



The colors on the altar have been different almost every week.

White, then red, then white then green. Why?

That's a great question. There actually is a "rhyme and a reason" to our color scheme. We talked in a recent Sunday morning Bible study about how traditions have meaning and purpose, but unless people know the meaning and purpose, those traditions just become meaningless rituals. "That's the way it's supposed to be," or "Because we've always done it that way," are not good answers.

The colors of the paraments on the altar and of the stole that I wear are the traditional colors for the various seasons and celebration days of the Church Year. It's kind of like how we use different colors in our homes at different times in the calendar year. For example, we traditionally use green and red around Christmas, brown and orange at Thanksgiving, red, white and blue next weekend for Independence Day.

There is one major difference, however. The colors in the sanctuary are not merely there for decoration or to 'add color for the sake of adding color'. The liturgical colors are there to remind us of our God - some attribute or action of His. Here's a brief explanation of how those colors direct our focus to God....

White - is the color of purity and holiness, celebration and joy. Thus, it is the appropriate color for the special days that celebrate Jesus and His work - Christmas, Epiphany (arrival of the wise men), Easter, Transfiguration and Ascension. The white color also carries through the whole seasons of Christmas (12 days) and Easter (50 days). White is used on Thanksgiving Day as a reminder that we have not gathered to thank "our lucky stars," but to focus on God as the "giver of all good gifts."

Purple - has since ancient times been the color of royalty. It is the color you will see on the altar during the Advent season, those four weeks in December where we prepare to celebrate Jesus - the King of kings - coming to live among us. Purple is also the color of the 40-day season of Lent which leads us up to Good Friday and Easter. The 'royalty color' serves to remind us that the One who died for us is no less than the King of all creation.

Red - is the color of fire. It highlights the power of the Holy Spirit who came upon the first disciples the form of tongues of fire (see Acts chapter 2). Thus, red is the color you will see on Pentecost Day, Confirmation Sunday (it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the confirmands have come to profess their faith in the Triune God) and Reformation Sunday (again, it was through the power of the Holy Spirit that Martin Luther and the other church reformers brought the church back to the truth that we are saved not by works or payments, but by God's grace through faith in Jesus and what He did for us on the cross).

Green - is the color of life and things that grow. It helps us remember that God is the source of both our life on earth and our eternal life. It also serves to remind us that His goal for us throughout life is to grow - in our understanding of Him and our faith in Him. You will notice green on the altar the majority of the time. Green is the color for the Epiphany Season (the one after Christmas) whose emphasis is on sowing the seeds of the Gospel in the lives of the people around us. Green is also the color of the Pentecost

season (which lasts roughly half a year from Pentecost Day to Advent in early December). It is during this season that we highlight the words and works of Jesus during His ministry on earth and seek to grow in our understanding of and trust in Him.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net