

The Episcopal Church is accurately described as “liturgical,” in that our worship is based on fixed forms that are authorized and published in our prayer book. The word *liturgy* means “the work of the people” or “the public work,” which reminds us that worship is not an activity we observe passively, but something that requires the active and conscious participation of the entire assembly. We call it the Book of *Common Prayer* because it contains corporate forms for prayer, things we pray together in common.

Our liturgy is inherently Biblical. Throughout our worship, quotations and readings from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are used. Words and phrases taken from the Bible appear here and there, reminding us of this cornerstone of our faith.

The liturgy also connects us to Christians throughout the ages. The psalms, creeds, and canticles would be familiar to the early church (if they spoke English). We imagine that what we do today would still be somehow recognizable to a Christian from first-century Palestine. You may have experienced worship in another country and language—the basic form and action still have meaning, even across these barriers.

Liturgy is also incarnational. It engages our mind, body, and soul. This is part of why we make gestures and assume particular postures—to remind us that God made all of creation, and the material world is very good indeed. In this, Anglicans tend to start their theological discourses from a viewpoint of the original goodness of creation, rather than the original sin of Adam.

God does not insist that we become perfect—or even more spiritual—for communion. Instead, God touches us and speaks to us in our earthly essence. We are called to be open to God’s message, which we can—and often do—see in the beauty of creation, in the rhythm of worship, in bread and wine, in art and architecture, in sound and song, or in the gesture and embrace of another person.

We come to church, week in and week out, not because every week provides a transformation. Sometimes we can be quite bored with the whole routine, sometimes we are inattentive, occasionally we are angry or grief-stricken, frequently we are distracted. Yet, sometimes—and often when we least expect it—we are touched by the hand of God and changed for good in ways we could not even imagine. For this to happen, we have to be present—because we cannot be transformed by the liturgy if we do not experience the liturgy.