

EXPLORING OUR FAITH

A Walk Through the Sunday Service

Session 2 – Sacred Space

This is an installment in a series, adapted from notes in the Sunday bulletins at St. Andrew's, that is exploring our Sunday worship. What we do. How and why we do it. History, theology, the way worship connects us with the mystery of God in Jesus Christ. Questions and comments are welcome.

We gather in the Lord's Name. Today we continue our discussion of the first part of the Eucharistic service, the "entry" or "gathering rite." Last week we talked about the Opening Acclamation – "Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever." We noted that it sums up how we gather here in the presence of God, as God's beloved Creation – "out of the ordinary, into the holy," you might say. We talked about preparing before worship, arriving if possible a bit ahead of time to center and quiet our busy brains and prepare ourselves for prayer.

A sacred place apart. This week we begin by stepping outside our red front doors, imagining ourselves getting out of our car and coming up the walk. (By the way, footnote about those red doors: in the Middle Ages they were a sign of sanctuary; in England, the king's officers could not pursue and arrest you if you were in a church. So symbolically our building still offers sanctuary for weary and battered souls today.) Maybe we're arriving for the first time. Our first impression may well be that this building is very historic and very beautiful. This is important to note, because tradition and beauty are both important in worship, not least in Anglicanism. Episcopal worship draws on hundreds, even thousands of years of tradition. In entering into our worship, we become part of that tradition. This tradition is "an ever-flowing stream," as an old hymn says. It evolves to keep us connected to eternal truths in a changing environment.

Our building. Our building reflects this evolution. Its basic design is that of Protestant New England meeting houses: double aisles to separate men and women, austere white interior, seating for a audience to hear lessons and preaching. But it has granite walls and pointed windows, reflecting the Catholic and gothic revival going on in Anglicanism at the time it was built in 1826. It has a prominent Altar. Its interior has been changed several times in its history and some proposed modifications are part of our capital campaign. We shape our buildings, but then our buildings shape us.

Shaping space. We always need to consider whether the shape of yesterday still works today – or whether it has ended up misshaping our worship and thus misshaping us. But however we answer such questions, our building should invite us to step out of the transient, out of the ordinary, into the holiness of God and of ourselves as God's people. A church building must help shape us into the Body of Christ.