

What Do You Bring to Church?

As you might expect, for a pastor, the words, “Time to get ready for church” carry a different meaning than they do for most people. When my wife and I got ready for church a few weeks ago, I admit, I felt a bit uncomfortable. You see, I was on vacation, we were going to a different church, and I suddenly realized that I just wasn’t sure what I needed to bring along.

It was hard for me to get out of my usual Sunday morning mode, and my mind kept jumping to my customary checklists. Where’s my briefcase? Do I have my hymnal? Sermon and prayers? Bulletins and other announcements? Notes of people I need to talk to? But none of that mattered. I was on vacation. Instead, I had to stop and think: what do I bring to church today?

One of the first things that comes to mind is *a repentant heart*. For, “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise*” (Psalm 51:17). This comes first because it usually works best when these preparations are done during the days and hours before the service starts. Self-examination (in the light of the Ten Commandments) exposes me for who I am before God: a sinner in need of forgiveness. This little exercise makes it clear to me why I need to go to church in the first place: to get God’s forgiveness.

In connection with that, I need to bring *a listening ear*. As Paul said, “*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*” (Romans 10:17). If I’m doing all the talking (even if that talking is all going on inside my head), then I’ll never hear what God has to say to me.

I also need to bring *a seeking soul*. Specifically, I need to bring *a Kingdom-seeking soul*. I may be searching for many things and worried about many things that are going on in my life, but Jesus said, “*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33). So when I come to church, it is to look for and long for the reign of God in this world and in my daily life.

All this calls for me to bring *an attentive mind* to church, for there is much for me to learn. “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). So I should come eager to engage, to discover what this Word is saying this day to me in my life. I should even come willing to challenge the texts that are read and the things the preacher says, as did the Jews in Berea, whom Luke calls, “*more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so*” (Acts 17:11).

And yes, I should also come with *a list of my requests of God*. For, “*Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice. ... Cast your burden on Yahweh, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved*” (Psalm 55:17, 22). So the burdens I bear, the needs I have, the things I desire—all these I can bring before the Lord, and He will answer according to His perfect wisdom and His good and gracious will.

In days gone by, Lutherans brought their own personal hymnals to church. Those hymnals helped them prepare at home, reminding them that they when they came to church they were coming to receive God’s gifts, to have their sins clearly and directly forgiven, to learn how God would have them live, and to pray, praise, and give thanks to a gracious and loving God. God grant us so to prepare and do the same when we come to church each week!