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Christian Tradition/Dr. Lodahl

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Church Visitation #1 (Group2-Lutheran)

On Sunday, February 7, I visited St. Timothy Lutheran Church; this was my first time ever attending a Lutheran church and I learned a lot about the Lutheran denomination in terms of their Christology and the way they view God. I know that Martin Luther, who the denomination is named after, was the leader of the Protestant Reformation in which Protestantism broke from the Catholic church. Aside from this fact, I knew hardly anything else about the specifics of Lutheran Christianity.

The architecture of St. Timothy is distinct; the main sanctuary has high ceilings that meet together in a point at the center. It seems as though this architecture was meant to remind the church members of why they were there and to whom they were singing and praying. There are ceremonial objects placed up near where the pastor preaches. The pastor wears a white robe and there are altar-boys who help the pastor in the children’s service and during communion. There are stained glass windows on the side walls of the building and the interior design of the church itself is very simple. The stained glass windows are beautiful reminders of the life and ministry of Jesus. Every physical and aesthetic thing in and about the church seemed to exist for a specific reason and nothing was present just for the sake of being present.

The congregation of St. Timothy was fairly diverse and had a variety of ages and ethnicities; however, I did notice that the majority of the people in the congregation were elderly. I feel that this may be attributed to the fact that the Lutheran church is more conservative than other Christian denominations. The congregation seemed very tight knit and I could tell that everyone knew each other, for the most part. During the “Greeting” part of the service, members of the congregation could easily recognize that I was not a regular attendee and they were very friendly in introducing themselves and making me feel welcome. This congregation exemplified what it means to be the family of God; everyone seemed to be well-loved and cared for.

The service as a whole was very structured; there were specified liturgies that the congregation would read and pray as a whole. The prayers that were spoken in unison by the congregation placed an emphasis on our unworthiness of God’s love and mercy. They also expressed deep thanks and a need for intimacy with God; they acknowledged that our constant goal is to praise the Father through our every word, deed, and thought. The liturgies placed an emphasis on how we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ; they also spoke of how Jesus came to earth as a human and sacrificed Himself for us. In fact, one of the scripture readings was called “Gospel Lesson” and came from the book of Luke. The Gospel holds a prominent place in the worship service. The sermon that was preached was about communion and the role that it has played, currently plays, and will continue to play in the church. Through communion, we are able to more intimately experience Jesus as we take the elements, which are symbols of His shed blood and broken body.

One thing that I found to be very interesting and unique about the Lutheran church was that they performed their children’s service up in front of the whole congregation. I thought that this was nice because it made the children seem more important to the church body and it gave them a voice. It also drew from my mind images of Jesus calling the little children around Him and proclaiming that one must be like a child in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Their childlike faith was refreshing and it reminded me of how important every Christian is to the body of Christ.

After the main sermon, there was a time of offering and then communion; the communion experience was unlike any other that I have ever had. We went up and knelt on an altar as we were given the elements and then sent out to go and do likewise as Christ would do. This type of communion seemed more personal than the way that I take communion at my home church (which is nondenominational). Because we went up and knelt on the altar, I felt that it was a more outward expression of what we were doing inwardly. It was almost as if we were physically going to the table with Jesus and joining Him in His last supper meal. A lot of the things that we did at the Lutheran church were outwardly expressions; for instance, we stood for the reading of Scripture and the Offering Response.

The worship songs that we sang were very familiar to me and I recognized them as being contemporary songs. I thought that, because the Lutheran church is the most basic form of Protestantism, we might only sing hymns or specified songs, as the Catholic church does.

Overall, my experience at St. Timothy Lutheran Church was spectacular; I learned so much about the Lutheran denomination and I loved being able to worship in ways different to those that I engage in most often. The picture of Christ that I received most readily from my time at St. Timothy was Jesus as a loving and caring figure who values people and their sense of belonging. Because of the way that we took communion and because the children’s service was in front of the entire congregation, I felt the importance of community and working together as the body of Christ. Being able to see this side of worship and praise that I normally don’t experience was eye-opening and renewing for me; I am so glad that I was able to attend St. Timothy and I look forward to the next church visitation that I get to do for Christian Tradition.