

A Timely Look at Pentecostalism through a Law-and-Gospel Lens (Part Three)

Colleagues,

Here is the final installment of Steve Kuhl's presentation on Pentecostalism, delivered at the Crossings conference last January. I pass it along without further ado.

Peace and Joy,
Jerry Burce

The Holy Spirit in the Age of Pentecostalism (Part 3 of 3)

Steven C. Kuhl

34. As Pentecostals zero in on the Acts 2 Pentecost story, they become focused on the supernatural elements within the story, in this case the miracle of speaking in tongues, and make that the point of the story. That is their hermeneutic. Accordingly, the purpose of the Holy Spirit is three fold. First, it confirms through supernatural signs and wonders (Acts 2:3) the eschatological message that "the last days" are upon us (Acts 2:14). Second, it gets the attention of the world (Acts 2:7) through these signs and wonders. Third, it empowers the disciples with supernatural gifts by the Spirit to explain these signs and wonders (Acts 4) to the world. The story is regarded, then, as literally paradigmatic, that is, it is assumed that the kinds of supernatural manifestations that happened at Pentecost is the new normal for any Spirit-filled gathering. As ingenious as this interpretation is for connecting Pentecostal experience

to the Bible, is that really the point of the Pentecost story? I think not.

35. To be sure, the story *presupposes* a supernatural worldview, but does it *proclaim* a supernatural worldview? I think not. The story is all about God being present through the power of the Holy Spirit to deal with the world in a new way: not through the old way of the law, which condemns sinners, but through the new way of the gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and raised, which offers forgiveness to sinners. Distinguishing law and gospel is the hermeneutical key for unlocking the meaning of the text. Let me illustrate this with three points.

36. First, that this spectacle happens on the Jewish Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1) is symbolically and interpretively significant. Pentecost was the liturgical feast day when the Jews observed the event of God's giving of the law to rule over Israel through Moses, 50 days after the Passover. The point of the story is that that dispensation is now coming to an end. To use words from the prophet Joel, referenced by Peter: the law, has seen its "last days" (Acts 2:17), so to speak. From now on, says Luke, let this Day of Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus, mark the beginning of a new day in which the Holy Spirit, not the law, rules your lives. What distinguish the rule of the Spirit from the rule of the law is this: the law brings the word of God's condemnation of sinners, the Spirit brings the Word of God's forgiveness for sinners, accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection. This is a pneumatology of the cross because the Spirit brings the benefits of the cross of Christ to sinners.

37. Second, central to the story is not the initial set of questions (two of them) that the crowd asked concerning the supernatural sights and sounds they saw and heard. Remember, those sights and sounds created "bewilderment" in some (How can

this be?, vv. 6, 8) and “sneers” in others (Are they drunk?, v. 12). Rather, central to understanding the text is the third and final question the crowd asked of the apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” (v. 37). Significantly, that question comes in response to Peter’s clear and poignant sermon connecting the fulfillment of the esoteric words of the prophet Joel and the messianic psalm of David to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And the answer to this third question is remarkably simple and unspectacular: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (v. 38). It is important to note that repentance *and* being baptized for forgiveness of sins *and* receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit are not three isolated things, but the packaged whole that defines the new life in Christ. This side of the resurrection, life in the Spirit has repentance and forgiveness as its basic law-gospel framework: the law’s incriminations are acknowledged in repentance, and gospel’s overruling of the law through forgiveness is received by faith. Whatever other features life in the Spirit might take on is open-ended, as the Acts of the Apostles will show.

38. The third point concerns the matter of speaking in tongues. Undeniably, the Pentecost story tells us that the apostles received the supernatural ability to speak in the languages of other nations. But again, so it seems to me, the point of the story is not that such supernatural phenomenon are necessarily part and parcel of the Spirit’s way of making an effective and powerful Christian witness. Rather, the gift of tongues serves to make a basic point about the gospel that was important in the early life of the church: namely, that it was for everyone regardless of national origin or cultural-legal affiliation. Therefore, the story illustrates another application of the hermeneutical distinction between law and gospel. The nations do

not need to learn the Hebrew tongue (or adapt to Jewish law and custom) in order to be included in the promise of the Jewish messiah, Jesus Christ, and be part of the reconciled people of God. The work of the Spirit is to accommodate the needs of the nations by raising up proclaimers who will bring the message of the forgiveness of sins to them. In other words, the apostles are free, as Paul would say, to be all things to all people for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:19-23). When in Rome one is free to do as the Romans do; when in Jerusalem one is free to do as the Jews do. What is important here is the freedom the Spirit gives to the church, or, in this context, to the apostles, for the sake of gospel mission. In their administration of the gospel they are free to accommodate as they see fit to the language, customs and the cultural heritage of the people to whom they are sent. The Book of Acts is filled with examples of how this law-gospel distinction forms and shapes a variety of missionary practices by the apostles.

39. In my reading of Acts, then, I am not denying that the Spirit might work supernatural signs and wonders. My point is that, true to the character of supernatural works and wonders, they will most likely be spontaneous and rare, not predictable and regular. What will be predictable and regular is the content of the Spirit-filled message: repent and believe the good news. As I read Acts 2, the Spirit appears to be the divine emissary who oversees two kinds of works in tandem: proclaiming and hearing. The Spirit ensured that the gospel of Christ was both *proclaimed* to the world (the disciples spoke in the language of the nations, Acts 2:4) and *heard/believed* by the world (the nations heard the gospel in their own language, Acts 2:8). The point is not how the proclaimers emerged—supernaturally or naturally—but that the message was consistent. And even if Pentecostal communities routinely experience signs and wonders every time they gather—good for

them!—the challenge remains that they do not let the signs and wonders overshadow the message, that the signs and wonders serve the gospel of God's love in Jesus Christ, as Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13.

40. Finally, I want to briefly address the issue of "evidence" concerning the work and presence of the Holy Spirit in the worship gathering. Pentecostals make an important point when they assert that worship is not simply a human activity, but the arena in which God is present through the Holy Spirit to build up the people of God for the sake of faith and mission. In that regard, I would like to think that Luther's description of the Holy Spirit's work in the Small Catechism's explanation of the Third Article of the Creed would please Pentecostals. One translation puts it like this:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers, and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and will give to me and to all believers in Christ everlasting life. This is most certainly true.

41. For Luther, the whole counsel of the triune God (aka, the gospel) is that sinners get connected to Christ and his saving work so that they might be reconciled, forgiven, justified, have things made right with God. The problem is, sinners don't have the ability to do that. With regard to God, they are by nature oppositional defiant. That's why the Holy Spirit is necessary. To paraphrase the language of the Gospel of John, the Holy

Spirit is the one person in the Trinity who is commissioned to take what is Christ's (his righteous work of dying and rising for sinners) and apply it to sinners (John 16:12-15). That application is synonymous with faith. Therefore, Luther begins his explanation of the Third Article on a depressing note about our inherent inability to believe. He does that because it is very important for believers to know that they become and remain believers not by their "own reason or strength" but by the Holy Spirit. To claim otherwise puts them at odds with the Holy Spirit and risks losing what the Spirit has given them.

42. But how does the Holy Spirit do this work of creating faith in Christ? Are the Spirit's means secret and known only to the Holy Trinity or are they public and essentially knowable to all? To be sure, in asking this question we venture onto very slippery theological ice, the mysterious topic of election. Therefore, let me answer it in a slippery way. The means by which the Spirit works faith are a matter of public knowledge, even though the reason they work on some and not others is not. Therefore, since the means by which the Spirit creates faith is a matter of public knowledge, it is possible to point to the "evidence" of the Spirit's work in the world. In Luther's explanation the "evidence" of the work of Holy Spirit is identified by four specific verbs ("called," "gathered," "enlightened," and "sanctified and kept") with the "Holy Spirit" as the subject or actor, "me" as the object of recipient of the action, and "the gospel" as the public discernable means of the action. We can unpack these four verbs through four questions.

43. First, am I being "called by the gospel"? Is the gospel being addressed to me through the ordinary, objective means Christ himself has instituted? Here I think the phrase "by the gospel" could be any one of the five means of the gospel that Luther identified in his Smalcald Articles (III.4): baptism, preaching, confession and forgiveness, the Lord's Supper, and

the mutual conversation and consolation of the saints. If this is happening, then this is “Exhibit A” for evidence of the Spirit at work.

Second, is there a regular “gathering” of people where the gospel is preached and the sacraments given and mutual love and support is shared? That is to say, is there a community of faith where the gospel is proclaimed freshly and the sacraments administered accordingly? If so, that is “Exhibit B” for evidence of the Spirit at work.

Third, am I being “enlightened” by his gifts? That is, does the fact that “He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers” give insight or enlightenment on how I think, live, and interact in the world. If so, that is “Exhibit C” for evidence of the Spirit.

Fourth, am I being “sanctified and kept” in the one true faith? That is, not only do I trust the gospel, but is that trust being nurtured and kept alive in me by the gospel? If so, that is my holiness and that is “Exhibit D” for evidence of the Spirit. For remember, sanctification or holiness is not a moral concept whose increase is measured by the standard of law, but a spiritual condition of being “set apart” by faith in the forgiveness of sins.

44. I have no idea whether Pentecostals would identify these very ordinary public ministry activities as “evidence” of the working of the Holy Spirit in the world. They certainly don’t have the panache of speaking in tongues or healings. But neither would they necessarily exclude such extraordinary supernatural phenomena as tongues or healings from joining them as evidence. I would very much welcome discussion with Pentecostals on this.

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A Timely Look at Pentecostalism through a Law-and-Gospel Lens (Part Two)

Colleagues,

In the two weeks since our last post the world's attention has swiveled to Rio de Janeiro, where the point I made in my introduction to said post is on vivid display. Rio is a spirited place at the moment, awash in all manner of energies and forces. To call them Olympic is accurate. Some are strong enough to shape the mood and mindset of nations, if only temporarily. In case you missed it, minuscule Fiji crushed mighty Great Britain in some species of rugby and won a gold medal, its first-ever. The jubilation in Suva was instantaneous. *The Guardian*, a British paper, used a telling headline to report that: "[Rugby is](#)

[our religion](#).” If you take the time to scan the article, you’ll notice how that spirit of victory is reordering relations between the country’s ethnic groups, at least for this week. Powerful indeed!

Just as powerful is the spirit of self-absorbed nationalism that caused most Americans to miss the joy in Fiji. (“Fiji? Like, who cares?”) To point this out is, of course, to offend against that spirit. If, in doing so, I offend any of you, please, my apologies, albeit half-hearted. I am, after all, the aging remains of an American kid who grew up in another part of the world. That changes one’s perspective. Or, as we could also say, it imbues one with a somewhat different spirit.

With that, back we swivel to Steve Kuhl’s reflections of this past January on the one and only Holy Spirit. I was planning to send you the rest of it in one batch. Second thoughts have prompted me to break that into two pieces, three in all for the entire paper. This week’s segment brings you some helpful observations on the shape and rationale of Pentecostal worship practices. These will also explain what’s going on, and why, at the “non-denominational” church down the road. After that will come the start of Steve’s engagement as a Lutheran thinker with Pentecostal claims and emphases. I should mention that in choosing the break between this and next week’s concluding segment I ignored his formal outline in favor of the unfolding logic of his argument. The great account of Pentecost in Acts 2 will be the focus for next time.

Two other quick matters:

First, my thanks to the handful of you who have responded to some posts of the past few months. I’ve been hoarding these for a while. I’ll share the best of them with all of you as soon as we’re done with Steve.

Second, I've been delinquent about passing along assorted reading tips that have come my way of late. Another future post will attend to that. For now, I point you to a book that belongs in the library of every Crossings-minded person. The title is *Gift and Promise: The Augsburg Confession and the Heart of Christian Theology*. Augsburg Fortress is the publisher. The combined energies of Editors Ron Neustadt and Steve Hitchcock are the reason it's out there as there as a thing to buy, and read, and treasure. Here's how Ron describes it:

Gift and Promise celebrates the heart of Christian theology that is expressed in the Augsburg Confession. In the first three chapters Ed Schroeder establishes the "hub" of that theology as it gets expressed in Article 4 of the Augsburg Confession, justification by faith alone. Then, nine of Ed's students discuss how that hub gets articulated in Augsburg's remaining articles of faith.

Steve Hitchcock and I believe not that this volume is not only timely as we prepare to observe the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, but that it will remain a valuable reference and resource for teaching well into the future.

I should underscore that supplies are limited. Copies are being sent at the moment to anyone who makes [a gift of \\$25 or more to Crossings](#). You can also order directly by sending a \$25 check to Crossings, P.O. Box 7011, Chesterfield, MO 63006. Write "book" on the Memo line. We're guessing, of course, that once you've browsed the book you'll want to buy another copy for someone else. Think friend, colleague, neighbor, bishop: anyone who could use a jolt of solid law-and-gospel thinking, and the wondrous Spirit that drives it.

Peace and Joy,
Jerry Burce

The Holy Spirit in the Age of Pentecostalism (Part 2 of 3)

Steven C. Kuhl

IV. Worship as the Liturgical Encounter with the Supernatural

23. It is important to recognize that the supernaturalism of Pentecostalism is not like the Supernaturalism of Shamanism. Pentecostal supernaturalism does not seek to compete with the scientific knowledge and practical benefits that naturalism has yielded. Therefore, we do not generally see Pentecostal ministers setting up shop or walking down the street performing miracles for people as though miracles were their cottage industry. Indeed, that was the error of Simon Magnus in Acts 8. For the most part the kinds of miracles and wonders that Pentecostals experience do not happen in a demonstrable way in the world in general, though they do happen there, but in the church gathered, that is, in worship. The Spirit demonstrates its power and reality in worship because the purpose of those miracles and wonders are to confirm the truth of the gospel of salvation therein proclaimed. They are understood to be serving the gospel mission of the church just as they did for the apostles in New Testament Times. Therefore, nothing is more characteristic of Pentecostalism than its worship. Worship is mission because worship is the encounter with the gospel confirmed by the Supernatural wonders of the Spirit.

24. To mainline Christians whose worship focuses on the orderly administration of the Word and Sacraments (what might be characterized as a thought-out dialectic of God's gracious promises and our trusting responses), it may seem strange to think of emotionally laden Pentecostal worship as following a

liturgical structure and enacting specific liturgical rites. But, as Daniel Albrecht and Evan Howard have noted, the categories of liturgy and rites, while not traditionally part of Pentecostal language, aptly describe Pentecostal worship.[ref]Albrecht and Howard, pp. 238-40.[/ref] In general, the Pentecostal worship experience unfolds in three parts, which Albrecht and Howard call macro-rites: 1) an initial time of "Praise" that 2) builds up expectation for hearing the "Prophetic Word" that 3) leads into the "Altar Service" where miraculous demonstrations of the Spirit take place. While each may appear to be purely spontaneous, they are not. They are well planned, but planned in a way that gives freedom to the believer's response.

25. The formal indebtedness of Pentecostal worship to the "New Measures" of Charles Finney and his 19th Century revivalist movement is obvious. Indeed, the worship style of Evangelicalism in general is formally indebted to this style. But what distinguishes Pentecostals from Finney is the theology that informs the style. Finney fostered an unapologetic Arminian[ref]Those wanting more background on Arminianism may find these two online articles helpful: "What is Arminianism?" at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/arminianism.html> , accessed on February 17, 2016, and "A Lutheran Response to Arminianism" at <http://whitefield.freesevers.com/ritchie1.html> , accessed on February 17, 2016.[/ref] theological outlook that ascribed to the human person an innate (semi-Pelagian) capacity to "come to Jesus." The purpose of the worship service, he believed, was to create the psychological conditions for doing this through the use of emotion and excitement. Therefore, developing culturally useful worship techniques and experiences to entice people in that direction was the goal of worship. The praise worship phenomenon in non-Pentecostal churches today descends directly from Finney. There is nothing supernatural whatsoever in

Finney's understanding of worship and the faith experience; it is purely psychological.

26. If I understand Pentecostalism correctly, it proceeds from a very different premise. It is not, in the least, *consciously* manipulative in its intents, even though many of its critics will charge it as being *unconsciously* so. Indeed, Pentecostalism, in my judgment, seems to be at best silent or ambivalent on Finney's program and the Calvinist-Arminian debate that informed it—at least if the theologians I have read are representative. Worship is for Pentecostals an objective, supernatural experience of the Spirit, not a subjective, entertainment event meant to move people in purely psychological ways. Faith and the Christian life is about the mysterious working of the Spirit to transform individuals who have been “born anew” and, thus, changed at their core.[ref]Juan Sepúlveda, “Born Again: Baptism and the Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective,” *Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge*, eds. Jürgen Moltmann and Karl-Josef Kusche (SCM Press Ltd, London and Orbis Press, Maryknoll: 1996) pp. 105-8.[/ref] Do worshipers get filled with ecstasy? Certainly. Could Pentecostals simply be playing out Finney's program in an unconscious or ideological way? Perhaps. But there is no way to prove that, and that would not be the assessment of Pentecostals.

27. In essence, then, Pentecostals liken Christian worship generally to what they imagined took place when the disciples gathered together on the first Christian Pentecost. Believing the words of Jesus in Acts 1:8 as not simply historically specific but universally paradigmatic, every Pentecostal gathering proceeds with the expectation of experiencing the promised, miracle-filled outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Acts 2 reports. In anticipation of that promise, they begin the first macro-rite of the liturgy by singing praises to God, which “both lifts the congregants toward God in adoration and prepares their

hearts for the hearing of the Word," the second macro-rite of the liturgy. During the second macro-rite the Scripture is read, a sermon is delivered, and other kinds of word-acts happen: Testimonies are spoken, prayers are offered, and prophecies are heard. Some may speak in tongues and others may interpret them. As Albrecht and Howard put it, "if Luther restored the 'priesthood' of all believers, Pentecostals have restored the 'prophethood' of all believers." Finally comes the third macro-rite, the "altar service." During this time the congregation is called to respond in any way the Spirit moves them. As Albrecht and Howard note, those who wish to have specific needs met in a tangible, supernatural way are especially invited up to the "sacred [altar] space where conversation, reconciliation, healing, deliverance and other forms of 'doing business with God' are transacted." [ref]Albrecht and Howard, pp. 238-9.[/ref]

28. To be sure, Christians who have both 1) a deep appreciation for the Spirit-bearing—dare I call them, "supernatural"—rites or sacraments that Jesus instituted (especially, the Lord's Supper) and 2) an experiential awareness of the importance of the penitential accent that pervades the New Testament witness will undoubtedly find Pentecostal worship and spirituality naively one-sided and severely wanting. But in offering this critique I get ahead of myself. The point is this. For Pentecostals, worship is an encounter with the supernatural, the Holy Spirit, in an ecstatically experiential and outwardly evidential way, with tongues being the "initial evidence" and other signs and wonders accompanying it. Worship is the experiential arena that confirms the supernatural conviction of the Pentecostal faith.

V. Some Theological Questions for Our Pentecostal Brothers and Sisters.

29. I have tried to present a fair and sympathetic historical, theological and liturgical picture of the emerging Pentecostal

tradition by focusing on what reputable Pentecostal scholars would identify as its best qualities and its most important contributions to the challenges that face Christianity and its mission today. Be assured, Pentecostal theologians and leaders are very aware of the aberrations and “tensions” in their movement: triumphalism, superstition, chicanery, and anti-intellectualism, to name a few.[ref]Vondey, for example, seeks to bring understanding to those who are “perplexed” by the apparent lack of coherence in Pentecostalism by identifying seven fundamental “tensions” that reside unresolved in the movement. These tensions encompass almost every aspect of Christian life and thought as is immediately evident from a simple glance at the table of contents, p. vii-viii. In addition to Vondey is Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*, Backer Academic: Grand Rapids, 2005. He not only sees the many turbulences in Pentecostalism’s interpretation of its own experience and classical doctrinal topics, but offers ways to rethink them and calm them into a breeze that might refresh and invigorate the church for today rather than replace it.[/ref] Above all, they are very aware of how the message of the movement gets hijacked and distorted by positive thinking philosophies and the so-called “health and wealth gospel.” And while it is true that Pentecostalism would have never ever received a second look were it not for its explosive growth, as that second look is being taken, more and more people are seeing that it at least addresses many of the right questions, even if one is not completely satisfied with its answers.

30. The central question that Pentecostalism addresses is the sticky one of the connection between human experience and divine reality. Of course, this is not a new question; it has been asked since the rise of pietism. But Pentecostalism brings new urgency to the question in light of the extraordinary answer it

gives. If I understand Werner Elert and the Erlangen School of Theology correctly, that was one of their central concerns too. To be sure, in addressing it they were responding not to Pentecostalism, but to Schleiermacher and liberal theology, the latter having described the relationship between divine reality and experience in ways that were highly problematic. Karl Barth would deal with this in his “theology of the Word” by dismissing the whole question as ultimately irrelevant. Elert could not accept this. Nor could Bonhoeffer, who would criticize Barth’s approach as a “positivism of revelation.” Wrestling with the question of how the divine is “experienced” continues to be one of the central challenges to Christian theology today—and it necessarily leads to the question about the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian theology and experience. Indeed, that is Crossings’ concern, too: crossing the gospel into people’s lives in a way that is experientially meaningful.

31. In what follows, I want to engage, in broad strokes, the two major foundational topics important to Pentecostalism that I identified above: First, supernaturalism as the central hermeneutical category for understanding the Holy Spirit and, second, the liturgy as the arena wherein the evidence of the Holy Spirit is confirmed in an outwardly experiential way. To be sure, these two topics are intimately intertwined and they cannot be addressed exhaustively here. Consider this as nothing more than a humble start.

32. With regard to Pentecostalism, the first question that non-Pentecostals often raise is this: are the incredible supernatural experiences they claim to have “real,” or are they a figment of the imagination? One might think it would be easy to test this question, but, as it turns out, it is not. For any attempt to find a rational method for testing the reality of a “supernatural” experience necessarily involves us in a category mistake. The best that a rational method can do is tell you

whether an experience is “natural,” that is, whether or not it conforms to the laws of nature in a predictable, expected way. Since supernatural experiences are by definition outside the bounds of the natural, a rational method can tell us nothing about the “reality” of such an experience. This is why ecumenical dialogue on Pentecostalism tends to bracket this question. So will I here. Suffice it say that those who are involved in Pentecostalism are, as a rule, absolutely convinced of the reality of their supernatural experience; those who are not involved are, also as a rule, inherently skeptical of it. Therefore, the reason Pentecostalism needs to be taken seriously is not because its claims are reasonable by the standards of modernity, but because it is the fastest growing Christian, if not religious, movement the world has ever seen. Something is happening here—and that is undeniable. Perhaps the advice of Gamaliel (Acts 5:38-39) is the best counsel for those on the outside who try to assess it.

33. One of the most basic criticisms Pentecostals have leveled against mainline Protestant churches is that they have sold out to the naturalistic zeitgeist of the Modern Age. The result, they say, has been a world stripped of belief in a living God eager to bless it and a church bereft of the power of the Spirit to proclaim it. Perhaps the first thing we Protestants should say to Pentecostalism is “*mea culpa*.” There is truth in this criticism. Scratch the theological surface of many mainline Protestant denominations and what you find is not a bold confession of the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and raised, but some variation of what sociologists of American religion, Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, have termed “Moralist Therapeutic Deism.”[ref]Christian Smith and Melina Lindquist Deton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press: Oxford/London, 2005).[/ref] If ever there is a theological

system that bends to the naturalist spirit of our age, certainly this is it. But is the brash, bold supernaturalism of Pentecostalism the Biblical antidote to this capitulation to naturalism? Might a naïve supernaturalism be as dangerous as a naïve naturalism? Might not a bold assertion of supernaturalism as easily miss the mark of the gospel as a timid capitulation to naturalism? Might it not be that, precisely because the New Testament writers lived in a world that took supernatural phenomena for granted, they had the intellectual challenge of showing how the point of the gospel was actually not about God's might over the world but God's condescension to be weak for the sake of the world—that is, for the world's salvation? And doesn't that mean that Christian pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit) needs to be foundationally a "pneumatology of the Cross," as Cheryl Peterson has noted?[ref]Cheryl Peterson, "A Pneumatology of the Cross: The Challenge of Neo-Pentecostalism to Lutheran Theology," *Dialog: A Journal for Theology* 50/2 (Summer 2011): 133-142.[/ref] I also think so—and I also think that the classic text of Pentecostals, the Acts 2 Pentecost story, properly read with the New Testament's hermeneutic of distinguishing law and gospel supports this view.

A Timely Look at Pentecostalism through a Law-and-Gospel Lens (Part One)

Colleagues,

It bears recalling in times like these that the world seethes

with spirits of every kind and hue. Americans who paid attention to the politics of these past two weeks saw this on display in the arenas of Cleveland and Philadelphia. Assorted gusts of this or that either tore or wafted through those cavernous spaces, some dividing the crowds, others uniting them. A few were gentle; many more were strong and fierce. They moved people to chant slogans and wave flags and hoist banners and behave in assorted other ways that we ordinarily eschew. We who watched from afar responded to them in a host of ways. For better or worse, they affected our spirits too, and they shaped our own behavior. We cheered or raged or ground our teeth in disbelief, perhaps. We called our friends to share impressions. We made donations.

I would argue that all human behavior is always spirit-driven. The question is, what spirit or spirits is doing the driving in any particular event? To say that the possibilities are legion is to understate the case. Legion upon legion is more like it. This is true also in the operations of those very human institutions that, in one fashion or another, wear the label "church." Every congregation, like every house, has its distinct smell. The odor reflects the peculiar mix of spirits at work in the place. So too with districts, synods, and dioceses; with schools and agencies; with denominations or "wider church bodies," as some would rather call them.

Christians assert that of all the spirits on the scene, all itching to animate and propel us, One and only One is Holy. Again a question presses: how does one detect *that* Spirit's presence, or lack thereof, amid the fumes we breathe? Or to drag in some older language, what is "of the Spirit," and what is not? Did baptized voters ask that question when they tuned into the tumults of the fortnight past? If not, they were being lazy, or timid. Where my own Christian tribe is concerned, the latter is more likely. Little Lutherans are rarely trained to think

about the Holy Spirit. Grownup Lutherans, if somehow trapped in discussions of where or how the Spirit might be at work in everyday affairs, will start to shift uneasily in their seats. A clear-eyed grasp of the sinner's capacity for self-delusion has something to do with this, I'm sure. That kind of clarity is a Lutheran strength. It also feeds a Lutheran weakness. We are far too modest about our calling and capacity in Christ to function as the Holy Spirit's operatives, too hesitant by far to inquire usefully into how that calling plays out as we go the mundane tasks of running a congregation, or the tawdry task (as some will see it) of casting a vote. Again, our lack of training in such inquiry feeds into this. So does our reluctance to put much stock in the promises of Christ, however plain and unmistakable they be (cf. [John 20:21-22](#)). But that too is an aspect of our sinners' delusion, as we of all people ought to know.

Last January the Crossings crowd hosted a conference on this matter of "discerning the Spirit." The papers were outstanding. You've gotten three of them via Thursday Theology in the months since. Today I start passing along a fourth, part two of which will bless your inbox a week from now. Steven Kuhl is the author. His topic is the Pentecostal response of the past century to the underwhelming attention that the Holy Spirit has gotten (and continues to get) in the conversation of older Christian groups.

You'll find Steve's paper of present interest for two reasons, I think. The first is the simple fact that too few of us know enough about the Pentecostal-minded churches that burgeon everywhere these days. Count me among the culprits who have gnashed their teeth about them for decades, not knowing whereof one gnashes, or at least not knowing well. Here Steve will illuminate, and that right brightly. In doing so he'll also press the question of how a person who distinguishes law and gospel might respond to the Pentecostal conception of how the

Holy Spirit is active in the world. Out of that may come some useful thoughts for you and me on the key matter touched on above. How do we discern the Spirit amid the seething melee of powers and forces that occupy our present moment and scream for our allegiance?

Peace and joy, the ruckus notwithstanding.

Jerry Burce

The Holy Spirit in the Age of Pentecostalism

Steven C. Kuhl

1. Introduction

2. The title of my talk, "The Holy Spirit in the Age of Pentecostalism," is meant to say that the topic of the Holy Spirit is a big topic today for many Christians and academic theologians chiefly because of the global strength of the Pentecostal Movement. It is not to say that Pentecostalism has the last word on the topic of the Holy Spirit—indeed, Pentecostals differ greatly, even on this topic—but that the Pentecostal experience has marked the point of departure for the discussion of the topic today.
3. We can think of the term "Pentecostal" much like we think about the term "Protestant." Protestants are often lumped together as a group, not because they are all in agreement on doctrine and practice, but because they shared a common aversion to aspects of the religious status quo when they emerged, namely, Roman Catholicism. In light of that common "opponent," they did come to share some general common accents. For example, Protestants tended to affirm notions like the priority of Scripture over tradition, justification by grace apart from works, and the

priesthood of all believers. In addition, they also tended to reject ideas like the Sacrifice of Mass, the cult of the saints, the requirement of priestly celibacy, and the sacerdotal view of the Sacraments. But when you scratch beneath the surface of what different Protestant groups mean by these common affirmations and rejections you will soon notice substantial differences in interpretation and practice.

4. Pentecostalism is like this, too. Pentecostals tend to share a common critique of today's mainline denominational churches. They see them as focused on institutional survival and doctrinal pettiness, and lacking in life and vitality—all because they lack an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit, what Pentecostals call “the baptism in the Holy Spirit” or “Spirit Baptism.” Pentecostals would say that mainline churches are open to the *idea* of being Christian but not to the *experience* of being Christian. To be sure, Pentecostals disagree on many things concerning the interpretation of their experience of the Holy Spirit and the biblical narrative that they claim confirms their experience. In their 100-year history, three very different classifications of Pentecostalism have emerged. Classical Pentecostalism, which has its own set of distinct denominational groupings, began around 1900; the Charismatic Movement, which nested in various mainline denominations, began around 1960; and the Third Wave Movement, which emerged out of Fuller Seminary, began around 1980. But what makes them all “Pentecostal” is a shared, tangible experience of the Holy Spirit in spite of other differences they might have.
5. Pentecostalism has captured the attention of Christianity today because of its explosive, global growth. Some estimates put the number of Pentecostals globally at 600 million. That is incredible when you consider its short

history in comparison to other expressions of Christianity. While getting an accurate count is difficult, the Pew Research Institute estimated that in 2010, of the 2.2 billion Christians in a world of 6.9 billion people,

50.1% are Roman Catholic (1.1 billion),

11.9% (262 million) are Orthodox, and

36.7% (807 million) are Protestant.

But in that "Protestant" count, Pew estimates that a staggering 72.7% (587 Million) identify as Pentecostal and Charismatic.[ref]See Pew Research Center, "<http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>", accessed January 18, 2016. For World Religious Demographics go to Pew Research Center, "Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project," <http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/questions>, accessed January 18, 2016. There you will see that of the 6.9 Billion people in the world 31.4% are Christian and 23.2% are Muslim.[/ref] Compare that with some of the other denominations who are in the Protestant piece of the pie and you get a good picture of the size of the Pentecostal movement:

Anglicans = 85.5 million (10.6%)

Lutherans = 78.3 million (9.7%)

Baptists = 72.6 million (9.0%)

Reformed = 56.5 million (7.0%)

Methodists= 27.4 million (3.4%)

5. Pentecostalism has also shaken up the assumptions that reigned among Sociologists of Religion throughout much of

20th Century. According to Peter Berger (a renowned sociologist of knowledge and religion and publicly committed Lutheran Christian) everyone, including himself, held to what is called the secularization theory of modernity, the assumption that “modernity would lead to the decline of religion.” Now that the 21st Century is upon us the facts simply do not bear out that assumption. As Berger says,

With some exceptions, notably Europeans and an international class of intellectuals, most of our contemporaries are decidedly ‘religious’ and not only in the less-modernized parts of the world. There are many large religious movements, only a few of them violent, most of them resulting in significant social, economic, and political developments. Arguably the largest and most influential (and almost entirely nonviolent) of these movements is Pentecostalism.[ref]Peter Berger, “A Friendly Dissent from Pentecostalism,” *First Things* 20, November 2012, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2012/11/a-friendly-dissent-from-pentecostalism>. [/ref]

6. In what follows I will discuss 1) the historical developments that gave rise to Pentecostalism, 2) the theological hermeneutic that informs Pentecostalism, 3) the worship style that characterizes Pentecostalism, and 4) a few friendly questions and concerns that I as a mainline, law-gospel distinguishing Christian have for Pentecostalism.
7. **The Historical Origin of Pentecostalism: Azusa and the Dialect of Experience and Scripture**
8. The traditional marker for identifying the beginning of the Pentecostal Movement is a remarkable rival event “led” by William Seymour, an African American Holiness preacher, in an old broken down church-turned-warehouse on Azusa

Street in Los Angeles in 1906. Although the lore surely supersedes the reality, the Azusa Street revival[ref]Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. While there are many books that rehearse this early history, I draw extensively on Robert Anderson's thoroughly researched and critically informed study of early Pentecostalism. While the sociological criteria he uses to judge Pentecostalism is subject to the charge of reductionism, the questions he asks and the sensitivity with which he approaches his topic is commendable.[/ref] is said to have gone on non-stop 24-7 for three years. It featured preaching, prayer and an amazing array of spectacular, miraculous, supernatural wonders that were not only mindboggling but exhilarating for the participants. People of all races and from numerous national backgrounds are said to have experienced healings, prophesying, ecstatic outbursts, and above all, the speaking in tongues.

9. Significantly, this exhibition of spirituality did not go unnoticed by the secular media, specifically, *The Los Angeles Times*, even though it typically ridiculed the event as "fanaticism" and described its prized gift as a "weird babble of tongues." [ref]Wikipedia, "Azusa Street Revival," accessed January 18, 2016 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/-Azusa_Street_Revival.[/ref]In response, the movement started its own journal, *The Apostolic Faith*, which regularly recorded and published what was happening from its own distinctive point of view. It also commissioned missionaries, many of whom were long-distance visitors from all over the world who had somehow caught wind of the happening, got caught up in the spirit, and returned home to spread the news that Pentecost had come again upon the

earth. As a result, Pentecostalism soon began to get a toe hold in many places.

10. The Azusa Street Revival serves Pentecostal history much the way Luther's nailing of the 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg serves Reformation or Protestant history. It is a symbolic moment, not an absolute one. It cannot be fully understood apart from its pre- and post-history, and yet, it contains within it the seeds for a radical rethinking, renewal, and reappropriation of Christianity for its time. Therefore, let us take a look at that pre- and post-history of the Azusa Street event.
11. In what I've said so far, one might get the impression that the Azusa Street experience happened unexpectedly, out of the blue. That is not true. Among the Wesleyan Holiness preachers and teachers (those who saw "sanctification" as a second, distinct work of grace in addition to "justification" or conversion), the idea was emerging that there was still another work of the Spirit missing in the Church. The idea was that a Spirit-filled Christian is not only one who believes that Christ is savior (Luther's insight on justification) and is increasing in moral holiness (Wesley's idea of sanctification), but also one who is empowered for mission, the initial sign of which is speaking in tongues. This latter point was especially important in light of a growing eschatological feeling that the end of the world was coming soon, making the need for rapid mission outreach paramount. What better means could the Holy Spirit use to convince a world, duped by the naturalism of modernity, about the truth of the Christian message concerning the reality of the living, active Spirit of God, than through a display of supernatural power in this experiential way? As Pentecostals would reason, just as it was by means of signs and wonders that the Holy Spirit,

working through the apostles, convinced the pagan world of the truth of God and Christ, so also it will be through signs and wonders that God will convince the modern world as well. A chief figure among these early preachers was Charles Fox Parham and, with him, the Bethel Bible School he founded in Topeka, Kansas in 1900.

12. Focusing on the Pentecost story in Acts 2 as the Biblical paradigm of the Spirit-filled Church/Christian, Parham surmised that the gift of "speaking in tongues" was the "initial evidence" that such a Church/Christian is existing and that subsequent gifts would, then, naturally follow—healing, prophesying, the interpretation of tongues, etc. With this conviction he asked his students to test it out by seeking the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" (which entailed waiting in prayer, fasting and expectation as Jesus instructed the apostles to do) and see if the promise of the Spirit would not come upon them with same identifiable signs as evidenced in Acts 2. On January 1, 1901, Agnus Ozman was the first to speak in tongues and a few days later other students did too. When news got out that Pentecost had come to Topeka, criticism of Parham's school and students came from both religious and secular sources, calling it a "Tower of Babel." In light of this the students began to doubt if their experience was real or imaginary. This will be an enduring issue for Pentecostalism. Is the experience really of the Holy Spirit's doing or is it a fabrication of human desire? With no clear way to test their claims, true Pentecostals are those who are self-evidentially convinced it is real and non-Pentecostals are those who are self-evidentially convinced it is not. Anyway, by April, 1901, the students left, the school closed, and Parham sojourned in both Missouri and Texas where he continued his work and slowly gained a following, especially in light of his accent on

healing.

13. One student who became convinced of Parham's basic premise was William Seymour, who, as we described earlier, presided over the sustained, three-year long, "Pentecostal revival" at the Azusa Street Mission. While there is no official count as to how many thousands of people actually visited Azusa, we do know that at its peak its official paper *The Apostolic Faith* had 50,000 subscribers. That the Azusa Street event came to an end is not necessarily inconsistent with Pentecostalism's self-understanding. From the beginning Pentecostalism did not see itself as a separate denomination among the denominations, but as a *movement* of the Spirit intended to renew every denomination.
14. Of course, that did not happen. On the contrary, as Pentecostal Christians shaped by their Azusa experience went back to their mostly Holiness, Methodist and Baptist denominations (with a smattering of Quakers, Mennonites and Presbyterians) to share their Pentecostal message, they were met with mixed reviews. While some Holiness denominations embraced the Pentecostal movement, many categorically rejected it for a variety of reasons. [ref]Those Holiness denominations that embrace the Pentecostal message and became Pentecostal include the Church of God, the Church of God in Christ, and the Pentecostal Holiness Church. Those Pentecostal denominations that formed anew when Pentecostals found no welcome in their predecessor churches, include the Assembly of God (1914), the Pentecostal Church of God (1919) and the Pentecostals Assemblies of the world (1916), which formed because of a split within Pentecostalism over the doctrine of the Trinity. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azusa_Street_Revival accessed January 17, 2016.[/ref]This led many early

Pentecostals into the position of forming their own denominations by default, meaning they were also faced with the problem of making doctrinal decisions on the numerous topics that gave rise to denominationalism.

15. For this reason, Pentecostals quickly ended up exhibiting the full breadth of doctrinal positions that tend to divide, especially as evidenced in the various Evangelical, Holiness and Fundamentalist-minded denominations and associations out of which they came. In addition, as the Pentecostal message infiltrated other mainline denominations (including Anglicans, Lutherans and Catholics) under the banner of the Charismatic Movement in the 1970s, it would also sit in relative doctrinal comfort within those theological traditions. As a broad movement, Pentecostalism is faithful to its deep pietistic roots and true to its premise that the Spirit-baptism experience has priority over doctrine. But a sense of irony attends this. For as the movement takes concrete form in any particular community of faith, debate over doctrinal issues will be unavoidable, raising questions about the sufficiency of that pietistic premise.

III. The Working Theological Hermeneutic of Pentecostalism: Supernaturalism

15. As the above interpretive history of Pentecostalism discloses, the relationship between the priority of the Pentecostal experience and the role of Christian doctrine is rather ambiguous. This fact has not escaped the notice of Pentecostals who are intellectually inclined. Among Pentecostals, interest in the intellectual dimension of the Christian life traces its beginnings back to the 1970s and the rise of the Charismatic Movement within the mainline Christian churches. At the forefront of this intellectual interest is Swiss theologian and author

Walter Hollenweger (born 1927), a Pentecostal who makes his ecclesiastical home in the Swiss Reformed Church. [ref]See Mark J. Cartledge, "Pentecostal Theology," *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. By Cicil M. Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong (Cambridge University Press, New York: 2014), p. 260. Cartledge identifies Walter Hollenweger as the "Father of the academic study of Pentecostalism" and the brief *Wikipedia* description of his work and writings presents him as a proponent of a Pentecostalism that has something intellectually and ecumenically to give to the life of the global church. To get a quick look at some – a very small portion – of today's leading Pentecostal scholars see Andrew Dragos' blog at <http://seedbed.com/feed/pentecostal-scholars/>. [ref]Today there are hundreds of Pentecostal scholars and schools all around the world. Significantly, interest in cultivating the intellectual side of faith is also being urged among Evangelicals generally as evidenced by Mark Noll in his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994). [ref]Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Eerdmans Publishing House: Grand Rapids, 1994). [ref] While the impact of this intellectual work has not yet touched the popular life of Pentecostalism, it is certainly helpful, I think, for showing those of us outside that tradition what constructive contribution Pentecostalism thinks it can make to the challenges that face global Christianity today.

16. It is important to remember that Pentecostalism emerged as a movement among preachers intent on bringing the experience of Pentecost upon the church in order to empower it for mission in the world in light of the imminent return of Christ. Critical of a church that they saw as bogged down in intellectual debate and institutional survival, Pentecostals decided simply to

ignore this messy dimension of the church's life. Today's Pentecostal scholars do not see this as an inherent anti-intellectualism within Pentecostalism, but the result of a mission driven imperative that takes precedence. [ref]Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism a Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark: London and New York, 2013), p. 133-53.[/ref]Determined to be nimble in mission, early Pentecostals postulated a simple, streamlined, pragmatic version of the Christian message of salvation to the world. In keeping with the basic theological outlook of the Holiness Movement, they called it the "Full Gospel." Four—some say five—theological topics combine to fill out the Full Gospel. They are: Jesus as Savior, Spirit Baptizer, Healer, and Coming King. Some would add Sanctifier if "sanctification" or holiness of life is distinguished from Jesus' role as Savior and Spirit Baptizer.[ref]Daniel E. Albrecht and Evan B. Howard, "Pentecostal Spirituality," *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. By Cicil M. Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong (Cambridge University Press, New York: 2014), p. 236.[/ref]

17. Because Pentecostalism exhibits a substantial range of theological diversity, even on the meaning of the elements of the "Full Gospel," an overarching area of theological thought that Pentecostal scholars have been focusing on is Pentecostal hermeneutics. They in essence ask, "Is there a distinctive theological framework for doing theology that is essential to the Pentecostal experience, even if the theological conclusions they reach on various issues differ?" Invariably, the answer is "Yes": Supernaturalism. [ref]Vondey, p. 30-34.[/ref]It is important to note that for Pentecostalism, Supernaturalism does not imply a rigid metaphysical dualism or a two-tiered cosmology consisting of the natural and the

supernatural, but of an easy going interaction between a personal God (the Supernatural) and his creation (natural). In other words, they tend to take the picture of God's interaction with nature in Genesis 2 as more than figurative. While God may be invisible to the human eye—and in that sense Genesis is figurative—nevertheless, his supernatural work is apparent in the fact that things counter to natural processes happen in nature. Therefore, the major premise of Pentecostalism is that God can and sometimes does act on nature in a way that circumvents what science knows as the natural processes. Indeed, this view of supernaturalism is the logical assumption to be drawn from the experience of miracles and religious ecstasy.

18. As Pentecostals reflect on the witness of the Old and New Testaments in light of their Pentecostal experience, supernaturalism is the common denominator. As they read the Scriptures they note that before the prophets spoke and the apostles preached they were caught up in the supernatural working of the Spirit. Before Jesus discloses his identity and enters into mission, he is caught up in the supernatural power of the Spirit to proclaim good news, to perform miracles, to enact healings and to produced signs and wonders, with the greatest sign and wonder being his resurrection, his triumph over death, the victory of the supernatural over the natural. Not only is this supernatural worldview the presupposition of the Acts 2 Pentecost story, but that story, as Pentecostals read it in light of their experience, describes the supernatural phenomenon that is the "initial evidence" of the bestowal of the Spirit's power upon the church: speaking in tongues. While Classical Pentecostals, Charismatic and Third Wave expressions of Pentecostalism may disagree on the extent, nature and function of speaking in tongues,

they do not disagree on the fact. The fact of speaking in tongues and other ecstatic, miraculous supernatural experiences is simply a given, by the Holy Spirit, that is self-evident to anyone who has experienced them. [ref]Mark J. Cartledge, *Charismatic Glossolalia: An Empirical-Theological Study* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2002). As I understand Cartledge, it is impossible to test for the experience by empirical means because it is an experience that is of the Spirit and, therefore, beyond human probing. The point is to interpret the experience in a way that is theologically consistent with Scripture.[/ref]

19. It would be tempting to assume that Pentecostalism has simply lapsed into the pre-Enlightenment worldview that Fundamentalism resorted to in its war against the naturalistic worldview of modernism. Remember, naturalism states that there is no reality beyond the natural, and that reports in the Bible of miracles and other kinds of supernatural claims are rooted in a pre-scientific explanation of the natural world. While many mainline Christian traditions proceeded “humbly” in the face of naturalism’s assertions, recognizing that the “worldviews” of Bible times and modern times have significant differences, Fundamentalism boldly repudiated it. This it did by asserting the “inerrancy of the Bible” in all things, including its reports on supernatural miracles and wonders, which must be regarded as literally, historically, and factually true. But it did so with this caveat: namely, that God had ceased to buttress the preaching of the gospel with supernatural demonstrations of power, as he did in apostolic times, because it is no longer needed. Now, for Fundamentalists, the Bible itself is the only evidence needed.
20. Although Pentecostalism shares Fundamentalism’s inerrant view of the Bible, it rejects categorically

Fundamentalism's cessationist view [ref]For a brief overview of this concept see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cessationism#cite_note-2, accessed February 17, 2016.[/ref]that God no longer supports or buttresses the preaching of the gospel with supernatural evidence. It is precisely the experience and testimony of Pentecostalism that the Spirit does accompany the preaching of the gospel with signs and wonders, and specifically with the "initial evidence" of tongues and subsequent wonders, and through them animates his Church. But this supernaturalism is not asserted, by Pentecostal theologians, to be a backward retreat into a pre-Enlightenment worldview, but rather a forward charge that is perfectly compatible with the emerging post-modern worldview for which personal experience and intuition takes precedence over institutions, rationalistic proof, and tradition.

21. While people today, including Pentecostals, have come to appreciate all the advances that modernism's naturalistic assumption has yielded in the areas of health, technology and the like, nevertheless, there is also a deep existential feeling that naturalism does not tell the whole story of life. Neither the human person nor the natural world in which we live can be reduced to mathematical equations or chemical processes. There is something more about life that touches us on the level of "experience," however that is defined, that cannot be isolated and studied in a laboratory or brought under our control and examined in a mechanistic way. Pentecostalism speaks to that feeling.
22. Therefore, openness to the supernatural, Christianly conceived, is the hermeneutical lens through which Pentecostals view Scripture and the Christian life. For Pentecostals, this includes "spiritual warfare" between

the good forces of the Holy Spirit and the evil forces of the devil. While Pentecostalism with its supernatural worldview is still viewed with skepticism in that part of the world that gave birth to rationalistic modernism (particularly Western Europe and, lesser so, North America), it tends nevertheless to sit quite comfortably in the developing world of the global South and East as the demographics attest. What that means, of course, is open to debate. A rationalist, on the one hand, will say that the religious growth of Pentecostalism is linked to the preconceived supernatural worldview it confirms in pre-modern cultures, while a Pentecostal, on the other hand, will say that its growth is linked to the fact that it speaks to actual lived spiritual experience in this postmodern age.

The Donald and Me

Colleagues,

The Republican convention cuts loose next Monday in the city I call home these days. With the date so near, a sense of dread is finally intruding on the euphoria that gripped the place last month when the local basketball team pulled off the impossible and beat the media darlings from that insufferable metropolis to the far west. Last week vomited up realities of a horrifically different kind in Baton Rouge, St. Paul, and especially Dallas. The dread here grew exponentially. I talked about that in my preaching last week, though hardly well enough. Now come reports in what remains of a local paper about security arrangements for next week. A zone will be established around the locus of the

proceedings. Glass bottles and other nasty items will be forbidden within. Not so guns. Ohio, after all, is an “open carry” state, and local jurisdictions are not allowed to override this no matter what exigencies they face.

We will pray again for Cleveland at church this weekend. I ask you to pray as well. Let’s pray for the nation as a whole, while we’re at it.

As for the madness that bans bottles and permits pistols, one of these days I (or one of you) should reflect on that as a minor manifestation of the wrath of God, who keeps insisting that we reap what we sow, etc. My own sensibilities being as they are, that would surely lead to a grimmer reflection on next week’s featured astonishment, Candidate Donald Trump, as a greater manifestation of the same wrath.

As it happens, today’s offering brushes against this latter thought, though without engaging it head on. Our contributor is Mike Hoy, former writer and editor of the Crossings newsletter, and editor as well of Robert W. Bertram’s posthumous publications. He sent this to me some weeks ago. Now seems a propitious time to pass it along. Those of us charged with the public proclamation of the Word of God in days like these will want to pay particular attention when Mike swivels his spotlight halfway through.

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce

Why there is an “I” in Donald Trump—and the rest of us

Here we are less than six months prior to the presidential election, and we already know that Donald J. Trump will be one

of the principle candidates on the ballot for the highest office this nation has to offer. Robert Putnam in *The New York Times* (5/8/16) reported, "The economic deprivation of the last 30 years for working-class whites, combined with growing social isolation, was really dry tinder," and Mr. Trump "lit a spark." The firestorm of support is evident in rise to ascendancy as the embattled-and-embittered presumptive nominee for the Republican party. He has no political experience, yet this is seen by many of his flocking supporters as a plus rather than a minus. He shows no regard for others and is probably incapable of empathy, and yet he is admired as one who "tells it like it is."

So let's do that—tell it like it is. But the more serious truth-telling is not only about Donald Trump but all of us in America.

My title suggests there is an "I" in Donald Trump. Consider the third letter of his first name: "N," as in this case, "narcissistic."

This is not news. Trump has been analyzed and diagnosed by psychologists looking objectively at his profile as suffering from Narcissistic Personality Disorder (DSM-IV). He has a totally exaggerated sense of self-importance and is in love with himself, and in such a way that nobody else (and especially those who do not love him in return) matters. It would be comical were it not for the fact that he is on the cusp of becoming one of the world's most powerful leaders. There are many who say he would be dangerous in that capacity, and they are probably correct.

Yet he is not alone in being narcissistic. Almost 40 years ago, Christopher Lasch published his monumental work, *Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations*. America is a narcissistic nation. And it seems the problem has worsened.

Consider the dipsticks of narcissistic behavior:

1. Having an exaggerated sense of self-importance
2. Preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty or ideal love
3. Believing one is “special” and can only be understood by, or associated with, other special or high-profile people or institutions
4. Requiring excessive admiration
5. Having a sense of entitlement
6. Selfishly taking advantage of others to achieve one’s own ends
7. Lacking empathy
8. Often envious of others or believing others to be envious of oneself
9. Showing arrogant, haughty, patronizing, or contemptuous behaviors or attitudes

Consider further that the disorder of narcissism is real when only five of this list are applicable. There is just too much evidence to convict America. The reason not many are speaking about Trump’s “I” (i.e., narcissistic) problem is because we are also so deeply infected, even if not to the extremes of complete narcissistic behavior. Yet even though this has been developing in America, this “I” problem has been around a lot longer than our nation. It has been evident ever since the origin of our sin. The “I” problem is universal, and no one is exempted.

It was during Trump’s acceptance speech following his endorsement by the NRA that I began to see in him something I had not seen before: how it is that narcissism not only makes people incredibly shallow, but deeply insecure. Why was Trump rehearsing again all his political victories of states that “I won,” less with a sense of deep regard for the people of those states as regarding them as trophies on his own personal shelf

to be reviewed? It was because he needed to continue to prop up his sense of self-importance. This made sense when considering his rise to popularity, because people (e.g., the aforementioned working-class whites, among others) who believe they have a sense of being trampled upon do not necessarily translate that into a concession that their core value of narcissism must also die. This is a deeper insight into our “I” problem. Because of our inflated sense of who we are, we refuse to die. We refuse to concede the “god” we have made of ourselves and find ways only to inflate it, like blowing up a balloon that is already full of holes. This is the most dangerous truth we have to see in America today. It is not Donald Trump, but it is what he represents—that the “I” does not need to die, even when the truth of its dying is so evident.

I confess that that problem is deeply frightening. There was a reason that Luther led off his list of 95 theses with the candid statement that, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’, he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” Our day, our life, our being starts with the death of our “I”, and from personal experience, it dies very hard.

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The place where our “I” can die is the same place where our being can be renewed: at the foot of the cross. Whenever we partake in the sacrament, we “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:26) We die and rise again in his forgiveness. The same could, and should, be said of preaching. But sadly, in my estimation, the status of preaching today has degenerated to moralism.

Just recently I came to worship on two consecutive Sundays at two different places, and walked away with disappointment from both. On Mother’s Day, my wife and I were invited to by a couple

of Karen's friends who were members at a local Missouri Synod congregation. I feared the message might be more of the legalism I had become accustomed to experience in the LC-MS. But it was more of a forty-minute motivational speech on the order of the prosperity gospel, surrounded by a band playing contemporary music to songs which were largely un-singable. There was little reference to Jesus the Christ in this motivational speech, save for a brief snippet where I thought the preacher might actually lift up the gospel-joy of the resurrection on this last Sunday of Easter. It quickly degenerated back to the theme of what we *must do* to "live forever." The second was by a synodical official at my parents (and my older) ELCA home congregation celebrating its 100th anniversary. He was charming and delightful to listen to. His message on this Pentecost Sunday lifted up how the book of Acts called for change, and how in the midst of change people sometimes fight; but forgiveness can endure for one another. Jesus was referenced for his teaching to his disciples that forgiveness is seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21-22). Forgiveness should be overflowing. Nonetheless, there was no mention made by this preacher of the cross at the center of such forgiveness, nor how deep the need for reconciliation really goes. It all rested on the message that Jesus *said* it, therefore *do* it. Moralism in preaching can be benign moralism, maybe even entertaining moralism, but moralism nonetheless.

Even from this small sample size of these two examples, the problem of preaching contributes to the problem of our American narcissism. It does not lead us to repentance from the "I" problem, but only calls our "I" to do or try new things. Rarely does preaching challenge our "I" to die in order that we may live—the promise that was given to us in our baptism.

Are we afraid of that deep sense of repenting? What do you think, Donald?

If we are, and I can think of why we should be, then let us return to the cross and the open tomb of our Lord, where the fear of dying and repentance is turned into great joy: Jesus “showed them his hands and his side; then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you.’” (John 20:20-21)

M. Hoy

May 2016

Ed Schroeder on Kingdoms and The Kingdom. A July 4th Special

Colleagues,

At some point in this past Easter season Ed Schroeder found himself reading the following in a Sunday morning bulletin:

“In our liturgy today we stand on the threshold of our Lord’s ascension into heaven, and the conclusion of his ministry among us, and the beginning of humanity’s work to build God’s dominion on earth.”

Ed went home and wrote a note to the Lutheran folks responsible. I got to see it. It strikes me as worth sharing, especially on this present threshold of America’s annual July 4th celebration. The notion of America as somebody’s special project with redemptive significance for the rest of humanity is deeply

ingrained in the national psyche. Earnest American Protestants have a long history of identifying God as the Somebody who is pushing it. Today's Protestants of a politically conservative bent work are still working hard to keep that tradition alive. I think, for example, of the megachurch pastor in my neighborhood who, some years ago, sent around a mailer that featured a family photo of him, his wife, and their several adopted children all draped in leather jackets with an American flag theme. That some of the children were obviously born in other parts of the world seemed somehow designed to cinch the point: God saves through America.

This sort of thing embarrasses liberal Protestants. They find it unseemly to assert that this particular nation could be quite that special. They trumpet its failings. Still, for all their raging at America's sins, they keep clinging as fiercely as anyone to the underlying Protestant premise that God is waiting for human beings to get their wits together somewhere on earth, causing righteousness to appear with peace and justice abounding for all, a bit of liberty thrown in for good measure, I suppose.

Now a premise is one thing. A promise is quite another. It's with this in mind that you'll want to read what Ed had to say in his note. After that, enjoy the fireworks this weekend, thanking God with modest and grateful hearts for First Article gifts.

In another matter, one of you kindly drew my attention to a mistake I made in last week's post. These days the preferred shorthand tag for the Greek-English lexicon I pointed you to is BDAG, as opposed either to BAGD or BADG, both of which appeared in my copy, the latter by mistake. The current tag came into vogue in 2001, when the third edition was published. Fred Danker was the sole editor of that edition. He revised extensively, and added much by way of new material to the earlier editions. The new tag is meant to honor that. I sit gladly corrected.

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce

On Kingdoms and The Kingdom

by Ed Schroeder

A liturgist's assertion: "Today we stand we stand on the threshold of our Lord's ascension into heaven, and the conclusion of his ministry among us, and the beginning of humanity's work to build God's dominion on earth."

Ed's response:

That final clause proposes a substitute, I think, to the Reformation-era Lutheran confessors' claim for what the Kingdom of God is.

That Kingdom-of-God term was as much a conflict-point with the established church of Europe's 16th century as were the cardinal vocables: justification, grace, and faith. Rome had already built an impressive Kingdom of God. "Not what Jesus had in mind when he spoke of Kingdom-of-God," the Reformers said.

They based this, no surprise, on New Testament texts where the creation, continuing existence, and fulfillment of Kingdom-of-God is never in a sentence where humans are the sentence-subject. Humans are always on the receiving end, the objects, with God, God-in-Christ, as the subject, the actor/prime-mover of the action. This is easily verified by reference to Luther's explanation of "Thy kingdom come" in his two catechisms in the Lutheran Confessions.

One sees it also in John's gospel (18:33-38), where Pilate can't

comprehend what Jesus is talking about when the topic is “my kingdom.” “Not of this world,” Jesus says. That doesn’t mean it’s on planet Mars, but that humans can’t create the kingdom he is bringing. But Pilate is himself a kingdom-creator. He knows that humans can do this. No wonder the disconnect. Jesus’ kingdom, so Jesus claims, is God’s kingdom, of God. Pilate—and Pilate’s world too—have no antennae for that sort of regime. That’s especially so when you move to the substance of the Kingdom-of-God that came with Jesus.

Basic to this is that the core of that kingdom’s “coming” is God (in Christ) now “ruling” sinners with mercy. When “forgiveness-of-sins” (= the simple synonym for “gospel,” thus Luther) is occurring, it’s always God the forgiver doing the action. And the image of building, as in “building the kingdom,” already misleads into Pilate’s conception of kingdom. No wonder that image is alien to the Kingdom-of-God vocabulary of the NT.

Kingdom-of-God is God in action forgiving sinners. No human being can be substituted for the subject in that sentence. It’s the One sinned against who is the actor if’/when sinners get forgiven. That’s why “God’s dominion” is a bad translation for the Greek “*basileia tou theou*.” Dominion carries a dominating notion of authority, ruling “over” people, thus clean contrary to “management by mercy,” a point Jesus seeks to make “perfectly clear” in a (last-ditch?) effort (Matt. 20:20-28) where Christ’s sort of “*basileia*” (“ransoming sinners”) is what the disciples don’t yet grasp. They’re still with Pilate.

It was my spouse, Marie, who noted the disconnect between those words in the Sunday worship folder and Martin Luther’s own in a devotion we recently read. “That is why we do not pray: Let us come to Thy kingdom, as if we should run after it, but thus: Thy kingdom come to us. For the grace of God and His Kingdom, with all the virtues thereof, must come to us, if ever we are to

receive it. Of ourselves we can never come to the kingdom, just as Christ came from heaven to us who are on earth, and we did not ascend from earth into heaven, to Him. When God reigns in us, we are His kingdom. That is blessedness.”

Not only were these two conflicting views of Kingdom-of-God near the center of the Reformation era church conflict, it is very much so in today’s multi-denominational global church. The minority voice now (as then) is the Reformers’ confession above. “It’s all about God forgiving sinners. It’s a God-and-sinners relation event. And cosmic was that event. It took the death and resurrection of the second person of the Deity to make it happen.”

The majority voice, the “dominating” voice today, works implicitly with Pilate’s notion of kingdom—sometimes flat-out explicitly. “Humans—people of faith, people of good will—can make the Kingdom-of-God happen here on earth. The agenda: restore the frazzled world of sinners to an Eden-like world of peace and justice. Jesus shows us the way. Forgiveness of sins? Oh, yes, of course, there is that too. But the core agenda of the Kingdom-of-God from New Testament times till right now is humanity’s work to build God’s peace and justice dominion on earth.”

Is that not a different Jesus from the one in the previous paragraph? I think so. –EHS

The Gerasene Demoniac, a

Strange Yet Timely Text

Colleagues,

Again a long hiatus. Again an effort to get back on track with sending you material, and to stay there for a while.

The formal relaunch will happen tomorrow night. For now an item that may or may not whet your appetite. It will depend on how you feel about reading sermons.

I'm ambivalent about it myself. A sermon worth hearing is a particular thing, addressed at a specific moment to a specific set of ears. Those blessed by God to find themselves with other ears in other moments may find it worth reading. Then again, they may not. Here the question of worth has to be whether or not the distant reader catches the voice of God speaking to her through these words. If all she spots is another preacher's opining, or worse, his preening, then her time is being wasted. Better that she takes the dog for a walk, or gets online and pays the bills.

So those of us who dare to pass sermons along do well to think twice and swallow hard three times. I've done that with the one I preached last Sunday, and have decided to take the risk. The feedback I've been getting from those who heard it suggests that others might be glad for a glance. The text was Luke's account of the Geresene demoniac, buttressed by the final paragraphs of Galatians. It sent me in directions I hadn't anticipated when I sat down to put the sermon together.

As ever, Kyrie eleison.

I hope this finds you well and still thanking God for much in these ten or more weeks since you last heard from Thursday Theology.

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce

"The Sanity Zone"

A Sermon on Luke 8:26-39 ref. Galatians 3:23-29

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (June 19), 2016

Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me'— for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who

had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

What I read to you just now sounds so strange that at first we can't imagine what it has to do with us at Messiah Church this morning.

But suppose I take the key figure in the story and describe him this way. He's a man riddled with inner demons. He ought to be locked up for the sake of everybody's safety, his own included. At some point the demons get the better of him. They addle his wits. They destroy his judgment. He goes on a rampage.

So does that sound at all like somebody you've been reading or hearing about this past week?

49 people dead and so many others injured in Florida because a man goes crazy with hate and breaks the chains of law, civility, and basic human decency that are there to keep all of us in check.

A year ago the same thing happens with another man in Charleston, South Carolina, and we wind up losing nine members of our own Christian family.

Up north in Newtown, Connecticut, meanwhile, a lot of parents

continue after three and a half years to grieve the slaughter of their little children. It doesn't help that no one seems willing or able to cut through the madness that paralyzes our politics these days and find a useful response to all this violence, a response that both great parties can get behind to the benefit of everybody.

But no, it doesn't happen. It seems somehow more important to fear and loathe and rant at each other, the same things repeated, again and again. That's the sort of thing the man in the story was doing as he rampaged through the graveyards.

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And here's a second thing to notice. The underlying issue in this story we heard is, quote, "those other people," unquote.

Well, of course that's the issue. I say "of course," because it's the main issue that runs through the New Testament from beginning to end. The question is, how do the wrong kind of people wind up being the right kind of people. How does that happen where God is concerned, and what does that mean for our own God-fearing attitude toward the people around us?

We've been listening for the past few Sundays to segments from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians. We'll be hearing more from that same letter for another few weeks. As you listen, be sure to notice how St. Paul is addressing this central issue head on.

Again the question: how can the wrong kind of people wind up all right? Paul's answer in two words: think Christ.

Yes, it's that simple. It's also that profound. "Think Christ." Christ for men, Christ for women, Christ for the ruling class, Christ for the poverty class, Christ for the little inside crowd that's been hearing the Word of God their whole lives long and

trying hard to obey it—never completely, never successfully. Christ just as much for the huge outside crowd, the great mass of unwashed others who have never set a foot inside a synagogue, and don't know Moses from Methuselah, and really, those people eat pork—that's exactly how disgusting they are, you know.

Imagine: Christ for them.

Or in America today, Christ for blacks, Christ for whites, Christ for all those Spanish-speaking strangers who sneak across the border. Christ for crazy liberals. Christ for crazy conservatives. Christ for men who date women. Christ for men who date men, a promise that lots of Christian people are struggling still to get their minds around.

Again the question: how does any human being wind up right with God? Again Paul's answer, or rather, God's own answer through Paul: think Christ.

Or this morning, think of Jesus as we see him in the story, where, like I say, the underlying issue is this main issue, so central to the New Testament, and frankly, to the Word of God as a whole. How, pray tell, do those crazy people who live across the border on the other side of the lake with all their disgusting habits, like raising pigs to eat—how do those people wind up, in the end, on God's good side?

Answer: Jesus gets in a boat and he goes to them. It's that simple. It's also that profound. Later he'll hang on a cross and he'll die for them, but here we're getting ahead of the story.

For now, some things to notice.

First, notice how the naked crazy man with all the demons is a picture of sorts for "those other people" as a whole.

Within the lifetimes of people sitting here this morning God's

world has been stained again and again with unspeakable outbreaks of mass murder. The most appalling by far was the Holocaust. But then came China, then came Cambodia, then came Bosnia and Rwanda. In every instance the devil's trick has been to persuade a mass of people that "those other people," however they're defined, are devils incarnate who have got to be suppressed. If that means killing them, so be it.

Prejudice and bigotry of any kind is always a matter of demonizing "those other people." However else the bigot may define them, she also calls them evil, or not quite human. With that she gives herself an excuse to be evil to them.

There's not a human being alive who doesn't need to be on guard against that devil's trick. In America this summer we'd all do well to pay attention to the way we think and talk about our politics. On the one side, it's so easy to imagine that there's something fundamentally wrong with anyone who would vote for Mrs. Clinton. Those evil liberals, you know. On the other, it's just as easy to plaster labels on attendees at a rally for Mr. Trump. For what it's worth, that's the temptation I'm fighting with at the moment, and I do have to fight to it, as do you, however you happen to be tempted.

How does any U.S. voter come out right with God? Answer: think Christ. Christ for Mrs. Clinton, Christ for Mr. Trump, Christ for all those crazy people on the other side of the lake, beginning with the craziest guy of them all—and that, of course, is what we see as the story unfolds, how Jesus exercises his astonishing authority and power as the Son of God, and drives the demons away, and makes the madman well again.

More specifically, what he does is to turn this terrible, broken person into somebody that other people can enjoy and be glad for. Better still, he makes him into somebody that Almighty God

can enjoy as well.

So let me push your imagination a wee bit further this morning.

Imagine—or better still, take it for granted—that on this very morning, June 18, 2016, Jesus is busy doing for millions of people the same thing he did for that one person in the story. He's expelling the demons, that is. And the places where he's doing this most visibly, where it's easiest to spot him at work, is in places like this. Churches, in other words. Or more to the point, in churches that deserve the name church, because in those places the Lord of the Church, Christ Jesus is his name, is absolutely front and center.

The older I get, the more I love church, and here's the thing I love most about it. In church, nothing matters about anybody, except this, that Christ is for them.

In church it doesn't matter what you eat or what you wear or where you were born.

In church I don't have to define you—I don't get to define you—by whether you're rich or poor, black or white, straight or gay, young or old. All these things matter immeasurably outside the church. They do not matter here. In real church it doesn't matter that somebody lost it in a meeting the other night and wound up behaving badly. The point is, they're here this morning, and being here, the only thing that matters about them is the one and only thing that matters about anybody.

Again, think Christ. Christ for you, Christ for me, Christ for everybody. I won't ask you in church what party you favor, or what candidate you're voting for—or if it comes out anyway, it won't cross my mind to care. Again, the only thing that counts for anything in church is Christ for us all.

Church, in other words, is a precious zone of sanity in this mad and crazy world where the demons rage and make us evil in the eyes of the other.

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Or better that I put it this way: that's what church is meant to be—this zone of God-given sanity. Too often it isn't, as St. Paul discovered at Galatia; and what surfaced there, this evil yen to set Christ aside and go back to the bad old days of measuring each other by other standards—that same thing keeps happening again and again. Other gospels get preached, as Paul puts it, and church gets spoiled.

That's why Christ keeps coming here again and again, week after week. Here is his body. Here is his blood. Eat it. Drink it. Look around and notice how others are doing the same. When you do, see them for what and who they are: brothers and sisters in Christ, holy and precious in the sight of God. And respond to them accordingly. After that, go your way, and serve the Lord by taking his sanity with you into the rest of the week.

Let me quickly underscore that.

People often want to know what they should or ought to do with this faith of theirs that they find in church.

So before we're done let me quickly point you to another to notice in today's story. It's the last thing Jesus says to the fellow who's been healed.

The guy, recall, wants to come along with Jesus. He's dismayed, I'll bet, by that strange reaction he's seeing in all his fellow citizens, how none of them are happy for him; how the one thing they want is to get Jesus on his way.

Here's the thing: people get comfortable with the demons they

know. They work out ways to cope with them. They'd just as soon that life stayed as they know it, and they didn't have to adjust to a new kind of reality.

Be that as it may: notice how Jesus tells the man to go home; to tell others what God has done for him.

Isn't that what he's saying to all of us this morning? Wherever you go this week, whatever you do, take your sanity with you, and find a way to praise God for it.

We will do that best if we do it the way the man in the story did it. Did you catch that? When he got home he went on and on about what Jesus had done for him.

Now it's our turn.

So suppose, for example, that you're in a conversation this week, and the topic turns to "those other people" and how nutty and awful they all are, how dangerous even. That's an evil spirit talking. I trust you'll catch that. I pray you'll have the nerve to interject and let it be known that you've been blessed with a different view of things.

I hope you'll invite the people you're with to see as you're able to see, to hear what the Holy Spirit has given you to know—that every human being is a person precious to God beyond understanding, a sinful creature that the Son of God gave his life for.

I wonder how different our nation would be these days if every person who went to church on Sunday were to make that witness again and again as the weeks went by.

Come to think of it, isn't that the essential Christian job? To look at others as God does, through the lens of Christ crucified, and to praise God out loud, in word and deed alike,

for what they get to see? Here at Messiah, at least, let's get to work.

May the peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Easter Leftovers, especially a Nagging Question about John 20:23

Colleagues,

Easter was a succulent season this year. I say that as one with the odd weekly job of chewing on tough texts so as to spit out something that others might find nutritious.

Not that my teachers of yore described the preaching task in quite this way, but there it is. It's what we preachers do, one bird feeding other birds with whatever she's managed to masticate in the days or hours prior. Put that way, of course, it shouldn't surprise us at all when some of those other birds find the procedure less than pleasant; though that's a topic in itself, and not the one I want to focus on today.

Instead, let me thank and praise Almighty God for the gift that keeps on giving, and giving, and giving some more. I mean these texts that the lectionary system returns us to, year after year or three-year cycle after three-year cycle, as the case may be. One might think that after twenty or thirty bouts with, say, the great gospel of Easter's second Sunday, John 20:19ff., there

would be nothing left to excite a preacher's taste buds. Yet somehow there is, and always will be, assuming a willingness to chew longer and harder than you may have the year before, with nerve ends searching and straining for flavors as yet unnoticed.

So much the better if your eyes are also on the lookout for the occasional translators' blunder. There are plenty of these laying around in most any translation. A few are egregious, others not so much. NRSV makes one of the former when it has Jesus telling Thomas not to "doubt" (Jn. 20:27). As I've grumbled in the past, the Greek word here is *apistos*, an adjective, which KJV renders neatly with "faithless." Why, I wonder, did the NRSV revisers not stick with that? Doubt and faithlessness are not the same thing. Doubt presumes a modicum of believing. We ought to tell our children that. It would relieve the angst that assorted authority figures have stirred up by barking at them not to be doubting Thomases. It would ease the angst all the more if we pointed them to the marvel of Matthew 28:17-18, where Jesus patently ignores the doubts of his feckless apostles and simply tells them to get to work. Come to think of it, that's a move he's still making in 2016, whenever any batch of his adherents gets together. There's not a one of us who isn't of two or more minds about him, whether we admit to it or not. A bit of honesty on this score would be refreshing, and not only to our children, but to the Lord Himself, I'll bet. If nothing else, it would ramp up our readiness to exult in his ridiculous patience with us.

So why is that honesty about our doubts so rarely forthcoming? The culprit, I'm convinced, is a stubborn, ingrained *apistia* of the worst kind. In its Lutheran version it says all the right things about justification by faith—then treats faith itself as a justifying work. One is right because one believes rightly. C.F.W. Walther warned against this very move in the fourteenth of his famous Theses on Law and Gospel. Even so, all too many of

his Missouri Synod descendents keep making it as a matter of course. ELCA types do the same, with the frequent twist that ethical assumptions are substituted for doctrinal formulations as the thing to be firmly swallowed. Still, the point remains the same: it's in the firmness of the swallowing that one is justified, appearing in the eyes of God and right-minded humankind as the right kind of person. No wonder children are as loathe as ever to pipe up in confirmation class with their deepest, most troubling questions, these being the ones that would seem to challenge whatever assumptions the teacher is peddling.

If only those teachers would content themselves with peddling Christ, the One in whom we come out just fine, no matter what questions our minds and innards are roiling with on any particular day.

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Speaking of questions, here is one that dug its hooks into me on Easter 2 this year: might it be that most of us have been so very wrong for the past umpteen centuries in our reading of John 20:23?

Most all of you will know the text by heart. "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained." That's the NRSV version. It follows obediently in the English path that KJV charted. Jerome and Luther appear to have taken the same track in their respective translations, though my Latin and German are too shaky to say that with unflinching certainty.

In any case, the point appears obvious, at least in theory if not so much in practical application. On Easter night our Lord Christ, having commissioned his reclaimed disciples ("As the Father has sent me, so I send you"), now imbues them with the

Holy Spirit and a consequent authority to do one of two things with respect to the sinners they'll encounter. They can forgive their sins, or they can choose not to forgive them. There's a cheekier way to put that. They can flick sins away (cf. Psalm 103:12) or they can stick them to the sinners responsible. Their call: flick 'em or stick 'em, the promise being that God will back them up whatever they decide.

This is wonderful to hear if you're the penitent on the receiving end of an absolution. It's tougher to credit when church authorities try to put the second clause into play and stick somebody with an anathema. Leo X was doubtless convinced that Luther would fry in hell on his say so. Wasn't God obliged, on Christ's say so, to enforce his pontiff's excommunicating bull? Luther scoffed at that idea as he dropped Leo's paper in the flames. His followers have kept the scoffing up over the centuries, at least where Roman pretensions are concerned. That hasn't kept them from groping for their own method of exercising Clause Two in a way that isn't risible to anyone beyond their immediate subgroups. They haven't found it yet. I think that no one has. The Amish may shun a miscreant, but who outside the shunning community imagines that God endorses this? In the days when Lutheran congregations excommunicated members for consorting with Masons, the ex-communicants simply strolled down the street and signed on with the Methodists. In Fort Wayne they started their own congregation and enrolled it with the ULCA. So which of God's Ft. Wayne groups was God backing up, the stickers or the flickers? I say this tongue in cheek, of course, but you'll get my drift.

History aside, what does one make of a "retaining of sins" in 2016? Did any preacher in the land attempt to address this on Easter 2 this year? If so, I'd be curious to know what he or she came up with. After that I'd plague her (or him) with my own new and sudden question.

Suppose the translators have been blowing it? Suppose our Lord is saying nothing at all in this text about sticking sinners with their sins? Suppose, indeed, that he's saying quite the opposite?

After all, as Raymond E. Brown points out in his commentary of Johannine commentaries, the Greek of 20:23 is opaque. I finally noticed that myself this year. Then I grabbed for Brown, and found him confirming what I thought I was seeing. "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins are forgiven." That much is plain. Then: "If you hold (kratein) them, they are held," or, per Brown, "held fast." To which Brown adds, "It is not clear whether the object held is the men [sic] who committed the sins...or their sins. The latter is more likely by reason of parallelism with the first part of the verse. The phrasing 'to hold sins' is strange in Greek even as it is in English." (The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI (Anchor Bible, Vol. 29, Part A), 1024.)

I checked out kratein in the second edition of BAGD—for lay readers, the definitive English lexicon (i.e. dictionary) of New Testament Greek, where the shorthand title refers to its four key compilers, the German Walter Bauer, and the Americans William Arndt, Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick Danker. Verbs are listed there with their first person singular, present tense inflection, in this case krateo. The entry runs to nearly a full column (8.25" x 2.75") of fine print, and accounts for every instance of the verb's use in the New Testament. The basic definitions are "take into one's possession" and "hold." The nuances are many and varied, and bear listing. Some demand a present emphasis. "Arrest, take into custody, apprehend"; "take hold of, grasp, seize"; "attain." These are grouped together under the first definition. Under the second come the following: "hold with the hand"; "hold in the hand"; "hold upright, support"; "hold back or restrain from, hinder in"; "hold fast."

To this last are appended sub-nuances: “prevent from escaping”; “hold in one’s power”; “hold fast to someone or something and hence remain closely united to it or him”; “hold fast, keep hold of something that belongs to oneself so that it cannot be taken away”; “keep to oneself”‘; and last—seemingly least—“retain,” where the reference, yes, is to John 20:23.

I wish Fred Danker were still among us so I could quiz him about this. In particular I’d want to know how he and colleagues settled on “retain.” Was it out of deference to the prior English translators, or did they themselves see something in the structure and grammar of 20:23 that supported a distinct and separate listing, appended as a caboose of sorts to the main sense of the thing?

I should note that BADG appears in a third edition. I don’t own a copy. I know someone who does. I should have stopped at his house to consult it. For all I know, Dr. Danker may have spruced this entry up. In his mini-lexicon, the last accomplishment of his long, productive career, he renders the two core definitions of *krateo* as “gain control of” and “have firm hold on.” Neither of these supports the notion of sticking somebody with their sins.

Back to Raymond Brown, and his mention of a parallelism between the two clauses of the verse. He uses that to resolve his own question about what’s being “held” in Clause Two, the sinner or the sin, and opts for the latter. This supports the standard reading, in which the clauses stand in contrast, sins either being forgiven (Clause One) or not forgiven (Clause Two). In a subsequent extended discussion of the verse (p. 1039ff.), he calls on Matthew’s contrast between “binding” and “loosing” (16:19, 18:18) to buttress this further.

But suppose John 20:23 is designed to reflect a different kind

of parallelism, the one that abounds in Hebrew poetry? We encounter it weekly in the Psalms. An idea is expressed. The same thought—not a contrasting one—is immediately recast in different words that underscore and amplify it. “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fullness thereof; / the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). Here both clauses say the same thing: “It’s all the LORD’s.” Clause Two underscores that this includes all human beings, as in (presumably) not just the Yahweh crowd but the folks next door who bend the knee to Baal.

So suppose the same kind of interplay is at work between the clauses of 20:23? Clause One: “If you forgive someone’s sins, God forgives them too.” Clause Two, repeating, amplifying: “If you hang onto that someone, God hangs on to that someone too.” Here, of course, I’m making hay with the opacity and oddity of the Greek’s “if you hold them,” opting against Brown to see the sinner and not the sin as the object held. Were I somehow able to discuss this with Brown—so sorry, he too is recently with the Lord, and making merry with Fred, I’ll bet—I’d want respectfully to point him to his own rule of thumb that the verse be interpreted “in the light of the immediate context and of the major themes of Johannine theology” (1042). Both of these, I’d argue, support the spin I’m applying to it.

Take the immediate context. It is Easter night. Jesus appears from nowhere amid the fear-addled disciples. “Peace be with you.” That opens the conversation, and makes it plain that their sins of doubt, denial, and blatant apostasy are suddenly a non-issue. He displays his wounds, there is joy in the room—and now he says it again: “Peace be with you.” Note the repetition, followed immediately by “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” With that he grabs hold of these sinners. He makes them his agents. And now the empowering, this wondrous breathing of

the Holy Spirit that authorizes them to do for others as he has just finished doing for them. That does not include sticking it to sinners. If anything, it means getting stuck on sinners, the way Jesus is stuck on them (cf. 15:12). It's as if verse 23 is saying, "Being sent as I'm sent you've got two related jobs, and the Spirit to pull them off. First job: forgive sins. Second job: hang onto the sinner." Kratein. Grab hold of them. Embrace them as you would a brother or a sister, and don't let go.

As to Johannine theology as a whole, isn't this what Jesus is doing from beginning to end in the Gospel? Again and again the two great moves: dismiss the sin; glom onto the sinner. Think Nicodemus; the Samaritan woman; the Bethesda invalid; the man born blind. Above all think Peter, who even after Easter night decides with others to slink away and go fishing again. Along comes Jesus to deal with his denial once and for all and after that to hold him tight. Kratein indeed.

Brown for his part uses John's context and theology to defend the older, standard reading. I'll leave it to you to see how he does that. If you don't own the book, it's well worth a trip to the older colleague's house to check it out there. The relevant pages are 1024 and 1039-45. Those who don't know Brown will quickly see what a meticulous scholar he is. They'll also spot how careful he is to honor the church's long-established teaching. One expects nothing less of a faithful Jesuit, and I say that with great respect. One likewise expects the sassy Lutheran to press, prod, and challenge tradition on the grounds of its evangelical fidelity. That's what I'm doing here. I'd like to think that Brown, for his part, would have thoroughly graciously in respecting that.

Some other time I'll press the case that my newfound sense of this verse will stand even if the "them" of Clause Two refers to the sins and not to the sinner. I'll muse as well on what

difference it would make in a congregation if we got past the notion that “retaining sins,” as in sticking it to sinners, was somehow a facet of our mission. Lutherans remain as convinced of that as anyone, I fear.

But such things have got to wait for later. At 2500+ words I’ve already exceeded the limit of a reasonable single post. To which I add, tongue in cheek, though only partly: Forgive the sin. Hang onto the sinner. God grant me the faith to return the favor, if and when I need to.

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce

1) Robert Kolb on Why Luther Matters Today (A Reading Tip).

2) Christ and “The Cloud”

Colleagues,

Two items this week. First—

Pr. Martin Yee, Assistant to the Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Singapore and a good friend of Crossings, administers and maintains at least three closed Facebook groups that focus on confessional Lutheran theology. He does this work with uncommon zeal. Not a day goes by without a string of fresh posts popping up in my feed. Often they carry links to items well worth perusing that I would otherwise miss. Here’s a teaser from one I

caught some days ago—

“In an age in which many mean it when they say, ‘I wish I were dead,’ we are able to say, ‘I have just the thing for you,’ and fit them with the death of the old identity and the garment of resurrection in Christ.”

The words are Robert Kolb’s. They come from an essay entitled “Luther’s Truths Then and Now,” delivered a year ago at an LCMS-sponsored conference in Wittenberg, Germany. I commend it happily to the rest of you, especially my fellow ELCA readers who would not be likely to stumble across it otherwise. Satan has long since seduced God’s American Lutherans into skulking on their respective sides of the barriers they’ve built between each other. There we take it as axiomatic that the sorry creatures on the other side are slaves of theological dreck. Perhaps it requires a Singaporean’s eye to spot how shafts of wholesome substance keep shooting up amid the dreck, and not on one side only, but on both. In the present case, there’s not a thoughtful Lutheran in the land who won’t benefit from Dr. Kolb’s rehearsal of Luther’s core insights. Better still are his observations on how useful and necessary those insights are for the 21st century world. The essay is long. This means merely that you’ll be well fed by the time you’re done reading.

For those to whom the name is new, Robert Kolb is a Professor Emeritus at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. More to the point, he’s a Reformation scholar with an international reputation. He’s also co-editor, with Timothy J. Wengert, of the definitive English translation of the Book of Concord. He has spoken at least twice at Crossings conferences, where his graciousness has been every bit as refreshing as the substance of his papers.

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Item two—

You'll have noticed that you're getting this post two days after its putative date—and it didn't surprise you. Thursday Theology arriving on a Saturday is not all that unusual of late. In keeping with my sinner's addiction to such things, I plead the excuse this time that Thursday was busy. Where I spend my days, we celebrated our Lord's ascension twice. The assembly in the morning was comprised overwhelmingly of the students in our parish school. I got things started there by noting that this was a special day—the school's weekly chapel service usually happens on Wednesday. Then the question: "Can someone tell me what the name of this day is?" Up shot the hand of the eager kindergartner. "Cinco de Mayo." I should have expected that. We chuckled and appreciated the little one's obvious pride in knowing what's what. Then we went on to revel in the Gospel.

And Gospel it is, this great Ascension Day account of Christ's present location (so to speak), and with it the promise of what this means for us all. St. Paul makes wondrous hay with both the account and the promise in the opening chapters of Ephesians, and elsewhere too. Not that many seem to notice it these days, preachers and teachers of the flock included. As I put it in a sermon some 25 years ago, we seem to think of the 40th day after Easter as a time not to celebrate the Ascension, but to mourn the Evaporation. No wonder the saints skip church in droves when the day rolls around.

In my digs this year, the numbers at the evening service were artificially bolstered by a choir director's prescience in scheduling her middle school choir for a contribution. That brought lots of parents along. Many, I'm guessing, were at an Ascension service for the first time ever. Anticipating this as I assembled the evening's bout of preaching, I caught myself groping harder than usual for a fresh way or two to make the good news obvious. At some point in the pondering the eye got snagged on Luke's mention of "a cloud," and how it "took them

out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). Then it dawned, how "the cloud" means something more to eighth graders in 2016 than it did to their counterparts of ten or even five years ago, and how, with that new meaning, comes a chance to gush with Gospel. So I pounced.

For the core of what came out, see below. I pass it along on the chance that others might find it useful down the road. If any have long since beaten me to the thought, I'd love to hear from you.

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce

On Christ and the "Cloud"—

(as heard at a church in Cleveland, Ohio

on Ascension Day, 2016)

So tonight, this Lord Christ, risen and ascended, is able once again to look each of you in the eye, and to call you each by name. In doing that he deals with your sins and failures, not by punishing them but by forgiving them; not by holding them against you but by getting rid of them. You might say that he erases them from your resume, and he gets away with that because, after all, he's in charge. The bean-counters are not.

And when he tells you tonight, as he already has, that your sins are forgiven, he wants you to know and trust that what you've done or failed to do is a non-issue, at least where God is concerned.

Now this is not the way the old world works. Ask any seventh or

eighth grader who worries about the grades she gets. Ask the parent of any seventh or eighth grader who nags her child about his grades. In the old world, the one all of us were born into, every person has his or her own track record. I should underscore with the students here that this is as true of an old pastor as it is of a middle school scholar. What we do or fail to do gets written down and recorded, if not on paper then in memories; if not the memories up here, in people's heads, then the memories of all those computers that constitute what these days they call "the cloud." And in that cloud it lurks and lodges as something that somebody can always hold against you, or use against you. That's why your parents also keep nagging you not just about your grades, but even more about being careful, so very careful, when it comes to posting things on social media.

Beware the cloud. It's a tool, a creature of the old world, and it operates by old world rules. It also helps to enforce those rules.

And here's the thing: when all the memories have been recorded and read, when all the rules have been enforced, we all wind up losers, every one of us. And even worse, we all wind up dead.

But that, you see, is one huge reason for tonight's great excitement. Once again we're hearing how there is somebody behind the cloud, somebody above the cloud, somebody so strong, so kind, so incredibly generous and good that he's able to defy the cloud, and he's perfectly ready to ignore the cloud. Better still, for the sake of everybody here—for the sake of people the world over tonight—he's busy overruling the cloud.

In tonight's great picture, the Lord Jesus is sitting at God the Father's right hand, where he's busy whispering in God the Father's right ear.

What he says is this: the only memory that matters is the memory of that dark, that terrible day, when I hung on the cross for them. In the same way, the only record that counts any longer is my record: this great accounting of my deeds, my accomplishments, my faithfulness; this record that all the saints and angels around this throne keep rehearsing in all its wonderful and incredible detail, all of it done, and lived and suffered to give us—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—all the reason we need to make these creatures new, and good, and perfect, and true, and at last to bring them home.

And even as the Lord Jesus says this, the Father sits there nodding his head in absolute agreement. That's the picture we get to see on this wonderful Ascension night.

Behind the cloud—that dark and ominous cloud, so full of threat and woe—behind it shines the light of Christ, and in that light is life for everybody in this room tonight. New life. Life that runs on the Jesus-only rule. Because of him you get to live. Because of him, your sins are forgotten. Because of him there is nothing, but nothing, that will keep the love of God from having its way with you.

Or to put that another way, because of Jesus risen and ascended, you and I are looking through the cloud tonight at the best future ever.

Thanks be to God!

A Sunday Morning Explanation of the Liturgy

Colleagues,

Last week Amy Schiffrin blessed us with a good-news glimpse of Easter reality. Her focus was the Eucharistic assembly. She showed how the Holy Spirit keeps working there with quiet power to bring sinners to life. She also underscored how important it is to help these sinners notice what's going on so they can embrace it with faith and joy.

This week's writer, Steven Kuhl, aims to do exactly that. He sends along some work he shared this past Sunday with the Episcopal congregation he serves in Milwaukee. It comes with an introduction, designed for you, that covers all the bases of background and purpose, and obviates any need for me to comment further. I'm sure Steve would be glad for your reactions. You can reach him at skuhl1@wi.rr.com.

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce

The Eucharistic Liturgy Explained

by Steven C. Kuhl

Introduction

The following "Narrative Explanation of the Eucharist," as I call it, is meant to explain the theo-logic and meaning of Eucharistic Rite II in the *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP), the so-called "contemporary rite" because it uses modern rather than

Elizabethan English. I wrote it for my congregation (St. Mark's Episcopal Church, South Milwaukee, WI) for use on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, 2016 (April 17), not because we are experiencing "worship wars"—Episcopalians seemed to have missed that battle that is raging in the contemporary Church—but because I think people would benefit from knowing more about the dramaturgical experience of the Word of God they enter into each week in worship. The liturgy helps us to be true Church, the Assembly of believers in Christ, by ensuring that we are gathered around the gospel and sacraments that Jesus himself established to make us Church and keep us in true faith. I am convinced that if people understood better the meaning of the liturgy in its overarching structure and its moment-by-moment ritual unfolding, they will find themselves personally engaged in a heightened way in the mystery and substance of faith, that is, in the Christ who died for our sins, who rose for our justification, and who will come again to consummate his promise. The liturgy, without explanation, can easily pass people by as a collection of pious things strung together. But when explained and understood, it can engage people in a remarkable pattern of call and response – of being called by the gospel and responding in faith and thanksgiving – that is life altering.

Because I am serving in an Episcopal congregation the explanation here focuses on the particular "setting" of the liturgy we use each week. But as you will see, the Eucharistic Rite in the BCP is very similar to the "traditional" Holy Communion liturgies that Lutherans are familiar with in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. This is so, historically, for several reasons. First, when Thomas Cramner (Archbishop of Canterbury and a key leader of the Sixteenth Century Reformation in England) undertook to revise the Roman Mass into what became the 1549 BCP, he consulted

closely with the Wittenberg Lutherans because he was convinced that the Lutheran insight on Justification by Faith (and its accompanying implication for liturgy and sacraments) was the hermeneutical key for reforming the Mass. Second, when Lutherans in America, in their different stages of immigration, recognized the need to drop their German and Scandinavian languages and adopted English (a phenomenon that happened as early as Muhlenberg in the 1750s), they drew heavily on the BCP for language and structure in shaping their own English language liturgy. (See Frank Senn, *Lutheran Identity: A Classical Understanding*, pp.62-76.) Third, when Lutherans and Episcopalians revised their worship books in the 1970s (The 1977 *Lutheran Book of Worship* and The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, respectively) they both did so by incorporating common accents retrieved from the early church by the Liturgical Renewal Movement of the 1940s. Whatever differences that exist in the structure and language of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the *Book of Common Prayer* or, for that matter, the most recent *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (2006) are matters of adiaphora (theologically neutral). One noticeable difference is that the Lutheran liturgy incorporated a "hymn of the day" after the Sermon to facilitate the congregation in a sung response to the message of the day, whereas the Episcopalian liturgy did not. A second difference is that the Lutheran Liturgy designed the Rite of Confession and Forgiveness to be a preparatory rite that precedes the gathering rite, whereas in the BCP it comes after the Sermon as a response to the Word. What is characteristic of both traditions' liturgy is the flexibility it allows while always maintaining the general pattern of being called by the gospel and responding in faith and thanksgiving.

What follows is exactly what I did with the congregation on Sunday morning. Worshipers encountered the liturgy (printed in regular typeface). Interspersed within it was an explanation of

the liturgy (in italics). I invite you to use and adapt whatever is here to fit your parish setting. My hope is that it will bring greater awareness and deeper appreciation for the meaning and practice of worship.

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Advertisement, Parish Bulletin, in the weeks preceding—

A Special Worship Service on Sunday, April 17.

Have you ever wondered why the order of worship we use (what we call, The Eucharist) is structured as it? To help us understand and appreciate our Anglican approach to worship we will be doing a “Narrative Setting of the Eucharist” on Sunday, April 17 at both the 8 and 10 a.m. service. It is a worship service that explains itself. It is the service we always do but with a step-by-step explanation of the meaning and logic of the various parts of the worship service as we do it. Plan to be there! You will not want to miss this!

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A NARRATIVE SETTING OF THE EUCHARIST: Rite Two of the Book of Common Prayer

THE ENTRANCE RITE

Entrance Hymn (*All Stand*)

*Jesus promised that wherever two or three are gathered in his name, he would be there. The **Entrance or Gathering Hymn** is sung with that expectation in mind, and the procession into the midst of the congregation of the cross and the ministers of Word and Sacrament symbolize that it is so! These ministers find themselves in a peculiar role. Even as they are to represent Christ to the community (through the administration of Word and*

Sacrament), they are also part of the community of faith needing what Christ has come to give them. The dialogs that happen throughout the liturgy are filled with this peculiarity.

The dialog that immediately follows the entrance hymn changes seasonally. It is a **Greeting** or an **Acclamation** to the Triune God whose kingdom has come to us on earth in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and whose rule is carried out among us through Word and Sacrament. The **Prayer of Humble Access** asks God to make us receptive to what God has come to give us in this liturgy. The **Kyrie** (or Lord Have Mercy) places on our lips a plea for God's mercy, which will be satisfied throughout the course of the liturgy. It places us in communion with all those biblical outcasts and sinners who looked to Christ for mercy and received it: the ten lepers in Luke (Lk 17:11-19), the Canaanite woman whom the disciples wanted to chase away in Matthew (Mt 15:21-28), and Bartimaeus, the blind man and representative believer in Mark's Gospel (Mk 10:46-52) to name a few. The **Gloria** (or Glory to God in the Highest) places on our lips our full-throated praise to God which is our appropriate worship. It places us in communion with the angels who heralded Christ in the presence of Shepherds at Christmas and the saints who assemble with them around Christ and his throne in heaven. The Triune God's gracious offer of mercy and our faith-filled response of praise is the pattern that informs all Christian worship, including the Eucharistic Liturgy, both as a whole and in all its various parts. Let us begin...

Stand

Greeting

Alleluia. Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Blessed be God: Father, Son (+), and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be his Kingdom, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of Humble Access

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Kyrie

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have Mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Hymn of Praise

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

Everything up to this point has been part of the entrance or gathering rite of the liturgy. Its purpose is to gather us together and prepare us for what is to come, the heart of the liturgy, which consists of two chief parts: The Service of the

Word and the Service of the Table. The Service of the Word inserts us as believing hearers into Jesus' teaching ministry; the Service of the Table inserts us as trusting participants into Jesus' death and resurrection, his saving work on our behalf. In this way the pattern of the liturgy follows the pattern of the Gospels: First, through hearing biblical testimony and preaching, Jesus teaches us who he is as the incarnate Son of God who entered human history for our salvation; second, he invites us to participate tangibly in his saving work of dying and rising for us through the sacramental signs that he instituted for us: Baptism at the beginning of our Christian walk, Holy Communion for every step in that walk, and confession and forgiveness because we stumble in that walk. Through these activities Christ invites us to trust him for our salvation and to love one another as he has loved us.

The Service of the Word begins with the **Collect for the Day**. Listen closely. Here, in the form of a prayer, the Celebrant "collects" or summarizes the basic message for the day in the presence of God and the gathered congregation. Think of the prayer as Jesus interceding on our behalf before the Father with the Holy Spirit so that this message may be taken to heart by us. Our response of "Amen" (which in Hebrew means "So be it!") is our affirmation that we do take it to heart. The **Lessons** and **Sermon** which follow set forth the message of the day. The Lessons consist of an array of readings from Sacred Scripture, beginning, usually, with an Old Testament text, accompanied by the recitation of a Psalm (the ancient hymn book of Israel), followed by a reading from one of the New Testament Letters, culminating in a reading from one of the Gospels. This pattern of readings is meant to show the harmony between the Old and New Testaments: that God's promise of salvation announced to ancient Israel is fulfilled through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The acclamations around these readings demonstrate

the central role they play in guiding the Christian community. The Scripture readings contain "the word of the Lord" for which we say "Thanks be to God." The Gospel reading points us directly to Jesus Christ our Savior to whom we offer "glory" and "praise." The purpose of the Sermon, then, is to take that biblically preserved promise of salvation and apply it to us present day hearers. Let us listen attentively...

Collect of the Day

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray...

Sit

The Lessons

The First Reading

The Psalm

The Second Reading

Stand

The Alleluia Verse

Refrain: Alleluia, Alleluia! Give thanks to the risen Lord. Alleluia, Alleluia! Give praise to his name.[Verse 2] Spread the Good News o'er all the earth: Jesus has died and is risen. Repeat Refrain.

The Gospel Reading

The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to

Glory to you, Lord Christ.

The Gospel is read...

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you. Lord Christ.

Sit

The Sermon

*The proclamation of the Word is followed by a series of responses to the Word. The first response is **The Nicene Creed**. It is a Fourth Century ecumenical symbol or summation of the heart of Christian faith that was created in response to numerous false understandings that existed at the time. In reciting the Creed we profess with the Church around the world our belief in the Triune God: that the God who is the Almighty Creator of the world is also the Father of Jesus Christ, the Son of God... who “for us and for our salvation” took on our human nature, endured death for our sins, and rose for our justification... and who, with the Holy Spirit, keeps us in this one true faith and gathers us into one, holy, catholic and apostolic church where the gospel is proclaimed purely, sins are forgiven daily, and eternal life is promised confidently.*

*The second response to the Word is **The Prayers of the People**. We pray because through the Word we know that God is eager to hear and come to our help in accordance with his good and gracious will made known in Jesus Christ. In these prayers we pray for whatever comes to mind – the church, the world, and all who are in need – trusting that no concern of ours is outside the concern of God, trusting that God knows better than we what we need.*

The third response to the Word takes the form of **Confession and Forgiveness**. Through the Word, we hear of God promises to forgive sins freely on account of Christ. Trusting this promise, we examine our lives, confess all manner of sin, believe in the words of absolution (that we are truly forgiven for Christ's sake) and strive to live amended lives, knowing that all this happens because of the power of the promised Holy Spirit working in our lives.

The fourth response to the Word is the **Passing of the Peace**. This is not simply a friendly greeting. It is an expression of the mutual forgiveness and reconciliation we have with God through of Jesus Christ becoming the glue that holds us together as the People of Christ. The "passing of the peace" means that we are a people reconciled to one another through Christ, that we love one another as Christ has loved us.

The fifth response to the Word is the **Announcements**. Yes, the announcements! That's because they both, a) highlight the kinds of service we, the community of faith, are doing in response to the Word and b) invite each one of us to participate in that service as we are able. The announcements remind us that good works are part of the Christian's natural response to the grace we have received in Christ.

The sixth response to the Word is **The Offering**. The gospel is free, we do not pay for it. But we do respond in thanks to God for it – and in wanting others to have it also, we give of ourselves, our time and our possessions to this end. This is what the offering is all about. To be sure, the offering, like all the other liturgical responses to the Word, is only a token of the service we offer everyday in our church, in our family, in our work, in our neighborhood, in our citizenship, and in our

world. But the fact that all these responses are real responses to the Word should not be minimized!

Of course, there can be other kinds of activities included in this series of responses to the Word as special occasions and recognitions arise in the community of faith. But let this list suffice for now as we, now, begin our response to the Word by confessing our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed...

Stand

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look

for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Prayers of the People

Let us pray for the Church and for the world.

Grant, Almighty God, that all who confess your Name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world. *Silence.* Lord, in your mercy...

Hear our prayer.

Guide the people of this land, and of all the nations, in the ways of justice and peace; that we may honor one another and serve the common good. *Silence.* Lord, in your mercy...

Hear our prayer.

Give us all a reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory. *Silence.* Lord, in your mercy...

Hear our prayer.

Bless all whose lives are closely linked with ours, and grant that we may serve Christ in them, and love one another as he loves us. *Silence.* Lord, in your mercy...

Hear our prayer.

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring them the joy of your salvation. *Silence.* Lord, in your mercy...

Hear our prayer.

We commend to your mercy all who have died, that your will for

them may be fulfilled; and we pray that we may share with all your saints in your eternal kingdom. *Silence.* Lord, in your mercy...

Hear our prayer.

The Celebrant adds a concluding Collect.

Confession of Sin

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

Kneel or sit. Silence may be kept.

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life.

Amen.

Stand

The Peace

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you

Sit

Announcements

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God.
Ephesians 5:2

The Offering is Collected

THE SERVICE OF THE TABLE

*The Service of the Table (also known as the celebration of the Lord's Supper) begins with the **Offertory**, when the collected offerings and the gifts of bread and wine are brought forward. A profound message is embedded in this action. God takes what we give him and returns it to us better than ever, because by his blessing they become bearers of the promise. The bread and wine we bring forward will be returned to us in the distribution of Holy Communion as the body and blood of Christ, nourishing us with the forgiveness of sins. The other things we offer, usually money, is blessed and dedicated also in service of the gospel, both for supporting the inward needs of the congregation and the outward needs of the world.*

*The whole focus of the Service of the Table is "Thanksgiving." That is why it is called the "Eucharist," the Greek word for "Thanksgiving." **The Great Thanksgiving** is a dialogue in which God through the ministry of the presider invites us to "give God thanks and praise." **The Proper Preface** amplifies just how fitting and right it is to give thanks and praise. But note: this is not mindless praise. It has a specific focus – and that focus is what God does for us through Christ and the Holy Spirit. In the Proper Preface that focus is shaped relative to the themes of the seasons of the Church Year – Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. But even then, it never loses its primary connection to that ONE theme that anchors our understanding of all themes: the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ as God's definitive act of*

salvation. This is reinforced as we sing the **Sanctus** (The Holy, Holy, Holy), and the **Benedictus** (Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna...), recalling the hymn the crowds sang on Palm Sunday as Jesus entered Jerusalem to make his rendezvous with the cross. The liturgy is thus inserting us into the saving work of Jesus which we will participate in explicitly in the distribution of Holy Communion.

The **Eucharistic Prayer** (which is both a mix of our remembrance before God of what he has done for us AND God's direct address to us of what he is doing for us now) is a bold statement of the logic (the why and the how) of salvation: God created us good that we might live in harmonious relationship with him and all that he has made. But we sinned, breaking relationship with God, bringing turmoil into the world, and leaving a legacy of disgrace and death. Not content with this state of affairs, God the Father sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to rescue us by confronting, on the cross, our legacy of disgrace death and by creating a new legacy for us of grace and resurrection. The Service of the Table is all about participating in that legacy. Therefore, at the center of the Eucharistic Prayer is the Words of Institution, recalling how on the night of his betrayal Jesus established the Lord's Supper as a sure sign that he is truly present with us believers today and that we are participating in his legacy of forgiveness and resurrection as surely as we eat the bread (his promised body) and drink the wine (his promised blood). The Eucharistic Prayer asserts that the full reality of the deity is employed in the logic of salvation, including the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit unites us with the promise of Christ given in the Words of Institution. He takes what is Christ's (his legacy of grace and resurrection) and applies it to us by making true faith in Christ a reality and true love for one another our way of life. Nothing illustrates more clearly the hardwiring connection the Spirit makes between us and Christ

*than when we conclude the Eucharistic Prayer by bold saying together the prayer Jesus taught us, **The Lord's Prayer.***

To be sure, the mystery behind the logic of salvation cannot be overlooked: and so the Eucharistic Prayer emboldens us to acknowledge that by inviting us to name the mystery through words like "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again" (Eucharistic Prayer A) or "We remember his death, We proclaim his resurrection, We await his coming in glory" (Eucharistic Prayer B) that we use today. But just because something is a mystery to us – that is, not fully comprehended by us – does not mean that it is not apprehended by faith: as being true for us and the foundation of our thanksgiving. So let us give thanks beginning with the Great Thanksgiving...

Stand

Offertory and Hymn

The Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We Lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. [Easter Season:] But chiefly are we bound to praise you for the glorious resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; for he is the true Paschal Lamb, who was sacrificed for us, and

has taken away the sin of the world. By his death he has destroyed death, and by his rising to life again he has won for us everlasting life.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed (+) is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation; in the calling of Israel to be your people; in your Word spoken through the prophets; and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus, your Son. For in these last days you sent him to be incarnate from the Virgin Mary, to be the Savior and Redeemer of the world. In him, you have delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you. In him, you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.

On the night before he died for us, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore, according to his command, O Father,

We remember his death, We proclaim his resurrection, We await

his coming in glory.

And we offer our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to you, O Lord of all; presenting to you, from your creation, this bread and this wine.

We pray you, gracious God, to send your Holy Spirit upon these gifts that they may be the Sacrament of the Body of Christ and his Blood of the new Covenant. Unite us to your Son in his sacrifice, that we may be acceptable through him, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In the fullness of time, put all things in subjection under your Christ, and bring us to that heavenly country where, with [_____]and] all your saints, we may enter the everlasting heritage of your sons and daughters; through Jesus Christ our Lord, the firstborn of all creation, the head of the Church, and the author of our salvation.

By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever.

Amen.

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Now the time has come for us to receive the promised Body and Blood of Christ and participate in this tangible way in the legacy of Christ's cross and resurrection. The meaning of the meal is clearly proclaimed in the **Fracture** with the words,*

*"Alleluia, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us," and our response, "Therefore, let us keep the feast, Alleluia." The instruction on how to make use of this feast is also clearly stated in the **Invitation**: "Come, for all things are ready. These are the gifts of God for you the people of God. Receive them in your hearts with faith and thanksgiving." The **Agnus Dei** (The Lamb of God) may be sung as our way of asserting that Christ's sacrifice is the grounds for our forgiveness. Then the moment arrives. We, the people of God, come forward and receive the bread and the wine along with the simple declaration: "The Body of Christ, the Bread from Heaven"; "the Blood of Christ, the Cup of Salvation." Equally simple is our response: "Amen," by which we mean, "It is so! I believe." Other gestures may be employed to express the meaning of the moment, such as, a) making the sign of the cross, symbolizing that the legacy of Christ's cross and resurrection is also our legacy or b) offering a simple prayer of your own in thanksgiving for what you have just receive. Let us now with ado, ready ourselves to come and receive this great Gift of gifts...*

The Breaking of the Bread

[Alleluia.] Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;

Therefore let us keep the feast. [Alleluia.]

Agnus Dei (*Lamb of God*)

The Invitation

Come for all things are ready. These are the Gifts of God for you the People of God. Receive them in your hearts with faith and thanksgiving.

Amen.

The Distribution

Having been graciously fed on the Body and Blood of Christ and lovingly nourished by the Paschal (Good Friday and Easter) fruits of his labor, we once again return thanks through the words of the **Post-Communion Prayer**. But that prayer also turns our attention to the outside world and to the places where we will find ourselves in the week to come. Those places are not a distraction from our life in the Lord, but the locations where we live it, where our Lord sends us to love and serve him by loving and serving others. Although the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Table have come to an end, you might say that the Liturgy of the Week, our service in the world, is just beginning. This is the meaning of the Sending Rite that concludes our worship. It is a hurried affair, symbolizing our eagerness to be Christ's disciples in the world. First is the **Benediction** (a hurried blessing in the name of the Saving God, the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit); then we quickly sing a last parting **Sending or Recessional Hymn** while the ministers of the liturgy scurry their way out, only to pause long enough to proclaim a last, brief word of **Dismissal**: "Go in peace; love and serve the Lord." To which we respond, fittingly, "Thanks be to God." We are thankful, not because our weekly assembly around Word and Sacrament is finally over, but because the purpose for which we gathered has been fulfilled. We are thankful that we have been fed and strengthen in faith and, thereby fortified for service in Christ's name. But we are also thankful that we will gather again next week. Knowing that the Liturgy of the Week is exhausting – both physically and spiritually – we are thankful that the arc of the week will lead us back to next Sunday's gathering. And therein lies the pattern of the Christian life: gathered and sent, gathered and sent. So let us conclude ...

Post-Communion Blessing and Prayer

The Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

strengthen you and keep you in his grace unto life everlasting.

Amen.

Let us pray. Almighty and everliving God,

we thank you for feeding us with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; and for assuring us in these holy mysteries that we are living members of the Body of your Son, and heirs of your eternal kingdom. And now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord. To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son (+) and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Recessional Hymn

Dismissal

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Let us go forth in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Easter Unfolding. A Gift from Amy C. Schiffrin. Part 2

Colleagues,

Easter themes continue to unfold in this second half of a paper that Amy Schiffrin presented at last January's Crossings conference. As she swivels into a discussion of the Eucharistic gifts we enjoy today, you'll want to notice how Luke 24:31-32, 35 is lurking in the background. So is John 20:22. That neither is mentioned, or needs to be, serves only to underscore how our Lord's resurrection is the essential precondition of everything we get to confess, celebrate, and thank God for on Christ's account, beginning with the gift of the Spirit. Dr. Schiffrin will make that point better than I can.

For what it's worth, having heard and read this paper I'm paying closer attention to liturgical language than I had been of late. There is always more power in the words we use than we sinners tend to assume. For good words packed with the Gospel's punch, thanks be to God.

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce

"Fill us with your Spirit to establish our faith in truth"
(continued)

Dr. Amy C. Schiffrin

January 26, 2016

Left to ourselves, we surely stray;

Oh, lead us on the narrow way,

With wisest counsel guide us;

And give us steadfastness, that we

May follow you forever free,

No matter who derides us.

Gently heal those hearts now broken;

Give some token You are near us,

Whom we trust to light and cheer us.[i]

What does it mean for the baptized to live filled with the Spirit of truth whom the world neither sees nor recognizes? What does it mean for a congregation, called gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Spirit to discover the shape of a joyful obedience empowered by the Spirit? Send now, we pray, your Holy Spirit, that we and all who share in this bread and cup may be united in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, may enter the fullness of the kingdom of heaven, and may receive our inheritance with all your saints in light.[ii] What does this mean? The Eucharistic epiclesis points us in the right direction.

Now there is a long and rugged history of the role and placement of the epiclesis within the Eucharistic Rite. Sometime the Spirit was called upon the material gifts of bread and wine, sometimes the Spirit was called upon the persons in the assembly, and sometimes the Spirit was ambiguously called upon both. Sometimes the epiclesis preceded the verba, sometimes it

followed, and sometime there were both.[iii] Sometimes the Spirit was simply understood to be present when the verba flowed from the Proper Preface in the act of proclamation.[iv] Yet in each case God is still understood as the giver so that the Holy Spirit would establish our faith in truth: the truth about who God is, from the beginning, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and how he acts; the truth about who we are and how we are called to live; and the truth about this world and the world to come, the truth about eternity, that is, the truth about the resurrection of the dead unto eternal life, that we may enter it.

So really, what does it mean for each of you here to live filled with the Spirit of truth whom the world neither sees nor recognizes? What does it mean for your congregation, called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Spirit to discover a joyful obedience empowered by the Spirit? What does it mean for you to receive and to live out the Truth that is known by the Spirit, by the water and by the blood?

Every Lord's Day the baptized come to table and are joined in prayer for the Spirit to come upon these gifts of bread and wine, and to come upon those who have been assembled by the Spirit's own power. Within a continuum of ritual variations our hearts and hands are made open so that we might receive that life that is the fullness of the kingdom of heaven, and...receive our inheritance with all [the] saints in light.[v] In some (often hidden) way the Holy Spirit is always directing our attention to Christ, and it is in and through Christ that we are taken to the Father's heart.

The Eucharistic epiclesis is among the most paradigmatic expressions of the life and faith of the baptized. For as Christ himself is hidden in bread and wine, word and water, so the Spirit fills the assembly with the presence of the Triune God wherever that community is gathered: the living room in a house

church, a stone and stained glass cathedral, on under-heated city basement, or at the end of a gravel road in a white walled church on the open prairie.

The Eucharistic epiclesis, however, does not come without a larger ritual framework. In the liturgical setting of the full Eucharistic Rites of the Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW), where the Institution Narrative follows the praise of the Father for creation, salvation history, and for Christ himself, which has already followed the Sanctus, the proper preface and sursum corda in which the assembly was called forth to, Lift up your hearts, and our very bodies responded, We lift them up to the Lord, we come to the remembrance (the Anamnesis) that recalls the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, and the hope of Christ's return, Amen, Come, Lord Jesus. And so at last we pray, Send your Holy Spirit, crying out in faith for what our Lord as already promised, I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you...Amen, Come, Holy Spirit. And with arms upheld by the Spirit we pray beyond our own needs, beyond our own tribe, beyond our own borders, beyond our own fragmentary existences, and especially beyond our own fears—especially our fear of death by abandonment, to Join our prayers with those of your servants of every time and every place and unite them with the ceaseless petitions of our great high priest until he comes as victorious Lord of all. Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. Amen.[vi] The Holy Spirit has directed our full attention to Christ, who is, who was, and who is to come, and when our attention is taken into to the future which he is preparing for us, then, and only then, that future, that eternal love, happens now.

For just as the Spirit descended upon Jesus as he came up from the River Jordan, and just as Jesus unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and proclaimed "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," and just as Jesus breathed peace into the disciples who shivered behind a locked door, and just as you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever, so now week after week, Sunday after Sunday, the Holy Spirit, whom you cannot see, but whose works you believe in—the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting—the Holy Spirit, is directing you to a Eucharistic life, a life in which we receive every breath with Thanksgiving. Our Lord Jesus says to us, If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And he has commanded you to Do this in remembrance of me.

All those multiple contexts in which we live and move, but in which we do not have our very being, all those divisions are to be overcome, and indeed are overcome as the Holy Spirit directs us to receive the life of the resurrected Christ into our lives. In the words of St. Leo the Great, The Spirit of truth breathes where he will, and each nation's own language has become common property in the mouth of the church.[vii]

Hidden in the fragmentation of society and invading every sub-culture, the body of Christ sings his resurrection song. Whether we wear the faded scrubs of an orderly at the county nursing home or the sleek Armani pinstripe as CEO of a Fortune 500 company we are owned by neither one, but by Christ. Whether we are cooing homemade melodies of love in a baby's tiny ear or singing lamentations as we caress the dying, it is the Spirit of truth witnessing to the eternal love of God for those whom he has made. Nothing can stop this love, neither heights nor depths nor angels nor principalities, nor powers. Nothing can stop this love because Christ has died. Christ is Risen, Christ will come again. We who once cried for his crucifixion, murderers all,

have now met him at the cross, dragged by the Spirit of truth kicking and screaming in denial of our complicity of our sin, but in a breath—born up as on wings of an eagle by this same Spirit whom the Father has sent to carry us to the empty tomb. As St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, we are always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be visible in our bodies. (2 Cor. 4:10)

There is however, one place where we all too often painfully see this life being made visible. It's not on the soil of the North American context but on the global horizon, and there we see in graphic and explicit scenes what truth looks like. For the Spirit of truth is made visible for all the world to see in martyrdom. 21 Copts beheaded, scores of Nigerian students mowed down, Iraqi Christians kidnapped and tortured, innocent young girls in nation after nation abducted and raped physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and then raped again and again and again: It is destruction and violation, defilement and desecration at every human level, and in this hell on earth these unsuspecting martyrs are speaking the truth, testifying with their whole body to the truth of who God is and whom he has made us to be, homo adorans, the worshipping human, trusting his promise, I am the Lord your God, obedient to his command, You shall have no other gods before me. Animated and empowered by the Spirit who is truth, martyrs incarnately speak his essence, which is truth, Father forgive them for they know not what they do. And speaking the truth about who God is, they simultaneously speak the truth about the world that he made, and the truth about those upon whom the Spirit rests, the truth that God's mercy is greater than our damnable ways, his forgiveness greater than any devil's temptation, and his love even deeper than any mass grave. Death has no hold upon those in whom the Spirit rests, for the Spirit is testifying to the truth in the lives of those who look to the Lord for every breath.

*O mighty Rock, O Source of life,
Let your good Word in doubt and strife
be in us strongly burning,
that we be faithful unto death
And live in love and holy faith,
From you true wisdom learning.
Lord, your mercy
On us shower;
By your power
Christ confessing,
We will cherish all your blessings.[viii]*

It is this vision that the Spirit breathes into the whole church, taking the resurrected life of Christ, and giving it to us so that we may live faithfully in any and every context. We cannot fully imagine it, just as a young soldier cannot imagine how he would feel or act when the Stryker in front of him hits an IED and he finds himself hemmed in by enemy fire. None can imagine this, and all of us in some way or another are afraid that our fear would be greater than our faith, that we would be paralyzed, that we would capitulate, that we would submit to the evil that surrounds us, that we would seek to cling to this life more than to the promise of life eternal. But from the testimony of the martyrs we see and hear the same fullness of the Spirit who came to us in the waters, the same fullness of the Spirit, who in the words of the epiclesis attributed to Hippolytus, blesses us [God's] servants and [his] own gifts of bread and wine, so that we and all who share in the body and blood of his

Son may be filled with heavenly peace and joy, and receiving the forgiveness of sins, may be sanctified in soul and body, and have our portion with all God's saints.[ix]

God has breathed his Spirit on your hearts so that when faced with the fullness of the law, that is your death, you will be filled with the Spirit's gift of eternal truth, and you will yet proclaim, All honor and glory are yours, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, now and forever. Amen.[x]

[i] LBW, Hymn 459. vs 2.

[ii] Eucharistic Prayer II, Lutheran Book of Worship (Minister's Desk Edition), 221.

[iii] For a concise history of the epiclesis in Lutheran Eucharistic praying see, Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Church in Act: Lutheran Liturgical Theology in an Ecumenical Conversation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 33-66.

[iv] In Luther's revision of the *Ordo Missae*, the *Formula Missae et Communions* of 1523, the *verba* is still within an Eucharistic prayer. Senn comments on the *Formula Missae*, "If this text of the institution narrative is compared with the text in the Roman canon, it will be seen that Luther has eliminated all extrabiblical words and phrases...It should be noted that this institution narrative is still included within a Eucharistic prayer, since it is introduced by a dependent *Qui*-clause. This Eucharistic prayer concluded with the singing of the *Sanctus*." Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 278.

[v] Eucharistic Prayer II, Lutheran Book of Worship (Minister's Desk Edition), 221

[vi] Eucharistic Prayers I and II, Lutheran Book of Worship

(Minister's Desk Edition), 223.

[vii] St Leo the Great, Sermons 75.1-3:CCSL 138A, 465-9 in Stephen Mark Holmes, *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 166.

[viii] LBW, Hymn 459. vs 3.

[ix] Eucharistic Prayer IV, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Ministers Desk Edition), 226.

[x] *Ibid.*, 226.