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Telling God's Story

Christ is Risen, Indeed: Good News for Him, and For Us

Back to the Beginning: Creation Shapes the Entire Story

"Daddy, Will Animals Be In Heaven?":
The Future New Earth

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EDITORIALS

Past. Present. Future. Our faith is living and active in all three tenses.

And when our life is ensconced within the arc of the scriptures, the tenses of faith find their depth grammar in the beginning, middle, and end of the story of God.

The 2013 Theological Symposium, “From the Creation to the New Creation: Seeing All Things in Light of the Entire Story,” took up these themes. And when we indeed “see all things” in light of the grand narrative of God’s action in the whole of creation, it shifts our whole perspective. The plenary presentations—published here—begin to spell out what it all means for theology, church, and ministry. Moreover, it sets the stage for what will happen in conversations about mission and witness at the 2014 Theological Symposium (September 23–24), “Faithful Witness to God’s Story in the World Around Us.”

Often this shift in perspective is understood as a recovery of a more genuinely biblical vision of the world. Biblical scholar and theologian N. T. Wright has done an invaluable service to the church catholic in this regard. But it also reflects the current emphasis, in theological circles, on *narrative*. Narrative studies have come to the forefront of any number of disciplines in the last twenty years or so. At its root, it reflects the assumption that human identity and community are composed by any number of *stories* that give it meaning. This is a turn away from, on one hand, a purely rationalistic account of human being (think Kant), and, on the other, a merely psychoanalytical one (think Freud).

All of which provides a significant opportunity for mission and witness to church and world from within a confessional tradition that is centered on faithfulness to the whole narrative of the scriptures (think LCMS). From beginning to middle to end, we are “storied” people. Nowhere is this more evident than in the communion of saints storied by the scriptures, centered in the incarnate life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When I began to learn New Testament Greek, I keenly remember the awe I felt when I learned the perfect tense, that the language had its own tense for completed past actions that nonetheless reverberate with action in present time. It completely opened my mind anew to what Paul was up to when he wrote 1 Corinthians 15. We have no pure equivalent in English to the Greek perfect tense, but we still reflect these tenses of the faith in some of the most important things we say to each other as followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

For instance, when we say, *I am baptized into Christ*. Not *I was* or *I had been*, but *I am*. Whether the water splashed our brow yesterday or forty years ago, its life is lived in the here and now. Nobody understood that reality better than Martin Luther.

Or when we say, in this season, *He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!* Not *He has been raised* or *He has risen*, but *He is*. The joy of Easter is in the *is*, that the full impact of his full-bodied resurrection from the dead is in how its past action is bringing present time into the future hope of God’s new creation.

Or, finally, when we confess, *I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come*. Not *I will look* or *I have been looking*, but *I look* for how the firstfruits of all creation is bursting forth—past and future breaking into the present—in the life around and within us this day and every day to come.

I am. He is. I look. Past and future meeting in the present. Our faith is living and active in all three tenses, from beginning to middle to end.

Travis J. Scholl
Managing Editor of Theological Publications

“A Gospel-Based Budgeting of Theology’s Resources”

I recently cracked open Richard Lischer’s *A Theology of Preaching*. I literally cracked it open; the glue in the spine was so dry that it pulverized upon opening and I was left with a sheaf of papers. No matter, Lischer’s work offers insights that are as fresh today as when they were first published in 1981. One phrase especially caught my attention, a phrase that reminds us pastors that we should be discriminating in our studies and ministry. With abundant theological resources at our disposal, with the temptation to get engrossed in theological tangents to gospel ministry, and with only so much time in a day, our vocation of caring for souls calls us to put a premium on the gospel of Jesus Christ, as Lischer calls it, “a Gospel-based budgeting of theology’s resources.”¹

Just like a financial budget for home, church and seminary, “Gospel-based budgeting” is a learned skill. That’s true because the law is born in every heart; the gospel comes from outside. Baptism hasn’t removed the inborn law from the preacher’s heart, and unless we are intentional about studying how the gospel speaks to the countless situations where law and sin are working death, we leave a void that will necessarily be filled by the law, that being our natural default. Our diploma and ordination isn’t sufficient, which is why C. F. W. Walther encouraged his students to be wary. “The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching.”² To keep us mindful of gospel-dominance, “Gospel-based budgeting,” Robert Kolb offers a helpful fact about the Reformers.

The Wittenbergers seem to have conceived of God’s Word as a body of teaching which was of one peace, a whole. They seldom if ever used the word “doctrine” in the plural. God’s Word does not consist of a string of pearls, doctrines, which go together to make up a necklace. Instead, God’s Word is like a body. It has different members, which most sixteenth-century Lutherans did not call “doctrines”—in the plural—as we do, but instead “articles of faith” when they occur in Confessional documents and “topics” or “loci [commonplaces]” when they occur in dogmatic treatises. These specific topics or articles are called into existence as projections of Biblical teaching by the challenges of the world, whether inside or outside the church, in specific situations.³

One reason why The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod maintains its seminaries is so our congregations and church workers can have needed and timely theological resources to help you apply the various articles of the evangelical doctrine to the specific challenges facing your congregation and community. Few of us pastors and churchworkers have the time and resources to become expert in the many theological topics that confront us in twenty-first-century ministry. In fact, no person, individual seminary professors included, can be knowledgeable in all the branches of academic classical theology and how they are useful in applying law and gospel to today’s ministry challenges. And because we are in a post-churched society, laypeople increasingly find themselves

in witnessing situations and many desire more understanding about the faith. So the church maintains theological faculties, its body of full-time theologians, each skilled in a specific theological discipline and all together constituting a substantial resource for you who are on the frontlines of ministry. Ask most of our professors about their division of time between classroom and their presentations in and for the church-at-large and you'll find that they gladly give considerable time to providing theological resources to congregations, pastors and laypeople. This is not new. The *Concordia Journal* is well known, our wide array of advanced degrees is available residentially and by a combination of online and residential intensives, our professors speak in your districts and congregations, the same professors serve on committees for the LCMS, and our extensive offerings on iTunesU are accessed around the world and becoming increasingly known within the LCMS. What is new is Concordia Seminary's desire to offer you much more. Because there is so, so much more to learn after graduation when we find ourselves in the challenges of congregation and community, we have new and varied resources to support all the baptized in giving "a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pt 3:15).

Ministry 411 is one new offering. Ministry 411 = 4 book clubs each year + 1 symposium + 1 workshop or conference of your choice. Four Concordia Seminary Online Book Club offerings:

"The Club" enables busy pastors to dig deeply into readings that will help them in congregational ministry. Four book clubs will be offered each year. Each track will cover a book each quarter. The book clubs will explore topics covered in our on-campus symposia, issues of pastoral practice and leadership, hermeneutics and homiletics, and classic Christian readings.

Add one symposium and one workshop or conference and Ministry 411 offers a simple and smooth way to use continuing education programs for you and other pastors in the field. Pastors in the field will receive one Continuing Education Unit (CEU) when they participate in an offering.

Another new offering is Lunch & Learn Courses. These live, online courses meet for a one-hour session one day a week over the lunch hour for a quarter (ten weeks). Pastors watch a presentation by a professor and then engage in a discussion of it with fellow pastors. As with the book club, one CEU will be given upon successful completion.

Continuing education is important not only for pastors, but for lay people as well. Concordia Seminary is offering new and revised opportunities that are designed specifically for laity but are also helpful to clergy. These new offerings include the creation of the Lay Bible Institute Online and a substantial revision of the "In the Word" Bible study series. For the past twenty years, the Lay Bible Institute has been conducted on Concordia Seminary's campus. It provides an opportunity for laypeople and pastors to deepen their theological understanding by engaging in a wide range of theological topics and contemporary issues. Topics have been the Crusades, Muslim outreach, American politics in light of the Lutheran distinction of the two kingdoms, and bioethics, to name but a few. Both pastors and laity have attended and learned for their ministries. Now Concordia Seminary offers the Lay Bible Institute Online. For two hours one

Wednesday each month, Concordia Seminary professors will share insights from God's word and from Christian thinkers that have shaped their lives and the way they see the world around them. The goal of these online webinars is to provide participants a fresh perspective for thinking about issues affecting church and culture in the world today.

Concordia Seminary is currently revising our "In the Word" Bible Studies for congregational use. You might call these, "Bible Studies in a Box." Each Bible study provides a four-week study of a topic or section of the Bible. It includes brief round-table discussion videos of seminary professors that can provide a discussion starter for congregational Bible studies and/or individual studies of God's word. Class outlines and discussion questions come with the Bible study. A new study entitled, "The Mysterious God: A Study of Job 38–41" is being prepared and will be followed by a study of Philippians.

Our *Concordia Seminary Magazine*, long a source of information about what's going on at the Seminary, has been redesigned to bring you articles written by our professors about theological topics that are of interest to laity and pastors alike and helpful for our confession to today's world. To get more information about any of these many offerings, email ce@csl.edu.

So what my predecessor, John F. Johnson, said years ago is coming true. He spoke about a "seminary without walls." That's also true about the Concordia Seminary Library, some 270,000 holdings that are available today beyond the walls of Fuerbringer Hall. Whatever your need or however deeply you want to research, our library sees itself as a central headquarters for the theological needs of the entire Synod. Any rostered church worker within the Synod can check out books from our library. The process is easy; just send an email request to librarycirc@csl.edu with a request of the books you would like. Your request will be shipped within forty-eight hours. We ask that you assume the cost for mailing the books back to the Seminary. Pastors in the St. Louis area receive a four-week check out with two renewals. Pastors living at a distance have a six-week check out with two renewals. If you are an alumnus of Concordia, St. Louis you can also access to our ATLA online services again by sending an email with your date of graduation to hoeltke@csl.edu or librarycirc@csl.edu. You will then be set up with online guest access. Finally, anyone at all, pastor, lay person, or your group can ask our research desk for any help with research of any kind. Call the Reference Desk at 314-505-7032 or send an email to libraryref@csl.edu.

The faculty of Concordia Seminary has goals as we offer these Continuing Education resources to the church. First, we want to focus on the needs of the church and the daily lives of her people. Second, we want to make access easy for you. The Internet provides an easy access global classroom that builds on the growing use of technology as an educational platform. Third, our offerings are intentionally collaborative. Continuing education is done best within a collaborative group of contextual learners who can share experiences and assist one another in reflection and application. I have a pre-Internet story about that coming up. Finally, since not all information available for continuing education is theologically reliable and accurate, we strive to offer

biblical and confessional quality. The Smalcald Articles, wrote Robert Kolb, “reveal the center and compass for all confession: redemption in Jesus Christ. They reveal the basic concern of all confession: effective application of God’s Word to the life of the church—good pastoral care of Christ’s people.”⁴ That is still the commanding need today, gospel ministry through “gospel-based budgeting of theology’s resources.”

I reminisce with deep gratitude about my first circuit. Here I was, newly minted from the Seminary with my Greek and Hebrew sharp and all my other classroom learnings fresh. Fresh? In hindsight “green” is a much better word. It was when our Winkel conference dealt with casuistry that I got my first inkling of how helpful continuing education can be for ministry. If your pastoral conference does casuistry, and I hope they do, you know how it goes. One brother presents a head-scratching case and sincerely seeks insight on how to proceed. The other brothers ask questions to wrap their minds around the issue, and insights are offered. “I had a case like that 20 years ago . . .” “Does Fritz have any insight?” “How about the CTCR?” “I’m thinking of when Jesus . . .” “And what about the Small Catechism which says . . .” And so it went. The many decades of learning and pastoral experience gathered around the table were integrated into a singular focus upon evangelical pastoral care. Oh, those other pastors knew so much more than I did; today the whole of us know more than any of us knows individually. Continuing education is about our Life Together for the care of souls with the one and only doctrine, the doctrine of the gospel, which we are called to speak and apply through its various articles in the specific situations of our ministries. As insightful as it is, Richard Lischer’s phrase, “A Gospel-based budgeting of theology’s resources” does not flow easily off the lips. “Lead with the gospel” does, and that is our focus as we offer you our faculty’s time, learning, and energies for your ministry.

Dale A. Meyer
President

Endnotes

¹ Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 22.

² C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, Thesis XXV, 403.

³ Robert Kolb, “Luther’s Smalcald Articles: Agenda for Testimony and Confession,” *Concordia Journal*, (April, 1988): 119.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

ARTICLES

The theme of the 2013 Theological Symposium was “From the Creation to the New Creation: Seeing All Things in Light of the Entire Story.” With that theme, we focused on letting the fuller biblical story, not just the cross and the resurrection, but the movement from creation to the new creation, shape our witness, mercy, and life together as God’s people.

The articles within this issue of the *Concordia Journal* explore what happens when we attend to a fuller proclamation of the Christian narrative, using as specific examples creation, the resurrection of Christ, and the new creation. To frame our reflections, this opening article explores the power of story both within the human experience and the divine revelation.

For a fuller explication and experience of the ideas summarized in this article, you are invited to view the opening plenary at concordiatheology.org.

Introduction

I would like to begin at a cultural moment that seems quite distant from our own. The year is 1674. The place is London. There, two poets (one famous and the other infamous) are situating God’s story in the public realm.

John Dryden is the famous poet. He is poet laureate, historiographer royal, a literary critic, and a dramatist, well known for his heroic plays. He has cultivated a reputation for over-the-top dramas that reinforce the over-the-top culture of Charles II’s court. In April 1674, John Dryden announced that he was writing a rimed opera of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. He was turning that faithful Protestant epic into a fashionable play.

John Milton is the other poet and he is infamous. He is a regicide and a divorcer, having defended the beheading of Charles I and having written tracts biblically defending divorce. Some of his books were publically burned by the hangman and his blindness was seen as a sure sign of God’s judgment upon him. Three months after Dryden’s announcement, Milton publishes a second edition of *Paradise Lost*, complete with a commendatory poem, laughing at fashionable poets and their “tinkling rime.”

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In 1674, in London, we have a cultural moment when two poets were situating God's story in the public realm in two different ways.

Consider Milton. In *Paradise Lost*, at the end of the poem, Adam and Eve are about to be expelled from the garden of Eden. God, however, does not send them forth disconsolate. God sends the archangel Michael and, in Books 11 and 12, Michael delivers a long sermon to Adam. The sermon covers all of biblical history, extending from Cain and Abel to the return of Christ and the new creation. Adam sees and hears it all. As Adam experiences this telling of God's story, he asks questions and forms judgments and Michael remains in conversation with him. At the beginning, Adam gets it wrong. He is not able to see what God is doing in the world. Then, by the end of the sermon, Adam begins to get it right. Through interaction with the master story, Adam grows. He becomes more discerning about the ways of God, firmer in faith as he holds on to God's promises, and prepared to enter the world. Milton's work suggests that Christians are formed in the faith to live in the world by hearing God's story. Telling the master story is the way in which God prepares his people for life in the world.

In contrast, consider John Dryden. Dryden has seen how God's story has been told. On the one hand, it was used to defend the killing of a king; on the other hand, it was used to defend the restoration of a king. On the one hand, it was used to argue that the great fire and the plague were God's judgment on London because of the courtly corruption of Charles II; on the other hand, it was used to argue that the great fire and the plague were God's purging of a city that would kill its king.¹ When one story can be used for so many different things, it makes you wonder whether the story is valuable at all. It makes you wonder what it would be like to enter the world without any story at all. So, when Dryden comes to the end of his opera, Raphael visits Adam and Eve. He shows them death and he shows them eternal life . . . but nothing more. There is no recounting of the story of Noah and the flood, no Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, no Exodus, no Israel, no exile, no Christ, no crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, or return. As Adam and Eve leave the garden of Eden, they go without God's master story and they resign themselves to living without a master story in the world. Dryden takes a line from Milton's Satan and puts it on the lips of Eve. The last thing Eve says, in fact the last human words of the opera, are "Farthest from what I once enjoy'd is best" (5.4.259).²

In this one cultural moment, we have two ways of situating the divine story in the world. People can either be formed by that story or free of it. As with Milton, one can be formed by hearing the whole biblical story and interacting with it in dialog with others or, as with Dryden, one can be free of it completely, since the farther one is from the origins of this story, the better life will be in the world.

I begin with this cultural moment because, in some ways, it mirrors our own. In America, some feel like they have experienced the rule of the Puritans. They have seen the Christian story being told to justify so many things. They have seen how the story has been used to say that our nation is the City on a Hill, the beacon of hope to all nations. They have heard how this story has been used to justify acts of mercy in

hospitals and homeless shelters and they have also heard how this story has been used to justify violence at women's care clinics and protests at military funerals saying these deaths are the judgment of God. When the Christian story has been used for so many different things, it makes some people wonder whether we would be better off without any story. They seek to free people from this story, to erase it from the art and architecture of our public spaces, and to remove it from the classrooms of our public education and from the skies of our imagination.

How are Christians, who have been called to be the church within this culture, to tell God's story? As the American culture erases this story from our cultural memory, the church needs to be more attentive to the sacred story that it tells. What does it mean to live in, with, and under God's story? To begin answering that question, this article will consider the storied shape of faith experience both as people live in story and as God's people tell God's story.

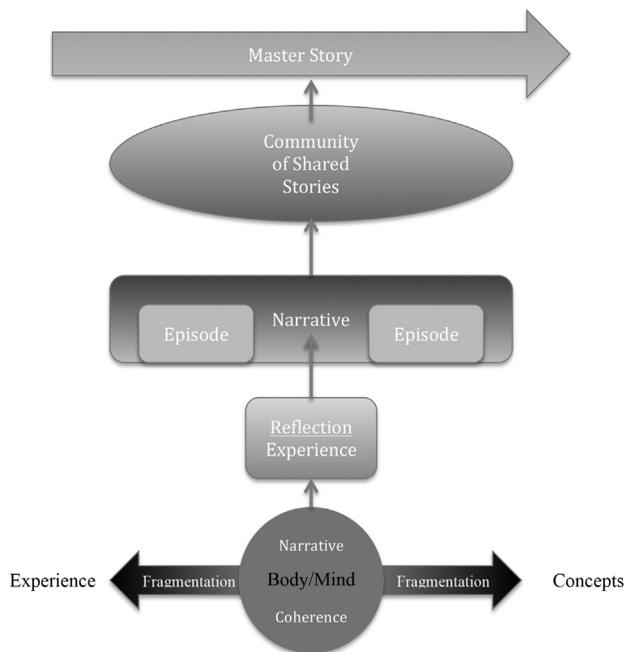
Living in Story

Recently there has been a rebirth of interest in narrative. Narrative is understood as another mode of knowing: you may know something by scientific investigation or you may know something by story. Narrative is thus being integrated into disciplines where traditionally science would be found. You have the development of narrative centered learning environments. Universities offer courses in narrative and geography, narrative law, narrative and public policy, narrative leadership, narrative physics, narrative engineering, narrative architecture, and you can even earn a master of science in narrative medicine.

The church is also undergoing a rebirth of narrative, both at the congregational level, where churches are going through Zondervan's thirty-one-week program called "The Story," and at the scholarly level, where narrative theology is returning to prominence. Even within Lutheran circles, we find a rebirth of interest in narrative. For example, Dr. Kolb's recent book, *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narrative as a Foundation for Christian Living*, explores the role of narrative in Luther's preaching.

With such a large body of literature on narrative, this essay will only set forth the basic dynamics of a narrative approach to faith experience. To do this, we will consider the following diagram (next page) as a representation of how individuals live in stories.

Most works that explore the power of story in shaping human experience make reference to an article by Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience."³ This diagram attempts to articulate in visual form what Crites is exploring in critical theory. For the purpose of introducing the diagram, I will move from the bottom to the top. This movement is not a Platonic movement from the experiences of this world to the realm of ideas or from the body to the mind, but rather an expanding of one's individual life experience into larger narrative horizons, moving from episodes in one's life to a larger personal story to a community of shared stories and then to the master story of God's work in the world.



At the heart of Crites’s work lies an act of meditation: his meditation on Augustine who is, himself, meditating on his faith experience. After Augustine was bishop, he composed a spiritual autobiography, *The Confessions*, and in composing that autobiography, Augustine created a narrative expression of his faith. Crites focuses particularly on that moment in Books 10 and 11 when Augustine is meditating on time and memory. At the juncture of time and memory is the birth of narrative. Because we are creatures in time, we experience a flow of experiences. Because we have memory, we are able to remember past experiences and to project from that memory into possible future experiences. This juncture of time that passes and memory that holds such passing moments together creates a quality that Crites argues is fundamental to human experience: narrative. Crites argues that because we experience the passage of time and because we have memory, we live in stories.

At the very bottom of the diagram lies what for Crites is essential—the self in its concrete experience as indivisible, temporal, and whole. For Crites, faith is incarnate in bodily experience. Crites objects to theories that bifurcate this holistic experience, that divide the self into either reason or experience. That is, on the one hand, Crites objects to those who would take this holistic experience of life and simply distill it into teachings and then leave the experience behind. Fred Craddock once lamented that this is how some preachers work with the narratives of Scripture. They reduce them to bare teachings and lose the enfleshment of theology in life.⁴ On the other hand, Crites also objects to those who would take this holistic experience and distill it into mere experi-

ence, momentary, fleeting, and unconnected to anything else. Instead of having only experience or only teaching, Crites argues that meaning is incarnate in bodily experience. Human creatures are not disembodied minds or mindless bodies but rather temporal beings and what best reflects that unity and coherence of human experience is the power of narrative.

Narrative works, however, within various horizons. Beginning at the bottom of the diagram, with the episode, one has limited temporal and communal horizons.⁵ An individual selects from a variety of sensory experiences and orders those selected experiences in a way that constitutes an event, a moment of significance in life. Left by itself, this event could quickly pass from one's memory or could linger there for years.

As one moves upward in the diagram, the temporal horizons begin to expand. The episode is joined to other episodes to compose a much longer personal story, a narrative. Narrative, thus, is the purposeful ordering of selected episodes in a way that gives life meaning. Over time, this personal story changes as certain episodes are added, others forgotten, and others integrated into the story in a different way. Individuals frame and reframe their life stories in the complex art of spiritual autobiography, selecting, interpreting, and sequencing experiences in a meaningful or purposeful way.

As one moves upward again in the diagram, both the temporal and communal horizons begin to expand. One's personal story is joined to the stories of others in a shared community. This sharing of narrative within community is always somewhat tentative and exploratory. Within community, personal narratives can be questioned or affirmed. Communities can frame or reframe life narratives, supporting or subverting them, reinforcing or recreating the way in which individuals experience their lives and tell their stories. In 2007, Henry Corcoran published his research on the power of storied communities at points of life transition.⁶ He noted that at points of major transitions in life (e.g., the birth or death of a child, marriage or divorce, or the move to a new job, a new home, or a new school), people are prone to reframing their narratives. For example, as some young adults leave their families and congregations and enter college, they may learn to frame their life story not in terms of their baptismal identity in Christ (a way of telling their story that was supported by their family and church community at home) but in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, or sexual orientation (ways of telling one's life story that can be highlighted within some collegiate social and educational communities).

Of course, for Christians, this attention to community and story is nothing new. The apostle Paul has already admonished and encouraged us to attend to the stories of the faith community. Paul's letters are filled with the call for imitation. He encourages the Philippians to "join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us" (Phil 3:17). Within this particular letter, he holds up for consideration not just himself but Timothy and Epaphroditus. In writing to the Thessalonians, Paul encourages them to imitate him in working while they are engaged in ministry (2 Thes 3:7-9). In writing to Timothy, Paul tells him to set an example in his speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (1 Tm 4:12). The writer to the Hebrews also

voices this theme, offering a chapter of the stories of people of faith. This rhetoric of exemplarity calls upon Christians to enter into the larger community of people of faith, living and interpreting life, reading and writing their lives in relationship to these witnesses of the Spirit's work.

As Alan Jacobs has noted in his work on spiritual autobiography, unfortunately some communities of faith can take these patterns and turn them into stereotypes.⁷ Such stereotypes alienate individuals, making them question whether their life experiences can be part of the larger community of faith. For example, conversion narratives that are modeled upon Paul's Damascus road experience can leave some Christians, brought to the faith in infant baptism, wondering what story they have to tell. What is needed for the health of the church is not the enforcement of a selected stereotype but the faithful awareness of the chorus of witnesses in Scripture, a sacred seeing of the variety of patterns their lives offer, a holy handling of the variety of ways in which God works in the lives of his people, so that Christians may faithfully appropriate these patterns from Scripture among the community of the faithful and contextualize them for meaningful self-interpretation and confession of the faith.

Finally, as one moves toward the top of the diagram, one encounters the master story. While our personal story is part of a community and its story, that community is also part of a larger story, the sacred story. This sacred story is the master story precisely because it is the Master's story. The one who created all things and set them into being with his word continues to create and order our lives through his word. This master story gives us the language to think about and form our stories. This master story not only reflects reality but it also constructs reality. It is this master story that gives us the lens to see God's work in our lives. So, the apostle Paul is able to listen to pagan poetry, the hymn to Zeus by Epimenedes of Crete, and hear within those words the song of creation—that God created all things and “in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). The apostle Paul is able to look at his present sufferings, his beatings and imprisonment, and speak about these as the sufferings of Christ (2 Cor 1:5). The apostle Paul is able to look at the gathering of God's people in a fractured church around bread and wine, body and blood, and speak to them of proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes, seeing a foretaste of the feast to come (1 Cor 11:26). The master story, past, present, and future, provides the lens through which we live, shaping how we experience, understand, speak, and share with one another and with the world the stories of faith.

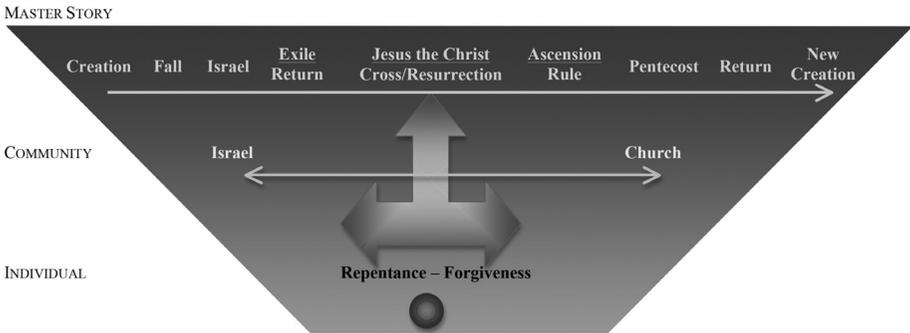
Narratives have a way of forming community and, through this master story, Jesus brings us into the community of God. Here, he forms and treasures the stories of his people, leading us to a new creation where peoples from “every tribe and language and people and nation” are gathered before the throne (Rv 5:9–10). Notice how individuals do not lose their identity as a tribe, people, nation, or language in Christ. Instead, when they are brought into God's kingdom, they find their identity as the people of God. In all of their individual and communal complexity, they are made part of God's purpose and mission in the world.

As we gathered for this symposium and as we publish these papers, then, we do so to listen more closely to that sacred story and to ponder its telling. Such theological reflection is important not just because of shifts in our culture that silence this story, but because people live in this telling. As the master story is told from generation to generation, it forms people who are part of the unfolding of God's kingdom from creation to the new creation.

Having considered what it means to be living in story, we now turn our attention to telling God's story.

Telling God's Story

In *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation*, John Wright examines the tensions that arise as Christians retell the biblical story in the American culture.⁸ One of the fundamental insights that Wright offers is the contrast between what I will call telescoping God's story and telling God's story. In order to explore this tension and how it can manifest itself within the Lutheran tradition, I would like to use the following diagram:⁹



This diagram enables one to see how the art of telling God's story involves both a vertical and a horizontal movement from a fundamental sacred experience to larger narrative horizons.

At the bottom of the diagram is that moment of repentance and forgiveness, the heart of God's gracious work, bringing individuals into his kingdom and sustaining them in the faith. Why, however, should we frame this event through the language of story? Isn't that simply allowing current critical trends to shape the confession of the faith? No. It is speaking the words we have been given to speak.

When the word became flesh and dwelt among us, Jesus Christ entered into human experience and lived a story. The story of his life, death, and resurrection, however, is not merely a story of a person who dies and is raised from the dead but rather is the story of the Son of God who loses his life to give all life. It is the sacred saving story into which we are baptized.

In Jesus Christ, God the Father reveals how he has established his reign on earth and will bring to fulfillment the restoration of all things. Extending from creation to the new creation, this master story gives all of life meaning (whether people acknowledge this story or not). In Jesus Christ, the eternal is made known in the particular and, to those who believe, it is savingly made known. In baptism, we are brought into this saving story, baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, who is Lord, has ascended into heaven, rules over all, and will return to raise the dead, judge the world, and bring about a new creation, where all who believe in him will live with him eternally. This is our Master's story and it becomes our saving story as we are brought by grace through faith into the unfolding of God's kingdom.¹⁰

As God's people tell their Master's story, the Spirit calls all people to live in this story through repentance, faith, and new life in the community of God's people, awaiting the restoration of all things in the new creation. Each believer is thus incorporated by the Spirit through Christ into the Father's kingdom. This incorporation delivers all believers from eternal damnation and reframes their life experiences, condemning false stories that separate them from God's kingdom and revealing the true story that gives them life and forms their identity as children of God and heirs of his eternal kingdom.

As God brings individuals into his kingdom, each person is made part of a people who live by his proclamation and have a holy purpose in the unfolding of his kingdom in this world. This is what is articulated by moving both upward vertically and outward horizontally in the diagram. As one moves upward vertically, one confesses how God is at work, not only in one's individual life but also in the formation of a community of people and in the larger saving story of the reign and rule of Jesus Christ. God is doing more than simply acting in your personal life. He is calling you and forming you to be part of his people who live by his proclamation and serve his holy purposes as he rules the world. As one moves outward horizontally in the diagram, one confesses how God's rule extends throughout history. God is doing more than enabling you to name his work in your life. He is leading you to confess that you are part of a much larger people who live in a much longer history. You worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who called forth a people, Israel, and through that people brought forth his Son, Jesus Christ, through whom he blesses all nations. This God was there at the creation of the world and he will be there on that final day, bringing about a new creation, and gathering all nations before the throne.

In his work, Wright insightfully argues that the church in America has distorted the contours of this larger story. The narrative horizons have been narrowed. In terms of the horizontal breadth of God's story, the American nation has replaced the church. God's people mistakenly identify America with the Church, mourning its fall as a Christian nation and desiring its rebirth and rise. Because they identify America with the church, they assume that the status of Christianity in this country is a faithful testimony to the reign and rule of God. In terms of the vertical movement, the direction has actually been reversed. Rather than individuals being incorporated into the larger saving story of God's work in the world, God is being incorporated into the lives of individuals and asked to serve their self-chosen narrative horizons. God becomes a supporting actor

in the individual's life story and the experience of repentance and forgiveness becomes part of a process enabling individuals to succeed and achieve their goals. Thus, the larger story of God and his work in the world has been diminished to a nationalistic and therapeutic agenda for self-actualization in a capitalistic consumerist culture.

What about the Lutheran tradition? Is it possible that our telling of God's story has narrowed as well?¹¹ Consider the activity of preaching. In past articles and symposia, I have reflected on how the law/gospel dynamics of faithful proclamation have been practiced in a way that limits the scope of our public proclamation of the faith.¹² In essence, at times, we reduce the larger story of God, which moves from creation to the new creation, to simply the proclamation of the death of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Indeed, the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sins is the heart of preaching but the art of preaching involves integrating that proclamation into the larger telling of God's story. At this point, let me be clear. This is not a problem with the dynamics of law/gospel. I am not pitting law/gospel proclamation against the telling of God's story. I am not arguing that one of these is better than the other. I am not proposing a false either/or but rather calling for a faithful both/and in preaching. Preachers proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins as part of God's much larger story. I am seeking to expand our telling of God's story, broadening rather than narrowing our narrative horizons. The problem is not with the proclamation of law/gospel but with the use of law/gospel to telescope God's story.

When law/gospel telescopes God's story, preachers read a passage of Scripture and meditate only on how that passage reveals sin and proclaims grace. Rather than meditate on how that passage leads God's people into a larger broader story, they ask "where's the law?" and "where's the gospel?" in preparation for a sermon.¹³ Suddenly, the stories of Scripture become disconnected from one another. They serve the preacher and God's people merely as examples of sin and forgiveness, dislocated from the larger biblical narrative and useful only for a momentary proclamation of law and gospel, revealing sin and proclaiming grace.

Over time, rather than tell God's story, preachers telescope God's story. Sunday after Sunday, God's people come and hear fragments of Scripture. Sermons use those fragments to proclaim only one part of the story: sin and forgiveness. People see sin and grace at work in the text and, by analogy, hear about sin and grace at work in their lives, yet all the while they miss the larger story unfolding in Scripture: the eternal fellowship of the Triune God and this God's mission in creating, redeeming, and recreating the world to live in fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Scripture becomes a collection of stories of various people who have sinned and been forgiven and we join them as individuals who sin and are forgiven rather than experience how God makes us part of his holy people, people who live by his proclamation and whose lives have a holy purpose in the unfolding of his kingdom.

Although we see and identify with individual stories and hear about the death of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin, the stories of Scripture remain individual stories and we miss the coherent revelation of the larger story of God. God suddenly becomes

a supporting actor in our stories, helping us with forgiveness, rather than one who brings us into his story, taking us as individuals and forming us into a people, his people who have a purpose and live by his proclamation in his world. Suddenly, preachers are taking God and making him relevant, fitting him into our small human stories, having him meet our fragile needs, rather than proclaiming how God makes us relevant, taking us into his kingdom, and giving our lives purpose in his world that lies beyond our fallen imagination and is yet to be revealed. The sermon becomes an individualized moment of sin and forgiveness rather than an integration of individuals, through repentance and forgiveness, into the community of faith that lives in the unfolding of God's kingdom in the life, death, resurrection, rule, and return of Jesus Christ.

How does one move from telescoping God's story to telling God's story? One way would be to consider the dynamics of this diagram and see how it fosters interpretation and proclamation of the larger master story. For example, consider a preacher working on a sermon based on Nathan's rebuke of David (2 Samuel 11 and 12, the Old Testament reading for Proper 6, Series C). At the heart of this narrative selection lies the dynamic of repentance and forgiveness, a dynamic highlighted on the individual horizon on the diagram. A preacher reading and proclaiming this text recognizes the reality of sin (in this case, adultery, deception, murder, and more) and the reality of forgiveness (as Nathan absolves the repentant David of his sins). Telescoping God's story would mean moving immediately from this experience of sin and forgiveness to one's hearers and their experiences of sin and forgiveness without attending to the larger dynamics that are revealed when one reads this text within its expanding narrative horizons.

The diagram, however, encourages one to consider this same reading in the narrative horizon of community (moving upward and outward). Here, one begins to see David not only as an individual man who sins but also as a leader of God's people who indulges his own desires rather than fulfills his vocational service to God's people. God's people had asked for a king to "judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sm 8:20) and God, in response, had given them a king. Now, however, when it is "the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle . . . David remained at Jerusalem" (2 Sm 11:1). His activities are private rather than public, indulging his own desires rather than fulfilling the ways of God as he serves God's people. He makes judgments for himself and fights for his own interests. While the battle rages against the Ammonites, David fights against his own people. While Israel besieges the city of Rabbah, David besieges Jerusalem and orchestrates a battle plan that kills Uriah the Hittite who fights for Israel. Whereas a Hittite refrains from the lawful embrace of his wife for the sake of Israel's battle, David engages in the unlawful embrace of Uriah's wife for the sake of his own pleasure and strategically interferes with Israel's battle to secure his own private victory at home. Suddenly, this story reveals more than the private sins of an individual person and it begins to reveal the public corruption of God's chosen people through the passionate self-interest of God's chosen servant.

Were one to consider then this reading in the larger narrative horizon of the master story, one begins to see God's work through Nathan the prophet as more than a rebuke of individual sin and as more than the restitution of a fallen public leader.

Earlier, God promised David a house that would endure forever and, now, God works through Nathan his prophet to continue to unfold his plan of salvation for all people, remaining faithful to his promises, even when his people fall into sin. Earlier, when David desired to build a house for God, God revealed his desire to raise up a descendent from David who “shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sm 7:13). In this text, we begin to see how this covenant promise of God will be fulfilled, in spite of the sinfulness of God’s people. Ironically, David’s descendent through the wife of Uriah (Mt 1:6) will be the Son of God who establishes God’s kingdom and will “save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). God’s overall plan, however, does not sanction sin. Rather, God rebukes sin and forgives his creatures, even as he remains faithful to his promise to deliver all people from the kingdom of Satan and bring them into the eternal kingdom of his Son whom he loves (Gn 3:15). In this text, we see that moment when God sends his prophet Nathan to rebuke the sin of David and, through repentance and forgiveness, bring David once again to God’s people, to rule over them, even as Yahweh himself remains faithful to his covenant promise and works to bring about the kingdom of his Son through whom he will gather a holy people from all nations and restore his fallen creation.

This is simply one small example of how God’s people can engage in practices that foster a telling of God’s story rather than a telescoping of it. Such practices of interpretation and proclamation, when cultivated in ministry and mission, pastoral care and personal devotion, will address a culture that has all but erased God’s story from its public memory and form individuals who live as part of God’s people who live by God’s proclamation and have a holy purpose in the larger saving story of God’s work in the world.

What might such a telling look like? How might this fuller story shape our approach to interpretation, proclamation, and witness? Such questions lie behind the papers of this symposium and the plans for the 2014 Theological Symposium. For now, I invite you to reflect with the following authors on what such a telling might look like, particularly in relationship to resurrection, creation, and the new creation.

Endnotes

¹ For an example of Dryden negotiating these different uses of the biblical story, see his 1667 poem *Annus Mirabilis*.

² John Dryden, *The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man*, in *The Works of John Dryden*, vol. 12, ed. Vinton A. Dearing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 146.

³ Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39, no. 3 (1971): 291–311.

⁴ Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 123.

⁵ In the opening plenary of the symposium, I present this theoretical distinction of temporal and communal narrative horizons through the mode of story, offering a constellation of stories to communicate how this plays out in real life. In this article, however, I have chosen to approach the topic through reason and explanation. For a storied presentation of this material, see the opening plenary at concordiatheology.org.

⁶ Henry A. Corcoran, “A Synthesis of Narratives: Religious Undergraduate Students Making Meaning in the Context of a Secular University,” *Concordia Journal* 33, no. 4 (2007): 357–374.

⁷ Alan Jacobs, *Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 19–39.

⁸ John W. Wright, *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007).

⁹ This diagram is a visualization of the theory of how to interpret selections from the biblical narrative first introduced by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart in *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 74–75. This theory has frequently been adopted and adapted by homileticians. For example, consider Sidney Greidanus's use of this theory to speak about preaching redemptive historical progression in his book, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 238–239.

¹⁰ Luther's Flood Prayer offers a beautiful example of how the church can give voice to the larger narrative horizons that surround baptism.

¹¹ In the opening plenary of the symposium, I examine this contrast of telescoping God's story and telling God's story using examples from biblical interpretation, preaching, and witness. In this article, I have situated this discussion in a larger conversation our church has been having about preaching. For examples of how this plays out in biblical interpretation, preaching, and witness, see the opening plenary at concordiatheology.org.

¹² See David R. Schmitt, "Freedom of Form: Law/Gospel and Sermon Structure in Contemporary Lutheran Homiletics," *Concordia Journal* 25, no. 1 (1999): 42–45; David R. Schmitt, "Richard Caemmerer's Goal, Malady, Means: A Retrospective Glance," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 74, no. 1–2 (2010): 3–18; and David R. Schmitt, "Law and Gospel in Sermon and Service," in *Preaching Is Worship: The Sermon in Context*, eds. Paul J. Grime and Dean W. Nadasdy (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 15–33.

¹³ Richard Lischer has discussed this reductive interpretative approach in his *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1992), 43.

Christ is Risen, Indeed Good News for Him, and For Us

Jeffrey A. Gibbs

Introduction

In 1999, I offered a symposium address, “Regaining Biblical Hope: Restoring the Prominence of the Parousia.”¹ I suggested that the church needs to recover from an over-emphasis on the minor biblical teaching about the interim state of the soul’s rest between death and judgment day. “Dying and going to heaven” should not be the major theme in our teaching and preaching about the future. Rather, the return of Jesus and the final victory of God should have pride of place in what we say and how we live in these days of longing.

Working backward from the future, so to speak, I would now suggest that another imbalance exists, and it has to do with the relationship of Good Friday and Easter. I have been intentionally listening for some time how Lutherans instinctively say the gospel. What I have heard, in many and various ways, is this: Jesus died for you. The rite of absolution in Divine Service, Setting One of *Lutheran Service Book* is a clear example: “Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins.”² In formal and informal contexts, Good Friday seems to be the gospel. There is (apparently) no need to speak of Easter for Easter is not spoken of.

To be sure, Good Friday is the gospel.³ It is striking, however, that since listening in this way I have never heard the gospel summarized like this: “God raised Jesus from the dead.” Of course, there is the Apostle Paul: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9). Then there are the holy angels: “Why do you seek the Living One among the dead. He is not here; he was raised” (Lk 24:5–6).

Now, it is a wonderful thing that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, along with others, has steadfastly defended the fact of the bodily resurrection of Jesus.⁴ I am suggesting, however, that there is a need to reclaim the significance of Easter. There are promises here for our faith to claim, promises related to the lordship of Christ, the reign of God, the new creation, and the Holy Spirit.

Good Friday and Easter (along with Ascension and Pentecost) go together, one event, in a sense. Different New Testament texts invite us to emphasize now one

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aspect of that multifaceted reality, now another. Even when the focus is, for instance, on the death of Jesus, there is more than one thing to say about it: propitiation, ransom, redemption, casting out of Satan, a pattern for our discipleship, and so on. All are true. In this essay, however, my focus will be quite intentionally on the Easter side of things.

I offer this essay as a somewhat basic, beginning sort of study. We will begin with a foundational assumption that must be firmly established if our theology of the good news of Easter is going to regain its rightful place.

Foundational Assumption: Death is Bad

At its most basic, fundamental level, Easter is the undoing of death, death's annihilation if you will. If, in the plan of God, something is to be annihilated, then we have to be clear about what that thing is. Only then will we be clear on the basic, fundamental meaning of the death . . . and reversal of the death . . . of Jesus.

Speaking theologically, death is an enemy, the last enemy of God and of his Christ that will be finally overcome.⁵ Paul's declaration is well known: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. . . . Then comes the end, when he delivers the reigning to God the Father after destroying *every* rule and *every* authority and power. For he must reign until he has put *all* his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed . . . is death." (1 Cor 15:22, 24–26; emphasis added). Death is the result of sin, the sin of the first Adam (Gn 3; Rom 5; 1 Cor 15). In terms of the grand story of God's ways with his creation, death is a profound disfigurement, a ripping apart of human creaturely existence. God put humanity into this world, and this is our home. Even though it is deeply twisted and marred by sin, this is still our home. Death smashes our relationship with our home—and with one another. Were death not an evil, a large number of the psalms would make no sense: "Turn, Lord, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love. For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol, who will give you praise?" (Ps 6:4–5). The psalmists are constantly pleading with God to save them from death.

The way that we think and speak about death will strongly affect how we think and speak about Easter, and (of course) the last day.⁶ To be sure, death is an evil whose power is limited. It cannot separate us from God's love in Christ, and there are aspects of this present struggling existence that come to an end when we die—temptation, fear, uncertainty, one would think.

Still we die; so, death is not the doorway into eternal life. It is the breaking of our humanity; a dead Christian is at rest, but broken. Death is not so much the *end* of suffering as it is the *cause* of the suffering and then the final blow against us. There is, to be sure, the positive statement of Paul in Philippians 1:21–23 (see also Lk 23:43), and that is fine. Lest Paul's words about "departing and being with Christ, which is far better" be over-interpreted, however, I draw attention to the following statements in the same letter:

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil 1:6)

So that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil 1:10–11)

So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:10–11)

Holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. (Phil 2:16)

These explicit statements of Paul reveal when God’s work will be complete in believers, and when all glory will again redound to the Father through the Son. It will happen on the day of Christ, on the last day.⁷ This is the entire thrust of most of Philippians 3, citing here only 3:10–11 (emphasis added): “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the *resurrection from the dead*.” In light of this emphasis on the last day precisely in Philippians, Philippians 1:21–23 must not be made far better than it actually is.

Accordingly, the truth that there is an interim state of rest for believers (“dying and going to heaven”) does not change the fact that death is death. If you think that the soul is unaffected by death, consider the truth that the “soul” is supposed to be united with the “body”—at least, that is what God designed. Death is an enemy of God and his Christ and his creation, and one day (along with all other enemies), death will be fully placed under the feet of Christ. But that day is not yet.

When a human being, a man or a woman or a child dies, that event of dying is evidence of sin and it testifies to the fact that God’s great story is not yet accomplished. It is utterly scriptural to insist that while you are dead, you are not fully the creation that God intended from the beginning. You are dead.

The Death of Jesus

I beg my readers’ indulgence if I begin by speaking somewhat provocatively; I have no desire to be avant-garde, and I will attempt to explain what I mean and do not mean.

In and of itself, and by itself, the death of Jesus is not good news. To anticipate what will follow, it is not enough to assert that Jesus’s resurrection from death is the declaration or the public acknowledgement that God has accepted the sacrifice of his son as sufficient payment for sin. Rather, the biblical testimony forces us to say that *only Easter makes it possible for the death of Jesus to be not bad news, but good news*. This means that we should be careful about speaking of Good Friday as the “completion” of Christ’s saving work, the “it is finished” (τετέλεσται) of John 19:30 notwithstanding. Jesus’s words there cannot mean there is nothing left to do, for if Good Friday is the completion, then why bother with John 20?⁸ Only Easter makes Good Friday good. Even in John’s gospel where the glory and the exaltation of Jesus are his crucifixion, still he is

the resurrection and the life, and the great sign of Lazarus's revival from death in John 11 points forward to Jesus's own resurrection in chapter 20. Even in chapter 10, the Good Shepherd does not just lay down his life for the sheep; he lays down his life for the express purpose (ἵνα) of taking up his life again (Jn 10:17).⁹

The death of Jesus culminates his obedience to the Father; he humbled himself unto the death of the cross, as Philippians 2:8 declares. When Jesus died, just as when you or I die, death had mastery over him. Listen to Romans 6:9: "We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has mastery over him (θανάτος αὐτοῦ οὐκέτι κυριεύει)." The verb in the second clause is κυριεύειν, glossed in BDAG with "to exercise authority or have control, *rule* . . . *be master of, dominate*."¹⁰ Romans 6:9 is a strong statement with a strong implication.¹¹ When Jesus died, when he was dead, death had mastery or dominion over him.

Peter also says as much in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 2. He quotes Psalm 16, "For you will not abandon my life (τὴν ψυχὴν μου) to Hades, nor let your Holy One see corruption (διαφθορά)." Peter's hermeneutical steps are clear, and right on the surface of the text. First, Psalm 16 is a psalm of David (Acts 2:30). Second, David is dead and buried, with his tomb among them to that very day. David, then, whose flesh has definitely seen corruption, cannot have been talking about himself (Acts 2:29–30). Third, this means that Psalm 16 is about the Messiah (Acts 2:31). Had the Messiah stayed dead, he would have seen corruption, which means he would not be the Messiah. (Paul, by the way, uses Psalm 16:10 in the same way in his sermon in Antioch of Pisidia, Acts 13:35, an important text to which I will return to below.) Since Jesus is the Messiah, however, it was not possible for him to experience or "see" that corruption, as David has prophesied. In sum, had Jesus remained dead, he would have seen corruption.

On a larger scale, think back to the narrative that "sets up" Peter's sermon in Acts 2, that is, the passion narrative in Luke. Recall how the Third Evangelist depicts the death of Jesus. One of the primary emphases in Luke's narrative of Jesus's passion is the following: in agreement with the divine will and plan, the perfectly innocent Son of God allows hatred and injustice to come against him and to kill him. Two themes work together here. On the one hand, human (and satanic) evil is at work in the events that Luke narrates. Luke tells us that Satan entered Judas, who then went to arrange for Jesus's betrayal and arrest (Lk 22:3). Jesus himself tells the crowd that comes to arrest him in the garden why they are really there: "When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Lk 22:53).¹² On the other hand, the material in Luke 23 emphasizes, repeatedly, the innocence of Jesus in the face of this evil.¹³ The centurion climactically declares Jesus's innocence: "Surely this man was innocent (δίκαιος)" (Lk 23:47).

Jesus is innocent, and has done nothing deserving of death. Against him has come great injustice and hatred that desire nothing less than his death. It is utterly consistent with Luke's themes, then, that Jesus's final word from the cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit," hangs out into space, and the reader must wait to see the Father's response. What will the Father do in response to such evil, in response to his

Son's prayer? The innocent one suffers and dies at the hands of sinners, and he entrusts himself perfectly to God his Father to await . . . what?

The death of Jesus is the mystery of the reign of God, that God's Son and Israel's true King would die. Here is the humiliation of Christ, deeper than I had realized, and perhaps more deep than one could fathom or express. A quote from Richard Gaffin's important study, *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*, captures an important truth, couched in Pauline terms:

[Christ's] death is the wages of the sin he became (cf. Rom 6:23), and the state of death he endured for a time is the nadir of his exposure to the wrath of the Father. Nothing resident in Jesus' death, as death, relaxes its severity or alleviates its grimness.¹⁴

If Christ is not risen, you are still in your sins. I do not exactly know how that works, but I believe that it is true. As God's economy of salvation works out in the world, the death of Jesus cannot be the last word. In itself, it is not good news, not yet. For death has mastery over him.

What does the Resurrection Mean for Jesus?

Let me begin by saying that in a number of NT texts, the sequential historical events of the resurrection of Jesus, the ascension of Jesus, his session at the Father's right hand, and Pentecost are all sort of commingled.¹⁵ Perhaps the most common way this is done is to speak of "the exaltation" of the Son.¹⁶ It would be hard to draw any distinct lines between what to say about one without saying the same about the other. To take one example: In the Great Commission recorded in Matthew, which takes place in Galilee sometime *before* the ascension recorded in Acts 1, the *risen* Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me." It is hard to get more exalted than that. To repeat, then, the New Testament texts do not always make explicit distinctions between Easter and the ascension.¹⁷ Having said that, we proceed to the texts and ask, "What does the resurrection mean for Jesus himself?"

Easter Brings Something Qualitatively New

Easter brings something new for Jesus himself. It is not sufficient to say, "He's alive again," as if Jesus were raised to the life that he had before from conception to crucifixion. This newness is reflected in the wonderful and strange new things about Jesus's body. The tomb is actually empty and it is the same Jesus. Jesus is not, however, only the same; he is also *different*. He is not always recognized; physical space and dimensions (or something like that) does not limit him. Jesus was raised to a new sort of life.

Jesus, in fact, has experienced the *resurrection* to immortality that awaits God's people on the last day. He is something new and he is a beginning, the firstfruits from 1 Corinthians 15:20 (more on that below). During his earthly ministry, Jesus humbled himself, and part of what that meant is that he was mortal, subject to death, kill-able. I suspect that this is part of what Paul means when he says that Christ came "born under the law" (Gal 4:4). With Easter, however, he is humble no longer, and he is no longer

subject to death. Rather, now has come “the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who abolished [or “nullified”] death (*καταργήσαντος μὲν τὸν θάνατον*) and brought life *and immortality* [or “incorruption” *ἀφθαρσίαν*] to light through the gospel” (2 Tm 1:10; emphasis added).

In Acts 4, the Jerusalem authorities understand (and object to) this claim that a new event had taken place. Luke writes that the priests and the Sadducees were greatly disturbed because Peter and the apostles were teaching and announcing to the people, “with respect to Jesus, the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:2). The Sadducees among them, of course, would be upset that “resurrection” is part of the message at all. The real problem for all the leaders, however, is the claim that God has done something new, something that he will do generally one day, but now—in Jesus whom they killed—already something new. The resurrection from the dead has happened in the case of Jesus. Jesus cannot die again. In his case and in his case only, for the first time in the history of the world death has been completely and in every way undone, nullified, reversed, and destroyed. That is why Jesus is firstfruits (1 Cor 15:20); the first to rise from the dead (Acts 26:23); the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18).¹⁸ So the question, again, is this: What does this new event mean for Jesus? What does it say about Jesus?

Easter as Christ’s Installation and Appointment to a New Reality in God’s Economy

We begin with Romans 1:4. In the salutation of Romans Paul actually articulates the content of God’s gospel, promised beforehand in the Old Testament. This gospel, Paul says, concerns God’s Son who “became/was born (*γενομένου*) of David’s seed according to the flesh, who was horidzo-ed (*ὀρισθέντος*) Son of God in power according to the Spirit of Holiness by resurrection of/from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 1:3–4). I have transliterated this second adjectival participle (*ὀρισθέντος*) because English translations of Romans 1:4 almost all agree in rendering it with something like “*declared to be* Son of God in power” (so ESV). The problem with this is that the commentators (following both the standard lexica and what is apparently the verb’s actual use) seem to all agree that *ὀρίζω* does not mean “declare.” It is stronger than that. It means “set, appoint, designate, mark out.”¹⁹ This implies that at Jesus’s resurrection, something new has happened; he was appointed Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.

I have no desire to be an adoptionist. It seems likely, however, that Paul is saying that, in connection with the Holy Spirit, when the Father raised him from the dead Jesus was appointed “Son of God with power.” He did not occupy this appointment before. Yes, he was Son of God, ontologically, by virtue of the personal union, from the moment of conception in Mary’s womb. In God’s plan and economy, however, Jesus had not yet in power become victor over death as he would become.

Obviously, there is need here to speak carefully. As a confessional Lutheran, I have spent some time pondering the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VIII, wherein the two natures in Christ, the doctrine of the personal union, the communication of attributes, Christ’s state of humiliation and exaltation, and other key

topics are laid out in the Lutheran manner. FC SD 10 describes the human nature of Christ in these ways:

On the other hand, to be a bodily creature, to be flesh and blood, to be finite and circumscribed, *to suffer and die*, to ascend and descend, to move from one place to another, to suffer from hunger, thirst, cold, heat, and the like are characteristics of the human nature, which will never become characteristics of the divine nature.²⁰

One would have to clarify the Formula here in a small but significant way. These were some key characteristics of Christ's human nature once—but no longer. For, risen from the dead, he cannot die again.

Suggestively, FC SD 26 goes on to describe Christ Jesus after Easter: "This is nothing other than that he has laid aside the form of a servant completely (without discarding his human nature, which he retains forever), *and was installed into the full possession and use of his divine majesty according to his assumed human nature.*"²¹ Then, in paragraph 28, the Formula again declares, "Christ *has been installed* in this power [that is, session at God's right hand] according to his humanity"²² (emphasis added).

To return to St. Paul, I am suggesting that Romans 1:4 is saying that Jesus was installed or appointed to an office—"Son of God with power"—when he was raised from the dead.²³ This was in accord with the Spirit of Holiness. Indeed, other passages in the NT say very similar things about *Easter* as Christ's installation or appointment by God.

Philippians 2 makes a striking statement. Starting at verse 8, Paul says "[Christ Jesus] humbled himself, being obedient until death, the death of the cross. Therefore, God also highly exalted him, *and gave to him the name that is above every name*" (emphasis added). The verbs "exalted" and "gave" are aorist indicatives, and they are parallel in meaning.²⁴ When God exalted Jesus, that is, when God raised Jesus from the dead, he also gave Jesus a name: the name, perhaps, as Charles Gieschen has argued, along with many others.²⁵ We would, of course, hold back from suggesting that this says anything that might diminish the fullness of deity, in the union of One Person that existed from the moment of Jesus's conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Nevertheless, Philippians 2:8–9 says what it says.²⁶ I am not entirely sure how to express it. If "name" entails authority and office and status, however, then what Paul is saying at the least is this: Jesus's humble obedience unto death *gave way on Easter to a new, divinely-granted reality of power and lordship and authority*. This new reality will be universally acknowledged on the last day, when every tongue confesses that Jesus is Lord.²⁷ This seems to be very close to the thought of Romans 1:4.

As an aside, I have been thinking about how we express the traditional categories of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. It is important to begin by averring that the incarnation itself is not an act of humiliation, for the *exalted* Christ is fully human and will be forever. An important element of how we describe the state of humiliation emerges from these discussions, and it needs to be explicit. Christ's state of humiliation included the truth that the human existence into which he came was a *mortal* existence. We would continue to insist on Christ's sinlessness, of course. We also must

say, however, that Jesus's ministry and life was that of a mortal man. He was subject to death (as the Formula said), and his exaltation entailed a change. It was the eschatological, victorious change from mortality—indeed, from the thralldom of death—to immortality and incorruption and resurrection life. On Easter, the man Jesus was appointed Son of God with power. On Easter, he was given the glory, the office, the name that is above every name.

The sermons in the book of Acts impart a similar significance to Easter. On Pentecost, Peter's sermon establishes the pattern that is repeated in the preaching throughout the book. Although the death of Jesus happened according to God, the blame for Jesus's death is laid squarely on the shoulders of his human enemies: "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (2:23–24). Peter continues, after citing Psalm 16 and the promise that the Messiah would *not* see corruption in death, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing" (2:32–33). After quoting Psalm 110:1, Peter summarizes what has happened to Jesus in the single complex event of Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (2:36). Romans 1:4 and Philippians 2:8–9 cohere with Peter's words. Risen from the dead, Jesus has been appointed Son of God with power and has been given the name above every name. The Father has made him both Lord and Christ. Having received the Spirit, now Jesus pours out the Spirit.²⁸

More of this truth emerges in Paul's synagogue sermon in Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13. The death of Jesus happened in fulfillment of the prophets. Though Jesus was innocent, the leaders in Jerusalem asked Pilate to take Jesus away, and they put him into a tomb (13:26–29). Then comes the good news: "But God raised him from the dead . . . And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled *by raising Jesus*" (13:30, 32; emphasis added). Now comes immediately an OT citation that reinforces and adds meaning to what we have already mentioned: "What God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you" (13:32–33). Paul also cites Psalm 16 (as Peter did at Pentecost) and Isaiah 55:3. Notice, however, the use of Psalm 2:7. Again, we avoid and reject adoptionism, but in some meaningful way, we must let the text say what it says. On Easter, the Father did such a dramatic event in Jesus, for Jesus, that the psalm's language of sonship and begetting can apply. On Easter, God the Father said to the Son, "You are my son; today I have begotten you."

The Contribution of Hebrews: Easter as Christ's Priestly Installation Forever

This constellation of Psalm 2, Psalm 16, and Psalm 110 as a lens through which to interpret Jesus's resurrection (and exaltation) leads also to another place in the New Testament, one where I was not, to be frank, expecting to go when I began work on this essay; "to the Hebrews." There are linguistic and theological links between the message of Hebrews and Paul's proclamation in Philippians 2:8–11. These links include but are not limited to the connection between Christ's obedient suffering and death and his subsequent exaltation and naming by God the Father. Consider the following:

The prologue reads, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed [ἐθιρκεν] the heir of all things, though whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Heb 1:1–3b ESV). So far, so good. It continues (with my emphasis and translation of 1:3c–4), "And after he had made cleansing of sins, he sat at the right hand of the Majesty in the highest place, becoming (γενόμενος), by so much, greater than the angels as *he has inherited [ἡκεκληρονόμηκεν] a name more excellent than they.*" Jesus has inherited a name more excellent than the angels have.²⁹ The next thing the writer says is "For to which of the angels did (God) ever say, "You are my son; today I have begotten you" (1:5a–c). So the question is this: When did Jesus inherit the more excellent name? When did God say to Jesus, "You are my son; today I have begotten you"? Both Acts 13:33 with its citation of Psalm 2:7 and Philippians 2:9 and the giving of the highest name when God exalted his Son suggest an answer: on Easter, Jesus inherited the more excellent name. This is only a suggestion at this point, because we have not read very far into the argument of Hebrews.³⁰

Further investigation of Hebrews, however, turns this suggestion about 1:4–5 into a virtual certainty. As we will see, Jesus inherited his more excellent name (= "authority"? = "office"?) and heard the declaration of Psalm 2:7 when God raised him from the dead. Moreover, in terms unique to Hebrews, Christ was appointed high priest according to the order of Melchizedek when God raised him from the dead, that is, when he was exalted on high.³¹ A quick examination of the flow of the argument from Hebrews 4:14 through 5:10 will support these conclusions.

In Hebrews 4:14, the writer declares that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens. (I suspect this means, "who has been raised from the dead and who is sitting at God's right hand," but that will emerge, so on we go.) This high priest is like us in every way, yet without sin, so he can help and sympathize. In 5:1–4, the writer emphasizes that no one takes such an honor upon himself, but is called by God, just as Aaron was. Then comes 5:5–6, "So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"—there is Psalm 2:7—and then immediately, "as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek" (ESV). Again, the question is when.

Listen to what the writer says next, 5:7–10 (ESV): “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death.” This seems especially to be a reference to the tradition of Jesus’s agony in the garden, and notice that God the Father is described as “able to save Jesus from death.” The writer goes on—“And [Jesus] was heard because of his reverence.” Now, I presume that “he was heard” means “God the Father granted his cry to be saved from death,” not, however, in the sense that he did not die. Rather, the writer means (to borrow the language from Acts and from Paul) that his flesh did not see corruption, that death did not keep its mastery over him, and that it was not possible for death to hold him. What else could it mean? The Father heard Jesus’s cry, and he saved him from death, that is, he raised him from the dead.³² Now come verses 8–9: “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.³³ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.” Just as God the Father said to Jesus on Easter, “You are my son, today I have begotten you,” so also on Easter, God said to him, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” Christ is appointed to that office in his resurrection, ascension, and session.

Hebrews continues this line of thought in chapter 7. In 7:1–10, the writer argues that Melchizedek’s priesthood was superior to the Aaronic priesthood. The argument runs generally like this: Melchizedek is superior to Abraham since the latter tithed to the former. Moreover, since when this happened Levi was still in Abraham’s loins, it follows that Melchizedek is superior also to Levi and the priestly service that derives from him. In the middle of this section are the intriguing verses 7–8, “It is beyond dispute that the inferior [Abraham] is blessed by the superior [Melchizedek]. In the one case, tithes are received by mortal men [Levitical priests], but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified *that he lives*” (ESV; emphasis added). The writer is about to argue that the Aaronic priestly service is inferior to that carried out in the order of Melchizedek because the former priests die, and cannot continue in their service. Things are different, however, with regard to the latter order of priestly service.

In 7:11–14 the writer observes that there actually *has* been a change of priesthood, and that implies that something was lacking. Then he says, in verses 15–16 (ESV), that this other priest—Jesus—has become a priest “not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, *but by the power of an indestructible life*.” This seems pretty clearly a reference to Jesus’s resurrection. The writer then cites Psalm 110:4 again; the certain oath that God swore with regard to Jesus. Then a few verses later, he offers the same contrast, 7:23–25 (ESV): “The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented *by death* from continuing in office, but he [Jesus] holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.” He is risen, indeed. Why, then, can this priest, Jesus, save? “Consequently he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” Why can Jesus save you when you come to him? He can save you because the Father raised him from the dead.

God heard Jesus's obedient and trusting cry and answered by raising him from the dead. Now, living forever, Jesus has been appointed a great high priest, and intercedes for us based upon the one-time sacrifice of his own life. Hebrews seems to be operating with an historical, sequential, almost commonsense understanding of things. At the same time, it is a very profound perspective. You cannot intercede for others if you are dead. You cannot be a great high priest forever without the power of an indestructible life. When God the Father raised his Son, he not only said to him, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." God also swore an oath concerning Jesus: "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

Summary

What happened on Easter with regard to Jesus himself? At least the following is true.

Most obviously and most fundamentally, on Easter Jesus was saved from death. May I also state the obvious? If Christ is not risen . . . if there is no Easter . . . then death retains mastery over him, and there is no salvation and no hope. It has to do with what death is, theologically. If Christ is not risen, he is not a perfected high priest, interceding for us. If Christ is not risen, he is not the Son of God with power, and he is not Messiah, nor is he Lord of all. Apparently, you cannot be any of these things if you are dead.

In the fullest and strongest sense of the word, Jesus was vindicated on Easter. In one unthinkable stroke, God the Father authorized and filled with power and meaning all of Jesus's ministry and teaching and truth, and he transformed the darkest of days and made it possible for Jesus's death to be saving, good, gospel. As I suggested above, it is not enough to say that Easter "reveals" or "shows" that God the Father has accepted the sacrifice of his Son. Easter is not just revelation; it is divine intervention, and saving deed. If one is going to speak in terms of Christ's sacrificial death and to ask how *Easter* fits into that reality, then Easter must be something like the actual accepting of the sacrifice, or some such truth. Here is a provocative quote from Richard Gaffin's book on Paul:

A soteriology structured so that it moves directly from the death of Christ to the application to others of the benefits purchased by that death substantially short-circuits Paul's own point of view.³⁴

On Easter and through Easter, Jesus was installed, appointed, exalted, and raised up over Israel and over the Gentiles as Messiah, and as Lord. He received and inherited a name, an authority, and an office so high as to be almost unimaginable. Exalted as Lord, he has authority to grant repentance, and forgiveness of sins to Israel and to all the nations. Raised from the dead and exalted as Lord by the power of the Spirit, Jesus now in God's economy pours out the Spirit upon all believers. What is the gospel? What can we say that is good news, indeed? We can, and should say this: God raised Jesus from the dead.

What Does the Resurrection of Jesus Mean for Us?

The Beginning of the New Creation in His Person

Let me begin with a broad truth that emerges from the inherent meaning of *resurrection*. On the third day, whatever that might precisely mean in terms of clock-time, God did a new thing, never before seen in the history of this troubled world. God brought the eschatological future into the present. He overturned death, permanently, in the case of Jesus. God's Son, killed by evil men who acted as Satan's partners and slaves, was raised to immortality *and in that raising there was a beginning of the new creation, the new heaven and earth that God has promised fully at the end of days*. Martin Franzmann said it eloquently:

All subsequent history is determined by this single, unparalleled, eschatological fact, the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. For this is not merely the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is alive. . . . His resurrection is the great turning point, from death to life, for all men and for all creation. . . . With the resurrection of Jesus the new life, the real and eternal life of the world to come, has become a present reality, breaking miraculously into the present world of men living under the sign of death.³⁵

More recently, N. T. Wright offered a similar declaration:

To put it at its most basic: the resurrection of Jesus offers itself, to the student of history or science no less than the Christian or the theologian, not as an odd event within the world as it is but as the utterly characteristic, prototypical, and foundational event within the world as it has begun to be. It is not an absurd event within the old world but the symbol and starting point of the new world. The claim advanced in Christianity is of that magnitude: Jesus of Nazareth ushers in not simply a new religious possibility, not simply a new ethic or a new way of salvation, but a new creation.³⁶

The new creation, the end of the story (or its beginning again) in fact, has begun. Of course, Jesus's entire ministry was the presence of the future, the reign of God come now ahead of time. But his ministry marched toward a goal in Israel. He willingly and powerfully became helpless and weak. His enemies killed him, and for a time, there was no hope.³⁷ Then God raised him from the dead, just as he said. Jesus's body, *Jesus*, is the new creation.

The Lordship of Jesus

Let me work back now from this broad truth, to what is arguably the basic christological confession of the New Testament: the Lordship of Jesus. The confession, "Jesus is Lord," is unbreakably attached to Jesus's resurrection. Note these obvious examples (my translation):

Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom 10:9)

For unto this Christ died and lived, that both of the dead and of the living he might be lord (or have mastery). (Rom 14:9)

Therefore God highly exalted him that . . . every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9–11)

Let all Israel's house assuredly know that God made him to be both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:36)

As Peter said to Cornelius (Acts 10:36), Jesus is Lord: Lord of all. This is, of course, in the first place, very good news. In the Large Catechism especially, we see that Luther knew this; he knew that we needed a Lord, and the entire second article of the Creed can be summed up in that one word. Exalted over death, sitting at the right hand and interceding, Jesus has authority to grant repentance and the forgiveness of sin (Lk 24:47; Acts 5:31). Jesus is Lord over guilt, over sin, over fear, over our time, over our money, over our suffering, over the church, over the nations, over the world. To proclaim the saving good news of Easter is also and at the same time to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus.

Participation in the New Creation, the New Humanity

As Lord, Jesus gives gifts. As Acts repeatedly says, because Jesus is risen from the dead, Jesus grants repentance and faith. The giving of the Holy Spirit (to which I will return in a moment), also flows from Christ's status as risen and ascended Lord. I would like to touch briefly, on how the category of "new creation" plays out in the NT. The specific language of "new creation" is not often present, even though (as I suggested before) the very meaning of true *resurrection* brings with it the truth of the future now present. The most significant verses are well known. They also nicely show the unbreakable connection between Good Friday and Easter.

For Christ's love controls us, because we judge this, that one died for all, therefore all died. And he died for all in order that those who live no longer might live for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. Therefore, from now on we know no one according to the flesh. Even if we have known Christ according to the flesh, now no longer do we know [him thus]. So then, *if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation*. The old things passed away; behold, the new things have come. (2 Cor 5:14–17; my emphasis and translation)

Paul here quite strongly proclaims the end of the old, and the beginning of the new. Our death to the old ways of the flesh is a past event; "therefore all died . . . the old things passed away." Christians are "those who live . . . behold, the new things

have come.”³⁸ Christ is the beginning of the new creation, and so if anyone is joined to Christ, “in Christ,” then he or she has become part of the new creation itself.

But may it not be for me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through whom the world has been and is crucified to me, and I also to the world. For neither is circumcision anything or uncircumcision—*but a new creation*. (Gal 6:14–15)

Paul’s words here seem at first to be a non-sequitur. The apostle strongly emphasizes the cross, not the empty tomb, and upon being in a crucified, that is, dead state (the force of the perfect passive verb, ἑσταύρωται) in relation to all that sinfully opposes Christ (i.e., “the world”). There is not an obvious connection between being dead to something old and to an old way of relating, and new creation. In light of other larger truths, however, and especially in light of the unbreakable connection between Christ’s death and resurrection, it is easy enough to fill in the conceptual gap and come to a conclusion.³⁹ Through the cross, the believer’s old relationship to “the world” has been ended. Now what matters is not the application or non-application of the Law of Moses (“circumcision”); what matters now is participation in the new creation that began when Jesus was raised from the dead.

Therefore, to be “in Christ” is to participate in the new creation that has begun and will be fully present at the Parousia. Behind this promise is the reality of Jesus as the second Adam. As such, Jesus is the beginning of a new humanity so large and all-embracing that we can come to be *in him*. This is the framework in which Ephesians 2:15 finds its meaning: “in order that he might create in him[self] the two [Jews and Gentiles] into one new man by making peace.”

Christ lives now in full resurrection life; Christ is the beginning of the new creation. This also means that the more familiar categories of “new life” or “eternal life” or “new birth” belong here as aspects of the new creation that has begun already in Jesus’s resurrection. He has new life; he therefore can grant to us new life. This connection between Christ’s new life and ours is made quite explicitly in 1 Peter 1:3:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (the Father) who according to his great mercy has given us new birth (ὁ ἀναγέννησας ἡμᾶς) unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

To be born again, to have new life, to have eternal life is possible only because Jesus is risen from the dead. Preeminently, of course, our baptismal union into Christ—into his *death* and into his *resurrection*—is the source of our new life in him. Union with Christ’s *death* is one side, the negative side (in a sense) of the reality. In baptism we die to sin, to the old way, to the power of the old age. There is also, however, the positive side: “If we have been united with him in a death like his, we believe that we shall also [be united with him] in a *resurrection* like his” (Rom 6:5; emphasis added). New life—new creation—is already now.

The payoff, of course, in Romans 6 and elsewhere, is the ability to live a life that is no longer mastered by sin and unrighteousness. Baptized, we no longer continue in

sin so that grace may abound. Philippians 3:10 speaks to the point: “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death if indeed somehow I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead.” Ephesians 1:18–20 connects Christ’s new resurrection life and God’s power given to us to live in that newness:

That you may know . . . what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand.

Our baptismal life is a life lived in the power of the new creation begun in Jesus’s resurrection, even as it is at the same time a life lived having died to the old order. This promise, of course, is grasped by faith since the old evil age lingers so that we must continually strive to put off the old man—in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Gift Who is the Holy Spirit

All of this is possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. The first thing to say here is the most basic and the most important, and it reflects once again the economy of salvation, what God has actually done in history. Risen from the dead and appointed Son of God in power by the Spirit of Holiness, Jesus the Lord has also poured out the Holy Spirit upon his people. As Peter says at Pentecost, Christ bestows this new gift of the Spirit in equal measure on all believers. This giving of the Spirit to all sorts and manners of people shows that the last days have begun. As Paul says, the Holy Spirit is the down payment (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14; cf. “firstfruits” in Rom 8:23). The Spirit already given is the earnest money of our full inheritance, that is, the new heaven and new earth. Only a few observations on the Holy Spirit are possible here.

Again, we must insist that something new has happened in God’s economy. The Spirit of God, present (of course) at the creation and active (of course) during Old Testament times has been given in a new way now that Christ is risen from the dead. There is John 7:38–39, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believe in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” Then we can return to Pentecost and Acts 2:

And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. . . . Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has poured out this that you are seeing and hearing. . . . Repent and be baptized each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:17, 33, 38)

Presumably “of the Holy Spirit” in this last phrase is an exegetical genitive, “the gift which is the Holy Spirit.” In Romans 8, the Holy Spirit is mentioned explicitly *twenty times*. Paul’s declaration there holds true for every baptized believer:

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him *who raised Jesus from the dead* dwells in you, then he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies, through (or perhaps, because of) his Spirit who dwells in you.” (Rom 8:9–11)

Raised in the power of the Spirit, Christ Jesus gives us his Spirit. Who knows what the Spirit will do? I suggest that two deeds of the Spirit are certainly to be wrought in us. First, we will have the ability to believe the promises of God in Jesus. Second, believers will have the strength to love: to love God, love one another, love all men, even our enemies. Though the flesh continues to war against the Spirit every day (Gal 5:17), believers are not in the flesh; believers are in the Spirit, given in God’s economy by Jesus (Rom 8:9).

In the Spirit, Christians also are baptized into one another; in the new Adam, we *together* are the new humanity, the community of the Spirit, the one body into which we all have been baptized. Here there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, but all are one—a unity—in Christ. The Spirit of God who will renew the face of the earth is present among us believers right now, right here and right now to grant faith, and to bear his multifaceted single fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, and all the rest. How do we know this is true? How can such promises be certain? They are certain because Jesus is Lord; they are true because God raised him from the dead.

Conclusion

The Bible teaches the salvific character of the cross, and much more about the cross as well.⁴⁰ It does not so teach, however, in a way that jumps over Easter or fails to articulate the power of Easter. God has done a new thing, and there are Easter promises for Christians to believe. It would be a beautiful thing and a blessing to God’s people to grow in our declaring of those promises. To use only one small example that harkens back to the beginning of this essay, the pastor could declare these words after the congregation has confessed its sins:

Almighty God in His mercy has given his Son to die for you, and on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead to forgive you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of the risen Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins.

Or as I suggested in an online post some months ago, the length and eloquence of the confession could be matched to the length and eloquence of the introduction to the absolution:

In the mercy of God, Jesus Christ came into the world, pure and free from sin. In every thought, word, and deed, he loved and served the

Father—and he loved you and all people as himself. He left no good deed undone; he perfectly kept the Father’s will. With his whole heart, Jesus willingly suffered the punishment of the cross in your place. Raised from the dead, Jesus lives forever with the authority to forgive every sin. When he comes again in glory, all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, therefore, and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins.⁴¹

This essay has only scratched the surface, and I have focused on the present realities and blessings that God has created by raising his Son from the dead. There is, of course, a future for the new humanity in Christ, a future for which we are looking and longing. The harvest has begun; the firstfruits are gathered, and the fullness is drawing near. Now completed in Christ himself, the day is coming when all things will be made utterly new. When this perishable puts on the imperishable—and only then—and when this mortal puts on immortality—and only then—then shall come to pass what is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54). Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord—in the LORD, in Jesus, whom God raised from the dead—your labor is not in vain. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Endnotes

¹ Originally a plenary address at the 1999 Annual Theological Symposium at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, it appeared in print in *Concordia Journal* 27 (October 2001): 310–322.

² *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 151. An examination of all of the rites of Holy Absolution in the divine services in LSB shows that the death of Jesus is referred to ten times, and Easter is never referred to at all. In noting this, please do not take this as a criticism of LSB, which is a wonderful liturgical resource. As my colleague James W. Voelz would say, “This is *only* an example.”

³ See, for example, Jeffrey A. Gibbs, “The Son of God and the Father’s Wrath: Atonement and Salvation in Matthew’s Gospel,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (2008): 211–227.

⁴ The remarkable study of N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) will serve as the standard historical apologia for the resurrection of Jesus for years to come.

⁵ I am, of course, well aware that a Christian can come to welcome the day of his or her death, especially when there has been great suffering. In such cases, death means the end of the suffering, and the beginning of rest with Christ. Lest we think, however, that here death is a friend, it must be remembered that the suffering that preceded the day of one’s dying was, in a sense, caused by death itself; such suffering was just death on the way. So, while dying after a long period of suffering can genuinely be welcomed, in such cases death has been manifesting itself in a particularly cruel way.

⁶ Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament* (London: Epworth, 1958), 27, pointedly comments, “Whoever paints a pretty death can paint no resurrection.” Cullmann has just referred to the stark, unsentimental portrayal of Jesus’s crucifixion painted by Matthias Grünewald, as well as to the powerfully glorious portrayal of the risen Christ by the same painter. Any internet search engine can produce these images for the reader.

⁷ There is a common speculation that one hears, to the effect that once a Christian dies, there is either some sort of entrance into a timeless existence, or that in some way the believer already is given the new, glorified resurrection body. This essay is not the place to expand on all the problems with this speculation. I can only point out two things. First, the speculation has no direct biblical support, 2 Peter 3:8 notwithstanding. God in his being is, presumably, outside of time. However, there is no support for the view that the interim state of believers between death and the resurrection is some sort of timeless existence. Revelation 6:10 speaks against it, for what it’s worth. Second, such speculations run the risk of directly contradicting Paul himself, for he tells us when we will receive our resurrection bodies, namely, at the Parousia of Jesus (1 Cor 15:22–24; 1 Thes 4:13–18). We do not know more about these matters than the Apostle Paul did.

⁸ At the risk of sounding flippant, the women at Jesus's tomb in the various gospel accounts are not chided for failing to realize the significance of Good Friday. They should have believed the promise that Jesus would rise from the dead. Failing in that belief, they were utterly logical and correct to think that all hope had been lost when Jesus died.

⁹ We might profit from a bit more careful attention to the image of Jesus as the good shepherd. In the first place, it is hard to imagine that Jesus's words are anything but unexpected and astonishing. No human shepherd, no matter how "good," if faced with the choice between letting attacking wolves kill his sheep or kill him, would opt for the latter. Common sense alone makes it clear that such a sacrifice would do no good, for then the wolves, having killed the shepherd, would proceed to ravage the defenseless sheep. As Jesus himself says, the reason why the Father loves the Good Shepherd is that he lays down his life for the sheep, *in order that he might take up his life again* (Jn 10:17).

¹⁰ Walter Bauer and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 576–577. ESV renders Romans 6:9b, "death no longer has dominion over him."

¹¹ See the same verb's force a few verses later (Rom 6:14).

¹² A Synoptic comparison provides a striking contrast. Both Matthew 26:55–56 and Mark 14:49 (the parallels to Luke 22:53) emphasize that the crowds' action of arresting Jesus is done to fulfill the Scriptures. Both statements are, of course, true. Luke has chosen, however, to offer the darker side of the truth; Jesus's arrest is the hour that belongs to his enemies and to Satan.

¹³ Again, synoptic comparison even more strongly highlights what Luke's own narrative reveals on its own terms. The following verses and units are unique to Luke, with no parallels in Matthew or Mark: 23:4, 6–16, 22, 40–43. Each of them emphasizes the innocence of Jesus, and the words of the "repentant thief" can serve as an apt summary of the cumulative effect of Luke's special emphasis: "This man has done nothing wrong" (23:41).

¹⁴ Richard Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 116.

¹⁵ Acts 2:32–33 gives the explicit sequence: "This Jesus God *raised up*, and of that we all are witnesses. *Being therefore exalted* at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, *he has poured out* this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing" (emphasis added).

¹⁶ An example of this is the key text, Philippians 2:9–11. After declaring that Christ suffered the death of the cross (v. 8), Paul does not feel the need specifically to say, "Therefore, God raised him from the dead, and seated him at his right hand." He simply writes, "He exalted him."

¹⁷ Scholars that are more liberal have argued that the view of a physical, bodily resurrection is only a later development, and that the authors who speak only of Jesus's "exaltation" do not necessarily believe in a bodily resurrection. To overturn and uproot this common scholarly claim is the primary burden of much of Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*. For brief mention of this issue, see Wright, *Resurrection*, 625–627.

¹⁸ It seems important to underscore at this point that no one else in all human history has been raised from death in the full sense that Jesus has been raised. This is basic logic: He is "firstfruits" (*ἀπαρχή*, 1 Cor 15:20), "firstborn" (*πρωτότοκος*, Col 1:18), and "first" (*πρώτος*, Acts 26:23). All other dead people who were restored to life (e.g., Lazarus) will have died again. It is not uncommon for people to raise the issue of Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration, as if this had some bearing on these topics. But Moses died, and is still dead. Elijah apparently never died. Their presence at the transfiguration cannot prove anything about the resurrection. Any speculations about the "mode" by which Moses and Elijah were present on the mount necessarily remain just that—speculations.

¹⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* (New York: T & T Clark, 1975), 1.61, avers that there is "no clear example" before or at the time of the NT that shows the sense of "declare" or "show to be" for the verb *ὁρίζω*; see also Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Ada, MI: Baker, 1998), 41–42; Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 234–235; Michael Middendorf, *Romans 1–8* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 59.

²⁰ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 617; emphasis added.

²¹ Kolb-Wengert, 620; emphasis added.

²² The German reads *eingesetzt* ist; the Latin, *evectus est*; see F. Bente ed. *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 1022–1024.

²³ Similar uses of the verb *ὁρίζω* with regard to the risen Christ occur at Acts 10:40–42 and Acts 17:30–31.

²⁴ So Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 237, who comments that the second clause ["he gave to him . . ."] is parallel "to the first clause, amplifying its meaning and indicating its nature."

²⁵ See Charles Gieschen, "The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003): 115–158. Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early*

Christian Worship (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 236, suggests that the view that the “name” is “none other than the name of God himself” is “the commonest understanding of the significance of the name.”

²⁶ Martin, *Hymn of Christ*, 230 notes the sharp change of subject that is indicated both grammatically (as God becomes the actor) and stylistically (as the clauses become short and simple). He sums up by saying about verse 9, “At this point we have to do with a new stage in the Redeemer’s way.”

²⁷ Martin, *Hymn of Christ*, 235–244, summarizes the various positions on Philippians 2:9. Peter O’Brien, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 238 offers this gloss for 2:9: “In his exalted status Jesus has a new rank involving the exercise of universal lordship. This gain was in official, not essential glory, since Jesus did not become divine through exaltation.”

²⁸ Here I can reference the profound reflection by my colleague Leopoldo Sanchez-Merino, “Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God’s Spirit: Jesus’ Life and Mission in the Spirit as a Ground for Understanding Christology, Trinity, and Proclamation” (PhD dissertation, Concordia Seminary, 2003).

²⁹ Part of the challenge of seeking precise answers of the Greek text involves the time sense of the participle “becoming” (γενόμενος) in verse 4. Participles in themselves, of course, have no time sense, but only derive it from the context. A typical (but not necessary) way to take the aorist participle here is as a reference to action that preceded the main verb. Perhaps more likely in this context would be the understanding that the aorist participle is contemporaneous with the main verb, so that Christ’s “becoming” and his “sitting” happen at the same time.

³⁰ Commentaries vary a bit on how to read the specifics of 1:4–5. Those who see here a specific reference to the resurrection/exaltation of Jesus include Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 17. Henry Alford, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press, 1976), 14, concludes that Jesus “inherited” his superior name eternally, and not in an historical action or moment. Craig Koester, *Hebrews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 191, noting a variety of views, nonetheless comments that “most interpreters” find a reference to “Christ’s resurrection and exaltation, since the quotation supports the exaltation of the Son mentioned in 1:2b . . . and since in 5:5 (cf 7:28) it refers to the eternal high priest in heaven.” R. C. H. Lenski, *Hebrews* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1966), 44, asserts that Jesus “inherited” his superior name at the moment of the incarnation, but that God “spoke” the words of Psalm 2:7 to him at his inauguration as king, that is, “as Paul says in Acts 13:33, in the resurrection of Jesus.”

³¹ Recall once again that often the NT writers group together the historically discrete moments of Jesus’s resurrection and his ascension.

³² Koester, *Hebrews*, 288, observes that the “main objection” to this reading of the text is that “If Jesus prayed for deliverance from death, the text seems to contradict itself: he could not have been “heard” (5:7c) since he died. Yet being heard does not mean that the prayer was granted immediately. God did not deliver Jesus from crucifixion, but he did deliver him from death by raising him to life again.”

³³ Note the conceptual overlap with Philippians 2:8, where Christ is obedient until death.

³⁴ Richard B. Gaffin Jr, *Centrality of the Resurrection*, 117.

³⁵ Martin Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 15.

³⁶ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 67.

³⁷ As has been perhaps too apparent, the focus in this essay is on the actual economy of salvation, the actual (sequential) deeds of God in Jesus. This is not the only way to speak about God’s ways. It is, however, certainly a (if not *the*) primary way of speaking, and always needs to be our joy and occupation in the church.

³⁸ The emphasis on the past act of dying with Christ and the ongoing reality of living with him as a new creation does not deny the ongoing reality of struggle with sin, the flesh, etc. It should be said, however, that our common way of speaking (from Luther) about “dying daily in baptism” is not, strictly speaking, a Pauline expression even though it reflects Paul’s teaching. Paul does not speak of Christians “dying” repeatedly. The tension between “definite change” and “repeated appropriation” comes to expression in Paul’s letters most explicitly in the language of “putting off” and “putting on” (See Col 3:9–10 and Eph 4:21–24). The former describes the change as having happened. The latter teaches the change as something that Christians have been taught to do. It is a classic “both/and.”

³⁹ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 343, explains, “The thought, in other words, is of a piece with Paul’s eschatology in general. With Christ’s death the exclusive rule of sin and death has been broken; *with Christ’s resurrection* the new age/creation has already begun (Rom 6:9–10; see also on 1:4)” (emphasis added). Similarly, F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 273.

⁴⁰ In a number of passages, the cross of Christ functions as a paradigm for and a call to Christian suffering; see Philippians 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:21, 24; 4:1.

⁴¹ <http://concordiatheology.org/2012/05/letting-the-gospel-predominate-in-the-absolution>.

Back to the Beginning Creation Shapes the Entire Story

Charles P. Arand

Do people, both inside the church and outside the church, hear our story as going something like this? “God created the world and he created Adam and Eve. They sinned. God then sent his Son into the world to save us. We now look forward to leaving this earth behind and going to heaven.” If so, is it possible that they have come to hear it unintentionally as an escapist narrative in which the impression is given that we don’t really belong here? The earth is not our home. And so we look to a day when we are taken off this earth and leave it behind.

But might we be missing (or at least not emphasizing) the important place of creation within the story? For Christianity, the story and doctrine of creation serves more than as background scenery or a stage for the story of redemption. It is integral to the whole story.¹ The opening chapter of the Bible introduces us to the essential characters, elements, and themes that shape the entire story that follows. I would like to highlight four significant moments in the Genesis account: 1) the creation of the cosmos out of nothing; 2) the creation of life on earth; 3) the creation of humans as stewards of life on earth; and 4) the establishment of sabbath joy.

Maker of Heaven and Earth

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gn 1:1). This verse summarizes everything that happens in Genesis 1.² Now, to say that God created the heavens and the earth is to say that God created everything from the smallest quark to the largest galaxy. Nothing exists outside of God that he has not made. For this reason, the early church confessed that God created everything out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*).

This confession provides us with the most basic ontological distinction that can be made. Where Platonism arranges reality into spiritual-material categories, the Bible organizes reality into the categories of Creator-creation. The distinction between Creator and creatures is a far more fundamental distinction than any distinction between us and other creatures.³ This has several far-reaching consequences.

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The Creator Is, by Definition, God

The Creator-creature distinction is key for confessing what makes God . . . God. So throughout the Scriptures, there is one thing and one thing only that would go on a job resume or job description to qualify one to be God. It goes something like this. “If you created everything that exists, then the job is yours. If you did not create everything that exists, then you need not apply!” Why?

To say that God created everything “out of nothing” means that God did not create out of pre-existing materials external to himself (as for example, an artist who works with watercolors or oils) as if the universe existed eternally alongside him.⁴ Nor did God create out of any internal need as if he needed the world to complete himself.⁵ Both of these examples make God dependent in some sense upon the world. But *creatio ex nihilo* affirms that God is not dependent upon the cosmos; the cosmos is dependent upon God.⁶ In other words, God created the world freely, “out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy.”⁷

This distinction of Creator-creature becomes key for confessing the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Nicene Creed. The debate with Arius centered on the question of whether or not the pre-incarnate Son of God was the Creator or a creature. The Creed took its cue from 1 Corinthians 8 by confessing “one Lord Jesus Christ . . . through whom all things are made.”⁸ The Nicene Creed then draws on Basil the Great’s work, *On the Holy Spirit*, to confess the Spirit as Creator, namely, the “Lord and giver of life.”⁹

So how does God create? By speaking. This speaking, for Luther, enables one to confess both God’s distinction from the world as well as God’s immanence within the world.

God creates by speaking a performative word that calls into existence those things that did not exist (Rom 4:17). “As the Creator, God’s effective word, which calls the creature into being, both says what it creates and creates what it says.”¹⁰ Thus, Luther suggests that God has his own grammar. “He does not speak grammatical words; He speaks true and existent realities. Accordingly, that which among us has the sound of a word is a reality with God.” As a result, when God says “let there be light” light comes into existence. Thus sun, moon, heaven, earth, Peter, Paul, I, you, etc.—we are all words of God, in fact, only one single syllable or letter in comparison with the entire creation.”¹¹

God does not speak a creative word only once and then stand aloof from his creation as if he were an absentee father. Instead, God continues to engage his creation by speaking to his creation. “Let the earth sprout forth. . . . Be fruitful and multiply.”¹² In a sense, He places his word of blessing into creation as its creative power. One might say that God’s promise is contained in “*seed and root*.”¹³ Or as Luther puts it, “The Word is present in the very body of the hen and in all living creatures; the heat with which the hen keeps her eggs warm is the result of the divine Word”¹⁴ And that promise remains effective to this day.¹⁵

In speaking to his creation, God places his word into his creatures and enlists them as the instruments through which he works.¹⁶ He does this work “in, with, and under” his creatures. Creatures become the gloves on God’s hands (*larvae dei*). In a sense, God enlists his creatures as “junior” partners. And so God works through earth to bring forth life (vegetation). He works through creatures to bring forth successive generations.

As God works through his creation, he voluntarily limits himself (or allows his will to be resistible when working through means) so as to allow each creature to contribute to life in God’s creation. He invites them to participate in—and even contribute to—his ongoing creative activity. So, for example, when two people choose to marry, their choice of each other and their respective DNA contribute to bring forth a unique child. The same applies to every other creature on earth. And in this way more creativity emerges within creation.

And God keeps on speaking all the way through the Bible. Whenever God utters a word of judgment, creation comes undone. Conversely, the word of forgiveness becomes the power of the new creation (“where there is forgiveness there is life and salvation”). The word of justification creates a new reality. The word of blessing in the Lord’s Supper continues to be effective to this day.¹⁷

We Are, by Definition, Creatures

If creation “out of nothing” defines God as God, it also says something about creation. The Christian confession declares that creation is not God and neither are we—contrary to other ancient and modern accounts of origins. The ancient Gnostics maintained that the physical creation came into existence as the result of a fall by a lower level deity known as Sophia. Today eco-feminist accounts suggest that we were born out of the body of God with the result that we are in some way divine ourselves.¹⁸ But we are neither accidental mistakes nor divine beings.

In the Large Catechism Luther asks, what does it mean to confess that God is the Creator? He unexpectedly answers that it means to confess that we are creatures!¹⁹ To be a creature, a human creature, is fundamental to my entire existence. It constitutes my first and core identity.²⁰ And this does not demean us. To the contrary, Luther contends, “It is a great honor to be called a creature. It is a costly, great thing, so it is yet here a much higher and greater thing to be God’s work and creature.”²¹ I am a human creature who in Christ has now also become a child of God. So, what does it mean to be a creature of God?

First and foremost, to confess our creatureliness is to confess that we are by definition contingent and dependent upon God. None of us has life of ourselves. Creation is not “a *self*-sustaining biosystem.”²² We have to look outside ourselves for life. And so Luther assumes that as creatures we cannot live without trust in a god. Thus the question of the first commandment is not, “will we have a god?” But “who or what is your God?” The Creator-creature distinction provides the basis for the first commandment, which essentially says, “don’t confuse the creation with the Creator!”

Second, as a creature we are accountable to God. We did not set up the world to run according to our notions. Instead, we find ourselves in a world that we did not create. And since this is God's world, we as creatures are accountable to the Creator. Perhaps one of the reasons that it is difficult to speak of the law of God and the wrath of God today, is that we no longer see ourselves as creatures and thus no longer see ourselves as accountable for our handling of his creation.²³

Isn't this emphasis on creatureliness not a theme that runs throughout the entire story down to the present day? Isn't the storyline of Scripture about human creatures who do not want to be creatures? They do not want to live dependent upon the gifts of God or live in dependence upon him. Early on, we wanted to rise above our creatureliness, to transcend our creatureliness and thus to become like God. That would put us in control.²⁴ And to that end, human creatures rejected their Creator...ultimately putting the Creator to death on the cross.²⁵

Salvation is thus not about God delivering us from our creatureliness. To the contrary, Christ restores us to our creatureliness. By contrast, some religions (e.g., Mormonism) promise a salvation that transcends our creatureliness, to somehow make us little gods or make us divine. But in the case of Jesus, the Creator became a male human creature to restore our creatureliness. And he rose and ascended and sits at the right hand of God both as God and as a human creature.

And so as Lutherans we confess that we are justified by *faith* alone. What does that mean other than that the gospel restores us to our creatureliness? To be saved by faith, to live by faith, restores us to that relationship for which God first created us. It is a relationship in which God as Creator and redeemer gives life to us and as creatures we receive that life from God. As James Nestingen has put it, "To be glad and content to be a creature—that is redemption!"²⁶

Lord and Giver of Life

"The earth was without form and void" (Gn 1:2).²⁷ Genesis 1 not only speaks to the absolutely unique work of God in creating everything out of nothing. It also devotes considerable space to describing how God gave form and shape to the earth and then how God filled the earth with living creatures. That is to say, God who is life itself, now gives life to his creation. For this is what God does. He gives life.²⁸ And thus the earth becomes home to life . . . a magnificent abundance and array of life!

God's Life-Supporting Planet

In the first three days of creation, God prepares the earth as a planet on which life could flourish. In doing so, God creates the conditions and supplies the provisions for the earth to become what some scientists call the "Goldilocks planet."²⁹ That is to say, it is just right for life! And that life defines and distinguishes our planet from every other planet in the solar system not to mention the larger universe. Among these provisions, Genesis mentions the sky (atmosphere), the water (hydrosphere), the land (lithosphere), and the sun and moon. Science can help us appreciate the importance of these for life on earth.³⁰

Consider the sun. Its relation to the earth makes it just right for life to thrive. The sun is not too large and not too small. It is not too bright and not too dim. The sun is not too close and not too distant. And thus the earth is not too hot (unlike Mercury and Venus) and not too cold (unlike Mars) for life. The earth resides in what some scientists call the “habitable zone.” And in that zone, the sun provides just the right amount of energy to support life on earth. The moon in turn helps to stabilize the tilt of the earth’s axis at 23.5 degrees (Mars has more wobble) relative to the sun thus contributing to the regularity of our seasons and a relatively stable climate.

Consider the atmosphere, which appears as little more than a “thin blue line” when viewed from space. It contains just the right ingredients for life on earth (twenty-one percent oxygen and seventy-eight percent nitrogen with the remaining one percent containing trace elements of carbon dioxide, methane, neon, nitrous oxide). In addition it acts as an insulating blanket as its water vapor and carbon dioxide keep the planet warm while avoiding the temperature swings of Mercury (-173 to 427 degrees Celsius). It also protects the earth by disintegrating meteors hurtling toward earth as well as by blocking harmful UV radiation of the sun. Finally, this life-sustaining atmosphere does not dissipate into space because the earth is the right size for gravity to hold it in place (unlike Mercury) while its active core generates a magnetic field that keeps the atmosphere from being stripped away by the solar wind (unlike Mars).

Consider water. If anything stands out when we see pictures of the earth from space, it is that the earth is a blue planet, a water planet. And there is perhaps nothing more essential to life than water. It is “the principal constituent of all living organisms.”³¹ We are ninety percent water when born and seventy percent water as adults. In fact, one might say with Vladimir Vernadsky some one hundred years ago that “Life” is “animated water.”³² And it is not just that water is found in a few places on earth. Liquid water is everywhere. Powered by radiation from the sun water evaporates into the atmosphere as vapor where it warms the planet. After cooling and condensing, it is drawn by gravity back down to the earth in the form of either snow or rain. As snow it deflects heat back into space and as liquid in the oceans and lakes it moderates the temperature of the land it borders.

Consider land. The earth has just the right proportion of surface area to its volume so as not to lose the heat from its molten core into space. And on this earth God provides a thin layer of topsoil that is the “fertile substrate for the initiation and maintenance of life.”³³ Rain contributes to the weathering of rocks by which minerals enter the ground to become the ingredients of cells and life. Soil enables the rain that falls to seep into underground aquifers that feed streams. It allows for plants to anchor themselves while providing the nutrients for feeding plants. It also “acts as our earth’s primary cleansing and recycling medium, in effect as a ‘living filter’ that renders toxins and pathogens harmless and transforms them into nutrients.”³⁴

Abundance and Variety of Life!

God did not create the earth to be void of life. He “formed it to be inhabited!” (Isaiah 45:18). And so upon preparing the conditions and places for life, God summons

life to come forth from the earth itself. God speaks: “Let the earth sprout . . . let the waters bring forth . . . let the land bring forth” And what happens? A profusion of life springs forth!³⁵ God makes the earth rambunctiously and exuberantly pro-life!³⁶ And that life spreads out to cover the planet and inhabit all its spaces. The waters “swarm” and the air “teems” with living creatures of every conceivable kind.

And what was the result of God calling life forth from the earth? A dizzying number and array of creatures. How many different types of creatures did he bring forth? Consider these numbers of species that are estimated to live on earth:

Vertebrates: 5506 species of mammals; 10,065 birds; 9831 reptiles; 7044 amphibians; 32,700 fishes;

Invertebrates: 1,000,000 insects; 85,000 mollusks; 47,000 crustaceans; 2175 corals; 102,248 arachnids; 4 horseshoe crabs;

Plants: 268,000 flowering plants; 16,236 mosses; 12,000 ferns and allies; 1052 gymnosperms; 4242 green algae; 6144 red algae;

Fungi & Protists: 17,000 lichens; 31,496 mushrooms; 3127 brown algae.

Altogether, scientists estimate that there are between one million and ten million species of living creatures on earth today.³⁷ Altogether, they make the earth a spectacle of life.

Note how God brings forth all of these creatures in a way that complements or “fits” the places from which he calls them and for which he makes them. Psalm 104 brings this out particularly well. Storks and fir trees belong together. High mountains and wild goats belong together. Cranes and marshes belong together. Lions and savannas belong together. Whales and oceans belong together. They belong together in that they have been given abilities by God that enable them to live in those places and in turn those places provide support for their lives. One cannot think of one without the other.

We cannot assume that God made all of these creatures simply for our purposes since Adam and Eve did not need them for food or clothing prior to the fall.³⁸ Instead, God gave them their own value and integrity. He gave them their own places to live on earth.³⁹ And he provides for them (Ps 147:8–9; Ps 104:21, 27). A striking example of this is found in Job 38–41 where God shows Job how he cares for the wild creatures that live apart from human culture. God sends rain in the wilderness where no human dwells (Job 38:25–27; cf Ps 147:8). And he feeds the young ravens when they “cry to God for help, and wander about for lack of food (Job 38:41).⁴⁰

God did not just provide for the mere existence or minimal survival of his creatures. He aimed for the exuberance of life. As the psalmist puts it, “You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for

joy” (Ps 65:11–13). He intended for whales to frolic in the ocean, cranes to dance on marshes, and for horses to stomp their hooves.

And today? Creation is not as God had made it. Since the fall, life is a struggle. Every creature struggles to live and not die. But God is a God of life. He does not discard his creation away and start over from scratch. He will not let go of life on earth. And so, God makes a covenant of life (three times in Genesis 9 and again in Hosea 2:18–20) with every living creature, “the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth.”⁴¹

And so, God continues to be active in his creation. Bayer points out that for Luther, God is not an idle, inactive God (*deus otiosus*) who rests his hands in his lap twiddling his fingers. To the contrary, God is the ever active God (*deus actuosissimus*).⁴² And so in between creation and the new creation God continually “counterpunches” sin and its effects. He persistently renews life daily and yearly in the midst of its “perpetual perishing.”⁴³ He continually opens new pathways for life with every new birth and every crocus that pokes through the winter snows. Life continues to come forth. As Luther puts it, “to create is always to make a new thing” (*creare semper novum facere*).⁴⁴

Ultimately, however, God does not just thwart death, he defeats death and brings forth eternal life in the creaturely body of his incarnate Son. That is the message of the resurrection. So just as “the wages of sin is death” so “where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.”⁴⁵ Forgiveness becomes the power of new life. Guilt brings the curse and with it death. But forgiveness undoes the curse and brings life. But both occur within the larger narrative of God’s gift of life or bestowal of life upon his creation from the garden to the garden city (Genesis 1 to Revelation 21–22).

Stewards of Life on Earth

“Let us make man in our image . . . and let them have dominion over . . .” (Gn 1:26). The next significant moment that captures our attention in Genesis 1 is the creation of humans. Genesis’ account of our creation informs us of what we are and who we are. It shows us that our first and primary identity consists in being creatures of God. More specifically, we are human creatures enlisted by God to look after life on earth.

Made from the Earth for Life on the Earth

The first thing we might say about God’s human creatures is that *God made us from the earth for life on the earth*. We belong here. In this regard we are not unique, for we share this characteristic with every other creature on earth. That is to say, we are embodied and embedded creatures on earth.

God did not create us as disembodied spirits like the angels. God made *Adam* from the *adamah*. To borrow from St. Augustine, “our bodies are the earth we carry.” We are embodied creatures and our bodies bind us to the earth. Air flows through us as we inhale and exhale. We drink and perspire water. We ingest the earth with the food we eat. We are so bound to the earth that when we travel into outer space, what must we bring with us? Portions of the earth: air, water, and food. Without them we die. God made us living creatures. To be alive (to have *nefesh*⁴⁶) in the Old Testament means to be animated, namely, to move across space. We are thus animated bodies. In

the Old Testament, plants (unlike humans and animals) are not considered “living” as they were not perceived to move across space.

Embodied creatures need places to live and move. Thus we are also embedded creatures. God embedded us on the earth among other creatures in particular places at particular times. Consider how important places are in the Bible. The garden of Eden was home for Adam and Eve. And then they lost their home. The people of Israel spent years wandering in the wilderness longing for a new home . . . the promised land. And ultimately, the Old Testament speaks of a future home, a new Jerusalem. And so we move from the garden of Genesis 2 to the garden city of Revelation 21–22.

Places are important, for they are where we live out our lives in the midst of God’s other creatures. Wendell Berry thus defines life as all that happens to us over time in particular places.⁴⁷ These places define the uniqueness of individual creatures. We move through these places and live in them. In them we experience the seasons of creation, the rhythms of daily life, and the passage of years. It is here, that we live with mates, have young ones, feed them, and make our homes. Life is a “storied residence.”⁴⁸

Made from the Earth to Look after Life on the Earth

Not only are we made from the earth for life on the earth. But we have been made in the image of God and given the task of looking out for life on earth. In this regard, we are unique among— all the creatures on earth. We might say in Lutheran terms that this was and remains our first vocation. For it is the first commission that God gave to newly created Adam and Eve.

Although Genesis 1:26–28 remains an infamous passage in some environmental circles⁴⁹ we need not shy away from the language of dominion or rule. It does not mean that everything exists for us to use however we please. Instead, dominion appears to be connected with the image of God. In other words, our dominion should mirror God’s own character and dominion over creation—and by extension, Christ’s own reign over creation. And when God rules, it is for the benefit of the ruled. Psalm 72 supplies a good example in which everything flourishes under the rule of a righteous king.⁵⁰

This means that before the fall, Adam and Eve were to tend the garden so that it would continue to flourish. And Noah provides an example of dominion in a post-Fall world when he is instructed to take animals into the ark and “keep them alive with you” (Gn 6:19). Indeed, James Limburg suggests out that the animal list in Genesis 6:19–20, 7:14, 21, 8:17 recalls the listing in Genesis 1:26–28. He argues that dominion here means to “rescue them, to nurture them, and finally to set them free to roam upon the earth.”⁵¹

So although God made us from the earth along with other creatures, he also made us unique as humans in two further ways. First, other creatures are mostly confined to their places and niches. Humans are not. We live in mountains, deserts, forests, and cities. Second, other creatures can only look after their own lives. God gave us the capacity to look out for other creatures. He gave us the capacity to extend our concerns beyond human concerns so as to embrace the needs of the nonhuman world as well.

But being made in the image of God also suggests that God gave us the ability to create as a reflection of his creativity. Of course, we do not create out of nothing.

Instead, we rework that which has already been made. Adam cultivates the garden... hence the word, "culture." Culture is the reworking of creation.⁵² It would come to entail the development of art, music, and tools (what we might call technology). But even here, the development of culture does not take place apart from nature (though we might use it to escape nature). Instead it takes place within nature and is dependent upon nature.

Of course, human history is replete with examples of how humans became puffed up with their own accomplishments. It has happened repeatedly from the tower of Babel down through human history to the present age. Today it is said that we now live in the "age of humans" (the anthropocene epoch).⁵³ We want to be in control. We seek to free ourselves from a perceived "crippling dependency" upon God, his creation, and our frail bodies.⁵⁴ But it is not without consequences for other creatures and for us.

One of those consequences involves pushing other species into extinction through either overhunting or habitat destruction. Henry Beetle Hough, reflected on the significance of extinction with regard to the Heath Hen in Martha's Vineyard in 1933, "There is no survivor, there is no future, there is no life to be created in this form again. We are looking upon the uttermost finality which can be written, glimpsing the darkness which will not know another ray of light. We are in touch with the reality of extinction."⁵⁵ Rolston puts it more succinctly, "When humans extinguish species, they stop the story."⁵⁶

But there are consequences for us as well. The very earth that gave us life now deals death. Adam sins and the *adamah* gets cursed. Pope John II warned,

Man thinks he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him.⁵⁷

And civilizations have fallen as the earth refuses to yield its bounty do to over erosion of its soil due to deforestation, or desertification, or over salinization of the soil.⁵⁸

Ultimately, we cannot fix ourselves or the creation. Only Christ can restore us and his earth. And he has done so and will do so. In the meantime, we find ourselves dealing with a "world of wounds."⁵⁹ We no longer exercise the dominion of Adam and Eve in the Garden. Our dominion is by "industry and skill" and "cunning and deceit."⁶⁰ Even our best efforts to protect and restore fall short. Wendell Berry expresses well our situation today when he says, "An art that heals and protects its subject is a geography of scars."⁶¹

As Christians we care for a groaning creation. In fact, Robert Saler suggests that "*Every act of care is an act of care for the dying*, and this applies as much to the earth and its creatures as it does to the various people for whom we care (and to whom we must one day say goodbye)." He continues, "It is an act of care that affirms the value of life

even in the face of that life's inevitable end." And in this it becomes "a divine act of rebellion against death's reality." But it is also an act of trust for it renounces "control over outcomes. It is to refuse to tie the value of an act of care—whether for a child, a tree, or an ocean—to its efficacy in conserving the cared-for thing."⁶²

God's Rest and Delight

"And he rested on the seventh day" (Gn 2:2). God completes his work of creation in the final act of the Genesis 1.⁶³ Where verse one opened by speaking of God creating heaven and earth, Genesis 2:1 caps the seven days by noting that God created heaven and earth *and all its host*, that is, everything in the earth. God's work culminates in rest on the seventh day. David Adams calls this state of rest, "the *telos*, or goal of God's creative activity." In other words, the movement toward the seventh day "reveals God's intention that this state of rest should characterize all that he had made, and should be the on-going experience of his creation!"⁶⁴

So what characterizes the day of rest? Luther notes that God rested, that is to say, he was satisfied with all he had made.⁶⁵ God rested and was refreshed (Ex 31:17). One might suggest that God rejoiced in his work. The seventh day would provide the basis for setting aside a day to celebrate God's creative activity (Ex 20) and the redemptive activity (Dt 5). It also "anticipates the end-time restoration of creation to the state of rest that characterized it as the completion of God's creative activity"⁶⁶ (Heb 4).

God's Delight

So God rests on the seventh day for he is satisfied with his work. We could see this coming. Five times over the course of the preceding days, God expressed his approval by declaring that what he had made was good. The sixth time, he declared it to be "very good." God likes what he sees. Adams notes that Genesis uses the word "good" to characterize the state of rest for the physical world.⁶⁷

Now we often take God's verdict to mean that the creation was perfect. And it was. But we need to be careful how we use the word "perfect." At times, we may use it in a Platonic sense to mean that it is static and unchanging. Nothing needs to be added. For Plato, change implies imperfection. It means that something is either moving toward perfection or away from perfection.⁶⁸ But in God's creation, perfection does not exclude change. After all, we have already seen that God gave the commission to be fruitful and multiply to all of his creatures and certainly dominion entailed change including the development of culture.

Now, we may intend to say that the creation was without flaw or sin or evil. Nothing was there to mar the creation. And that is certainly true. But there is more to it. God's affirmation "connotes 'goodness' in the sense of a thing that has been brought to completion and which functions as it was intended to function."⁶⁹ Good should thus be taken in a broader sense to include beauty and harmony (*shalom*). Everything is and functions as God envisioned. Psalm 104 offers a good picture of that harmony as lions hunt by night and humans farm by day.

This goodness of creation reflected the goodness of God. The early church quickly recognized this connection. Their confession of the goodness of God's creation ran counter to the way in which many people in the first few centuries viewed the world in which they lived. For few if anyone considered this physical world to be good. The Platonists considered it to be chaotic and inferior to the immaterial world. The Gnostics considered the world to be a dungeon and our bodies as tombs.

But do we live in ways that confess the goodness of creation? At times we may speak about the corruption of the world in ways that may obscure the goodness of God's world. Here article one of the Formula of Concord is particularly helpful. It maintains the the goodness of God's work while rejecting the corruption that suffuses it. And because God valued it, he set out to reclaim it. The Son of God took on a human body. And Christ's saving work comes to us in elements of creation delivered by human creatures. God will finally raise up our bodies on the last day for life in a new creation.

So when God declares his world to be very good, he expresses his delight with it. It expresses the prayer of the Psalmist in Psalm 104, "may you rejoice in all your works!"

Creation's Praise

Not only does God rest and rejoice over his creation, but he invites us to do the same. The sabbath provides time to celebrate God's amazing achievement of bringing forth a wondrous creation.

For Luther, "to sanctify means to set aside for sacred purposes or for the worship of God,"⁷⁰ namely, to "thank and praise" God. Elizabeth Achtemeier suggests that creation's praise functions as an echo of God's love. In other words, God says "It is very good! Creation then rises up and sings, "yes, life is very good indeed."⁷¹ And creation now does that with regard not only to God's original work of creation, but with regard to God's new work of creation from the cross and the tomb.

So how does the wider creation praise God? In light of Psalm 148, other creatures praise God by being what God had made them to be. Birds by being birds. Trees by being trees. As humans, we put creation's praise into words. To borrow from my colleague, Paul Raabe, "We glorify God by extolling his works!"⁷² This is what the Psalmists do. First they issue a summons to praise God and then they give the reasons for that praise by recounting God's works.⁷³ Thus the Sabbath becomes a day to tell stories of what God has done, to speak of the wonders of God, and to put into song what God has done. It is time to celebrate his accomplishment of creating this earth and the creatures that fill it.

Setting time aside to celebrate God's creation both expresses a creaturely faith that acknowledges the rule of God and is in turn strengthened by God's creative work. It provides opportunity for us to slow down and even stop. For it takes time to watch attentively and observe what God has done. This takes place in two ways.

First, we must attend to the word of God. For it is the word that gives us the lens to see creation as the amazing work of God. It equipped Irenaeus and Tertullian to see the wonders of creation as marvelous miracles—as great as anything else that God

would do in the future, including the resurrection.⁷⁴ Luther expresses himself in similar (if hyperbolic) terms when speaking about the creation of birds on the fourth day. “These things are written down and must be carefully learned that we may learn to be filled with wonderment at the power of the Divine Majesty and from those wonderful deeds build up our faith. Nothing—even raising the dead—is comparable to the wonderful work of producing a bird out of water.”⁷⁵

Second, the word of God sends us into the creation with the encouragement to pay attention to God’s handiwork all around us and not race through life with blinders on our eyes. The Old Testament writers give ample evidence of firsthand knowledge of many of the creatures and wonders about which they wrote. Luther encourages us to do the same:

We do not wonder at these things, because through our daily association with them we have lost our wonderment. But if anyone believes them and regards them more attentively, he is compelled to wonder at them, and his wonderment gradually strengthens his faith. (LW 1:49)

Basil the Great provides an excellent example of firsthand knowledge of God’s creation as he extols the wonders of trees in their roots and bark. He writes, “I have seen these wonders myself and I have admired the wisdom of God in all things.”⁷⁶ More recently, the famous French ocean explorer (and Roman Catholic) Jacques Cousteau put it well when he said that we explore to give witness to the miracle of life.⁷⁷

Conclusion

So creation is more than a stage or scenery for God’s story. It is integral to the entire story. After all, the entire story is about God’s relationship to his creation, especially to those extraordinary creatures that he had formed from the ground to look after and cultivate his creation. It is about how those remarkable creatures turned a garden filled with life into a wasteland of death. And it is about how God entered his creation, became a human creature, restored his human creatures by his death and resurrection, and thus will renew his creation. And all of this, according to Colossians 1:15–20 is made through Christ and for Christ.

Endnotes

¹ Gustav Wingren makes the important point that the Genesis comes before Exodus and the first article before the second article for a reason. They are foundational and foundations come first. He rejected attempts to make the question of knowledge central, which centers the story on us rather than on God. See Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law*, trans. Ross McKenzie (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961; Wipf and Stock, 2003). See also Mark P. Surburg, “Good stuff! The material creation and the Christian faith.” *Concordia Journal* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 245–262.

² See David L. Adams, “Some Reflections on the Historicity of the Biblical Creation Account,” (a paper presented at the Dies Academicus of the Lutherischen Theologische Hochschule, Oberursel, Germany, Nov. 7, 2013).

³ See Jaroslav Pelikan, “Doctrine of creation in Lutheran Confessional Theology,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 26, no. 8 (August 1, 1955): 573.

⁴ Adams has a very good discussion on the Babylonian and Egyptian mythologies in “Some Reflections,” 5–15. This is true as well of Platonism in which the world is fashioned out of preexisting materials.

⁵ Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nature, God & Pulpit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) cites a line from the play, “Green Pastures,” in which God is portrayed as saying, “I’m lonely; I’ll make me a world,” 28. Achtemeier also points out that panentheism sees God as somehow creating the world and working with the world in order to complete himself, almost a necessary form of self-expression, 28–29.

⁶ See Jaroslav Pelikan’s “Creation and Causality in the History of Christian Thought,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 32, no. 2 (March 1990): 10–16. There he makes the point that the fathers were concerned to stress that creation dependent upon God in order to reject the idea that matter existed alongside God from eternity.

⁷ Bayer notes that Luther’s statement is a “precise interpretation of the creation formula ‘out of nothing’.” See, Oswald Bayer, Christine Helmer, and Richard H. Bliese, “I Believe That God Has Created Me With All That Exists: An Example of Catechetical-Systematics,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (1994): 155.

⁸ Richard Bauckham refers to these verses in 1 Corinthians as Paul’s Christian interpretation of the Shema, in *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). The Formula of Concord speaks of Christ as the “almighty Lord, our Creator and redeemer” Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, VIII.44 in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 600.

⁹ David Maxwell suggests that Nicaea hardened the Creator-creature distinction. “Platonic Participation and the Doctrine of Creation in Cyril of Alexandria’s Commentary on John” (unpublished paper presented at the Fourth Annual Symposium in Honor of Fr. Florovsky, Princeton, NJ).

¹⁰ Johannes Schwanke, “Luther on Creation,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (March 2002): 5.

¹¹ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1–5,” *Luther’s Works 1*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 21–22, 49.

¹² Bayer develops the idea of God’s address to creation. See especially his section, “Creation: Establishment and Preservation of Community,” *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 95–119.

¹³ Holmes Rolston III. “The Pasqueflower,” *Natural History: Magazine of the American Museum of Natural History* 88, no. 4 (April 1979): 8.

¹⁴ Luther, “Lectures on Genesis,” *LW* 1:53.

¹⁵ Luther, “Lectures on Genesis,” *LW* 1:75. Luther also wrote with regard to giving birth that it does not take place apart from the word, “For when God once said (Gn 1:28): ‘Be fruitful,’ that Word is effective to this day and preserves nature in a miraculous way.” So the birth of a baby today is as miraculous as was the birth of Isaac. “Lectures on Genesis,” *LW* 4:4. And again, “For the growth of the fruits of the field and the preservation of various kinds, this is as great as the multiplication of the loaves in the wilderness.” *LW* 4:5. See also C. S. Lewis, “Look down into every bay and almost every river. This swarming, undulating fecundity shows He is still at work thronging the seas with spawn innumerable,” *Miracles* (London: Fontana Books, 1960), 138.

¹⁶ “Our parents and all authorities—as well as anyone who is a neighbor—have received the command to do us all kinds of good. So we receive our blessings not from them, but from God through them. Creatures are only the hands, channels, and means through which God bestows all blessings.” See Large Catechism 1.26 in Kolb-Wengert, 389.

¹⁷ “For the true and almighty words of Jesus Christ, which he spoke in the first institution of the Supper, were not only effective in the first Supper; they remain so.” Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, VIII.75 in Kolb-Wengert, 606.

¹⁸ As an example, see Sally McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992).

¹⁹ Large Catechism II.13 in Kolb-Wengert, 432. See also Henrich Holze, “Luther’s Concept of Creation: Five Remarks on His Interpretation of the First Article in the Large Catechism (1529),” in *Concern for Creation: Voices on the Theology of Creation (Svenska kyrkans forskningsråd och författarna)*, 1995), 23–48.

²⁰ And so the First Article teaches that “we should know and learn where we come from, what we are, and to whom we belong” (WA 45, 12, 16–17). Pelikan argues, “The fundamental category in the Biblical doctrine of man is the category ‘creature’ . . . It’s “picture of man as sinner . . . must portray him as a fallen creature.” Jaroslav Pelikan, “Doctrine of creation in Lutheran confessional theology,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 26, no. 8 (August 1955): 569.

²¹ WA 45, 15, 1–2.

²² Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 109.

²³ Hence Luther points out that if we truly believed the first article, it would “humble and terrify all of

us” Why? Because we daily misuse it as if it belonged to us and fail to acknowledge that we receive it from God. Large Catechism II.22 in Kolb-Wengert, 433.

²⁴ Bonhoeffer picks up on this thought nicely. “It [humanity] now lives out of its own resources, creates its own life, is its own Creator . . . Adam is no longer a creature. Adam has torn himself away from his creatureliness.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, ed. John W. De Gruchy (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). Bonhoeffer also argues that disobedience is too weak a word. What takes place is “rebellion” (120). See also Oswald Bayer, who speaks of the “absurd desire of humans to become self-Creators” in “Self-Creation? On the Dignity of Human Beings,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (April 2004): 275–290.

²⁵ Erik Herrmann (personal conversation) also points out that in dying for our sin, Christ the Creator restores our creatureliness.

²⁶ James Nestingen (personal conversation).

²⁷ David Adams has a good insight as to water. “Water is the only thing known to ancient man that has substance but no inherent form. Thus water quite naturally comes to represent chaos, i.e., unformed matter.” “Some Reflections,” 8.

²⁸ David Maxwell points out that for the early church fathers, life was a divine attribute and gift. Creatures do not have life in and of themselves. They receive life only as they participate in God’s life. See “Platonic Participation and the Doctrine of Creation in Cyril of Alexandria’s Commentary on John.” See also Wingren’s chapter on “The Creator and Life,” in *Creation and Law*, 18–31.

²⁹ Paul Davies, *The Goldilocks Enigma: Why is the Universe Just Right for Life?* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008). See also, Peter D. Ward and Donald Brownlee, *Rare Earth: Why Complex Life Is Uncommon in the Universe* (New York: Copernicus SpringerVerlag, 2000).

³⁰ What is presented in the following paragraphs (unless otherwise noted) is dependent upon information about the earth in comparison with other planets in the solar system provided by Brian Cox, *Wonders of the Solar System* (New York: Harper Design, 2013).

³¹ Daniel Hillel, *Out of the Earth: Civilization and the Life of the Soil* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 32.

³² Hillel, quoted on p. 32.

³³ Hillel, 23.

³⁴ Hillel, 24.

³⁵ Holmes Rolston III. “The Bible and Ecology,” *Interpretation: Journal of Bible and Theology* 50 (1996): 16–26. “Preaching on the wonder of creation,” *Journal For Preachers* 34, no. 4 (January 2011): 39–46. Rolston notes how “the earth produces by itself” Mk 4:28.

³⁶ Rolston frequently speaks of the world as prolife in the sense of it being oriented to generating life. See e.g., Holmes Rolston III, “Creation: God and Endangered Species,” *Biodiversity and Landscapes: Paradox of Humanity*, eds. Ke Chung Kim and Robert D. Weaver (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 47–60. See also, “Human Uniqueness and Human Responsibility,” *Science and Religion: a Critical Survey* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006), xi–xlv.

³⁷ IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Redlist, 2013. http://cmsdocs.s3.amazonaws.com/summarystats/2013_2_RL_Stats_Table1.pdf

³⁸ Interestingly, Luther speculates that our bodies would have been far more durable if the practice of eating meat had not been introduced after the flood. In other words, “a diet of herbs rather than of meat would be far finer today.” “Lectures on Genesis,” *LW* 1:36.

³⁹ Claus Westermann argues that “A God who is understood only as the God of humankind is no longer the God of the Bible.” *Genesis 1-11* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), 176.

⁴⁰ James Limburg has a helpful discussion in which he points out that it was often thought that their crying was because their parents had abandoned them “Quoth the Raven: Psalm 147 and the Environment,” *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, eds. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Warsaw, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 105. See also Psalm 147:9 and Luke 12:24.

⁴¹ See Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2004) in which he explores descriptions of the age to come.

⁴² Bayer, “An Example of Catechetical-Systematics,” 147. See also Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 200–201. *LW* 33:233, 178.

⁴³ A fortuitous expression of Holmes Rolston III. “Perpetual Perishing, Perpetual Renewal,” *The Northern Review* 28 (Winter 2006): 111.

⁴⁴ WA 1, 563, 6ff. Beintker points out that Luther “was a decided advocate for the thesis of a *creatio continua*.” Michael Beintker, “Das Schöpfercredo in Luthers Kleinem Katechismus,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Religionsphilosophie* 31 (January 1989): 5.

⁴⁵ Small Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar, in Kolb-Wengert, 362.

⁴⁶ Hans Schwarz provides a helpful overview in *The Human Being: A Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 5–8.

⁴⁷ Wendell Berry, *Life is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000), 40. See also, “Is Life a Miracle?” *Citizenship Papers* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2003), 184–186.

⁴⁸ Holmes Rolston III. “Down to Earth: Persons in Place in Natural History” in *Philosophy and Geography III: Philosophies of Place*, eds. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 285–296.

⁴⁹ Thomas A. Sanction writes, “The idea of dominion could be interpreted as an invitation to use nature as a convenience. Thus the spread of Christianity, which is generally considered to have paved the way for the development of technology, may at the same time have carried the seeds of the wanton exploitation of nature that has often accompanied technological progress,” *Time* 133 (January 2, 1989): 29–30. Wallace Stegner: “Our sanction to be a weed species living at the expense of every other species and of earth itself can be found in the injunction God gave to newly created Adam and Even in Genesis 1:28: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.” Wallace Stegner, “It All Began with Conservation,” *Smithsonian* 21 (April 1990): 35.

⁵⁰ The Formula of Concord identifies the image of God as original righteousness, that is to be conformed to God’s intentions for us. In this case, looking after the earth would be one key purpose for being originally created in God’s image.

⁵¹ James Limburg, “The Responsibility of Royalty: Genesis 1–11 and the Care of the Earth,” *Word & World* 11 (March 1, 1991): 128.

⁵² Robert Rosin notes, “Broadly put, culture is anything not naturally biological, anything people create as they freely interact with their natural environment and each other.” Again, high culture is “something not natural or biological but developed out of reflection, used in shaping a view of life and transmitted to subsequent generations who maintained it because it proved useful.” See Robert Rosin, “Christians and Culture: Finding Place in Clio’s Mansions,” in *Christ and Culture: The Church in Post-Christian(?) America* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1996), 57–96.

⁵³ Mark Lynas argues that we are in charge, so we better get used to it and figure out how we should manage the planet in *The God Species: Saving the Planet in the Age of Humans* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2011). Eugene Stoermer and Paul Crutzen are credited with coining and popularizing the term the anthropocene to describe how humans are the dominant force for shaping the planet today.

⁵⁴ Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 149.

⁵⁵ J. J. McCoy, *The Hunt for Whooping Cranes: A Natural History Detective Story* (Forest Dale, VT: Paul S. Eriksson, 1966), viii.

⁵⁶ Holmes Rolston III, “On Behalf of Bioexuberance.” *Garden* 11, no. 4 (July/August 1987): 32.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* Section 37, 1991. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus_en.html

⁵⁸ See Hillel’s account of its impact on past civilizations, *Out of the Earth*, 55–134.

⁵⁹ Aldo Leopold, *Round River: From the Journals of Aldo Leopold*, ed. Luna B. Leopold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 165.

⁶⁰ Luther, “Lectures on Genesis,” *LW* 1:67.

⁶¹ Wendell Berry, “Damage,” *What Are People For? Essays by Wendell Berry* (Farrar: North Point Press, 1990), 7.

⁶² See Robert C. Saler, “The Earth, the Road, and the Tomb: The Mortality of the Earth and Care for Creation,” *The Cresset* 77, No. 3 (Lent 2013): 50–52.

⁶³ Luther, “Lectures on Genesis,” *LW* 1, 75.

⁶⁴ Adams, 20.

⁶⁵ Luther, “Lectures on Genesis,” *LW* 1:75

⁶⁶ Adams, 20.

⁶⁷ Adams notes that it consists of “three closely-related blessings: fecundity (fruitfulness), security, and the rule of God,” 20.

⁶⁸ For a good overview of Platonism, Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1985).

⁶⁹ Adams, 20.

⁷⁰ Luther, "Lectures on Genesis," *LW* 1:79

⁷¹ Achtemeier, *God, Nature, Pulpit*, 42.

⁷² Personal conversation.

⁷³ See Roger Sorrell's analysis of Francis of Assisi's canticle in *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 118–124.

⁷⁴ For example, Irenaeus exclaims, "Surely it is much more difficult and incredible, from non-existent bones, and nerves, and veins, and the rest of man's organization, to bring it about that all this should be, and to make man an animated and rational creature, than to reintegrate again that which had been created and then afterward decomposed into earth" (commenting on Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones). Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," 5.3.2. In Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 529. Likewise, Tertullian: "On this principle, you may be quite sure that the restoration of the flesh is easier than its first formation." Tertullian, "On the Resurrection of the Flesh," 11. In Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 553.

⁷⁵ Luther, "Lectures on Genesis," *LW* 1:49.

⁷⁶ Basil the Great, "On the Hexameron," in *Saint Basil Exegetic Homilies*, trans. Sister Agnes Clare Way (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 1963), 3–150.

⁷⁷ Jacques Cousteau's *The Human, the Orchid, and the Octopus: Exploring and Conserving Our Natural World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 39. "We never attempted to decipher the meaning of life; we wanted only to testify to the miracle of life."

“Daddy, Will Animals Be In Heaven?” The Future New Earth

Paul R. Raabe

A Calvin and Hobbes comic strip pictures Calvin raising his hand in class and asking the teacher, “Miss Wormwood, I have a question about this math lesson.” The teacher calls on him, “Yes?” Calvin then asks, “Given that, sooner or later, we’re all just going to die, what’s the point of learning about integers?” “Turn to page 83, class,” says Miss Wormwood. Dejected, Calvin mutters to himself, “Nobody likes us ‘big picture’ people.” Calvin makes a good point. We need to be “big picture” people. That means intentionally appreciating the grand biblical narrative that moves from creation to the death and bodily resurrection of Jesus to the future bodily resurrection and the ultimate eschatological new creation.

My daughter asked, “Daddy, will animals be in heaven?” My immediate response was to say, “Maybe, but no dogs.” Yet, that is a common question and a good question. It gets at the big picture. What does the post-resurrection look like? What kind of eschatological future do you lay out before your people? What do you teach your people?

Where does the overall meta-narrative go? Is it that everyone will lose individuality and be absorbed into some all-encompassing unity? Is it that we will be reincarnated as kings or frogs depending on how many good works we do? Is it that this earth will go on forever and get better because of modern science and technology? Is it that the universe will repeatedly collapse and expand, collapse and expand? Or is it that the earth will be annihilated and we will enter some non-local, non-space reality called heaven? With our future resurrection body will we walk and run with our feet? Will there be terra firma in the eschatological future?

We confessional Lutherans adhere to the motto *ad fontes* (to the sources). What does the Creator say through his revealed word about the eschatological future? Let’s spend some time looking at some texts in both testaments.

Future Destruction of the Corrupted Creation

What do you teach your people? What kind of future do you set before your people? Is it a future that naturally on its own power emerges from the present? By our advances in technology and science will we humans be able to overcome death and

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decay? By our efforts can we establish a perfect ecological environment, an eco-utopia? Will the earth simply go on forever under human control?

2 Peter 3

The present universe will not simply remain as is nor will it gradually merge into utopia. It will be destroyed. The classic text that stresses this coming destruction occurs in 2 Peter 3:1–13. I quote from Curtis Giese’s commentary.

. . . a reminder to recall the words previously spoken by the holy prophets and the command of the Lord and Savior [previously spoken] by your apostles, because you know this first of all: that in the last days mockers will come with mocking, by walking according to their own desires and by saying, “Where is the promise of his coming? For (ever) since our fathers fell asleep all things are remaining the same from the beginning of creation.” For by maintaining this, it eludes them that long ago the heavens came into existence and the earth (has) received its form out of water and through water by the Word of God, through which [water and Word] the world that then existed perished when deluged with water. But the present heavens and earth by the same Word have been reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly men. But let this one matter not escape you, beloved, that one day with the Lord is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow regarding his promise as some reckon slowness, but he is patient toward you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. The Day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements, by being burned, will be destroyed, and the earth and the works (that are) in it will be disclosed. Since all these things are about to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, as you anticipate and desire to hasten the coming of the Day of God, on account of which the heavens, being consumed by heat, will be destroyed and the elements, being burned, will melt! But we await new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells.¹

Peter responds to mockers who assert that the creation has always and will always continue as it has been. Giese comments: “Their view of the universe is static. Moreover, this raises an epistemological issue. The scoffers choose to trust their own perceptions rather than God’s promise and the testimony of Scripture.”² Against the scoffers Peter stresses three things:

- 1) Creation is not autonomous. The Creator brought it into existence out of nothing and gave it its form and shape.

2) In the past creation has not simply remained the same. On the contrary, the Creator has intervened. Not only did he create it, he also destroyed it. There has been a succession of worlds. The pre-flood world was destroyed by the Creator using the waters of the flood: “the world that then existed perished (*apollymi*) when deluged with water” (2 Pt 3:6).

3) Now the present heavens and earth are being “reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly men.” Peter goes on to expand on this third point. The day of the Lord will come suddenly and unexpectedly like a thief in the night. Then the heavens will “pass away” (*parerchomai*) and the elements³ will be burned and destroyed (*hō*). Then the earth and the works done in it “will be disclosed/found” (*heurisko*). There is a text-critical question with that last verb. Some manuscripts read “will be burned up” (*katakaiō*). If we read “will be disclosed/found” (*heurisko*) as seems more likely, it refers to the way all works will be exposed, evaluated and judged by God at the eschatological judgment.⁴

Peter goes on to say: “But we await new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells.” Does he mean that the present creation will be annihilated according to its substance and replaced by a fundamentally different reality without terra firma and without space? No. The phrase “new earth” is not merely symbolical. Just as the pre-flood creation was destroyed by the flood but not annihilated, so also the present creation will be destroyed by fire but not obliterated. The adjective “new” (*kainos*) means “new in quality,” not “new” in the sense of completely novel *ex nihilo*.⁵

What is the problem with the present creation? The present creation is not characterized by human righteousness (2 Pt 3:13). The ungodly dwell here (2 Pt 3:7), and all people on earth are sinners in need of repentance (2 Pt 3:9). In 2 Peter 1:4, Peter speaks of “the corruption in the world by sinful desire.” Peter assumes the inextricable connection between human sin and creation itself.⁶ According to Genesis 3, the “ground” (*adamah*) is cursed because of man/Adam (*adam*). In order for the Creator to have a creation where human righteousness dwells, he must destroy the present creation and make new heavens and a new earth.

In this new heavens and new earth, “righteousness dwells.” With this expression Peter refers to the active righteousness of believers, their righteous character and deeds, their “holy conduct and godliness” (2 Pt 3:11). After their bodily resurrection, Christians will constantly and perfectly do righteousness.⁷ The place where this will happen is on the new earth. The verb “dwell” (*katoikeo*), when used of people, refers to dwelling on earth. Peter was not thinking of a completely different reality without terra firma or space. He speaks of what Christians will do on the new earth. Then once again human righteousness will be “at home.” In the words of Martin Franzmann, the ultimate goal for God’s creation, “over which He once spoke His ‘very good’ (Gn 1:31; 1 Tm 4:4), is not extinction but restoration and transfiguration.”⁸ Or as Lenski says,

“The heavens and the earth shall be renovated, renewed, purified, made perfect.”⁹ In Acts 3:21 this same Peter speaks of the future, eschatological “restoration of all things,” restoration (*apokatastasis*), not annihilation. Peter agrees with Peter.

Other Texts on the Future Destruction

Peter encourages his readers to recall what was spoken by the Old Testament prophets and by Jesus, the Lord and Savior, himself. The prophets announced the future day of Yahweh when the present creation will be destroyed (for example, Is 34:4; 51:6; Jer 4:23–26; Jl 2:30–31; 3:14–15; Zep 1:2–3; cf. Ps 102:25–27=Heb 1:10–12). Some prophetic texts speak of creation being consumed by fire (Is 30:30; 66:15–17; Zep 1:18; 3:8). Jesus himself spoke of the future destruction of the present universe. For example, in his eschatological discourse he said: “Heaven and earth will pass away (*parerchomai*), but my words will not pass away” (Mt 24:35; Mk 13:31; Lk 21:33; cf. Mt 5:18). Also the apostle John spoke this way. According to Revelation, at Christ’s second coming the earth and sky will flee away (Rv 20:11; cf. 6:14); the first heaven and the first earth will pass away (Rv 21:1). The discontinuity is clear. The current creation, corrupted by sin, death, and decay, will pass away.

Future New Creation

What do you teach your people? Where does the overall meta-narrative go? Is it that the Creator created the earth for his human creatures to live together with animals in the here-and-now, but in the future eschaton the Creator will annihilate the earth and remove his believing human creatures from the earth to live in his presence forever—no animals, no trees, no space, only the Triune God with human creatures and angels?¹⁰ Is the future only heaven and no more earth? What kind of eschatological future should you lay before your people? What, in fact, are the promises of God?

Romans 8

While there will be destruction for this present creation, there will also be a new creation with significant continuity between the two. The new creation of the future will not be a completely novel reality without space or earth. The classic text that stresses the continuity occurs in Romans 8:17–23. From Michael Middendorf’s commentary on Romans:

And since [we are] children, [we are] also heirs—on the one hand, heirs of God and, on the other hand, fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we are suffering with [him] with the result that we might also be glorified with [him]. Indeed, I count that the sufferings of the present time [are] not of equal value [compared] to the glory which is about to be revealed to us. Indeed, the fervent expectation of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but on account of the one who subjected [it], upon hope that also the creation itself will be freed from the slavery to the corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Indeed, we know that all the creation

is groaning together and suffering birth pangs together until the present. And not only [creation], but ourselves, while having the first-fruits of the Spirit, we ourselves are also groaning within ourselves while eagerly awaiting adoption, [that is,] the redemption of our body.¹¹

Here the apostle Paul makes a contrast.¹² He contrasts the sufferings of the present time with the glory of the age to come. Creation itself has “eager expectation.” The noun in verse 19, *apokaradokia* suggests the picture of a person stretching his head forward to see what is coming. This “eager expectation of creation eagerly awaits” the eschatological future. Paul uses the verb *apekdechomai* for the eager waiting that belongs to Christian hope (Rom 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor 1:7; Gal 5:5; Phil 3:20). Creation shares in the Christian hope. The apostle emphasizes the intensity of these eschatological yearnings. In verse 22, he states “all the creation is groaning together and suffering birth pangs together until the present.”

In verses 20–21 Paul explains why the creation is eagerly awaiting. For creation was subjected by God to futility, purposelessness (*mataiotes*). It cannot attain to its goal. It is currently under “slavery to corruption.” Paul is referring to Genesis 3 where the Creator placed creation under a curse. Middendorf writes, “At times the creation’s corruption is the cause of human suffering; at other times, creation suffers due to the activity of fallen humanity.”¹³ Also note that Paul makes a distinction between creation itself and the “futility” and “slavery to corruption” that it is now experiencing. One is reminded of the distinction emphasized in the Formula of Concord article I, the distinction between human nature itself and the original sin that thoroughly corrupts it.¹⁴ The “futility” and “corruption” will end but not creation itself.

Creation was subjected by God to futility “upon hope that also the creation itself will be freed from the slavery to the corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” The eschatological future for creation itself is the freedom that awaits the children of God. It is not a different kind of freedom such as a freedom that results from annihilation, as if God will put groaning creation out of its misery by annihilating it. No, creation will receive the same freedom that will be experienced by the children of God, freedom from corruption, freedom from futility. Creation itself will be glorified with the same glory that the children of God will experience.

Paul emphasizes that the future destiny of creation is tied to the future destiny of God’s people. Creation is now suffering birth pangs until it gives birth to a new creation at the time when our mortal bodies are raised from the dead and glorified. Creation itself has a glorious future of freedom. Not only creation but also we ourselves, as we eagerly await our future of adoption as sons of God, the redemption of our body. Just as creation’s groaning and our groaning are tied together, so also creation’s future and our future are tied together.

Revelation 21

Together with creation itself we await a new creation. According to Peter, “we await new heavens and a new earth according to his [God’s] promise, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pt 3:13). John in Revelation uses the same language.

And I saw a large white throne and the One sitting on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled and a place was not found for them. . . .
And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea is no longer. And the holy city, new Jerusalem, I saw coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they themselves will be his people, and God himself will be with them [as their God],¹⁵ And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall no longer be, nor sorrow nor crying nor pain shall be ever again, because the first things have passed away." And the One sitting on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new!" And he says, "Write, because these words are faithful and true" (Rv 20:11; 21:1–5).¹⁶

In his vision John saw a new creation. The present heaven and earth fled away, passed away, and no place was found for them (Rv 20:11). John saw a new heaven and a new earth. He saw the heavenly Jerusalem coming down to the new earth (see also Rv 3:12). In that future day heaven will be on earth. God alone can make that happen. And what does John conclude from this? That God will dwell with men, the Creator with his human creatures (*anthropoi*). The assumption behind this statement is that humans are earth creatures. If there is to be fellowship between Creator and humans, humans do not ascend but the Creator comes down to earth.

Echoing our Lord's statement John goes on to say, "the first things passed away" (*aperbomai*). Then the one sitting on the throne said: "Behold, I make all things new." The two statements go together. The second statement does not say that God makes all new things, as if creating everything *ex nihilo*, but that God makes all things (*panta*) that currently exist new (*kaina*). This second statement helps us understand the first statement. When old things are made new things, then the old things "passed away." They no longer exist as the old things (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). Brighton comments, "God will not annihilate the present creation, cast it out as some trash, but rather he will, by recreation, transform the old into the new."¹⁷ John goes on to depict the future new Jerusalem and the future garden of Eden with the tree of life. It is all very physical and material, a future heaven on earth.

Isaiah 65

Peter and John's language of "a new heaven and a new earth" comes from Isaiah 65:17–25, the mighty seer of old. The translation is by Reed Lessing in his commentary on Isaiah 56–66.

"For behold I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth.

And the former things will not be remembered.

And they will not come up upon [the] heart."

"Rather they will rejoice and be glad in what I am creating.

For behold I am creating Jerusalem a joy,

and her people rejoicing."

“And I will be glad in Jerusalem.

And I will rejoice in her people.

And there will not be heard again in her the sound of weeping,
or the sound of crying.”

“There will not be there again an infant of [a few] days.

Or an elderly man who will not fulfill his days.

For the young man will die a hundred years old.

And one missing the mark of a hundred years will be regarded as cursed.”

“And they will build houses and live [in them].

And they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.”

“They will not build and another live [in them].

They will not plant and another eat.

For like the days of a tree [will be] the days of my people.

And the work of their hands my chosen ones will enjoy.”

“They will not toil in vain.

And they will not give birth for calamity.

For they [will be] offspring, ones being blessed of Yahweh,
and their descendants with them.”

“And it will happen that before they call even I myself will answer.

While they are speaking even I myself will hear.”

“The wolf and the lamb will graze as one.

And the lion like large cattle will eat straw.

But [for] the serpent dust [will be] his food.

And they will not do evil nor will they destroy in all my holy mountain,”
said Yahweh.

Isaiah announces the eschatological day of the Lord, when the Lord will create a new heavens and a new earth. That new creation will so exceed the present creation that we will not even remember the former things. Together with the new creation there will be a new Jerusalem, which rejoices in Yahweh and Yahweh rejoices in her. As Isaiah stresses elsewhere, Yahweh’s glory will fill the earth, and the entire earth will know Yahweh.¹⁸ Verse 20 gives a hypothetical: If someone were to die, it would not be before one hundred years. Everyone will live long. Earlier in Isaiah 25 the prophet proclaimed that death itself will be swallowed up (v. 8). According to Isaiah 65:21–23, God’s people will build houses, plant vineyards, and enjoy the work of their hands. “They will not toil in vain” (v. 23). The future new creation will be the reversal of the curse of Genesis 3, a new earth where God’s people are active, doing constructive activities.

Then Isaiah repeats the picture of the animals that he gave in Isaiah 11. When the eschatological new creation comes, then “The wolf and the lamb will graze as one, and the lion like large cattle will eat straw” (Is 65:25). Then both predator and prey will live together peacefully and harmoniously. Then the carnivorous animals will become herbivores. Then the predatory animals will “not destroy in all my holy mountain” spoke Yahweh. Before the presence of Yahweh humans and animals will live harmoni-

ously. There will be a new creation, established by the Creator himself. The Creator himself through his prophet has promised a new creation with animals. We have no basis to discard this promise as merely symbolical. The Creator will reclaim his messed up creation, including animals.

Old Testament Land Theology

The language of Isaiah needs to be understood in light of the Old Testament's rich theology about the land.¹⁹ In Genesis 12 God promised Abram "to your offspring I will give this land" (v. 7). Over and over again God repeated that promise to Isaac and Jacob and Jacob's sons. Years later when the sons of Jacob/Israel were in bondage in Egypt, God came down to deliver them and to lead them to the land he had sworn to give them. Unlike the wilderness the promised land would be almost like a new garden of Eden:

For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. (Dt 8:7–10)

Then under Joshua God began to fulfill that promise. Israel did not take the land; God gave it to them as an undeserved gift. Israel inherited the land. God promised to bless his covenant people by means of that land. The land was a gift and means of blessing from the God of Israel. At the same time Israel's life in that land was to be distinctive. God called his covenant people to live in the land by walking in God's ways, not the ways of the other nations. If they imitate the other nations, then God would thrust them out of the land. It is holy land for a holy people under the holy God.

You know the rest of the story. Israel repeatedly rebelled and then had to face the just wrath of God. The north was taken into exile in 732 BC and Samaria, its capital, in 722 BC. Judah was exiled in 701 BC with only Jerusalem left. Then a century later in 587 BC, Jerusalem was exiled.

Amos 9

Yet that was not the end of the story. God promised through his prophets that God will bring his exiled people back to the land. A good example occurs in Amos 9:11–15. The translation is by Reed Lessing in his commentary on Amos:

On that day I will raise up the falling tabernacle of David.
I will repair their breaches,
and his ruins I will raise up,
and I will rebuild it as in days of old,
so that they will possess the remnant of Edom,
that is, all the nations over whom my name is called,"
declares Yahweh, who is doing this.

“Behold, days are coming,”
 declares Yahweh,
 “when the plower will overtake the reaper,
 and the treader of grapes [will overtake] the one sowing the seed.
 The mountains will drip sweet wine,
 and all the hills will wave [with grain].
 And I will restore the restoration of my people Israel,
 and they will rebuild desolated cities and dwell in them,
 and they will plant vineyards and drink their wine,
 and they will work gardens and eat their fruit.
 And I will plant them in their soil,
 and they will never again be uprooted from the soil that I have given to them,”
 says Yahweh your God.

At the time of Amos the house of David was more like a flimsy hut about to fall. God would bring down the hut of David and exile his people. Yet God promised that he would then rebuild the Davidic house, restore his people, incorporate Gentiles into his people, and fructify the land.

God began to fulfill his restoration promise by bringing his people back from exile to the land where they built their houses, planted their vineyards, and made their gardens. Only it was clear that the promise still awaited its full realization. The crops of the land did not abound, and the Messiah of the line of David had not yet come.

This promise and others like it met its full fulfillment with the first coming of Jesus and his church. For two thousand years we have been witnessing Gentiles coming to Israel’s Messiah and having Yahweh’s name called upon them. In fact, we Gentile Christians are part of the fulfillment of Amos 9:12 (cf. Acts 15:13–18). Nevertheless, there is still a not-yet. The promise still awaits its full consummation when the earth will abound with crops and the mountains will drip sweet wine.²¹

What does Jesus do with this type of land promise? He expands it. Psalm 37 promised that “the meek shall inherit the land” (v. 11); “those blessed by the LORD shall inherit the land” (v. 22); “The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever” (v. 29). Jesus expands the promise by saying “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Mt 5:5). Jesus promises the future eschatological new creation.²² The Old Testament promised land becomes the eschatological new earth. Or consider Romans 4:13: “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world . . .” The land of Canaan becomes the world. In light of the fulfillment in Christ, “the original land of Canaan and the city of Jerusalem were only an anticipatory fulfillment of God’s promise. As such they function in Scripture as a sign of the future universal city on the renewed earth, the place where righteousness dwells.”²³

Hosea 2

What about animals? Isaiah depicts animals living in peace in the future new creation. Hosea gives a similar promise in Hosea 2. God announced that he will punish the idolatrous Israelites by laying waste her vines and fig trees and by having the wild

animals of the countryside devour them (Hos 2:14). The Creator punishes by the reversal of creation. But then God promises to bless by restoring creation. Later in Hosea 2 God promises to make a new covenant, only this covenant will be with animals and to the benefit of Israel.

And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. (Hos 2:18)

This covenant with the animals reminds the reader of the covenant after the flood. God promised to Noah and his sons, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth.” (Gn 9:9–10). God cares for all his creation, not only humans. He went to a lot of bother to save every kind of animal at the time of the flood. He includes animals in his post-flood covenant. Then through Hosea he promises a new covenant with the animals. Here the emphasis rests on their benign character. They will no longer threaten or hurt God’s restored Israel.

Proleptic Eschatology: Jesus with the Wild Animals

And lo and behold, Jesus of Nazareth spent forty days and nights in the desert and “he was with the wild animals” (Mk 1:13). Wild animals (Greek *theria*) were typically seen as a dangerous threat to humans, animals such as bears, leopards, wolves, and poisonous snakes. Jesus in his weakened, vulnerable condition “was with the wild animals.” Yet the wild desert animals did not hurt Jesus. In Mark’s gospel the expression “to be with someone” suggests close and friendly companionship (Mk 3:14; 5:18; 14:67; cf. 4:36).²⁴ This is an example of what Jim Voelz calls “proleptic eschatology.” Jesus inaugurated the future eschatological new creation ahead of time. As Jim Voelz says in his commentary on Mark, “his being with the wild beasts (*theria*) incarnates the new relationship between the formerly hostile elements of the old creation and the people of God.”²⁵ It is important that we run Old Testament promises through Christ and the New Testament. In light of Mark 1:13 we may conclude that the Old Testament promise of peaceful animals is not mere symbolism. Those days when Jesus the Messiah, the last Adam, was with the wild animals gave a visible promise that in the future new creation there will be perfect harmony between God’s human creatures and animals.

Exhortations

The biblical texts clearly depict an eschatological future characterized by both discontinuity and continuity. Both sets of texts need emphasis. The present creation will pass away and the Creator will create a new creation. Here I wish to draw out of these texts some practical suggestions for pastors.

I sense that commonly in preaching and teaching not enough use is being made of the future tense. One important way to articulate the law is to preach the threats, and one important way to articulate the gospel is to preach the promises. Threats and

promises are by definition future tense statements. Beware of over-realized eschatology. There is still a not-yet. Some things in God's overall narrative have not yet happened. Make frequent use of the future tense.

By proclaiming the threats of God, you are warning sinners to turn from sin to God before it's too late. Warning is an important speech act. And by proclaiming the promises of God, you are inculcating hope in your hearers so that they will wait in eager expectation for the Parousia, for the day of resurrection, for the new creation. By means of your proclamation of the threats and promises of God the Holy Spirit creates and strengthens the eschatological yearnings of people.

The Scriptures do not speak of Christians at the bodily resurrection "going to heaven." The ascension of Christ is not the eschatological paradigm for us. The biblical depiction of the last day is not that we ascend to heaven but that Christ in public, visible glory will come down to us. Even a text like Philippians 3:20, which speaks of our citizenship in heaven, does not mean that in the end we will go to heaven but that Jesus Christ will come again in glory to transform us.²⁶ Just as God came down to us and became flesh, so on the last day God in the flesh will come down to us. Let us pray with Isaiah, "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down" (Is 64:1).

Talk about the future the way the Scriptures talk about the future. Instead of using only the word "heaven" for the future, speak of the future "heaven on earth" a la Revelation 21. Or simply say "the earth" as in "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5) or God's people "shall reign on the earth" (Rv 5:10). Instead of using the verb "to go" as if leaving the earth behind, use biblical expressions such as "inherit the earth"; "inherit the kingdom"; "enter eternal life."

Follow the Scriptures in depicting life in eternity as active, dynamic, involving worship and work, and all in the immediate presence of the Triune God. Too often we depict the future eternal life as boring. That is not the way the Scriptures depict it.²⁷

Annihilation or Transformation

Francis Pieper in his magisterial dogmatics discusses the future "end of the world."²⁸ He notes that our old Lutheran theologians disagreed on how to understand the "passing away" of the world. Is it total annihilation according to substance or is it transformation? Luther, Brenz, Nicolai and others taught a transformation, while Johann Gerhard, Quenstedt, and Calov taught annihilation according to substance. Pieper follows Gerhard in preferring the annihilation view but leaving it as an open question.

Part of my purpose here is to reopen this debate. Will terra firma and space come to an end? Is the future of believers at the day of bodily resurrection away from earth in heaven, defined not as a place but as "wherever God reveals Himself in His uncovered glory, 'face to face'?"²⁹ For Christians on the future resurrection day is the paradigm the ascension of Christ so that we too will ascend? Does the overall narrative lead to the goal that we will ascend into God's immediate, visible presence where there will be no trees, no animals, no terra firma, no space? Or is the narrative's goal a new creation, heaven on earth where God's immediate, visible presence will dwell among his people? Will there be the new physical earth, terra firma with trees and animals? Will God's people have work to do as stewards of this new creation?

What's at Stake Here?

There is a lot at stake in the question of the ultimate future of creation itself. Will the Creator reclaim his creation or not? If the physical earth, the terra firma, will one day be annihilated, and we will live forever with God in a completely alternative reality without space, then the Creator would end up discarding his creation. As Hoekema puts it:

If God would have to annihilate the present cosmos, Satan would have won a great victory. For then Satan would have succeeded in so devastatingly corrupting the present cosmos and the present earth that God could do nothing with it but to blot it totally out of existence. But Satan did not win such a victory. On the contrary, Satan has been decisively defeated. God will reveal the full dimensions of that defeat when he shall renew this very earth on which Satan deceived mankind and finally banish from it all the results of Satan's evil machinations.³⁰

On the last day the Creator will reclaim his corrupted creation just as he will reclaim his sinful human creatures. As Romans 8 stresses, the future of creation itself is tied together with the future of the sons of God.

The biblical texts we have looked at are clearly on the side of new creation. This is true especially if we let the Old Testament have a say in the discussion. The Old Testament Scriptures keep our feet on the ground.

Everywhere they presuppose and affirm the goodness of God's creation. The ancient Israelites were a down-to-earth people, for the most part agriculturalists and owners of sheep and goats. They rejoiced in their concrete physical life. Their hope was not to become deified or divinized but to live in fellowship with YHWH in a fully human way, the way the Creator had made them and intended them to be. To live under your own vine and fig tree, to enjoy the fruits of your own fields, to drink the wine from your own vineyard, that is the good life. "It doesn't get any better than this." No one steeped in the earthy BC Scriptures would be tempted toward Gnosticism, Platonic dualism, Docetism, asceticism, or spiritualism, alternatives that are as prevalent today as they ever were.³¹

Conclusion

You Christians have such a bright future ahead of you. The Lord Jesus will come again visibly in glory and transform your lowly body to be like his glorious body. Then he will say to you his sheep, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And you will enter the new and greater promised land, the new creation, where the crops will abound, the hills will flow with new wine, and the wolf will lie down with the lamb. Then you will see your Creator and Savior as he is, face-to-face. Then God's name shall be perfectly hallowed, his kingdom shall come in all its fullness, and his will shall be done perfectly on earth. What a future of eternal joy and bliss. Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.

Endnotes

- ¹ Curtis P. Giese, *2 Peter and Jude, Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012), 161, 184.
- ² Giese, *2 Peter and Jude*, 173–174.
- ³ The Greek noun *stoicheia*, “elements,” designates either the heavenly bodies such as sun, moon, and stars, or the basic elements that constitute the whole universe. See Giese, *2 Peter and Jude*, 189–190.
- ⁴ A good parallel occurs in 1 Corinthians 3:12–15.
- ⁵ The adjective “new” (*kainos*) does not imply a totally different, unique substance. For example, according to 2 Corinthians 5:17, a Christian is a “new creation” (*kaine ktisis*) but still the same human creature as before.
- ⁶ Compare, for example, Isaiah 24:4–7.
- ⁷ In 2 Peter 1:1 the apostle refers to the passive righteousness of justification, “to those having obtained faith of equal value with ours, in connection with righteousness from our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” See R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1945), 247–253.
- ⁸ Walter R. Roehrs and Martin H. Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), s.v. Second Peter 3.
- ⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1945), 350.
- ¹⁰ As I understand it, this seems to be the view of Johann Gerhard, the classic seventeenth-century Lutheran dogmatician. See his *Loci Theologici*, under *de consummatione seculi* and *de vita aeterna*. Also see Robert O. Neff Jr., *The Preservation and Restoration of Creation with a Special Reference to Romans 8:18–23* (ThD Dissertation, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1980).
- ¹¹ Michael P. Middendorf, *Romans 1–8, Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 635, 656.
- ¹² John Reumann argues that Romans 8:19–22 is an apocalyptic fragment from a different source. According to Reumann, while Paul uses this fragment to emphasize the not-yet dimension, Paul’s interest is supposedly only with people, not creation. However, Paul explicitly affirms what verses 19–22 say by stating in verse 23 “And not only” does creation groan but also we ourselves. John Reumann, *Creation and New Creation: The Past, Present, and Future of God’s Creative Activity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973), 98–99.
- ¹³ Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 670.
- ¹⁴ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. “The Formula of Concord I: Concerning Original Sin,” *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 487–491, 531–542.
- ¹⁵ On the text-critical question regarding the words *auton theos* (“their God”), see Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 589.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 580, 588.
- ¹⁷ Brighton, *Revelation*, 601. Brighton references G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) 265.
- ¹⁸ See Isaiah 6:3 and 11:9. On 6:3, see Andrew H. Bartelt, “The Centrality of Isaiah 6 (-8) Within Isaiah 2-12,” *Concordia Journal* 30 (October 2004): 316–335, especially 328.
- ¹⁹ For good introductions to Old Testament land theology, see Elmer A. Martens, *God’s Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981); Christopher J. H. Wright, *An Eye for An Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983).
- ²⁰ R. Reed Lessing, *Amos, Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009) 575.
- ²¹ Other land promises stress the same sort of fecundity of the future land. See Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 21–48, Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 1333–1337.
- ²² Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1-11:1, Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 244.
- ²³ David E. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 112.
- ²⁴ See Richard Bauckham, “Jesus and Animals II: What did he Practise?” *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, eds. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 47–60, especially 54–60.
- ²⁵ James W. Voelz, *Mark 1–8, Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 136–137.
- ²⁶ See N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 143.
- ²⁷ For a provocative and challenging discussion of how the Scriptures depict the future new creation, see Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2004).
- ²⁸ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics III* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953; original *Christliche Dogmatik III* published in 1920), 542–543.
- ²⁹ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics III*, 553.
- ³⁰ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 281.
- ³¹ Paul R. Raabe, “Why the BC Scriptures Are Necessary for the AD Church” *Lutheran Forum* (Summer 1998): 11–12.

HOMILETICAL HELPS

Easter 4 • Acts 2:42–47 • May 11, 2014

So those who heard and received in faith the testimony of Peter on the day of Pentecost were all that day baptized, all three thousand of them (Acts 2:41). All were added to the communion, to the fellowship, of the saints. And so “they devoted themselves” not only to “the apostles’ teaching” but also to its *κοινωνία* (2:42), to the conviction that theirs was the gracious gift of a sharing, of a common participation, in the things of a singular and extraordinary household and family: the household and family of our heavenly brother, whose own Father in heaven above is therefore also *our* Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, to this and on account of this they devoted themselves in all things and in every way for the common good, as one of course would, as one of course should. For that is what household and family is; that is what household and family does, or at least should do. For that is what they knew themselves to be: a heavenly household and family at the table of their heavenly householder in the communion of “the breaking of the bread and the prayers” (2:42). “And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles” (2:43), so that all might be given to see the glory and the wonder of their restoration, their oneness, in Christ.

And so all who believed were and remained quite naturally and quite regularly together. All who believed quite naturally and quite regularly shared *κοινός* (all things in common) (2:44), as would, as should, the superabundantly blessed persons of a singular household and family. And their joy and their generosity in doing so was as one would expect it to be amongst those who know themselves to be united by God’s grace as the singular household and family of the creator of the cosmos. “And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need” (2:45). After all, what else was there for any of them otherwise to do? What did they in such blessed communion in any way lack (so thus to hold back?), in blessed communion with a beloved Son whose own communion was and is with the God and Father of us all? Therefore, they did only that which seemed infinitely natural. In blessed communion with one another, they acted as would, they acted as should, all who know that what they have is not their own. In blessed fellowship with one another, they were exceedingly, they were joyfully, generous with one another as beloved brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, of the one who loved us first.

Therefore, day by day they continued together in worship. Day by day they gave and they received, they shared, in everything, not just in the breaking of the bread and of the prayers of the Table of Our Lord but also in the very sharing of their homes, in all that they had, “with glad and generous hearts” (2:46), receiving one another as one would receive a beloved brother or sister, for that is what they knew themselves to be. Therefore, on account of this their manner of giving thanks and praise to God, they were held in favor by all the people, as one again might expect.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (2:47), and continues still to do so from “every nation under heaven” (2:5). May the Spirit-wrought conviction of those who have been added still be that of those who thus were so, for Jesus’s sake.

Bruce Schuchard

Easter 5 • Acts 6:1–9; 7:2a, 51–60 • May 18, 2014

We all like to be a part of a winning team. Up to this point in the book of Acts, the church was the winning team. Yes, there had been arrests and there had been threats. However, the believers were bold, public preaching was well received, and the harvest was bountiful. The nature of “winning” for the church changes with the martyrdom of Saint Stephen. I wonder how many of the disciples reflected back on Jesus’s words, “. . . and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake” (Mt 10:22).

While our text gives us plenty of material regarding this pivotal moment in the life of the young Christian church, I would like to focus on Stephen’s persecution. The church’s response to persecution mirrors Stephen’s response.

The text gives us two words that form Stephen’s response—grace and power. Notice the event begins with, “And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8).

We are told that he had great power. Yet in this tragic event, he does not seem to be very powerful. There are no great signs and wonders to persuade anyone. There are no thunderbolts from heaven to terrify the enemy. In fact, he is taken outside the city like trash and put down like a sick animal. The picture hardly fits the world’s standard of power. Yet there is no greater power than confidence in God’s word to work through our weaknesses. While miracles would continue, increasingly, power among the believers would be understood as a bold witness of Christ in the face of persecution.

Grace is the second word that formed Stephen’s response to persecution. Notice two things about Stephen’s example of grace. First, he had no trouble calling the people out for their sins. He pointed out how their ancestors had rejected God’s prophets. He calls them out for trusting in Solomon’s temple, rather than the God who had made his dwelling among his people. He pulls no punches calling them “stiff-necked” and “uncircumcised.” This would hardly seem to be the words of a “grace-filled” servant of the word. Yet we are reminded in God’s word that we have been called to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). Grace spoken with his dying breath gained greater significance because he laid the foundation of sin with the law. Stephen called them out for their sin and then released them of their guilt with his final words of intercession.

Finally, notice God’s grace in persecution. Jesus foretold of his death with these words from John’s gospel: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). Stephen

scattered the seeds of God's word even as the people spilled his blood. A young man stood nearby as a witness, Saul. God would transform Saul the persecutor to Paul the apostle. Through Paul's preaching, the gospel would go forth to the Gentiles.

This text challenges us to understand our strength in the face of persecution. Our strength is in the power of God's word. We make use of that strength when we are bold to witness to Christ. I am humbled by Stephen's boldness. I think about the times that I was silent in my witness to Christ. Certainly, there were times when my witness was not needed. However, there have been times when I was simply afraid. I was afraid of saying the wrong thing. I was afraid of offending others. I was afraid of getting into a fight.

This text challenges us to let grace define our witness; grace that speaks the truth in love, and grace that sows the seeds of forgiveness. In the martyrdom of Stephen, we are reminded that God's word is always active and effective. We may not see positive effects of the gospel seeds we sow, but the promise is there. By the power of the Holy Spirit, when the time is right, that seed will sprout into faith.

Todd Jones

Easter 6 • Acts 17:16–31 • May 25, 2014

Ascension Day is fast upon us. In the Gospel reading for today, Jesus assures his disciples that, even though he is leaving them, he will not leave them as orphans. He will send them the helper in the person of the Holy Spirit. The helper will comfort, lead, and guide them in truth.

The disciples would remain to carry out the Lord's mission and ministry, in the world but not of the world, so that others would come to faith through their word. They would bring the Christian worldview to people with differing worldviews. Would there be times when they wished Jesus were standing right there next to them? Would there be times when they might wonder if they had the right words to say in order to bring the gospel to people as clearly as possible?

Today's reading finds Luke's Paul in Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him. Paul, never one to waste an opportunity to evangelize and share the gospel, took a tour of the city to find out more about the Athenians; what shaped their lives and formed their worldview. Paul, a monotheistic Jewish Christian, quickly realized that he was clearly the visitor! Pluralistic paganism had the home field advantage in Athens. Most of the residents would know little, if anything, about Scripture. Would that deter Paul? Hardly! He was always ready to make a defense for the hope he had in Christ (Epistle for this Sunday, 1 Peter 3:15). As the saying goes, you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. What would be Paul's approach in Athens?

Exegetical Notes

Verse 17:16: *paroxynō* (παροξύνω): Paul's spirit was aroused within him (by anger, grief, or a desire to convert them). His desire was that everyone should hear the gospel and come to faith in the one true God. This should be the posture of every Christian as well, for all religions are not the same. They do not worship the same god, and they do not lead to salvation.

Verse 17:18: Epicurean and Stoic philosophers: The Epicureans regarded the world as the result of random motion and combination of atomic particles. A general uncertainty of life was part of Epicurean teaching. All fear of divine intervention in life or punishment after death was gone. In addition, the gods would have nothing to do with human existence. They detached themselves from humanity. And death is simply the final end. The philosophers maintained that philosophical discussions were the path to a happy life, that humans were mortal, that the cosmos was the result of chance, and that there was no such thing as a provident god.

symballō (συμβάλλω): BDAG cites Acts 17:18 under definition 1, "to engage in mutual pondering of a matter, *converse, confer with someone.*" Definition 5, "to come into conflict with someone," is not the meaning in this verse. Paul did not engage in a quarrel or fight with the philosophers. He simply engaged them using language and concepts familiar to their worldview in order to make connections for the gospel proclamation.

Verse 17:20: The Athenians were polite, yet skeptical, due to serious concern.

Verses 17:22–23: *deisidaimōn* (δεισιδαιμόνων) can be used in a denigrating sense, viz. "superstitious." In this text it is used in a laudatory sense in Paul's introduction, "devout," "religious."

"What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." Joseph Fitzmyer points out:

[Paul] realizes that pagan Greeks do not worship the "true" God of Jews and Christians, but he tries to show that the God whom he proclaims is in reality no stranger to the Athenians, if they would only rightly reflect. His starting point is Athenian religious piety, and he tries to raise them from such personal experience to a sound theology. Their piety, in his view, does not go far enough.¹

Verses 17:24–29: Paul tailored his proclamation to the Athenians so that they "should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him." The Christian worldview meets the pagan worldview at various junctures in this section of Paul's speech. For instance, the cosmos did not come about through random chance, but rather from God who is intentional. The true God is not detached and uninterested in humanity, as the philosophers understood the gods to be, but rather God is truly interested and cares for and about creation and all creatures, including humanity. In fact, some of their very own poets have pointed out as well!

Verses 17:30–31: God would no longer overlook human ignorance, if indeed he had in the past. Paul proclaimed that all people are to repent and turn to the one

true God. Jesus is the man to whom Paul referred, the one whom God raised from the dead. The resurrection would have certainly been another new teaching in contrast with the philosophers' understanding of death as the end.

Verses 17:32–34 are not included in the reading for the day, but it is important to note that there were some who pondered Paul's words and were brought to faith in Jesus Christ. Among them was Dionysius, who Eusibius identifies as the first shepherd of the diocese of the Corinthians.

Preaching Suggestion

The preacher could use this text as an opportunity to help equip and encourage the saints in the pew to be ready to give a defense of their Christian hope. He can bring in parts from the Gospel reading to encourage the hearers primarily that they are never alone in this world. Christ has not abandoned us for we are baptized children of God (Epistle for the Day). Because the Spirit of truth dwells within us, we are encouraged to give a defense of our faith when asked. One does not need to have a theological treatise in hand in order to give a defense. Rather, like Paul, we can reflect on God's work in our lives (Psalm of the Day, Psalm 66:8–20), and simply tell the story of God who became human, like one of us, in Jesus Christ and the wonders he has done and continues to do.

This is also an opportune time to encourage building non-judgmental relationships with those with differing worldviews. Get to know them and find out what shapes and forms their thinking and outlook. When God provides the opportunity to share Christ, they will have a better understanding in order to tailor the gospel message. After all, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

Michael J. Redeker

¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 607.

Easter 7 • Acts 1:12–26 • June 1, 2014

Acts 1:12–26 narrates what the followers of Jesus did after his ascension. They remained in Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded (Acts 1:4). Luke names the eleven disciples and then summarizes that they were together in unity dedicated to prayer.

“All these were continuously devoted (present participle) with one accord to prayer together with women, also with Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers” (Acts 1:14). Jesus is God in human flesh. God in human flesh as true man has a human mother and human brothers. To emphasize the biblical Christology we confess with the early church that Mary is “the mother of God.” We can also say that these are “the brothers of God.” According to John 7:5, Jesus's brothers did not believe in him, but now they are part of his disciples. Probably the forty days of post-resurrection appearances led them to faith.

The word ὁμοθυμαδόν (with one accord) recurs in Acts. It can be used to refer to the unity of the opponents (Acts 7:57; 18:12; 19:29), but here it stresses the unity brought about by Jesus, in the teaching, confession, and prayer, shared by the followers of Jesus (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 8:6; 15:25). This emphasis on unity in Acts 1:14 correlates with the gospel lesson of John 17:1–11, where Jesus prays for those whom the Father gave him, that they may be one even as Jesus and the Father are one. Acts 1 records the beginning of the fulfillment to Jesus's prayer.

Peter as the first among equals then proclaimed to the group of about 120 believers. He began with the vocative, "Men, brothers." He spoke to males who are now "brothers." Whereas in verse 14 "brothers" refers to Jesus's natural brothers, here it refers to "brothers" in the faith. Jesus creates the family of God so that he is our "brother" and we are "brothers" with him and each other. Peter explained that the Old Testament Scriptures had "to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before hand by means of the mouth of David." The Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and he spoke them by means of human instruments. In this case Peter was referring to Psalms 69 and 109, both Davidic psalms.

The story of Judas Iscariot is revealing in many ways, two of which are these. First, it shows the resistibility of the grace of God. Jesus himself had called Judas and numbered him among the twelve. Yet, Judas betrayed Jesus. His story serves as a warning to every follower of Jesus to "take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12). It calls for daily repentance and faith in the forgiveness of sin. Second, the story of Judas fulfilled what God himself had foretold. Even something as dark as that episode ultimately was not an unforeseen accident. The two psalms (69 and 109) focus on the hostility faced by David, the anointed king, and thereby also on the greater hostility faced by the new and greater David. Yet God will vindicate his anointed king, both the OT king and the NT King. We should not pit "rectilinear" and "typological" against each other. Both psalms refer directly to both the OT type and the NT antitype. David, inspired by the Spirit of the Messiah, was speaking as the OT occupant of the Messiah's office. Psalm 69:25 emphasizes that not one of the Twelve will continue Judas's hostility. Psalm 109:8 prays that another person would take the wicked leader's ἐπισκοπή (office, overseership).

It was important that they have twelve apostles to match the OT twelve. God has one covenant people of God, including his OT people built on the twelve sons of Israel/Jacob and his NT people built on the twelve apostles, with the Messiah Jesus as the chief cornerstone for the entire people of God.

God fulfilled the prayer of Psalm 109, not in a magical way, but through the responsible decision and action of the remaining followers. Only two men met the requirements necessary for being an eyewitness of Jesus's public ministry from the baptism of John until Jesus's ascension. The record of Jesus's public ministry was given and normed by eyewitnesses. Peter says that the man selected by God will be "a witness of his [Christ's] resurrection with us." When we bring the Christian message to people it is not enough to speak only of ideas. We must speak of history. For we do not follow cleverly devised myths. The bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is as historical as

his crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, attested by eyewitnesses. God chose Matthias to serve as an apostle and official eyewitness together with the other eleven.

Sermon Idea

The sermon could develop the theme “Built on the Twelve Apostles.” Our text narrates how Judas Iscariot was replaced by Matthias. It was necessary that the church have twelve apostles to correspond to the twelve sons of Israel/Jacob. For the church is built on the foundation of the twelve apostles, with the Messiah Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. You, by faith in Jesus the Messiah, belong to the new Israel. And this Messiah was crucified and bodily raised for you. That is not a myth but historical, testified by the official eyewitnesses of Jesus’s public ministry, such as Matthias. That is also good news for you, a promise and guarantee that you will inherit the eternal kingdom bodily together with all of God’s Israel.

Paul R. Raabe

Pentecost • Numbers 11:24–30 • June 8, 2014

Gift giving frequently accompanies celebrations. The birth of a child, the joining of man in woman in marriage, confirmation, graduation, and the like are all occasions for giving and receiving gifts. Some gifts are received with great joy and gratitude. Some gifts have caused recipients to express gratitude while simultaneously thinking of how that gift might be re-gifted or returned because the gift is a duplicate or not what was really wanted.

The Israelites, as we see earlier in Numbers 11, were dissatisfied. Actually, they were more than dissatisfied. Their grumbling and complaining and anger with God was at a level that would have seemed more appropriate had a pandemic struck their community or had the Egyptians returned and killed most of them. Those gifted with freedom from slavery, with God’s visible presence with them on their journey to the Promised Land in the fire by night and cloud by day, and with manna fresh every morning, were not one bit pleased. They were ungrateful. What did they lack? Nothing. What did they want? Meat, fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. Granted, any simple meal would be more appealing if it was accompanied by juices from roasted meats and seasoned with savory vegetables. Ungrateful hearts see not what they need and have but what they want and lack.

How did Moses, their leader, deal with their ungratefulness? The anger of the Lord was ablaze and Moses was “displeased.” It can be frustrating when a pastor cannot please the people because what the pastor has to give the people do not want, and what the people want the pastor does not have to give. We are tempted to side with Moses and add our displeasure to what pours out from the heart of God’s servant. Moses is charged with leading these people and yet the people do not respond to him, and we naturally wonder, and even demand to know, what God is going to do about it.

How very telling that God continues to be “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love”! Boldly, we echo the words of the psalmist saying, “These all look to you, to give them their food in due season” (Ps 104:27). God did not withhold his hand of blessing to the people of Israel, and he continues to stretch forth his hand, to give us our daily bread, and to give us the gift of his Spirit.

In our text, a cloud descends on Moses and the seventy men of the elders. Instead of a crack of thunder, a bolt of lightning, and torrential rains to sweep them away, the Lord comes down in the cloud and gives them a gift. The same gift of the Spirit given to Moses is now shared with the seventy. Moses loses none of his gift, but as one candle lights another, the Spirit is given to each and they all begin to prophesy. This is God’s gift to his people to be a blessing to others.

New gifts! The presence of the Lord! More blessings! A time for repentance and renewed zeal for ministry? Not quite. The Lord chose to also give this gift to Eldad and Medad who had not shown up for the meeting that day. This caused Joshua much angst because, well, why should they have a special and powerful gift when they do not appear to be, by human measurement, worthy of such gifts. Joshua saw himself as being more worthy than they. Joshua, Moses’s servant since his youth, was displeased that God would give this gift to those with fewer years of experience.

On this day of Pentecost, we pray in the Collect, “O God, on this day, You once taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending them the light of Your Holy Spirit. Grant us in our day by the same Spirit to have a right understanding in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy consolation.” Today we celebrate God’s faithfulness to the Israelites, to Moses, to his church throughout the ages. We rejoice that God continues to gift his church with all things needful. We repent for being ungrateful when God’s hand stretches forth and provides abundantly all that we need for body and spirit. We repent for the times we look at other baptized brothers and sisters and become jealous of how God has blessed them. Today, on a day of great celebration, and renewed by the Spirit, we pray God will use each of us to tell of his marvelous blessings.

William Wrede

Holy Trinity • Genesis 1:1–2:4a • June 15, 2014

Editor’s note: at concordiatheology.org this homiletical help includes a sermon outline.

As with any pericope there are a number of directions a sermon based on this text could take. When one considers the average parishioner’s familiarity with the creation account—and given that this is Trinity Sunday—one is also confronted with the reality that people will bring expectations to the service and the sermon in particular. A close reading of the biblical narrative reveals a stark contrast between the creation account in Genesis 1 and the rest of the Old Testament of God’s feelings towards man. Take Genesis 6:6–7 for example:

And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.

Much has evidently changed. In five short chapters we have moved from the repeated refrain “it is good,” a refrain culminating in the Creator who steps back and declares it is “very good,” to regret over creating man and being grieved to the point of destroying not just man but much of the wider creation he delighted in. The problem may have begun with one man, but its effects have spread to the point where God decides to blot out not only man but “animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens” as well.

This impulse to undo his creation is not limited to the flood. While God promises not to destroy the world in flood again, he does bring destruction upon man and creation due to his anger over their sin. Consider Sodom and Gomorrah where God razes not only the city but “what grew on the ground as well,” or his repeated threats to destroy his own people (Exodus 32, Numbers 16), to say nothing of the repeated depictions of the “Day of the Lord” throughout the writings of the prophets.

The key to a sermon following this theme is an exploration of how God is able to declare once again that his creation is good. On Trinity Sunday, a poignant text to help with this would be one usually reserved for the cold of winter, that text of the baptism of Jesus. As the Father’s Son—he who was there at the beginning and through whom all things were made—stands in a river being baptized, the heavens are torn open, the Holy Spirit appears in the form of a dove, and the Father declares, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” (Mt 3:17). It is through this man, the new Adam, that God steps back and declares of his creation “it is very good.”

Jason Broge

Proper 7 • Jeremiah 20:7–13 • June 22, 2014

Conflicting Messages

On this day the church in worship ponders God’s “unfailing love” (gradual) and “never-failing providence” (collect). The church prays to God to put away from her all hurtful things and provide for her all things profitable. As in the prophetic words of Jeremiah, in Matthew 10 our Lord’s words ring true that the Lord’s faithful will face persecution from authorities and betrayal from family for his sake and the gospel. Matthew 10:22 reads, “All men will hate you on account of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” Altogether, the thought of the day calls for confidence in the word amid the conflicts endured by God’s people.

Notes on the Text

Jeremiah, like other prophets, was directed to employ symbolic acts to accent the message God has for the people. Our text follows the account of the prophet smashing

a clay jar (19:1–12) symbolizing the way God will smash the nation of Israel for their apostasy: for their turning the land God gave them into “a place of foreign gods” and pagan sacrifice (19:4). Seven chapters later, the prophet walks with a yoke of crossbars strapped around his neck. This act was symbolic of Israel’s political submission to the Babylonians. God’s own people will be in exile, inevitably. God will let the Babylonians dominate Israel, and bring Israel under its yoke (27:11). In his fury and wrath, God will turn his own people over to foreigners. God himself will do this with outstretched hand and strong arm (21:5), the very arm and hand that rescued them from their oppressors in Egypt (Ex 6:6). God rescues. God punishes. God binds his people. God delivers.

Through his pronouncements, Jeremiah is striking at the foundation of the authorities and powers in Israel (20:1–6). The false prophets and officers of God’s people were misguiding and misleading them away from God’s plan for them. Jeremiah is delivering a scathing attack on these authorities. In fact the prophet renamed the chief officer, “terror from every side,” a play on words. This leader actually is a terror to him and to all who follow him as their leader.

The prophetic function normally is twofold. It is one of foretelling and forth telling. Prophetic utterances have their implications for the present, imminently as they are spoken as well as for the future. Sadly, these words are not heeded when they are spoken to the intended audience. They must be spoken, nevertheless. Jeremiah decries this predicament that he is in (v. 9). God’s words are in his heart as it were, “a burning fire shut up in his bones,” and he could hold it in no longer. God’s words, especially the words God put in the prophet’s heart, breaks his heart as it were.

Proclaiming the prophetic word leads to isolation of the prophet. Throughout this periscope, Jeremiah laments his experience as he summarizes them especially in verse 10. His own friends are waiting for him to slip. He hears the whisper from many, “There is terror on every side.” His enemies might take revenge on him and overpower him. They think they will prevail and overthrow his case against him.

The prophetic word is indeed a word of deliverance. This word is Yahweh’s word that bestows on his people his unfailing love, and never-failing providence. In the end, the righteous people of God will be delivered from the enemies and the oppressors. God will rescue his people from the wicked. Surely, he will test his righteous (v. 12), and he will deliver his people from the evildoers (v. 13). The final victory is the Lord’s. He sees the heart and mind of his people (v. 12) and his deliverance is cause for them to sing his praises.

These themes echo throughout the New Testament. The reading from Romans (6:13–22) is but one example that brings these lessons to bear on the individual on a personal level.

The Lord’s own life and ministry on earth is the supreme example of this, and that is precisely to where these lessons point. The appointed gospel lesson calls attention to its implications for the Christian community as much as it anchors its life on earth in the name and for the sake of her Savior and Lord.

The incarnate Word, the very Son of God, faced resistance and opposition, especially from his own people as he walked the face of this earth, proclaiming the rule and

reign of God (e. g., Jn 1:11). St. Paul's missionary life paralleled that of his Lord's. Acts 13 is but one account of the rejection of Paul's preaching by his own people the Jews, and Acts 14 depicts the confusion and the misunderstanding that came about him and his proclamation among the Gentiles in the towns of Iconium and Lystra.

The preacher has so much here to draw from, to develop his own proclamation of the crucified Christ to his audience that lives today in the milieu of pluralism and inclusivism.

Victor Raj

Proper 8 • Jeremiah 28:5–9 • June 29, 2014

On May 13, 1940, Winston Churchill addressed the British parliament as he was about to become prime minister. Hitler's troops had already invaded Poland, and they had just begun their *Blitzkrieg* advance into France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. War was crashing upon the world as Churchill stepped into leadership. And unlike so many politicians, Churchill did not promise a bright, optimistic future; he held out no hope of speedy victory or early peace. Instead, he electrified the parliament and unified his country with famous but difficult words: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat." No politician today would campaign on a slogan like that.

The prophet Jeremiah delivered a message that was similarly difficult: God's righteous judgment was manifesting itself in the rising power of Judah's enemy, Babylon. The victory of Babylon was inescapable; captivity and long exile loomed. These were not only geopolitical realities, but as Jeremiah proclaimed, Yahweh himself was at work to judge his people and call them to repentance.

This pericope speaks to the difference between false and true prophets, but the narrative is a little hard to understand without the surrounding context. It must be clear that the confrontation between false and true prophets, between human lies and God's truth, is never a merely theoretical exercise. In chapter 27, Yahweh instructs Jeremiah to make and wear a yoke as an object lesson that God is giving Nebuchadnezzar the power to dominate all peoples. The accompanying message made it clear that Babylon would conquer, that such conquest was God's will, and that any would-be prophet who predicted otherwise was simply lying (cf. 27:14–15).

Then, in the opening verses of chapter 28 (vv. 1–4, just before the assigned reading), Jeremiah is confronted by Hananiah with precisely such a "prophecy" of false comfort. Hananiah directly contradicts Jeremiah's prophecy: the temple vessels will be returned, and the captive leaders of Judah will be released. In other words, according to Hananiah, God will break the king of Babylon's yoke of power. In the verses immediately following our text (vv. 10–11), Hananiah enacts his message with an object lesson of his own. He breaks the yoke that Jeremiah was wearing.

Jeremiah's message was completely different: Yahweh was on Babylon's side, using Nebuchadnezzar as an instrument of wrath and judgment. So the stage is set in

our text (and remember this is “in the presence of the priests and all the people,” v. 5) for a confrontation between prophet and prophet. It is obvious which prophetic message, Jeremiah’s or Hananiah’s, would have been more attractive to the audience in Jerusalem. Hananiah was promising, in the name of Yahweh, that the calamity of Babylon’s power was going to pass away quickly, and that the stolen temple vessels and the captive leaders of Judah would be coming home very soon, “within two years” (v. 3). Who would not prefer a quick and easy peace? How much more comforting it was to be told that God was on your side, and that the difficulties would soon be overcome. Hananiah proclaimed Yahweh’s grace without repentance, victory without suffering—in effect, resurrection without the cross.

Jeremiah himself wishes what Hananiah said were true. In verse 6 of our text, he says, “Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord make the words you have prophesied come true.” Yet he also reminds Hananiah (and us) that God’s prophets are usually bearers of “bad news”: “war, famine, and pestilence” (v. 8). Still, in the final analysis, we recognize a true prophet by the test of whether or not what he says actually happens. “When the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet” (v. 9).

The assigned text leaves the story rather open-ended. (The pericope may have been selected to avoid the somewhat strange and complicated matter of Jeremiah wearing a yoke, which will require some explanation for contemporary audiences.) But Jeremiah knows that peace and victory are not just around the corner. Yahweh did not send or speak through Hananiah (v. 15). The false prophecy will not come true, and the false prophet will die (v. 17).

While one can approach a sermon on this text in several ways, a significant challenge is connecting this text to the gospel. The other pericopes for the day can help. In the Gospel lesson (Mt 10:34–42), our Lord speaks of his own message in a very Jeremiah-esque way. Just as Jeremiah could not agree with the lying prophet’s false comfort, Jesus delivers a startling warning against facile hopes of superficial peace: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (v. 34). There is no exact parallel between Jesus and Jeremiah, of course: Jeremiah is constrained to announce Yahweh’s judgment, while Jesus is the One who *brings* the sword, forces the choice of loyalty and love—and ultimately bears Yahweh’s wrath himself. The sword of judgment fell on him. It was *his* blood, *his* toil, *his* tears, and *his* sweat that satisfied Yahweh’s judgment and brought us peace. That’s not cheap grace, but the rich, costly freedom of Yahweh’s saving love.

Jeremiah’s word about true and false prophets (Jer 28:9) helps us listen to a greater Prophet. How do we know if a prophet speaks the truth? We know by seeing whether what he said actually happens. The judgment of God really did fall on Christ on the cross. And Yahweh’s grace and victory for us really did dawn with his resurrection.

William W. Schumacher

Context Considerations

It might come as a surprise that this Old Testament text is appointed for the fourth Sunday after Pentecost when we are used to it being read on Palm Sunday. Why does it make an appearance at this time? Most likely, the reason is its thematic association with the Gospel reading, Matthew 11:25–30, in which Jesus describes himself as “gentle and humble in heart.” Similarly, in Zechariah’s oracle the Messiah is depicted as being humble (v. 9).

Another important consideration is that this Sunday falls two days after the celebration of Independence Day in the United States. Many congregations will give some reference to this occasion in the worship service, and the sermon can accommodate this.

Textual Considerations

The book of Zechariah is divided into two main parts. The first, chapters 1–8, delivered between 520 and 518 BC contains apocalyptic visions to encourage the post-exilic community to complete the construction of the temple and so demonstrate faithfulness to God. The second part, chapters 9–14, is composed of two prophetic oracles delivered later (after 480 BC) which look ahead to the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of his kingdom. The text under consideration falls at the beginning of these latter eschatological oracles.

In verse 9, the prophet heralds the coming of the messiah king to and for his people. The people of God (depicted as the daughter of Zion/Jerusalem) are summoned to rejoice and exult at the king’s arrival. He is described as having the attributes of righteousness and humility and of bringing salvation. He is depicted as being “mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The significance of this posture is threefold. First, it marks the messiah as one who is humble and therefore a servant to those he comes to save. Second, it signals that he arrives in peace, as opposed to riding on a warhorse (note the contrast in verse 10). Finally, it marks him as one of the royal line of David, since the mule (or donkey) was the mount used by David and his sons (2 Sm 13:29, 16:2, 18:9; 1 Kgs 1:33).

Verse 9 announces *that* the king will bring salvation. Verses 10–12 describe *how* he will do so. He disarms those bearing the implements of war and speaks peace (*shalom*) to the nations, reminiscent of the messianic prophecies of Isaiah (2:4, 9:5–7, 11:1–10) and of Micah (5:10–11). He establishes his universal rule over all nations, as earlier prophets had foretold (Ps 22: 27–28; Is 9:7, 66:18–20; Mi 5:4–5; Dn 7:14). Based on the blood of the covenant between Yahweh and his people, the king shall “free your prisoners from the waterless pit,” echoing the promises of liberation by the Servant of Yahweh announced by Isaiah (Is 61:1–2). Those who were formerly imprisoned he will return to the protection (“stronghold”) of God and provide restoration beyond even their original state of security (“I will restore to you double”).

Homiletical Development

The preacher must direct the hearers to the fulfillment of these rich and wonderful promises. Zechariah's oracle points to the person and work of the messiah, and the preacher will do likewise in demonstrating how Jesus of Nazareth fulfills these words. This passage is explicitly quoted in the gospels as referring to Jesus's entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday prior to his crucifixion and resurrection (Mt 21:5; Jn 12:15). There the Servant King, the true Son of David who is "gentle and lowly of heart" (Mt 11:29), embarks on his procession to the cross. Although he is righteous, he is condemned as a criminal in order to bear sinful humanity's unrighteousness and to impart to us his righteousness. He breaks the oppression of sin and Satan, and speaks peace to us. By his "blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28), he sets us free from the waterless pit of hell. His reign is a universal and eternal one, and we are secure in the stronghold of his grace.

As noted earlier, the occasion of this Sunday follows quickly upon the observance of Independence Day in the United States. The sermon might reference this occasion by drawing the parallel between a patriotic parade and the procession depicted in the text. Furthermore, a contrast might be drawn between the rule of the king that is celebrated in the prophecy, and the system of governance in our democratic society today.

David Peter

Proper 10 • Isaiah 55:10–13 • July 13, 2014

Editor's note: at concordiatheology.org this homiletical help includes extensive textual commentary.

Preliminary Thoughts

It is easy to treat this text non- or a-historically, preaching a generalized sermon about the word of God and its power, especially in verses 10–11. Such a sermon would not be unorthodox, but it would not be *textual*. These four verses, as all pericopes, are situated in a context, first literarily/textually, and then historically. The power of the word of God accomplishing his ends, including final salvation, is, in the first instance, a message to Isaiah's hearers and readers. From that context they can be brought to bear on us and on our contemporary context.

Introduction

Chapter 55 of Isaiah concludes the section comprising chapters 40–55. What started with a command to comfort Yahweh's people in exile (40:1) now concludes with an invitation to come to a great feast provided by Yahweh (55:1), and a promise that they will be beneficiaries of an everlasting covenant (55:3) that will be sought by the Gentiles (55:5). With these verses Isaiah addresses those in Israel's future who will be returning

from Babylon to the promised land, with his contemporaries, of course, “overhearing” his words, as it were. Isaiah 55:6–9 may be placed within the context of these prior five verses as well, but this section might also have as its focus Isaiah’s time, the eighth century, with a plea to the people to abandon the ways that will lead to exile. This may well explain verses 8–9, which could be referring to Yahweh’s mysterious plan to take his people into exile and then bring them back again. After these nine verses, we find our text, which brings chapter 55, as well as the entire section 40–55, of Isaiah to a close.

Commentary

Verses 55:10–11: These verses may have as their focus Isaiah’s eighth century BC setting, or they may be ambiguous in their time frame, speaking (also) directly to the exiles centuries later (cf. the discussion in the Introduction, above). In either case, God’s word is a vital and life-giving force. It creates. It is a word of promise that is always effective. Given the prior context of Isaiah 52:13–53:12, that word centers in the work of Yahweh’s Servant, but it carries that work of redemption to effective completion with a new and lasting covenant (cf. 55:3). These verses bear an interesting relationship to Mark’s gospel and its emphasis. Mark invites his hearers/readers to trust the word of Jesus, which always comes true (see the passion predictions in 8:31, 9:31; 10:33–34; and especially 16:7: “He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see him, *just as he told you* [cf. Mk 14:28]). These promises of our Lord are effective because they are of a piece with the promises of Yahweh in Isaiah—indeed, the word of the same God, working in the same way, for the same purposes.

Verses 55:12–13: Here the focus seems to be on the future exiles, though Isaiah’s contemporaries could be in view, as well. Regardless of what they suffer, including exile and deportation, nothing will be the last word except the triumph of the plan of Yahweh. There will be restoration. Again, we see NT fulfillment, but that in a complex way. Ultimately, the fulfillment of these verses occurs at the Parousia, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth (Rv 21:1), when what is mortal puts on immortality (1 Cor 15:53–54). But the fulfillment (also) occurred *proleptically*—ahead of time, in history—in the ministry of Jesus Christ. As our Lord fed the 5000—when people came without money to be fed (cf. Is 55:1)—it was in a desert place (Mk 6:35), but one in which young green grass was blooming (Mk 6:39)! At this miraculous feeding, the full restoration of God’s creation was anticipated, even as it was in Jesus’s miraculous healings (e.g., Mk 7:31–37) and in his calming of unruly nature (e.g., Mk 4:39–41).

Sermon: “From Promise to Triumph”

Introduction: It is not hard to believe and to carry on when things are going well, but when God’s saving action is not apparent and completely obvious, things get much more difficult.

1. Carrying on with difficulty was the case with Israel, both before the exile to Babylon and during that exile. Things were, indeed, bleak. But God promised through Isaiah an eternal covenant and eternal benefits. It would not

ever be apparent how everything would work out, but Israel could trust God's word of promise to bring them final triumph on the basis of an everlasting covenant founded upon the work of his Servant.

2. The people of Jesus's time were in an almost identical situation—under the oppression of Rome, with no apparent victory of God's gracious reign and rule. But, in Jesus's actions in his ministry, God's word of promise through Isaiah came to fruition in a preliminary way, and the word of promise of a new covenant (Is 55:3) came to fulfillment in an even more complete way through the new covenant in his blood (Lk 22:20). And all of this as a token of the full redemption of this people at his second coming.
3. These verses speak to us today. We stand in relation to our Lord's second coming as the people of Israel did to Yahweh's promise of return from exile and to the promise of a new covenant in the Servant, Jesus. Just like them we wait; we wait for the completion of the promise in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, what was true for them is true for us, as well: God's word is powerful, creative, and trustworthy. It can never fail. You can trust it with your life. We will surely come into possession of the promised inheritance of a new creation, as the sons and daughters of the King.

James W. Voelz

Proper 11 • Isaiah 44:6–8 • July 20, 2014

Isaiah 44:6–8 is nestled within a larger discourse of the chapter that glorifies the God of creation over the idols made by man, while reminding the reader that the Creator God is also a redeeming God. Below are three approaches to preaching this text. Each one utilizes the text and the surrounding context to explore different facets of the overarching theme.

Approach 1: The God Who Formed Us

This approach focuses on the repetition of the concept of formation. Verses 2 and 21 bracket the sermon by focusing on God's formative work, while verse 9 shows the folly of the human formation of idols. The nonsensical nature of attempting to form a god from elements in creation is demonstrated by the work of the Creator God. Verses 2 and 21 emphasize both the mystery of God's formative work within the mother's womb and his continued formation of his people as servants. The stark contrast of verses 9–20 provides an excellent opportunity to proclaim the law of human folly as well as the powerlessness of the gods made by human hands. The final section of the sermon presents a powerful reminder that the Creator God is also a redeeming God who redeemed his people first through the shepherd Cyrus and ultimately through Jesus Christ.

- I. God Formed Us (44:1–2)
- II. We Form Gods (44:9–20)
- III. God is Forming Us (44:21–28)

Approach 2: Do Not Fear

This approach focuses on Isaiah 44:1–8. The central message of this text is that Israel need not fear for they are the chosen servants of God and will be his witnesses. The admonition to not fear is found within two major sections. The first section (44:1–5) focuses on the confidence that Israel can possess as God’s chosen people and the blessings he gives. The second section (44:6–8) places Israel’s confidence in the nature and character of God for whom there is no equal. Extending the concept of not being fearful from Israel to the church through Christ can be done in a variety of ways through the use of texts such as Luke 12:32, John 14: 27, and Revelation 1:17. The choice of texts allows for changes in nuance depending on the context and community.

- I. Do Not Fear—I Have Chosen You (44:1–5)
 - A. Yahweh’s words to Israel
 - B. Christ’s words to us
- II. Do Not Fear—I Am the First and the Last (44:6–8)
 - A. Yahweh’s words to Israel
 - B. Christ’s words to us

Approach 3: Witnesses of the Living God

This approach focuses on the comparison of the God of creation who formed man with the gods formed by man from what God has created. The text Isaiah 44:6-28 is the focus. While there are a number of comparisons that can be made between the God of Israel and the gods made from wood and stone, one of the more interesting juxtapositions is found in the use of the word “witness.” In the first section (44:6–8) God proclaims that his redeemed people will serve as his witnesses to his identity and faithfulness. The witnesses found in the second section (44:9–24) however, are dramatically different from God’s redeemed witnesses found in the first section. The witnesses in the second section are the blind and ignorant idols made by men. Not only do the idols made by men fail in their role as gods, they also fail as witnesses to the humans who created them. The passage exposes how those who make idols place themselves in the position of a creating god, but the creatures they create are nothing more than elements of creation fashioned in their own image. Man is redeemed by the God who made him, not by the gods man makes. This section concludes with a call to remember the Creator God and return to him surrounded by the witness of the earth itself. In the final section of the sermon, we turn to the living God that is Christ and our call to bear witness to him as the fulfillment of God’s redemptive promise.

- I. Witnesses of the Living God (44:6–8)
- II. Gods of the Living Witnesses (44:9–24)
- III. Living Witnesses of the Living God (Acts 1:6–11)

Tony Cook

Proper 12 • Deuteronomy 7:6-9 • July 27, 2014

According to the context of this pericope, Israel was to have no fellowship or covenant with the heathen. She was to war against their blasphemous religion. In a similar way, Christians of the New Testament are to distance themselves from the world and its wicked, unbelieving ways (1 Cor 15:33; 2 Cor 6:14–18). In both cases, this spirit of separation and noncommunion should proceed not from pride and lovelessness, but from knowledge of God's love and faithfulness.

God's Faithfulness and Ours

- I. God, our faithful God, keeps his word and covenant in redemption and forgiveness.
 - A. This is seen in his dealings with his people Israel. He chose them for a holy historical destiny of testimony to him. The reason for this choosing was not a greatness in Israel, nor was it any claim to righteousness on Israel's part (Dt 9:4–5), but the cause was his love. The result was that he redeemed them (v. 8). Redeem (padah) connotes an image of purchasing freedom (e.g., Ex 13:13–14) with a ransom (pidyon, Ex 21:30). It is used to describe God's freeing of Israel and the individual believers in Israel—from Egypt, from the Babylonian captivity (Is 35:10), from iniquities (Ps 130:8), from death, its curse and darkness (Hos 13:14; Ps 49:7ff.), from the troubles of life (Ps 25:22; 26:11; 31:5). Through his covenant with the Israelites, he showed mercy and forgiveness to those who clung to him.
 - B. He is faithful also to us, who are redeemed through Christ from the curse of sin, the devil's kingdom, and death (1 Pt 1:18–21; Col 1:13–14; Rom 8:23). The cause is not in us, but in His love, with Christ's blood as the ransom. Some Christians have been redeemed from literal demon possession by his grace (e.g., Roberta Blankenship, *Escape from Witchcraft*); all trust in him that the wicked foe may have no power over them.
- II. God's faithfulness is guaranteed in his oath concerning his people.
 - A. He swore to Abraham to bless his seed and to bring blessing to the nations through his seed (v. 8). The oath is found in Genesis 22:16–18. This is the basis of his choosing of Israel.
 - B. That oath includes blessing for us. It was kept, and still is kept, ultimately in Christ's work and applies to all the believing children and heirs of Abraham, including Gentiles with faith (Heb 6:13–19; Gal 3:7ff.). Thus Jews and Gentiles who trust in Christ are the new Israel and may trust that the Lord is faithful never to leave nor forsake them.

- III. Israel is a holy nation, belonging to God, redeemed for a purpose.
- A. Old Testament Israel is consecrated to be his holy people, remembering his redemption (v. 6). Its holy purpose is priestly work (Ex 19:6), teaching his truth to the nations (Dt 4:5–8; Is 2:3), proclaiming his great faithfulness (Ps. 89). The apostles and other Jewish believers in Christ fulfilled this purpose. Paul sorrowed without ceasing that so many of his kinsmen did not (Rom 9:1ff).
 - B. All Christians are called to the holy purpose of faithfully serving and testifying to the Lord who has redeemed them. We are the new Israel, a holy “nation” to tell of his wonderful deeds to a world that still needs his marvelous light. But we cannot do it if we fall back into the darkness ourselves (1 Pt 2:9–12). Iuva, Iesul (Help, Jesus!)

Thomas Manteufel

Proper 13 • Isaiah 55:1–5 • August 3, 2014

In 1538, the Dance of Death made its way into the Bible.

In their printing of the Old Testament, the Treschel Brothers included *Life after the Fall*, a woodcut by Hans Holbein (see <http://www.dodedans.com/Eholbein.htm>). In his woodcut, Holbein pictured Adam and Eve both involved in postlapsarian labor. Adam is tilling the ground and Eve is nursing a child. Near Adam, however, one sees death, a skeleton tilling the field. Near Eve, death again is visible, an hourglass measuring the limits of our lives. Death is everywhere, hounding our efforts and measuring our days, so that we “labor for what does not satisfy” (Is 55:2).

In his woodcut, Holbein was actually creatively appropriating a much larger painting and a much larger tradition. In St. Mary’s church in Lübeck, there was a painting nearly 100 feet long, weaving itself along the walls of a small chapel. The painting filled the walls with life-sized figures . . . in a chain dance with death. Death was weaving itself in and out of the figures, calling to them to “Come here to the dance.” People old and young, rich and poor, from the pope and the emperor to the hermit and the peasant were invited by Death. “I call everybody to this dance.” Even an infant who cannot walk heard Death’s invitation and was invited to the dance. Gathering for worship, one was surrounded by the figures dancing with death. You never knew when Death might extend his invitation and take your hand.

Although it took so long for the Dance of Death to make its way into the Bible, God’s people have long heard death’s call. Isaiah gives voice to the question that has troubled all people ever since the fall: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?”

Why do we do that? Because that is all we are able to do. From the glossy magazine ads that litter our life to the billboards that hover in the sky, our world is filled

with merchants crying out to us: “Come and buy.” Why? To make the little bit of life that we have satisfying, because, in the end, nothing will last. All will decay. Death will whisper its invitation to “Come” and all our labor will be in vain.

In contrast to the Dance of Death, Isaiah gives voice to the Lord of Life. Like Death, the Lord’s call is to everyone (v. 1). No one is excluded. But unlike Death, the Lord’s call brings people life. The life the Lord offers is rich (“wine and milk” in v. 1 and “rich food” in v. 2) and free (“without money and without price” in v.1). It will answer the deepest needs of human experience, bringing eternal life to the soul (v. 3). Most surprisingly this call is not new. It is one that reaches deep into Israel’s past (based on God’s covenant love to David, v. 3) and one that reaches out to embrace the world’s future (as all nations come to this one the Lord glorifies, v. 5). Even “a nation that you do not know” and “a nation that did not know you” (v. 5) will join in the feast. In this text, Isaiah issues a call from the Lord of Life and his voice triumphs over the Dance of Death.

This call has not stayed in the promise of prophecy but taken on flesh in Jesus Christ. He came to dance our dance with death, died on a cross, and rose victorious never to die again. Suddenly, the church is surrounded with a chorus of witnesses, who invite the world to life. The apostle Paul heard this call and made it known to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch. There he proclaimed the certainty of all of God’s promises made known in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (Acts 13:34). The author of Hebrews gave voice to this call as he closed his letter with words of benediction (Heb 13:20).

From the voice of Wisdom calling out to all people to come to the house of the Lord (Prv 9:1-6) to the voice Jesus raised above the din and banter of the temple to invite all who are thirsty to come to him (Jn 7:37) to the voice of John, aged and exiled, closing out his vision of the end of all things with the simple cry of the church to “Come” (Rv 22:17), this cry of the Lord of Life is sounded. It is an eternal cry of salvation for all. It comes from the one who danced with death, died on a cross, and rose victorious never to die again. This is the cry that Jesus will raise on the last day. By the power of his life, he will raise all people from the dead and, by the power of his love, he will call all who believe in him to enter into the new creation.

Because of the fall, the Dance of Death made its way into the Scriptures. Because of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, the Lord of Life is making his way into our world. In 1538, we have a moment when the Dance of Death visually marked the pages of the Bible. Today, the question is, how is the Lord of Life reaching out from the Scriptures to make his mark upon our world? Where is his call? What does it sound like? How is God, through you, calling out to the peoples that do not know him and sharing with them this life that is rich and free and brings eternal life to the soul?

David Schmitt

BOOK REVIEWS

A LIGHTHEARTED BOOK OF COMMON ERRORS. By Don Hoeferkamp. Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 2011. 136 pages. Paper. \$12.99.

Who would have ever anticipated a book on grammar and word usage to be helpful and entertaining at the same time? Don Hoeferkamp's *A Lighthearted Book of Common Errors* is just such a book. As I read it, I laughed—and I learned. You will too.

In providing us this book, the Reverend Hoeferkamp has continued a welcome trend initiated recently by Lynne Truss's *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* and by Patricia T. O'Conner's *Woe Is I*, two books that have rescued us from the rigid pronouncements of stuffy preservers of rules and placed us into the hands of wordsmiths who recognize the potential of grammar, punctuation, correct spelling, and appropriate word usage to augment the vigor and vitality of the English language. Hoeferkamp, like Truss and O'Conner, is neither die-hard nor avant-garde, but, like Baby Bear's porridge, "just right."

Two factors account for the readability and effectiveness of *A Lighthearted Book of Common Errors*. The first factor the author is aware of. "Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down" are the opening words of his introduction. That sugar is the author's humor. For example:¹ his tongue-in-cheek definition of a semicolon as "what you have left if part of your colon is removed" (116). Helpful as well as humorous is the author's occasional practice of deliberately committing an error even as he simultaneously corrects it, thereby put-

ting literacy and illiteracy side by side to facilitate the learning process. (See the last paragraph on page 88.)

The second factor accounting for the book's appeal and impact is one that the author is not aware of: his humility. For example, when he argues that "Do you know?" is preferable to "Did you know?" he unobtrusively adds, "I myself am guilty of this habit, if 'guilty' is the right word" (15). (I reluctantly joined him in his humbling mea culpa when in Appendix 1 he discussed the correct pronunciation of "en route.")

Somewhat controversial, perhaps, is the author's fondness for punning. (I like it—thanks to Shakespeare—but not everyone may.) Puns pepper nearly every entry in the book. Hoeferkamp's wit sparkles and dazzles. How about this statement from the entry for "Lie/lay"? "To say something like 'I laid down' is to lay an egg. But I will lay you odds that laying down the law about using 'lie' and 'lay' correctly may get you laid into by laypersons who lie in wait in the secret lairs of their selfimposed layers of defense mechanisms" (51). (I wonder how long he lay awake at night composing that statement!)

To be sure, there is much more to good writing and speaking than correct usage, correct grammar, correct spelling, and correct punctuation. Creativity, profundity, organization, clarity, word choice, word arrangement, all are more important. But it does not follow from this that correctness is unimportant. Correctness is a prerequisite, a qualifier, for good writing and speaking. No one will consider a man in a tuxedo well dressed if his shoes are caked with mud. Who hasn't recoiled, for example,²

at the preacher who says, “Jesus died for you and I”? His theology is sound (thank God) and his assertion remains good news, but his atrocious grammar diminishes the quality of what otherwise may be a fabulous sermon as well as the authority of him who preaches it.

I have a handout for my homiletics students titled “In Defense of Literacy,” which I orally subtitle “A Theology of Language.” In this handout I maintain that God’s choice of language (words) to communicate his Word (Jesus) indicates the inseparableness of message from medium. God harnesses the unique power of his Word to the magic of human language. “In, with, and under” the words of gospel we write and speak, God’s Word is truly present. For the proclamation of his gospel God’s method is not monergistic (God without man). Nor is his method synergistic (God and man). Rather his method is transformative (God through man). It is, therefore, incumbent upon us who proclaim his gospel to master the medium of language in all its correctness and vitality, not with the false assumption that by that mastery we are helping God do his job but with the prayerful hope that through our language skills the word of God “as becometh it, may not be bound, but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ’s holy people.”

Don Hoeferkamp’s remarkable book can contribute to that end.

Francis C. Rossow

Endnotes

¹ Here I follow Pastor Hoeferkamp’s advice (40) to put the expression “for example” at the start of a sentence rather than inside it.

² Whoops!

MY BRIGHT ABYSS: Meditation of a Modern Believer. By Christian Wiman. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013. 182 pages. Hardcover. \$24.00.

Christian Wiman’s *My Bright Abyss* stands in a long line of spiritual writings that mix memoir with theology with a kind of deep spiritual insight. I would place him alongside some of the recent writers in that line, like Kathleen Norris or Henri Nouwen. I am confident enough to say that I think *My Bright Abyss* will become a classic in that line, even if Wiman never receives a readership as large.

Christian Wiman also stands among a cloud of poets whose poetries have grappled with faith. Such poets include Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, and W. H. Auden, and I suspect Wiman would not be ashamed to stand alongside contemporaries like Mary Karr, Franz Wright, and Scott Cairns. But perhaps the root of both these family trees (the spiritual and the poetic) is John Donne. Wiman’s poems (like those in *Every Riven Thing*) seem to reverberate with the same metaphysicality as Donne’s, and his spiritual writing grapples with the same profundities, often brought on, like Donne’s, by the body’s frailties and illness.

Last summer Wiman completed a decade of leading one of the country’s most prestigious literary journals, *Poetry*, to take up teaching (and presumably writing) at the Institute of Sacred Music at Yale University Divinity School. Part of me regrets that a person who takes religion seriously has left one of the mainstays of American literary culture. But, if we can expect more writing like *My Bright Abyss* to be the result, it is worth the sacrifice.

Wiman grew up in West Texas, within a stridently Pentecostal family and community. He even confesses to a prepubescent “experience” of being “filled with the Holy Spirit.” As we might expect, he lost that faith in college, in a second conversion to a “bookish atheism” that he embraced with a “convert’s fervor.” It is not until he is diagnosed with an incurable cancer shortly after getting married that he reawakens to spiritual impulses he can never quite shake. In short, he returns to faith. Or perhaps faith returns to him. He writes: “Faith is not some half-remembered country into which you come like a long-exiled king, dispensing the old wisdom, casting out the radical, insurrectionist aspects of yourself by which you’d been betrayed. No. Life is not an error, even when it is” (7). *My Bright Abyss* is the result, which takes as its starting point an earlier essay, “Love Bade Me Welcome,” which went viral online.

Wiman’s poetic excursions do not always fit neatly into the cognitive-propositional categories of a highly structured systematic theology. Also it occasionally falls into a kind of mid-twentieth-century existentialism that I thought we had finally left behind. Nevertheless, more frequently, we come across passages that shimmer with a luminosity that we could just as easily find in Augustine:

Lord, I can approach you only by means of my consciousness, but consciousness can only approach you as an object, which you are not. I have no hope of experiencing you as I experience the world—directly,

immediately—yet I want nothing more. Indeed, so great is my hunger for you—or is this evidence of your hunger for me?—that I seem to see you in the black flower mourners make beside a grave I do not know, in the embers’ innards like a shining hive, in the bare abundance of a winter tree whose every limb is lit and fraught with snow. Lord, Lord, how bright the abyss inside that “seem.” (13)

Of course, the book does not often reach for such Augustinian self-consciousness. But the passage displays Wiman’s gift: how he is able to intertwine deeply theological reflection with a keen eye for an image (“embers’ innards like a shining hive”), culminating in the auditory double entendre he makes of the most inconspicuous word of the whole paragraph (“seem” as both suggestive linking verb and the seam of a garment). This is a poet’s gift.

My Bright Abyss is structured as a patchwork quilt of fragmented reflections that, even though they do not flow into a seamless autobiographical story, gather together with narrative force. The *pensées* build upon each other. Indeed, the form is reminiscent of Pascal’s *Pensées* or Dag Hammarskjöld’s *Markings*. The sign to me that I will return again and again to this book is the way in which I have found myself reading it. I have found it nearly impossible to read more than two or three, perhaps four, pages at a time before I have to stop and take

some time for a deep breath of silence. In the silence, Wiman's words provoke my own reflection upon a faith that seeks understanding, this faith that comes only as a gift of God in a Word made flesh. In the silence, I am brought closer again to the One who would bid us "to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12).

Travis Scholl

READING ZECHARIAH WITH ZECHARIAH 1:1–6 AS THE INTRODUCTION TO THE

ENTIRE BOOK. Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology, 59.

By Heiko Wenzel. Leuven: Peeters, 2011. 340 pages. Paper. \$61.00.

For at least three reasons critics divide the book of Zechariah between chapters 1–8 and 9–14: (1) the sections exhibit different literary styles, (2) Zechariah's name does not appear in the book's last six chapters, and (3) there is a heightened apocalyptic style in Zechariah 9–14. Heiko Wenzel, in his 2006 Wheaton Graduate School Ph.D. dissertation, argues against splitting the book into two parts. His thesis is that Zechariah 1:1–6 is more than an introduction to the prophet's eight night visions. Rather, these verses provide an interpretive framework for the entire book; the warning of Zechariah 1:3–4 is sounded again and again throughout all fourteen chapters.

Wenzel's argument is largely based upon the reading strategies of Michael Bakhtin. For instance, Bakhtin urges us to see books as unified coherent pieces of art. We are not to separate the part from the whole. Textual tensions need

not signal multiple authors; rather they facilitate interpretation and understanding. Therefore, to interpret Zechariah 1–8 and 9–14 separately is tantamount to interpreting a different work than the book of Zechariah. It is a faulty exegesis to assume that there is no traceable argument that runs throughout the book. Wenzel instead argues that Zechariah presents us with a coherent narrative.

Bakhtin also assumes that a dialogue is going on between textual producers and those who receive them. Defining the receptor community, therefore, greatly assists the interpretive process. For the book of Zechariah, then, it is best to assume that the prophet's focus is upon how those in Persian Yehud in the late sixth century respond to God's word. Zechariah frequently uses the messenger formula (e.g., Zec 1:3, 4, 14; 3:7; 7:9; 8:23; 11:4) and announces that he has been sent to the people (Zec 2:13, 15 [EN 2:9, 11]; 4:9; 6:15). Standing in line with other ancient Near Eastern messengers, the prophet's role was to facilitate dialogue between Yahweh and his people as though they were standing face to face.

Armed with these two reading strategies from Bakhtin, Wenzel's chief text is Zechariah 1:4. When the prophet challenges his audience in this verse to be different from their forefathers, whose sins brought the Babylonian catastrophe, he implies that they are in grave danger and may end up like their ancestors. To be sure, the surviving post-exilic remnant heeded Haggai's preaching (Hg 1:1–11) and began to rebuild the temple (Hg 1:14). Yet the book of Haggai describes the community's discouragement (Hg 2:3–4), their unclean state (Hg 2:14) and the fact that they did not turn to Yahweh

(Hg 2:17) though this was the prophet's repeated command (Hg 1:5, 7; 2:15, 18). The outward transformation of the temple did not match an inward change in their hearts. This is why Zechariah's preaching, which overlaps Haggai's by a month, issues such a stern warning in Zechariah 1:4.

It may appear as though Zechariah's ministry was a complete success. He preached. The temple was rebuilt. Everyone was thankful. And they all lived happily ever after. But this is not a correct reading of the book. Hypocritical fasting (*Zec* 7:1–3), idolatry (*Zec* 10:2; 13:2), and a lack of godly leadership (*Zec* 11:3–17) indicate that there would be another exile. The prophet describes this in Zechariah 14:1–2. However, Yahweh's final word to his faithful remnant is grace and mercy (*Zec* 14:20–21).

Judgment is promised in Zechariah because the book's theology is based, in large part, upon the Sinaitic covenant. The rhetorical questions in Zechariah 1:5–6 refer to Deuteronomy 28:15, 45 and announce that covenant curses overtook the community's ancestors. This reference to texts in Deuteronomy indicates the validity of Deuteronomy 5:3; "*Not only with your ancestors did Yahweh cut this covenant; but also with us, we, these ones here today, all of us alive.*" The Sinaitic covenant is therefore in play with each successive generation of Israelites. And this includes the post-exilic generation living in Persian Yehud. Jeremiah's new covenant (*Jer* 31:31) has not yet been fulfilled. The Babylonian destruction of the temple was not the end of the covenant Yahweh made with his people at Sinai. It was rather the covenant's execution. The post-exilic community of

Yehud was faced with a similar situation that confronted their ancestors. Shall they worship and serve the God who lovingly rescued them from their enemies or blend in with the surrounding nations and bow down to their gods?

Wenzel is largely successful in pointing out that Zechariah's audience is different from their forefathers only in that they listened to prophetic preaching and resumed rebuilding the temple. The more fundamental change of their hearts did not happen. As a result, the prophet promises that divine wrath will fall again, only to be followed with complete restoration (*Zec* 13:7–14:21).

Sometimes Wenzel makes connections in Zechariah with earlier texts that appear dubious and occasionally his interpretive comments are forced. But these minor weaknesses do not detract from his trenchant defense for the unity of Zechariah as well as his numerous interpretive insights. Those who preach and teach from this, the longest of the Minor Prophets, will find Wenzel's study to be invaluable.

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ZECHARIAH 9–14. International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament. By Paul L. Redditt. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012. 164 pages. Hardcover. \$81.00.

Paul Redditt has spent most of his academic career publishing monographs and articles on the book of Zechariah and so his commentary on the book's last six chapters exhibits seasoned reflections and numerous insights on a very difficult text. Following the goal of the

International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament, Redditt brings diachronic and synchronic methods into closer discussion with each other. On each section of Zechariah 9–14 he offers a translation with notes, a synchronic and diachronic analysis, and then concludes by integrating both methods in what he calls a “concluding integrative summary.”

Redditt believes that Zechariah 9 was composed during the hopeful days of late sixth-century Persian Yehud while Zerubbabel or his Davidic successor lived in Jerusalem. Zechariah 10 possibly arose in the early part of the fifth-century while people still believed that Israel and Judah would reunite. After these hopes failed the darker and more strident chapters 11–14 were added, perhaps sometime during the latter part of the fifth century. Unfortunately, the author does not embrace the idea that the hope for a new king emerges after 9:9–10 and so he does not interpret 10:2, 4; 11:13; 12:10; 13:7 as messianic promises. The Davidic hope died and in its place the author/redactor promotes a divine theocracy (14:9, 17). Redditt does not believe that Zechariah 9–14 exhibits apocalyptic eschatology (as this term is generally understood) and his position on the Book of the Twelve is that it is not “... a collection of the sayings of twelve individual prophets, but is a composite work that *over time shows more and more internal dialogue among collections*” (21).

Redditt’s keen synchronic analysis is on display when he notes that in Zechariah 9 Yahweh is the chief actor as well as the main speaker. Zechariah 9:1–6a and 14–17 describe what Yahweh will do in the future. In these parts Yahweh speaks in the third person. In

the middle section, 9:6b–13, Yahweh speaks in the first person. Redditt then suggests a chiasmic structure that accents the main theme of the chapter—God’s re-establishment of his kingdom.

- 9:1–6a Yahweh’s restoration of his kingdom
- 9:6b–8 Yahweh speaks of his redemptive plan
- 9:9–10 Yahweh presents Zion’s King
- 9:11–13 Yahweh speaks of his redemptive plan
- 9:14–17 Yahweh guards his restored kingdom

Redditt pays close attention to earlier texts, believing that Zechariah 9–14 alludes to and echoes previous passages more than any other section of the OT. For instance, he points out that 9:11–17 presents an assorted array of earlier themes like imprisonment, warfare, theophany, and miraculous fertility. The movement is from ultimate despair in a waterless pit (9:11) to absolute joy in God’s provision of grain and new wine (9:17). This not only depicts Israel’s sojourn in Egypt and subsequent deliverance but also Judah’s exile in Babylon and the people’s rescue by “Yhwh of armies” (9:15). Another link to the exodus comes in 9:14 which envisions God’s march from Sinai to Zion. Since he led his people once, he will lead them again.

Throughout his commentary Redditt displays an astute awareness of how units are linked together. For example, in his comments on 11:4 he observes that the falling trees in 11:1–3 prepare readers for the fallen hope that the north and south will be reunited as envisioned in, e.g., 9:12 and 10:6–12. Moreover, the text’s mockery of the shepherds (11:1–3) paves the way for the prophetic sign-act involving shepherds (11:4–16) and judgment against the worthless shepherd (11:17).

One more example of Redditt's synchronic analysis will suffice. He notes that 12:1–13:9 goes full circle. Promises for divine protection begin the unit (12:1–9) and are followed by thoroughgoing repentance and purification (12:10–13:9a). But these chapters end with a description of reconciliation between God and his people (13:9b). The journey is racked with pain and suffering but ends with gladness and joy. Chapter 14 covers much of the same territory though it concludes with a loftier destination.

Who are the uncompassionate shepherds in chapter 11? Redditt thinks that they represent Yehud's religious leaders—possibly Levites and priests—in the fifth century who took orders from governors under Persian influence and then enacted their policies. The author maintains that the text “may well have been condemning the priests at the temple for

their collusion with the actual overlords, the Persians. Such a condemnation might well need to be made quietly, discreetly, even ambiguously” (84). And who are the merchants in Zechariah 11? Redditt believes that they are the Persian officials who were overseers of the shepherds, i.e., the Judean temple personnel.

In bringing together a lifetime of work in Zechariah 9–14, Redditt's commentary sheds significant light upon a very obscure section of the Bible. His connections to the New Testament are few and far between and his fascination with diachronic issues often obscures the organic unity of these chapters. That said, Redditt's commentary is a welcome contribution, not only in Zechariah studies, but also for those who continue to research and write on the Book of the Twelve.

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