

sunday

rhythms



When the Church gathers, it is not to consume a religious product, sitting by as spectators while worship is served up to us, hot and tasty. When God's community gathers, we are entering an experience, we are coming – together – to speak to and hear from and bow before our God. These experiences are important to us because we care deeply about the Gospel, the message that God has come to us in Jesus and invites all of us into the story. If you are in the place of wanting to explore the possibilities of faith, this experience is for you too. Feel it. Taste it. Wonder if the stories told and the faith embraced might be true. What follows is intended to give context to the Sunday rhythms of DCF, the ways we all – regardless of where we are on the spiritual path – are able to encounter Jesus and his story. Dive in.

Communion

For much of the history of the church, the gathering around the Lord's Table (also known as the act of Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper and the Eucharist) was a central moment in our public acts of worship. This practice reflects the picture in Acts of the early church where gathering around the Lord's Table as a community was held equally as important as acts of teaching Scripture, participating in prayer and sharing life with one another. Paul also seems to reflect the reality that "breaking of bread" was integral to the life of the earliest Christian communities (Acts 20:7-12; I Corinthians 11:18-20, 33), and he evokes imagery suggesting that sharing a meal at the Table of God was core to the identity of God's people (I Corinthians 10:17).

We do not suggest that weekly communion is the only appropriate way to worship. However, for us, the symbolism enacted and the story retold compels us to want to meet one another – and God – at his feast each week.

Communion is both a symbol and a story. It is both something pictured and something experienced. Communion allows us to remember – and enter into – the reality of Jesus Christ, the one who died and rose again and now is among us offering grace. Our Creator has made us tactile creatures. Our mind needs to be stretched and our wills need to be challenged. However, we also need to *experience* spiritual reality. We need to experience God. Coming to the Lord's Table, receiving bread which Christ told us is his body and dipping it into wine or juice which Christ told us is his blood, is a way we experience God, a way we taste grace.

We share a common cup where all who participate dip the bread into a cup along with others who are participating with them. This recounts the way Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples, and this imagery honors the truth that we are not isolated souls participating in some individualized rite, rather we are part of a community, a people God has connected by his cross and resurrection. We are a family, and we are sharing in a feast.

Communion is a time to reflect, remember and repent. But it is not always solemn. Communion is a time to rejoice, to receive grace, to be forgiven. The picture God has given us is his table. The setting is a feast. There is dancing. There is laughter. There is friendship. There is hope. There is God.

Passing of the Peace

Some of Jesus' more frequent words were: "Peace be with you." (Luke 10:5; Luke 24:36; John 20:19-21) Jesus calmed storms, spoke faith to doubters, offered hope to the oppressed, promised forgiveness to sinners and calmed the hearts of the fearful. In all this, Jesus was giving *peace*. However, life in our world is often anti-peace, and to such a troubled world, Jesus continues to offer – through his words and his presence and then the words and presence of those who follow him – peace. So, when we gather on Sundays, we recognize that Jesus is among us, offering peace to each of us *through* each of us, our voice and our touch the peace-giving voice and touch of Jesus.

As a Jesus-community, we provide space for this Jesus-act of peace passing each Sunday. We turn to one another, to one we might know well or to one we might be meeting for the first time. We give a handshake or a hug and we say something like, *Peace to you* or

Prayer

Peace of Jesus to you. This is more than a greeting, more than a “say ‘hi’ to your neighbor” time. This is space where we recognize we are a community, a people God is forming and a people who are able to participate in the life and peace Jesus always desires to give.

Participating in this act is uncomfortable at first. It can feel strange. Since we live in a culture of anti-peace, this is no surprise. The tension is increased because our society places a premium on maintaining personal space -- and passing the peace is an intimate, spiritual, communal act. Jesus calls us to be part of the community he is forming, the Church. This means opening ourselves up to giving and receiving from one another. This means being the peace-giving voice of Jesus to one who might be lonely...or fearful...or sinful – and, thankfully, it means receiving this same peace-giving voice of Jesus in return, recognizing we are all ones who are lonely... or fearful... or sinful. That’s the essence of Jesus-peace, anyway -- a gift from a good and generous God.

If you are unsure of what you make of Jesus and are uneasy with this act, do not feel put on the spot or under pressure to say anything. Simply receive the words offered to you. Merely receive them as a gift. This is how Jesus offers his peace, free with no strings attached.



Teaching

The Scripture is God’s gift to guide us into encountering the Living Christ. It offers us instruction and mercy. It provides us with wisdom and correction. However, the Bible is not a textbook or manual. It is a place where the God-breathed words are breathed afresh into our soul (I Timothy 3:16). At DCF, we place a high priority on sitting under the teaching of God. We wrestle with what God says. We seek to understand the implications of what God says. We wonder if we are correctly hearing what God says. Yet, in all this, we are acting in faith ... that *God has said*. God has spoken. Our Sunday teaching hopes to faithfully engage and journey into the things God has spoken. We desire to let Scripture speak for itself, attempting to minimize the way we impose our presuppositions or worldview or politics or felt-needs onto God. We desire to let him speak. And we pray we will have the courage to obey.

Giving

Generosity has always been something the gospel calls us to (I Timothy 6:18). We are called to give our life, our passions, our hearts, and yes, our crisp green bills. Part of the early church’s weekly communal experience was the act of each one giving as they were able to support the mission God had called them to (I Corinthians 16:1-4). Giving is no more a duty than participating in music as worship or communion as worship or prayer as worship. It is also no less important. The wisdom writers of Scripture – as well as our own experience – indicate that we use our financial resources for those things we value and believe in. Giving is a way of speaking against the consumerism and greed of our culture; and in its place signaling that we deeply value God and the community he has placed us in.



If you are a guest of DCF, we ask you not to give. We ask you to receive all that happens as a gift. However, if DCF is part of your life, your community, then we ask you to consider how the call of God and the call to worship would influence your use of your financial resources.

Prayer is conversation, and conversing with God is central to the life of following Jesus. St. Benedict called prayer "the work of God," reflecting the reality that God is the one first at work in prayer – we are merely joining the conversation, responding to God's invitation to engage in God-work. Prayer is often portrayed in Scripture as a communal act. The Psalms were the prayer book of the early church where, together, they would sing and speak their hopes and their repentance and their passions ... to God. We pray together in many ways at DCF. We provide a prayer space with aids to prayer and a prayer journal. We often provide moments of silence for personal prayer. Most Sundays, we pray the Lord's Prayer and have a closing prayer available for our entire community to pray together. We believe God is present and God is listening. So, we pray.

Reading of the Gospel

DCF practices the regular reading of the gospel, the story of Jesus. We read this story because it is our story. We need to be reminded that we are not asking God to enter our story, but rather he is asking us to enter his. The Lectionary is a very old way the church has sought to regularly retell the Jesus narrative. Following a three year cycle, we hear the high points of Jesus' ministry on earth. As we hear these words, we are instructed by his ways and changed by his teaching.

Music and other Arts

Music is common in most every tradition of public worship. Music speaks the language of our soul. The Hebrew culture in which Jesus lived was a culture of poets and musicians. Perhaps the best known book of the Bible, Psalms, is a collection of prayer books that God's people have used over the centuries to worship our God. The prayers were often spoken, but the prayers were also sung. The music at DCF attempts to provide our heart a voice. Through music, we sing of God's character, we sing of our need, we repent, we ask God to move on our behalf and we simply celebrate that *God is ...* and that we are his people.



Music – as all art forms do – reflects the reality that we are artists, formed in the image of a creative God who loves diversity and beauty. Embracing this truth, our musical expressions are eclectic and diverse, ranging from 16th century hymns to original scores, from old gospel to acoustic and rock. We also incorporate other art forms (imagery, ambiance and original works, to name a few) as expressions of God's creative work and our creative response. In it all, however, we hope to see God, not merely the art and the music.

In the end, communal worship is an invitation to step into God's story...however you come...wherever you are on the journey.

Open the door.

Take a step inside.

Release your heart.

Worship.

Dive in.

[More information on our church, our values and our communal life is available on our website: www.dcf-clemson.org]