

Worship 101: The Kyrie

This month's installment of Worship 101 will take a look at what is known as the "Kyrie." The word Kyrie means "Lord" and comes from the Greek language. Sometimes it's called the Kyrie, eleison or "Lord, have mercy." We see the Kyrie make its way into the church's worship in roughly the 4th century (the three hundreds A.D.). Originally it was rather short, just three lines: "Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy." Notice the allusion to the Trinity, with the three lines beginning with Lord, Christ and then again Lord. Later on the church expanded the Kyrie to what we use today on pages 152-153 in the Lutheran Service Book.

The Kyrie is based on a number of passages in the New Testament where people in need come to Jesus seeking help or "mercy." Examples would be the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:22) and the Ten Lepers (Luke 17:13.) From the book, Lutheran Worship: History and Practice (pg. 409) we learn the following about the Kyrie: The biblical and liturgical contexts do not support the thesis that this is a prayer of confession of sins. It is instead a cry for mercy that our Lord and King hear us and help us in our necessities and troubles.

Therefore, in the Kyrie we are not again confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness. We've already done that in the confession and absolution. Instead the Kyrie is a prayer reminding us of God's infinite kindness to us, the world, and the church of God.

In the Kyrie we use the word peace. This peace is not to be thought of as "world peace" in the sense of people getting along with each other. Instead, this peace is a "salvation peace" as in our "being at peace with God." It's the kind of peace that Jesus spoke to His disciples on the first Easter evening where he says to them: "Peace be with you!"

Thus, we pray saying: "In peace, let us pray to the Lord." Here we acknowledge that we come before God in a state of peace because of the finished work of Christ on our behalf. The response is, "Lord, have mercy, that is, Lord, help us." We continue this thought asking, "For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord." In the third petition we pray that God would help those who aren't Christians come to know about this peace with Him: "For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord." We go on praying for God to be with and help those who gather here for worship each week: "For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord." The final petition is: "Help, save, comfort and defend us, gracious Lord."

Once again we see that the Kyrie, eleison is a part of our Divine service that Christians have been using for many centuries connecting us to what believers have done in the past. As they prayed, Lord, have mercy, Lord, please help us, so do we pray, "Lord, have mercy."

In Christ,
Pastor Bloom