

# **“Joy and the Christmas Burglar”: A sermon for Christmas Eve**

First, a note to thank all those who wrote in with feedback on Steve Kuhl’s “Simple Version” synopsis of the distinction between Law and Gospel. I’ve passed all of your feedback along to Steve.

Second, an apology for not getting Steve’s “Fuller Version” out to you last week. It will come next week. Until then, please do keep sending in feedback on the “Simple Version” if you have any thoughts to share.

Finally, for this week, we bring you the sermon I had the pleasure of hearing this Christmas Eve at Messiah Lutheran Church in Fairview Park, Ohio, by my fellow Thursday Theology editor, Jerry Burce.

Peace and Joy,  
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

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“Joy and the Christmas Burglar” Sermon for Christmas Eve, 2014  
At Messiah Lutheran Church, Fairview Park, Ohio  
Text: Luke 2:1-20

+ In Nomine Jesu +

On this night of nights, grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And in this night I pray that God will bless you, each and every one, with a taste of joy, the gift that every parent in this place so wants their children to know, especially at Christmas.

And by joy, I do mean joy, which is something other than delight, I think—something deeper, something richer, not nearly so noisy, and it lasts a lot longer.

Delight is tearing through the paper on that box beneath the tree and finding out that Santa brought you the very thing you asked for. Delight is learning in that first glorious minute of Christmas dinner that mom still has her touch-boy, oh, boy, does she ever—yes, and dad stills knows his wine.

As for joy, that's another kind of feeling. If and when it pokes its nose up in days like these, we'll notice it mainly as a warm and happy glow that wells up from somewhere deep inside, and behind it—pushing it up, so to speak—is an understanding that everything is fundamentally good and right and well for you and the people you treasure, and this is so even if the turkey is a wee bit on the dry side for once, or the wine too sweet, or if the gift that lurks behind the paper is the kind the hapless husband seems always to buy—clueless, he is, and I say that from deep experience in the art of being clueless [when it comes to buying gifts, especially for a woman. I can tell you all those little signs that let him know right off the bat how once again he's missed the mark. Still, she says—so gracious she is—still, it's the thought that counts, you know, and in any case, all is well and all is good with all of us tonight, and tomorrow is so full of promise; and because she says it with a warm and honest smile, he says it too, and yes, there is joy in that house that night, a strong joy that wraps itself around the children's hearts, and they start glowing too, and they know that they are safe. What more can any parent want for any child of theirs come Christmas?

What more can God want this Christmas for his sons, his daughters—for each of you?

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There is not a lot of joy in that story I read you just now—you may have noticed. It's an old story, of course, so very familiar to many of us, though really, what makes it most familiar is not that we've heard it so many times before, but rather that it's filled with people so very much like us and the ones we read and hear about today.

So off in distant Rome there sits an emperor who wants a census taken so he can take a better stab at guessing how much tax revenue he can count on for the next few years. He has roads to build, you see, and armies to feed—and sure, cronies to satisfy. Now getting the revenue right has always been a tough and grinding business. It still is. Just ask your congressman—your mayor, for that matter. There are lots of perks to holding power, I imagine, but the daily taste of joy isn't one of them. There's not a lot of that in Washington these days. Again, you may have noticed.

Anyway, Caesar pushes his button and the human tide starts flowing. There are people here tonight who travel every workday morning in the great tide of cars that flows most heavily on local freeways from west to east, the sun glaring through the windscreen the whole long way. All it takes is one car bumping another, and the flow becomes a crawl. At that point you start to taste what Joseph and Mary were tasting as they trudged the seventy miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, jostled from start to finish by surly crowds, and she so great with child, so eager she is to be off the road and done with this wretched trip. What word would you use, I wonder, to describe taste in Mary's mouth? I'll guarantee it isn't joy.

Nor is “joy” a word that any thoughtful person would apply to the nighttime mood in Bethlehem, that little town where the sleep is nowhere near as deep and dreamless as the song wants us to think. How could it be? Has there ever been a night in

Fairview Park that wasn't troubled by someone's grief, or broken by another person's wrath and fury? So count on it: somewhere in Bethlehem, that long ago night, a teenage girl is weeping angry tears of frustration with her father who doesn't like her boyfriend. Somewhere a wife is wondering why her husband isn't home yet. Somewhere a father stands helpless in a corner; his child is hot with pneumonia and gasping for breath, and the sound it makes is tearing him apart. Two streets away a burglar skulks in the shadows of his next target. He's desperate for some cash. No, he won't bother looking for it in the stable yonder. Sure, a light flickers there, but people reduced to spending the night in a place like that will have nothing a burglar wants. So he thinks, at any rate.

Suddenly the cry of a woman in labor pierces the night. Soon after that he hears the tiny wail of a newborn baby.

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Now all of you know that our ancient brother, the burglar, has just caught the sound of God's best gift ever. He's clueless, of course. So is everyone else in Bethlehem that night—the frantic father, the worried wife, the angry daughter. Let's not forget the neighbors all around who in fact are sleeping through the night with dreams untroubled. Their turn for grief and woe is on its way—it's just not yet. Still, it's bound to come, we all know that. I admit, I had a birthday yesterday, and it's not as if I'm getting younger; and in the presents I got I didn't find a guarantee that mine would never, ever be the car that makes a mess of your morning commute, or mine the broken body that the ambulance is hauling away. None of you will find that kind of guarantee in your Christmas stocking tomorrow morning. God doesn't pass them out, you see; he never has, he never will, not to people like us, he doesn't, people who can't get through a single day without burgling something from somebody—that's just what sinners do. We filch, we sneak, we steal, and the worst of

it is that most all of us are absolutely startled when God points this out to us, and after that we get our backs up—all huffy and offended we are, not willing to listen, not willing to fess up, not willing for a moment to face reality.

But here is what's real—dare I tell you? Not a day goes by when I don't steal God's glory by putting myself at the center of my universe. I cannot help doing that, and you can't help it either.

Not a day goes by without me sneaking a heap of coins from the stash of love that God means to pass along to other people through me. I'd so much rather keep them for myself—those other people are such a bother, and some of them are so annoying. This too I can't help but feel as I jostle through the crowds that share the path I'm on, and yes, you feel it too.

So no, of course God doesn't pass out guarantees of trouble-free existence to the burgling likes of us—and anyone who says otherwise is a liar and a fraud. Why would God do that? How could God do that, and still be righteous?

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Yet even so God loves us. Imagine that! So in the night—our night—the baby wails. It's your turn now to hear that wail, and to ponder it, as Mary did.

Such an odd gift this is—a hapless husband kind of gift, or so it seems on the surface, and that for sure is how countless people through the centuries have responded to it. “*What child is this?*” they say. “*What use is he?*”

Well for that, let's ask the shepherds, that other cast of characters in tonight's great story. In the fields, they were, working the night shift. I've never worked a night shift in my life, though some of you have; a few of you do. I know that

daytime people like me take the night shift crowd for granted. That too is a piece of our daily theft. We never think to pass along the thanks and appreciation so richly due to the people who patrol our streets, or stock our stores, or clean the toilets in the office buildings we crawl to in the morning through all that traffic. Back in Bethlehem it's been years since anybody thought to thank a shepherd for anything at all, though I don't suppose the shepherds expect this. Truth be told, they're a lot closer to honesty about themselves than daytime people tend to be. You can tell by their reaction when all of a sudden the light goes on, that fierce and terrible light of the glory of God—not a speck of sin or dirt is hidden from its glare. "The jig is up," the shepherds say. "We're going to die."

"Fear not," the angel answers. "Don't be afraid." For to you is born this day a Savior who will do the dying for you. He'll also do it with you, when your time comes, though that time isn't yet. For now you'll find him wrapped in swaddling clothes, a hint of the shroud they'll wrap him in later. You'll also find him in a manger, this too a hint of the cross they'll one day hang him on.

And now a detail the angel doesn't mention, though you know it well. When they string that Savior up they'll surround him with—who? A pair of burglars—thieves, as we usually say. One of these will have the sense to look him in the eye, and call him Lord.

As for the night-shift shepherds, what they discover when they scurry off to Bethlehem is that they matter. And the one who loves them most of all is God.

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God wants nothing more this Christmas night than for each of you to make like those shepherds, and to scurry to the manger where your Savior lies. All wrapped in bread and wine he is, for us to

eat and drink.

When you come near, be sure you also do as the one thief did. Use the eyes of your heart to look this Jesus in the eye.

Some things to think about as you do that tonight.

This baby born in Bethlehem grew up to be the biggest burglar of them all. Imagine that! He stole all kinds of things that people strangely cherish, though he did it in a strange, astonishing way—without once failing to give God the credit God deserves, or holding back on the love God wanted him to pass along to other people. The Righteous Burglar—that's who Jesus was.

So there came a day when people openly accused him of stealing God's thunder by forgiving sins. "Give God the glory," Jesus answered. "He sent me to do that."

And in forgiving those sins—in going on to pay the price for having done it—here are some other things that Jesus stole.

He stole the devil's right to force God to hold your sins against you.

He stole away your right to look yourself in the mirror and to say to your reflection, I am bad, I count for nothing, I have no worth. You younger ones in particular, will you please remember that?

You older ones, will you remember how this baby born in Bethlehem grew up to rob things like accident and cancer, tornado and flood, of their ability to vaunt themselves as proof that God doesn't like you. Who honestly can say in these days of Christ our Savior that God doesn't love you?

Will all of us please remember how this baby grew up to steal our right to live and act as sinners, as if that's all we are,

sinners only, and nothing more. While we're at it, let's remember too how Jesus robbed us of the silly clothes we often strut around in, those deeds and reputations we like to wear as proof that we're somehow better than the people around us.

"Here am I," says Jesus. "Wear me instead." After that he invites us to look around and notice once again how those low-life shepherds were wearing him first. So are countless others in the night-shift crowd that we daytime people ignore, and too often take for granted.

Taking people for granted—any person, anywhere—is the one thing God, at least, will never do. Why else was Jesus born?

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One last thought.

A few days ago I got a note from one of you who'd been reading ahead and thinking about this Christmas story. Here's what he said—

*What stuck out for me this time through is where the shepherds returned home glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. No doubt absent in what they heard and saw was a treasure chest of money, a promise of life-long health, or even the notion of a crummy promotion to day-shift shepherd. None of it. Just a baby. Just Jesus. And that was enough to spark sincere joy. Here is the practical, tangible good that God provides me now, this very instant.*

When you get home tonight, look at the people around your Christmas tree—your nearest and dearest, they are. Remember what you heard here, how the Son of God was born for them; how after that he died for them. He owns them now. God raised him from the dead to do that owning. These days Jesus is Lord, and Caesar is not. Nor is sin, nor is death, nor is the devil himself.

So dear these people are to you, of course they are, but each of them is dearer still to God Almighty, and you are too. And yes, because of that all is well and all is good with all of you tonight, and as for your tomorrow, it's so very full of promise. Come what may, it always will be, and that is true even in days to come when you're the angry teen, the worried wife, the frantic father, or even when you're back to skulking in the shadows as burglars do.

Even then Christ will be there to steal away your fear, your sorrow, your sin. He'll replace them with peace and hope. That's the very thing he was born to do. There is nothing, but nothing, that is big or bad or strong enough to cut you off from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord. So it is with your dear ones too.

God grant you all the taste of joy tonight. Merry Christmas!

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

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## A Stab at Describing the Law/Gospel Distinction

Colleagues,

First came America's Thanksgiving—a Thursday holiday, for those of you in other lands—and then a week more filled than usual with demands of the regular calling. So again you saw a gap in posts. Your editors, grappling with the fullness of life on the one hand and their limitations on the other, have been mulling on the notion of moving from a weekly to a monthly schedule, no longer Thursday Theology, but Third Thursday Theology. That may

well be in the offing, especially as one of us prepares for her first child, due early in 2015. For now, we'll stumble on as best we can, with weekly posting as our aim. I'm pleased to suspect that we'll be able to keep that going through most of January, though if all you get two weeks from now, on Christmas Day, is the undersigned's sermon from the night before, don't be surprised.

This week and next we're sending you a piece that Steven C. Kuhl has been working on for a few months. It's meant eventually for the Crossings website, as a description of the principle that governs the work that appears there. Most of you know it well, the distinction between Law and Gospel, or to get fussy about it, the *proper* distinction between those two, the universe of theological discourse being rife with distinctions that are downright improper. One takes it for granted that many who visit a site like Crossings will have been steeped in impropriety, and charity suggests that one be proactive in addressing their disappointment when they fail to find the clues they seek for pleasing God by obeying Moses. So much the better if we can help them grasp why they're getting their noses rubbed in Christ.

In any case, that's the challenge Steve is taking on, with a 2015 audience in mind. I mention the latter, because audiences change. If the minds of people today still ran smoothly in channels familiar to Americans of the nineteenth-century Midwest, we could simply slap [C. F. W. Walther's estimable theses](#) on the website and let it go at that. (For what it's worth, I have yet to see anybody address the rampant misery of faith-as-work—"Do you *really* believe?"—with the pithy clarity that Walther achieved in Thesis XIV.) But that was then, this is now. Confusion about the Word of God and how to hear it keeps bubbling up with fresh angles, twists, and improprieties, and, in that bubbling, keeps inviting fresh accounts of how to hear

the Word well, in a manner that results in the objectives God has for it.

Steve's fresh account comes to you in two parts. The first is a synopsis of sorts, or as Steve calls it in the provisional draft he shared with us, the "Simple Version." Next week we'll send you the "Fuller Version." In both cases, and with Steve's consent, we invite comment and reaction, and not only from those of you who wallow in theological literature and argument as pigs do in mud, but even more from those of you who do not, and wouldn't know Barth from Boethius. ("C'mon, we're *lay* people!" Answer: indeed you are, and you're also among the colleagues in this grand adventure of delivering Christ and his benefits to people who need them.)

So for all of you, the question—a key question, because the matter at stake is *the* key matter, the one that drives whole the Crossings project: is Steve clear? Do you follow what he's saying? And after that a second question: did you catch yourself itching to argue with him at any point, or even wanting merely to put up your hand and grab his attention, and if so, where, and why? Do give thought to that, please, and then get back to us. Your responses will be gladly received and much appreciated as the work of polishing goes on.

Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

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## **What is Meant by "The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel"?**

*Simple version:*

The "proper distinction between Law and Gospel" refers to a

theological rule of thumb or interpretive insight for understanding the workings of God in the world. It asserts that God operates in two distinct ways: Law and Gospel. The Law refers to that activity through which God both places demands upon us (summarized by Jesus in the two love commandments: love of God and love of neighbor) and evaluates us in accordance with those demands. Those who fall short of God's demands are described as "sinners" and inevitably reap the due consequences of that judgment. The Gospel, by contrast, refers to that activity through which God graciously promises to reconcile sinners to himself by joining them, through faith, to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Trusting this promise of God in Christ, sinners are adopted as children of God, regarded as holy and precious in God's sight for Christ's sake, and made new creatures by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The proper distinction between Law and Gospel is the insight that informs both a faithful interpretation of Scripture and an honest understanding of the Christian life. It has its roots in Jesus' own teaching as expressed in the New Testament Gospels and is the organizing insight of the Epistles as they seek to ground and clarify the Christian Message for the early church and its heirs. Throughout history this rule of thumb has emerged to guide the Church when it found itself adrift on choppy theological seas: whether it be Irenaeus against the Gnostics, Athanasius against the Arians, Augustine against the Pelagianists, Luther against the Neo-Pelagianists, Walther against the New Measures, Elert against the Barthians or Bonhoeffer against the pseudo-Lutherans. The Crossings Matrix is offered as a methodological tool to help Christians practice the art of properly distinguishing Law and Gospel as they wrestle with Scripture and think about their own vocation as Christians in the world.

Drafted by Steven C. Kuhl

Executive Director  
The Crossings Community

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# **“Sheep? Goat? Try ‘Member of the Family.’” The Real Surprise of Matthew 25.**

Colleagues,

Two weeks ago, when we sent you a sermon by Luther on the Parable of the Virgins, I proposed to follow that up with an account of Matthew 25 that reads its three great stories as promise, not threat. My aim was to get this to you in enough time to be of possible use for this Sunday, November 23, when the last and greatest of the stories is scheduled for hearing in the churches that most of us attend. I've missed that mark, I fear. The account is done, but it gets to you late. Ah, well. I'll take a smidgeon of comfort in knowing that it will lurk on the Crossings website until the next Year of Matthew rolls around. That will be in 2018. Reading now might plant a reminder for then that Matthew 25 is packed through and through with some seriously good news for us to hear, and celebrate, and pass along.

Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

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With time a-wasting I'm going to condense an imagined longer,

better-written piece into a page or two of loosely linked thoughts, thrown together as preparation for the hearing that all of us will be doing this Sunday if we show up in a church that follows the Revised Common Lectionary. The dominant text will be the third and final image in Matthew 25, of the Son of Man come in judgment to separate the sheep from the goats.

Some observations:

1. As with any Sunday morning text, the temptation will be strong to read [Matt. 25:31-46](#) as a stand-alone passage, without reference to its context, whether immediate or document-wide. Resist that temptation. If it helps, yell, "Get behind me, Satan."
2. After all, the stand-alone reading is the devil's kind of reading. It yields results that are bound to fail the double-dipstick test of genuine Gospel. It doesn't comfort consciences, but burdens them. It doesn't glorify Christ. Instead we're left to cringe and bristle at the thought of Christ.
3. Thus the comment of one in the little knot of thirty-something men who read this through with me last night. "I'm on the spot," he says. "I've got to produce, but I don't know how high the bar is set. How many sick beds must I visit, how many bellies do I fill, to wind up counted with the sheep?"
4. Or as another said, "It pretty much negates everything we've been talking about these past few months [in our tour through Galatians]. According to this [i.e. Matt. 25, stand-alone reading], Christ himself is telling us that it's all about our works. Faith is beside the point."
5. "Yes!" says Satan.
6. "No!" says the person who, paying attention to the wider framework the passage is nestled in, begins with the observation that Matthew's Gospel abounds in absurdly good

news. "Blessed are the poor in spirit / the mourners / the meek" (5:3-5). And that's just for starters.

7. Go now to the heart of the Gospel, at its structural center, in the third of five clearly demarcated "discourses," two preceding, two following: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and hid; then in his joy he sells everything he has and buys that field" (13:44). There is but one way to read this that finally makes sense. It describes the God who, in Christ, divests himself of all that he has, to own the treasure he finds in shabby, broken sinners, of whom Matthew himself is a prime example, as are his tax-collecting colleagues (9:9-13).
8. Note the tagline at the end of the episode mentioned above: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (9:13). Here Jesus is describing his own behavior as dispenser-in-chief of mercy, the "Son of Man" with "authority on earth to forgive sins" (9:6). Of the essence: this is the same "Son of Man" who shows up "in his glory" in this Sunday's passage (25:31). So, going in, we should expect to witness a glorious dispensing of mercy, not a totting up of sacrificial offerings.
9. Key to this project of dispensing mercy are Jesus' disciples. Pay particular attention to the circumstances of their formal appointment, in direct response to Jesus' gut-wrenching "compassion" for the milling crowds, "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (9:35–10:4). Out of that arises their remarkable calling as agents of Jesus' mission, the specifications of which are laid out in the discourses of Chapters 10 and 18. These serve as boot camp and basic instruction for the great mission assignment of 28:19.
10. Two lessons lie at the heart of this missionary instruction. a) God is absolutely dependable. He's behind

- his workers, and has them covered. "So have no fear" (10:29-31). b) God is generous beyond imagining. Thus the story of the servant whose debt of \$2.5 billion (at least) is written off in another spasm of compassion (18:23-27).
11. Thus too the story of the workers in the vineyard (20:1ff), which is told in response to Peter's attempt to tether future reward to his own labor and sacrifice as a discipled missionary (19:27). "Not so fast," says Jesus. "I won't let you down (19:28-29), but understand that pay for kingdom work is predicated not on output or time served, but strictly on God's rule-defying kindness and generosity" (20:13-15).
  12. Note again the emphasis on generosity—huge, undeserved, welling up from God's inner depths. This is one of Matthew's most important and striking themes. It glimmers at the beginning (foreigners drawn to the joy of Christ, Chapter 2, v. 10 in particular) and persists till the end (disciples commissioned in spite of their doubts, 28:17ff.). According to Matthew, it's what Gospel is about. By the time we get to Chapter 25 he'll have beat the drum about it so often that we're obliged to look for it, expecting that if it's not there patently, it nonetheless serves as the underlying presupposition of everything Jesus will say.
  13. Fast forward, then, to 24:3, which opens the discourse that the sheep-and-goats passage will conclude. "When [Jesus] was sitting on the *Mount* of Olives, the disciples came to him privately..." So this is Sermon on the Mount II. Don't be surprised when you catch persistent echoes of Sermon on the Mount I (Chapters 5-7). Key message of SM I? "God is your *Father*. Imagine that. Better still, trust it. Act on it." The one who reads SM II with that in mind will be the wise reader, who builds on rock (cf. 7:24).
  14. A second thing to note as we plunge into SM II: this is

Jesus talking in private with his disciples, i.e., and crucially, his missionary interns. They know something about him. They've been learning to trust him, though there's tons of learning still to do. They're about to see him swallowed up in the darkness of the Passion. Ergo the essential message, about to be delivered, and tailored *specifically* for them, with earlier themes repeated: "I'm counting on you, absurdly, with a generosity of trust and commitment that defies imagination. As for you, count on me. I've got your back. Come what may—a lot of it won't be pretty—trust, trust, trust! And with that, away you go. To the nations, *ta ethne*, with whom God intends, in me and through me, to be as generous as he already is with you."

15. Parenthetically, about *ta ethne*: this too is one of Matthew's key themes, the mission to the nations, the others, the outsiders. Gentiles, if you must. It's everywhere in Matthew, beginning, middle, and end. Why interpreters commonly miss it and describe Matthew instead as in-house moral instruction for a beleaguered Jewish Christian community, I can't begin to say.
16. So with all this in mind, let's look again at the three great stories of Matthew 25, not forgetting that there's logical and narrative spillover from 24 to 25 that demands checking out. (I leave this to you.)
17. First, the virgins (25:1-13). Read in context, here's how I parse it: "Boys, you're headed not for hell, but for the Best Party Ever. Imagine that—you and the likes of you, not merely the invited guests but the extra-special guests, with a place assigned for you already at the head table, rubbing elbows with groom-and-bride. Is that good news, or what? Now don't forget it. Night may fall, and it will. I'll likely show up late. You can pretty much count on that. That said, don't make the fatal error of giving

up on me. Don't join the crowd that thinks the Party is a pipedream and takes grinding teeth and outer darkness for granted, as our necessary human fate. You'll find that theory everywhere when you hit the road and meet *ta ethne*. Don't be sucked in by what you hear. Instead, let your light shine!"

18. Next, the talents (25:14-30). "Boys, don't sell yourselves short, and still less, don't sell me short. Look what I'm entrusting you with in these days or years or millennia of waiting. Ten talents here, five there, one over there. One talent is fifteen years' worth of a bottom-rung worker's minimum daily wage. Do the math: 8 bucks an hour, 12 hours per day, 6 days per week, 50 weeks per year (2 weeks off for R&R), and all that times 15. It amounts to \$432,000, not exactly chump change, and even that is nothing more than the feeblest hint of the massive treasure I'm putting in your hands. Yes, you can handle it. Why else would I entrust you with it? So off you go on that road to the nations, and once you get there, spend, spend, spend, investing in them as I've invested in you. It's your turn to risk. Don't think for a moment to bury the treasure, i.e. to conceal the reality of God's forgiveness, stupendous in its breadth and depth and absurd generosity. Don't let me hear that you kicked a Canaanite woman in the teeth, or a blind beggar, for that matter, because you thought they'd waste what you invested in them. If it does get wasted, that's my problem, not yours. Absorbing loss is my specialty. Trust me to do it without taking it out of your hide. The one thing I will not tolerate is a refusal to risk the treasure. How else does it multiply and grow? So no, I can't have you not trusting me, not if the job's to be done that I send you to do.

- a. And finally, the sheep and goats (25:31-26). "Boys"—or shall we make it "girls" this time? "I

need you out there among *ta ethne*, taking risks with my treasure, also piercing the night with your lamps of trust in the impossible Party To Be. As you go, remember who you are: not merely my disciples, my missionaries, but much more than that, my ‘brothers,’ my ‘sisters,’ the ‘members of my family,’ the folks who are out there doing the ‘will of my Father in heaven’ as they spread around the marvels of his generosity” (see crucially 12:50, ref. 25:40).

- b. “Girls, boys, it’s dangerous work. Watch these next few days to see precisely how dangerous it gets and where it will land me. Remember what I said, that when it’s your turn ‘you’ll be hated by all because of my name’ and again, that what they do to me they’ll do to you (10:22, 24-25). So don’t be in the least surprised when you wind up hungry, or thirsty, or naked, or sick, or in prison. Or flayed or boiled or crucified, for that matter. Or these days down on your knees with the barrel of an ISIS rifle shoved in your mouth.”
- c. [Time out: it’s happening, folks, it’s happening; shame on us in our safe American suburbs for ignoring the happening, also in Nigeria, in Pakistan, in North Korea; in plenty of other parts where Christ-folk are loathed and feared, and where brutality is casual, and sometimes official. But is our disregard for the “least of these,” our own sisters and brothers in Christ, so ingrained and habitual that we can’t be bothered to peep a protest, or even to pray? “The time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God” (1 Peter 4:17). Yes? But back to our story–]
- d. “Lest” (says Jesus to his missionaries) “the peril

of your assignment gives you too much pause, let me show you now how thoroughly I've got your back. On that day when I come to judge the nations—the folks I'm sending you to, in particular the ones who never get around to joining our ranks—here's the standard I mean to use. Where they're concerned (not you), I don't plan to ask about their faith. Faith in me they haven't got. They don't know me from Adam. So instead—specifically where they're concerned, not you—I'll ask about their works. Yes, I know it deviates from the new and vastly better 'law of faith' that my future friend Paul will talk about (Rom. 3:27), but deviation is my prerogative, isn't it (20:15), and all the more when the deviation serves to amplify the wild generosity the Father sent me to kick-start.

- e. "And in asking about their works, there's one thing and one thing only I'll want to know. How did they treat you? Correction: I won't ask. I'll know it already. And it's out of that knowing that I'll make my separation of sheep from goat. When *you* were hungry, thirsty, sick, naked, rotting in jail, did they help, or not? The smallest finger lifted on *your* behalf is all it will take for me to number them among the righteous. As I've said before, 'Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward' (10:42).
- f. "Sisters, brothers, are you getting it? Do you grasp how profoundly you matter to me and always will, come hell, high water, or my own crucifixion? Off you go then, and get to work. Alertly. Energetically. With a light and joyful step."

20. Thus far our Lord. Our response? "Thanks be to God!" What else can it be?
21. Summarizing question: does a telling like this, anchored in the whole Matthean context, lift the yoke from weary hearers (11:28-20)? Does it comfort the troubled conscience of the called-and-baptized disciple who knows too well that her own righteousness as a dispenser of mercy is a torn and shabby thing, and by no means a fit dress to wear to God's party? More to the point, does it heap the glory, every speck of it, on the head of Christ, who decks us out in his own hard-earned raiment? I think it does. And thinking so, I commend it to you.
22. Remember, you could do worse. A lot worse. You could join the mass of readers, preachers, and hearers whose hearts are sure to sag as they chew away grimly this Sunday on Sheep-and-Goats, the Stand-Alone Version. But why would you want that? How could God want it for you?

Jerome Burce  
Fairview Park, Ohio

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## **Homily on the anniversary of an ordination**

Today we bring you a homily preached this past summer by Ed Schroeder on the occasion of a fortieth anniversary of ordination. In it, Ed makes reference to several visual aids, including a picture made by his wife Marie, a photograph of which is included below (and as an attachment to this e-mail).

In a separate note to us, Ed explains the significance of Marie's picture as follows:

"As in the homily, the point of the picture is that the word 'church', both in its Hebrew and its Greek originals—*Kahal* and *Ekklesia*—designates an event. A gathering, a congregating, where the "grex" get together. With only one exception, I think, the N.T. Greek never uses the term as the subject of a sentence, and that one place, as I remember, is where the *ekklesia* at one geographic location sends greetings to the *ekklesia* at another place. So the gathering at X sends a greeting to the gathering at Y. Thus the *ekklesia* itself never goes out into the world to do something, is never the agent for any action out in the world. Rather, the *ekklesia* is itself the action, the action depicted in Marie's painting. Granted, the birds, the members of Christ's body, do all sorts of things not only when they are feeding and chattering at the gathering, but also when they fly away to their manifold daily-life callings. Whoops! I'm getting homiletical again, but I already sent you the homily!"

That very homily is what follows.

Peace and Joy,  
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

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Keith Holste (Seminex 1974). 40th anniversary of ordination.  
August 24, 2014. Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves,  
Missouri.

Texts:

Isaiah 51:1-6

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew 16: 13-20 [Caesarea Philippi]

There's danger in asking an eighty-three-year-old professor to speak for any reason. The fifty-minute lecture is his standard module.

(To quote Bob Bertram: With dotage comes anecdote.)

Today's task: connecting three visual aids right up front here [preacher not standing in the pulpit, but amidst the visual aids between the folks and the altar area] with the three texts.

The visual aids:



1. [Addressing Keith Holste, who is sitting in the chair.]  
Keith, tell us about the rock from your Kansas hometown.  
For us today, this Rock is the visual for Peter's confession.
2. The second visual aid is this bird feeder, this artwork of Marie's for what the term 'Church' designates in both Old Testament and New Testament. Birds gathering around a bird feeder with the Chi-Rho label on the birdseed, and, most important, actually feeding on the food available at the feeder.
3. The third visual aid is Keith himself, facing all of us here in the congregation. Congregating—that is, gathering together. Right now we ARE Marie's picture.

First off. What happened forty years ago?

Keith Holste was ordained, "ordered," to do the work of ministry. Do what? Do what the Augsburg Confession says ministry is. And forty years ago Keith said out loud to everybody there, "I'll do it."

What's that? Let's check. Augsburg Confession Article 5: THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH.

To understand AC 5, you need to see the sequence.

AC 1: Christian faith is all about God, the Triune God.

AC 2: With this God we're in trouble. Sin.

AC 3: Jesus is God's rescue operation for folks stuck in sin.

AC 4: People get rescued when they trust Jesus's offer. "Here, I did it for you. Take it, it's yours."

AC 5: OK, how does the Jesus offer get to folks who weren't there when he did it all? Answer: "ministry."

[Read AC 5: THE OFFICE OF MINISTRY.

"To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided gospel proclamation and the sacraments. Through these, as through means [instrumenta in Latin], he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe him."

*"Solchen Glauben zu erlangen, hat Gott das Predigtamt eingesetzt, Evangelium und Sakamente gegeben. Durch diese Mittel gibt er den heiligen Geist, welcher den Glauben , wo und wann er will, in denen wirkt, die das Evangelium hören. Das lehrt, dass wir durch Christi Verdienst und nicht durch unser Verdienst, einen gnädigen Gott haben, wenn wir solches glauben."*

Better the German text itself with the term '*Predigt-Amt*' (Gospel-offering agency) for the Latin term '*officium*'. God's program, an agency, for getting sinners connected to Christ. Those sinners who weren't around when Christ was walking the paths of Palestine.]

In agreeing to take that assignment, Keith put himself between a rock and a hard place.

We've got a Kansas rock here up front from where Keith grew up. Our visual aid for Christ, the Rock of our Salvation.

We've got the rock three times in the texts we've just heard. And none of them is negative. Peter's name is Rock in Greek. [Petrified wood, we talk about. Petr-oleum-oil out of rocks.] Then his faith-confession. Jesus calls it ROCK, the ROCK on which his church will be built, a ROCK so solid that the Gates of Hell are no match for it. And then the third one: the Old Testament reading, "Rock from which you were hewn."

That ROCK confession is a Jesus-confession: "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."

What's the "hard place"? The hard place is human hearts. Hard hearts. Yes, us folks here this morning.

Christian ministry is the business of connecting *that* rock to those "hard places," us hard places.

Keith's been in the business for forty years. We're here this morning with that very consciously on our minds.

The Gospel reading gives us the specs on the connection between ROCK and church.

But first a Word about the third visual aid, the bird-feeder picture up here. Marie created it for a class I taught not long ago. It's a picture of the church.

Christian ministry is the business of getting folks fed at the bird feeder and making sure that the birdseed is the food that Peter confessed.

Ministry is the name for the connecting process. How the goodies from Jesus get to people. That bird feeder is a picture of "ministry." When folks come to feed there, church happens.

Summa. Gospel text. The bird food. Jesus says he will build HIS kind of “gatherings” (his sort of congregatings) on this foundation. In short, he promises to get the bird-feeder operation going and keep it going, the power of death and hell notwithstanding.

Now the Epistle. What happens to the birds, to these “hard-places” when they do feed at that bird feeder?

They move from being conformed to this world to being transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

That English translation doesn’t do very well with the original Greek. Starting with the words conform/transform. A nice pun in English. But too tame for the Greek. Schema and metamorphosis.

“Instead of being hooked by the schemes of the present age, undergo metamorphosis.”

Metamorphosis is a BEEEG change. Like from caterpillar to butterfly. Same critter, but oh, so different! You’d never have guessed.

The metamorphosis starts with your “mind.” Getting your head screwed on right about what God’s up to when Jesus appears on the scene. What’s God really up to? What’s really is the whole ball of wax of God’s operation, where it’s all going to wind up?

Mind-blowing. That’s the metamorphosis.

And what follows in the next paragraph is also mind-blowing.

It’s not just Keith who has this assignment. It’s all the birds who’ve been at the feeder. If you’re baptized, you are on assignment. Signed up for the bird-feeding business.

In this Epistle text Paul specs out seven—count 'em!—different sub-assignments to carry out the Big assignment. There is no New Testament notion that “clergy” is the class of folks who are s’posed to be doing this.

It’s everybody who’s been feeding at the bird feeder.

As they fly away, they’re on duty. Different sorts of birds, but the same assignment: Get folks to the feeder. Connect ‘em to the ROCK. Do what Peter did. Tell them about the ROCK. Set up a bird feeder—be a bird feeder—when you bump into other birds. Wherever it happens.

One body, many members, St. Paul says.

Folks who have fed at the Christ bird feeder get connected. First of all, to Christ, but also to each other.

One body, many members. Main point: all connected to the Head. But that connects them with all the others so connected. No one in exactly the same spot as the next one. Many locations.

Many different gifts. So many different vocations in your different locations.

Eyes can do stuff that our ears can’t.

Some are gifted talkers. You get folks to the feeder with your gift of gab.

Some are good at helping people. OK, you people-helpers.

Some know how to teach. OK, teach folks.

Some are gifted counselors. OK...

Some are gifted with stuff to give away. OK...

Some are gifted with leadership. OK...

Some are gifted with empathy. OK...

A quick final peek at the Old Testament text.

The rock quarry where God got this started. Abraham and Sarah and God's promise. The promise was about "salvation and deliverance and righteousness and comfort and joy and gladness." The whole ball of wax called Gospel. And the simple imperative was: "Listen, look, look, listen, just listen."

Why? With all the schemes other folks dream up you wind up in the desert, waste places, wilderness. The schemes themselves vanish like smoke, wear out, and if you try to live on them you die.

"BUT my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never end."

Peter's confession links to this Abraham/Sarah text: "You, Jesus, are what God was promising to Abraham and Sarah."

Back to Keith for closure. For forty years getting folks in hard places connected to that ROCK. Not that you have to be formally ordained. Anyone already feeding at this bird feeder can bring it to others, can bring others to it. But we forget. And thus wind up following all sorts of schemes and going backwards from butterfly to caterpillar.

So we appoint folks to make sure it happens. Even "order" them to do so. That's what ordain means. You are under orders to do this. Under orders to be an agent for the metamorphosis St Paul himself is promoting. He too was under orders, just as Keith is. Under orders to move us away from caterpillar schemes and morph us into butterflies. That's the change from "munch and crawl, munch and crawl" to "sip nectar and fly, sip nectar and fly!"

Today we thank God for putting Keith under orders to be his bird-feeder tender, his metamorphosis minister. OUR bird-feeder tender, our metamorphosis minister. So that we keep on keeping on as that picture over there. Birds and butterflies. Feeding on

Christ and flying!

Let's sing it with a bit of variation to the common doxology, namely, with Keith himself in the hymn text.

[Line the text to the congregation.]

Praise all through whom God's blessings flow.  
Today Keith Holste here below.  
For him and with the heavenly host,  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

EHS

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## Luther on the Ten Virgins—and the Surprising Source for This

Colleagues,

This may look at first glance like one of the scantier posts you've ever gotten from Thursday Theology, but really, it's not. That's because the meat is tucked away in a link you'll get to shortly. Be sure to click on it. It will be your food for the week, thrown together by master chef Martin Luther and delivered to your inbox in solid English prose thanks to a surprising somebody that you don't know and won't have heard of until now.

Some background. I've been banging my head this week on Matthew 25:1-13, the Parable of the Ten Virgins. I plan to preach on it this weekend, as do a host of other pastors who follow the Revised Common Lectionary in one or the other of its denominational variants. That includes many of you, I suppose;

and if I'm right in also supposing that you're as interested as I am in figuring how to use this text to deliver some good news from God to the people we'll be talking to, then your heads are hurting too.

Saying this, I'll resist the urge to tell you what the head-banging here has been all about. It will bog me down. If willing spirit triumphs for once over slow-moving flesh, I'll get to it in a week or two in connection with some ruminations about the last of Matthew 25's great images, the separating of the sheep and goats. What matters for now is the simple observation that the Gospel takes a beating when people start talking or writing about anything in Matthew 25. There are exceptions to this rule, of course—Robert Farrar Capon comes especially to mind—but these are few and far between. This week's scratching around in commentaries and websites, including ones that flash a Lutheran label, left me uniformly gloomy. No one finds anything other than a looming threat in Jesus' point about the virgins. "Shape up. Or else." (Again, exceptions: see reflections by [Ed Schroeder](#), [Cathy Lessmann](#), and [Steve Kuhl](#) at our own [crossings.org](#).)

All this led me to wonder what Luther might have said about this parable. What books I have were lacking, so I hitched a ride with Mr. Google. He took me promptly to the very thing I was looking for, [a sermon by Luther on Matthew 25:1ff](#). So there it is, your reading for the week and the chief content of this post, by no means scanty or short on substance, as you'll see. And do see, because I'll bet my bottom dollar than none of you have run across it before. It's been available in English translation for scarcely a year, and even in German (or Latin?) it will have been deeply buried in the great heap of Luther's output.

Again, the link: [Luther on the Ten Virgins](#).

By way of quick prelude: the sermon was preached in Erfurt on October 21, 1522. I imagine Luther was still exulting in his release from the confines of the Wartburg Castle. In any case, the cause of that confinement, his condemnation at Worms, would have still been much in mind, so we shouldn't be at all surprised to find ourselves wading through a fair amount of his boilerplate invective about scholastic theology and papal opponents. When he finally gets around to digging into the parable, he uses it as a springboard for reflecting on the relationship between faith and good works. In the [model for studying texts](#) that we hype at Crossings, that means a focus on the connection between Steps 5 and 6, where the point is to ensure that God's work in Christ doesn't go to waste, but makes a leap into daily lives that resonate with trust and hope in God.

Luther puts it this way—and I think I'll quote him on Sunday: "Therefore, let each one see to it that he has these two together: the oil, which is true faith and trust in Christ; and the lamps, the vessel, which is the outward service toward your neighbor. The whole Christian life consists in these two things: Believe God. Help your neighbor. The whole Gospel teaches this. Parents should tell it to their children at home and everywhere. Children, too, should constantly foster this Word among themselves."

On a lighter note, when you get around to reading for yourself you'll notice that the folks the folks at Erfurt who got to hear this sermon on the day it was preached were busy celebrating the Feast of the 11,000 Virgins. Again I'm betting bottom dollars that you're as clueless as I was about that, so here's the skinny on it, more than you ever wanted or needed to know about [St. Ursula and her companions](#). Thank you, Mr. Wikipedia.

Finally, a word of delighted surprise about how the sermon is

available to those of us who are chained to English. When you click on the link—perhaps you've done that already—you'll find yourself at the website of Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Las Cruces, New Mexico. A bit of browsing there will reveal that Emmanuel was founded in 1987 as a Wisconsin Synod mission. Two years ago it left the Wisconsin Synod to affiliate with a recently formed entity called the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America (ELDoNA).

ELDoNA currently has seventeen pastors on its roster, one of whom is Emmanuel's Paul Rydecki, translator of this sermon. When I wrote to thank Pr. Rydecki for making it available, he answered as follows:

"It was my pleasure to provide Luther's sermon to those who may benefit from it, including myself. I enjoy translating from both German and Latin and have published several items through Repristination Press (available on Amazon), most recently a series of 12 sermons by Aegidius Hunnius on the Table of Duties, as well as Johann Gerhard's commentary on Romans 1-6."

Go figure. Out of New Mexico, of all places, and from a pastor who finds that "the larger synods [e.g. Wisconsin] either do not confess the faith once delivered to the saints in unison, or that they confess in unison things that are contrary to that faith." That too is from Pr. Rydecki's note. After some glancing at the [ELDoNA website](#), I can't suppose that he and I would get through five minutes of conversation without rubbing each other's sensibilities raw, but still, there he is, a servant of the Lord blessing the Lord's Church and that little band of the Lord's servants who read Thursday Theology. And for that, thanks be to God, who surely keeps the holy angels in a state of constant merriment over the way he goes about delivering his gifts.

Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

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# **Something Greater Than Justice." A Post-Ferguson Reflection**

Colleagues,

Richard E. Mueller, senior pastor of the Lutheran Church of the Atonement in Florissant, Missouri, stepped into his pulpit on the last Sunday in August understanding that the week's events in the now notorious Ferguson, one suburb to the south, required his attention. What he said that morning got to us via a back channel, and we thought you'd want to see it too. We thank him for his permission to pass it along.

As you read, please do so with a) discernment, and b) prayer. When I called for the aforementioned permission, Rick made a point of asking for your feedback. What might he have said that didn't get said? How would you have laid out the Gospel in a circumstance similar to the one he faced? For him it's a pressing question. The agony in Ferguson is far from done, and tension is presently on the rise as people wait for a grand jury to decide whether to bring criminal charges against the police officer involved. Rick mentioned that there are children and families in Atonement's church-and-school community who will be directly affected if public protests resume. The best way of thanking him for his contribution this week will be to pray for

them.

A final quick thought. Friday is Reformation Day. As Rick intimates below, justification by grace through faith is God's best response for now to our thirst for justice. Perhaps we devote this Reformation Day to some careful thinking about how this is so. By "careful," I mean the kind that opens the inner floodgates of thanks and praise to God.

Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

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Pastor Richard E. Mueller, preaching in Florissant, Missouri on August 30 and 31, 2014—

"No justice, no peace. No justice, no peace." The chant resounded up and down West Florissant Avenue and echoed through millions of radios and TVs in greater St. Louis and, literally, around the world. "No justice, no peace." And, yet, we all surely wondered, what would justice look like? What would constitute "justice"... for a family that had lost a teenaged son,... for a community that too often gets the short end of the stick,...for business owners whose establishments were in the wrong place at the wrong time,...for police and other first responders who endured long hours and more than a little abuse,...for homeowners whose property value may never recover,...for a community whose good name has been tarnished for years to come? "No justice, no peace?" What, pray tell, might "justice" look like?

In our Thursday morning Bible class, as part of a larger conversation, we reflected on the Prophet Micah's call to "do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God." And, we asked, "What are some practical ways in which churches today

can stand for justice...in our communities and our world? And, it quickly became clear that we are much better at "loving mercy," than we are at "doing justice." In the wake of the recent events in Ferguson, some of our school and church folks got together and launched a drive for food and personal care items for the affected households, and people responded generously. But, when Thursday's conversation turned to doing justice, we were all in favor of it, but at a loss as to how we could help bring it about. "No justice, no peace," the protesters chanted. And, yet, we wonder, what might justice actually look like? We picture a blindfolded Lady Justice holding her scales and wonder what, if anything, could ever bring them back into balance.

Bishop William Willimon recounts a story from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, about a man who described how with several drunken friends from the secret police he had laughingly shot a young man and bound up his body and then went to the young man's home, where they dragged out and shot his father in front of his wife and then dragged away his body. Now, eighteen years later, after the man confessed before a horrified courtroom, one of the judges asked the now much older woman what she would like to see done to this man. Her reply: "This man has taken away from me everything dear to me. But he has not taken away my ability to love." And, then, she asked for some dirt from wherever they buried her husband—and for the man to visit her twice a month. Was this justice? Or, maybe something greater than justice?

In fact, the Hebrew Bible has a word for this, a word that does not readily translate into English. That word is '*chesed*'. And, yes, sometimes that word is translated as "mercy," and sometimes as "loving-kindness," and sometimes as "steadfast love," or "loyalty," or "persistence," or "constancy," or "goodness," or "forgiveness." In truth, it is all of these and more. It refers to God's determination to do right by His people, and to His

yearning that we will in turn do right by each other. And, as serious as God is about the need to "do justice," the rabbis were clear: God is even more insistent that *chesed* takes precedence, even over justice—

—an insistence that we find over and over again in the parables of Jesus: the parable of the vineyard owner who pays all his workers a day's wage, even though some only worked an hour; the parable of the father who threw a welcome-home party for the son who had disgraced the family; the parable of the king who forgave his servant an unimaginable debt; the parable of the street people invited to the wedding banquet; and on and on. Was this justice? Or, maybe something greater than justice?

And, then on the Cross, suffering perhaps the greatest injustice the world has ever known, this same Jesus offers restoration to the brigand who acknowledges his guilt, and forgiveness to the mob that refuses to. Was this justice? Or, maybe something greater than justice?

Justice, Aristotle said, is when people get what they deserve. But that's far from our Christian understanding. Our understanding is that God by grace offers us something far better. He offers us *chesed*, that steadfast, persistent, merciful forgiveness and love that restores us to God and to each other, that grace that fights through all the obstacles we put in God's way, so that His love can be made known.

So, does that exempt us from doing justice? Far from it! But it does help us appreciate that justice is the bare minimum in our dealings with each other. And that, when our communities fail to offer it, we should be actively engaged in rectifying that failure: working to overturn unjust laws, to expose unfair practices, and to speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves. Micah's words still ring in our ears, because they

are God's own Word: we are both to "do justice" and to "love *chesed*." All of which finally brings us around to today's Second Lesson, Paul's pointed description of what lives redeemed by God's grace and committed to both justice and *chesed* will look like—everything from genuine love to patient suffering, from hospitality for strangers to a banquet for enemies. Justice, tempered by *chesed*.

Perhaps South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, inspired in large measure by the nation's churches and Christian heritage, can even point us in a fruitful direction, beginning with truth and yearning for reconciliation. Beginning with truth—not the "truth" about "him" or the "truth" about "them," but with the truth about me, the truth about us. To begin, not with litanies of self-justification or self-pity, but with the real truth about our own inattention, our own lack of concern, our own lack of good judgment, even our own complicity in that which causes hardship to others. (And, frankly, apart from that I have no idea how reconciliation can happen.)

That is, to begin (where our worship so often begins) with the truth, an acknowledgment of our own inattention, our own lack of concern, our own complicity—and, then, to carry that truth to the Cross, and to lay that truth at the foot of the Cross, and to hear again our Lord's own words of restoration and forgiveness. And then, and only then, will we begin to "know justice," and we will surely "know peace."

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# More Musings on 'Justification'

Colleagues,

Two weeks ago we sent you a scattershot post about Richard Dawkins, Romans 3 in English translation, and the God's Word version of Bible. One of those items garnered a response. It plunged the undersigned into some further musings. Here they are.

Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

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In [our October 9 note about Romans 3](#), we touched among other things on the problem of using the word 'justification' to translate Paul's Greek. A day later Ed Schroeder sent us an amended snippet from [Thursday Theology #28](#) (3 December 1998):

*"In Luther's day justification "by faith alone" was a phrase that jolted. Justification was not merely a courtroom term, but a gallows term. Capital criminals were "justified" (=given their due justice) when they were executed. (Bob Schultz has an essay on this forensic term in medieval jurisprudence. He also talks about a public executioner who, with mask on face and ax in hand, had "justified" so and so many criminals.) The big deal about JBFA is that sinners get justified (put to death) in their union with Christ. He dies our death with us and for us. Then, just as he was raised at Easter, Christ-connected sinners survive their own executions to walk in newness of life."*

This prompts a couple of quick comments. First, I recall having

read this, those sixteen years ago when Ed first sent it out, and being "jolted," as he says. The thought continues to startle. One justifies the murderer by chopping off his head. Said villain is now "cut down to size," a further thought that lands us promptly in the territory of Mary's Song, where God "brings down the mighty from their thrones," etc., by showing "strength with his [ax-swinging] arm" (Lk. 1:51f).

We don't talk like this in the churches I know. Few if any confess faith in a God who behaves this way. We've lost the nerve our forebears possessed to associate the Almighty with the reality we know, half of which is ugly, bitter stuff. Luther looked it in the face and saw the shadows of God's alien work, impossible to miss, though equally impossible to delineate with any degree of precision. Today's Lutheran pretenders are all too precise in denying God a role of any kind in the dirty, dismal work of restraining evil, a work that uses evil to answer evil. (Show me the death-dealing brigand who will call the policeman's bullet "good.") Jeremiah saw Nebuchadnezzar's horde looming on Judah's horizon and announced that Yahweh's biceps were flexing (25:9). That side of Jeremiah's thought gets hidden these days. Luther embraced it, and used it explore the glory of the cross, a glory both exquisite and excruciating. What is the cross, if not evil met head on by the greatest act of evil ever committed, the killing of the Son of God? That this unfolds at the Father's insistence and with the Son's acquiescence is also a piece of the core witness that few people today seem willing to think deeply about without resorting to unfaith or blasphemy. ("God the child-abuser in whom I will not believe!") Is the mystery monstrous? Yes. But only in it and through it do we arrive at that Easter eruption of Good-Beyond-Imagining in the everlasting Christ and the power of the Spirit, and, with these, the unfolding promise of God's re-creating overhaul of evil, deadly people. Here Saul of Tarsus comes to mind.

Words shape how we think. Lacking a proper OED, I looked up ‘justification’ in a lesser one, the [Online Etymology Dictionary](#). It confirms the medieval usage that Ed’s note reports: “administration of justice.” Time was, apparently, when “self-justification” meant “frank expression of regret for wrong done,” which runs along similar lines; but I daresay it’s been a few centuries since anybody used the latter term in that particular striking sense. These days the whole point of justifying oneself is to avoid apology, apology being, after all, another dirty, deadly business, entailing shame and culpability with penalties attached. Self-justification in the current sense is what the Pharisee does in Jesus’ parable about the two men praying (Lk. 18). In the archaic sense, it’s what the tax collector does. Were the archaic sense still the norm in spoken English—it isn’t; it won’t be again—we might be more disposed than we are to acknowledge God’s right to administer justice as God sees fit, whether by killing or making alive (thus Hannah, Mary’s predecessor, 1 Sam. 2:6); whether by exacting the penalty, or flooding us with mercy, or both. The tax collector goes home “justified,” having trusted God enough to let God exercise God’s sense of justice as God alone sees fit. By contrast the Pharisee is still stalling, mired as he is in the sinner’s penchant for telling God exactly what God would think and do, if only God knew right from wrong the way we know it.

Pharisees abound in the American church. The dustup over same-sex relationships is but one example of arguments, both recent and ongoing, that are shot through and through with the Pharisaic mindset, and this on both sides of the ditches we dig between us. More on that some other time. The point for now is simply to groan inwardly for the redemption of our wits, counting on the Spirit to intercede for us with those “sighs too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). God save us from the poverty of our

language, our thinking, our faith. God us save from the peril of refusing God's justification. God save us from the folly, utter and appalling, of wasting Christ.

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## Original Sin

This week we bring you an essay from the files of Ed Schroeder, written by Ed under circumstances lost to time, but offered up here as a short meditation on the connection, as Ed puts it, between the "spoke" of sin and the "hub" of Christian theology.

Peace and Joy,  
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

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## Original Sin

The Biblical word for the human dilemma is sin. The first-ever "Lutheran" articulation of the term comes in Article II of the Augsburg Confession (1530) on "Original Sin." In English translation only seventy-one words. "Our churches also teach that since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin. That is to say, they are without fear of God, are without trust in God, and are concupiscent. And this disease or vice of origin is truly sin, which even now damns and brings eternal death on those who are not born again through baptism and the Holy Spirit" (Tappert edition).

"Sin" designates two things absent in human beings—from the very git-go—and one thing that has moved in to fill the vacuum. We don't fear God, nor do we trust in God. [The Latin term for

trust is ‘*fiducia*’.] And replacing these absent realities is concupiscence. That term, ‘concupiscence’, in its Latin original was shown to be the hot potato as the Roman theologians responded to the Augsburg Confessors on Article II. Which elicited this response from the author of the AC, Philip Melanchthon, when he penned (yes, a pen!) the document labeled “Defense of the AC.”

“Our opponents approve Article II, ‘Original Sin,’ but they criticize our definition of original sin.” And the fight is about concupiscence. Just what does the term mean? As Melanchthon then spells out what “we” mean, he starts with the usage of the term ‘*concupiscentia*’ in the Latin Bible, the Bible that was the authority for all the debate participants. And he then goes to Augustine, claimed by both sides in the debate as THE doctrinal authority from antiquity.

But then he goes on. “Not the ancient theologians alone, but even the more recent ones—at least the more sensible among them [!]-teach that original sin is truly composed of the defects that I have listed, as well as of concupiscence [as we describe it].” Documentation for that claim is then found in Thomas Aquinas (!), Bonaventure, Hugo of St. Victor.

In one sense both sides agree on what concupiscence is, namely, an “inclination” to do, think, “evil.” The disagreement is on how serious, how bad, this “yen” toward wickedness really is. “Our opponents claim that the inclination to evil is a neutral thing,” the sad consequence of Adam’s fall. Namely, the orderliness of Adam and Eve’s original righteousness went topsy-turvy with their Ur-disobedience, and all their offspring now have received the same dis-orderly heritage. Our “yens” go in wrong directions. Yes, that IS serious, but not THAT serious to justify saying, as AC II does, that concupiscence “even now damns and brings eternal death.”

Serious, yes, but not THAT serious.

I'll never forget—well, I haven't up until now—an exchange between Robert Bertram, chair of the theology department of Valparaiso University, and Robert Pelton, chair of the theology department of Notre Dame University. It was back in 1958 or '59. I was the new kid on the block in the VU department. The presidents of the two universities, O.P. Kretzmann (VU) and Theodore Hesburgh (ND), personal friends, had decided—doubtless over cocktails—"Let's get our boys (yes, all boys) together for some theological exchange." It was some five years before Vatican II. So "the boys" got together twice a year at the outset. Their place, and then our place. The first one at ND was on baptism. One of them and one of us presented papers. No surprise, mostly simpatico.

Second one at our place, VU. Topic: Sin. Here both department chairs presented the papers. Pelton first, Bertram second. In Bertram's presentation he walked/talked his way through Article II of the AC and its sequel in the Defense of the AC. When Bertram finished, the first response came from Pelton: "Bob, it can't really be that bad, can it?" It was an Augsburg 1530 re-run in northern Indiana four-hundred-plus years later.

So how bad is it?

Melanchthon again: "When we use the term 'concupiscence', we do not mean only its acts or fruits [the discombobulated moral orderliness pervading Adam and Eve's descendants], but the continual inclination of [human] nature." Yes, "the scholastics [i.e., the debate partners in this kerfuffle] misunderstand the patristic definition of sin [e.g., Augustine's] and therefore minimize original sin.... They miss the main issue."

[Sidebar. On the term 'original' in this discussion. For the Augsburg Confessors "original" has two valences. On the one hand

it signals that sin has been coterminous with my life from the very moment of my origin. Namely, there is no time way back at the beginning of my existence which I can point to and say "Back there I was innocent." Rather this has been my diagnosis right from the beginning of my life. It is the shape of my life. The inclination of not fearing God, not trusting in God, and the "yen" to be my own God, to curve back into myself, to find in myself the center of my universe.

On the other hand it signals that the "bad" things I do in thought, word, and deed have their own origin, their root, in this primal inclination. My sins (plural) have their root in this primordial inclined plane where everything rolls in the same direction: to me.]

Basically the "main issue" missed by the scholastics is what has just been said in the sidebar above. "When they talk about original sin, they do not mention the more serious faults of human nature, namely, ignoring God, despising him, lacking fear and trust in him, hating his judgment and fleeing it, being angry at him, despairing of his grace, trusting in temporal things, etc. These evils which are most contrary to the law of God, the scholastics do not even mention."

The punch line for such a minimal diagnosis of the human malady then follows: "What need is there for the grace of Christ...what need is there for the Holy Spirit?"

There is a direct correlation between diagnosis of the malady and the healing thereof. Therefore the wagon-wheel spoke about sin is always linked to the prime article of the AC, justification by faith alone, a faith clinging to the merits and benefits of Christ. The doctrine of sin is eventually Christological. When sin is minimized, Christ is too.

The reality of concupiscence, "the inclination to evil,"

persists also in those who do trust Christ. It is a constant for the believer as well. “Doubt about God’s wrath, his grace, and his Word: anger at his judgments; indignation because he does not deliver us from trouble right away; fretting because bad people are more fortunate than good people; yielding to anger, desire, ambition, wealth, etc. Pious men have confessed to these things, as the Psalms and the prophets show.”

In the Defense Melanchthon concludes, “Christ was given to us to bear both the sin and penalty and to destroy the rule of the devil, sin, and death; so we cannot know his blessings unless we recognize our evil. Therefore our preachers have stressed this in their teaching. They have not introduced any innovations, but have set forth the Holy Scripture and the teaching of the holy Fathers.”

Back to Valparaiso University in the 1950s. To Bob Pelton’s “It can’t be that bad, can it, Bob?” the other Bob, Bob Bertram, said: “How bad is it? Bad enough that it took the death and resurrection of the second person of the Trinity to fix it.”

That’s how the spoke labeled sin links to the hub of the wheel of Christian theology, Augsburg catholic version.

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**Octoberish Orts. 1) Richard Dawkins, Fundamentalist? 2) Romans 3 in English 3) The**

# Intriguing “God’s Word” Translation

Colleagues,

Instead of bread this week we feed you crumbs, i.e. another batch of quick thoughts arising from items that caught the attention of the undersigned as recent days flew by. Links embedded here and there will lead you to chewier substance. Thank God for the Internet. Seriously.

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

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1. There's a little dustup going on this week among members of the atheistic tribe. Do you all know Richard Dawkins? He's an English biologist who burst into view eight years ago as the best-selling author of [The God Delusion](#), a manifesto of sorts for right-minded folks who are sick to death of religion and can't fathom why anybody would continue in this day and age to entertain absurd theistic fantasies, and thus to underwrite the horrors that such fantasies are bound to spawn—and so on. The usual drill. Dawkins's latest effort is *An Appetite for Wonder: The Makings of a Scientist*, the first half of a proposed two-volume memoir. John Gray, for one, was not impressed, and said so via a book review in the latest print issue of [The New Republic](#). Gray is a superb writer and thinker who closed out a teaching career as emeritus professor of European thought at the London School of Economics. I know him strictly through his *TNR*reviews, which are almost always rewarding. An atheist himself, Gray finds Dawkins

to be narrow and shallow, and, where Christian thought is concerned, either unwilling or unable to understand what he rushes to critique. Thus the title that either Gray or a *TNR* editor affixed to the piece, “The Closed Mind of Richard Dawkins.” Better still is the subtitle, “His atheism is its own kind of religion,” an assertion that was proved this morning when a [furious rejoinder to Gray](#) appeared on the *TNR* website. I coin a term: atheology. Its practitioners appear as quick as their theological counterparts to jump all over each other at the first whiff of error, where “error” is often little more than a synonym for “deviation from the party line.” That’s pretty much what thoughtful Gray is being hammered for right now, or so it seems to me. I note all this with a certain degree of unholy Schadenfreude. Christ loves his enemies. His lesser disciples choke down their chortles at seeing a fellow like Dawkins dosed with a hefty spoonful of his own medicine. Yes, shame on me. By contrast, kudos to John Gray for pushing us all, through his spanking of Dawkins, in the direction of greater charity in our estimation of the Gentile other. The risen Christ whose existence Gray doesn’t credit had a remarkable thing for Gentiles, a point that Matthew keeps making in the texts we’re listening to this fall. I can’t help but think that he’s pleased indeed with his unwitting servant, and wishes that members of his own baptized tribe would perk their ears up and pay attention. Hence this present note. What is fundamentalism if not the smug certainty that I’m righteous in my right-thinking, whereas the other is a wicked, dangerous fool. Fundamentalism so defined afflicts us all in one way or another, and makes us blind and dangerous. Listen to Lutherans, for example, as they natter among themselves about the folks on the opposite sides of their intra-tribal divides. “Good Lord, deliver

your world."

2. Righteousness came up at my pericope study this past week as we looked at texts for the next few Sundays. Well, of course it did. One of those Sundays, at least for Lutherans, entails a celebration of the Reformation, at the heart of which is a reading of St. Paul's astonishing reflection in Romans 3 on the import of Christ's crucifixion for God's response to sinners. Far be it from me to dig into that right now, lest I get buried, and leave you devoid of a Thursday Theology post this week. So instead, let me merely draw your attention—again?—to the misery of English translation as funneled through the King James tradition and settling in the ears of many in our pews via the prose of either the New Revised or the English Standard versions that we listen to these days. The problem has to do with the different streams that modern English draws its vocabulary from, modern English being dated from the decades prior to Shakespeare and King James's scholars. Already by then half our words were taken from ancient Anglo-Saxon, and the other half from the Latin and French of England's medieval overlords. So we wind up with "right" and "righteous" on the one hand, and with "just" and "justice" on the other, both being dragged in to deal with Greek words that share a common root, "*dik-*". Paul's initial listeners heard a word beginning with "*dik-*" driving into a noun that also began with "*dik-*". Our listeners on Reformation Sunday will hear a verb, "justify," and a noun, "righteousness," and they won't make the same automatic connection between those words that their Greek counterparts once did. To compound the mess, they'll hear "justify" being used in a transitive sense that hardly ever appears in spoken English these days. I wrote about this some years ago in a piece that's unavailable online. Otherwise I'd link to it

and be done. Suffice it for now to underscore the imperative, for this year's Reformation Sunday preachers, of repairing the translation; of ensuring, that is, that the people they're talking to will grasp that "justify" in Romans 3 is about *making* something right that initially was not right—this as opposed as to making a case that the thing was right in the first place. That latter is what goes on when "I justify my actions." The former is what God does when God "justifies the ungodly." We were *in truth* all wrong. In steps God to make us all right. The breathtaking marvels here are, first, that God chooses to do it in the first place, and, second, that he settles on so apparently simple a mechanism for getting the job done. He sees us trusting Christ, and claps his hands, and says "Voilà!" "All right!" Go figure. Comes the persistent challenge for us of spotting other Christ-trusters and saying "All right!" about them, and doing that even when we notice how grievously wrong they are, and in so many ways.

3. I should mention that not all English translations follow the King James path. Of those that don't, none is more intriguing than *God's Word to the Nations*, more briefly known as the God's Word translation, GW for short. Check out what it does with [Romans 3:19-31](#). "Righteousness," "justify," "justification"—these go out the window in favor of "God's approval" as something to have or to get. It's an intriguing approach. I think it works. GW is not well known, I suspect, and I can't imagine it's being used in the churches that most of you attend. It deserves attention, though, and especially from Lutherans, the Christian tribe that produced it. Decades ago, amid the noxious contentions of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, a fellow named William Beck produced his own, idiosyncratic "[American Translation](#)" of the Bible. Beck

was full of fulmination about the “modernistic” errors that had crept into the RSV, the preferred version of the day in most mainline churches. A prime example of such error was changing “virgin” (KJV) to “young woman” (RSV) in the rendering of Isaiah 7:14. What could that be, except some arrogant modern scholars with unbelief in their hearts taking a whack at the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, a point that Beck’s publisher and chief promoter, Herman Otten, made over and over, ad nauseam, in the noxious pages of his weekly *Christian News*. Beck’s stated aim was to produce a translation free of doctrinal error. His high hope, urged by Otten, was to see his work adopted as the LCMS’s official translation. It didn’t happen, and Beck died; and at some point a group of Otten fans in my neck of the woods, Cleveland, Ohio, decided to take Beck’s work and update it. They formed a private Bible society. They hired scholars. They set up shop for a time in a building barely a mile from the church I serve. And out of that emerged something fascinating, the GW, a piece of work that more than deserves our attention. Almost twenty years ago, while the work was still in progress, I had a chance to talk with the scholars involved. One of their lay associates is a member of my congregation today. As I recall, their chief aim was to produce an accurate rendering of the Scriptural text in English that a seventh-grader would find accessible. Hence the disappearance, say, of a multisyllabic, mouth-filling word like ‘justification’. But what do you replace it with? That’s where the fascination enters in, and I often catch myself being pleased and instructed by the choices these scholars made. My friend and colleague, Dick Gahl—we’ve passed along some work of his in Thursday Theology—uses GW as a matter of course, and for good reason. One of my own tests of a translation’s accuracy, theological as well as

linguistic, is to see what it does with the “*skandalizein*” of Mark 9:42ff. Why I’ve seized on that test in particular is for some other time, perhaps. Here I simply note that KJV, followed by NRSV, gets a passing grade with “cause to stumble.” RSV, followed by ESV, flunks the test with “cause to sin.” GW, by contrast, gets a flying-colors A+ pass with “cause to lose faith in [Jesus].” The minds and hearts that settled on that rendering knew what they were doing. So yes, check GW out, add it your arsenal. For what it’s worth, the original society went out of business shortly after the translation was done—the challenge of marketing it was more than they could handle, or so I understand—and they sold the rights to Baker Publishing, which has kept it in print. You can find it online too. I get it at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com), my favorite source for a wide range of translations, including Latin and German.

Jerome Burce  
Fairview Park, Ohio

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## An MD's "Crossing" of DOCTORED. The Disillusionment of an American Physician

Colleagues,

Last week we sent you Phil Kuehnert's review of Sandeep Jauhar's *Doctored*. The book is currently in sixteenth place on the *New York Times* list of bestsellers in the "Science"

category. That's one reason for daring to send you another treatment of it this week. A second reason is that most of us listened this past Sunday to Philippians 2:1-13, appointed in the Revised Common Lectionary as the second reading for the sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Series A. As it happens, today's contributor, Jay W. Floyd, MD, uses that very passage to authorize an approach to the practice of medicine that differs dramatically from the one people are hearing about from Dr. Jauhar. Dr. Floyd goes to church with Pr. Kuehnert, and also serves as his primary physician. Have you ever had doubts as to whether the Gospel of Christ Crucified makes a difference in the practice of everyday life? If so, the faith-full doctor is going to cure them. Read on!

Peace and Joy,  
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

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A few thoughts on completing *Doctored: The Disillusionment of an American Physician:*

1. My immediate reaction on completing the book was one of relief: Finally, the vitriolic diatribe had come to an end! The author's own relief appears to have come only after leaving Manhattan to live in the Long Island suburb, a notion that struck me repeatedly during the book. "You need to leave the city," I repeatedly urged in my mind. It seemed obvious that much of his dysthymia, depression, and despondence occurred as a result of the overcrowded, bustling, nonstop, wearying lifestyle which comes with big-city dwelling, with its proverbial rat race of working to make money to pay bills to feed the family to keep the wife happy. Moving sooner to an area with a more reasonable cost of living might have brought him closer to peace earlier in his career.

2. I propose that Dr. Jauhar was set up for disillusionment from the beginning. This is because of his worldview. By worldview, I mean all of the socio-cultural-spiritual underpinnings, the thoughts and values and mores, the habits and patterns and processes which form the underlying matrix through which life is lived, decisions are made, actions are executed, both individually and in relationship. While being proud of being a first generation Indian-American, Dr. Jauhar's worldview is steeped in that culture, one of caste and hierarchy, of patriarchal patrilineage. Repeatedly, he expresses the innate desire—instilled by his mother, mostly—of going into medicine for the purposes of prestige, power, social standing, and earning potential. His primary goal is to make money and be respected in his community and among his peers. This approach rests in the need to *get*: to get or be given tangible and intangible things in order to feel complete. Such an approach to medical practice—or to any profession, most likely—is a setup for disappointment.
3. My own worldview, on the other hand, is based in Christian spirituality. The starting point for this way of life is not in getting, but rather in giving, not in holding on, but in letting go, not in being filled, but in becoming empty. This is expressed most clearly in Christian Scripture by the apostle Paul, in his magnificent hymn to Christ, in Philippians 2, where God is described as one with Jesus, “who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.” Paradoxically, and in the mysterious way of God, fulfillment in the Christian life comes not from getting, but from becoming empty, not from receiving, but from giving away. This giving of oneself as the starting point for Christian living can be taken directly into the exam room. I do not see patients

to get RVU's (the unit of reimbursement for my work done), but to give a listening ear, an examining touch, and a measure of helpful advice or succor. The worries and stresses of prior authorization, utilization review, electronic medical record keeping, insurance denials, personality conflicts in the office, and too few RVU's to make administrative overseers happy can melt away once the exam room door closes behind me and I enter the giving mode.

4. The Christian worldview is based in love. This love is best expressed as the notion of Greek *agape*, rather than *eros*. *Agape* is a way of love that allows freedom from the constraints of expectation. It is an approach to our neighbor that promotes acceptance and belonging, a bringing in and enfolding, inclusion and community. This is best expressed in Scripture by the feast of the Last Supper, the drama of which is intensified again by the notion of emptying out. Jesus says, on decanting the wine, "This is my blood, *poured out* for many for the remission of sins." It is in the giving of himself that Jesus completes his worldly mission, giving even to death on the cross. The words and actions of Jesus, expressed as *agape*, can form the basis for our own speech and behavior in Christian living. Approaching the patient with *agape* can lead to a much more fulfilling encounter—and thus a happier professional life—than thinking of the patient strictly as an RVU-generator.
5. I believe that Dr. Jauhar starts his thesis with a flawed notion: that American medicine is, like him, in middle age. He sets the starting point for modern American medicine circa 1950. *Doctored* is published, therefore, in medicine's sixty-fourth year. This would imply, to continue his trajectory, that medicine will wither and die in another thirty years or so. What then? His opening

chapter displays a naïve nostalgia for golden years that never existed. Why are these “halcyon days” (p. 8)? I would not have cared to practice in a time when children died of infectious diseases that are now easily treated, and when working adults living past forty were lucky. Medicine has no infancy, youth, adulthood, and death; of what value is this anthropomorphizing of a profession? Practicing medicine in the current era is exciting and stimulating. We are not aging as a profession, just evolving. We are on a path of continual innovation and improvement, of amazing discoveries on the research bench and translational movement into the clinical arena. Procedural and pharmaceutical advances occur that, frankly, are beyond belief. Just a few years ago, who would even have entertained the notion of a face transplant? Who could have predicted the worldwide eradication of smallpox, a killer pathogen since antiquity? The remarkable advances in Dr. Jauhar’s own field of cardiovascular medicine, from coronary artery stenting to cardioverter-defibrillator implantation, to the development of heart-, brain-, and life-saving statin therapy? Even the treatment of congestive heart failure has come light-years in pharmaceutical and procedural interventions compared to when I graduated medical school in 1990. By no means are we in an era of middle age, the implication being that it’s all downhill from here. No, we are on a rocket’s trajectory upward, with no end in sight.

6. In his final chapter, Dr. Jauhar’s prose becomes relaxed and unhurried. The bustle of city living is replaced with the serenity of the “country husband” (p. 245). Now, in this quietude, Dr. Jauhar can contemplate the purpose of his life and profession. During the preceding chapters, he never displays a spiritual side to his existence. He and Sonia “try” the Hindu spiritual enrichment center, but to

no sustaining or fulfilling avail. Now, he states, "I believe most people who are drawn to medicine desire a career of tangible purpose. What redeems the effort?" (p. 260) The word 'redemption', in my view, is vastly overused. It has both lay and theological meaning. In the lay sense of the word, used here by Dr. Jauhar, the meaning is one of salvaging a loss. It is commonly used this way by sports commentators and writers. To me, if the University of Virginia basketball team finally defeats Duke, it has nothing whatsoever to do with redemption. They just won the game. Likewise, Dr. Jauhar seeks to "redeem" the profession of medicine from the evils plaguing it: prior authorization, overutilization of perhaps unnecessary studies, cranking patient numbers for the purpose of generating RVU's. This redemption, he proposes, is found in the "tender moments helping people in need" (p. 260).

7. *I disagree!* The process of medical practice—that is, the one-on-one encounter behind closed doors in the exam room; the patient's revealing of inmost secrets, concerns, and fears; the proffered and accepted hand to shake and the examining touch; the *doctoring* of the patient, teaching of the physiology, pathology, and treatment approaches to disease states; the give-and-take in negotiating a final treatment plan—this is the *starting point* of the entire affair. This is where the rubber meets the road. There is nothing to redeem here; this is it! This is what I became a physician to do. This process does not require salvaging; it requires practicing. We don't need to save it, we just need to do it. This is why I love it. This is where *agape* takes place, where the giving occurs, where fulfillment is achieved through emptying out. This is where doctors can make a difference in the lives of their patients: in the individual encounter, based in *agape*,

caring for our neighbor in the community of love.

Jay W. Floyd, MD  
9/7/14