

## Genuine Gestures

“we decide if a speech act is false or a lie not only if it is misspoken on the part of the speaker but also if it is not congruous with the context in which it is spoken or heard.”

Worship is that place and moment in which we among others in gestures of prayer praise God, where we are caught up in a “hot house;” a “laboratory of experimentation;” of gestures being learned and practiced knowingly or unknowingly.” Brett Webb-Mitchell

Is the gesture

- integrated (authentic - word, deed, character)?
- invitational (drawing people into participation)?
- intelligible (does it make sense to people)?
- inspired (Spirit-led - flow, not forced)?
- incarnational (embodying the Christian story)?

## God’s Story, My Story, Our Story

“Our identity is dependent on having a story that tells us who we are: our understanding of life’s meaning and purpose is dependent on having a story that tells us what the world is like and where we are going. To be a community of faith, we must be a people with a story; a common memory and vision, common rituals or symbolic actions expressive of our community’s memory and vision, and a common life together that manifests our community’s memory and vision. The church is a story-formed community.” John Westerhoff, *A Pilgrim People*.

Stories are fundamentally oral and communal in nature. They are meant to be told, dramatised, sung, danced, and expressed through visual arts... In an oral culture.., learning involves all the senses and the imagination as well. In an oral culture truth is poetic, and storytelling is understood as the doorway into the realm of the sacred... The biblical story becomes a sacred story that is to be imagined and participated in, not studied objectively... John Westerhoff, *A Pilgrim People*.

## Worship as Formation

“Liturgies - whether sacred or secular - shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world. In short, liturgies make us certain kinds of people, and what defines us is what we love... [Our] orientation to the world is shaped from the body up more than from the head down. Liturgies aim our love to different ends precisely by training our hearts through our bodies.. They prime us to approach the world in a certain way, to value certain things, to aim for certain goals, to pursue certain dreams, to work together on certain projects. In short, every liturgy... teaches us... to be a certain kind of person. Hence every liturgy in an education, and embedded in every liturgy is an implicit worldview or understanding of the world... An education, then, is a constellation of practices, rituals and routines that inculcates a particular vision of the good life by inscribing or infusing that vision into the heart (the gut) by means of material, embodied practices.” James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p25.

### Worship informs us (head)

We grow in our understanding of God, the Bible, Christian beliefs, current issues, the nature of worship, Christian ethics and values, our faith traditions.

### Worship forms us (heart)

We are shaped by the rhythms and habits of worship, by the seasons and celebrations of the church year, through relationships, space, language, story, participation.

### Worship transforms us (hands)

We experience deep encounters with God that change us in profound ways, becoming Christ-like, being called and responding to grace - new life, reconciliation, renewal, vocation, mission.

Based on Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education*.

## Christly Gestures

Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Christly Gestures*.

Worship is one of the core **practices** or habits of the church. We can think of our words and actions within worship as being **gestures**.

“... gestures are corporate - learned, practiced, and performed by members of Christ’s body. The community of Christ is re-created by the gestures that embody the story of God’s gospel. Some gestures are particular for an individual’s grace-given gift and service in Christ’s body; others are performed in common and in coordination with other members of Christ’s body”

“gestures are learned in the practice of the gesture itself”

“The community is created and re-created by the gestures people use in social interactions.”

“The story is embodied in the gesture. Performance of the story in gestures is key to remembering whose we are as a people.”

“the obvious characteristic of language, oral or written, is that it is gesture. The speaking of a word is a gesture that, like sign language or body language, can be understood only in the context in which it is performed and received.”

“The church is God’s gesture to the world. Christians do not merely have practices of gestures; rather, our very beings are a gesture of God’s doing: we exist because we are God’s creative gesture, created to praise and worship him.”

“Many gestures are ancient in origin, gestures first performed in the early church as recorded in Scripture, such as the Eucharist (1 Cor. 11) or the singing of psalms (Col. 3); some are no longer commonly practiced among all Christians, for example, the holy kiss. Other gestures are born of the tradition of the church’s heritages, such as bowing before the cross...”

## Gathering

Gestures of hospitality and welcome

Gestures of praise and thanksgiving

Gestures of confession and forgiveness

## Word & Sacrament

Gestures of hearing and seeing the Scriptures

Gestures of praying and contemplating the Scriptures

Gestures of interpreting the Scriptures

Gestures of sharing Communion

## Response

Gestures of responding to the Word

Gestures of offering

Gestures of prayer for others

Gestures of sending and commitment