluck dinners, so it's the community dimensions of church. There was something about the sense of ultimate importance, even if you were bored as a child and didn't understand what was going on, and you understood the affirmation that came back, you know, was a community.

Brian McLaren (Author, *Finding Our Way Again*):

Two early memories of worship come to mind. One was visiting my grandfather's church when I was a little boy. And my church, the church that my family went to, was

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very quiet, very reserved. But my grandfather's church, there were a lot of older people, and they were very vocal, so somebody'd be praying and people would be going 'amen' and 'amen,' 'glory to God.' And there's this sense of almost groaning – mmm, yeah, mmm, you know. And I remember being a little boy looking at these people thinking, 'I wonder what's going on in their minds. This is a little weird, but it was also this feeling that there's a part of life that I have no idea what it means, and those guys are experiencing it, but I don't know what that means. And, of course, that's part of growing up.

Narrator:

The idea of the community of believers is as old as the church itself. The New Testament book of Acts describes the strong sense of community and sacrificial living that existed during the early church. In that time, Christians practiced a type of communal living, in which land, homes and possessions were sold and shared with one another.

Dr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, C.P.P.S. (Institute for Liturgical Ministry):

We read in Acts chapter two and chapter four how in the Christian community, there was a common sharing and there was no one among them in need.

Narrator:

In a time where wealth, race and gender divided society into classes of citizens, the early church brought people of all backgrounds together as equals in the community of faith.

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The Apostle Paul referred to this equality when he wrote, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Outside of the scriptures, history has left us with other evidence of community within the early church.

Rev. Dr. John D. Witvliet (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship):

First Clement is a very early document, roughly 100 A.D., give or take a few years. It’s a document written to the church in Corinth, probably by a group of Christians in Rome. It includes quite a bit of concern over church leaders, presbyters, who were dismissed from their posts and it includes reflections on, then, the nature of ordination, and its relationship with worship and church life. It’s a very helpful document, very early on, that gives us a sense of Christian community struggling to be faithful and to discern exactly what that should look like.

Narrator:

The Catacombs are another source that prove the existence of the early Church community. They contain the narrative of a faith village as expressed in art, Christian symbols, and written prayers for specific people at the time of baptism, hardship, or death.

As the Church developed through periods of persecution and formal recognition by Emperor Constantine in the early 4th century, the faith community endured and flourished. This was not without its difficulties, however, particularly in regard to how

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believers remained in fellowship with one another. Fifth century preacher Chrysostom addressed the difficulties of community life in his sermons and homilies.

Rev. Dr. John D. Witvliet (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship):

I think one of the most significant contributions those sermons offer us for our understanding of the history of Christianity would be all of their references to the commonality of life. He preached to people and spoke readily about the challenges and frustrations of ordinary life. And so he would refer to people in the assembly who would be experiencing great disagreements and how important it was for them to reconcile with each other. He would frankly acknowledge that some people would come to the weekly worship assembly more interested in finding a future spouse than in worshipping God, and in reading these homilies, you have a sense of community of ordinary people dealing with the struggles of everyday Christian life. And these sermons, then, become a witness to us to the fact that many of these early remarkable theologians and pastors deal with the very same challenges that all pastor do today.

Narrator:

Prior to becoming a noted preacher, Chrysostom lived in the Egyptian desert with a group of monks and hermits committed to a life of solitude and a singular focus on their faith practice. What would become the monastic movement was born from these Desert Fathers, as St. Anthony the Great and others banded together to form communities for the practice of the Christian faith. Two of the most famous monastic societies were the Benedictines of the 6th century and the Franciscans of the 13th century.

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Dr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, C.P.P.S. (Institute for Liturgical Ministry):

This coming together to live in community, still retaining the idea of total commitment, still retaining the ideal of a constant awareness of God's presence, so that what characterizes both the Desert Fathers and the monastic movement is that most of the day, if not absolutely all of the day, is spent in silence. The difference is in the monastic community, we learn to live this silence together, and it's together as members of the Body of Christ, rubbing shoulders, rubbing all of the kind of warts off, rubbing together all the knots that we come to perfection together.

Narrator:

Though many localized faith communities developed during the early centuries of the Church, there remained a growing divide among Church leaders in Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople, Antioch, and Jerusalem over issues of church authority, politics, language, liturgy, and theology. Rather than destroy the body of Christ over these debates, the East-West or Great Schism, as it is called, divided medieval Christianity into two large communities: the Eastern or Orthodox Church and the Western or Roman Catholic Church.

Despite this schism, a split that still separates Eastern and Western churches to this day, as a whole, Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic Christians share more similarities than differences. They have a common history dating to the New Testament. They all claim the essential elements of the story of Christ such as His virgin birth, His sinless nature,

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His vicarious death as atonement for sin, His physical resurrection and His Second Coming. They all believe in the divinity of Christ, the Holy Trinity, and in Jesus Christ as the Head of the universal Church. Understanding and nurturing these common bonds was, and continues to be, a vital part of the worship experience in the larger Body of Christ.

Rev. Dr. John D. Witvliet (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship):

I think the study of worship and its history is so rich with spiritual potential. And one key reason, or dimension of that, is learning to recognize Christians in different traditions as part of the Body of Christ. There are many people who are committed members of a particular Christian church who may have neighbors who represent many other traditions, but may never really understand or acknowledge them as brothers or sisters in Christ. And to understand what forces have shaped their worship practices. And so, the study of the history of worship is invaluable in simply understanding our neighbors: both close by, across the town, and around the globe.

Narrator:

As Church history moved from the Reformation to the modern era, it evolved geographically with the discovery of the New World. The Christian community expanded to include indigenous people from North and South America, and as the Church grew, more people were baptized, more cultures were added, and more traditions were included.

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Protestantism changed rapidly and created a multitude of various Christian communities, particularly in America during the Second Great Awakening of the early 19th century. As revivals spread across the frontier, so did the Methodist, Baptist, and Holiness movements.

Lester Ruth, Ph.D. (Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies):

American Christians have tended to be very innovative when it comes to worship. They'll stumble across something that attracts large numbers of people and generates lots of experiential salvation and great quantities of people and so they'll take it, they'll standardize it, they'll name it, and then they'll end up promoting it.

Narrator:

For the Catholic Church, there were few changes until the Second Vatican Council, which transformed the way Catholics viewed worship in community and their participation in the Body of Christ.

Denis R. McNamara, Ph.D. (The Liturgical Institute, Mundelein, IL.):

Well, part of the fundamental theology of the worshipping congregation is that it forms a mystical Body with Christ as its head. When you hear Paul talking about the many members, each having a different dignity but all required for the Body to function, and Christ is the head. You know, a body without a head is not living and not doing very

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well. And so, when you see a congregation assembled in a church like this, the notion is that the prayers that human beings in this room are offering are being offered to the Father as being joined to the Body of Christ Himself. Who is mystically in Heaven, speaking and pleading for us at the right hand of the Father, and that the Catholic priest takes the role of the Head and the congregation takes the role of the Body. And so, a body is typically looking in one direction and speaking to one subject. And so, in the long tradition of the Church, until the Second Vatican Council, the priest would often face east, or what they say his back to the people. And that's not because he didn't want people to see what's he doing as much as it is one body with one voice that was praying to the Father in the same direction, as opposed to two bodies talking to each other back and forth. And the language of a lot of the liturgy is like that. When you begin the prayer for morning and evening prayer, the phrase is "O God, come to my assistance." Even though there may be a hundred people praying because it's one body, they don't say, "come to our assistance" as if there were a hundred bodies in the room. It's one body, joining their voice. And the body they form mystically is the Body of Christ, and the voice they speak is the voice of Christ pleading in Heaven at the right hand of the Father. Typically, unless you are a mystic, you are not seeing Christ pleading at the right hand of the Father, and the way to make that real is to do it, to realize that reality by doing it.

Narrator:

At one time, the Church was the center of every community, as not only a house of worship, but as a gathering place to conduct the business and social affairs of the town or

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village. Modernization has changed the centralization of the church in everyday life, which has led to a struggle of how to preserve a close-knit community among believers.

Dr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, C.P.P.S. (Institute for Liturgical Ministry):

I grew up in a time when attending worship on Sunday was simply expected. And in fact, was largely, also a social experience. Our churches were largely neighborhood churches – we met with our neighbors, we shared our needs, we experienced God’s presence. The expectation of our own lives was that somehow, as a nation, we are a religious people. And being visible about that, at least once a week, more often more than once a week, was simply how we lived. Clearly, over the last fifty or sixty years that has largely changed.

Narrator:

One place where friends and neighbors still gather in a close-knit community is at the Harvest Ranch Cowboy Church, where people of all ages and backgrounds gather every Tuesday evening for food, music and a message from the Word of God. Cowboy churches originated on the rodeo circuit and have grown in popularity as a way of worship within the context of the country lifestyle. As Pastor Bill Patrick explains:

Bill & Vickie Patrick (Harvest Ranch Cowboy Church):

The cowboy culture that we’re talking about is actually country, laid back. In our brochure, it talks about how can you be a farmer, you can be a president of a company, you can be a mechanic, you can be anything and come here because it’s a simplified

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service with God as the main attraction. You have to enjoy the laid-back country atmosphere. You have to enjoy nature. You have to enjoy animals. You have to enjoy...a lot of my sermons are illustrated sermons. I use animals; use my horses, things like that - use my dog. A twenty-minute illustrated sermon and it packs a punch to get the point across to people that it's not about how big a cathedral you got. It's not about how big a congregation you got. It's not about how much money you got or how big a home you got. It's about worshipping and loving the Lord, no matter whether you are the person that's homeless underneath a bridge or the president and CEO of a big company. God has no respect between the two. This is a bridge type ministry to where people can come here, feel comfortable. If they ever want to go to a traditional church, they can. If they want to stay here the rest of their life, they can, too.

Narrator:

At Harvest Ranch, the cowboy theme is incorporated into many aspects of the worship service. A saddle serves as a pulpit and prayer requests are stuffed into a saddlebag. Baptisms take place in a horse trough. Before every worship service, there is a chuck wagon meal open to all, and many in the congregation come early to enjoy the food and fellowship.

Bill & Vickie Patrick (Harvest Ranch Cowboy Church): Clip 62 5:55:28 – 6:27:00

In a traditional church, one of the rules is, 'You don't bring food into the sanctuary.' Well, my sanctuary is here. Our sanctuary is here. And they feel more comfortable coming in and sitting behind a table, because I think a lot of times the table and the chair

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is kind of a security-type situation for them. They can eat. They can talk. They can fellowship. They can get to meet one another and feel comfortable, and I think the food and the tables and that type of meal makes it feel at home.

Narrator:

For Bill and Vickie Patrick of Harvest Ranch Cowboy Church, the barn door is always open, ready to welcome new people into the body of Christ.

Bill & Vickie Patrick (Harvest Ranch Cowboy Church):

So if people could come here and take something away, I want them to come here and say, 'I'm going to change my life. I'm going to quit worrying about things that I have no control over and I'm gonna give it to God.' That's what I'd want them to take away. And enjoy their life.

Narrator:

The Harvest Ranch Cowboy Church is just one example of the many churches and faith groups that are reaching beyond denominational lines to return to the ancient ideals of the Christian community.

David Neff (Editor, *Christianity Today*):

In the Church we are beginning to realize that we are one of the few places that people can experience community any more. But most of our church services have drifted away from the things that can build community. And that's kind of what's exciting as we see

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rather it's in the Emergent Church, or in the Ancient-Future Movement, or in the Liturgical Renewal, or all of those different streams, the recovery of common worship, which means setting and listening to the scriptures read together. Coming around the Lord's Table on a regular and frequent basis together. These are the things that help us to experience our lives as community as we have common worship.

Narrator:

Christian communities within the Church are looking back to earlier faith practices to redefine the future of Christian worship.

Brian McLaren (Author, *Finding Our Way Again*):

There's been a really interesting conversation going on, for about ten years, really it's been going on longer than that, over the last ten years a lot of us have found each other. And at first this was mostly evangelical folks, but now increasingly there are mainline Protestants, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox folks getting involved. And what those of us who are evangelical realize is that we don't have much memory. You know as Protestants we can go back five hundred years, but there are a lot of practices that come from the first fifteen hundred years of the Christian faith. And so, what's been happening, it's kind of like people who have different treasures, we come to the table and we bring our treasures. And so, for example, evangelicals have a great treasure of sharing their faith and evangelism. Evangelicals have specialized in, like, contemporary music and the use of media; and people from more ancient traditions, they learn

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something from that. But then those of us who didn't have that type of religious memory, spiritual memory, we're gaining a lot by learning things from, for example, from Roman Catholics like lectio divina, which is a way of, not just studying the Bible, but of just meditating on scripture and really almost marinating in the scripture, you know. There are practices of silence that maybe some Protestant, like Quakers, have had an appreciation for. But there's this deep tradition of learning to quiet ourselves and still ourselves in God's presence. So, what's happening, ironically, is often many new churches of very young people are becoming interested in ancient practices of the earlier centuries of the Church.

Narrator:

Part of recovering ancient practices in the modern Church has involved looking inward, to establish mini-communities of the greater Body of Christ such as house churches and small groups that emphasize intimacy and accountability in their practice of worship.

Kim Miller (Creative Director, Ginghamburg Church):

I'm not sure exactly where we're going in worship. If trends prove true, I believe we're going to a more intimate place where we gather in crowds for concerts, but for true worship, we're looking for the afterglow. We're looking for the coffee shop scenario. We're looking for the experience where I can talk about what I've learned among trusted friends and that it becomes safe space for me to work out my own salvation. It's going to be up to the people that gather, to assure that those coming to participate truly have the ability to participate, and to grab hold, and to customize that experience for what they're

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needing in their lives because I think the days are gone and fastly fading where we would come just out of obligation or a sense of duty. But it's going to have be really meaningful and it's going to have to address the true needs in our lives.

Mike Slaughter (Pastor, Ginghamburg Church):

You know, we fellowship with God as we fellowship with one another. We demonstrate our love for God by how we actively demonstrate that kind of love through serving one another. So I truly believe, as we are part of this what's called "postmodern" "post Christian" culture that's there's going to be, you know, kind of a rediscovery of the power of intimacy that comes in micro-communities.

Narrator:

Another part of the modern Church looks outward, where globalization and modern technology have made it easy to reach those places where it once took months, or even years. As the world seems to have grown smaller, the community of Christians – reaching out to one another – has gotten larger.

Dr. James Abbington (Candler School of Theology, Emory University):

Globalization and the blending of cultures in the Christian faith, is just, I think is the most awesome thing that's going on right now. To live at a time when a church contains some many different cultures, and so many different ethnicities all praising God is exciting. It's awesome.

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Micahel Pasquarello III, Ph.D. (Asbury Theological Seminary):

It's pretty difficult to watch the news and read the newspaper today and not hear about something called "globalization." There's an increasing awareness that we live in a world that is interrelated and for many reasons: for economic reasons, political reasons, and cultural reasons. That certainly has an impact in the Church in that Christians in North America are more aware of what Christians do in other parts of the world than in any time in history. And that there is access and movement from different parts of the world so that Christians in say Africa or Asia are bringing to us the gifts and the strengths of their life as God's people, and we're able to do the same.

Narrator:

One thing is certain. When people of faith live in community with others, whether around the corner or around the globe, worship becomes more than just a once a week event: it becomes a way of life.

Brian McLaren (Author, *Finding Our Way Again*):

Jesus constantly talked about the danger of honoring Him with our lips when our hearts were far from Him. Or James talks about what value is it to say you have faith if you don't back it up with your life. And this is always a problem. It's a whole lot easier to do God talk than to do a God walk. You know, it's a whole lot easier to have right opinions than actually live out a life of love for God and our neighbor. So, what we find is, if we are just focusing on information - listening to lectures, taking notes - that does the trick. But if we're focusing on a transformed life, not just information but

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transformation, then that requires practice. So, I not only need to believe that it is important to forgive people who wrong me. I actually have to practice forgiveness. I not only need to have this sense that God loves this stranger and the outcast, the marginalized person; I actually have to develop the habit of hospitality and welcome that person into my home and my space. So, this to me is so important for us to recapture, that the spiritual life really is a way of life. And that the church, in a sense, is more like a health club or an exercise facility than it is like just a lecture hall. Because we are going there to exercise the muscles of our character and really develop a way of feeling, a way of thinking, and a way of acting and treating other human beings. And, at the center of it all, a way of always keeping our windows and doors open to God.

Narrator:

As we have seen, the idea of Christian worship within a community is not stagnate or limited to one culture or period in time.

Rev. Dr. John D. Witvliet (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship):

One big surprise in teaching worship practices is the discovery of a deep and vital faith in people in very different Christian traditions, very different cultures, very different times and places. At times when students might not expect it, when they expect to find descriptions of practices they would resist, but then coming to understand the time period or the culture they discover what a remarkable example of faithfulness and vitality is found. For people coming to the faith for whom practices of worship are brand new, one of the greatest discoveries is just how, I think, rich and complex and comprehensive the

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Christian faith really is. It's not just about having sins forgiven, that's a key portion – indispensable portion. But it's also about this remarkable vision for the fullness of kingdom life, for every aspect of life.

James R. Green (Executive Director, The Jesus Film Project):

Certainly the Bible talks all about the Kingdom. And God's driving goal is to build His Kingdom. I love the passage in Daniel seven where Daniel was given a vision by God and he said every tribe and tongue and nation would acknowledge God and would worship God. And, certainly God's plan is to bring the world to Himself; that every entity, every nation, every tribe, every language will acknowledge that God ultimately is the King of kings, the Lord of lords.

Narrator:

The vision of a unified community of believers worshipping God eternally is likewise proclaimed in the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation. Both Daniel and Revelation place this community in a Heavenly city where worship of God is never ending. This community is the fulfillment of God's eternal and ongoing redemption story, embracing Christians from around the world and throughout history.

Roll Credits, fade to black.