

“Eight Questions on the Church Calendar”
March 1, 2020
Faith Presbyterian Church – Evening Service
Pastor Nicoletti

We have this evening more of a topical sermon – a discussion on one of our practices here at Faith Presbyterian Church.

Here at Faith we observe the traditional Church calendar. We observed Advent this past December, followed by Christmas and then Epiphany. We will celebrate Easter, and then Ascension, and Pentecost. And today our sanctuary is decorated for the season of Lent. We have banners up that remind us of the suffering and the death of Christ. We have a purple cloth over the cross. Our prayers and our liturgy have and will continue to emphasize the themes of Christ’s death for us, as well as our death to sin.

But why do we do this?

Many Christians – especially many evangelicals – do not observe the Church calendar, except maybe for Christmas and Easter. Other churches – especially churches from a Reformed background – can be quite hostile to the idea of the Church calendar. Rachel and I were members of a church at one point that made a point of doing nothing out of the ordinary on Easter, and when passing reference was made to the fact that it was Easter, more time was spent emphasizing how that Sunday was no different from any other Sunday than was spent saying anything about Easter in particular.

While it seems that many newer or younger churches in our region of the PCA celebrate the Church calendar, still, many other churches in our denomination do not, and many would view something like the celebration of Lent with a lot of suspicion. Isn’t it Catholic? Isn’t it un-Reformed? Isn’t it adding to God’s commandments for worship?

Tonight we will spend a bit of time considering those sorts of questions.

We will be looking at a number of texts this evening, but let’s begin by asking for God’s blessing – Let’s pray ...

Lord, you call us to worship you.

And we desire to worship in a way that pleases you, and that shapes us more and more into your image and into the reality of your gospel.

Bless us now as we consider how we do that over the seasons of the year.

Give us wisdom and right understanding from your word.

And bless us that we may know you more and more.

We ask all of this in Jesus’s name.

Amen.

This evening I want to give a big picture of how I think we should think about and approach our use of the liturgical calendar. To do that, we’ll ask eight questions. Each of these questions and answers could easily become a full sermon or lecture in and of itself ... but I’ve tried to restrain myself from going too deep so we could look at the big picture tonight, and be helped in how we think of the church calendar in our corporate worship and our individual devotion.

With that said, let's proceed to our eight questions.

And our first question, appropriately enough, is: Where do we get direction on how we should structure our worship?

And the answer for us is: the Bible. And the Bible itself gives us this answer.

Some of you are doing Bible-in-a-year reading programs. And if you are, then chances are you are currently in, or have just finished the Book of Leviticus. Which comes right after the second half of Exodus. And when you finish reading the second half of Exodus and the entirety of Leviticus, as a modern Christian, you probably have a whole lot of questions about a whole lot of different things. But one question you *don't* have, if you are paying any attention at all, is this: Does God care how we worship him?

Because the second half of Exodus and the whole Book of Leviticus are *filled* with details, spoken by God, about how *he* wants to be worshipped. God cares how he is worshiped.

And lest we take all that data as merely a base – a starting point – to which we are free to add whatever we want, we are given the account of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10. Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron the high priest, we are told, each offered “unauthorized fire before Yahweh, which he had not commanded them.” They took God's commandments for the sacrifices and burnt offering to bring before Yahweh in worship, and they added a different one to the mix – one Yahweh had not commanded. And how does the Lord respond? We read in Leviticus 10:2: “And fire came out from before Yahweh and consumed them, and they died before Yahweh.” The Lord struck them down for offering worship of their own devising – worship contrary to what the Lord had commanded himself.

So the principle quickly emerges at the beginning of the Bible that the Lord tells his people how to worship him, and we are not to do what seems right in our own eyes, but are to follow his commands. This concept of looking to the Bible for direction in our worship is often called “The Regulative Principle.” *The Westminster Confession of Faith* – part of the constitution of our church and our denomination – expresses this in chapter one and chapter twenty-one. In chapter one, it says that “there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God [...] which are ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word,” [WCF I.6]. But the bulk of the concept then comes in chapter twenty-one, where we read: “The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men [...] or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.” [WCF XXI.1]

The Bible is where we get direction for how we should structure our worship. That ought to settle things.

Only, it does not. Because Christians have and continue to differ on what exactly that means.

Dr. Michael Farley, an adjunct professor at Covenant Seminary, whom I studied liturgical theology under for several classes, in his paper titled “What is ‘Biblical’ Worship?” points out that there are three different versions of the regulative principle at work in the major schools of evangelical thought on worship.

The first is a regulative principle based on the practices given in the New Testament alone. He writes that his approach “defines the norm for Christian worship as the apostolic *practice* of corporate worship in the first-century church. Thus, according to this principle, liturgical practices are biblical only if there are explicit NT commands or normative examples of those particular practices.” [Farley, “Biblical Worship”, 592]

The second version of the regulative principle focuses more on New Testament theology and early church history. This version of the regulative principle also relies on the New Testament alone for its biblical foundations, but it expands its approach by not only looking for explicit commands or examples of practices in the New Testament, but also considering how certain practices might embody and express theological truths taught in the Scriptures. And with those two concepts in mind, this approach often looks to the liturgies of the early church for its ideals on what worship should be like. [Farley, “Biblical Worship”, 597]

The problem, Farley argues, with both of these views is that when it comes to the Biblical basis of Christian worship, they rely almost exclusively on the New Testament – casting aside as irrelevant the majority of the Christian Scriptures: The Old Testament.

Which brings us to the third version of the regulative principle. This version of the regulative principle seeks to bring the whole Bible to bear on the question of Christian worship. This means that while it values the wisdom that can be encapsulated in the liturgies of the historic church, it places primary emphasis on the role of the Bible. It looks to the New Testament for practices testified to there, but it also pays a lot of attention to what the Old Testament has to say about worship. As it does, it seeks neither to just repeat Old Testament practices or to ignore them, but it asks how the principles behind those Old Testament practices should be transformed and applied in Christian Worship. [Farley, “Biblical Worship”, 602]

In other words, there are meanings, symbolisms, and principles in Old Testament worship that we are not merely to ignore or cast aside, but about which we are instead to ask how they can and should be applied to our context after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. [Farley, “Biblical Worship”, 609]

And we see examples of this already in the Scriptures. Fire falls on the heads of the Apostles at Pentecost, as it did in the past on the tabernacle and temple, indicating that the Church is the new human temple of God [Acts 2]. Paul explains to the Colossians that the meaning of Old Testament circumcision has been taken up into the practice of New Testament baptism [Col 2:11-12]. In the gospels we see how the Old Testament Passover meal is transformed by Christ into the New Testament Lord’s Supper [Matt 26:17-29]. The Apostle Peter speaks of the Church as a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices [1 Peter 2:4-5]. We could go on and on. When it comes to the worship of God’s people, there is not a hard break and starting from scratch at the death and resurrection of Jesus, but a transformation of everything that has come before.

And this should make sense to us as a congregation. For decades our church has stressed the fact that the *whole Bible* speaks to who God is, who we are, and how we are to relate to God and live in relationship to him. We are not a New-Testament Church, we are a Whole-Bible Church. Of course we need to read the whole Bible through the lens of where we are now in redemptive history, but we know that the entire Bible is relevant to our Christian lives.

And so, coming back to our first question: Where do we get direction on how we should

structure our worship? Our answer is the Bible. But not just part of the Bible – the whole Bible. The whole Bible gives us direction on how we should structure our worship.

And that leads us to our second question. If the whole Bible is relevant to our worship, then what clear instruction does God give to his people to order their liturgical calendar?

And what we see, as we look to God's instruction to Israel under Moses is that in addition to giving a weekly calendar of worship built around the Sabbath, God also gave Israel an annual liturgical calendar which he called them to observe.

The three annual feasts are described in Exodus 23 [verses 14-17], in Leviticus 23, and in Deuteronomy 16.

In the first month of their liturgical year, in the spring, they celebrated the feast of Passover. In the third month of their liturgical year – seven weeks after the Passover, they celebrated the Feast of Weeks, also known as Pentecost. And then, in the seventh month of their liturgical year they celebrated several annual feasts: The Feast of Trumpets on the first day of the month, the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the month, and then the Feast of Booths in the third week of the month. All faithful Israelites were invited to participate in these three major festivals: the Passover, the Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Booths. And all adult males were *required* to participate in them.

And we see three things with these feasts. The first is that in order to instruct and to shape his people, the Lord instituted both the weekly Sabbath liturgical calendar, and also the annual feast-based liturgical calendar.

Second, we see that the annual calendar walked the people of God through the major events of redemptive history. Passover celebrated Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Pentecost celebrated Israel's arrival at Sinai. And the Feast of Booths reminded Israel of God's provision for them as they wandered for forty years in the wilderness. [Leithart, 91]. And so, the annual liturgical calendar walked the people through the major acts of redemptive history up to that point.

Third, we should note that the liturgical calendar also corresponded to the natural seasons. Passover took place at the time of the spring planting. Pentecost was at the time of the first fruits, and the Feast of Booths came at the time of harvest. [Leithart, 91]

And so, when God gives Israel an annual liturgical calendar under Moses, we see that it is a calendar that works in cooperation with the weekly Sabbath, rather than against it, that is fitting to and so cooperates with the seasonal calendar that God has written into creation, and that it walks the people through the major acts of redemptive history over the course of the year.

This leads us then to our third question: How should God's people in later periods of redemptive history approach the liturgical commands given to Moses?

The answer we will find is that they are called to use wisdom to apply the principles behind commands of earlier eras to new situations in redemptive history.

We have already touched on that as we considered the regulative principle – a lot changed in the coming of Christ that was to transform the worship of God's people.

But I also want us to see that that is not an entirely new dynamic with the coming of Christ. As God matured his people over the course of redemptive history, they necessarily had to make adjustments to his commands. And the method by which those changes were to be made was not by the issuing of a revised version of Leviticus. It was instead in the exhortation to wisdom.

One very concrete example of how this happened can be seen in the transition from the tabernacle to the temple. In Numbers 5:17 a priestly rite is described which required the use of dirt taken from the dirt floor of the tabernacle. That's the command that is given under Moses. But when the temple is built under Solomon, the floor of the temple is no longer made of dirt. It is now wood overlaid with gold [1 Kings 6:30]. [Jordan, 234] So the question is: how is the rite to be carried out?

And we're not given an answer. One theologian writes: "God left us the Mosaic Law, but [He] has also shown us that it must be *applied* by transformation to new covenantal situations. Such an application must be made by *wisdom*, and thus wisdom literature comes into focus during the Davidic establishment. The books of Proverbs, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon were written either largely or exclusively by Solomon and David [...]. That fact strikes a blow against any simplistic and legalistic attempt to impose the Mosaic legislation in the New Covenant, but it also reminds us that the foundation of our social wisdom must be a careful consideration of the Mosaic Law." [Jordan, 226-227]

In other words, the change in the redemptive setting from tabernacle to temple, and the lack of a specific divine command offering direction, required God's people, even back in the days of Solomon, to use wisdom to transform and reapply the law given under Moses.

A similar thing occurs with the Levites at the building of the temple. One of their chief duties of transporting the tabernacle and its furniture has come to an end. And it's at this time that we see David give them a new musical task in the worship of God. [Jordan, 234] As God's people move into a different period of redemptive history, they are called on to use wisdom to transform and reapply the commands the Lord had given them in previous eras.

As the situation of God's people changes, they are not given a new revised version of Leviticus over and over again. Which means that we should not be surprised that the New Testament includes no new book of Leviticus for the New Testament church. That's not how God worked with his people in the past. He called them instead to use wisdom to reapply what he had told them in earlier eras.

That also means that we should expect more diversity and freedom in worship, when compared to the Mosaic era, even as God's people remain faithful to God's commandments for worship today. We might consider that two different priests in Solomon's temple might have used their wisdom to come up with two different solutions for the holy dirt needed for the rite of Numbers 5. One might have been superior to the other, but both might still have been acceptable wisdom-based applications of the principles of Numbers 5. We need to hold on to that thought, because we will come back to it.

But it leads us to our fourth question, which is: How do we see God's people ordering the annual liturgical calendar in the Bible after the era of Moses?

And what we see is that as with other elements, the people of God honor the liturgical calendar given to Moses, but they also use their wisdom to modify it. And they particularly modify it by adding to it. Because God was not done acting in redemptive history.

We see this happen in two instances in the Old Testament.

The first is the establishment of Purim in Esther chapter 9 [verses 20-32]. There we read of how Mordecai and Queen Esther, though no divine direction was given to them, respond to God's deliverance from Haman by instituting a feast and calling on all Jews to observe it. In doing that, they added to the annual liturgical festivals of the Jews.

Even so we may think that while we are not told of a divine decree, it is still recorded in Scripture and that may serve as a sort of direct divine authorization.

But that's not the case in the establishment of the Feast of Dedication – also known as Hanukkah. Hanukkah was established in the Intertestamental Period between the Old and the New Testaments, to commemorate God's deliverance of the Jews from the king of Syria as well as the recovery of Jerusalem. There is no Scriptural authorization for this addition to the annual liturgical calendar. Which is why it's striking that in John 10:22 we see Jesus in Jerusalem at the time of the festival – which certainly seems to imply that he considered it a valid feast in the liturgical calendar of the Jews.

In both of these cases we see that even before the coming of Christ, the people of God were called on to use their wisdom not only to receive the liturgical calendar given by God to Moses, but to transform it and reapply it according to the mighty and redemptive works of God that came after the time of Moses.

So we see how the liturgical calendar is given first to Israel through Moses. We see how God's people in later stages use wisdom to add to it. And we have said that in the new stage of redemptive history after Christ's resurrection God's people are especially to use wisdom in approaching such directions that were given in the Old Testament.

Which leads us to our fifth question: Is observing the liturgical Church calendar *required* now for Christians?

And the answer is no. But with that we need to make two important points.

First, there is no command to an annual calendar in the New Testament, and so how Christians and churches interpret and reapply the annual calendar under Moses is a matter of wisdom, not of direct revelation. And so we must resist any attempt to say that the traditional annual church calendar is commanded by God. It is not.

With the absence of a command the church is called to use its wisdom, but it is not permitted to elevate its wisdom to the level of the Word of God. *That* is what so many of the Reformers were rebelling against in the Roman Catholic Church, where the Church calendar was not just observed, but was required and had been elevated to the same level as Scripture. That is a huge mistake. Where no command is given, we cannot bind the conscience of others by elevating our assessment to the level of God's Word, and declaring that those who disagree are in sin. That error is something like what Paul is speaking against in Colossians 2:16.

But at the same time, the fact that there is no command does not mean that all approaches are equally good.

Remember again the example from Numbers 5. There is a rite that requires dirt from the ground of the tabernacle. After the building of the temple with its golden floor, that dirt no longer exists. Priests are then called on to use their wisdom to find a new solution in keeping with the principles of the original rite. And it's not hard to imagine that two priests might come up with two different solutions, that both might be acceptable, but that one still might be better than the other.

And those realities lead us to a framework not so different from that which the Apostle Paul applies to situations in Romans 14. In Romans 14 Paul addresses how on certain matters Christians will disagree. And their disagreement will largely stem from different ways they have applied biblical principles. One such example is over diet. Some Christians in the first century felt their faith called on them to abstain from certain foods. Others knew all food was acceptable to them in Christ. Paul says that the second one is right while the first is a weaker brother. But even so, Paul says that both are acceptable before God and both should welcome one another.

Then Paul goes on to point out that one person observes one day as better than another, while another esteems them all alike. "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind," he says, and neither should pass judgment on the other.

Three things are worth noting here.

One is that Paul states in these cases that one position is better than another. He explains why the one who accepts all food holds a better position than the one who abstains because he thinks it is unclean.

But he also says that both are acceptable before the Lord, and both can be done to the honor of the Lord.

And with that he adds that Christian brothers are not to judge one another on these matters.

Such matters involve the wise application of Biblical principles.

And when it comes to these kinds of issues, we tend to fall into one of two bad categories.

One is to treat such differences as matters of indifferent where each person's view is subjective, and no one's view is better than anyone else's. Many Christians do this in the area of worship – they present some very basic core requirements for Christian worship, and then treat everything else as a matter of mere preference. But that's not what Paul does here. He says that some positions are wiser than others. He pushes against our tendency to treat such differences as being purely subjective.

But then, on the other hand, we can have a tendency to declare that the details of how we do things in worship is faithful, while every other practice is unfaithful to the Lord. And Paul doesn't do that here either. He maintains that the one who carries out the inferior ceremonial practice, but is convinced in his mind, does what he does to the honor of the Lord, and we should welcome him rather than judge him.

And Paul's categories here should be a great help and a rebuke to us in matters of liturgy and worship.

Because many aspects of worship are like this. Here at Faith we believe that the traditional hymns of the church with thoughtful words, rich music, and beautiful accompaniment on the piano and organ are good, wise, and valuable ways to worship the Lord. And we should think that.

Some other churches refuse musical accompaniment to their singing, and sing only metered psalms. Other churches sing modern and repetitious praise songs.

There are two temptations. One is to wave off our differences as mere preference. The other is to stand in judgment over those other churches.

Paul calls us to neither response in such matters. Instead he calls us to study the issues hard, to think them through well, to search the scriptures, to ask God for wisdom and to talk about these issues with others – even those we disagree with. And then, convinced in our own minds to go forward as we believe the Lord has called us.

Paul applies this approach to the ceremonial issues of Romans 14, and it's noteworthy because he doesn't treat them the same way as moral issues. He doesn't say "One man commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, another abstains, let each be convinced in his own mind." He doesn't say anything like that! But when it comes to issues where God has not given a direct command, but has called on his people to use wisdom to apply the principles he has given us, Paul allows that Christians can come to different conclusions, that some conclusions can be better than others, but that still, both sets of actions can bring honor to the Lord.

And so with the church calendar. There is no command in the New Testament. That does not mean there is not Biblical direction, but it means that the issue must be resolved by applying wisdom to the revelation we do have. I am convinced in my mind that observing the church calendar is a better application of the Biblical principles we are given than rejecting the church calendar is. But I'm also convinced that each group of Christians can honor the Lord so long as they are doing what they are convinced is best in this area, and that our calling is to welcome such brothers and sisters, not to judge them.

Which brings us to our sixth question: What then is the wisdom behind the traditional church calendar? What does it aim to do?

And the answer is that it aims, every year, to walk us through the life of Christ, and the themes that has for our Christian lives.

In Advent we consider first the coming of Christ in his incarnation. In Christmas we remember his birth to the Virgin Mary. In Epiphany we remember his revelation to the nations and to his followers, in the coming of the Magi, his baptism in the Jordan, and his first miraculous sign at Cana.

In Lent we focus on his suffering for us – his temptation, his earthly ministry, and ultimately in his death on the cross. In Easter we remember his resurrection and his victory over sin, death, and the devil. At Ascension we remember his ascending to heaven to sit on the throne at the right hand of the Father. On Pentecost we remember his pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Church.

And then at Advent again we consider his final coming to judge all people and make all things new.

The wisdom of the traditional church calendar is that it sets the themes for our worship over the year in accordance with the major works of redemption that Christ has accomplished for us his people. Just as Israel had its annual liturgical calendar set around the major works of redemption that God performed for them in the Exodus, so the traditional Christian calendar focuses on the major works of redemption that Christ accomplished for us, and walks through them every year.

Which brings us to our seventh question: Where did the wisdom behind the traditional church calendar come from?

And the answer is many people over many centuries.

Though there were debates about the best day to celebrate it, the observance of Easter began in the second century, or possibly even the first, and it was observed throughout the Church. Pentecost similarly emerged from a number of regions, a little bit later – at the end of the second century. We should note that the early and the broad adoption of these celebrations in the early church lends itself to the idea that from the beginning Christians saw wisdom in transforming the annual calendar.

But then, the celebrations around these two festivals grew and developed over time. The establishment of Good Friday and Holy Saturday emerged from churches in regions of Egypt and Syria in the third century. That developed further into the celebration of Holy Week which took its final form in the fourth century, and was likely the result of a fusion of traditions in the church in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the addition of the feast of Ascension ten days before Pentecost seems to have begun towards the end of the fourth century in the churches of Antioch, Nyssa, and northern Italy, and then became more universal in the fifth century.

Lent as a forty-day season of fasting before Easter emerges suddenly in the early fourth century, and was likely the result of fusing two different practices – one from Alexandria and the other from North Africa and Rome. And even after it was established there was for a time a significant amount of regional diversity surrounding Lent.

Christmas and Epiphany grew out of two different celebrations of Christ's birth in the fourth century, celebrated in two different regions. The season of Advent as we know it was not really established until the late sixth century. [Bradshaw, 179-190; Bradshaw and Johnson, 158]

Now ... for those of us who are more systematic thinkers, and who like precision ... this can be frustrating. I for one, am the kind of person who would naturally prefer it if some liturgical scholars in the early church had just sat down and worked out a perfect church calendar and then implemented it exactly across the board.

But as I've thought about it, I've come to appreciate why the way the church calendar has developed is not a liability but an asset.

For one thing, it's not the work of just a few people, but the result of input from many Christians, in a range of cultures, across many regions, and over many centuries. Time was given for good

practices to develop. Time was given for unwise practices to die out. Proverbs says that in an abundance of counselors there is safety, and with many advisers there is success. [Prov. 11:14; 15:22] And the traditional church calendar has grown out of an abundance of counselors.

Second, the traditional calendar is not perfect. It cannot claim some sort of unearthly perfection. It has been worked out over time, applying wisdom to Scripture and changing situations. And so the traditional calendar can still benefit from improvement. It is not a finished project, but an ongoing work of the Church.

Third, the traditional church calendar allows for both unity and for local diversity. From early on the Church desired some unity from congregation to congregation and region to region, in order to express the unity of the church around the world. But at the same time, local and even congregational diversity has always been an element. The traditional calendar, rightly understood, links our congregation with others around the world, while also allowing us to develop our own unique practices from the wisdom and insight given to us.

In these ways the development of the traditional church calendar comes from the wisdom of Christians who have gone before us, over the centuries, and it calls on our ongoing wisdom and judgments today.

Which brings us to our eighth and final question: What are some of the benefits of the traditional church calendar for us? What are the benefits we see?

One of the central benefits is that it walks us all through the major acts of redemptive history, and the major processes of the Christian life, every year, again and again, regardless of what else is going on in the life of the church.

And so every year in our worship, through Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, and back again to Advent – every year we walk through the central works Christ has accomplished in the history of redemption.

But every year in our worship we also walk through the central works of Christ in the *application* of redemption to every one of us. In Advent and Christmas we are reminded that Christ must be born in and dwell in each one of us. In Epiphany we are reminded that we must recognize Christ for who he is in our midst. In Lent we are reminded of how we must die to ourselves and die to the sin that still dwells within us. In Easter we are reminded how we must bring to life holiness and virtue in our hearts. At Ascension we are reminded how Christ must reign in our hearts as he does over his kingdom. At Pentecost we are reminded of the Spirit we have received and the mission he has given us. And at Advent once more we consider the day Christ will return and raise us up for everlasting life.

And what is key is that in our worship we walk through those themes of the accomplishment and the application of redemption, every year, no matter what else is going on. Every year we will cover those central truths. Sometimes I will stop and preach on those themes as we go. But whether I do or not, we will cover them. Which means, among other things, that we are also free to continue through large books of the Bible over the course of the year, because we know that even as we do, we will walk through the major themes of Christian history and the Christian life every year through the thematic organization of the Church calendar. If I spend a year in the Gospel of John and only get from the baptism of Jesus to his healing of the man born blind, that's okay, because we all have walked through the whole work of Christ in the church calendar.

If I spend a year in a book that focuses deeply on a few aspects of the Christian life, that is okay, because we will have walked through all the major aspects of the Christian life through the church calendar.

The church calendar holds before us all the major themes of the gospel, every year.

That's true of us as a church and it's also true of us as individuals. And I think many of us need that on an individual level too.

Some of us are positive thinkers. And if that's you, then you need the forty days of Lent to remind you of Christ's suffering and the ways you need to die to yourself.

And some of us are more negative thinkers. And if that is you, then you need the fifty days of Easter to remind you of the victory and joy of the Christian life.

There are many benefits of the Christian calendar. But the central one is that every year, if we are paying attention, it will help us to better see all the major aspects of the gospel.

And that is really what is at the heart of all of this. This is not about one church being right and another being wrong. It's not about one practice being divinely revealed and another being rebellious. This is about the desire that all Christians should share, that we be a people who are shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ. And for centuries Christians have found that one of the best ways to do this is like Israel, to walk together through the saving works of God, again and again and again. And so we walk through the pattern of the gospel every week in our Lord's Day worship. And we walk through the pattern of the gospel every year in the Church calendar.

We can discuss the details of that. We can debate the pros and cons of specific practices.

But the heart of it all is our desire and our calling to be a people shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

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Bradshaw Paul F. and Maxwell E. Johnson. *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011.

Farley, Michael A. "What is 'Biblical' Worship?: Biblical Hermeneutics and Evangelical Theologies of Worship." *JETS* 51/3. September 2008, 591-613. You can access this paper (which I highly recommend) here: <https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/51/51-3/JETS%2051-3%20591-613%20Farley.pdf>

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