



Rhythms of Liturgy and Life

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Greetings! Thank you for your interest in the “Rhythms of Liturgy and Life.” As promised, here are notes to refresh your memory of the key points of the presentation I have given at several events. The powerpoint slides are not available at this time.

“Everything is rhythm”

Patterns form us. All of life is based on a “cosmic dance” of microscopic and macrocosmic worlds.

There exists at the outermost horizon of our knowledge great cosmic rhythms of an ever-expanding universe as stars and systems die, are born and move at incredible velocities and distances.

All that exists lives in rhythmic relationship.

As we are able to look more closely at the smallest units of matter, what we find is not solid, but rather we are rhythmic waves bound together producing matter. At our innermost bodily subatomic horizon, tiny quarks dance in rhythmic relationship, creating a choreographed communication system.

Life at all levels is about negotiating a dance between entities, whatever their size.

We are dynamic energy systems constituted by our rhythms - from the pulse of neurons and muscles that move us through the world, to the rhythms of our relationships with each other and with the holy.

Worship is the place where we crystallize and express in symbolic ways our experience of being a part of the sacred, cosmic, rhythmic dance of life.

It is a place where the ordinary becomes extraordinary, where all that is, is seen as part of the Creator, the Heartbeat of Creation.

The “Scrapbook”

As we imagine the photo album of the Christian global community at worship, we discover a wide range of expression. The ways that we sing with each other, speak to each other, move in concert with each other in worship, create rhythmic patterns which imprint themselves upon us. We come to associate these rhythms with “the holy” - with what God “feels” like to us - to how the Spirit is stirring in us. Who we are is formed through our worship into those who “go and do likewise” as disciples in the world. We practice what we are becoming.

“You don’t think your way into a new kind of acting, you act your way into a new kind of thinking.” - Parker Palmer

We often give considerable attention to what is said in worship, and we should concern ourselves with “substance.” But substance also has to do with the non-verbal aspects of our worship as well. What we know from those who study the science of memory is that what often makes a longer and deeper impact on us what we *do and the manner in which we do it*.

“To be boring is to bear false witness.” - Tom Driver

This is not about a particular style of worship. I have seen boring in every style of worship! Monotony comes in many forms. Monotony has more to do with a lack of diverse dynamic energy. Steven Spielberg says that as he is editing a movie, he knows that every 6 minutes there needs to be some sort of dynamic change... I think that’s good information, but I also think there is an even better reason to consider the dynamics of worship - that is our very *spiritual formation*.

Worship is a place where our very bodies are learning the behaviors and rhythms and patterns of energetic witness that we need as the Body of Christ. The question is, to what are we being formed?

Primal Patterns

And so in this time together, we are going to take a brief look at “The Primal Patterns” which helps us describe the energy and flow of dynamics in worship. It is what I call a “hermeneutics of rhythm” for our worship. Hermeneutics is a fancy word for a lens through which we look to analyze what is going on.

“The body is one big rhythm machine”

We are all dancing physical entities. And yet, we are not all “dancing to the same drummer,” so to speak. From our earliest rhythmic patterns of breathing as infants, to our basic brain waves and the patterned manifestations of our fingerprints, we are living distinctly varied rhythmic lives. The rhythmic “frequencies” through which we experience the world—our perspectives—are varied.

Starting in the 1930’s, with the bulk of the research done from the 1970’s to today, kinesiologists began to study the way people moved—the dynamics through which they moved through their lives. Up until then, human movement had been analyzed, but the focus was really the differences between human movement and that of other species. But these particular scientists were interested in the ways people did similar things but with diverse energy. They came to realize that people’s muscles fire off in different ways. Our brains and muscles - the “neuromuscular connection” or “neuromuscular excitation patterns” - do not all work with the same dynamics of energy. Well, certainly our experience bears this out! One person goes to a spa to relax and rejuvenate while another’s idea of rejuvenation is a 50 mile bike ride!

“We all have a kinesthetic vocabulary”

We all have “home patterns” - ways of moving that bring us the most ease and power. Like the best sense of the word “home,” a home pattern is one in which we find our greatest ease of expression and resonance in terms of energetic identity. Although we use all the patterns, our home pattern is one in which we feel most like “ourselves.”

And because we now are beginning to understand better the intimate connection between the workings of our bodies with our minds and spirits, what we begin to see is that our ways of moving in the world also become ways that we perceive the world and even how we experience God and the particular worship expressions that speak to us.

The Four Patterns

If you move through the world with “things to get done,” making lists and moving with purpose and goal, we call you....

“Thrusters”

- **sudden, ballistic neuromuscular patterns of movement**
- **strong sense of direction**
- **getting somewhere**
- **“Just do it! Go for it!”**

The gifts of thrust for our lives AND for our worship are...

The gifts of Thrust

- **decisive movement toward a goal**
- **the dynamic of change, of purpose**

- rally for action
- sense of a “mighty force” at work

As we experience this energy in our worship, we experience the holy at work in a particular theological way

- **this is a God of action; a transformational God;**
- **a God “on the move” who makes a way out of no way**

Songs: *Up From the Grave He Arose (refrain); We Sing to You O God (FWS 2001); We Are Marching in the Light of God (FWS 2235-b)*

Space and color, tone of voice, visuals, the direction of our bodies and movement contribute to the creation of energy patterns. Bright colors, processions, recessions, prophetic preaching all add to the *Thrust* dynamic in worship.

“Overrides”

But just as each pattern has gifts, “too much of a good thing is still too much.” When one pattern is used too much, or to the exclusion of other dynamics, we are also formed, but not in the ways we particularly desire...

Overrides of Thrust

- **unbalanced, it can drown out some voices - especially marginalized voices**
- **keeps us from also experiencing the “still small voice”**
- **opportunities for collaboration and relationship may be missed**
- **victory at all costs is sometimes not a victory at all**

If you move with reserve, are perhaps careful in your placement... If you like for things to be organized and in order.... If you like to find a way to do something and repeat it... we call you...

“Shapers”

- **carefully placed movement**
- **ability to “hold” and “contain”; stillness of pose**
- **focus on proper structure and form**
- **“A place for everything and everything has its place.”**

The gifts of Shape

- **helps “set apart” ritual time and space**
- **defining and clarifying; easily repeatable**
- **offers a sense of “the way things are” when all else seems to be falling apart**
- **virtues of fidelity and endurance**
 - **this image is an eternal, steadfast, enduring God**

Songs: *Glory to God (FWS); Doxology; The Church’s One Foundation*

Spaces are often symmetrical, tailored paraments; concern for particular people, things, actions, there is a sense of permanence.

Overrides of Shape

- **unbalanced, it can err on the side of the “correct”**
- **to the detriment of what is called for in the moment**
- **lack of play and improvisation resulting in a “stiff upper lip”**
 - **can avoid the heights and depths of joy and sorrow;**
 - **worship ceases to mirror the ebb and flow of life - to feel relevant**

If you love to move from “this to that”... are interested in many things... find yourself swaying easily to whatever rhythms present themselves... are energized by interaction... we call you...

“Swingers”

- **fluctuating movement**
- **highly interactive; multidirectional**
- **personal; direct relating**
 - **“Get in the swing; swing on by; mood swing”**

The gifts of Swing

- **strongly interactive, playful, emotional**
- **the language of celebration, of creativity**
- **gives focus to a sense of community**
- **celebrates process more than form or goal; “it takes as long as it takes”**
 - **image of God as relational - a God of hope and possibilities**

Songs: *Halle, Halle (FWS 2026); Sanctuary (FWS 2164); Jesus, We Are Here (FWS); Make Us One, Lord (FWS 2224)*

“Swing” spaces often help us focus on the community such as circular configurations or turning to face each other by facing the center of the sanctuary

Swing Overrides

- **unbalanced, it can get stuck in its back and forth to the detriment of going deeper or going forward**
- **can get too self-focused**
 - **can rely solely on emotion as a barometer for worship, a little too “touchy-feely”**

If you “go with the flow,” moving in easy and fluid movements... can simply “be” with others without the need to interact in a direct way... find energy in meditative environments... we call you...

“Hangers”

- **“go with the flow”**
- **sustained and freeflowing**
- **willingness to “meander”**
 - **indirect in focus; sees the big picture**

The gifts of Hang

- **this is the language of “being”**
- **a sense of going deeper; of mystery and awe**
- **comfort with silence and prolonged reflection**
 - **a God who is ever-present at the deepest core of our being**

Songs: *Come and Find the Quiet Center (FWS 2128); Jesus, Remember Me (UMH 488)*

Many churches find it difficult to “hang” ... finding extended silence difficult. The surge in popularity of walking labyrinths and of worship in the tradition of Taizé, as well as the meandering to prayer stations of the “emerging” worship movement are real gifts to the church.

Overrides of Hang

- **unbalanced, it can be difficult to initiate action or take a stand**
- **avoidance of a solid “place”**
- **without structure, it can read as indecisive or unorganized**
 - **can lack needed personal interaction**

“Ritual Resonance”...

So, we’ve taken a look at these four patterns. One of the things I think is possible is that we literally “resonate” with different kinds of worship because our bodies are literally “resonating” with various rhythms that feel more or less like an experience of God to us. (*One person grumbles after a lively hand-clapping hymn, “It’s not reverent enough...” and another person has “had it up to here” with hand-holding and what they call “schmaltzy music” and “touchy-feely” worship.*)

We need to be aware, also, that often we are socialized or conditioned to believe that one particular pattern is holier than another. It is important to understand that God moves us in many ways!

Experiences of God are kinesthetic

Just as we “resonate” with certain portrayals of the holy in word or visual images, images of God are also kinesthetic. Here are some questions that I think are worth asking ourselves...

What does God “feel” like to you?

In what rhythms do you encounter the holy?

What happens when one rhythm is deemed “holier” than another?

How “inclusive” is our worship of various kinesthetic images of God?

We need two things... to **have our rhythms affirmed**, empowering us to particular gifts of discipleship... and we need to **utilize many rhythms** in order to not only be inclusive, but to expand our understanding of God and of who we are called to be as the Body of Christ...

Formed through worship as people who come to their feet;
who are ready for action;
inspired for action. (*Thrust energy*)

Formed as people who name and claim God’s reality;
Who embody the vision of the kin-dom of God;
Who share with others the sure foundation that is God. (*Shape energy*)

Formed as people who love deeply,
relate personally and intimately;
who feel the ebbs and flows of life and emotion
and respond to a hurting world. (*Swing energy*)

Formed as those who can listen for the still small voice leading and guiding us
Able to simply “be” present - steeped in awe-filled moments;
guiding others to the presence of the ever-mysterious God. (*Hang energy*)

As we “synch up” with the energies of worship, of each other and ultimately of God... patterns of action are formed. In a word, we are “moved!”

“Falling in love is really falling in rhythm.” - Layne Redmond

A “polyrhythmic” Christianity knows that to fall in love with God is to fall in love with the rhythms of creation, of our very bodies...

and the rhythms of liturgy and life!