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When God Remembers

Gift of Remembrance:
Paul and the Lord's Supper in Corinth

To Forgive Is Not to Forget

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EDITORIALS

Memory and the Life of Faith

This issue of *Concordia Journal* is devoted to Concordia Seminary's most recent Theological Symposium, held in September 2015. The Symposium's theme was "In Remembrance of Me: Memory and the Life of Faith." It featured presentations on memory from the viewpoints of neuroscience, psychology, sociology, theology, and pastoral ministry. Three of them have been adapted as articles for this issue, and other presentations will be available for listening and viewing on ConcordiaTheology.org.

These presentations covered many topics and issues, and raised many questions and thoughts. The essence, however, can be captured in one sentence: "Memory is more than we think." The essential follow-up question is, "More what?"

First, memory is more complicated than we think. Most people know that the term "memory" covers more than one function or capacity, like "short-term memory" and "long-term memory." But recent studies in neuroscience and psychology show us that what we usually call "memory," which comes to us automatically and seamlessly, covers a number of functions and capacities, and that they are linked to various parts of our brains. Memory is more complicated than we think.

Second, memory is also more involved than we think. We naturally relate "memory" to ourselves—our memories, our memory—and for this reason to other individual selves. But memory is also communal. Groups also have memories. They acquire them. They relate them. They live with them in mind. Any family shows this, but so do congregations and other communities. In fact, any group that is aware of itself as a group has to have memory. Memory at the communal level always matters—and in this way, memory is more involved than we think.

Third, memory is more elusive than we think. I mean this in two senses. In the first sense, we usually think of memories as fixed. Memory in computers and smart-phones is called "memory" because it is supposed to be and act like our own memory. But our memories are never fixed. Every act of remembering not only brings things to mind but also forms them again. For this reason, memory is more dynamic and less reliable than in our experience with memory. In the second sense, memories and the capacity for memory are fragile. Certainly, memory and memories are durable, but they aren't permanent. Injury, disease, and simply aging erode not only memories but memory itself. Concussions and Alzheimer's are only two of the most prominent reasons for these losses, because memory is more elusive than we think.

Taken together, then, memory is probably more important than we think. For Christians, the theme of memory and the life of faith is at least important enough for Christians to think carefully about. The Symposium, including the articles here, helped us to do this. It is hoped that you will find them helpful and stimulating.

But since memory is so basic—basic to any sense of personal identity, basic to any means of locating ourselves, basic to any notion of having community—it is worth recognizing and working through some of the large questions that the topic of memory poses. I'll leave you with one set of these questions. Medicine, psychology, and neuro-

science all regard memory in particular and mind in general as matters of our brains. What does this mean for notions of “soul” and “spirit” in particular, and the “human creature” in general? Concepts like “physical,” “spiritual,” “material,” and “mental” are confusing today, if not often confused. Most Christians accept without question that memory and mind are physical and material. So they are concerned about brain injuries from concussions and strokes, about the effects of drug and alcohol abuse, about the onset of Alzheimer’s and the general decline that comes with aging, just as they are interested in the benefits of exercise, meditation, surroundings, and social relationships. But many of these Christians also believe that they have, if not really are, souls, that is, spiritual, not physical, beings, consisting especially of memory and mind. How can they think both? What do they think they are? What does this mean for the preaching, teaching, and pastoral care of our churches?

Joel P. Okamoto

Waldemar and Mary Griesbach Professor of Systematic Theology

The Recruitment Admission

This is curious. Lately I have been hearing about seminarians listening to lectures by baby boomers about the millennial generation. What the boomers are saying, students report, doesn't square with the way they as Christian millennials think. "We're sitting right there. Why don't they ask us?"

I think about that because seminary recruitment is a pressing issue. Enrollments are declining in a majority of seminaries throughout the United States. At the same time vacancies in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are steadily increasing. There are many reasons for what's going on, and many reasons are part and parcel of the complexity of post-churched America. But hand-wringing is not my concern now. As a friend says, "Complaining is not a strategy."

Recruitment is an admission that our time is passing. Leadership in our congregations and the wider church was once passed to us. Like it or not, recruitment of future pastors is an admission that we must pass leadership on to the next generation. "One generation shall commend your mighty works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts" (Ps 145:4). I wonder if we older church leaders truly trust that the Lord of the church is raising up new leaders for a different time in the history of the church.

In my years of dealing with seminarians, I have learned that they are significantly different from my generation. For example, they form community in ways different from previous generations. Our campus was designed for eight hundred unmarried students who would dorm together, study together, take meals together family style, play sports together, and live regimented lives together. There was a nurse, a barber, a student bank, student print publications, but no wives, no cars, no telephones. That kind of community has given way as society has changed. Today's seminary is not a closed system and community is more complex. Married students and families are one community. Single students in Founders Hall are another. Distance learning cohorts form their own tight communities. These subsets of community interact with their specific group and with other subsets of community through texting and Facebook as much as in person. As these various groups come together for campus activities, like classes, chapel, and sports, an overall seminary community forms. Community is no longer the result of the "system" or the geography of campus; today it's the vocational coming together of students and their families in Christ for the sake of his mission.

The new generation of pastoral leaders are keen to worship but are not interested in debating worship styles, as older people often do. They come from congregations of different worship styles. Some grew up using *Lutheran Worship* or the *Lutheran Service Book*, but others come with absolutely no experience with hymnals (as everything is printed or projected on a screen). On campus, they come together in chapel and experience the range of Lutheran worship. They graduate with little interest in the "worship wars" of older generations but with a passion for worship that focuses the congregation on God's ministry to his people and through witness and service to their communities.

Today's seminarians want to be part of a thriving Lutheran Church—Missouri

Synod but their greater passion is to be faithful to the ministry and mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. They have positive views of the LCMS from their home congregations, through field education, vicarage and intensive experiences with LCMS congregations, and the study of LCMS history, but they do not equate the LCMS with the holy, Christian church. While they want to be positive contributors to our denomination, they are discerning. Jesus and his mission are more important to them than manifestations of the institutional church.

Another difference is that the rising generation of church leaders has been conditioned by different experiences than previous generations. My generation was impacted by the Kennedy and King assassinations, the Vietnam War, protests of the 60s, and, in our denomination, by Seminex. That's history to our students. In fact, many of them were only seven-years-old on 9-11. Their context of culture, family stability, personal and national safety, interpersonal trust, and economic outlook is different. Whereas my generation grew up in an America where the church had a privileged position and citizens had a general knowledge of the Bible, today's seminarians are more at home in this time when the institutional church is struggling and American culture no longer favors the church. I don't see seminarians wringing their hands about the sad state of society and the institutional church; older people do that. Our future pastors are optimistic about witnessing in their generation. Maybe a bit naïve—weren't we all—but thank God for the mission Spirit that lives in them!

All of which is to say, God is raising up this new generation of seminarians for this new time in the history of the church. He is the Lord of his church, not our generation or, for that matter, the next generation. Every generation of believers remains sinners subject to the subtle attacks of Satan. And in every generation the Spirit of God moves the baptized to faithful witness to the Lord Jesus. Older church members and leaders need to walk a fine line between imposing our views upon them, which they will resist and sometimes resent, and sharing the learning and any wisdom we have gained over the years of our heavenward way. The challenge for the established generation is to be quicker to hear, slower to speak, and to trust that the Lord of the church is raising up his witnesses for the next generation. Recruitment is not just an admission that the baton of leadership must be passed. Recruitment is an invitation to give up the notion that we can control the future of the church and instead entrust the future to the Lord of the church and the leaders he is now raising up. After all, these young believers have the Spirit as much as we do.

Many years ago, our daughter Elizabeth moved to Washington, DC to begin her career. One day on the phone she told me about a problem she was dealing with. Naturally I proceeded to tell her how I thought she should handle it. She paused a moment and then said, "Dad, do you want to live my life for me?" My turn to pause. I answered, "Yes, I do, but I know I can't." We would like to live the lives of young people, but we can't. Let's recruit tomorrow's pastors and trust the Spirit of the Lord Jesus to bless his church when we've gone to heaven. "Each age its solemn task may claim but once; make each one nobler, stronger than the last" (*LSB* 682, v. 1).

Dale A. Meyer
President

Encomium for Louis Brighton: A Letter to Dad

I was born in 1955 to very loving parents. When I was eight months old my father passed away due to a doctor's mistake. In 1957 my uncle (dad's brother) married my mom and raised me as his own son. I migrated to the United States in 1972 at age sixteen to further my studies and remove myself from the Israel/Palestine conflict (I am an Arab Palestinian). In leaving my home at a young age, I missed the close relationship between father and son. Therefore Louis Brighton became my spiritual father. A longtime professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Dr. Brighton passed away on November 13, 2015.

+ + +

To a Reverend Doctor of the church, my spiritual father, Louis Brighton:

I write these words in loving gratitude to my heavenly Father, for the way you (Professor Brighton) touched my life, shaped my ministry, and caused me to hunger and thirst for the Word of the Living God. Tears of joy roll down my cheeks as I reflect on the many hours I was privileged to spend at your feet as you demonstrated to me and countless others the role of the under-shepherd of God's flock.

We met in the summer of 1989 while I was enrolled in the Greek summer program in preparation to the office of the Holy Ministry. In the early days I would see you on campus. You always had a big smile on your face and a kind word on your lips filled with love and adoration of your Lord and Savior, Jesus. When you would see me you would always say, "How is your lovely bride, Jean, and how are your wonderful boys, Tony and David. How are your studies going?" In this you became such a dear friend and mentor to me and ultimately played the role of my pastor away from my home congregation in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

As the days progressed and we were to start the seminary education, many of your former students would say, "Make sure you register for Dr. Brighton's classes. You will learn much and you will see what a true pastor is."

I listened to the upper classmen's advice and took as many classes as I could from you. During those formative years, I learned so much from you, dad, and wanted to be like you as a pastor. When I returned home from classes, I would tell my wife: "If I could only be half of what dad was I would have served my Lord faithfully and well."

Dad, you cared enough for my soul, my future ministry as an under-shepherd of God's flock that you would teach me in humble ways what it means to be a pastor. I was moved by your caring and pastoral attitude and would find any excuse to be with you in your office and get to know you so much better.

In the classroom, dad, you reminded me again and again that what was *caught* was as important as what was *taught*—and what was taught was extremely important. For thousands of pastors you modeled the Lord Jesus, taught about Christ's great love for us, and opened up the Scriptures in a true evangelical fashion. Students left your

class feeling as though they had just taken a walk on the road to Emmaus. Beginning with Moses and all the prophets you explained to students the things concerning the Christ of the Scriptures. In the breaking of the bread, you helped us to see more vividly the crucified and risen Savior and to dwell under his wings of mercy. Your exposition of God's word set our hearts aflame with joy, high heavenly hope, and love.

You made me hunger for the word of God and drove me to dig deeper into the original languages so that I might see the face of Christ more clearly and concretely. I remember how you would often say to me, "Son, see Christ and his love everywhere in Scriptures. For the whole Bible from front to finish is all about Jesus!"

As I said above, dad, you shaped and formed my ministry to be the husband, father, son, but above all, the pastor that I am today in the service of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I will never forget the stories you told that brought the lessons to life! In one of my classes on the Book of Revelation, you shared with the class a story that took place during World War II that moved you to be faithful even to death.

While we were discussing chapter 2 in general and verse 10 in particular, I remember you leaning on the podium, with your finger pointing at us, and saying: "Men you need to hear me and hear me well." "Don't ever deny your Christ no matter what! Always share the love of Jesus, the face of Jesus, and the compassion of Jesus. Never stop preaching Christ's good news." As the story progressed, your face became red, your voice had a higher pitch, and your eyes focused on each one of us.

During the war, the Nazis had made their way into Poland. They had gotten hold of a Christian professor and brought him out to the public square. At gunpoint, they asked this professor to deny his Christ or face death. He wasn't willing to deny his Lord and Savior. Then they brought his wife and children out to the square. Again, they asked him to deny his Lord and again he declined. Then one of the soldiers brought the wife closer to him, pointed the gun at her temple, and said, "Deny your Lord or we will kill your wife." Before he could speak, the wife started speaking, "Please don't deny our Lord, he died for us. His promise was this, 'even if you die, you shall live.' I will see you again even if they kill me." The professor looked at his wife and the soldier and said once more, "I can't deny my Lord and Savior." With that the soldier pulled the trigger and the wife collapsed in her own pool of blood. Dad moved towards the window and looked out (into a far away land); the silence in that classroom was deafening!

Dad, you powerfully continued the story saying this scene occurred three more times as his three children were shot and collapsed in their own pools of blood right next to their mother. Dad began to choke up and tears began to roll down his cheeks and looked at us once more, and said: "Never, never ever deny your Lord and Savior!" This was the first time I saw you cry, dad.

Dad, this story has been etched in my memory. My ministry has by the power of the Holy Spirit continued to be focused on being the humble servant of the most High God—imitating in word and deed your love, dad, for the gospel and the Lord you so faithfully loved, served, and taught me and others about.

To you dad, my spiritual father, thank you for your love of God's word and his

gospel. Thank you for the many gifts you have given me over the years, your own personal Bible signed in Greek to your spiritual son and your commentary on the Book of Revelation autographed just for me to be faithful and to never be ashamed of my Christ. Thank you for teaching me what it means to be a servant for the sake of the kingdom. Thank you for your role in shaping me to be the pastor that I am today. Thank you for encouraging me to remain in the ministry when Satan unleashed his venom on me and thank you for being you, dad!

I love you with all of my heart and look forward to seeing you again soon with the risen and exalted Christ—he who was slain but now lives forever.

I pray that the words of John—“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rv 2:10)—will help us to remain faithful until the end of life, when we will see the Lamb around his throne.

In Christ’s love and in his service,
Your spiritual son, Nabil Nour, a foot washer (Phil 1:6)

Nabil Nour is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Hartford, South Dakota, and serves as the fifth vice president of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. This letter originally appeared on ConcordiaTheology.org.

ARTICLES

Is God forgetful? Does he experience periods of amnesia? Actually, the Bible speaks often of God *remembering*. The Hebrew verb “to remember” (*zakar*) occurs 222 times in the Old Testament and one-third of those instances speak of God remembering. It is common biblical language. To foster theological and practical reflection, what follows is a summary of how the Scriptures use this language.

The Word “To Remember”

So what does it mean that God remembers? In the Bible, the verb “to remember” does not simply mean to recall an intellectual fact, such as “I remember the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides” (or something like that). It is not mere recall of a fact. “To remember” means to bring to mind something or someone from the past and then to respond with an action. Remembering always leads to an action in response. Consider this narrative from Genesis 40.

Joseph is in prison in Egypt. The chief baker and the chief cupbearer were imprisoned with Joseph, and Joseph interprets their dreams. The chief cupbearer relates his dream to Joseph. Joseph interprets it: “In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office and you shall place Pharaoh’s cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer.” (Joseph interprets the chief baker’s dream as well: “Yes, Pharaoh will lift up your head as well, only he’ll lift it up from you and you will be hanged on a tree.” You have to enjoy the wordplay that occurs so often in the Old Testament.)

Back to the chief cupbearer: Then Joseph said to him, “Only *remember me*, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house.” The narrative goes on to report that the Pharaoh restored the chief cupbearer to his position. “Yet the chief cupbearer *did not remember Joseph, but forgot him*.” In this narrative, to remember Joseph means to recall how Joseph helped the cupbearer in the past and to mention him to Pharaoh so as to release him from prison. Alas, the chief cupbearer forgets Joseph. *Forget* is the antonym of *remember*.

God Locates Himself in Time and Remembers and Responds with Action

As mentioned, the Old Testament often speaks of God remembering. Here is a famous example, recorded in Exodus.

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During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and *God remembered his covenant* with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew. (Ex 2:23–25)

God gave his covenant promises to the Patriarchs over four hundred years earlier. Now, God heard Israel's groaning and cry for help and "remembered his covenant" with them. Note all the personal verbs: God heard, remembered, saw, and knew. God is a personal God, not an impersonal force.

In these texts, we must not think of God as the timeless One who transcends time, for whom every moment is an eternal now. These texts depict him locating himself at a certain moment in time. In these texts, God is with his time-bound people as an "incarnational God." From that position, the past is a past that he "remembers," and the future is a future concerning which he makes promises. I would not be surprised if this God of Israel one day would become man and live within space and time on planet earth. Wait a minute; he in fact did just that. We rejoice in the incarnational language used throughout the Old Testament that anticipates the big incarnation in the fullness of time with Jesus.

Moreover, this text illustrates that when God remembers, he responds with action. "The essence of God's remembering lies in his acting toward someone because of a previous commitment."¹ He remembered his covenant promises and was now going to fulfill them by bringing Israel out of slavery in Egypt. The action that is implied depends on the nature of the direct object. What is it that God is remembering? When he remembers his promises, he begins to fulfill them.

God Remembers or Does Not Remember Sins

Consider another direct object. In Hosea God says:

When I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed, and the evil deeds of Samaria, for they deal falsely; the thief breaks in, and the bandits raid outside. But they do not consider that *I remember all their evil*. Now their deeds surround them; they are before my face. (Hos 7:1–2)

Here God remembers Israel's evil deeds. It does not simply refer to God's omniscience. The statement functions as a threat, implying that now Yahweh will respond by punishing them for their sins. And in fact he did just that in 722 BC by sending northern Israel into exile under the Assyrians. One of the great values of the Old Testament is that theology typically takes place in a visible and tangible way within human history. In this particular case, we see what happens when God remembers human sin and iniquity. It results in the punishment of exile.

In contrast, some texts speak of God determining not to remember human sins. A classic example is God's promise of a new covenant in Jeremiah: "I will forgive their iniquity, and *I will remember their sin no more*" (31:34). In the new covenant, God will

no longer hold their iniquity against them; he will no longer accuse and condemn sinners. In short, God remembering sin is bad news; God determining not to remember sin is good news.

In general regarding the pertinent Old Testament texts, that God remembers or does not remember does not refer to his omniscience. It is an act of God's will. According to Jeremiah 31, God will intentionally determine not to remember their sin. Moreover, the consequences of God remembering will be either good or bad depending on what God is remembering. One must look at the direct objects.

God Remembers His Covenant and Promises

Well, what are the different kinds of direct objects? What does God remember? Over fifteen times God remembers his "covenant" and his "promises." A famous example occurs in the flood narrative. God says to Noah and his sons:

When I bring clouds over the earth and the [rain] bow is seen in the clouds, *I will remember my covenant* that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh . . . When the [rain] bow is in the clouds, *I will see it and remember* the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. (Gn 9:14–16)

This text does not reflect God's omniscience. Rather, it expresses God's will to bring to mind his ancient promise and carry it out. In this case, the rainbow is "the sign of the covenant." The rainbow not only reassures us human creatures of God's promise, it also influences God. The Creator sees the rainbow and remembers his promise not to destroy the earth with a universal flood.

God remembers his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Exodus, for example, Moses intercedes for Israel, who had just broken the covenant through their idolatry of the golden calf. Moses prays to Yahweh:

Turn from your burning anger and repent from this disaster against your people. *Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel*, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, "I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever." (Ex 32:12–13)

Frequently the language of God remembering appears in the context of prayer. Here Moses prays to God to remember his ancient promises and to keep them by not annihilating Israel on the spot but by multiplying them and leading them to the promised land.

Psalm 132 is David's prayer that God would remember the oath he swore to David concerning both the Davidic line and Zion. Nehemiah holds up another promise for God to remember.

Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying . . . "if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your dispersed be under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and

bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there”
. . . give success to your servant today, and grant him [Nehemiah] mercy
in the sight of this man [King Artaxerxes]. (Neh 1:8–11)

Nehemiah desires permission from King Artaxerxes to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. So he prays that God remember what he spoke through the words of Moses, namely, that when rebellious Israel is dispersed into exile and then repents, God will bring them to Jerusalem.² God can be trusted to remember what he spoke in the past, for he is a faithful God. “For Yahweh your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you *or forget* the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them” (Dt 4:30–31).

God Remembers People

About 40 percent of these texts speak of God remembering people. Sometimes being remembered by God involves specific, concrete blessings. For example, regarding Jacob’s wife Rachel who was barren, Genesis records: “Then God *remembered Rachel*, and God listened to her and opened her womb” (30:22). As a result, she gave birth to Joseph.

But usually the context indicates a bigger theme. God remembers the patriarchs and his promises to them. He remembers Israel. For example, he says through Jeremiah: “Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, *I do remember him still*. Therefore my heart [in Hebrew “my bowels”] yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, declares Yahweh” (Jer 31:20).

Note that when God remembers people, it is usually good news. He remembers his love and commitment for them. The alternative is that God does not remember the damned. It is as if they never existed.

I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength, like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom *you remember no more*, for they are cut off from your hand. (Ps 88: 4–5)

In Psalm 25:6–7 David prays:

Remember your mercy, O Yahweh, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. *Remember not the sins* of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love *remember me*, for the sake of your goodness, O Yahweh!

Note the gospel emphasis of this petition. O Lord, don’t remember my sins but do remember me “according to your steadfast love.”

God remembers the cries of the afflicted in their favor. Psalm 9 expresses it this way: “Sing praises to Yahweh, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds! For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; *he does not forget* the cry of the afflicted” (vv. 11–12).

God Remembers Good Works Flowing From Faith

The faithful do not want God to remember their sins. But how about their good works that flow from faith? Do they want God to remember those deeds? In fact, there are texts that speak this way. In chapter 15 Jeremiah prays: “O Yahweh, you know: *remember me* and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance take me not away; know that for your sake I bear reproach” (v. 15). God will soon execute his wrath against rebellious Israel. In that context, Jeremiah beseeches God to remember him and not treat him the same as the wicked. He desires God to remember his many years of faithful service and dedication in the midst of persecution.

Jeremiah wanted to be remembered and not treated like the rest. In different circumstances, the prayer can ask to be remembered and included with the others. The psalmist prays:

Remember me, O Yahweh, when you show favor to your people; help me when you save them, that I may look upon the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may glory with your inheritance. (Ps 106:4–5)

His prayer is not self-centered. The psalmist wants to be remembered by God so that he too can rejoice when God comes to save the people.

In Psalm 20 the people express their hopes and prayers for King David:

May Yahweh answer you [David] in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob protect you! May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion! *May he remember all your offerings* and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices! (vv. 1–3)

They hope that God will remember and look with favor upon David’s faithful actions, especially his work and offerings toward Zion. When God remembers David this way, it means salvation and protection for the people of Zion.

When King Hezekiah was about to die, he prayed: “O Yahweh, *remember* how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight” (Is 38:3; 2 Kgs 20:3). King Hezekiah still had work to do for the kingdom of God. He did not want to die yet. He prayed that God would remember his past faithfulness. The Lord heard his prayer and gave him fifteen more years; the Lord also promised to deliver Hezekiah and Jerusalem from destruction by Assyria.

When God Remembers the Works of the Wicked

In a few texts, the faithful pray that God would remember the destructive deeds of the wicked against them. In Psalm 74, the psalmist prays that God would remember his redeemed people after their foes destroyed the temple. He protests God’s seeming indifference to their plight. “How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever? Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them!” (vv. 10–11).

In verse 18, he prays that God would remember the hostility of the enemy and act against them: “Remember this, O Yahweh, how the enemy scoffs, and a foolish people reviles your name.” He repeats the prayer and expands on it at the end of the Psalm: “Arise, O God, defend your cause; remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day! Do not forget the clamor of your foes, the uproar of those who rise against you, which goes up continually!” (vv. 22–23). For God to “remember Mt. Zion” (v. 2) and restore her, he would have to defeat her enemies, hence the prayer that God remember those enemies.

Nehemiah’s Prayers

The book of Nehemiah contains quite a few prayers asking God to remember.³ In chapter 6 Nehemiah prays against the wicked:

For this purpose he [Shemaiah] was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid. (vv. 13–14)

Again, in chapter 13 he prays against the wicked: “Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites (v. 29).

Elsewhere Nehemiah prays for God to remember in a positive way: “Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people” (5:19); “Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love” (13:22). Nehemiah prays that God remember his faithful deeds for his benefit. Clearly it is not based on works righteousness but as he says “according to the greatness of your steadfast love.”

Again, in chapter 13 he prays: “Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service” (13:14). Here Nehemiah refers to his efforts to have Jerusalem keep the Sabbath day holy.

What was Nehemiah’s concern? It was a prayer for God’s future activity. He wanted God to uphold his efforts to reform and strengthen Jerusalem. The alternative would be that God would one day bring Nehemiah’s work to naught and foster the plans of the wicked. To remember Nehemiah meant God’s gracious favor for Nehemiah and for Nehemiah’s efforts at reform.

Nehemiah was so intent about the future that his book ends with this prayer: “Remember me, O my God, for good” (13:31). The prayer for God to remember concludes the book of Nehemiah, and the book of Nehemiah concludes the Hebrew canon. Thus, the entire Hebrew Old Testament canon ends with the prayer for God to remember.

A word on the canon: the foreword to the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) says, “The BHS, following the BHK, deviates from the order of the biblical books in L [Leningrad Codex] only in placing 1, 2 Chronicles at the end” (xi). Needless to say, this is an understatement. While intending to reproduce the Leningrad Codex, the modern edi-

tors of BHS rearranged the books of the Bible. At any rate, the Hebrew Old Testament canon ends with Nehemiah and Nehemiah ends with a prayer for God to remember.

Well, did God remember Nehemiah and by implication the rest of the Old Testament faithful? When we turn to the Gospel according to Luke, we see that the answer is “yes.”

God Remembering and the New Testament

God remembered his mercy and his Old Testament promises by sending his Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. The Magnificat in Luke praises the Lord, that “he has helped his servant Israel in *remembrance of his mercy*, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever” (Lk 1:54–55). So also the Benedictus, upon the birth of John the Baptist, extols the Lord God of Israel: “that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and *to remember his holy covenant*, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham” (Lk 1:71–73). According to the Magnificat and the Benedictus, the coming of Jesus the Messiah constitutes the ultimate fulfillment of all the Old Testament prayers for God to remember his promises and his Old Testament people.

The New Testament also reveals instances of God remembering the good works of the faithful and the evil works of the wicked. In Acts 10, Cornelius explains why he sent for Peter:

Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, “Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and *your alms have been remembered before God*. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter.” (vv. 30–32)

Because God heard his prayer and remembered his alms, Peter came to Caesarea and proclaimed the gospel to Gentiles.

What about God remembering the iniquities of the wicked? According to Revelation 16, at the eschatological judgment, “*God remembered* Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath” (v. 19); and in chapter 18: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great . . . for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and *God has remembered her iniquities*” (vv. 2, 5).

We see that the New Testament speaks of God remembering in ways similar to the Old Testament. I will close on a gospel note. The thief on the cross petitioned our Lord, “Jesus, *remember me* when you come into your kingdom” (Lk 23:42). That is a good prayer. It rightly is included in our hymnal (*LSB* 767), and we appropriately sing it on All Saints Day.

Conclusion

About seventy-five texts in the Old Testament speak of God remembering. It is a common theme. These texts depict God as what we might call the “incarnational God”

who locates himself with his people in space and time. From that perspective, God remembers the past and promises the future.

God's remembering is not simply intellectual recall. It is an act of the will. God remembers the past and responds appropriately in the present.

About a third of these texts are prayers for God to remember. It is not that he is forgetful or suffers bouts of amnesia and needs to be reminded. Rather, God wants to be reminded of his promises, his commitments, and what he has said in the past.⁴ Faith delights in so reminding God. Moreover, faith praises God for remembering.

Many of the prayers concern the future. In the hymn "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," we sing "Time, like an ever-rolling stream, Soon bears us all away; We fly forgotten as a dream Dies at the op'ning day" (*LSB* 733, v. 5). The prayers petition God not to cavalierly dismiss after death one's faithful labor. Rather, the faithful want their work flowing from faith to bear lasting fruit into the future generations. In that context, a prayer for God to remember is most appropriate.

In short, the language of God remembering occurs frequently and conveys rich theology. It seems that we do not speak this way very often. Yet, we need to use this kind of language much more in our preaching and teaching and in our prayers, both individual prayers and the church's prayers.

Endnotes

¹ Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* Studies in Biblical Theology 37 (London: SCM Press, 1962), 34.

² Note, for example, Deuteronomy 4:27; 12:11; 30:2, 4. See Andrew E. Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah* Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 393.

³ On the prayers in Nehemiah, see Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 94–95; Philip Werth Penhallegon, *Prayers in the Book of Nehemiah* (PhD dissertation, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2012).

⁴ H. Eising notes that God's own revealed nature as abounding in steadfast love explains why people can appeal to his remembrance. H. Eising, "zakhar," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 72.

Gift of Remembrance

Paul and the Lord's Supper in Corinth

Mark A. Seifrid

“Do this in remembrance of me.” This self-giving command of Jesus appears twice in Paul’s recounting of the words of institution to the Corinthians, serving his warning to them (1 Cor 11:17–34, esp. vv. 24, 25).¹ Jesus’s command to “remembrance” may be taken as belonging to the Pauline *paradosis* (11:23), in which, through both selection and interpretation, the words of institution were made comprehensible for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper within Gentile churches.²

The particular thesis that I want to offer with respect to the theme of “memory” is that in the context of Jesus’s command ἀνάμνησις or “remembrance” signifies an outward, objective reminder, which—by virtue of the words of institution—*works* “remembrance,” namely, the remembrance of faith. Jesus does not in the first instance call for an inward appropriation of his word and work, but establishes an outward “reminder,” which by virtue of his word will prove to be effective within the community. The faith of the believing community is sustained through the effective “remembrance” that Jesus establishes.

Sixteenth Century Disputes

Before we consider 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 and its context, it is worth reminding ourselves that the interpretation of Jesus’s command stood at the center of sixteenth-century debates. Within the late medieval theology in which Luther was educated, it generally was the *suffering* of Christ rather than the *Christ* who suffered that was central to the meaning of the Lord’s Supper.³ The presence of Christ’s body and blood in the sacrament were recognized, and provided the basis for the sacrifice of the Mass. Aside from certain exceptions, however, the interpretation of the Supper tended to give priority to the representation of the sufferings of Christ that were to be actualized inwardly by the communicant. The virtue of the Supper was that it brought Christ especially near and present to the communicant. In and of itself, however, the real presence of Christ did not *do* anything with respect to the recipient, even if it reconciled God and made God ready to answer the petitions of the supplicant.⁴ Generally, it was by means of internalizing recollection that the temporal distance between the passion

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and the participant was to be overcome. The heart and its affections were to be moved to true discipleship.

As is clear from his earliest writings, Luther shared in this understanding of the Lord's Supper.⁵ His conception of the sacrament radically changed with his discovery of the effective character of the words of institution and the saving promise that they bear. For him, the direction of movement within the Lord's Supper was inverted. The Supper for Luther was not a coming to Christ by actualizing his saving deed through remembrance and meditation, but Christ's bringing himself and salvation to the communicant through his word of promise. "Remembrance" for Luther (*commemoratio, memoria*) was no longer merely a remembrance of the *passion*, but a remembrance of Christ's promissory words of institution that—bound to the elements—establish saving communion between the believer and the crucified and risen Christ in faith. The memorial thus establishes our remembering; Luther recognized the two-sided nature of remembrance, both the *memorial* that reminds and the *remembering* of faith. Indeed, in an early transitional, yet reformational writing on the Lord's Supper, Luther emphasizes the corresponding communal implications of the sacrament, without setting aside his new understanding of the sacrament as unequivocal gift.⁶ The interpretation of remembrance that I wish to underscore thus corresponds to an insight that Luther articulated but did not develop at length.⁷

As we know, Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper was not shared by all Reformers. While for him, the idea of the Mass as an offering was excluded by Christ's effective word of promise, Luther's colleague in Wittenberg Andreas Karlstadt avoided the sacrificial understanding by limiting Christ's command, "Do this in remembrance of me" to a recollection of the past event of salvation. The Swiss Reformers Ulrich Zwingli and Johannes Oecolampadius, following Augustine's distinction between *res* and *signum*, likewise understood Christ's command of remembrance to signal the distance of Christ's saving work from the communicant. Despite varying emphasis and argument, all three of them understood remembrance as the actualization of the past event of salvation by the communicant and the believing community.⁸ They differed from the Roman church in their thinking that *completed salvation* was the object of the recollection. Nevertheless, they shared in the traditional conception of the Supper in that they understood remembrance as the actualization of the past through reflection on its significance. The focus of the remembrance was again the saving *event*, the passion of Christ, with its effects, and not the Christ of the passion himself.⁹

The inner-Protestant controversy over this matter brought Luther to define more carefully the relationship between Christ's word of promise and the gift given "under" the bread and wine. In a dramatic reversal over against his earlier writings, he came to emphasize the instrumental function of Christ's body and blood in the Supper.¹⁰ They became for him no longer a confirming sign alongside the promise of forgiveness and new life, but the very means by which communion with the crucified and risen Christ is established. In his debates with his adversaries, Luther thus focused on the hermeneutical and material issue of the real presence of Christ in the Supper—the fundamental

matter—leaving the meaning of Christ’s command of remembrance undeveloped.¹¹ Only later, when he became concerned about the laxity of the congregations concerning the Supper, did he develop the motif of remembrance, assigning it the meaning of *thanksgiving* and *praise*—as his opponents had done.

It was Melanchthon who more fully appropriated Christ’s call to remembrance. While he affirmed the real presence of Christ in the sacrament, he regarded Christ’s words of institution to bear a fundamentally promissory significance. Correspondingly, for him the command to remembrance signified a call to faith. Faith then lays hold of the gift of Christ’s body and blood given in the words of promise. Melanchthon’s emphasis on the subjective dimension of the Supper, together with his long-standing desire for a unified Christendom, may lie behind his later use of language concerning the Supper that was acceptable to his Reformed counterparts. That concession is not our concern here. It is simply worth noting his more subjective, receiver-oriented interpretation of the words of institution. Melanchthon does take into consideration the interpretation of ἀνάμνησις or “remembrance” as an objective memorial. But he rejects it. Perhaps that is because in the context of the Protestant debates, he regards this interpretation as referring to a past event, an interpretation that would contradict his understanding of Christ’s real presence in the elements established by his words of promise.

Luther and Melanchthon thus stand very close to one another in their understanding of the Supper, even if they vary on their use and understanding of Jesus’s “remembrance.” As we shall see, Luther stands closer to the sense of Jesus’s words, especially in his early recognition that ἀνάμνησις bears the sense of “outward reminder” or “memorial.” He may well have come to this understanding through his knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures.¹² Yet Melanchthon’s concern with the inward matter of faith finds its place in Paul’s reminder as well: the remembrance that Jesus commands establishes a remembering that is nothing other than faith. That is the implication of Jesus’s “remembrance,” which Luther also recognized.

Correction in Corinth

We should not forget that Paul’s reminder to the Corinthians of the words of institution—our first written record of them—comes as a correction of their abuse of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17–34). The precise form of that abuse is not apparent in the text, and it is beyond the purposes here to detail the various theories. I will sketch the problem and offer what seems to be the best reading of the situation.

Most interpretations of the passage focus on Paul’s reproach and admonition in 11:21–22 and 11:33–34, which largely are directed to individual conduct, even if they bear relevance to the conduct of the church as a whole. They thereby tend to overlook Paul’s opening—and therewith most likely fundamental—description of the problem: “When you *gather* as a church, I hear that there are *divisions* among you” (1 Cor 11:18). These divisions most likely are related to Paul’s opening exhortation to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:10–17) and to the divisions that have arisen with respect to the *χαρίσματα* (1 Cor 12:1–31). Paul here introduces his correction of the Corinthian church with refer-

ence to the divisions among them and provides no indication that he departs from this concern in his following admonition. The problem of the divisions appears to be fundamental for Paul. Any reconstruction of the background will have to consider it.

Secondly, the factions become manifest when the congregation gathers for worship and specifically in the premature consumption of the meal associated with the sacrament.¹³ When gathering, “each one *goes ahead* (προλαμβάνει) to eat their own meal” (1 Cor 11:20–21). Paul’s correction is likewise temporal in nature: “when you gather to eat, *wait for* (ἐκδέχεσθε) one another” (1 Cor 11:33–34). Contrary to what they supposed, the Corinthians do not eat the Lord’s Supper.¹⁴ Each one eats his or her own supper. In interpreting the passage, then, the conundrum lies in precisely how the divisions within the church were manifest in “each one” going ahead, rather than waiting for others.¹⁵

A common attempt to resolve the question in suggesting that wealthy members in their leisure arrived earlier and began the meal (or a meal that preceded the Supper) apart from the less privileged members present fails to account for Paul’s characterization of the problem as that of factions. It is not merely that individual members of the congregation failed to wait for one another. The failure to wait was an expression of divisions within the church. Furthermore, it appears that the consumption of the meal—or the lack of a meal to consume—took place simultaneously, despite the early start by some. Paul presents the outcome that “one is hungry and another drunk” as taking place during the eating (ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν), not because of it.¹⁶ The shaming of “those not having (anything)” takes place during the meal itself (11:22). The “going ahead” with one’s own meal need not and probably does not signal a late arrival by church members of lower standing (11:21). Paul does not speak of their arriving late, only of their lack of adequate food. Those who “went ahead” of others ate *their own supper*. The common entrance into the meal implies a shared meal, with neither want nor excess.

It is not likely, either, that the Corinthians had altered the order of the celebration of the Supper by moving the breaking of the bread to the end of the meal.¹⁷ The full meal started with the breaking of the bread and concluded with the cup. Paul’s wry comment concerning abuse of the Supper, “one is hungry, and another is drunk” makes sense only in the context of a full meal. Likewise, he presupposes that the church “gathers to eat” even in his injunction that they wait for one another. In his correction concerning the Lord’s Supper, he repeatedly refers to “eating and drinking,” and does so finally in reference to “the body and blood of the Lord,” so that there can be little doubt that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper included a complete meal (1 Cor 11:26, 27, 28, 29; cf. 1 Cor 10:16–17).¹⁸

Some knowledge of the nature of public meals in the Greco-Roman world may help us toward a resolution of the riddle that Paul’s words present.¹⁹ The gathering of Christians probably was very much like the (admittedly varied) gatherings of associations, and less like the gatherings in private homes, which often are thought to exemplify the setting of the meal.²⁰ Although estimates vary, the Corinthian church was probably of considerable size, perhaps around one hundred in number.²¹ Even a larger urban home (with atrium and triclinium) could probably not have accommodated that

number. Perhaps a landed estate would have been sufficient.²² It is quite possible that the church met in a rented space that would have accommodated their size. Paul has no word of admonition to an owner of a house who might have hosted the event. His correction, “Don’t you have houses in which to eat and drink?” further suggests that the gathering took place somewhere other than in a house.

It is unlikely that the entire Corinthian church ate a common meal at a common table.²³ It is much more likely that they ate in groups at different tables. The meal would not have been served on individual plates. Eating alone was rare. Bowls and dishes would have been sent around each table. The wine was distributed in a similar way. Each table-group would have had to secure its own food and drink, most likely by common contributions. The meal began when all the members of the group were at table.

It is especially significant with respect to our concerns that in the relatively infrequent reports of the meals of associations conflict between table-groups appears prominently.²⁴ Each table—not each individual—would have proceeded with its own meal, and thus, in the Corinthian situation, with its own supposed celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Paul’s admonition, “each one goes ahead with his own meal” should not be understood as depicting the actions of the Corinthians directly. Paul more likely holds each one accountable. This approach is characteristic of his ethics: the problem was not to be solved by mere injunctions (although Paul provides them), but by a change of heart in each one involved.

If this description comes close to the way in which the Corinthian church conducted the meal, the tension between Paul’s opening rebuke concerning divisions and his following “temporal” correction diminishes somewhat. It is likely that the Corinthian church was regarded and regarded itself as an association.²⁵ As is attested with regard to meals of associations, tables tended to segregate according to status, with varying fare at each table that would have been emblematic of social standing. In this regard, the meals at Corinth were not much different from the situation in Antioch that Paul describes in Galatians 2:12, where Cephas’s table-fellowship underlined the distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Social competition likely took place, as each group within the Corinthian church sought to assert its status. Competition and strife within associations often erupted in conflict.²⁶ Perhaps the premature start of the meal by the various groups also constituted display of status. It preempted the common start of the meal, which apparently implied a common meal. The prescription implied in Paul’s injunction to start the meal together is that caring for one another was to take the place of competition with one another. The precise social mechanism by which the common start meant a common meal remains unclear, but the dynamic is evident. Paul does not urge the sharing of food. He simply presupposes that once the time of the meal became common to the entire church, the meal was shared by those who had gathered. Perhaps the command of Jesus, “Do this in remembrance of me” was to be instrumental in leading the church to a common breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup. In any case, it is the common meal that is of fundamental importance to Paul: he does not admonish the wealthy to supply sumptuous meals for the entire church—that approach might well have led to other problems (cf. 2 Thes 3:10)—but to reserve such meals for

their own homes. The fundamental problem, again, appears to be the divisions, and the social striving that split the church, and in which the needs of those of lower standing were disregarded (cf. 1 Cor 12:22–27).

This observation does not fully explain Paul's emphatically individualistic description of the situation: "each one goes ahead with his own supper when eating" (11:21). Nevertheless, it is clear that his words applied especially to those who shared in a privileged table. Paul probably addresses the elite within the church, or, more likely, a sizeable number who regarded themselves as upwardly mobile, and who had become a source of the divisions within the church. His opening rhetorical question presupposes a measure of wealth: "Don't you have houses in which to eat and drink?" (1 Cor 11:22; cf. 11:34). That would not have been true for many, who lived within the households of others or perhaps in small apartments. Likewise, his following reproach: "Or do you despise the church (assembly) of God and shame those who have nothing?" again suggests that he primarily addresses those who held or sought higher status within the church.

Paul understands the problem in the celebration of the Lord's Supper in Corinth as a problem of the church as a whole. His corporate approach to the issue is clear from his opening withholding of praise and his concluding directives for the community (11:17, 22; 11:33–34). At the same time, individuals within the church had to ask themselves to what extent they had contributed to this corporate failure. This observation applies to Paul's pointed interpretation of the words of institution, and his following call to self-examination (1 Cor 11:26, 27–29). "Have I despised the church and shamed those who lack?" (11:22). The life of the community and the faith of the individual were coincident and inseparable in this unhappy matter.

The Corinthian "forgetting" of the words of institution in its abuse of the Supper is therefore not merely an intellectual failure, but an act of disobedience of which the church was guilty, both corporately and individually. The Corinthians in their forgetting were guilty of unbelief, an unbelief which corresponds to Israel's idolatry: "You have forgotten the God who made you" (Dt 32:18). Remembering, correspondingly, is an act of faith and obedience that bears both corporate and individual dimensions. Paul's language reflects that of the Scriptures, in which remembering is an actualization of past words or events (whether of God or of Israel), whether it be help and salvation (when God remembers his promises or covenant with the patriarchs), wrath and vengeance (when God remembers sins), or confession, thanksgiving, praise, and obedience (when Israel remembers the Lord).²⁷

It is unlikely, of course, that churches today will repeat the Corinthian error in its original form. Nevertheless, divisions within the church and maneuvering for status and power have not ended. That these actions take place outside of the celebration of the Lord's Supper does not diminish their seriousness. We, too, are tempted to idolatrous "forgetting" of Jesus's words. Are contemporary "worship wars" all that far removed from the problem in Corinth? The church stands and must stand at the foot of the cross, where the ground is entirely level, no matter what our gifts and office might be. The Lord's Supper is Jesus's reminder that this truth is to be present and visible among us, especially in our worship and our celebration of the Lord's Supper. We

may remember that in one of his earliest writings on the Lord's Supper, Luther explores the communal dimension of the sacrament and presents both the comfort and obligation present within it.²⁸

Christ's "Remembrance" and the Words of Institution

We turn now to Jesus's establishment of his "remembrance." Paul *reminds* the Corinthians that he had "received" the words of institution from the Lord, and handed them on to them. His language implies the transmission of the *paradosis* originating with Jesus rather than a direct revelation from the risen Lord.²⁹ It is fairly clear that the tradition that Paul presents to the Corinthians represents the interpretation of Jesus's words within the context of the Gentile mission. Before all else, the "cup-word," according to which Jesus speaks of "the new covenant in (or by) my blood" instead of "my blood of the covenant" strongly suggests that the Pauline tradition—which likely derives from the apostle himself—sought to make Jesus's words comprehensible to Gentile believers who did not yet fully know the Scriptures. In this respect, Paul treats the words of Jesus in the same way that he treats the Scriptures: he is more concerned to convey the meaning of the words to his hearers than he is to repeat a tradition verbatim. A verbatim repetition might be misunderstood, and was impossible in any case, since Jesus almost certainly spoke in Aramaic.³⁰

Paul's interpretive presentation of Jesus's words also applies to Jesus's command to "Do this in remembrance of me." The command appears twice in 1 Corinthians 11:24–25, with respect to both the bread and the cup, likely reflecting liturgical use (cf. Lk 22:19–20). In the context of the letter, the repetition of Jesus's command underscores the seriousness of the Corinthian offense, and corresponds to Paul's repeated references in context to the bread and the cup, which begin already with his ironic remark that in the Corinthian abuse of the Supper, "one is hungry and another is drunk" (1 Cor 11:21). The apostle brings a *reminder* of Jesus's words directed to the correction of the Corinthians.

With regard to the words themselves, it is important to note that Jesus enjoins a remembrance of *himself*: "Do this in remembrance of *me*" (1 Cor 11:24, 25). While his saving death stands at the center of this remembrance, the remembrance includes *Jesus* himself, especially his gift of himself, his body and his blood, in the words of institution. The significance of the remembrance is especially apparent in the light of the Pauline introduction: "In the night in which he was *betrayed*, the Lord Jesus took bread . . ." (1 Cor 11:23). Yet Jesus is not finally betrayed, but gives himself. And in giving himself, Jesus establishes that he is Lord, even Lord over the betrayal that was coming upon him. It is not finally the case that his life was taken from him. He himself willingly gives it.³¹ He does so already in the words of institution, even though betrayal and death were yet to come.

In following the Lord's command to "do this in my remembrance," the church "proclaims the death of *the Lord* until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). But what is "this" that Jesus commands his disciples to do? In context, "this" refers to the action of Jesus that precedes the command, namely, the taking and breaking (and thus distributing and eat-

ing) the bread and the (implicit) distribution and drinking of the cup (1 Cor 11:24–25).³² The physical acts of distribution and eating and drinking are the means by which the believers “proclaim the death of the Lord.” Yet in themselves, these physical actions remain ambiguous. In the context of Paul’s admonition, they might be interpreted as a command to share earthly goods. In a secondary and limited way, they, in fact, serve this end. But the fundamental meaning of Jesus’s command can hardly rest in the call to follow Jesus’s example. As often as the church follows Jesus’s command, they participate in “*this* bread and (*this*) cup,” namely the very same bread and cup in which the first disciples shared, namely, the bread and cup *of the Lord* (11:27).³³ Moreover, unworthy participation renders one guilty of the Lord’s body and blood (cf. 10:16–17). Jesus’s command has to do with something more than following his example. A third verb stands alongside the “taking and breaking” of the bread and the distribution of the cup. After Jesus took the bread and, giving thanks, broke it, he *said*, “This is my body for you” and “This cup is the new covenant in (or “by”) my blood.” Whether or not the Corinthian church regularly included these words of institution in its celebration of the Supper remains uncertain. But it is clear that according to Paul the words of institution determine the meaning of the distribution of the bread and the cup. To follow Jesus’s command is not an ambiguous action. The action of the church bears Jesus’s self-giving word. It is only by the word of Jesus that the eating of the bread and drinking of the cup constitute a *proclamation* of the death of the Lord. Otherwise the significance of the action would be unclear. Words here speak louder than actions. Or more precisely, words here are actions. They are Jesus’s self-giving speech-act that effects what it says.

Here again we may remind ourselves that the proclamation of the Lord’s death is simultaneously communal and individual in nature. Both are involved in the Corinthians’ abuse of the Supper. Both are included in Paul’s correction.

We now come, finally, to the remembrance itself. We have noted that Jesus establishes the Supper as one who is Lord of his own death, making it into an act of his giving his body and blood, and placing that gift within the bread and the cup. The gathered church proclaims the Lord’s death in the outward and visible act of participation in the Supper. The command of Jesus behind the church’s remembrance recalls similar language from the Scriptures. In some instances, the very term ἀνάμνησις appears in such contexts in the Septuagint. Thus, for example, the Lord instructs Israel concerning the Passover, “This day shall be a day of remembrance for you” (Ex 12:14). This word in the first instance is not a command that Israel is to remember the day, although it is to do so. The day is instead a gift. Its celebration is to serve as a memorial that awakens and preserves Israel’s recognition of the Lord’s act of deliverance that has formed and determined its life up to that moment. Likewise, in the book of Leviticus the Lord establishes “memorial sacrifices,” that bring Israel to remembrance before the Lord for forgiveness and blessing (e.g., LXX Lv 2:2: μνημόσυνον).³⁴ There is ample evidence, too, that the term ἀνάμνησις may bear the sense of “(outward) memorial” or “commemoration,” including within the New Testament (Heb 10:32).³⁵ We do best, then, to understand the remembrance that Jesus establishes according to Paul’s witness, not as our remembering, but rather as the outward remembrance that is located in the celebration of the

Supper. In observing the Supper for the remembrance of Jesus, the church sets an audible and visible reminder of the crucified and risen Lord *in his self-giving* here and now.

This reminder does not exclude, but includes our act of remembering, which, as we have seen, is nothing other than the act of faith. The remembrance that Jesus establishes by his word works our remembering, namely our conscious, believing reception of the Supper. Paul thus enjoins each one to self-examination in participating in the Supper.³⁶ The significance of this remembrance and the remembering that it effects is especially apparent in the context of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34. In disobedience and unbelief, the Corinthians had “forgotten” Jesus's words. Jesus's words nevertheless remained effective. In the first place, the Corinthians, or at least some of them, suffered sickness and even death as a result of their guilt with respect to the body and blood of the Lord present in the Supper (11:30). The remembrance was effective even in its abuse. Jesus's words also remained at work in *Paul's reminder* to the Corinthians. His letter was received and preserved. Although further battles were to come, the Corinthians were called back to faith and the proper observance of the Supper through the words of Jesus. By virtue of the words of institution—in this case, first as they were written by the apostle—Jesus's remembrance became effective with them and effected their faith afresh. In this respect, Jesus's remembrance transcends the memorials that the Lord established for Israel. Israel repeatedly “forgot” the Lord, as the Lord says, for example, in the book of Jeremiah (2:32; 3:21; 13:25, 18:15). In contrast—if we may appeal to the Markan tradition—in the Jeremianic “new covenant” fulfilled in Jesus's blood, it is the Lord who “forgets.” He forgets transgressions and sins by setting them aside (Jer 31:34).

Luther's emphasis on Jesus's unqualified gift of himself in the Supper thus stands close to Jesus's command to celebrate the Supper as an outward remembrance. Furthermore, his understanding of the term ἀνάμνησις in this context turns out to be valid. At the same time, Melancthon's interpretation of remembrance as our remembering in faith does not go missing, but finds its proper place, just as it did with Luther himself. Our remembering—our believing—does not finally rest in ourselves, our decisions, or our abilities, but in the effective word of Jesus that has been given to be heard, seen, and tasted. This is very good news, which we dare not forget—neither individually or corporately.

Endnotes

¹ The Lukan account of the words of institution includes this command in the “cup-word,” and in other respects corresponds to the words of Paul (Lk 22:15–20).

² Usually it is thought that Paul received the form of the tradition that we find in 1 Cor 11:23–26 early within his mission, perhaps in Antioch. It seems to me more likely, however, that it is the theologically creative mind of the apostle that lies behind the interpretation of Jesus's words for a Gentile context. The interpretive changes that he makes do not essentially alter the tradition, but only make it clear and understandable to others. In this case, the Lukan account of the institution of the Lord's Supper is dependent on the Pauline tradition. The Markan tradition likely stands *formally* closer to Jesus's words, especially in Jesus's naming the cup “my blood of the covenant” (Mk 14:22–25, esp. 14:24; cf. Mt 26:26–29). But as others have noted, the Pauline tradition may well display elements of an earlier, independent tradition that included Jesus's command to “remember” him. See O. Hofius, “Herrenmahl und Herrenmahlsparadosis: Erwägungen zu 1Kor 11, 23b25,” *ZThK* 85 (1988): 203–205.

³ See the thorough discussion of this background as well as the debates of the Reformation, which I take up in the following discussion in D. Wendebourg, *Essen zum Gedächtnis: Der Gedächtnisbefehl in den Abendmahlstheologien der Reformation* Beiträge zur historischen Theologie (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 4–22.

⁴ See A. Angenent, “Abendmahl; 3 Mittelalter,” *RGGA* 1:21–24.

⁵ See Wendebourg, 40–60; O. Bayer, *Promissio: Geschichte der reformatorischen Wende in Luthers Theologie* 2 ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), 230–237, esp. 233.

⁶ One thus receives help and comfort in the Lord’s Supper from the entire *communio sanctorum*, and at the same time is obliged to love and serve others, who are part of the same “loaf” and “cup” in which one shares. See “The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods,” LW 35:49–73 = WA 2,742–758; cf. Bayer, 226–229; Wendebourg, 45–47.

⁷ Wendebourg, 48–54; Bayer, 251–253.

⁸ Calvin later affirmed in the Supper a spiritual participation in Christ seated at God’s right hand. This spiritual “eating” takes place alongside the immanent eating of the bread and drinking of the cup. Temporal distance is thus replaced by a spatial and metaphysical one that was to be bridged by the Spirit and faith. “Faith” in this case does not have the concrete words of Jesus as its object, but the image of the risen and exalted Christ. For a brief discussion, see Joachim Stadke, “Abendmahl. III/3/1.6. Calvin und der Calvinismus,” *TRE* 1:116–118.

⁹ On Karlstadt and the Swiss Reformers, see again Wendebourg, 61–138.

¹⁰ Wendebourg, 139.

¹¹ Wendebourg, 153–155. That gap was especially apparent with respect to Oecolampadius, who argued that only a symbolic understanding prevented the Supper from being understood as a sacrificial Mass.

¹² Cf. Bayer, 252.

¹³ Paul explicitly links the factions with the problems that appear in the celebration of the Supper: “When therefore you come together . . .” (1 Cor 11:20).

¹⁴ It is likely that Paul coins the expression “Lord’s Supper” in order to contrast it with the practice of the Corinthians. Rightly, K. Vössing, “Das ‘Herrenmahl’ und 1 Cor. 11 im Kontext antiker Gemeinschaftsmähler,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 54 (2011): 49.

¹⁵ Some interpreters have argued that Paul warns against feasting “in front of” others (προλαμβάνειν) and admonishes the Corinthians to “welcome one another” (ἐκδέχεσθαι). But the usage of the two verbs suggests a temporal meaning. Pace Hofius, 220–222, the examples that he cites in favor of taking προλαμβάνειν as “eating in front of” and ἐκδέχεσθαι as “welcome,” are not finally convincing.

¹⁶ In speaking of “hunger” and “drunkenness” Paul most likely recalls the bread and the cup, and thus emphasizes the Corinthian abuse of the Supper.

¹⁷ See P. Lampe, “Das korinthische Herrenmahl im Schnittpunkt hellenistisch-römischer Mahlpraxis und paulinischer Theologie Crucis (1 Kor 11, 17–34),” *ZNW* 82 (1991): 183–213, who connects this interpretation with the late arrival of those of lower status. There is little evidence in 1 Cor 11:17–34 that the Corinthians had altered the order of the meal, not least because Paul speaks of the distribution of the cup, “μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι” (after the meal). See Hofius, 207–217, likewise Vössing, 44–49.

¹⁸ Although there had been abuses, the integral meal or ἀγάπη continued in some fashion until the fifth century, even though it was discouraged and sometimes even prohibited.

¹⁹ Here, and in what follows, I have drawn heavily on the excellent essay by Vössing, 41–72. At a number of secondary points I have provided my own conjectures. Because Vössing interacts thoroughly with recent secondary literature in a generally convincing way, I am allowing myself the freedom of not citing varying opinions on the Corinthian setting. They are secondary to our concern with the theme of “memory” in any case.

²⁰ This thesis is at the center of the discussion of 1 Cor 11:17–34 by Vössing, 41–70. Along with the argument concerning the size of the church, Vössing also suggests that the early start of the meal by some hardly would have been likely in a private home.

²¹ See J. Murphy-O’Connor, “House-Churches and the Eucharist,” *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* eds. E. Adams and D. G. Horrell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 131–133. He argues from the names of persons that appear in Acts, Romans, and the Corinthian correspondence together with the probable presence of households, and the recognition that neither Luke nor Paul provide a complete list of names for a number of around forty to fifty. But this estimate is likely too low given the factors that Murphy-O’Connor himself considers. Nor is it likely that the meeting of the “whole” church was infrequent, or that Paul generally was speaking of smaller gatherings—else the factions would have separated. It is not likely either that Gaius, whom Paul names as not only his host, but also as “host of the entire church” provided for the gathering of the church in his home (Rom 16:23). The problems that Paul describes could hardly have arisen under the authority of a single patron. It is more likely that with the church now unified under the apostle, Gaius’s home

became a center for communication with Paul. For a further discussion of the size of the Corinthian church, see Vössing, 51–2.

²² As Vössing, 52, suggests.

²³ It is possible that they all sat on benches at tables rather than reclining. Admittedly, this practice would have been unusual for those of higher status. But Paul presupposes that during worship all are seated (1 Cor 14:30). On the question of reclining or sitting, see Vössing, 54–55.

²⁴ Vössing, 56–62.

²⁵ Murphy-O'Connor, 130, argues that since the Corinthian church would not have been regarded as a *collegium licitum*, they must have met in a home. Nevertheless, according to the Lukan report, despite the break with the synagogue, Gallio regarded the Jewish complaint against Paul as internal to the Jewish community and refused to intervene in their affairs (Acts 18:12–17). The Corinthian church may well have existed under this umbrella for some time.

²⁶ See Vössing, 56–62.

²⁷ On the theme of “memory” in the Scriptures, see B. S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel Studies in Biblical Theology* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1962).

²⁸ See n. 6, above.

²⁹ The Pauline tradition (Lk 22:15–20; 1 Cor 11:23–25) is distinctly different from the Markan one (Mk 14:22–25; Mt 26:26–29). The differences are (1) Paul’s introduction and placement of the event, in which the explicit connection with the Passover meal is supplanted by Jesus’s word (11:23); (2) the substitution of εὐχαριστέω for εὐλογέω with respect to the bread (11:24; cf. Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22) (3) the “(body) on behalf of you” (11:24; Lk 22:19; “given on behalf of you”) likely interpreting and taking the place of “take[, eat: Mt]” (Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22); (4) the presence of the command to “do this in remembrance of me” (11:24, 25); (5) the cup as “the new covenant” in place of “my blood of the covenant” (11:25; cf. Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24); “until (the Lord) comes” taking the place of Jesus’s promise of celebrating the meal with the disciples in the kingdom (11:27; cf. Mk 14:25; Mt 26:39; Lk 22:16). The Markan tradition likely more fully represents the original wording, but this probability does not exclude the likelihood that the Pauline tradition independently bears elements that go directly back to Jesus. See n. 1, above.

³⁰ Liturgical use of the words of institution follows the same pattern as Paul, as it introduces wording from Mt 26:26 and Lk 22:20 into that of 1 Cor 11:23–25, thus interpreting the Pauline text.

³¹ As he does elsewhere (e.g., Rom 14:9), Paul comes quite close to the Johannine witness (e.g., Jn 10:17–18).

³² “Giving thanks” is integral to this action, but as the participial form of the verb shows, it is not the primary matter of which Jesus speaks.

³³ So, rightly, Hofius, 226–7.

³⁴ Thanks to David Adams for calling these passages to my attention.

³⁵ See LXX Lv 24:7; Nm 10:10; Ps 37:1 (Mt 38:1), 69:1 (Mt 70:1); Ws 16:6. That all but the last of these are directed as reminders to God does not change their character as memorials in the least. The two headings of psalms are the most interesting, since in them words (to be read or recited in worship) themselves constitute the memorial. The proximity to Jesus’s words of institution is apparent.

³⁶ Inadequate attention has been given to this text with respect to the question of the communing of children. By no means may it be dismissed because Paul is dealing with a different issue in 1 Cor 11:17–34. His admonitions provide no indication that children participated in the sacrament, and, in fact, point in the opposite direction. Furthermore, Paul’s understanding that participation in the Supper includes our own active remembering and understanding—including self-examination and judgment—sets a boundary for the discussion of this issue.

To Forgive Is Not to Forget

Mark D. Rockenbach

You have heard the phrase, “forgive and forget.” And many have spent a significant amount of time trying to forget sin so that it will be forgiven. The problem with this concept is that the forgiving ends up in the hands of the one trying to forget. And it promotes the idea that sin is only forgiven once it has been forgotten. However, this is not a biblical way of understanding forgiveness. Look through the pages of Scripture and you will find many references to sinful acts that have not been forgotten. The sin of Adam and Eve (Gn 3), the sin of King David (2 Sm 4) and the sin of the adulterous woman (Jn 8:1–11). None of these sins have been forgotten. In fact, they have all been written down so that every generation can know what took place. If we buy into the premise that forgiveness is based upon our ability to forget we are doomed. Psychologically speaking when you tell someone to forget it or not to pay attention to it, they actually do the thing you tell them not to do; they look at it, they fixate upon it, they can’t turn away.

A pioneering experiment conducted by Daniel M. Wegner instructed participants not to think about a white bear. Yet, this became an impossible task. The more they tried not to think about a white bear the more they thought about it. On average, the participants thought about the white bear twice as often as the group that was told to think about a white bear.¹ Try it for yourself. For the next five minutes—do not think about a white bear.

This same psychological process takes place when you tell someone to forgive and forget. The more you try to forget it the more you remember it and the more you remember it the more angry you become, the more bitter you become, the more depressed you become, the more . . . fill in the blank.

Psychologically what is taking place is rumination or cognitive looping. When people fixate upon negative repeated thoughts, they get stuck replaying the incident in their minds over and over.² Rumination, the repeated remembering of the event has been correlated to depressive episodes³ and sustained anxiety.⁴ Researchers have also discovered that rumination tends to prevent people from remembering specific events from the episode. Ruminating upon negative thoughts tends to display memory over-generalization.⁵ When people over generalize they misplace the facts of the situation and the rumination of the event does not tell the whole story. People will add details

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that did not exist, or they will eliminate details that they don't think are important. As a result, what they are remembering is not the true story but only their interpretation of the events that took place.

To reduce the negative results of rumination, counselors will use treatments such as Mindfulness-Based Meditation. The core concept of this technique is to help people learn how to identify and attend to negative thoughts before they escalate into major depressive episodes.⁶ The focus is not on forgetting but on facing the thoughts with a new understanding. For example, psychological researchers used Mindfulness-Based Meditation in connection with Cognitive Therapy and discovered it was effective in assisting those with suicidal thoughts. The ability to attend to the suicidal thoughts helped to identify triggers and reinterpret cognitive looping.⁷

All of this is important for our understanding of forgiveness. When a person is stuck replaying a sinful incident in their mind over and over, the psychological community will call this rumination and the treatment goal is to end the cognitive looping. However, theologically speaking we would call it unforgiveness with the goal of moving the person to the point of forgiving those who sinned against them. Consider this example: You are in conflict with Jack because Jack reported to the whole voters' assembly that you miscalculated the church funds. You keep playing the incident in your mind (rumination) and you refuse to forgive Jack (unforgiveness). There are three options available to you: (1) run from Jack, (2) attack Jack, or (3) forgive Jack. Those who are stuck ruminating upon the incident are unwilling to forgive and will naturally find themselves responding to Jack by running or attacking. You might attend a different worship service than Jack; you might stop going to voters' meetings. On the other hand you might choose to verbally attack Jack in the meeting and point out all his failures or send emails that express your anger or hatred toward Jack. Whether you run or attack, the problem of rumination results in unforgiveness.

Unforgiveness takes place when the sinful act is replayed over and over in one's mind (rumination). One might be encouraged to forget it or stop thinking about it. The theory is that by forgetting it you will have forgiven it. But when you tell someone to stop thinking about a sinful act against them they will ruminate upon it even more and the roots of unforgiveness grow even deeper (remember the white bear). The psychological community is correct that we need to interrupt the endless cognitive looping that is causing so much suffering. But think about this theologically. When it comes to sin, it is not cognitive looping but unforgiveness that needs to be interrupted. The reason we ruminate upon particular sins is that we have not forgiven them (unforgiveness), and the only way to end rumination upon sin is to forgive it.

Forgiveness is always in the hands of our Lord: "By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pt 2:24; Is 53:5). Therefore, the premise that we must forget so that we can forgive is not helpful. The forgiving gets put in the hands of the one trying to forget. Yet, forgiveness comes from the One who sacrificed himself upon the cross, Jesus

Christ. It is through his blood that we are justified and redeemed. By the water of baptism, by the body and blood of Jesus that we eat and drink in the Lord's Supper, by the words of absolution we are forgiven.

When God forgives he looks at us differently, he remembers us differently. God no longer sees our sin condemning us to eternal death in hell. God sees Jesus justifying and redeeming us as resurrected children of God who have life. God has not forgotten about the sin of Adam and Eve but he promised to send a new Adam (Jesus) who would crush the head of the serpent (Gn 3:14–16). God has not forgotten the sin of King David but through the prophet Nathan spoke words of forgiveness: “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die” (2 Sm 12:13). God has not forgotten the sin of the woman caught in adultery; Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they (her accusers)?” “Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin” (Jn 8:10–11). Sin is not forgotten but forgiven. God through his Son Jesus Christ does not use our sin against us. God knows, remembers, and sees that our sin is forgiven in the name of Jesus. God says, “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Jer 31:34). It is not that God gets amnesia. God knows, remembers, and sees our sin differently. God chooses not to use that sin against us because we have been justified and redeemed by Christ. The psalmist highlights this: “Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O Lord” (Ps 24:6–7). The psalmist is asking God not to remember his rebellious ways. Instead, he is asking God to remember him according to God's steadfast mercy.

You can run from Jack, you can attack Jack, or you can forgive Jack. By the gracious work of Jesus we can forgive Jack and end the ruminated cycle of unforgiveness. The goal is not to forget but to forgive and we forgive because of the work of Christ. Will you still remember what Jack did? Probably so. But if you have forgiven him you will remember it differently, you will see it differently. You will remember the incident through the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness ends the rumination or cognitive looping that causes endless emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual turmoil. Forgiveness says, by the work of Jesus Christ I will not use this against you. When we remember the story of Adam and Eve we know about this sin, but we also know about the Savior. When we remember the story of King David we know about the sin, but we also know about the Savior. When we remember the story of the woman caught in adultery we know the sin, but we also know about the Savior. You will probably remember your own sins or the sins of others against you, but there is great joy and peace knowing that the Savior has forgiven them. Therefore, we remember them differently; we remember them as being forgiven by the wounds of Jesus Christ! (1 Pt 2:24, Is 53:5).

Endnotes

¹ Daniel Wegner, *White Bears and Other Unwanted Thoughts: Suppression, Obsession, and Psychology of Mental Control* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994).

² Susan Nolen-Hoeksema “Responses to Depression and their Effects on the Duration of Depressive Episodes,” *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 100 no. 4 (1991): 569–582. John Teasdale, Richard Moore, Hazel

- Hayhurst, Marie Pope, Susan Williams, and Zindel Segal "Metacognitive Awareness and Prevention of Relapse in Depression: Empirical Evidence," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 70, no. 2 (2002): 275.
- ³ Jannay Morrow and Susan Nolen-Hoeksema "Effects of Responses to Depression on the Remediation of Depressive Affect" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58, no. 3 (1990): 519–527.
- ⁴ David Marcus, Kathleen Hughes, and Randolph Arnau "Health Anxiety, Rumination, and the negative Affect: A Mediation Analysis" *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 64, no. 5 (2008): 495–501.
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- ⁶ Maya Schroevers and Rob Brandsma "Is Learning Mindfulness Associated with Improved Affect After Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy?" *British Journal of Psychology* 101, no. 1 (2010): 95–107.
- ⁷ Steven Hayes, "Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Relational Frame Theory, and the Third Wave of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies" *Behavior Therapy* 35, no. 4 (2004): 639–665.

HOMILETICAL HELPS

Pentecost • John 14:23–31 • May 15, 2016

We find ourselves at the third great festival day (*LSB* 489), having celebrated the resurrection and the ascension of our Lord. Our text takes us to the night he was betrayed, as Jesus anticipates what we now remember as having happened. He is preparing his disciples—and us—for resurrection life after his resurrection and ascension, even as we wait for him to come again.

Exegetical Notes

Our Pentecost pericope brings us into the middle of the first chapter of the Farewell Discourse (Jn 14, 15–16, 17). John 14:13–31 includes the second of the five Holy Spirit/Paraclete sections (14:15–21, 14:25–27, 15:26–27, 16:7–11, 16:12–14), which should be considered together, as they circle around (in Johannine style) to reinforce Jesus’s promise. One might also anticipate the fulfillment of the promise, first in John 20:21–22, and then, of course, in the great day of Pentecost, when the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh signaled the arrival of the new age (Acts 2:16 with the citation from Joel).

In John 14, Jesus responds to questions posed by the disciples with revelatory responses: “I am the Way” (14:5–7); and “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (14:8–14). This is followed by the first reference to the Paraclete—“another one”—also sent by the Father and who is the “spirit of truth” (the one who testifies to the truth of him who is the way, the truth, and the life).

That the Paraclete in this discourse is “another one” confirms that Jesus himself is the first Paraclete (1 Jn 2:1), the atoning sacrifice (ἰλασμός) for our sins and those of the whole world. He brings identity through “abiding in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν, cf Jn 15:4) that results in doing his will (“keep my commandments,” 1 Jn 2:3, Jn 14:23, cf. Jn 15:5).

John 14:23 begins as a response to the question by Judas (not Iscariot!) in v. 22, which echoes the suggestions of the brothers in 7:2–5. Jesus’s answer there helps us understand the context here: the right time had not yet come for the full revelation. First the disciples have to understand, and then they will become witness of these things to all the world. But now Jesus’s time is at hand.

Verses 25–27 are the heart of this passage as related to the Holy Spirit and his coming. Here the focus is on teaching, and that is a key role of the Paraclete (cf 16:12–14). At some point, the translation of *Paraclete* (“call alongside” or “one called alongside to help”) probably needs to be addressed, but any translation will highlight only one aspect of Jesus’s promise of the Spirit. *Advocate* over-emphasizes the forensic role. *Comforter* is likely the least helpful, especially in our parlance. Isaiah 40:1 offers a biblical sense of *comfort*, but there, too, this is so much more than sentiment or just being there. John 17:6–7 presents an activity not particularly comforting.

Encourager or intercessor represents other aspects. From an OT perspective, the idea of a successor may be helpful, as the one who “carries on the work,” such as Joshua to Moses, or Elisha to Elijah. The Spirit also comes upon the judges and prophets to give them power and wisdom to carry out the mission (cf Acts 2).

The role of the Paraclete includes all of the above in some way.

But key in the thought progression of John’s Gospel is that the disciples do not—and cannot—understand until after (1) the resurrection, and (2) they receive the Holy Spirit. They struggle both with the identify of Jesus as the word made flesh, sent by the Father yet one with the Father, and with the mission and purpose of Jesus, revealed in the cross and followed by the resurrection. In this sense, the Paraclete is the “second teacher” who will come after Jesus who is the first teacher and actually lead them to understand both the person and the work of Christ (as the third article follows the second, because we “cannot by our own reason and strength . . .”). The *teaching* is not quantitative in a sense of more and new things but qualitative in the sense of finally and fully understanding what Jesus has been teaching them all along.

Thus comes a true and lasting peace (*shalom*, v. 27), not as the world understands peace, and not as the world gives peace (“not as the world gives” works both ways).

Finally, vv. 28–31 conclude with an exhortation to show love for Jesus by recognizing that he knows what he is doing and that his plan conforms to the Father’s will. Though argued and explained in Trinitarian discussions, the fact that the “Father is greater than I” likely reflects the dictum that no “messenger is greater than the one who sent him” (13:16).

Though a minor issue, the final exhortation to leave is troubling only to those who want to see the whole discourse as a composite work revealed through a clumsy redactional seam. Nor is it necessary to assume that chapter 15 continues “on the way,” perhaps as they passed a vineyard (but see 18:1). Rather, at this point Jesus introduced the fact that they needed to leave. And then he kept speaking to them.

Homiletical Thoughts

As Jesus prepares to leave his disciples, going to the cross and then, after the resurrection, to his Father, he promises that he will not leave them alone. The first fulfillment is in John 20:21–22, when Jesus gives them the Spirit, along with the peace (14:27), grounded in the authority to forgive sins. The partial but growing understanding of Peter and John (20:9) and of Mary (20:10–17), is now complete (the lights come on!), and it is ultimately expressed by the most unlikely of them: Thomas who became a witness a week later but confessed, “My Lord and my God” (20:28). Now that the disciples understood, it was time for the Spirit to be poured out on all flesh.

Thus Pentecost is the next stage in the great story of God’s salvation through Israel and in Christ, and even to us who carry on the story as the fulfilled Israel into all the world.

We, too, have the Spirit at our side to lead us into all truth, which is the One who is the way, the truth, and the life, and to carry out the mission of Jesus after he has returned to the Father (like Joshua and Elisha). His power is necessary—not along to help us with

our will but to get into our heads and hearts the will of the Father through the Son.

Thus the sermon could pivot on the two themes: Now that resurrection life has been given and proclaimed, the Spirit causes us to understand Jesus and to carry out his mission. We get it, and we get on with it. And we are not left alone or on our own. Our hearts are not troubled, and we are not afraid.

Andrew Bartelt

Holy Trinity • John 8:48–59 • May 22, 2016

“I Am” Your Creator and Redeemer

This is one of the better-known passages in John and is a favorite passage for many when it comes to finding texts that speak to the deity of Jesus. And yet it is perhaps one of the more enigmatic passages as well. After all, what kind of a name is “I Am”? It is for this reason that we need to help people connect the dots between this text and the larger narrative of Scripture.

As many readers will immediately recognize, this passage connects with the OT context in which God reveals his name to Moses. When Moses asks God what he should call him, God says, “I Am.” Jesus here appropriates for himself the name by which God identifies himself. This is why the Jews expressed anger toward Jesus and accused him of blasphemy.

But what does it mean for God to say “I Am”? Often this is translated as Lord. And rightly so. He is the one who rules. He is the one who rules over all things. There is none who is like him. But why is there none like him? And why does he rule over all things (note that this conversation with Moses takes place before God rescues his people out of Egypt)? Is it because he is a more powerful god than all the others?

Here is where we need to connect the dots in the narrative. Why is God Lord? Why is he the “I Am”? Because he is the Creator! Here we would do well to remember that in Scripture, the title “God” is not a reference to an abstract deity or a philosophical concept of ultimate being or anything like that. It is always rooted in a narrative. And what defines God in that narrative of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation is that he is the Creator. To put it bluntly, “if you created everything . . . you are God.” If you did not create everything . . . you are not God.”

Now let’s come back to Jesus. I am the Creator. Consider how the very Gospel of John opens (verses 1–4).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

So to confess that Jesus is God is to confess that he is the Creator of all things. And for this reason he rules all things.

That brings us back to John 8. Here we confront the Creator who became a human creature. But how is it possible that this man is the “I Am,” the creator of the entire universe? Everyone knew that he was only in his fourth decade of life on earth. He had been born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth. And so we encounter the mystery of the incarnation. Jesus can say that he is “I Am,” the Creator, because it is the person of the Son of God who took on a human nature. The one who speaks is the second person of the Trinity. Yet he speaks through his human nature, he speaks as a man.

And so the one who created us now redeems us. Or put the other way, the one who has redeemed us is also the one who had created us. Thus we confess that Jesus is our Lord, that is, he is both our Creator and our Redeemer. He is one and the same.

In terms of an outline, one might try to help people see why Jesus’s statement “I Am” was so shocking and appalling to the Jews. We tend to take it for granted that Jesus claims to be Yahweh. But we often don’t think about what it is that makes Yahweh God, namely, that he is the creator of the universe. And so we tend not to think of Jesus as the Creator either, instead limiting his identification and lordship to being our redeemer in the second and third articles of the creed. It might be more startling for us to realize that Jesus claims to be our creator. And yet also more comforting, for the one who created us is the one who has now redeemed us!

Charles Arand

Proper 4 • Luke 7:1–10 • May 29, 2016

At first blush, the central theme of this pericope seems to be faith and its remarkable residence in a Gentile centurion. That motif fits well with the preceding context. The centurion distinguishes himself not only as a capable builder of synagogues, but he is also a competent builder of houses, clearly founding his own on the rock. The centurion with his great faith embodies the wise builder of Jesus’s sermon on the plain.

Still, in addition to the keynote on faith, a careful reading of these short verses, especially in Greek, reveals a subject even more pronounced—a refrain illustrated at least three times. The centurion’s slave, it is noted, “was to him honorable (*entimos*),” and the descriptive phrase is placed for emphasis. Then, when the distinguished delegation of Jewish elders arrives on their mission of mercy, they assure Jesus of the legitimacy of the request because “he is worthy (*axios*),” and then present evidence to support their claim. Finally, before Jesus can complete his trek to the centurion’s home, a new delegation, this one comprised of friends of the apparently widely popular centurion, appears with a fresh message from the unseen character: “Don’t bother, I am not worthy (*ikanos*) . . .” So, the question becomes central: what exactly *is* the definition of worthy? Who has worth?

On one level, of course, the centurion is a worthy man. He likely belongs to that pious group of Gentiles who worship Yahweh and joins his Jewish neighbors in the life of the synagogue. And, he clearly cares for his slave as more than a piece of property. But, this noble Gentile is not self-deceived by his own legitimate success and righteous-

ness in the eyes of the world. The looming death of his treasured servant underscores the greater reality. He is an unworthy creature in great need, helpless in the face of death. The centurion knows his place. Certainly aware of his place in the hierarchy of the Roman military, he's even more conscious of the place he occupies in the infinitely more significant spiritual ordering of the universe. Only God is God, and he is but a broken and desperate creature. That he already sees Jesus in the authoritative God-spot is remarkable—and that prompts appropriate wonder and praise from Jesus. Perhaps a Gentile can more readily see what Jesus's own kinsmen struggle to recognize.

Of course, we are the Gentile readers who still yearn to see the reality of our standing. It is interesting to consider that in the standard form of the Catholic mass, just before the distribution of the host, the words of the centurion come from the mouths of the people: "I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof." And in a closely related context we hear Luther teach: "He is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words." So, the two themes are married together. The one who is worthy is simply the one who knows where he stands in the order of things, recognizes and confesses his own great need, and then looks to God for help, which, of course, is the essence of faith.

How easily is that faith rattled and threatened by the undying desire of every one to matter. We disguise it with concepts like self-esteem and positive self-regard, but, however it is named, it is pride. Not unbelief, but pride is the antithesis of faith. So those who know the score—who know their desperate need—renounce pride, plead for mercy, and find it. Faith knows its place. Greeted with such faith, Jesus is not content only to say a word and walk away having delayed a servant's death until another day. No, now he presses on in his task and not only enters under our roof, but stays there. Jesus knows his place: it is with us. Faith knows its place but marvels and delights in the incongruity when Jesus inverts the order of things and enters and stays under our roofs.

Goal: To make clear that the final standard of worth in God's kingdom centers on the confession of God's sovereignty and the admission of human contingency and dependence.

Malady: Concealed behind euphemisms such as "positive self-regard" or "self-esteem" pride continually asserts itself, damaging and killing faith.

Means: Submission to authority checks the growth of pride, but desperate need kills it.

Possible Outline

"Know Your Place"

- I. The places we occupy.
 - A. Standing in the world.
 - B. The place of pride: the self counts.
- II. The place of faith.
 - A. Need reveals our true standing.
 - B. Jesus heeds our cry for mercy and takes his place.
 1. On the cross.
 2. In our lives.

Joel Biermann

Introduction and Overview

This well-known pericope is “typical” of Luke’s Gospel in several important ways. Chief is the portrayal of Jesus as a *prophetic figure* (in something of a contrast to Matthew, where he is more obviously a Yahweh and Moses figure). This theme is initiated and made programmatic for the third Gospel by the critical visit by Jesus to the synagogue in Nazareth in chapter 4, in which he not only describes himself as a prophet (4:24: “No *προφήτης* is acceptable in his own homeland”), but also goes on to compare himself explicitly to Elijah (4:25–26) and Elisha (4:27). (See also the description of him by the pair on the road to Emmaus [24:19] as a *προφήτης* mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.) In this text we see that prophetic theme instantiated once more, as Jesus comes to the aid of a widow whose son has died, even as did Elijah in the OT lesson for the day from 1 Kings 17. Hence the people say in our text: *προφήτης μέγας ἠγέρθη ἐν ἡμῖν*, “A great *prophet* has arisen among us” (7:16). As a prophet, Jesus’s words are to be heeded—even as the widow of Zarephath says regarding Elijah: “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth” (1 Kgs 17:24). Jesus’s words are critical at both the beginning and the end of his ministry and mission in Luke’s Gospel (see 4:17–21, 24:44–49), and in between (9:35—see also the assessment of him by the crowds in 9:19). See also Peter’s speech in Acts 3:22–23 and the citation of Deuteronomy 18:15–20, which characterizes Jesus as a prophet like Moses, and one whom the people should hear. In this pericope, though, the deeds side is more prominent, with Jesus raising the widow’s son. Both sides of Jesus’s prophetic mission are referenced in the comments by the Emmaus travelers (“deed and word”), as well as in the pericope following the one we are considering. When the disciples of John the Baptist are sent to enquire of Jesus concerning his person, Jesus replies, “Go and announce to John the things that you see and hear: the blind regain their sight; the lame walk; lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are evangelized” (7:22).

Basic Considerations of Language and Meaning

7:11: Καὶ ἐγένετο . . . ἐπορεύθη—“And it came to pass . . . (that) he journeyed.” This construction provides an OT “feel” to the pericope, as it mimics Hebrew and especially LXX verbiage. Note that later in this verse the syntax is V-S (verb-subject) not S-V, which is also a Semitic linguistic characteristic. See also 7:12, 15, 16, 17.

7:12: ἰδοὺ—The use of this interjection, especially in the narrative itself, is also a Semitism. ἐξεκομίζετο—Note the imperfect indicative passive: “was being carried out.” τεθνηκώς—a masculine, singular, nominative, perfect active participle, describing the state of the young man, that is, “dead.” μονογενῆς—This word, also used in John 1:18 amid great controversy, clearly means “only” here, not “only begotten.” αὐτῇ—This form could be a feminine singular nominative *personal* pronoun, or, a feminine singular nominative *demonstrative* pronoun, that is, αὐτῇ = *this* woman. The majuscule manuscripts have no accents or breathing marks, so it is impossible to distin-

guish the two forms with any certainty. Luke often uses the nominative of the personal pronoun in this slightly ungrammatical way, to mean “he, she, it,” though it is then emphatic (see, e.g., 1:17; 8:54). If so, this should be rendered, “And *she* was a widow.”

7:13: ὁ κύριος—Note the use of κύριος here as a descriptor of Jesus during his earthly ministry *by the narrator*. (Manuscript D and several others substitute Ἰησοῦς.) Matthew and Mark *never* exhibit this usage (though it does occur in Mark 16:19 and 20!). This use of κύριος brings Luke into conformity with Acts (see Acts 9:10; 16:14; 18:9; 22:10; 24:15).

7:13: ἐσπλαγχνίσθη—This denotes the deepest, most heartfelt expression of pity and compassion = “bowels of compassion.” μὴ κλαῖε—a negative “present” imperative = “*Stop* weeping.”

7:14: τῆς σοροῦ—genitive case, because the verb ἄπτομαι “takes” the genitive. ἔστησαν—strong/2nd aorist indicative active of ἵστημι and as such *intransitive* in meaning = “stood (still)” (cf. Mk 10:49). νεανίσκε—vocative case for direct address (cf. κύριε in 5:12). ἐγέροθι—*aorist imperative passive* but *intransitive* in meaning (see Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*, chapter 24, section D) = “arise” (also ἠγέροθι in verse 16).

7:16: ἐδόξαζον—imperfect indicative active, here, *inceptive*: “began to glorify.” ὅτι (twice)—not “that” or “because” but an indicator of *direct* discourse. It is virtually quotation marks. ἐπεσκέψατο—a key word that is almost technical for God coming to his people. It is to be seen against the background of the OT as denoting God making his presence known in judgment and in grace, whether in history (e.g., Jer. 29:10) or at the end of history (e.g., Is 26:14; 27:1 [note that translations may render the Hebrew with words like “punish” rather than “visit”]). An important linguistic connection can and should be made to Luke 19:44, where Jesus predicts the fall of Jerusalem because, as he says to the people, “you did not know the due time of your *visitation*” (τὸν καιρὸν τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς σου), which is a reference to his own presence and actions. With this sentence, the people express with words (i.e., on “Level 1”) what the resurrection of the young man signifies: that in Jesus’s presence and actions, God himself is “visiting” his people in grace.

7:17: ἐν ὄλῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ—Oddly, though the action of our text occurs in Nain in Galilee, Luke focuses upon the area around Jerusalem with these words, as is his wont (note that in chapter 24 all resurrection appearances of Jesus are in the environs of Jerusalem, not in Galilee).

Theological and Preaching Considerations

While focusing upon Jesus’s compassion for the widow in this passage might seem desirable, focusing instead on Jesus’s prophetic and divine visitation activity is preferable and more far-reaching. In Jesus’s life and ministry, the true voice of Yahweh himself is heard, and the saving eschatological deeds of Yahweh come on the scene. This is confirmed by the following pericope, namely, the question of John the Baptist put to Jesus through the former’s disciples. Note Jesus’s answer in 7:22. These are the very deeds that Isaiah said *would* come to pass when Yahweh himself comes to his peo-

ple personally (see especially Is 26:19; 29:18; 35:5–6). Our text conveys this awesome truth—that in the resurrecting by Jesus of the young man at Nain, the eschatological reign and rule of God broke into our world—into history. Amazing! We might say that it broke in *proleptically*, that is, ahead of time, before the full end/consummation of all things = the age to come. Furthermore, it broke in as a kind of *foretaste*; that is, not all the dead were raised. (Indeed, the young man died again, even as did Lazarus [Jn 11] and Jairus’s daughter [Mk 5], two other foretastes). Jesus himself rose triumphant from the grave on Easter morning, which was also a proleptic manifestation of the eschatological reign and rule of God, but now as a *full manifestation of the age to come*, that is, he arose never to die again. And we are guaranteed to participate in that fullness, we who have been baptized into Christ and have put on Christ (Gal 3:27). In the resurrection of the young man at Nain and in our Lord’s resurrection, then, our own resurrection at the full implementation of the age to come is assured. (For further discussion of the proleptic coming of the eschatological reign and rule of God in the person, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, see Voelz, *What Does This Mean?: Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*, Addendum 11–B.)

James Voelz

Proper 6 • Luke 7:36–8:3 • June 12, 2016

“If this man were a prophet, he would have known.” Simon’s statement implies that if Jesus were a true prophet he would know about the sinful lifestyle of the woman who was anointing him and refuse her expression of love. Simon was not only assuming how a prophet would respond, but also assuming that Jesus must not be a prophet because he did not act according to Simon’s definition.

The irony of this passage is that it is precisely because Jesus is the True Prophet that he allowed the woman to approach and anoint him with tears and ointment. This misunderstanding of Jesus’s identity prompts a parable from Jesus and a corrective rebuke of Simon.

Jesus, in the parable that follows, illustrates that the woman’s expression of love was in direct proportion to her canceled debt of sin. She who is forgiven much, loves much and he who is forgiven little, loves little. Comparing the hospitality that Jesus received from Simon to the outpouring of gratefulness from the sinful woman, Jesus makes a convicting observation. Unlike the loving and faith-filled response of the woman, Simon failed to show Jesus the simplest of common hospitality—no water for Jesus’s dusty feet nor kiss of greeting. But the woman used her tears to wash her master’s feet and her hair to dry them. And in place of the absent kiss, the woman kissed Jesus’s feet repeatedly as she prepared to anoint them with oil.

In the narrative that follows the parable, we are once again shown the dedication and love of grateful women. Those who had been healed of evil spirits and illnesses followed Jesus and supported Jesus and his disciples financially in order that they might

continue their ministry. The elevation of the women in this text as a greater expression of love for Jesus and his forgiveness cannot be overlooked. Their recognition of their need for Jesus and of who Jesus was and what he graciously provided is a lesson not only for Simon, but for all who read this text.

Homiletically, one might take many approaches to this text. The most obvious approach would emphasize that our love toward Jesus is based on what he has done for us in his atoning death on the cross; that Jesus has the power to forgive as illustrated in the text as a whole and specifically in verses 48–50; and the importance of recognizing the depth of our forgiveness in Christ through an honest and non-pharisaical appraisal to our sin.

Another approach would be to acknowledge women as exemplars of faith and patrons of the early church within Scripture. Their willingness to honestly reflect on their need for Jesus and their openness to expressing their gratitude through loving devotion is something that men can struggle with in light of the common stereotypes of masculinity in American society. It is important, however, that this approach not be used as a form of gender bashing, but as a reminder that for many men, humility, expressions of love, and honest self-reflection can be a challenge. The goal is not to promote a feminine approach, but a Christian one. The goal is to help the listener reflect on the debt of sin forgiven by Christ in order to anchor actions toward him in a grateful and loving response to the forgiveness he willingly won for all. Accordingly, the anointing by the sinful—or perhaps more aptly named—grateful woman can be seen as an anointing ultimately for his death.

In this text, we see the willingness of Jesus to embrace those considered the greatest of sinners as well as to correct those seen as society's leaders. Sin and our need for forgiveness is the great leveler where men of privilege stand next to women of ill repute, both in need of the very same thing—Jesus and his forgiveness.

Anthony Cook

Proper 7 • Luke 8:26–39 • June 19, 2016

“Why Do You Not Leave Me Alone?”

Narrative Focus

This pericope falls within a series of four of Jesus's miracles (8:22–56): calming a storm, casting out demons, healing a woman, and raising a girl from the dead. These together show Jesus's power and reign over every sphere of danger and calamity: nature, spiritual powers, disease, and death. Sadly, the series C lectionary focuses on pericopes unique (or uniquely told) in Luke; but the adventurous preacher might take an opportunity for a short four-week series on the “Power of Jesus,” focusing on these four episodes, culminating in a girl being raised from the dead and ending with the hope of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Two features of this text stand out in Luke's Gospel. First, the event occurs in

Gentile territory, thereby demonstrating that all peoples participate in Jesus's reign. Second, this is the only event in Luke with a mission focus ("describe what God did"). Note that Jesus instructed the man to do this within his household (οἶκός), but he ends up "announcing through the whole territory what Jesus did for him." Preachers may wish to focus on this theme; this study suggests instead a theme connected to the power of Jesus.

Textual Focus

Some exegetical issues require resolution. First, in 8:28, τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί may be rendered, woodenly, as "what to me is also to you?" But that is not very clear English, and perhaps, as Arndt and others suggest, "Why do you not leave me alone?" is more accurate (cf. ESV: "What have you to do with me"). A second issue with this phrase is who the speaker is at this point: Is the man speaking, or the demon?

The ambiguity of the speaker may serve as a homiletic device: The question, "Why do you not leave me alone?" if voiced by the demon, is answered by Jesus as Lord who has conquered Satan by his death and resurrection. He does not leave the demon alone because he has come to destroy evil in all its forms and drive it from the face of the earth. In the midst of terrorism and war, bloodshed and shootings, the need for a Savior is all the more pressing and obvious.

But, "Why do you not leave me alone?" is also the question of the man, who has been possessed and beset by evil. From him (and from us) it is a plaintive cry. God has every right, in his justice, to leave us alone and abandon us. It is a question, ultimately, of faith. Even in the midst of bombings and shootings, of disease and death, God could easily abandon us to the sin, pride, and arrogance of our society and of each one of us. But he does not leave us alone. He breaks in to our world to be with us, to become one with us, to deal with sin decisively in his body. He does not leave us alone.

There is an interesting "blank" in the episode, while the herdsmen run into the town and get the townspeople Jesus and the man are left behind, absent from the description. When they return, Jesus is sitting with the man, peacefully, who is now clothed and of sound mind. How did that happen? How did he get the clothes? What were he and Jesus doing and discussing while everyone else was away? And notice that it is not Jesus, nor the healed man, who relates the story of what had happened, but the herdsmen. Jesus and the man are detached from all the chaos and anxiety and fear that is surrounding them. They are remarkably calm and, well, normal, even as everyone else is in an uproar. Such is the power of Jesus.

Finally—not an exegetical issue but a cultural challenge—in our day, our hearers may respond to the biblical account with incredulity. Skeptics will doubt the authenticity of any miracles, and the seeming over-the-top description of the swine and the cliff only gives ammunition to those who doubt the gospel accounts. But a sermon is not necessarily the best place for apologetics (and certainly Luke feels no need to *defend* the historicity of the event, he simply tells it). The preacher will best serve his people by himself being convinced of the power of Jesus, and allowing the power of that Word to prevail mightily through him.

Hearer Focus

As you develop the sermon in a way that connects to your congregation, the text urges certain themes. Here Jesus demonstrates, again, his all-encompassing power to us. In this text we are driven to confidence. Even in the midst of crushing and overwhelming forces which we cannot comprehend or battle, the power of Jesus is undiminished. That power does not ratchet up the volume, responding to power with even more overwhelming power, but with a word, with peace, with calm, with, dare we say, a normal, everyday life. “What do you have to do with me?” can be the yell of the enemy, the unbeliever, opposed to God and his power. But it can also be a cry of faith, a cry of wondrous confidence in the God who always responds to save his people. The psalmist praises, “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! (Ps 139). “What a God,” we say, “who has to do even with me!” daily, and finally on the last day, through the cross and the empty tomb to the right hand of the Father, from which place he reigns still today, this day.

Jeff Kloha

Proper 8 • Luke 9:51–62 • June 26, 2016

Notes on the Text

9:51: This passage is the beginning of what is often called the *travel narrative* in the Gospel according to Luke. The passage marks a turning point in Luke’s account of Jesus Christ. At his transfiguration Jesus had spoken of his departure (9:31). Now, according to Luke, Jesus knows this event is near, and he sets out resolutely toward Jerusalem. Luke is consistent in highlighting Christ’s ascension into heaven: this event marks the end of the Gospel, and is the way he characterizes the book in the opening of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:1–2).

9:52: Jesus sends messengers ahead. As we see in 10:1, Jesus sent messengers to all of the places he would visit, so this fact alone is not unusual.

9:53: But Luke reports about a Samaritan village that will not welcome Jesus because he is going to Jerusalem. James and John want to know whether they should call down fire from heaven. Their reaction is reminiscent of Elijah calling down fire from heaven on the captains and their men (2 Kg 1:10–14). It also echoes John’s preaching about the wrath to come (Lk 3:7–9).

9:54–56: Jesus rebukes them, and they move on. He gives no reason, but see a variant that echoes Matthew 20:28 and John 3:17: “For the Son of Man did not come to destroy the lives of men, but to save” (but v. 55 has several variants). One should also remember the “good Samaritan” (10:30–37) and the Samaritan leper (17:11–19).

9:57–62: A summary of Jesus’s exchanges on his journey. Compare Matthew 8:19–22, but note that these exchanges take place around the Sea of Galilee. Taken together, they reflect an unsentimental and realistic view on discipleship. It may mean

alienation (if not persecution; cf. 9:23–25), and in any case it requires single-minded, unflinching devotion to Christ and his mission, overriding social conventions and family obligations (cf. 14:25–33). But anyone who does not follow in this way is not *appropriate* or *fit* or *properly suited* (εὐθετός) for the reign of God.

Notes for Preaching

Although this pericope suggests several points upon which a sermon might focus, I suggest focusing on discipleship, the most apparent theme in this passage.

You might begin such a sermon by pointing out the obvious: that discipleship in the Gospel of Luke (or any Gospel) is always following Jesus. But what does this mean? We can discern several features. First, discipleship means actually receiving and hearing Jesus and those whom he sends. The Samaritans refused, and that meant not following Jesus. Second, discipleship means being aligned with our Lord. James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven. Jesus’s rebuke meant that they weren’t following him on this important matter. Third, disciples should be clear about its nature. The man who volunteered to follow was told about the consequences, which is to go about with “no place to lay [your] head.” Following Jesus means going as he went, and that can be challenging and alienating. Fourth, discipleship means following single-mindedly. Jesus challenged the men he called who asked about delaying. He required them to set out immediately and resolutely, just as he was going resolutely toward Jerusalem.

Only the second, third, and fourth points will be relevant to a congregation of followers of Jesus. You should clearly and concretely explain and/or illustrate the implication of each point. For example, the second point might call for patience in dealing with those who ignore Christ’s call or Christ’s disciples; the third point might call for cautioning against complacency; the fourth point might call for urging hearers to “hear the word of God and keep it” (Lk 11:28). In any case, you should strive to discern that which is most challenging to your hearers, because the Lord in this passage is challenging to those whom he comes to and whom he addresses.

Joel P. Okamoto

Proper 9 • Luke 10:1–20 • July 3, 2016

Sermon Notes

Luke 10:1–20 does not develop an argument but instead lays out a series of sayings that are disparate in structure and content: a metaphor (v. 2); a comparison (v. 3); instructions (v. 4); regulations and brief developments of themes (vv. 5–13); lamentation (vv. 14–15); a wisdom saying (v. 16); a dialogue (vv. 17–20), which has an apocalyptic (v. 17), juridical (v. 19), and paraenetic (v. 20), tone.¹

In this text, the kingdom of God sounds like it is made of *threads* and *loose ends*. Words, themes, and events in this text have connections, or *threads*, with the Old Testament and various other texts. We can follow the threads to see how this text ties

in to a bigger picture of God's kingdom. The threads also invite us to read forward. That is, they connect *us*, God's people now, to God's kingdom as well.

Loose ends in the text leave us hanging in various ways: tensions in God's kingdom that still need to be resolved, questions that need to be answered, events that have not happened yet. What follows are some of the threads and loose ends that make up this text:

Loose end: When teaching interpretation of biblical narrative, we often use the saying: "description is not prescription." In other words, unlike commands, and laws and instructions, narratives do not clearly direct us to do anything. They are not prescriptive in this sense. However, commentator David Brooks offers another perspective on narrative. He writes, "In middle age, it was as a novelist that Tolstoy achieved his most lasting influence. After all, description is prescription. If you can get people to see the world as you do, you have [unwittingly] framed every subsequent choice."² So, if the text is not giving us evangelism techniques or instructing us in how we must do mission work, what is it trying to do? How is Jesus trying to get us to see the world as he does? How is his view different from other viewpoints that hold our attention? How might this text influence the way we live our lives and live out our faith? These are questions to think about as you prepare to preach on this text.

Thread: In verse 1, the seventy-two "others" (other than the twelve) that the Lord sends out links to the LXX text of Genesis 10 and the number of nations in Jewish thought.³ If this is the connection, then Jesus may use this number to tell us that his kingdom goes beyond the narrow boundaries of the Jewish nation, but extends to all the nations of the world. This thread might suggest that the fulfillment of OT prophecy has begun, and God's blessing to the nations is at hand (Gn 12:1–3; Is 9:1–9; 42:1–9, etc.). The mission of the seventy-two emphasizes the power of God's kingdom to defeat the diabolical enemies of his creation and his people (vv. 9 and 18). The language of the text and the miracles it describes suggest that this mission has eschatological implications (i.e., the last days of OT prophecy have broken into the present evil age). The mission of the seventy-two may also anticipate the mission to all the world seen at Pentecost (Acts 2).

Thread: In verse 2, the metaphor of the harvest is usually used in Scripture for the judgment (Jer 51:33; Hos 6:11; Jl 3:13; Rv 14:15), but here it is positive (Is 9:3, Ps 126:5–6). Again, the language suggests that the mission has eschatological implications—a matter of life and death. The metaphor of "mission is a harvest" still guides the church's thinking about our mission today.

Thread: The metaphor of God's people as lambs and Yhwh as their shepherd is common in the OT (Is 40:11; Ez 34:11–31; Pss 23:1; 79:13; 95:7), and so is the metaphor of the enemies as wild animals or wolves (Zep 3:3; Hb 1:8). In Isaiah 53:7, the servant of Yhwh is "like a lamb led to slaughter." Again, this picture guides the church's thinking about our identity, what we are to expect in this world, and what our relationship with Jesus means. Both the image of the harvest and lambs among wolves occur repeatedly in Christian hymns, prayers, and art as a way of thinking about our place in this world and the nature of God's kingdom. In this connection, Isaiah 11:6, "the wolf

shall live with the lamb” gives God’s people hope that the kingdom we await contains a marvelous reversal of fortunes where lamb and wolf are reconciled.

Loose end: In verse 6, the seventy-two heal the sick and proclaim that the kingdom of God is near. But this utterance leaves us wanting: wanting to see and experience the same power that these disciples saw. “The kingdom is near”—a foretaste of the salvation that God has promised—suggests that the kingdom is still near, but it seems invisible now. We are still waiting for Jesus to appear again and tie up what seems to be a loose end.

Thread and loose end: In verses 12–15, the mention of Sodom connects to the terrible judgment of that city (Gn 19). Jesus also mentions two cities known in the OT for their idolatry and resistance to Yhwh, Tyre and Sidon. Both of which were eventually destroyed. He mentions these in order to lament the recalcitrant cities of his day and pronounce judgment on them. In verse 15, his pronouncement upon Capernaum is in language uttered against Babylon (Is 14:12–15), a prophecy that came true. But “that day” and “the judgment” that Jesus refers to in verse 12 and verses 13–15 points to a future yet to come. Jesus uses eschatological language of judgment that awaits fulfillment. When will it come? What will it look like? What is the church to do in the meantime?

Thread and loose end: The now versus not yet, and hidden versus seen, tensions that are part of our experience in this age surface in verses 17–19. Here, the seventy-two rejoiced in the power of Jesus’s name to subject the demons themselves. Their success is expressed in terms of healings and exorcisms, not conversion—the visible power of the kingdom is highlighted.⁴ Yet, we ponder this taste of victory while we are in a continuing struggle against Satan and evil. The victory seems incomplete. The kingdom has come, but not in its full manifestation, and so we must wait for this awful loose end to be tied up.

In the text, Jesus responds, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” Again, the language is reminiscent of that used against the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14:12–15. Jesus also asserts that he has given his disciples power over both physical and spiritual demons. Nothing can hurt them, he says. Clearly, the events of the end time are playing out. Yet, it is true that Satan still exerts his power in this age. Satan has fallen, yet he prowls like a lion. Both are true, a tension that awaits resolution. Furthermore, in this text there is a tension between the image of Jesus’s disciples as lambs in the midst of wolves and the image of his disciples treading on serpents and scorpions and overpowering demons. From our perspective, we long to move from faith to sight so that our lamb-like humility and vulnerability can ease. The now and not yet tension in which we live is palpable. How can both be true? How will the tension be resolved? What does this mean for the church today? We need to discuss these questions.

Thread: In verse 20, Jesus drops an interesting line: “Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” He gives his disciples this amazing assurance that God loves them. That God has made them his own. Their names are “written in heaven” gives us assurance that God will not forget about us. But I need to know if I can identify with these disciples. Are Jesus’s words meant for me? How do I know? What promise do I have personally that this is true? This line gives preachers the opportunity to talk about the significance of baptism for the certainty of salvation. In addition, in the words we hear in the absolution and in communion, God tells each of us: Your name is written in heaven. Rejoice.

Concluding Thoughts

The text gives us a complex picture of the nature of God's kingdom. The now-not yet, hidden-visible, law-gospel, and power displayed in weakness tensions are not solved in this text. In the present age, we cannot escape them. We live within them and our experience of them marks the Christian life. By thinking of the kingdom as threads and loose ends, the sermon does not have to solve anything or present a program for action. Instead, it can help people expand their vision of what the church is all about and what Jesus has done and will do.

In many ways, the text keeps us wondering and waiting. That is a good posture for God's people to take. Jesus reminds us that we are part of something much bigger and farther reaching than ourselves. In fact, it is probably true that threads and loose ends have always characterized God's kingdom. That is what we are a part of, and we must wait and watch for everything to be tied up on that last day of which Jesus speaks.

Timothy E. Saleska

Endnotes

¹ Francois Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 22.

² David Brooks, "Description is Prescription," *New York Times* (Nov. 25, 2010).

³ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 412, says that the number seventy-two in Enoch 3:17:8, 18:2–3, and 30:2 is reckoned as the number of princes and languages in the world; Bovon, *Luke 2*, 26, says that the MT of Genesis 10 has seventy instead of seventy-two. The manuscript tradition of Luke fluctuates between reading seventy-two and seventy. See Bovon, *Luke 2*, 26, footnote 24, for discussion of the variant readings.

⁴ Bovon, *Luke 2*, 30.

Proper 10 • Luke 10:25–37 • July 10, 2016

Provided here is a sermon digest based on the parable of the Good Samaritan. The reader is free to appropriate into a sermon that which is beneficial.

Focus: As those restored by Jesus, we love others by serving their needs despite the messiness and busyness of life.

Introduction: Anyone who seeks to learn the game of tennis knows that learning to serve is a most difficult task. This is true in tennis, and even more so in life.

Life in Christ involves service. It means serving others. It happens on the path of everyday living. It is directed to those who we encounter on that path—our neighbors.

Setting: Through discussion Jesus agrees with a lawyer that the law is summed up as this: "You shall love the Lord your God . . . and your neighbor as yourself" (vv. 26–28). Then the lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" (v. 29). To answer, Jesus tells a story.

Scene 1: Priest and Levite vv. 30–32

A man is traveling the winding road through the rocky desert. He is accosted by thugs who attack, assault, rob, and beat him. They leave him as if he were road kill.

Later he is approached by two men:

A priest, fresh from leading worship at the temple, saw the bloodied fellow. If he were dead, to touch him would be taboo. The priest would experience ceremonial defilement and so lose his priestly prerogatives. This was too messy!

Illustration: A Sunday school teacher asks her students: What would you do if you were that priest? One answers: “I think I’d throw up.” Indeed, it’s messy! So the priest doesn’t get involved.

A Levite (religious worker) had kept very busy in religious activities. He cleaned the temple and synagogue. He maintained the holy furniture and vessels. He directed the choirs and musicians. He organized the sacred library. But when he saw the beaten man, he passed by. He was too busy!

Today Christian discipleship happens in the everyday journey of life, where opportunities to serve arise. But for us, to get involved is oftentimes:

Too messy: We hesitate to get involved with people’s problems: a coworker divorcing, a neighbor whose kids are unruly, a teen who looks odd, an old person with a house run down, a sick friend.

Too busy: To help and serve others takes time. We’ve got life scheduled to the minute. So we can’t fit the needs of others into our schedules. We’ve got other obligations and deadlines.

Illustration: Researchers at Princeton Seminary planted an actor who depicted himself as a sick vagrant. In one group only 10 percent stopped; 90 percent were “too hurried.” See: http://faculty.babson.edu/krollag/org_site/soc_psych/darley_samarit.html.

Scene 2: Samaritan vv. 33–35

Samaritans were the hated enemy of Jews, considered half-breeds, traitors, and heretics. So when Jesus introduces this character, quite likely the audience expected him to be a villain (that’s how Samaritans were commonly portrayed)—“Boo! Hiss!” Perhaps they expected the Samaritan to finish off the injured fellow.

Instead, the Samaritan “has compassion” (v. 33). He rescues the Jewish victim, serves him, and sacrifices for him so that he is cared for.

Having completed the story, Jesus asks the clinching question: “Which proved to be a neighbor?” The lawyer responded: “The one who showed mercy.” Jesus then directs, “Go do likewise” (vv. 36–37).

Law and Gospel Proclamation

To us Jesus also says, “Go and do likewise.” The problem is, we often don’t. The lives of others are too messy! Ours are too busy! We fail to serve. We fail to love our neighbors as ourselves.

But there is one in this account who does—not the fictional Samaritan, but the real-life narrator. Jesus came into this messy world and connected with messed up people—prostitutes, publicans, lepers. More than that, he connected with *sinners*. He was the “friend of sinners.” He served them—healed, forgave, and released them from the mess of sin and the peril of death.

Moreover, he serves *us* sinners! He heals, forgives, and releases us from our sin and its deadly consequences. “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45).

This was Christ’s mission: he saw us in our need (dying in sin), loved us, and took on himself the mess of our sin. He was beaten and bloodied so that we might be rescued, so that we might live.

Now in response we join Christ’s mission, and serve in his name. We serve in the messiness and busyness of life. We serve because he first served us.

Illustration: A man once observed Mother Teresa cleaning the wounds of a leper. He turned away in revulsion and said, “I wouldn’t do that for a million dollars.” Teresa looked at him and replied, “Neither would I. But I would do it for Christ.” See: http://www.jameslau88.com/my_life_with_mother_teresa_by_james_martin.htm

Conclusion

We have been rescued by Christ. He gave his all that we might live. Thus we serve others in the messiness and busyness of life. We do it for Christ.

David Peter

Proper 11 • Luke 10:38-42 • July 17, 2016

The Gospel lesson appointed for the ninth Sunday after Pentecost is the Mary and Martha account. It illustrates the priority of the word over food. The psalm for that day prays, “Teach me your way, O Yahweh” (Ps 27:11). That prayer expresses the desire of Mary.

When tempted, Jesus himself said, “Man will not live by bread alone” (Lk 4:4). The quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3 continues “but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” In the parable of the Sower, Jesus warns against letting the cares of life dominate over the hearing of the word, and he commends those who hear the word, hold it fast, and then bear fruit (Lk 8:14–15; see also 11:28; 12:22–31).

Notes on the Text

10:38: The story of Mary and Martha is unique to Luke. During his travels ultimately to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51) Jesus entered a village. We know from John 11:1 that the village was Bethany, two miles east of Jerusalem, probably modern El-Azariyeh on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. Unlike a Samaritan village that did not receive Jesus (Lk 9:52–56), Martha welcomed Jesus as a guest. Both Martha and Mary were followers of Jesus.

10:39: Mary, the sister of Martha, was sitting at the feet “of the Lord,” where she “was continually/attentively listening to his word” (imperfect of ἀκούω). To “sit at the feet” is a posture of submissive learning (e.g., Paul at the feet of Gamaliel in Acts 22:3).

10:40: In contrast, Martha wanted to pay attention but “was distracted over

much service.” The noun *service* (διακονία) sometimes refers to the public service/ministry of the word (e.g., 2 Cor 5:18), but here it refers to the meal preparation. Martha was like some of the women who “continually gave service” (imperfect of διακονέω) to Jesus and the disciples out of their own supplies (Lk 8:3). Martha came up to Jesus and spoke to him: “Lord, you care—don’t you—that my sister left me alone to serve?” With the particle οὐ the question expects a “yes” answer. Assuming that Jesus does care about this, Martha speaks an imperative to the Lord: “Then tell her that she should assist me.”

10:41: The Lord responds to Martha with gentle admonishment. By repeating her name, Jesus clearly shows that he cares about her. “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things.”

10:42: Jesus continues: “But of one thing there is need.” In contrast to Martha’s *many* concerns, there is *one* thing needful. “For Mary chose the good portion which will not be taken away from her.” Here *for* answers an implied “Why do I say that? For . . .” A positive adjective (good) can be used for a comparative (better). The noun *portion* was probably chosen as a play on words; Mary chose the better portion of the meal. This portion is the Lord’s word that she was single-mindedly hearing. The final clause works on two levels. The better portion “will not be taken away from her,” not now by ordering her to help prepare a big meal nor for all eternity. The devil tries to “take away” the word of God from the hearts of people (Lk 8:12), but the Lord will not do that.

Sermon Idea

Let the Lord’s Word Mesmerize You

Goal: One goal of a sermon on this text could be to encourage and motivate the listener to “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the word of the Lord as given in both Testaments.

Malady: Reports from Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregations indicate that attendance at adult Bible classes is rather dismal. People are busy and stressed. Moreover, our pragmatic American culture supposes that nothing could be more impractical, unproductive, or boring than study of the Bible. Even faithful Christians can be caught up in the busyness of everyday living. As a result, serious study of the Lord’s word is neglected. We all need to confess our neglect and indifference, receive holy absolution, and amend our daily lives. Then teachers will study more diligently and strive to become better teachers, and hearers will put a priority on serious study of the word over all the other daily tasks and pursuits.

Means: Why should we “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the word of the Lord? Because the Lord’s word is not boring. It is deep and mind-blowing, awesome, overwhelming really. Not only that, it is the word of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the very Son of God. He is the one who fulfilled what was written by Moses and the prophets, and he did it all for you. He lived the obedient life for you; he set his face to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die for you; he was raised from the dead and exalted for you; and he will come again in glory for you. His word will save you and transform your life. It is the one thing needful. Like Mary in the gospel lesson, let the Lord’s powerful and saving word mesmerize you.

Paul R. Raabe

It might seem like an odd thing to do, but notice how our first reading in Luke 11 takes on a slightly different tone when it is considered in light of the last of our Lord's words in chapter 10, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

The disciples' request in chapter 11 might seem reasonable and natural; it could have been prompted by the anxious desire to "get prayer right." Apparently, John, as with other great rabbis had taught his disciples to pray. Each rabbi had a distinctive prayer model. The disciples did not want to be left out. They had experienced the demands of ministry at the beginning of Luke 10 and knew they needed to become confident prayer warriors. Their request reflects a perspective that prayer is about the proper technique, the correct words, perhaps the proper posture. So they asked and Jesus answered their request. He taught them to pray, but he also taught them that the heart of prayer is not technique, structure, and terminology. The heart of prayer is our relationship with God, our Father. For the sake of time and in view of our familiarity with the text, little time in this homiletical help will be spent on the portion of the text most often called "The Lord's Prayer."

The Lord's Prayer provides a framework through which we can understand prayer in the context of our relationship with God, our Father. While it can be recited, as it is in most of our churches every Sunday, it also provides a framework that challenges the foundation of prayer.

In teaching them to pray, Jesus challenged the disciples to rethink the very nature of prayer. Christian prayer is not like the prayers of the people of this world. They view prayer as a negotiation process with a superpower. They appeal to God's ego with flowery speech and generous portions of praise. They appeal to God's greed with their promises and pledges. They appeal to his sense of justice by offering many prayers in the hope of shaming God into action. The prayers of Jesus's disciples do none of these things.

Prayer springs not from our need but from our relationship with our heavenly Father. While we readily acknowledge the omnipotent and benevolent nature of God, we begin our prayer with an acknowledgement that God is our Father and we are his children. Our adoption as daughters and sons into God's kingdom is a gift from God granted to us through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The fact that God is our Father changes everything in prayer. Now, we are bold in our petitions to our Father. Verses five through eight contain a teaching offered in parabolic form about prayer. Many people get caught-up in the details and miss the point that the parable is more about our prayers than about God's answer to our prayers. In this story, the sleeping friend yields to the persistence of the knocking neighbor, primarily because the knocking neighbor is bold. However, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the friend gets up and opens the door with bread, not a bat with which to silence the offender. In other words, Jesus celebrates the boldness because the neighbor is confident in the relationship he has with his sleeping friend. God desires us to be

confident in our relationship with our heavenly Father; so confident that we persist in asking, seeking, and knocking.

The ultimate expression of confidence in our heavenly Father is our trust in God to give us good gifts as he determines best for us. We can be at peace knowing that every good gift comes from our Father.

Todd Jones

Proper 13 • Luke 12:13–21 • July 31, 2016

Literary Context

In the verses proceeding today's text Jesus confronts the religious authorities about their hypocrisy (11:37–54) and then warns his disciples to be faithful in the midst of persecution (12:1–12), persecution that would come in part from those very religious authorities. Today's pericope then follows. Here Jesus turns from the disciples to interact first with one man who seeks his aid and then to address the crowd. This passage is then followed with Jesus again addressing his disciples and teaching them how to live faithfully regarding possessions and material needs (12:22–34), especially in light of his return on the last day (12:35–53). Jesus's blunt refusal to help the man who approaches him in 12:13 is best understood in this wider context.

The Text

12:13–14: Jesus bluntly refuses this one man's request for intervention in a dispute with his brother over their inheritance. There is no reason not to take this man's request at face value: His (probably older) brother has refused to divide the inheritance with him and so in effect is robbing him. Yet Jesus refuses to get involved—"Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Jesus's response could indicate that one reason for him refusing to intervene is that judging such a dispute was simply not a part of his calling.

Yet read in the context of what came before—Jesus warning his disciples about coming persecutions—and what follows—Jesus teaching his disciples not to worry about their possessions—the interpreter might also conclude that this man's request displays a significant misunderstanding of Jesus's ministry. Jesus has come to usher in the last days when God will bring salvation to Israel. For those who are following Jesus, concerns about living in this present age are not to be a distraction from living as if the last days have come. Yet what does this man seek from Jesus? He wants help in acquiring "what is rightfully his" in this present age as if the last days have not already broken in with Jesus. Even if his complaint is legitimate, he is not seeking from Jesus the gracious things Jesus was sent to give (e.g., salvation or the Holy Spirit).

12:15: Jesus uses this as an opportunity then to address the crowd and warn them against covetousness—"one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

12:16-21: Though this parable is commonly referred to as the parable of the Rich Fool, from a strictly human perspective everything the man plans seems to display worldly wisdom. He plans to do what he must to preserve this unexpected bumper crop, and then he hopes to “take it easy and enjoy life,” one life goal of many Americans. Some interpreters read some deeper sin into this man’s deliberation, that is, he does not speak of helping the poor as he deliberates and this indicates that he is selfish. Yet this might be reading more into the parable than is there. Indeed, what may be most troubling about this parable is that most of what this man plans is just about what any other person might plan in such a situation. That such simple deliberations about what to do with one’s possessions might earn the accusation of fool from God himself is meant to unsettle the hearer.

Of course, what makes all of these deliberations foolish is that it is already determined that this man will die that very night. That this man is even in control of his own property is an illusion. Jesus’s warning and interpretation of this parable then follows: “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Considerations for Preaching

Covetousness is a form of idolatry that might prevent someone from faithfully responding to the initiation of God’s reign on earth in Jesus Christ. Such an idolatrous attitude is displayed by the man who approaches Jesus over the inheritance and by the man in the parable. Since the last days have come in Jesus Christ, Jesus’s disciples are not to worry about laying up treasure for themselves, but should seek to be rich for God.

What does it mean to be rich for God? Such a life is described in Jesus’s teaching that follows in 12:22–34. See especially 12:31 and 32—“seek [God’s] reign” and “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the reign.” One who is rich for God will live as if God’s gracious reign in Jesus has been given to him. This will then be evident in how one trusts God and so does not worry about food, clothing, and possessions (12:22–31). Such a people will even sell their possessions to give to the poor (12:33). For such a person life does not consist of the abundance of possessions, but what God has done in Jesus, bringing salvation to Israel and to all people.

David I. Lewis

Proper 14 • Luke 12:22–34 (35–40) • August 7, 2016

It is always important to consider the context of the assigned readings. Therefore, look at Luke 12:16–21. Jesus tells a story about a rich man who has an abundance of earthly goods. He has so many earthly goods that he is considering a plan to tear down his current barns in order to make way for bigger barns. Jesus does not tell this story in order to hold up the rich man as a godly example. In fact Jesus calls the rich man a fool (Lk 12:20). However, the story of the rich man sets the stage for the assigned reading.

In contrast to the rich man, Jesus tells the disciples to consider the ravens (Lk 12:24). Ravens have no barns; they are scavengers who daily look for food. This distinction between the rich man and the ravens is important because it helps us to understand the relationship between trust and worry.

The rich man trusted only in himself. He idolized himself and his ability to collect so many earthly goods. Some people might be in awe of the rich man and all the treasures in his possession. Yet, there are two kinds of treasures. One kind of treasure grows old and rots while the other last forever. The rich man trusted in the treasure that grew old and rotted. Although he did not seem worried about growing old and rotting in the grave, he should have been. When we put our trust in our own abilities, we don't put our trust in God. And for many people this misplaced trust causes worry, anxiety, sleepless nights, panic, and even physical discomfort. This is why Jesus said, "O you of little faith" (Lk 12:28). When we fail to trust in God, we end up trusting in things that should cause us to worry. That is the point Jesus is making with the rich man. The rich man should have been very worried because he trusted in himself, but the ravens trust in their creator and do not worry.

In order to address worry we need to assess what we trust in. When we trust in things that grow old and rot there is a lot to worry about. We end up being anxious about what we will eat and what we will wear. But when we trust in God for our daily bread there is no need to worry. "Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds" (Lk 12:24). When we place our trust in God there is no need to worry because God does not grow old and does not rot. We trust in God who not only provides for our earthly needs but also our spiritual needs.

God provides purses that will not wear out, treasure that will not be exhausted. Look to the cross and see Jesus hanging naked, hungry, and thirsty. He hung there so that we have the best treasure of all, forgiveness of sins. No matter how many barns the rich man had, no matter how much he trusted in himself to maintain the level of his wealth, it does not compare to the treasure we have in the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are ravens living every day trusting in God to provide. And he does provide! Fear not! Do not worry! Be not anxious! We trust in God who sacrificed his Son to give us the treasure of salvation that does not grow old and does not rot.

Mark Rockenbach

Proper 15 • Luke 12:49–53 (54–56) • August 14, 2016

As if the themes of this Gospel weren't challenge enough, two significant exegetical/translational questions must also be addressed.

Luke 12:49b is "a passage of well-known difficulty, the translation of which remains doubtful."¹ Just presents the case for the translation "How I wish that it were already kindled," but the parallels are not exact for the whole expression, nor the exam-

ples numerous.² Plummer paraphrases: “What more have I to desire, if it be already kindled.”³ Arndt also finds Plummer’s translation “the most plausible” option. Arndt translates: “and what do I wish for if now at length it is kindled?”⁴

In support, Plummer adds, “The next verse does not imply that it is not kindled; and the history of Christ’s ministry shows that it was kindled, although not to the full extent.”⁵ Arndt, too, interprets the statement as referring to “the actual results of [Jesus’s] message.” We are “to think here of the clashes caused by the Gospel, some people rejecting others accepting it . . .”⁶ This reading, which the Greek does allow,⁷ would seem to provide the best progression of thought to the following verse. There is no wish to extinguish the fire that his preaching has kindled, for this is the purpose for which he came. Now that his work has begun, he longs to see it reach its end (τέλος; cf. τελεσθῆ in 12:50) in the baptism that awaits him. Overall, this seems preferable to taking 12:49 as a contrary-to-fact condition: “would that it were kindled (but it is not).”⁸

The second question is the ἀλλ’ ἦ of 12:51. Despite differing proposals for the completion of the apostrophized ἀλλ’, there is no disagreement on the force of the combination. It means “except” in the sense “no other thing than,” “nothing but.” Such a strong expression of a negative alternative does not allow us to read the verse as an example of dialectical negation; that is, “not peace, but division” = “not (only) peace, but (also) division.” The text allows no softening of its force, no easing of the tension.

Our Lord came to cast fire upon the earth. This fire, in keeping with his desire to carry out his Father’s purpose, has already been kindled. His ministry cannot but lead to a baptism for him, and he is hard pressed, oppressed, greatly distressed, until it be accomplished. This is the way it will be from now on⁹: division will strike the very places where his people live and sunder the closest of family ties. Jesus brings no peace that comes apart from the word he proclaims, apart from the baptism he must undergo. Jeremiah’s picture of the word that blazes like fire and smashes like a hammer (23:29; breaking in two the family hearth? splintering the dining room table?) is well in line with the picture in Luke 12: “The world is lit up with flames, and Christ is bathed in blood.”¹⁰

The sermon might develop these points:

A future perfect? This text uses a rare Greek verb form: the future perfect. But is this the perfect future we imagine for ourselves? We see here a Jesus we cannot recognize, whose purpose is to burn and destroy. Set for the rise and fall of many (Lk 2:34), He comes with axe (Lk 3:9) and hammer (Jer 23:29) in hand. The fire he kindled still roars in our world.

A perfect future can only come about through the perfect completion of the work for which he came. That means a fiery word for the world and a bloody baptism for himself. He has set his face toward Jerusalem; he will not turn aside.

Though we long for the day when division will cease, we will not settle for a “dreamy” peace (Jer 23:26–27) that comes from distorting or silencing the divisive Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). Our hearts break as our homes are divided, but we know that this, too, means the word is at work.

Lent comes from the word *lengthen*, referring to the lengthening days of spring-time. But, oh, how long the days seem as we wait for the perfect future God has prepared for us in Christ. Christ's baptism now stands completed, so we, too, need to know "what time it is" as we wait for our Lord to return and say: "Peace be with you."
Jeffrey A. Oschwald

Endnotes

¹ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, International Critical Commentary, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1922), 334. First published 1896.

² Arthur Just, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 520.

³ Plummer, 334.

⁴ William F. Arndt, *Bible Commentary: The Gospel according to St. Luke* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 323.

⁵ Plummer, 334.

⁶ Arndt, 323.

⁷ Cf. Fitzmyer's "literal" translation of the line. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X–XXIV)* The Anchor Bible, Vol. 28A; (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 996.

⁸ Note how closely the reading favored by Plummer and Arndt parallels John 12:27 (28–33).

⁹ Note the rather rare future perfect used here: you will have been divided and continue in a state of division.

¹⁰ Plummer, 334.

BOOK REVIEWS

RECEIVER, BEARER, AND GIVER OF GOD'S SPIRIT: Jesus' Life in the Spirit as a Lens for Theology and Life. By Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. Pickwick Publications, 2015. 360 pages. Paper. \$34.00.

The Ecumenical Councils defended a Logos Christology that affirmed the Son's divine consubstantiality (*homoousios*) with the Father (at Nicaea, AD 325) and the personal or hypostatic unity of the Son against any division or confusion of his divine and human natures (at Chalcedon, AD 451). Leopoldo Sánchez seeks to "complement" and "invigorate" a Logos Christology with a Spirit Christology that is faithful to the biblical account of Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Son who "receives, bears, and gives God's Spirit." Yet his proposal follows neither pre-Chalcedonian adoptionist narratives, which speak of the Spirit's presence in the man Jesus while denying his divine preexistence, nor contemporary post-Chalcedonian (and post-Trinitarian) accounts, which substitute a Spirit Christology for a Logos Christology. Rather, Sánchez seeks to supplement a Logos Christology's emphasis on the "static" and "individual" aspects of Jesus's identity—his "being-from-before" and "being-in-himself"—with a Spirit Christology that highlights the "dynamic" and "relational" (or "social" or "ecstatic") aspects of Jesus's identity—his "being-in-act" and "being-in-relation" (or "being-in/through/with/for-another").

Sánchez's argument makes an important contribution to contemporary theology. Specifically, it deepens and expands our understanding of three theological themes: the Holy Spirit's role

in the humanity of the Son and his life and mission for us (in Christology and soteriology); the Son's identity before the Father in the Spirit (in the economic and immanent Trinity); and our present-day participation by grace—as adopted "sons"—in Christ's life in the Spirit through the Spirit's work in our lives (in ecclesiology).

Sánchez begins his argument with a nuanced analysis of the "partial" eclipse of a Spirit Christology in three pre-Nicaean theologians: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Athanasius. Focusing on their interpretations of Jesus's baptism, he demonstrates that they tended to eclipse the role of the Spirit in Jesus's life in their attempts to counter heterodox views of Jesus's identity. Nonetheless, these same interpretations also laid the groundwork for understanding the place of the Spirit in Jesus's life and its implications for Christology, Trinitarian theology, and ecclesiology.

From there, Sánchez presents a biblical and theological account of Jesus's identity as "receiver, bearer, and giver of the Spirit" as a framework for complementing Logos-oriented approaches. Focusing on *the incarnation*, he interprets three defining moments in Jesus's life in the Spirit—his conception, his anointing for mission (at the Jordan), and his glorification—in order to locate them within a broader soteriological and economic-Trinitarian trajectory. Focusing on the *paschal mystery*—encompassing Jesus's suffering and death on the cross, his resurrection, and his pouring out of the Spirit from the God the Father at Pentecost—Sánchez describes how the Spirit Jesus "receives" from the Father and "bears" in inexhaustible fullness

throughout his life and mission is the same Spirit from the Father whom he freely “gives” in love for others. Focusing on the *atonement*, Sánchez examines three classic Logos-oriented readings of the atonement (associated with Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, and Gustaf Aulén) in order to demonstrate that a Spirit Christology enables us to integrate valuable insights from each atonement theory within a broader economic-Trinitarian account of Christ’s identity as receiver, bearer, and giver of the Spirit.

These Christological reflections have Trinitarian implications. Implying a reciprocal relationship between the missions of Son and the Holy Spirit in God’s economy of salvation, they provide insight into the Trinitarian concepts of “person” and “relation.” In addition, they provide a basis for relating two conceptions of intra-divine relations: the “processional,” which stresses the logical priority of the Son over the Spirit in the order of intra-divine processions, and “social” (or “*perichoretic*”), which stresses mutual reciprocity in intra-divine relations. To relate these two conceptions, Sánchez proposes an “*in spiritu*” (“in the Spirit”) model for understanding how the Son exists in a reciprocal relation of love and communion with his Father in the Spirit. Compatible with *both* Eastern (*per filium*) and Western (*filioque*) views of intra-divine relations, this model presupposes the classic order of processions within the Trinity assumed in both views even as it also highlights their potential for accentuating dynamic and relational aspects of God’s Trinitarian life.

In a constructive vein, Sánchez appropriates four classic theological distinctions as conceptual aids for inte-

grating a Logos Christology and a Spirit Christology: (1) the “identity” of Jesus and the Logos, on the one hand, and the “non-identity” of Jesus and the Spirit, on the other; (2) the “order of knowing” (Lat. *ratio cognoscendi*) and “order of being” (Lat. *ratio essendi*); (3) the human and divine wills and operations of Jesus Christ (as clarified at the Council of Constantinople III, AD 680–681) and (4) the divine and human natures of Christ (following Martin Chemnitz). With this fourth distinction, Sánchez appropriates Lutheran Christology in order to relate the Eastern doctrine of the communication of attributes in the person of Christ to the Western scholastic distinction between the incarnation (as grace of union) and the holiness of Christ (habitual grace). In so doing, he brings to the fore the Holy Spirit’s role *in* Christ’s human nature, which he describes as the *genus habitualis* or *genus pneumatikon*.

These theological reflections have profound practical implications for proclamation, prayer, and sanctification. Relating a Spirit Christology to Gerhard Forde’s claim that “theology is for proclamation,” Sánchez points out that the conviction of and liberation from sins that comes about through word and sacrament is—through the Spirit—an actualization of Jesus’s baptism, death, and resurrection in our lives. In a critical analysis of Thomas Aquinas’s Logos-oriented approach to prayer, Sánchez proposes a theology of prayer grounded in the church’s participation—as adopted “sons”—in Jesus’s prayer life in the Spirit. Lastly, drawing on biblical, Nicene, and Lutheran confessional sources, Sánchez relates a Spirit Christology to a sacramental or incarnational approach

to a theology of sanctification based on three models of life in the Spirit of Christ, which he describes as “baptismal,” “dramatic,” and “Eucharistic.”

Sánchez’s case that a Spirit Christology complements and invigorates classic Logos Christology has profound implications not only for Christology, soteriology, and Trinitarian theology, but also for ecclesiology and the Christian life. It is of particular relevance for Lutherans. Not only does it demonstrate the fruitfulness of Lutheran Christology for greater ecumenical understanding of the complementarity of Logos and Spirit Christologies, but it also makes the case—with its explicit depiction of the pneumatological link between Christ’s and the Christian’s life in the Spirit—that a Lutheran emphasis on God’s justification of humans by faith in Christ need not negate a robust theology of sanctification or holiness.

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DIVINE HONOURS FOR THE CAESARS: The First Christians’ Response. By Bruce W. Winter. Eerdmans, 2015. 348 pages. Paper. \$35.00.

Are Christians being persecuted in America? In some countries the answer is a definite “yes,” but in America? *Divine Honours for the Caesars* details how minority Christians interacted with majority non-Christians in the first-century Roman Empire. Winter doesn’t draw conclusions for us in post-churched America; that’s left for us as pastors. “Most of what we do in serious Bible study has to do with overcoming the gaps

that separate us from the original audience of the scriptural documents.”¹

“Overcoming the gaps” includes setting aside our assumption that the ancients sharply distinguished between the divine and human. Winter quotes Duncan Fishwick:

The boundary between gods and man was narrower in Graeco-Roman belief than in ours and more fluid. . . . So if a man performed meritorious and extraordinary deeds, if he was endowed with great beauty or strength, that was recognized as manifestations of a godlike quality and a title to “divinity” with its appropriate recognition. (52)²

That’s why emperors could be called divine, a notion inconceivable for us. Second, we shouldn’t impose our American separation of church and state onto the first century. While Roman officials preferred to stay out of religious matters (Acts 18:15; Jn 19:31), the American separation of church and state wasn’t known to Romans. The emperor was the *pontifex maximus*, literally the chief bridge-builder between the gods and humanity. “There was no dichotomy between political and cultic issues in the Roman Empire” (42). A third wrong assumption is to assume Romans took religion as personally as we do. Most Americans identify personally with a faith tradition (or increasingly as “none”), but religion for most Romans meant the performance of rituals by the priests of various cults, and participation by all benefited the well-being of the whole community. Christians’ personal and exclusive claim that Jesus is Lord was troubling, even subversive.

Part I of *Divine Honours* documents the presence of imperial cults (Winter prefers the plural, 49) throughout the empire. Temples, priests, religious rites, vows, sacrifices, celebrations, the public calendar, holidays, coins, and innovative provincial honors to curry favor with Rome were all part of the pervasive cults and integral to the stability of the empire. The chapter “Adopt, Adapt, Abstain” tells how the Jews responded. For example, when Herod the Great adopted Roman ways by building a temple to “*Roma* and Augustus” in his capital at Caesarea Maritima, the Jews were allowed to abstain and adapted by sacrificing in their Jerusalem temple *for* the well-being of the emperor, not *to* the emperor. Another example: Emperor Claudius (AD 41–54) decreed, “It is right, therefore, that the Jews throughout the whole world under our sway should also observe the customs of their fathers unhindered.” But with that came a catch; Jews were “not to set at naught the beliefs about the gods held by other people” (104). How would Jewish and Gentile Christians with a commission to evangelize the world respond?

Part II of *Divine Honours* looks at how Christians did respond in various Diaspora cities and provinces, Athens for one. The Areopagus Council heard Paul’s speech because it was responsible for admitting new deities to Athens, including new emperors (Acts 17). The reaction to Paul’s visit and speech was mixed, and “some men joined him and believed” (17:34). Winter concludes:

When thinking about the implications of their conversion, they were no longer to attribute provi-

dence to the gods nor speak of the “divine being” in terms of a plurality of gods. Neither could they venerate statues of gods before Athens’ imperial altars, nor in the temples of other gods on the allotted days. That would be idolatry, for this “unknown” God could not be replicated in any human likeness (17:29). (158)

That suggests that the converts immediately understood “the implications of their conversion,” which seems questionable. Growth in faith is a longer process than justification.

In Galatia, the problem was pressure from Jewish Christians upon Gentile believers to put themselves under imperial exemptions by following Jewish laws. Imperial edicts protected the Jews, their practice of circumcision, Sabbath, and diet, although those practices all drew public mockery. The Jews were allowed to meet weekly (other associations were not), to sacrifice and pray *for* but not *to* the emperor, to send their temple tax to Jerusalem and other privileges. A Jewish Christian would retain those protections, but would a Gentile Christian? Winter says,

If all male Christians were circumcised, they could legitimately meet once a week, be seen to be Jewish by following the Torah as a canon by which they lived and also claim that appropriate cultic honours were being given to the Caesars in the temple in Jerusalem within the legitimate parameters of the Jewish faith. Hence, they would not be required to give divine

honours in the imperial temples in the province of Galatia. (241; see also 18, 227, 244, 247)

Paul incisively saw that as an abandonment of the gospel and so his vigorous letter to the Galatians. Winter: “His response to the Galatian crisis indicates the enormity of the pressure brought to bear on the first Gentile Christians for them to take this despised but evasive action (circumcision) for the sake of all Christians in the province” (249). Paul’s Law/Gospel insight was profound. But did the Judaizers immediately grasp Paul’s reasoning? This reviewer believes it was a slower process than Dr. Winter implies.

In Revelation “refusal to participate (in imperial cults) would result in summary execution” (286). Revelation chapter 13 describes the economic suffering and execution of those who would not bear the mark of the beast.

And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. (13:15–17)

Chapter 17 describes a seven-headed beast that rises from the abyss. Those heads, says the text, “are also seven kings,

five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while” (17:10). Winter identifies the sixth head, the one who “is,” as Nero and the seventh, who will “remain only a little while,” as Galba, Nero’s successor who reigned only three months (AD 68). Winter’s chronology for chapter 17 and his study of 666 lead him to this conclusion: “The sixth king is Nero both by reason of the number of kings and *gematria*.” Indeed, Nero “punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians.”³

But was Revelation written in Nero’s time or much later? Winter dates Revelation earlier than most commentators. In one footnote he says, “Dating the book to the era of Domitian does not coincide with the internal evidence in Revelation 17:10, as he was the tenth emperor” (292, footnote 22). Domitian was emperor from AD 81 to 96. In favor of the accepted later dating, Louis Brighton wrote, “By the time Revelation was written, Nero had been gone for twenty years or more.”⁴ While Brighton’s commentary predates *Divine Honours*, the sweeping apocalyptic nature of Revelation suggests a wider persecution than that of AD 64. Brighton adds,

Even if one could satisfactorily make such matching identification, they would only serve as models or types of all such earthly rulers and the powers they exercise. That is, all oppressive earthly rulers that come and go through the entire period of time covered by the prophetic message of Revelation (Christ’s

ascension to his return) are symbolized by these seven kings as by the beast itself.⁵

The stated aim of *Divine Honours for the Caesars* is to show various responses to imperial cults under the Julio-Claudian emperors, from Augustus to Nero, 27 BC to AD 68 (15). Winter's treatment of Revelation caps off this reviewer's suspicion that too much is being compressed into the Julio-Claudian era. Winter's mentor E. A. Judge distinguished three periods through the first century. First, "the Gallio period, when Roman courts would only accept suits against Christians on criminal charges." Second, "the first Epistle of Peter represents the second approach, belonging clearly to what we may call the Nero period, the stage when the Roman authorities had allowed convictions for criminal offences to serve as a precedent for prosecutions on the ground of membership alone." And third, "the Pliny period, the stage when the Romans themselves, in an endeavor to stop an embarrassing spate of prosecutions, tried to prevail upon Christians to make a formal renunciation of their membership in the incriminating society. The reaction was wildly defiant, at least as far as the New Testament documents go, and only thinly veiled behind the traditional apocalyptic imagery"⁶

Returning to the beginning, where are we in twenty-first century America? Our context is significantly different, a constitutional republic in which we can participate, not a legally and socially imposed imperial cult. "Rather than being persecuted, Christianity in the

United States is losing the rather absolute predominance that it once held in America."⁷ *Divine Honours for the Caesars* provides numerous insights for confession in post-church America, as long as we overcome the gaps between then and now, as Winger put it. Sanctification comes more slowly than Dr. Winter sometimes implies, but our confidence is that the Spirit is still guiding his church to confess Christ, especially in less church-ed times.

Dale A. Meyer

Endnotes

¹ Thomas Winger, "The Spoken Word: What's Up with Orality?" *Concordia Journal* 29 (2003): 136.

² See Acts 12:22; 14:11; and 28:6 where Paul is thought to be a god.

³ Tacitus, *The Annals*, 15:44; 304–305.

⁴ Louis Brighton, *Revelation Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 354, footnote 40.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 449.

⁶ David M. Scholer, ed., *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge* reprint ed. (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2007), 54–55.

⁷ Michael Knippa, "No 'Lions of Gory Mane': Persecution or Loss of Predominance in American Christianity" *Concordia Journal*, 41 (2015): 299.

MEISTER ECKHART: Philosopher of Christianity. By Kurt Flasch. Translated by Anne Schindel and Aaron Vanides. Yale University Press, 2015. 338 pages. Paper. \$38.00.

For those who may not know of him, Meister Eckhart was a prominent thinker, preacher, and teacher of the later Middle Ages, famous both for what he taught and for the trouble it eventually brought him. He is also important for Luther studies, for he is one of the medieval figures Luther regularly praised and looked to for guidance, and so it is

appropriate that this book should receive attention in a publication geared to Lutheran pastors.

Kurt Flasch's purpose is to recast Eckhart in light of his complete corpus, as a philosopher of Christianity rather than as a mystic and preacher. He believes that this traditional approach to Eckhart is superficial and unfair. When Eckhart's works are considered broadly the real positions of the man emerge. Flasch takes a developmental approach to the subject, which is a composite of biographical and document based treatments, allowing for changing positions over time as well as Eckhart's thought in the various contexts of his life. Here we benefit from an interesting composite of biography and writings that effectively makes the case that Eckhart was primarily concerned with a rigorous, thought-based Christianity.

Eckhart takes an ontological approach to the problems of the faith and particularly the interrelation of the soul and God. One would expect such an approach to be Platonist in orientation, but instead Eckhart makes copious use of the physics and metaphysics of Aristotle. This is especially evident in the question of the actual interaction of the soul with God. Flasch makes it clear that while Thomas Aquinas believed that God created grace as a kind of buffer between the soul and God, for Eckhart the soul was directly acted on by God. Yet, according to Flasch, Eckhart avoids the trap of talking about the hidden God directly. He avoids this problem of mystery by keeping to an Aristotelian and evidence-based approach, working from the Vulgate scriptures and the writings of other Christian thinkers rather than a

mystical reality world ala Plato or Neo-Platonism.

Eckhart is also portrayed as a surprisingly practical theologian. He spends much time advocating for an active Christian life of love and service to both God and the neighbor. He is not above making some controversy with his preaching, in which he also calls for leaders and princes to repent. Reform in the church represents another theme of his work. Here he calls for apostolic poverty and a return to simplicity, which were the core values of the monastic orders. The active life of Christian love is Eckhart's goal, a result that comports well with Luther's second kind of righteousness and teaching of vocation.

Flasch covers all of the major works of Eckhart individually and does his best to maintain them in order of their appearance (some of this background information is speculation). In addition, he goes into some detail on the charges that were leveled against Eckhart at the end of his life, as well as his trial and defense.

A word should be included about the translators, who had a yeoman's task in bringing the German into a readable English. They did a great job, but the language sometimes remains impenetrable, not due either to the author or the translators, but rather to the depth and difficulty of Eckhart's thought in itself. This book can be a difficult read, but for those who are really interested in Luther, medieval thought, or the ontological approach to God and the faith, a highly rewarding one.

Timothy Dost

FAITH SPEAKING

UNDERSTANDING: Performing the Drama of Doctrine. By Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Westminster John Knox, 2014. 298 pages. Paper. \$30.00.

Kevin Vanhoozer's newest work is a follow up to his much-heralded work, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. *The Drama of Doctrine* itself was a direct response to George Lindbeck's seminal work *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984) and his highly influential (and debated) cultural-linguistic account of religious communities and their doctrine.

What made Lindbeck's work important was how it set the terms of the debate over the nature of doctrine with his now famous typology of theories of religion and their doctrines: the "cognitive-propositionalist" and the "experientialist-expressivist." In a nutshell, the cognitive-propositionalist highlights "the cognitive aspects of religion and stresses the ways in which Church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities."¹ This view sees religion as "similar to philosophy or science as these were classically conceived" and has a "preoccupation with the cognitive or informational meaningfulness of religious utterances."² On the other hand, the experiential-expressivist interprets doctrines as "noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations." This view "highlights the resemblances of religions to aesthetic enterprises" and is congenial to the "liberal theologies influenced by Continental developments that began with Schleiermacher."³

Lindbeck's two types correspond to conservative and liberal approaches to Christianity that are firmly rooted within foundationalist assumptions and are still very much in place. I say all this because both Lindbeck and Vanhoozer fit the types even as both claim to move beyond them. As I argue in *Upon This Rock: The Nature of Doctrine from Antifoundationalist Perspective*, Lindbeck's cultural linguistic model is really just an expansive version of the expressive-experientialist model; a move from *Ich Theologie* to *Wir Theologie*. Likewise, Vanhoozer's account in *The Drama of Doctrine* and *Faith Speaking Understanding* is similarly an expansion on the cognitive-propositionalist account that seeks to overcome the weaknesses of the type, but is still firmly rooted in it.

For Vanhoozer, "Doctrines are not simply truths to be stored, shelved, and stacked, but are indications and directions to be followed, practiced, and enacted. Christian discipleship is a practice of *doing* truth, of learning the way of life that is in Jesus Christ" (xiv, emphasis original). The Christian life, far from being static or characterized as intellectual assent to propositions (like typical cognitive-propositionalist accounts) is active and participatory in God's ongoing drama of redemption.

This is the way the people of God come to know and express their love for God: by conforming their lives—hearts, souls, minds, and strength (Mark 12:30)—to his will, on earth as it is in heaven. Doctrine gives direction for bearing faithful witness, for speaking understanding. Moreover, if action "speaks"

louder than words, then faith *speaking* understanding involves both verbal and nonverbal modes of communication: words and deeds. (1, emphasis original)

Right belief goes hand in hand with right practice. It is impossible to be “in Christ” and not participate in his ongoing redemptive work. You can’t just state the truth or assent to it as a propositional statement; Christians must embody and live the gospel.

Vanhoozer’s model for making sense of embodied truth is his “theatrical model” in which the Bible is God’s authoritative “script” for the real life “play” of the church and its theatrics before a watching world. Doctrine is “instruction about God and direction for playing one’s role in the same drama of salvation that lies at the heart of the Scriptures” (21). In short, the nature and function of doctrine is to direct the Christian disciple to God’s word and therein enable the church to be faithful “actors” in the divine drama, embodying the word in speech and action. Doctrine is for doing within the divine economy.

Vanhoozer’s account is far more expansive and detailed than I am allowing and his theatrical account of doctrine within the divine economy goes well beyond what I could elaborate here. Lutheran readers should know up front that Vanhoozer’s account privileges a broadly evangelical viewpoint and reads like it. That being said, I have virtually nothing to criticize in terms of what Vanhoozer *exhorts* the church to believe and do. In those terms, I recommend this book. His model is a call to take seriously both the indicatives and impera-

tives of Scripture and I am in full agreement with him. I think the fear of many of his critics is that his theatrical model may lead to an inward-facing performance of the gospel—that is, an in-house performance that goes unseen by the world—is unfounded and is more apt for Lindbeck’s account of doctrine. I found Vanhoozer’s constant referral to the theatre—he even found a way to describe the sacraments as “props”—wears thin at times, but no one can accuse him for not thoroughly mining his metaphor.

As good as *Faith Speaking Understanding* is (and it is a good book), like his previous works, it is enmeshed within foundationalist assumptions even beyond still being a cognitive-propositional account. For example, Vanhoozer’s works are almost always theory laden as in, “once we have this theory or model in place then everything will work” (*Is There a Meaning In This Text?* and *The Drama of Doctrine* especially do this) and this book is no different. I kept thinking, “yes, what you are exhorting is true and good, but why do I need the theatrical model in order to make sense of what Scripture is calling me to do? Why do I need the context of the theatre in order to make sense of my calling to be a disciple?” He could have easily dropped the theatrical model altogether, or used it as an illustration, and cut the length in half. It would have been a better book.

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Endnotes

¹ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 16.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

**REFLECTING THE ETERNAL:
Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the Novels
of C. S. Lewis.** By Marsha Daigle-
Williamson. Hendrickson Publishers,
2015. 330 pages. Paper. \$14.95.

Every time I teach my course on C. S. Lewis's novels and poems, some perceptive student will notice a resemblance between some item in a Lewis work (most often *The Great Divorce*) and some aspect of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Customarily, I casually acknowledge the similarity and return to whatever issue was being considered before the student's contribution.

The author of *Reflecting the Eternal* agrees that Lewis's "use of Dante's poem is more visible in [*The Great Divorce*]" but maintains "it is *all* of his fiction, and not just this novel, that constitutes Lewis's *Divine Comedy*"—a title sometimes suggested for the totality of Lewis's novels to acknowledge his heavy borrowing from Dante (154). Near the end of the book, Daigle-Williamson puts it more bluntly: "[I]n none of Lewis's novels is Dante's story absent" (201).

Reflecting the Eternal supports Marsha Daigle-Williamson's claim again and again. Her book accumulates a mass of evidence that might conceivably top Dante's Mt. Purgatory. In a remarkably thorough and systematic manner, the author demonstrates a wealth of similarities between Dante's *Divine Comedy* and all of Lewis's fiction, including even *The Chronicles of Narnia*, specifically *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* and *The Silver Chair*—similarities in every conceivable aspect: actual citations, allusions, episodes, characters, settings, structure, philosophy, theology, and even specific

words and phrases. And she does this in a clear, readable, unaffected style that keeps the book from reading like a catalog or an index. Even her unique way of handling her voluminous footnotes (locating not only the footnotes themselves but even their designations to the back of the book, thereby reducing the interruption of the flow of the text proper) is an example of her courteous concern for the reader as well as of her scholarship. *Reflecting the Eternal* is a tribute not only to the genius of Dante and Lewis. It is also a tribute to the genius, industry, courtesy, and modesty of the author. In keeping with Lewis's own standard, Marsha Daigle-Williamson is for her readers "a pair of spectacles rather than a spectacle."

If anything, the author is too thorough. She over-proves her thesis, giving the faintest similarity between Lewis and Dante the benefit of the doubt. Occasionally, a similarity she discovers sounds forced; what may be mere coincidence is awarded the status of a borrowing or an influence. Ransom's invitation to Lewis in *Perelandra* "Come down Thursday" the author regards as an echo of the "Thursday" in *The Divine Comedy* as the day on which the pilgrim initiates a trip. The author scents a borrowing by Lewis in the fact that he uses the word "frightened" or "fear" nine times on two pages of *That Hideous Strength* even as Dante uses the word "fear" five times in forty-seven lines of the *Inferno*. Is this evidence of meticulous scholarship? Or an instance of "protesting too much"? I'm not sure.

Determining a given author's sources and influences can too easily be a pedantic exercise. Some readers, of course, especially those enamored of a particular

author, will be interested in biographical and bibliographical factors that may have influenced their favorite. Here or there an occasional student will consult a book such as the one under present review for support of a term-paper thesis. Such a publication, it seems, is designed more for Lewis scholars than for Lewis *aficionados*, right?

As an aficionado myself, I do not find this to be true of the Daigle-Williamson book. Even as I experience delight in finding ripples of the Christian Gospel in belletristic literature—and especially in Lewis’s works—some fans of Dante will thrill at discovering ripples of his classic poem in the writings of Lewis. Then there are peripheral joys, such as (for me) the author noting an emphasis on poetic justice in both Dante and Lewis (what Dante calls *contrapasse*). In Dante’s *Inferno*, for example, Daigle-Williamson points out that “murderers who shed the blood of others are immersed [in hell] in a river of boiling blood, receiving for all eternity the essence of what they chose in life” (17). Similarly, she notes that the clergyman in *That Hideous Strength* whose practice in his witness was to sever biblical quotations from their true meaning has the vocal cords that preached his heresies severed at the end of the novel (17). Likewise, Jane Studdock in the same novel experiences a situation befitting her offence: Jane “having delayed in joining the [Christian group], her membership is now further delayed.” As Daigle-Williamson neatly puts it, “What she chose is what she is given” (120). The peculiar satisfaction that poetic justice provides a reader is just one of the many joys that are a bonus in *Reflecting the*

Eternal. The book is not merely a catalog of borrowings.

Even worse, a publication determining a given author’s sources and influences can be a dangerous activity, the possibility always present of, intentionally or unintentionally, diminishing that author’s integrity and capacity for originality. Has Daigle-Williamson’s project done so to C. S. Lewis?

More than a few Lewis critics have paid tribute to his phenomenal memory. Whatever he read, he retained—permanently; his brain absorbed concepts and details like a blotter. His “plagiarism” (if we dare call it that) was unconscious, plagiarism by osmosis rather than by intention, an innocent, legal variety of plagiarism indicative of a brilliant mind rather than of an evil heart. Unacknowledged borrowings are not deliberate; rather they leak out unconsciously. As Daigle-Williamson puts it, “Dante’s poem was part of the ‘habitual furniture’ of Lewis’s mind” (176).

Even better, Lewis treated his unconscious borrowings imaginatively, creatively. Ordinarily, he improved what he borrowed. “Lewis’s art reflects an astonishing depth of creativity in shaping his allusions to Dante’s poem” (201). “The fact that the depth of Lewis’s relationship and debt to Dante has for the most part been fleetingly referred to without many examples by most scholars is itself evidence that Lewis’s adaptations and transformations of Dante’s material is so profoundly creative that much of it has gone unseen” (206). One example: The nautical images Dante uses in his *Purgatorio* to describe his pilgrim’s spiritual journey, mere metaphors there, are converted by Lewis in *The Voyage of the “Dawn Treader”* into literal items at the beginning of the

journey described there, items attractive in a book designed for children (167). Lewis's conversion of what is metaphoric and symbolic in Dante into the literal in his own works is a procedure that Daigle-Williamson calls "transpositional" or "incarnational" (167).

Daigle-Williamson ends her book with a pleasant surprise. She describes Lewis's reaction to his reading of Matthew Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* in which Lewis takes issue with a critic's contention that only those who are capable of recognizing the Homeric episodes from the *Iliad* could appreciate Arnold's poem. Lewis modestly confesses that he knew nothing of Homer at the time. For Lewis the relation between Homer and Arnold "worked the other way." When he read Homer's *Iliad* years later, he "liked it partly because it was for [him] reminiscent of *Sohrab*" (205).

Daigle-Williamson applies this reaction to the relation between Dante and Lewis. "Because of the myriad of different ways in which *The Divine Comedy* and its messages are cast and reflected in Lewis's novels, I believe that *Dante's poem* has been given renewed life in the modern imagination—whether readers are aware of it or not—and that Lewis in his own right, can be called 'a Dante for the modern age'" (207; emphasis mine). Her point? Dante's *Divine Comedy* not only sheds light on Lewis's works; Lewis's works put new light on Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Both works become more meaningful in the context of each other, suggesting perhaps a different subtitle for *Reflecting the Eternal*, namely, "The Novels of C. S. Lewis in Dante's *Divine Comedy*!"

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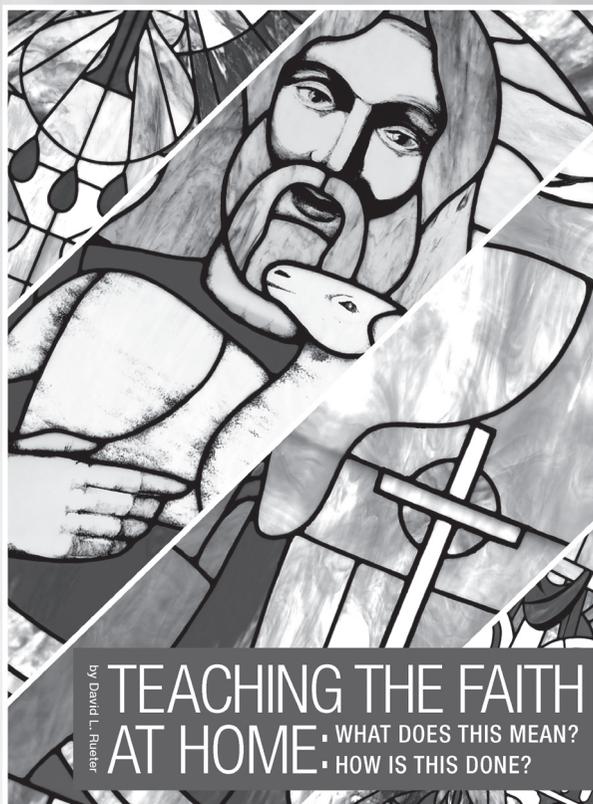
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