

**Selected Sermons of Pastor Don Baron
(May 6, 1931 ~ Sep 11, 2013)**

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The King's Ransom - Matthew 20:17-28

What would you think if I were to say that Jesus didn't die so that you could go to heaven? Before you tar and feather me as a heretic, please permit me to take us through today's Bible text.

vv. 17-19

These words had been repeated often to the disciples.
They never got the point.
Like all of us, they heard what they wanted to hear.
They never heard the words about death, mocking, scourging, crucifixion.
They only got as far as "going up to Jerusalem" - and that excited them.
That fit into their preconceived notions about Jesus.
"Well," they thought, "it's about time!
He's going up to claim the crown!
Let's find Him a white steed and have a parade into the city! Hosanna!
He's going to gather an army and drive the Romans out.
Finally, we're going to have the Messianic Kingdom!
Sadly, they missed the point entirely.

They should have noted that Jesus called Himself "Son of man."
Not the Messiah King - that had become politicized name.
Not Son of God.
No, Jesus' focus was on His humanity, His coming humiliation.
Paul tells us He was the emptied-out God.
He had taken the form of a servant, born a human
He was humbled, obedient to death, even a horrific death on a cross.
Strange, peculiar God, this.

vv. 20-21

Here's more evidence of the blindness of His disciples.
Good old Mums - they want the best for their children.
But it's obvious that this Mum is supporting what her sons think best.
Their focus is on the Messianic kingdom they think is about to be established in Jerusalem.
"We're following you, Jesus. What's in it for us, Jesus?"
But before we condemn James and John, STOP.
We may have this very attitude among us.
"I'm going to heaven - isn't that great?
I have an eternal life policy that I can cash in at the end.
I just need to pay a few premiums -
you know, go to church when it's convenient.
don't beat your wife
be a decent neighbor
put up with the church crowd.
But that is to adopt a stance that's totally foreign to Jesus, who asserts,

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"I came, not to be served, but to serve."

vv. 22-24

Can you hear the dismay, the anguish, the disappointment in Jesus' voice?

"You don't know what you're asking!"

That's after 3 years with them - and they don't get it.

And now's He's about to leave them.

The serving of His world is to be in the hands of self-servers!

v. 24 The other disciples were indignant.

But did they understand?

Their later behavior proves they didn't.

Were they angry because they hadn't thought of the idea first?

vv. 25-27

In v. 25, Jesus is describing what everyone takes for granted.

Who would question that?

Ask the Caesars, Napoleon, the Pres. of Chrysler Corp, yes, ask bishops & cardinals

Greatness is measured by raw power over others - all too often even in democratic societies.

vv. 26-27: Jesus is a radical! He's unreasonable!

We would have written the Beatitudes differently:

Blessed are the pushers, for they will survive.

Blessed are the hard boiled, for they never let life hurt them.

Blessed are the belly-achers, for they get their own way.

Blessed are the slave drivers, for they get results.

Blessed are the trouble makers, for they make people take notice.

But Jesus says it's not that way in the family of God.

It's radical for God to get on the floor and wash people's feet.

It's ridiculous for God the Maker of heaven and earth to be murdered for you and me.

And now, having redeemed you and me from our safe, risk-free, orderly, hell-bound ways, He calls us to the radical, ridiculous, job of being what Martin Luther called "little Christs."

To join in His mission

To get crucified, if need be, for the sake of others.

To set aside our personal agenda for His.

A certain high school student received a Christmas card from a schoolmate:

"Thanks for making Physics class fun. And although I don't know you well, you seem always to be honest and caring. Thanks."

No wonder this note writer, when invited by that classmate to a spring break Christian camp, answered in the affirmative, and went.

No wonder he eventually made a commitment to Christ.

In a dog-eat-dog world, he had finally seen one person who risked being a servant.

He saw a little Christ, and he liked what he saw.

v. 28 is really the theme of Jesus' entire life.

And it's intended to become the theme of those He has ransomed by His death on the cross.

Just as Jesus cannot be understood apart from His mission to us, so it is intended that you, if

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you're a Christian, cannot be understood apart from your mission to others.

How would you describe yourself?

As a homemaker, a mechanic, a businessman who incidentally is going to heaven?

Or as a heaven-bound servant of others who incidentally is a homemaker, a mechanic, or a businessman?

It makes a world of difference.

No wonder the Bible calls the Christian experience a "conversion."

The word "conversion" means a reversal, a turnaround.

And multitudes in the church have never made that turnaround.

How about you?

Mrs. Simpson, an active church member, taught 4th grade at the local school.

She knew that she should love and treat all the kids alike.

But Teddy - now that was different.

He was sullen, sat with his head down, never looked her in the eye.

He was unattractive, unresponsive and, in fact, repulsive.

Somehow Mrs. Simpson kind of enjoyed putting X's next to his mistakes.

And she wrote F's on his report card with a flourish.

She should have known better; she had seen his record from lower grades:

1st grade: "Teddy is withdrawn; trouble at home.

2nd grade: "'Teddy's mother has terminal cancer."

3rd grade: "Teddy's mother died this year; his father is indifferent to Teddy."

At Christmas time it was the custom in this school for the children to bring a gift for the teacher.

They were all beautifully wrapped - except for Teddy's, which was wrapped in wrinkled brown paper.

When she opened it, it was a used bottle of cheap perfume.

She tried to be polite and thank Teddy, but it wasn't easy.

After all the children had left, Teddy hung back and said to Mrs. Simpson,

"I hoped you would like the perfume. You see, it was my mother's, and it would be nice if you smelled like my Mum."

And then he left.

Mrs. Simpson sat down and wept, and asked God for forgiveness and help.

She had long since had a conversion to God.

Now she had a conversion to the world, to serve it - beginning with Teddy.

She began to work with him and to encourage him,.

Teddy's reading caught up, and he passed some tests.

Teddy graduated and went on to high school.

Several years later, Mrs. Simpson received a note:

"I'm graduating next Tuesday and was hoping you could come."

Then came an invitation to his university graduation.

Then came a note that he had just received his medical diploma.

Later she was asked to be substitute Mum at his wedding.

"The Son of man came, not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.

To go back to the question I asked at the beginning:

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"What would you think if I were to say that Jesus didn't die so that you could go to heaven?"
Well, it's true that Jesus didn't just die so that you could go to heaven.
No, he died to make us heaven-bound servants who, moved by His costly act of ransom, will bring others with us, drawn to Him by our servanthood.

Thank You, dear Ransom, for what You have done for us.
Forgive us for permitting our society to squeeze us into its own mold of looking out for #1.
For each of us, whether young or old, it is not too late for a conversion -
a conversion to Your own radical way of living.
Turn us inside outward.
Help each of us to invest ourselves in a few other people who need to meet You.
We want to use all that we've got to do some things that last long after we've gone home to You.
Amen.

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THE BEST IS YET TO BE—I Thess. 4:13-18

Jogger: “I’m doing my best to prolong my life.
After all, some day I may find out what my life is for.”

What’s YOUR life for?
What are you prolonging your life for?
What is in your future that makes living worthwhile for you?

Basically, there are two views of life.
Which view you hold will have a tremendous effect on you.

(chart)

2 VIEWS of the WORLD

Practical Atheism

1. God is irrelevant.
2. No unified understanding of existence.
3. No absolute truths/morals.
4. No ultimate meaning to your life: “do your own thing”

Practical Christo-centrism

1. Jesus Christ is the focal point of existence.
2. Unified world view.
3. Absolute truth/morals revealed by God.
4. Deep meaning, goal, mission: “to glorify God & enjoy Him forever”

Now if you were to go to someone who holds View #1 and ask them:
“What is in your future that makes living worthwhile?”
If they’re honest, they will say, “Well, actually, there IS no future.”

In a beautiful valley in New England, USA, there was a very neat, pretty little town.
The people took pride in their community and their homes and it was admired by folks from miles around.
Then the fateful announcement came from the government.
The valley was to be turned into a hydro-electric dam.
It would be quite a few years before the dam would be completed.
But the entire town was going to have to be relocated...
because when the dam was completed, the town would be submerged.
Between the fateful announcement and the completion of the dam, the town changed.
The homes fell into disrepair and went unpainted.

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Weeds grew everywhere.
It became a depressed town.
No one cared anymore.

You see, where there is no future, nothing is worthwhile.

- Is that why so many youth suck it up, shoot it up, and give their bodies away indiscriminately—because they believe there's no future?
- Is that why a huge number of adults seldom think beyond what the next TV program will be—as a way of escaping the reality that there is no future to look forward to?
- Is it because, deep down, our society has bought the beer ad lie of some years ago that went, "You only go around once...so do it with gusto"

The implied message being, "There's no future, so drink our beer and forget it."

Now ask someone who seriously holds View #2 the same question: "What is in your future that make living worthwhile?"

The answer will probably be something like this:

"WOW! This is only the beginning!

Look where I'm headed!

I'm getting ready!

I've got work to do!

I want my loved ones with me!

I'm motivated!

I'm joyful!

That's what our Bible text today is all about: I Thess. 4:13-18

V.13 The Christians in Thessalonica were new believers.

But they seriously believed Jesus' words, "He who believes in me shall never die."

And now some believers in the Thessalonica church had died!

How were they to understand Jesus' words that "He who believes in me shall never die"?

They were troubled.

Paul is writing them this letter to help them understand.

Paul says, No, brothers & sisters, they're not dead.

Their spirits are with Jesus.

Even their bodies are not really dead, but have fallen asleep - because they will one day rise again.

(It was the early Christians who coined the word "cemetery" to replace the word grave-yard.

The word "cemetery" comes from a Greek word that means place of sleep.)

And then Paul contrasts the Christians who have fallen asleep with those "who have no hope."

How awful to see some one you love go thru the door of death, with no assurance that you'll ever see him again!

Not that Christians don't grieve at being parted.

Paul doesn't say, "don't grieve"

He says, "just don't grieve in the same way that people who have no hope grieve."

Martin Luther's 14 year-old daughter, Magdalena, was dying.

He cried out, "O God, I love her so."

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He held her in his arms as she passed away.

At the graveside, Luther spoke these words:

"O my dear Magdalena, you will rise and shine like the stars and the sun.

How strange to be so sorrowful, and yet to know that all is at peace, that all is well."

V. 14: Now Paul lays out the facts that are the ground for the Christian's hope.

"One day," he writes, "God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep."

If that's true, then those who have died in Christ are with Him this very moment.

Where else would they be - He died and rose for them, didn't He?

They put their trust in Him.

They were baptized into Him.

Their eternal destiny is tied to Jesus.

They will return with Him on the world's last day.

V. 15: I wish I could be privileged to be alive when Jesus appears again, and to be spared the death and burial of my body.

But in any case, says Paul, that privilege would be no greater than for those who are already with the Lord Jesus.

Why? What's going to happen?

V. 16 Strange, there are thousands of paintings that depict the events in Jesus' life.

But there are few, if any, of this awesome event.

In this verse, we are standing on the edge of eternity.

The supernatural world, always there but invisible, is suddenly breaking through and has become visible.

At the center of the noise and brilliance of this mind-boggling scene is Jesus Christ Himself

-

- this time coming, not as a baby, but as the God-man who rules His universe.

There's the noise of celebration.

After all, here's a universe, infected & polluted by powers of evil and by our sins,

...being freed right before our eyes.

...evil obliterated once and for all.

...God and good finally triumphing.

Don't YOU want to be there to see that sight? I do!

By God's grace, I will - and so will you.

The first impact of that awesome scene is this: "The dead in Christ will rise first."

Their spirits, returning with Jesus, are reunited with now-perfect, restored bodies.

No more sickness,

death,

crying,

separation.

That awful stuff is once and for all deleted from God's universe.

And then V. 17:

Two astonishing facts here:

1. We will meet the Lord, face to face. What will THAT be like?

Book of Rev. tells us that He will personally wipe every tear from our eyes.

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The one I've been reading about, singing about, talking about,
communing with by faith will be standing before me, my faith replaced now by sight...
...all doubt gone now.

...perhaps a excited shout from my heart, "It's all true!"

2. The second stupendous fact is this: I'll be "together with them," that is, my loved ones, never to be torn apart again.

And that includes not only my immediate loved ones, but my brothers and sisters whom I've never met, but whom I've prayed for and given for, in PNG, in Kyrgyzstan, in China, in Africa.

And here's the almost incredible heart of a future that will so totally transform our present - contained in the words, "With The Lord"!

Add to that the words "together with them" - loved ones and new friends from the 4 corners of the earth.

The best friend I've ever had next to my wife was Pastor Fred Illick of Maryland, who died of cancer several years ago.

In our last phone conversation, his final words were, "See you in the morning."

I knew what he meant.

When you know that you can say that as death approaches, it changes the way you go at life.

So after Paul finishes his description of that coming great Day, he adds this in V.18:
"Therefore, encourage each other with these words."

You see, we're in a world where the pressures of life make it normal to "look out for #1."

We scurry about to establish a standard of living dictated by our society...

...and then exhaust ourselves scrambling to maintain it.

We get stressed out by competition in the work-world, trying to get to the top of the totem pole.

We are driven by a clock deep inside that tells us that life is short and time is running out.

But if Jesus IS coming again and I'm going to walk on forever with Him and my loved ones, then:

I don't need a certain standard of living to establish my worth.

I don't need to be on top of the totem pole to prove my value to myself and others.

And the clock isn't going to run out.

I've got better things to do, than to play those games.

And what's that?

Let me walk with my God, deeply, personally...

...His concerns first

...His assignments first.

And let me walk with others - let me be an encourager.

- Let my life be a ministry.

- Let me deny myself and give myself away.

Let me be an active part of those crazy people who meet on Sunday mornings to practice not looking out for #1.

- who don't come to church just for themselves, but come to build one another up.

- they come to encourage each other - after all, Jesus is coming!

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- they are ministers all, reaching out to the wide world, as well as to their extended family in Tauranga.

That's what the Great Reunion is all about -

- impacting all of life, from here to eternity.

Will you be there at the Great Reunion?

Don't examine yourself to see if you're good enough.

You're not.

There will be no one there who is good enough.

The millions who will be there from across the ages will be those who went to the crucified Saviour and repented over how they'd failed God & others...

...and how they'd wasted so much of life on trivia.

...the Reunion people are those who had transferred their trust from themselves to the Son of God.

...they knew that He died under the load of their own failures to live positively for God - that He literally went through hell for them.

...they knew that He arose to assert His mastery over death & the grave.

Perhaps this is the time for you to commit to Him - or to recommit to Him.

If you are moved in that direction, I invite you pray like this:

Father God, I have failed to be all You planned for me to be.

I have lived too much of my life far from You.

In my scramble to survive, I have abused others - if not in action, then in thought.

As I look at myself through Your eyes, I realize I have lived an unproductive, self-seeking life.

Lord Jesus, in your love You permitted the hellish consequences of my ego-centered life to fall on Your head.

Forgive me, Lord. Move into my life and take the wheel.

Until that thrilling Victory Day when I meet You face to face, I want to use what I am and have, for Your purposes, not my own.

Welcome to my life, Lord - and come soon.

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Already His body was not bound by the laws of nature that we're familiar with.

Space was not a problem for Him.

To our eyes, He would suddenly appear and just as suddenly disappear - as if He were fading in and out from a 4th dimension that we know nothing about.

A ghost, you say.

But no - to prove that He was still human and physical, He invited them to touch Him.

And Luke tells us in Acts 1 that He was eating with them.

That doesn't sound like a ghost, does it!

Do you think He could appear to us as He did to His disciples?

Of course - because He's never left us.

He appeared to Paul after His Ascension.

And Acts 1:11 tells us He will do just that on a day of His choosing.

In this awesome event, Jesus transitioned from a local presence to a presence wherever His people are.

He permeates your life, even your body.

You live, move, and have your being in Him.

You are IN Christ.

You should know these things so that you will grasp the wonderful fact that your Lord Jesus is not absent up in the sky somewhere...

...nor is He just "spiritually" present with us now, like a ghost - that would be a let-down, in contrast to His Real Presence as a human with His disciples.

He is right next to you, this very moment, warm and human and fully able to sympathize with your human experiences.

But, so what?

Is this a lot of doctrine that doesn't make much difference for your life?

Not at all!

I'll summarize the So what? of Ascension Day truth with these 2 words:

Joy and Job.

A. Joy "Then they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great Joy."
(Luke 24:52)

3 joys:

1) There is the joy of knowing that He is not LESS with you than He was with the disciples, but MORE so.

His presence in you, I believe, even brings health & healing to your body.

His presence strengthens your mind and spirit.

2) There is the Joy of His Supper, where the God-man who fills the universe

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and is outside time and space, breaks through and is in direct and
personal touch with you.

Radio broadcasts fill this room right now.

But only if you have a receiver can you hear them.

At the Altar, we have receivers of bread and wine, and He says "This bread
is my body, this wine is my blood."

Here I am - for you.

Don't ask me how; He said it; that settles it.

And you come, sometimes battered by life, and the ascended God-man is
there for you.

3) There is the JOY of knowing He plans to appear again - fully visible like
before Ascension Day.

I will see Him, face to face.

Like, with all its tangles and pain and lack of closure, on that Day will all come
together and make sense in Him.

All the loose strings of your personal life.

All the injustices out in society.

All the riddles of life, will make sense on that Day.

Because on that Thursday, He filled the universe, we are a people of JOY.

B. Job "Men of Galilee" (the two men said to them), "why do you stand here
looking into the sky? This same Jesus...will come back..."

The two men weren't pleased that the disciples stood there gawking up at
the sky where Jesus had disappeared.

Their words imply urgency - there's a JOB to be done before He returns!

3 observations on the Job:

1) Right now, earth, not heaven, is the focus of our God-given assignment.
It's a message for us, not to be "so heavenly minded that we're no earthly
good."

It's a message for any of us who think that earth is the place to pursue our
own self-centered agenda.

No, there's a pressing task to be done on earth - now.

2) The job requires that we focus our lives on knowing Him and finding our
place in His plan.

No matter how old or young you are, God has a plan for your life.

The disciples returned to Jerusalem and spent whole days in prayer,
waiting for the Holy Spirit to empower and direct them.

Our lives too need to find their place and meaning in the Commission Jesus
gave us to reach the unreached.

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Not to sit in our pews waiting for people to come.

Wu Ding-fang, a former Chinese ambassador to the U.S., wrote these sad words:

"I met Christian missionaries in China and was impressed with their faith. When my government sent me to America, I made up my mind to become a Christian and join the first Christian Church that invited me. I have been here for three years, and no one has asked me. It's too late now. Now I shall not come."

Jesus said GO.

We are tempted to treat the church as a "shrine" - a place one goes to so as to fulfill its purpose.

but the church is intended to be, not a shrine, but an ammunition depot - not a place to which we come primarily, but a place from which we go, equipped with arm to win the war for souls.

3) The Job has to do with human relationships.

It's not primarily mass evangelism at a stadium, or the TV evangelists.

The Kingdom of God grows in the soil of one-on-one relationships

It's Andrew meeting Jesus, then looking up his brother Peter, and saying,

"I have found the Messiah!"

It's Philip searching out his friend Nathanael and saying, "We have found the One Moses wrote about!"

It's Don MacRae who brought her Buddhist wife Karen to church,

who told her brother Glenn, who brought his wife Lynn,

who brought their daughter Kyrah who now introduces her

students to Jesus at the Christian school where she teaches.

It's a certain mother-in-law in Tauranga inviting her son-in-law to the Alpha Course, and seeing him come to life in his relationship with Christ.

That's where the Job and the Joy meet.

It's not just the dramatic moments we all wish we could have when a friend steps from darkness into the light of Christ.

It's also the daily inconveniences of putting someone else first...

...patiently plowing the ground of friendship,

awaiting the day when, thru hardship and crisis, the message of Jesus finally begins to blossom in a softened heart.

A lady once told a pastor that she was going through a spiritual dry spell.

She felt no enthusiasm for the Christian life, though she desired it.

The pastor asked her to tell him the names of 3 people she knew who needed love.

She began to plan specifically how to give these 3 some token of her love.

in one case, it was a note...for another a casserole...for

another an invitation to her home.

She paid a price in time, energy, money, and privacy, to be sure.

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But as she carried out her commitments, she began to experience afresh the presence and reality and power of the living Christ in her life

Who should be on YOUR list and when will you begin?

That indeed is where the Joy and the Job come together.
And you can do it, because the ascended Christ is right by your side...
...closer than your breath...
...waiting for you to cry, "I surrender, Lord. Let's do life your way."

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Centrifugal God - devotional

John 20:19-23

"As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you."

Note the "as...so..."construction.

Implying: In the same manner as...

In the same spirit as...

With the same urgency as...

With the same thrust with which the Father sent me out, so I thrust you
out...

The word there is apostello (send out) but the word "thrust" is not too
extreme.

Mark tells us that the Holy Spirit "thrust" or "hurled" (Jesus) out into the
desert" where He would hammer out His mission. (ekballo)

And later Jesus told His disciples to pray the Lord of the harvest to hurl
out (ekballo) workers into the harvest.

All of which is to say that God is a centrifugal power,
a reaching-out God

the hound of heaven, bent on pursuing another.

There is definitely no relationship between this God and the god of the
old philosophers who is the "unmoved mover"

aloof

indifferent

contemplating only Himself

more like Jaba the Hut in Star Wars than anything else I can think of.

Far from being the "unmoved mover," He is God-on-the-move -

moved by His nature and our plight to lay hands on us with a kind of
loving violence.

He creates man and woman - then actively pursues them in the Garden.

He's been doing that ever since, confronting every person with the
question, "Where are you?"

Mankind ruins itself and creation - and the centrifugal God breaks into the
mess,

Face to face with the serpent, He insists, "I WILL put enmity between
your seed and the woman's seed" and "He WILL crush your head."

Then this eager God invades another man's life and announces, "I WILL bless
you, and all peoples WILL be blessed through you."

Later, this consuming God stops Moses in his tracks with a blazing
bush and sweeps him up in His own passion to rescue His beloved
nation.

Later yet, Amos defends his impossible mission by complaining that he didn't

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ask for the job. No, he says; "Yahweh took me."

Then this centrifugal God describes Himself as a father who makes a fool out of himself as he pulls up his skirts

and races down Main street to welcome his rebel son home.

This God who will not be stopped confronts murderous Saul and strikes him blind until he is ready for the washing of baptism and

becomes God's man to bring the blessing to all peoples.

The epitome of this moved Mover's movements is the Incarnation -

the climactic intrusion of that centrifugal force that is God,

when He pushes His way into the human race,

and binds the strong man.

"As the Father has sent me out, even so I send you out."

To be reconciled with this mission-driven God is to be turned inside out, to become a man, a woman, for others - like Him.

Once we were centripetal people - turned in on ourselves by our curs-ed sin - now being transformed into centrifugal people like He is.

Little Christs, to use Luther's term.

The tools for this total change of orientation are the means of grace.

But the means must not be confused with the end.

The end is to bowl us over with the reality of His unconditional acceptance of us in Christ.

and, on the ground of that reality, to transform us into hurled-out people.

Peter is so bold as to tell us that we are actually "partakers of the divine nature."

And that includes His centrifugal nature.

I wonder, How is my thrust as a church worker? How is yours?

It's so easy for me to become a mere "professional," doing all the right things but having lost that persistent drive which can only be sustained by Him who hurls us out into the harvest.

And what of our churches? Are they centrifugal forces?

That's our job, sisters & brothers - not merely to be such a force among them while they glide passively through life -

but to be the Holy Spirit's agent to stir them up and thrust them outward into community, workplace, and world.

Our greatest joy will be not what we have accomplished as ministers but to see what they are accomplishing as ministers, because we equipped them.

Our congregations are intended to be centrifugal forces in our communities - externally focused churches, who are seriously convinced that they exist for non-members.

And our centrifugal nature cannot stop with our own immediate communities, for that too can be a subtle form of self-centredness.

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The time is long since past when it suffices to send a few dollars out of synodical dues to world mission headquarters and then forget about it. There are still several thousand totally unreached people groups out there, while 90% of our present missionaries are working among people groups where there are already churches and Bibles.

They are needed where they are, to be sure.

But today, local churches are beginning to take the initiative to provide the thrust to the unreached by adopting an unreached people group, learning about them sending out a fact-gathering team eventually sending a long-term missionary among them.

All of this is within the reach of smaller congregations jointly releasing their centrifugal powers to do the task.

It's when a congregation by faith moves out into the unknown that the centrifugal energy of God begins to demonstrate itself to the fullest in the life of a church.

This matter of a centrifugal congregation following its centrifugal God is extremely well-expressed in an article by Canadian Pastor Stuart Coles.

"A Parable Concerning God's Wife and Her Husband"

The Church is God's wife. He has married Himself to her "for better or for worse." According to the church's history in the Bible and in subsequent ages, it is frequently "for the worse." She suffers from selfishness, from self-righteousness, from stuffiness, from timidity, from the cruelties that spawn out of fear and prejudice.

Most of all, God's wife suffers from the temptation to want to settle down. She craves a place to shelter and entrench herself. She secretly determines to reform her Husband, to domesticate Him, to tie Him down to where she is and where she wants to stay.

"To tie God down" to that which has been is the essence of religion. Religion is the corruption of the church's marriage partnership with her Husband. The OT calls it shoring.

God cannot be tied down. He is free, He is a missionary, a pioneer, an explorer, a frontiersman, a creator of that which has not been before. He shakes the status quo. He tears the old times off the world's calendar, so that every age is a new age, and every day is an adventure into an untrodden future. He is a very turbulent husband. He keeps moving on, and He keeps calling His wife to follow Him, to keep a-comin' with Him into each new situation.

The Church wants to settle down. She wants security. ("Organized religion is interested in organized religion.") The Church knows in her secret heart how

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dangerous it is to leave all defences and all establishments and follow her Lord: why, a person can get killed going where God goes and doing things the way God does. Where does God want to go, and what does He want to do? Some religionists act as though all God wanted to do was "go to church."

Sure He "goes to church" - but just long enough to have a quick, no-foolishness chat with His wife - a briefing session on "what's cooking." He pays her very loving, very deeply understanding, husbandly attention. But the, all too son, He says, "Come on, old girl. Let's get moving. We've got work to do." And He goes out the door so fast, and in such an unexpected direction, that half the time "the old girl" just stands there gaping. she tries to keep her skirts down and her housekeeping papers from blowing all over the place in the breeze created by God's going. This breeze is known as the presence of the Holy Spirit.

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"The Greatest Story Ever Told"

Note: this is an overview of the Bible that was prepared for a group of people, including children, who knew next to nothing about the Christian faith. The language is almost child-like (but I hope not childish), for truly profound things do not require fancy vocabulary. Don Baron

Why Christmas? Have you ever thought about that?
All over the world people send Christmas cards and buy gifts for one another. The shops are crowded with people busy buying gifts...people buy loads of food at the supermarkets.
The streets are decorated; people hang lights outside their homes. Every one holds a party.
There are Christmas parades with Santa Claus or Father Christmas.
Everyone says "Merry Christmas." Why? Why Christmas?

Oh yes, there are pictures and crèches that show Mary and Joseph, and shepherds, and 3 kings and, in the middle of the scene is a little baby.
So one answer to the question, "Why Christmas?" is that we celebrate the birth of that little boy, Jesus.
But, so what? That answer is too simple.
So I ask again, "Why Christmas?"

Well, it IS about the birth of that baby.
But to understand that baby and to understand the meaning of His birth, we must tell the WHOLE story.
So come with me, way back to the beginning of the story, will you?

START

In the beginning, there was only God.
He is intelligent, wise, powerful.
Above all this God is a God of love.
He said, "I think I'll make a world, with stars and planets and comets.
And He threw those huge things out into the space He had made.
Then He chose one of those planets - the one we live on.
He said, "On that planet, I am going to make something very special.
I'm going to make two of them - I'll call one "man" and the other "woman."
They will be special because they will be more like ME than anything else I've made.
Like me they can think, and plan, and make things.
They can laugh.
They can speak a language and be understood.
ABOVE ALL, they can love.
They can love one another.
They can love Me, just like I love them.
So He made the man and woman whom we call Adam and Eve.

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He put them in a huge garden, so large that we would call it a national park, with millions of animals and birds and rivers and trees.
And God and Adam and Eve were good friends and loved one another and spent a lot of time walking and talking together in that beautiful place.

But God wanted them to love Him freely, and not just because they had no choice. So He said to Adam and Eve, "Do you see that tree over there?
If you love me, then, of all the millions of trees in Eden National Park, you will not eat the fruit from that tree.
Then I will know that you freely choose to love & trust Me."
Adam and Eve thought that was cool, because life was so abundant there, with their life so close to God, and with more than enough food to eat.
Life was WONDERFUL and joyous in Eden.

DETOUR

Then one day, a stranger walked into Eden National Park.
He was once a powerful angel, but he had come to hate God and became God's jealous enemy. HE wanted to be god.
And because he hated God, he hated the man and woman who were made to be so much like God Himself.
He found Eve near the tree that they weren't supposed to eat from and persuaded Eve that God was keeping something very special from them by forbidding to eat that fruit.
Soon she felt that she really NEEDED to eat that fruit.
And she did, and then she talked Adam into eating it too.

Next time God came looking for them to take a walk with Him, Adam and Eve realized that they had changed.
They didn't want to walk with Him any more.
Because they had violated His rule, they didn't feel comfortable around Him - it was a feeling that we call "guilt."
They didn't think of God as their friend anymore, and they tried to hide so He couldn't find them.
But you can't hide from God.
God realized that something was wrong.
He knew that they had chosen to love the fruit of that tree more than they loved Him.
The separation that Adam and Eve caused was like a disease that would spread to their children and their children's children, all the way down to us.
We could call that sickness "I" disease, and it has spread to every one of us.
We love "me, myself, and I" more than God, and we love ourselves more than we love anyone else.
We are always looking out for "me, myself and I" and thinking about "me, me, me."
It's very easy for us to be selfish and very difficult for us to be unselfish.
Our actions, our words, and even our thoughts - maybe especially our thoughts - are "I"-centered.
Even the word "sin" helps us remember this; what's the middle letter in the word

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"sin"? "I"!

And the awful result of our sin-disease is that we cut ourselves off from God. Since life comes from God, and we are cut off from Him, we DIE.

The results of sin is DEATH - cut off from God forever.

NEW START

God was hurt and disappointed that the people He loved had turned away from Him.

He could have just WIPED them out and washed them right out of His hands. But that's not what He did.

No, God loved them so much that He decided to cure their sin-disease.

He could have forced us to behave, like robots.

That would have been easy.

But, no, He wanted people who FREELY loved Him, not robots.

And that would not be so easy.

To do it the loving way would take a long time.

To win them back to Himself, He would suffer a broken heart many, many times over, but He would be patient.

So He started to make a plan.

He would start with one man.

His name was Abraham, and he was the father of the nation of Israel.

God said to Abraham,

"Abraham, I love you just like I love all the wayward human race.

But you and your descendants are going to be part of my special plan to love the world back to Myself.

Trust me, Abraham, and follow my instructions.

And so God began to show Himself to the people of Israel, and to teach them about Himself and His plan to rescue all the human race.

Hundreds of years later, the people of Israel had become slaves in Egypt, and it was very hard.

Their masters beat them, and they often went hungry.

But God called a man named Moses to lead them out of Egypt to freedom. Moses told the king of Egypt that, unless he let God's people go free, the angel of death would come and the oldest boy in every Egyptian home would die.

But would the eldest son in each Jewish home also be killed?

No, because God gave them a gift called the Passover.

Each Israeli family was to kill a lamb and eat it, and put some blood of the lamb on the doorway.

When the angel of death came, he would see the blood on the doorway and he would "pass over" that home.

A lamb would take the place of each oldest son.

God was teaching them how one life can be given, or substituted, for another. The lambs died instead of the oldest sons.

That was one way that God was teaching them about His plan to rescue all the

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human race.

God also began to tell the people of Israel that, one day, He would send His one and only Son who had been so close to Him from all eternity.
God's Son would come and walk among them - just like God did with Adam and Eve back in Eden National Park.
He would show them how much God loves the world, because HE would do what the Passover lambs had done, taking the place of every elder Israeli son back in Egypt.
HE would die in our place.
HE would be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the whole world!

JESUS

NOW we come to Christmas-time!

The time had come when everything was ready for God to come and walk among us.

How would He come?

Would He come with fireworks to make us say, "Wow"?

Or with a mighty army of awesome angels to frighten us to death?

Would He be born in a royal palace to grow up as a King to conquer the world?

How could He come in a gentle way that would show us that He loves us and wants to make up with us and bring us home to Himself?

Well, you guessed it.

God chose to cut Himself down to the size of a helpless baby - born, not in a royal palace, but in a barn, to a poor woman, who named Him...Jesus.

Can you think of a better way for God to come and love us?

Now I think we can begin to understand the "Why" of Christmas.

But there is still some more that follows His birth.

When He had grown up, one day a man named John, who knew God well, announced to everyone who would listen, "This man Jesus is the Lamb of God who is taking away the sins of the world!"

To show people that He was the Son of God, Jesus did many miracles. One day a sick man was brought to Him, and Jesus said to Him, "Take courage, son, your sins are forgiven."

That surprised everybody, because, after all, who can forgive sins beside God?

And then Jesus healed the man's sickness as well.

You see, forgiveness is so important to us that Jesus puts forgiveness even ahead of physical wellness.

One day, Jesus' friend, Lazarus became deathly sick, and he soon died.

He went to Lazarus' tomb and called, "Lazarus, come out!"

And Lazarus did come out, alive and well!

Jesus proved Himself to be the very Lord of Life.

But He would have to first be the Lamb of God who carries away our sins before He could forgive us and raise us from the dead.

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Now Satan, God's enemy, stirred up the leaders, and Jesus was arrested and beaten and a painful crown of thorns was pushed down on His head and then they laid Him down on a cross where they hammered great nails into His hands and feet.

He hung on that cross for six hours, suffering untold pain.

Even more terrible, while on the cross He was poisoned by all the sins of the human race, including yours and mine.

That's why He died.

Just before He died, He cried out, "It is finished!"

Everything necessary for you and God to become friends again was completed.

Jesus took your place and mine. Your lamb and mine had died instead of us.

When you're sorry about your sins, and stop trusting in yourself, and put your trust in Jesus, God the Father says to you, "Where are your sins?"

My Son already suffered for your sins, and they're gone!

You are forgiven and clean.

Welcome to my family!"

But that's not the end of the story either - not at all!

Jesus died and was buried, and everyone THOUGHT that was the end.

But on Sunday morning, 3 days later, Jesus was alive again!

With their own eyes, over 500 people saw Him alive!

He sent them out to tell the world, and to call everyone to repent and to put their trust in Jesus.

FINAL START

And there's still more to come!

The Bible tells us that one day He will come again, this time not as a baby but as the King of the universe.

He will re-make His world to be without sin, and without death - a perfect world, full of adventure with Jesus and with our loved ones who trusted Him.

You and I, and all who put their trust in Him will enjoy the excitement, the peace, the fullness of life, walking and talking with God as He originally planned it.

And now you know God's story from beginning to end.

And at the very center of that story is the coming of Jesus, Son of God, to save us.

THAT'S what Christmas is all about.

Amazing love - the Son of God, given for you.

Do you want Him in your life?

That's the only REAL way to celebrate Christmas.

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**Just As If I'd Never Sinned - Luke 18:9-14
Pharisee & the Publican**

A pastor, a Boy Scout, and a computer expert were the only passengers in a small plane.

The pilot turned to them and said, "This place is going down, and you need to know that there are 3 parachutes for us 4 people.

Pilot: "I should have one - I have a wife and 3 small children."

The pilot put one on and jumped.

Computer whiz: "I should have one. I'm the smartest man in the world and the world needs me."

And he jumped.

The pastor said to the boy Scout: "You are young and I have lived.

You take the remaining parachute and I'll go down with the plane."

The Boy Scout said, "Relax sir. We still have 2 parachutes.

"The smartest man in the world just jumped with my backpack, thinking it was a parachute."

Moral: When a man thinks he's smart, the odds are he is not!

Likewise: When a person thinks he is righteous, the odds are he is not.

That brings us to today's story, told by Jesus: Luke 18:9-14.

Let's take a closer look at these 2 men.

v. 11 "stood up"

This was the OT position of prayer.

For the Pharisee, it was a position of pride.

He had swaggered into the temple, right up to the front, thinking how pleased God would feel to be honored by his presence.

"Prayed about himself" - literally "prayed TO himself"

He hadn't really come to talk with God at all.

He had come so that he could feel good about himself.

He had come to congratulate himself.

Have you ever caught yourself praying -

and you became conscious of yourself praying.

"Hey, not bad! What zeal!

Wow, listen to those nice-sounding words!"

At that moment, were you praying to God or playing to the audience, that is, to yourself?

"I am not like other men," the Pharisee boasted.

Then he picks what he considers the worst people -

robbers,

evildoers,

adulterers,

and, glancing around him, "or like wretched tax collectors."

V. 12 then he boasts of his achievements:

fasts twice a week - the law only required a person to fast once a year)

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A tenth of all he gets (law required only a tenth of certain things)
Did you notice the most frequently used word in this prayer?
"I"

And so someone has said, "There are none so far from God as the self-righteous."

v. 13 here we have the tax collector.

"stood at a distance" - because he felt distant from God.

Who was he to draw near to God?

He knew himself too well.

He didn't belong here in this temple that he had visited so seldom.

"Beat his breast"

The only other place this phrase is used in the Bible: at the cross.

The people there had seen the horrific things that had happened.

The wrenching pain.

the cry of Jesus as He died

They go away beating their breasts with

alarm

fear

the unmitigated tragedy of it all.

Here a man stands in the presence of God

alarmed at his own distance from God.

overcome by his own ruined, wasted life

fearful of the final outcome when he dies.

he has nothing to say in his own defense - not a word.

he is alone & naked before God.

"God have mercy on me, a sinner" is all he can say.

Our first reaction is: Of course, God will reject the Pharisee.

He's a repulsive prude.

Of course God will receive the humble tax collector.

But wait: we have not been fair to the Pharisee,

and we have let the tax collector off much too lightly.

Let's take a second look.

The Pharisee was a religious leader in the community,

looked up to and admired.

Pharisees were dead earnest about serving God.

They worked hard to maintain society's moral standards,

to defend family values, etc.

The Pharisee would be the first to say, "the family that prays together
stays together"

He would fight abortion and support law and order.

He's a good man!

The Tax collector would be a calloused guy.

He could care less about society.

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He is a quisling; he has entered the service of the enemy occupying power.
He is fleecing his own people to fatten his own wallet.
He kicks his feet up in front of TV on the Sabbath.
He's never in church.
He doesn't feel welcome, and doesn't have time anyway for that stuff.
All in all, he's a corrupting influence on society - an undesirable.

V. 14 And the tax collector went home justified and the Pharisee didn't??
It's not at ALL evident that Jesus should praise the tax collector and condemn
the Pharisee!

What kind of strange God is this who accepts renegades and rejects good
people?

Furthermore, we are too quick to say to ourselves, "Well, of course, I'm the
tax collector in this story."

"I know I'm a sinner.

"I thank You God, that I'm not so proud as this Pharisee"

And so,, if we're not careful, we end up being Pharisees in tax collectors'
clothing!

It's subtle, isn't it.

We must be especially careful of the devout moments in life.

No confession of sin safeguards against pride.

Even humbleness is something the devil can exploit,
because it's so easy to be proud of our humbleness.

Yes, when a person thinks he is righteous, the odds are he is not.

Matter of fact, these two men in Jesus' story are quite similar in some ways:

Both are in temple.

Both want to stand before God and seek His fellowship.

Both are thankful

- the Pharisee that God has enabled him to live an upright life.
- the tax collector that there is mercy with God.

What is it, then, that makes one an unforgiven man and the other a justified
man?

Here's the crucial difference:

1. The Pharisee looked downward to measure himself.

He finally landed on a repulsive social outcast as his standard.

Of course, he came out smelling like a rose.

2. But the tax collector looked upward to measure himself.

You see, a truly burdened conscience doesn't think of others at all.

He is alone with God.

And God stoops down to commune with such.

You are sitting here this morning feeling very inferior

You feel that if the rest of us knew what goes on in your head during

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a worship service...

If we knew something in your past...

If we knew how far you really feel from God,

Or how much a failure you really are,
well, you wouldn't be welcome here.

I want to assure you that all those pious-looking people around you are feeling
exactly as you do!

But if you think WE wouldn't welcome you, then you must feel all the more that
way about God.

This story is for you!

Who went home justified?

The successful, pious churchman? No!

The man who went home justified was the man in the temple that day who
felt like you feel today.

It's a tragedy that the church so easily forgets this story.

By the Middle Ages, the message that sinners go home justified was lost
in a merit badge system at least as bad as the religion of the Pharisee.

There was a hierarchy based on merit:

1. There were the saints who were considered to have so many brownie
points that they had extra to give away.
2. There were the clergy - that's what you became if you wanted to be sure
that you'd make it to heaven.
3. Then there were the laity - so hopelessly entangled in this dark world that
they would surely spend thousands of years suffering in purgatory
after they died.

That was to pay for their sins before going to heaven.

but who, if they said enough Our Fathers, and prayed before the bones
of the saints

...could earn enough leftover merits from the saints to shorten their
agony in purgatory.

A monk by the name of Brother Martin suffered under that system.

He wanted desperately to be able to stand tall before God and say,

"God, I thank you that, finally, after great effort, I am not like others."

The more he tried, the more he knew how awfully far short he fell of God's
standards.

While others looked down to measure themselves, He looked up.

He was alone before a holy God, and despaired.

To make things worse, he found that he couldn't love that kind of God.

Driven in his despair to the Scriptures, Martin Luther came to see that,
apart from the priceless name of Jesus itself...

...the most liberating, comforting, exciting, explosive word in the Bible is
the word spoken of the tax collector in v. 14: Justified.

What does it mean?

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It's a legal term.

Imagine you're in a courtroom and you're accused of a serious crime.

The jury comes in; you stand.

"Have you reached a verdict?" the judge asks.

"Yes we have, your honor. We find the accused - guilty."

The tax collector was guilty.

You and I are guilty before the court of God's justice.

But then God does something no human legal system would allow.

God, who established the moral Law in the first place...

He whose holiness reacts to sin as blazing fire reacts to a drop of water...

He steps down from the judge's bench, stands beside you, and receives
the very death sentence that He Himself has pronounced.

The record shows that His sentence has been carried out on a Roman
cross outside Jerusalem.

Then He who died arises from the dead, and returns to His judge's seat,
where He finds no record against you in His books.

He declares you justified.

In His eyes, it's "just as if I'd never sinned" - justified.

V. 14 says the tax collector "went home"

What did he do there?

I know 3 things he didn't do:

1. He didn't say, "Now that I know that God justifies rascals, I can pick up my
old life and go on swindling people."

No, he'll find it unthinkable to be so ungrateful as to deliberately go on
giving pain to his Father God.

2. He no longer maintained his former distance from God.

He came into His presence often, daily, with a grateful heart.

He worshipped with the exhilaration of a man who had a new lease
on life.

- a man who knew where to take his guilt whenever he fell.

Would he ever again beat his breast and cry, "God have mercy"?

Yes, many times.

But he knew he had a Father who hears sinners' prayers.

3. He didn't keep quiet about what had happened.

He told his wife

He wrote a friend

He taught his children

His passion in life was that people around him might know the release and
the peace of being justified by a loving God.

Dr. D. T. Niles of Sri Lanka:

"Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."

Come, beggars.

Come, tax collectors

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Eat the bread - and pass it on.

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Prepare to Meet Your God - Matt. 25:1-13

In the late 1940s, Dr. J. U. Findlay neared the gates of a village in Israel.

There were 10 young women

- brightly dressed
- playing musical instruments
- dancing down the street

Dr. Findlay's guide explained, "These women are to keep the bride company until the groom arrives."

Dr. Findlay asked: "Is there any chance of seeing the wedding?"

The guide said, "It's not likely. You see, the wedding might be tonight,
- or it might be tomorrow night.

Traditional Jewish weddings were always held at night.

When the groom neared the house, the bridesmaids (always unmarried)
would go out with torches to meet the groom...

...and to accompany him to the bride's door.

When the bride came out, the women would lead the way with dancing
down the street, to the groom's house,
where the door is closed and the wedding would begin.

Now we're ready to better understand Jesus' story for today: Matt. 25:1-13

The point of Jesus' story is this:

Outwardly, all 10 of the women looked alike.

But there was one crucial difference: their oil reserve.

Look at us this morning: we all came to church

we all have sung and prayed

we all look OK.

But if we could look inwardly, as God does...

there might be great differences here - and only time will tell.

I'm speaking of your oil reserve

your inner life

your unseen daily walk with God - or lack of it.

The foolish virgins weren't ungodly or evil people

They represent people who live fairly good lives...

...but there is not inner life of time with God...

...no reserve for the crises of life.

wise virgins represent those who know that life will deal them hard blows...

...who realize that mere hand-to-mouth casual feeding on God's food

will not give them the inner stamina for tough times...

...nor for the challenging opportunities to accomplish something
great with their lives...

...nor for the Day when Christ returns for His final reunion with His
bride the Church.

The only way to be ready on THAT day is to be ready EVERY day.

Who knows when the next crucial turning point in your life will come?

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Geoff Wood could not have known that last night he would meet
his Lord face to face.

Before we left for Hawaii, Geoff wanted to talk with me about his death.

He made it clear that he put His trust in Christ alone.

He had a reserve of oil that would see him through.

You will read in "The Olive Tree" of young Andy Mackenzie.

Inoperable cancer required the replacement of the bone & socket
of his upper right arm.

Things were looking up until they discovered that the cancer had
spread to his lung and is probably terminal.

The articles by Andy and by his parents are evidence that they
have a huge reserve of oil in their lamps -

- a peace with God that will see them right through to the
final day on earth and the final Day of Jesus' coming.

NOW is the time to become strong, not later when the door is shut.

The question for us to ask is not, "How little of Christ can I get by with?"
but, "How much of Him can I fill my life with today?"

The work that should have been the work of a lifetime cannot be crowded
into the final moments of life.

V. 9 sounds selfish of the 5 wise virgins, doesn't it.

But some things cannot be shared.

Can the spiritually negligent person borrow a friend's faith in time of crisis?

Is character transferable?

Can moral strength be loaned out?

We would not do this story justice if we did not spend some time on the wonderfully positive aspects of Jesus' story.

Throughout the OT, God is referred to as the Groom and His people the bride.

In the NT, Christ claims to be God Himself, because He takes over the Groom title and applies it to Himself - just like He takes over other titles that

belong to God alone, like King, Shepherd, and the "I AM"

Traditionally, the engagement ceremony made a couple husband & wife.

though they didn't live together until the public celebration, the
marriage feast.

Christ and His Church (that's us) are already husband & wife,

but the great, final wedding feast is still ahead,

when He comes to take His bride home - what a day that will be!

Paul writes about that day in I Thess. 4: (read)

Encourage indeed!

* the world will not end with a whimper - despite the secular doomsday
prophets.

It will end with a party!

* I may die before He comes, and I know there will be many undone things.

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Jesus says, "Keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."
"Stay awake" he says. "Be alert." "Stay on your toes."

NOT like the anxious fisherman's wife, who each day stood at the end of
the pier, wringing her hands, fretting over her husband's return.

Rather like the OTHER fisherman's wife -

who went on caring for their home,

mothering the children

life and activities permeated by the thought of her husband's return.

now and then glancing out the window toward the sea,

aware that ALL her activity was precious just because he would
soon return.

Not a torturous "Is he coming?"

Rather a celebrative anticipation: "He's coming!

"It's all worthwhile!"

The great German Lutheran theologian, Helmut Thielecke was on board
ship, journeying to the U.S.

There was a German shepherd dog - entrusted to the ship by its owner,
who was coming by plane.

The dog was constantly shaking with misery.

People patted him and spoke to him, but it was not comforted.

He was in a strange world, and didn't understand how the voyage
would end.

His whole familiar dog world had come to an end.

no fields or grass

no familiar smells to sniff

for him the world ended at the ship's railing;

beyond was an absolute void.

he had no idea whether he would ever again smell grass or
see his master again.

there was no way to tell him that there was a captain who had it
all planned...

...he knew the course

...he knew the date of arrival.

On Thielecke's return voyage, there was a different dog.

It wasn't half as beautiful or clever as the German shepherd.

But it was far more confident and content...

because...this dog had a young girl, his mistress with him.

he too missed the streets and the fire hydrants.

he didn't know what was wrong with this strange world he was in.

but when his little god's heart fluttered with anxiety, he had only
to look up at his mistress, as if to say:

"As long as you're here, it can't be too bad.

You surely would not have brought me here to this strange place
if it were not to come to an end some day...

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...when we return to a proper world with the right kind of smells."

There are many comings of Christ before THE coming.
He comes quietly, sometimes even in disguise.
but always seeking a deeper relationship with us.
always prodding us to be alert.
"How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given.
so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.
No ear can hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
where humble souls receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in."

But one day He will come NOISILY.
By His grace I'm going to be there for the great celebration,
where all the insane things on this planet,
and all the incomplete and faulty things in my life,
 will be made right,
...and we'll really begin to live.

Don't miss it...be ready.

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**The End is the Beginning - Matt. 27:27-56
(using quotes & paraphrases from Krummacher)**

What a dying bed for the King of kings!
As often as we enjoy peace of heart,
or assemble to sing hymns of hope...
let us not forget that the cause of the happiness we enjoy is solely the fact
that Jesus once extended Himself on the fatal tree for us.
See His arms forcibly stretched out on the cross.
The executioners seize the hammer and nails.
who can bear to look?
The horrible nails from the forge of hell are placed on His hands and feet.
The heavy strokes of the hammer fall - do you hear the sound?
They thunder on your heart, testifying of your sin in horrible language,
and at the same time of the wrath of Almighty God.
Remember that you aided in swinging those hammers...
the most awful act which the world ever committed is charged
to your account.
See, the nails have penetrated through, and from both hands and
feet gushes forth the blood of the Holy One.
Those pierced hands bless more powerfully than while they moved
freely and unfettered.
They are the hands of a wonderful Architect who is building the frame
of an eternal Church.
There is no help or salvation but in these hands.

The cross is then brought near to the hole dug for it.
Powerful men seize the rope attached to the top of it, and begin to draw,
and the cross, with its victim, is elevated to its height.
He hands between earth and heaven.
Thus the earth rejects the Prince of life from its surface...
...and heaven also seems to refuse Him.
See! His bleeding arms are extended wide;
He stretches them out to every sinner.
His hands point to the east and the west...
,...for He will gather His children from the ends of the earth.
So there stands erected the symbol of the New Covenant.

"I am crucified with Christ," exclaims Paul the apostle, and by these words
he points out the entire fruit which the cross bears for all believers.
His meaning is: "They are not His sins for which the curse is there
endured, but mine.
He who dies on the cross, dies for me.
Christ pays and suffers in my stead."

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During that mysterious darkness which covered the whole land from noon until 3 o'clock, our blessed Saviour was surrounded with the most dreadful spiritual darkness as well.

He remained silent.

He was drinking the bitter cup of God's wrath against sin.

The powers of darkness fiercely attack Him.

He enjoys no contact with heaven.

It is the gloomiest period in His whole life.

But finally His agony is so piercing that He is forced to utter the most touching words of grief.

His Father - His own Father - who had been with Him from eternity -

His Father, by whom He was always loved - has withdrawn His face.

And from Jesus' cross arises the most piercing & agonizing cry. (v. 46)

At 3 in the afternoon Jesus cried with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

Luther one day sat thinking about those words.

He continued for hours without food, sat there still as a corpse.

Finally, in amazement, he cried out,

"God forsaken by God! Who can understand it?"

It was the saddest words that ever came from the lips of Christ during His journey from the manger to the cross.

While in the Garden of Gethsemane He could still address God as Father:

"Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

But now on the cross how different the cry:

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me."

How dreadful it must be to experience the withdrawal of the face of Him whose favor is life, and in whose frown is death.

That was the heaviest wave that ever went over Jesus.

It made His last hour the hour of unspeakable suffering.

He had patiently endured His arrest & seizure,

the desertion by His disciples,

the cruel and unjust trial,

the mocking and spitting,

the whipping,

the carrying of His cross,

the taunts of the religious leaders,

the torture of crucifixion.

but when His Father hides His face from Him, He is overwhelmed.

To the Saviour this was truly the hour of darkness - of pain - of desertion.

Author Rowland Hill wrote this prayer: Oh, my Saviour, no tongue can describe, no angel can fathom the abyss of Your suffering for me a sinner!

As I cannot reach the infinite height of Your love and Your glory in heaven, so I cannot descend into the depth of Your sorrows when here on earth. I can only wonder and adore!"

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Why is He hanging on that cross, uttering those awful words, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

It was not the nails which pierced His hands and feet...

...nor the agony of crucifixion, that caused this heart-rending cry.

No, He was now offering Himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

As our substitute He suffered all that divine justice required to bring
the sinner back to God.

Here is the mystery: the Father bruises the Son, and puts Him to grief
for our sakes.

All the cries and tears of Him whom the Father appointed to accomplish
our salvation, were for us.

When He comes in the name of His Father to save us sinners, the Father
forsakes Him, because on His shoulders was laid the damning load of
human guilt.

He endured pain that we might enjoy pleasure.

He suffered the hiding of His Father's face that the light of that face might
shine upon us.

Indeed, "were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

Now the unutterable anguish of Jesus is drawing to a close.

His words, "It is finished" (v. 50 - "cried out in a loud voice") must have
fallen on astonished ears that day.

The Sufferer who hangs on the cross has finished His mission on earth -

His wearisome journeys thru the land of Israel

His works of mercy and miracles.

His sorrows and agonies as our representative.

He has finished the great work of redemption
made an end to sin

made reconciliation between God and man

He has pointed out the way of peace

bound up the broken-hearted

reclaimed the wanderer

preached the Gospel to the poor

brought life and immortality to light.

The great atoning sacrifice is offered

the ransom is paid

divine justice is fully satisfied

the powers of darkness are vanquished

man is saved.

The last barrier in the way of the sinner's salvation is removed.

The gates of heaven are opened wide to us.

How serene, how full of confidence, how triumphant does Christ appear

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in His last moments!

Behold the triumph of the Redeemer in His death!
He would not die until He knew that all things necessary for our salvation
were accomplished.
Then, with a loud voice, He exclaims, "It is finished!"

At the sound of this victorious cry, we believe that Satan and his legions
trembled and fled.

May this sound from the cross ever strike our ear like music.
It proclaims pardon, peace, and eternal life to a sinful, guilty world..
Come to the Saviour.
He will break your chains and give you rest, peace, joy, & immortality.
for with His dying voice, He says of man's salvation: "It is finished!"

Look again at the cross and listen to the last words of the Son of God.
They are not feebly uttered.
It is the voice of One who voluntarily expires. (v. 50)
"Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit."
How great and sublime are His parting words!
May the last words of Jesus be our support and our joy when we approach
the river of death.
Then, while relying on the merits of the Redeemer, may we say with the
love of God in our heart, "Father, into Your hands I commend my
spirit."
When we close our eyes on the passing scenes of earth, we will open
them in the splendour of eternal day,
and find ourselves face to face with Jesus.
So then, in health, in sickness, and in the solemn hour of death, let us
commit our spirits to the hands of our Heavenly Friend, and
all will be well.

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Romans 8:18-23 "Where Is God When I Hurt?"

Imagine that my fist represents your life on this planet.
Now imagine a bright red line going out from my fist
Coromandel...Pacific...Alaska...North Pole...Solar system...
Milky Way...distant galaxies...
...never stopping...
That's what the Bible says your life looks like.

(Transparency): Now let this spot take the place of my fist...
...the all-too-short red line represent the endless red line we just
imagined.

Now imagine that you are a microscopic germ living in the black spot.
The spot would loom enormous
Spend your life exploring it, knowing nothing of the rest of the line.

But you're not a germ - you're an intelligent human.
You can step back and view the entire scene in your mind.
Black spot represents the 80-90 years of your life on this planet.
You COULD spend your entire life focused on the spot alone.
Millions do.

You COULD develop a lot of theories about this black spot.
...How it came into existence
...What is the meaning of life on the black spot.
...If you believed in God, you might come up with some ideas
about how cruel and indifferent God appears to be in that
80-90-year period.

But wouldn't your opinions be all wrong, since you are only taking into
account the black spot and not the red line?

That's the main point of Paul's words in his letter to the Romans.
He wants them to think about life in terms of the whole picture.
(Read)

Paul describes life in the black spot pretty accurately, doesn't he.
(2nd transparency)

"present sufferings" - v. 18
"waits" 19 & 23 Longing for something better, for resolution of
life's contradictions & incompleteness.
"frustration" 20 failed efforts; lost dreams & goals; jilted love...
you never applied yourself when young and you're still paying the price
Regrets that you have not been a great model for your children.
"bondage to decay" 21 unavoidable death, the snuffing out of a
life, especially if precious to us.
aging with its loss of spouse, increasing dependency on others,
loneliness

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"groaning" 22, 23 from the groans of physical pain to the
groaning of betrayed and wounded spirits

All of these things are common human experience within the black dot, within
bounds of the few decades of our lives.

If that were all there is...

If I had nothing more to look forward to but dying with a whimper...

what nonsense life would be.

and how unbearable the present sufferings.

BUT, says Paul, that black dot is but a paper-thin slice of eternity.

Put it all into perspective.

That red line out there, Paul calls Glory...the Glory to be revealed.

And what's out there awaiting us?

(transparency)

1. The sons & daughters of God will be revealed. v. 19

That is, our eyes will be opened and we'll fully grasp the glory
the power
the privileges

of being adopted sons and daughters of God Himself.

2. The creation will be liberated - v. 21

Our sin brought a curse on the whole world, and it's decaying,
running down, and being spoiled by man.

Our redemption will bring release from the curse to creation,
and it will spring to new and exciting life for us to explore
and to care for.

3. The redeeming - or restoring - of even our bodies.

"We believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

To be fully human is too have a body.

Christ's brought us full redemption.

Not forever as disembodied spirits, but as robust, vigorous
men and women now become what we were intended
to be.

And so Paul places the broken life in the black spot - our 80-90 years
in contrast to life on the red, eternal life and says (transparency)

NOT TO BE COMPARED!

Nothing in the black spot can be compared with life on the red line!

Now, with that full picture of life in mind, we can go on to ask:

"Why does God permit suffering?"

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Maundy Thurs 2000 A.D.

“Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ”
John 19:23-24

Tonight, I’m looking ahead to Friday, to this small incident at the crucifixion to shed light on the meaning of tonight’s Supper.

There at the foot of the cross are four soldiers, playing a crap game, of all things.

They inherit all that the Man on the cross possessed – His clothing.

They have divided Jesus’ clothes into four parts.

These would include the large piece of cloth that was thrown over the shoulder, and the belt, and sandals.

But then they come to the robe underneath that hung down to the feet.

It’s one piece of woven cloth, without seams, and they think it a shame to rip that up into four parts.

So they shoot the dice to see who will win it.

It seems to be a terribly irreverent thing to record at this terrible moment in Jesus’ life.

But it must have been very significant to the four gospel writers, because all four recorded it!

One reason for it’s being significant to them is the fact that David spoke about it almost 1,000 years before.

Psalm 22:

Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

David had no experience like that in his life – he wasn’t talking about himself.

Rather he was prophesying the Messiah’s sufferings, and it fits only Jesus 1,000 years later.

(Read the whole psalm.)

But again, why would this little incident be so important that it was even included in prophecy?

It must symbolize something much greater than itself.

And, sure enough, we find real significance in these words about a robe.

But let’s back up – all the way back to Adam – to lay the groundwork.

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Before Adam surrendered to sin, he walked in the white
and honorable robe of perfect innocence.

* He was a child in his Father's house.

* He walked with God in intimate fellowship.

* He was in effective charge of his Father's world.

Then came the tragic grab for independence, and everything
changed.

* Now he runs away from God & hides.

* To the question of God, "Adam, where are you?" he answers
"I was afraid, and hid, because I was naked."

Don't you see yourself here?

Adam's nakedness is ours.

Not a thread of the original righteousness is left to us.

Our original beauty is lost.

What we were meant to be is out of reach.

And, yes, we too run from God and hide.

The Law of God, written on our hearts, accuses us.

It's uncomfortable to be around Him.

Some go so far as to run away from Him by denying that
He even exists.

Deep down, every one of us knows that we don't dare appear
naked before a holy God.

As much as some try to convince themselves that they're OK,
we really know that we're like the king whose tailors
deceived him into thinking he had clothes on...
...when, as a matter of fact, the king had no clothes!

Where do we go for the clothes to cover our moral nakedness?

Paul will help us.

In Romans he tells us, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

Let's follow up on that.

Beneath the outer garment of Jesus' marvelous & active life,
He wore a robe.

It was the robe of perfect obedience – a life that pleased
His Father in absolutely every way.

Many eyes examined Him for faults, even His enemies, and
no one could find any.

Even God looked Him over and said, "This is my beloved Son
in whom I delight."

That beautiful robe was made up of pure love to God & man,
without blemish or spot.

And that robe is symbolized by the seamless robe at the cross.

Just as the seamless robe became the legacy of a Roman
soldier, Jesus perfect robe of righteousness is your
legacy as a believer.

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Paul writes, "As by one man's disobedience (that's Adam) many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one man (that's Jesus), many were made righteous."

There is a double gift that you receive from Jesus when you put your trust in Him:

1. Forgiveness.
The punishment has been taken by Him.
You are "un-condemned."
2. But not only that.
Christ fulfilled the total Law of God thru His perfectly obedient life.
That righteousness is now yours.
When God looks at you, He sees His own Son's righteousness!

Listen to Isaiah's words (61:10-11) I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness.

Jesus' flawless righteousness now covers you like a robe.
A holy God looks at you and remembers what His Son did for you.
And He says to you, "You are my beloved daughter in whom I delight."
"You are my beloved son, in whom I delight."

When you're down on yourself...
When you're crushed with your failures...
When your conscience condemns you – rightly or wrongly – remember that there is a higher Judge whose Son has paid the price for your guilt...
...and when you come to Him in sorrow, He rushes to you like the father of the returning prodigal son, and covers you once more with Jesus' blood-bought robe of righteousness.

Remember that the soldier who got that robe received it without any merit of his own – he just cast the dice.
And you are justified only by His grace, and not because you've been pious enough – not even because you've repented enough – but only because He loves you and paid the full price.
I'm sure that the possession of that robe had a great influence on that soldier.
There must have been times when he wore that robe, looked

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down at it and felt ashamed as he remembered whose
it was.

There is a novel called, "The Robe" in which that robe
prepared its owner to eventually become a Christian.
So remember what a powerful influence the robe of Christ's
righteousness will have on your life.

It will change you; it will make you grateful daily; it
will drive you to Him to worship & fellowship.

What's the relationship of all this to the Supper of our Lord?

In the Supper, you really receive nothing that you don't already
have.

But that doesn't mean you don't need it, or that it isn't
extremely important in your Christian life.

Think of a husband & wife who have a good marriage.
In one way or another, they renew their marriage vows
daily.

I don't mean they repeat the vows they spoke at the altar.

But the words "I love you" are spoken often;
And there are daily hugs & kisses, and other
expressions of affection & commitment.

Is that because they were ceasing to be "one flesh"?

No. That's a given; that's a fact that stands for life.

Then why all the repeated expressions of commitment?
Because they need to be reassured.

Doubts arise. Life is complicated.

There are distractions.

There are messy moments...

moments of disagreement, even anger.

Are things still OK with my beloved and me?

How kind of Jesus to give us His Supper.

Something to be repeated often.

Is that because His robe no longer covers me? No.

His Supper is a place for reassurance that the relationship
stands fast.

That despite the distractions of life...

...despite the ups and downs of my feelings &
zeal for Him...

...despite my failures in being faithful...

He still unconditionally welcomes repentant me.

He says, "Come, let's re-enact it all."

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Put me on again...and again...and again.

"You are my beloved son or daughter in whom I delight.

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“Put on the robe of righteousness that is already yours;.

“Receive my body and blood afresh – the body and blood
with which you are always in union.

“You need reassurance? Look, here is bread and wine.

They contain my body & blood.

How much more concrete can I be about giving
myself to you?”

(Sing, “I am covered over...”)

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“Who Said the Dead Don’t Rise?” Luke Chapter 24

You might think that any preacher worth his salt would have an easy
time preparing an Easter sermon.

I have a confession to make.

I find it one of the hardest to prepare.

After all, you know what I’m going to talk about.

- no element of surprise
- you’ve heard it all before, right?
- how can I say anything new?

I asked myself: Exactly what do I want to happen to my listeners
tomorrow?

I’m going to tell you what I wrote:

“I want people to come away, 1) freshly convinced that Jesus is really
alive and 2) excited about at least one way that Jesus’
resurrection makes a difference in their personal lives.

So this morning, I’m excited about that.

I truly want those two things to happen to you..and me.

And the way I’m going to do it is to walk us thru the resurrection
chapter in the Gospel of Luke: chapter 24.

P. _____

Let’s start with Purpose #1: that you come away freshly convinced
that Jesus is truly alive.

I want you to see that those who claimed to be eye witnesses were no
gullible primitives, as contrasted with us sophisticated 21st century
people who know better.

WE know that the dead don’t rise.

There are 4 scenes in the drama of that Sunday morning.

Scene 1 is the women: vv. 1-8 (read)

In v. 1 we see them bringing materials for a good 1st century Jewish
burial.

They come with no expectation other than that there would be a
corpse in a cave.

They would give it a more decent burial, because they, like us, know
that the dead don’t rise.

v. 4 They find the cave empty. Did they shout, “He is risen! He is
risen indeed”?

No, it never entered their minds.

It says, “they were wondering about this.”

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v. 8 Only after the trauma of falling to the ground in fright is their memory jogged and they recalled what Jesus predicted before He died.

Scene 2 concerns the 11 disciples – vv. 9-12 (read)

The women rush in to tell what they've experienced.

What's the response:

Is it: "O hallelujah! He's risen, just as He said!"

Oh, no.

v. 11 (read): Why this response?

Easy: They too knew that the dead don't rise.

v. 12: Peter goes out to see the tomb.

Good ol'e Peter – He's better than the others, right?

He's thinking maybe Jesus IS alive, right?

Wrong.

He's just curious.

What's gotten into these women?

He sees the strips of linen that had been wrapped around the corpse.

Think for a moment about those strips of linen.

If someone had moved Jesus' body, there is no reason why they would have unwound the strips of linen, would there?

Furthermore, the strips were NOT unwound.

The words, "lying by themselves" means "empty" – lying there without the corpse that had been wrapped around.

It was as if the body inside had just evaporated and the strips had collapsed in place.

Yet, with the evidence SCREAMING at him, Peter know the dead don't rise.

He merely goes away "wondering to himself what had happened," but not for a moment entertaining the thought that Jesus was alive.

Scene 3 is about two of the disciples.

Let's read this by sections.

vv. 13-16 (read)

v. 16 – "kept from recognizing Him."

Simple. The knew that the dead don't rise.

I can't help but thinking they must have glanced at His face and thought, "Hm, how similar this man's face is to Jesus."

...and then they sank back into their grief.

...because everyone knows the dead don't rise.

vv. 17-24 (read)

v. 17 – "faces downcast" – deep depression.

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v. 21 – “we had hoped” – they had hoped that Jesus was the promised Redeemer...

...”BUT” – they imply – “we were obviously wrong.

What good is a dead redeemer?”

All this DESPITE vv. 22-24

...the report of the women

...the confirmed empty grave

These two were so unimpressed by the news of the empty grave that they hadn’t even bothered to hang around Jerusalem and investigate further.

No, when you’re dead, you’re dead – and they were going home and try to put their lives together again...WITHOUT Jesus, who sadly was a total disappointment.

vv. 25-29 (read)

I think the two men at this point were thinking something like this:

“Let’s see now.

- the women said Jesus is alive.
- now this man – whoever he is – is convincing us that the OT actually predicted the death and resurrection of the Messiah.

I don’t know what this all means, but let’s hear more.”

And then it happened: vv. 30-32 (read)

v. 30 How many times had they seen THAT action?

- Jesus took bread & gave thanks & broke it & fed 5,000 people
- No doubt He did it daily at meals.
- Just this past Thursday evening, He took bread, gave thanks & broke it and said, “This is my body.”

The two men’s eyes are as big as saucers.

They gasp and look at one another, as all the facts fall into place.

They no doubt shouted, “It’s He!”

And He disappeared.

v. 32 Now they understood, and they rush back to town.

vv. 33-35 (read)

The disciples have begun to believe.

But it’s still second-hand information.

Peter has seen Him, they say.

Scene 4 – now a larger number of people are involved –

The disciples “AND those with them”

And there He stands.

vv. 36-44 (read)

Their minds race to explain what they’re looking at.

“It LOOKS like a body,” they think, “but the dead don’t rise.”

The best explanation they can come up with in their befuddled

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And that brings us to the second part of my purpose this morning,
which is to send you home excited about at least one way in which
Jesus' resurrection makes a difference in your personal life.

I could choose to focus on vv. 45-49 (read)

Here's a focus for your life – in a world where most people no longer
know why they're alive.

Our society has made us the most affluent society in history – more
comforts, more pleasures, more technological breakthroughs than
our great-parents could have imagined in their wildest dreams.

Yet it has left us empty and restless on the inside.

We have sold our souls and trapped ourselves in a lifestyle that
gives us no time or energy to think about questions like
Why am I here?

What's the meaning of it all?

Is there anything that's really worth living & dying for?

Where will it all end for me?

We use noise to replace thought, like the TV that blares senselessly
even when no one is watching.

We fear being quiet or being alone with the thoughts & questions that
well up from deep within

Here's a focus for your life, built on the solid fact that one very
important dead man is alive.

Here's meaning & purpose for you and your life roles as someone's

Friend

Spouse

Parent

Child

Employee

Employer

Neighbor

Here's a way to concentrate your life on something that will still be
of great value 100 years from now, namely, using your callings
in life to help people discover why they're alive.

It's becoming a woman, a man, for others...because He's alive.

That way, your life will go on sending ripples out long after you're
gone.

Or I could focus on vv. 50-53 (read)

Here are lives that have experienced the deep fulfillment of joy, praise,
worship – of a life brought into union in the here and now with the
living Christ...

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...a vibrant relationship that paints all of life with bright colors, with the power as well as with the serenity to live the good life.
...not a make-believe polyanna life that makes believe that everything if OK when it's not...
...but a life that engages the real world with gusto because it has first been in personal touch with the One who made it all and has redeemed it all.

Or finally I could simply focus in on the powerful fall-out from Jesus' Resurrection – unspoken, yet screaming from this chapter:

What's that?

The abolition of the fear of death.

You can claim that you're not afraid to die.

But the psychologists tell us that deep down every human has an acute fear of ceasing to exist – even if we're not conscious of it.

They tell us that this fear haunts us deep down – drives us –

Depresses us when we don't know why we're depressed –

Does mischief in our inner being.

This morning's news tells us that, of the millions of graves that pock mark this planet, there is one that is decisively empty.

It is the guarantee that what God did once in a graveyard in Jerusalem

He will one day repeat on a grand scale for the world – for you and me.

Against all the odds, the irreversibility of death & decay has been reversed!

To the certainty that the dead don't rise, you may add today two certainties that cancel the first one out:

Jesus' empty grave

And your own.0

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“Thrice Loved” Isaiah 6:1-8

Some of you may remember Mikko, our blue-green parakeet
who, alas, departed this life a few years ago.

Like most animals, Mikko knew only how to do 3 things:
eat, play, and reproduce.

What if Mikko were to say to me, “I have you ALL figured out.
“You humans don’t do things the same as I do, but I know that
you only do 3 things: eat, play, and reproduce”?

How would you react?

“Mikko, old bird, you’re using your own very limited
experience to try to understand me – how ignorant
you are!”

After all, humans are FAR more complicated than that –
even granting that there ARE some who seem never to
mature beyond eating, playing, & reproducing!

There are dimensions to our lives of which Mikko knows
absolutely nothing.

(FAST) talking with a friend

reading a novel

building a house

thinking

collecting stamps

painting a room

laughing at a good joke

planning a trip

playing Monopoly

putting on a new shirt

taking a walk with someone you love...

...just to name a very vew of the things Mikko wouldn’t
comprehend.

You see, much of what I used to do in Mikko’s presence was
clothed in mystery to him.

Now if such an immeasurable distance lifes between parakeet
and man – both creatures –

would you be surprised to know there’s an INFINITE
gap between Creator and creature? You and God?

Isn’t it a tad arrogant to think we’ve got God figured out?

That’s why Luther spoke about “the hidden God.”

One our own we can discover little about the real God.

The Latin theologians called God the “mysterium tremendum”

If God is truly God, sovereign of the universe...

wouldn’t you be surprised if He were transparent to a colony
of tiny creatures inhabiting a tiny planet off in a corner of
of a galaxy that’s off in a cornerof the universe?

If we are to know anything about the mysterium tremendum, we

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must begin from this pretty obvious fact:
From our side we can know very little about Him.
The trouble with so many religions is precisely the claim to
have figured God out...
They've placed Him in a box.
The mystery and awe are gone
God has been shrunk down to a size that can be grasped &
manipulated by humans.
Are we to conclude, then, that we cannot know God?

Isaiah 6:1-8 page 680

I'd like you to note 3 things from this passage:

1. This is not Isaiah figuring God out.
This is God invading Isaiah's life.
If we can't reach God from OUR side, that doesn't mean
that God can't reach US from HIS side.
That's what's happening here.
This is God pulling back the curtain a WEE bit for Isaiah
to experience His majesty.
- v. 1 – seated on a throne...high & exalted...the temple in
Jerusalem about to burst with His overwhelming
presence.
- v. 2 – strange creatures all over the place: “seraphs”
literally “fiery ones” – dazzling beings
- v. 3 – shouting to one another something about God being
thrice holy.

- v. 4 – the whole building is shaking, the ground beneath
rumbling
filled with smoke that adds to the awe, and hiding
much of what is going on.

You can be sure Isaiah didn't shout, “God, now I've got
You figured out!”
There is mystery here – there is FAR more to God that
Isaiah can begin to grasp.
You'll never have God nicely wrapped and in a box.
If you do, I assure you, you've got a false god.
If you are to know God at all, you can have only what He
chooses to let you see.
But He DOES want you to experience Him...because He
loves you...

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...and because your life is a bewildering riddle without Him.

So the first point is: This is not Isaiah figuring out God; it's God condescending to show Himself to Isaiah.

2. His reason for making Himself known is to rescue a man and a world in trouble.

v. 5 – Isaiah – seeing God enables Isaiah to know himself. and enabling Isaiah to see the sickness of his own society. and to take his share of the blame. “I’m ruined...”

v. 6 – the coal that removes guilt.

A once had a growth and the doctor burned it off.

He “cauterized” it.

God “cauterizes” Isaiah’s guilt – the unclean lips the dirty mouth.

He releases Isaiah.

Isaiah has been part of society’s problem.

Now, as a forgiven man, he is to become part of the answer.

The guilt that had immobilized him

that ate away within him, and haunted him

that made him useless to God AND to society...

was GONE.

That’s what God definitely wants you to know about Himself – He loves to wipe slates clean for repentant people. Yes, God reveals Himself in order to rescue the race that He loves.

3. For point #3, come back to v. 3 – to the three-fold holy. Here we have one of the many hints in the O.T. that God – though He is the one and only God – - is FAR more complex than we are, just as we are far more complex than a parakeet.

Note v. 8: “whom shall I send” (this is the one God speaking) “and who will go for...US.”

Hint: this one God is, within Himself, MORE than one as we know oneness.

To understand the Bible, we must remember that God spent 2,000 years – from Abraham to Jesus – to reveal Himself progressively.

Most of that time was spent in a world of rampant, corrupt polytheism – i.e., many gods, thousands of gods... the kind that you can figure out & manipulate.

God is busy revealing Himself as the one God over all –

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high...awesome...ruler...King of the universe...
...not some puny tribal god.
...not the gods of the Greeks who lived on Mt. Olympia
and who competed, and argued, and fought with
one another.
...these were all gods made in man's image.
But Jehovah, or Yahweh, is totally different.
The great creed of the OT was called the Shema:
"Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is One.
And for those who turned from the man-made pagan godlets
to the living Lord over all...they found Him to be
personal:

He is God over us
cause of joy
some one is in charge, and He loves us
He keeps order
He steps in and acts when we're in trouble
What a life-changing things that was in a world of cruel,
impersonal, unpredictable gods!

Then one day, Rabbi Y'shua appeared on the scene.
He called 12 men to live with Him and to know Him well.
Were THEY in for some mind-boggling experiences
One day on Lake Galilee, which was famous for sudden storms,
a raging storm broke out.
Rabbi Y'shua stood up and shouted, "Quiet!"
The storm stopped & the life-threatening waves were
calm.

"Who IS this? Even the wind and waves obey Him."
Yes, who is this indeed!

Later, during a discussion about Abraham, who had lived
2,000 years before Jesus,
Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I AM."
"I have ALWAYS been around," He said.
And, by the way, "I AM" is an OT name for God.
Yes, who is this indeed?

Later, a disciple, Philip, said, "Show us the Father...
Jesus: "What? You don't know me? He who has seen
me has seen the Father."
Yes, who is this indeed?

A new dimension of the Mysterium Tremendum has
broken out with the coming of Jesus.
We knew about God OVER us – yes, how wonderful!

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But now we meet God WITH us – more wonderful yet.
God walking beside me.
God being personal – even human!
God entangled with my life...
intervening when I need Him.

The Bible calls them Father and Son
not because one existed before the other.
both are eternal God

God the Son never stopped being God, but also became
human – born of a virgin
Mysterious? Yes! The Mysterium Tremendum.
Are you surprised?
And here's the proof of His love
When we were lost and self-destructing, God didn't say,
"I'll send some one else."
No, He said, "I'll go myself."

But there is more yet to the mystery:
In Jesus' Baptism, there was the Son in the water;
And the Father from above: "This is my Son."
No something else:
The Spirit of God descending upon Jesus.
Later, Jesus gave us the Pentecost promise that the Holy
Spirit would be IN us.
So we have one more dimension to the god who wants us
to know Him:
God over us; God with us; God IN us.
However, the Creator and the creature are never to be
confused.

Shirley McClain notwithstanding, who says she is God,
and the Mormons notwithstanding, who say that we are
all intended to be gods.
No, I am not God...You are not God...and you never will be.
YET: you have a relationship that could not be more intimate:
God Himself a guest in your body.

The early Church invented a word to express this threefold
Mystery of God over us, with us, and in us:
Trinity – 2 words, "Tri" and "unity"
The word is not in the Bible.
But what it represents is clearly taught there.

How deep & wonderful that the mysterium tremendum –
the hidden, undiscoverable God walks into your life

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because He loves you and wants you to experience Him.
You come to know Him as the one God in 3 persons.

God over you – the Father whom you can trust to work out
everything – even the worst things – for good.

God with you – God the Son, Jesus.

Because He became man, He is able to share your anguish
and to take on the consequences of your sins in
His human body on the cross.

God in you – God the Holy Spirit who knows you from the
inside.

- know your deepest feelings & thoughts
- places in you all His authority and resources so as to
- do His bidding.

Do you remember the bottom line in Isaiah's encounter
with the living God?

"Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

There's a world out there that I love.

It's full of hurting, bewildered people far from Me.

I want an army of people who know me to infiltrate that
world as my ambassadors.

Remember Isaiah's ready answer, awed as he was by his
fresh experience of God?

"Here I am; send me."

"Awesome, loving Triune God,

I'm learning to love the world's people as you do.

Where in the world do You want me to serve?

I'll go where you want me to go, Lord.

Here I am; send me."

Prayer: thrice loved...

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“Entrusted with a Treasure” I Thess. 2:1-12

Please take a stroll with me thru these straightforward words of Paul
From 3 points of view.

I. The Controversial Nature of the Gospel

2:1-2

Acts 17:1-9

Today also: bitter attacks

Americans United for Sep. of State & Church

Christian motto on door of legislator

St. Jude's in Kapolei – a cross

Removal of refs to Xn. faith from textbooks:

Pilgrims...how explain them apart from faith?

Freedom of speech zealously protected – except for Xns.

Ex. Disapproval of homosexual lifestyle – as a moral

Question – forbidden on some U. campuses.

Culture wars – postmodernism vs. Christian faith.

No absolutes – taught constantly on TV.

Permit children of any age to watch hours & hours:

Odds are that they will abandon the Christian

faith early in adulthood: different mindset.

Postmodernists – totally incompatible with Xn faith.

The Christian faith is no easy commitment – it was extremely
controversial in Paul's day – and it still is.

Oh, being religious was OK in Paul's day, as in ours.

But being specifically, clearly, consistently Christian – that's asking for
trouble.

Expect it.

Be prepared for it.

Don't be caught by surprise.

Get to know your Bible – spend as much time to understand
the Bible as you do watching TV.

As an adult, read some good books – know what you believe
and why you believe.

What you learned in Sunday school won't be enough.

II. The Passion of an Apostle

A look into the heart of Paul.

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- v. 2 – “dared” (Philippi background) –flogged, imprisoned
- v. 3 – no impure motives or trickery.
Single-minded...
- v. 4 – “entrusted with the Gospel” – mere steward; humble position.
No pride, arrogance here.
No fancy robes & huge pectoral crosses here – just a trustee.
- v. 4 – trying to please God, not men.
- v. 5 – no flattery. No questionable methods of winning people.
- v. 5 – no greed covered over with piety.
Unlike some of our TV evangelists with
private planes
occupying entire floors of hotels
body guards
\$100,000+ salaries (v. 9)
- v. 6 - not looking for the praise of men.
God is not impressed by the signs of success that
impress humans.
No softening of the message of Law & Gospel so as
not to offend.
No putting on a show – pizzaz, people falling on the
floor
Hundreds of thousands of people in Africa - TV.
Have you ever asked what happened to these
people after the show is over?
Most disappear until the next show comes along.
Meantime, faithful national pastors who have
served there for years now go out to urge
their sheep back to the simple chapels &
the less dramatic work of feeding &
equipping them for daily Christian
life.
- Sensationalism does nothing for the tough stuff of Christian life/ mission.
- v. 7 – “gentle among you like a mother caring for her children”
not pushy, not authoritarian.
Loving, protecting, teaching like a patient mother
- v. 8 – “delight to share with you the Gospel AND our lives as
well”
This is giving rather than getting.
This is a man giving himself away – draining himself

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of his life, for others.

v. 9 – “toil & hardship” – no comfortable job; no 40 hrs. a week.

v. 10 – “holy, righteous, blameless”

model of the power of Gospel to change lives.

Paul asked nothing of his people that he did not do.

vv.11-12 – “like a father” (v. 7)

provider, encourager: “Come on, by God’s grace you can do it!”

This is true apostolic ministry style.

May this be an accurate description of our new pastor.

Use this passage to pray for him!

III. The Character of a Congregation

A church builds its character on the model of its leaders.

What would be the character of a church pastored by Paul?

v. 2 – prepared to suffer and pay the price for being faithful.

That might even mean growing more slowly – and losing some people – because of Biblical teachings that are not popular.

Or because of moral or social issues that it finds it must speak out on.

Would you believe that there are evangelical churches in Honolulu that refuse to take a public stand on the abortion issue because it’s controversial and they might lose some members over it?

Paul in Galatia – 1:6 –

little matter of circumcision – “come on Paul, give a little!

Are you willing to lose members over this little matter?”

5:2-4

No a truly biblical church will tell forth every truth of Scripture, regardless of the cost.

The results are in God’s hands, not ours.

v. 4 – a deep & humble awareness of being trustees of the Gospel.

Hence: one passion: to get the Gospel out, whatever it takes.

vv. 5-6 – a congregation that doesn’t know how to be other than genuine & honest.

Never resorts to gimmicks.

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It has a straightforward message based on Scripture alone.

vv. 7-8 – a congregation that is gentle, not pushy –
loving, welcoming,
sensitive to people, even as we urgently seek to bring them
to faith in Jesus Christ.

v. 9 – A hard-working, persistent, servant-church.
It exists for its non-members and its community, and labors to
get in touch.

v. 10 – holy, righteous, blameless – working hard, by the Holy Spirit's
power – to reflect the character of Jesus Christ in its
entire life.

That would be the character of a church pastored by the apostle Paul.
As GSLC moves on in God's plan, may this also be a description of the
character of this fellowship.

Is that what you want for GSLC?

You know the saying: a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Whether GSLC is to be all God intends it to be depends on
you & your personal walk with Jesus.

What you do or don't do in intensifying your life-walk with
Jesus doesn't only affect you – it affects us, too.

Is it a walk that includes a daily time with Him in His Word &
in prayer?

Is it a lifestyle that is prepared to pay the price in time and
money to get involved in hukilau evangelism?

Is it a walk that includes accountability to other brothers &
sisters?

No one can get very far as a spiritual loner.

In all of this, will you remember that the Bible says: You are not your
own; you have been bought with a price?

As Jesus conquered death and hell when He died and rose again,
So you, when you put your trust in Him, are an escapee from
eternal death and hell.

He has a plan for your life to be woven into His Master plan of
time and eternity.

He's calling you this morning. Trust Him. He's trustworthy.
If you have not yet put your trust in Jesus Christ as your God & Savior,
He calls you this morning, too.

He invites you to the cross to see what your living away from
God cost Him.

On the cross He stepped in between you and the horrific
consequences of your sins.

His resurrection is His promise to you and all who trust Him that

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death is not your destiny; eternal life is.
By receiving Him this morning you become part of His ohana –
the fellowship of newborn people on mission for Him.

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“The Contagious Church” Colossians 4:2-18

Past 4 weeks: Walking thru Colossians

Special for us as we begin a challenging time of transition and
of wonderful new starts

Col. Is for us a review of what we're all about.

We are a community, an ohana, a family, and we hold
things in common that are far greater than any of our
differences.

This is not a time to go church shopping – which is so terribly
American – like choosing the supermarket with the
best deals – but which violates all that the NT says
about what Jesus' ohana is all about.

No, this is a time for rediscovering who we are,
and who He is

and what His plan is for us.

Colossians is a wonderful little document to help us do that.

So is 1st Timothy, which we'll have a look at in coming weeks.

As we move into the warm closing words of Paul to Jesus' community
in the city of Colossae, I think it would be good to do a
brief overview of his little letter to them – big picture.

Page _____

1:15-20 - the Massive facts that are the foundation of our life as ohana.

1:21-22 - but these facts are for us.

As people who once were alienated from God, we have now been
reconciled with Him by those facts.

We have been justified.

2:13-15 - not only forgiven & given right standing with God.

Also made alive – re-born – God has become our Father .

His “DNA” has been inserted into us

v. 15 – Satan & his agents were disabled at the cross and have no
claim on us.

3:1-4 Expect a change in lifestyle.

Your heart is set on something new – on Jesus.

He is the new lens thru which you are learning to see life.

Christ is your life – it is beginning to radiate with HIS
own character.

3:5-8 So you find yourself stripping off the awful stuff that once
came so naturally, but which now have become unthinkable

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for a person in whom Jesus Christ dwells.

3:12-14 But not merely taking off the old smelly clothing, but
putting on a new outfit.

...simply made up of the things that describe Jesus Himself:
compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience,
forgiveness, love.

What we often forget is that every time Paul says “you” in this letter,
He is really saying “y’all” –

And now we come to the close of Paul’s letter.

He is especially warm and personal.

Paul has three areas of strong concern as he says farewell.

They are my areas of concern too:

4:2-4 Prayer.

DEVOTE yourselves to prayer.

“to invest yourself”

I Thess. 5:17 – pray without ceasing.

An attitude, a focus of your heart.

Like in a good marriage – even when you’re apart and busy
with life’s demands, there is an undercurrent of
awareness of the other.

That’s why coming home at the end of the day is so special –
the fulfillment of a wish you’ve had all day, to be with
your beloved.

“be watchful” – like a sentinel on watch – wide awake.

A sentinel is on the front line – he has many lives in his
hands.

He will be the point of contact with the Enemy.

So with the Christian.

You have been appointed a Kingdom sentinel.

Stay awake

Many lives are in your hands, too, both saved and unsaved.

“Being thankful.” – This, too, is an attitude that runs thru your life.

Prayer is not a grim, dry duty

It’s a privilege for you when you remember that you are an

escapee from eternal hell, by His grace alone,

and that there are some special people who will become

escapees like yourself as you hold the Enemy back so that one
day the Savior can get thru to those people.

vv. 3-4 are a reminder that intercession for others should predominate
in your times with God.

- an open door – that God will manipulate the circumstances of

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- your friends life to prepare him for the saving Message.
or the circumstances in an entire society such as the Dungan.

Pray for the messengers – our summer team; the Oettings, the
Rusches, our missionaries on every continent.

It's lonely and hard out there, and they are OUR messengers.
I especially want to call on all of us at GSLC to take 5 minutes each
day to pray for two major concerns of our ohana:

1. Our new pastor; our pastoral search task force to prostrate
themselves before God as they do their work.
2. For the Dungan people that our team will meet & serve in
July; for the team itself as they equip themselves; for
their faith commitment to trust God for certain
amounts of financial support from friends &
family outside GSLC.

I'm calling on our Cell Servants to see to it that these two things
are prayed over at every single cell meeting until we
have clear answers from God.

4:5-6 – Lifestyle Witness

In v. 5, Paul is speaking of the evangelizing influence of our behavior.
"Make the most of every opportunity" –

If you are a Christian, you are in full-time ministry.

Christ is IN you, and He is full-time ministry.

Furthermore, Christ is your LIFE- not merely your part-time
hobby when other things don't occupy your attention.

There is no room here for "ghetto Christianity" where all of our
friends are church people and we've lost contact with
those who don't yet know Jesus.

The NATURAL tendency is to lose touch with non-Christians, and
that is tragic.

You and I will have to work intentionally to reverse that trend.

Pray for that during Purpose Time in your cell meetings.

In v. 6, Paul talks about our conversation.

While it's true that spoken witness is only a small part of our
witness, that doesn't mean that you don't need to speak
the word sooner or later.

But Paul's concern is not just those special moments when you get
to talk with someone about Jesus.

He's concerned that ALL of our conversation be attractive.

Just think of how many hours a day our mouths are making sounds!

All of those sounds are to be "full of grace & seasoned with salt."

"Full of grace" or better "full of graciousness" because you know
that the person you're speaking with is loved by Jesus.

Jesus longs for that person to be in His ohana.

Your graciousness – concern, interest, kindness – will be one

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factor in that person coming to faith.

“seasoned with salt”

Have you ever eaten food where the cook forgot to add a little salt?

Bland, unexciting to the palate.

Add the salt, and all the flavors come out.

Salty conversation makes people curious, gives them a desire for more.

May GSLC be a fellowship of people who are practicing beautiful
conversation among themselves with an eye to moving
back out to do the same to those who are not yet in
God’s ohana.

4:7-18 – Corporate Lifestyle Witness

The details of this passage are not as important as the feel you get
as you read it.

Here is a contagious fellowship of people who love their Lord and
one another deeply.

Each person is precious.

Paul knows that the Colossian Christians care, and that they will
be there for the individuals he names.

“See how they love one another” - early church.

Transparency:

I am convinced that people all over the world will not listen if we have the right
doctrine but are not exhibiting community. And there is no use saying you have
community or love for each other if it does not get down into the tough stuff of life.

Francis Schaeffer

Oh, how I pray that people will say the same about us at GSLC.

What a witness that will be in an age when people feel isolated,

Where many no longer have an extended family nearby,

Where divorce has left so many couples in permanent pain,
along with their children.

As a matter of fact, we could fill a book with the stories of people caring
for people at GSCL.

Not always dramatic – but caring actions that confirm that fact that
Jesus Christ is active among us.

Services of love that demonstrate the wonderful presence of the
Holy Spirit in the life of GSLC.

So...

Prayer

Lifestyle Witness

Corporate Lifestyle Witness.

Can we work together to make these things vital among us?

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If God is having His way with us in these three areas, then the future
Of this congregation & its mission is bright indeed.

Prayer:

Where will YOU begin?

Prayer?

Lifestyle witness – what will you change in your behavior?

Corporate Lifestyle Witness – how is He calling you to get

Involved in someone else's life in Jesus' name?

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“Standing Confident in a Hopeless Age” Colossians 1:21-23

There is a very sad story about Alizabeth Barrett Browning, the famous authoress.

Her parents so totally disapproved of the man she married that they disowned her.

Almost weekly, she wrote love letters to her mother & father, asking for a reconciliation.

They never once replied.

After ten years of one-way letter-writing, Elizabeth received a huge box in the mail.

She opened it and was shocked & heartbroken.

The box contained ten years' worth of weekly letters to her parents.

Not one of them had been opened!

I have an even sadder story of rejected reconciliation.

God has written loads of love letters to us seeking reconciliation.

Every Christian sermon is one of His love letters.

Every life that shines forth Jesus is a living love letter.

And some of His love letters are contained in this book.

Yet many, many people are living far from God.

Many people don't even know about His letters.

Others know about them, but

ignore them

or return them unopened.

Two weeks ago, we began working our way through one of His wonderful love letters in the Bible.

It was written by God thru His friend Paul, and sent to the people in a city in today's Turkey called Colossae.

But He intends the letter for you and me, too.

Last week, we spent some time with what is one of the deepest parts of the letter.

Let me try to summarize it – by way of review if you were here, and by way of introduction if you weren't:

(Transparency)

It's all about Jesus, and here's a simple summary:

When God comes to us, His name is Jesus Christ.

He made the universe; it is His.

He holds the universe together every moment.

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When His universe got broken, it cost Him His life to fix it.

When he returned from the dead, He began to fix His
universe by creating a new human race to live in it.

He is to be supreme in everything.

Now that's saying a lot.

But it doesn't yet sound like much of a love letter, does it.

It's kind of impersonal

It tells all about Him and who He is and what He's done.

But now we come to today's part of the letter where God gets
very personal.

He begins it by writing: "And YOU..."

Col.1:21-23 - p. 1165

Chinese: p.

There are two major words in this passage that I hope you will
never forget.

They are the basic two words of all of God's love letters
to us:

v. 21 ALIENATED

v. 22 RECONCILED

One is in the past: "ONCE you were alienated..."

One is in the present: "But NOW He has reconciled you..."

Let's look at them in more detail, shall we?

1. ALIENATED

A terrible word.

Some of us know what it is to be aliens –

Either you're an immigrant to this country...

Or you've lived overseas.

(my experience in Japan – shave ice?)

It means that you don't really belong.

You are excluded from many rights & privileges.

You often don't know what's really going on around you.

You are a stranger.

Sometimes you may feel very alone.

You may even meet hostility.

To be "alienated" is even worse than being an "alien."

It means you've been deprived of something you once had.

It means a destroyed relationship, a broken friendship.

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Our letter says that “you were alienated from God.”

You may say to yourself, “Wait a minute!

“I don’t deserve that.

“I’m not a bad person.

“I’ve tried to be kind to people,
and to be a good husband or wife
or a good employee
or a good parent.”

But God is talking about something much deeper
than outward behavior.

He’s talking about an attitude.

And every one of us has an attitude problem when it
comes to God.

We ignore Him;

Whole days go by without thinking about Him.

We live as if He doesn’t exist – or at least that He is
very unimportant.

Matter of fact, He is anything but “supreme” in our lives.

That’s why the letter says (v. 21) we “were enemies in
our minds.”

Why, that’s even worse than the evil behavior that flows
from our minds!

What God seeks more than anything else is an intimate
relationship with you.

He made you to be His friend, and you are
ignoring Him!

In fact, you are replacing Him with something else
in your life: your job, your \$, your ambitions,
your possessions, maybe even your children.

Without a word, you’ve been telling Him, “I’ll do things
my way.”

Your lifestyle has been shouting, in the words of a
famous poem:

“I am the captain of my soul; I am the master of my fate.”

And you’re not.

He is.

You’re missing the whole point of your life, because you were
made for fellowship with Him.

You’re alienated from God.

And if He is the one who made all things,
owns all things,
holds it all together,
and loves you so much...

well, that’s serious.

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2. RECONCILED

“But NOW...” (v. 22)

Isn't that great?

That “Once you were” has been wiped out by “But now
He has”

God refuses to leave you as an alien.

He is bent on making you a “naturalized” citizen.

Actually, a “supernaturalized” citizen – because it's a
miracle every time an alienated person is
changed to a RECONCILED person.

That's what He loves to do!

That's what made Him willing to step into your shoes
and take on Himself the consequences of your
alienation from God.

It took a cross to make it happen.

A cross where God Himself took responsibility for your
distance from God...

...your disinterest in His friendship.

Finally, you learn to look at the cross and cry out,

“Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life,
my soul, my all!”

Now, because of His sacrifice on the cross, He
counts you as His dear friend.

Now Jesus presents you to His Father as one who is
“holy, without blemish, free from accusation.” (v.22)

He has nothing against you, because His Son has wiped
the record clean.

He counts you forgiven...not guilty.

He counts you as His friend.

At the cross, God was reconciled with you.

It remains only for you to be reconciled with Him!

Even as I speak, He is enabling you to say,

“Yes! I want this. I can hardly believe it, but
I am God's friend!”

And what is going to happen to you (v. 23) as you grow in this
trust relationship with Jesus Christ, is that you will find your
life becoming solid & firm, built on a strong foundation
that can withstand life's crises.

You have become a person of hope – a rare commodity in our
present world.

You are able to look to the future, both in time and eternity,
with peace – the knowledge that all will end well

Your Friend has gone ahead of you and is preparing the

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way.

(story of man & son who collected a priceless treasure of paintings; son went to war, was killed on front line; he received a portrait of his son from his son's good friend; after man's death, auction of his priceless paintings was begun with his son's portrait; went for \$10, then auction was over; "whoever takes the son gets it all.")

Jesus is God's love letter to you.
Fail to take the Son and you lose all.
Take His Son and all that God has is yours!

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Pastor Don Baron's Communion Articles

HIS SUPPER: JESUS, YOU, AND ME

The sharing of the body and blood of the Lord that comes through bread & wine (I Cor. 10:16) is not only a “vertical” thing – that is, Jesus and you communing privately together. It also has an important “horizontal” dimension. It’s Jesus...and you...and your sisters & brothers in Christ, being re-connected in a fellowship that will never end. The horizontal aspect of the Lord’s Supper is made very clear in the very next verse, where Paul writes, “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” You are bound together with that person to your left and right, and with all who commune at the altar! It isn’t always easy, this horizontal dimension of our life with Christ. We’re all “sinner-saints” – justified yet sinful – who sometimes rub one another the wrong way! That’s why Luther’s illustration is interesting: he reminds us that bread happens only after a lot of grains have been crushed. Then they’re ready to be blended into dough, baked, and become “one loaf.” Even in a Christian congregation, you can be “crushed” and hurt by a fellow sinner-saint. As you go to the altar, be aware of those around you and thank the Lord Christ for them. Where there is distance between you and another person, wipe it out with forgiveness! While you’re sitting below, pray for each brother and sister in Christ as you see them proceeding up to the Altar. Yes, that includes not only the ones you “like” and are attracted to; it includes all in your church family. The horizontal and vertical dimensions of Holy Communion are both important!

THE SUPPER: DEEPLY PERSONAL

“Even though in the Sermon there is the very thing that there is in the Sacrament and vice versa, yet there is the advantage that here (in the Sacrament) it points to a particular person. Here it is given to you and me in particular” (Martin Luther). The Lord’s Supper is the Gospel personalized. You might respond to the preached Gospel by saying, “Well, that’s all fine and good, but how do I know it’s intended for me?” But you can’t say that to the bread and wine that is placed in your hands and mouth! That is for no one else but you! It’s as if your very name were written on the bread and the cup! No wonder Holy Communion is called “the Sacrament of assurance.” It’s for you who wonder if Jesus really loves you. It’s for you who are tired of your sins and of yourself, and you feel unworthy to come. It’s for you lonely widows, and you worried parents, and you unemployed, and you ailing and dying ones, and you who are at the end of your rope. Whatever your condition, there is a piece of bread and a sip of wine waiting just for you. In them, He is waiting to get very personal with you. Come.

COMMUNION: PLACE OF JOY!

How sad that we dress the Lord’s Supper in the funereal black of Good Friday instead of the hilarity of Easter white! The focus of the Supper is not merely the death of Christ. He is present as both the Crucified One and the Risen One. Eating His Supper is not a time of sadness, but of joy - joy comparable to the Sunday when the mourning disciples were confronted with His sudden presence and realized that He was not dead, but mightily alive! Jesus said the Supper was to be eaten “in

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remembrance of Me” – not “in remembrance of My death.” Smile! Celebrate! This is not a memorial service for “the late Jesus,” but a resurrection celebration, a reunion with the One who was dead but is vibrant and alive. It is not the flesh of a corpse that we receive, but the flesh and blood of the exalted Lord who fills His universe but who meets us exactly here in bread and wine. Leave the altar with a smile on your face!

FEELINGS AT THE ALTAR

Don't try to “generate” feelings at the Altar. If you are depressed or sick or distracted, you may fail and go away disappointed. No, come just as you are! The Supper is for you in your worst of moods or in the numbness of no emotions at all. Christ did not abandon His Presence in the Supper to the roller coaster of your moods, or even to your ability to remember Him. In fact, Jesus' body and blood are so surely present in the Supper that even an “unworthy” person (that is, who is unrepentant or doesn't recognize the body of Jesus in the Supper) actually receives the body and the blood – although to his own harm (I Cor. 11:27-29). Repentance and affirming the words “for you” is all that “qualifies” you to come! Your emotions or power of meditation do not cause His presence. The bread is - not might be - a participation in His body; the cup is a participation in His blood (I Cor. 10:16). “This is – not might be - my body.” Jesus is the host at this Supper, and He will not fail to be there for you!

HOLY COMMUNION: THE BREAK OF DAWN

The Lord's Supper will be even richer for you if you come remembering that there is a powerful future dimension to it. Jesus added this anticipation of the future to the Supper when, in the Upper Room, He said, “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25). As you eat the Supper, you are standing on tiptoe by His side, peering ahead to celebrating with Him in His new world! His Supper is the appetizer, the hors d'oeuvre for the resurrection banquet at His coming! Paul writes, “Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes” (I Cor. 11:26). His Supper is God's “packed lunch” for you as you make your way along the hard and joyous road home! The future broke into time with the resurrection of Jesus. In Communion, that future breaks into your life. The Lord's Supper is the dawn for you, because “it is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself” (Luther). Through it you already have one foot in the coming new world. As the resurrected Lord presents you with His own atoning body and blood, He does away with the boundary between your present death-bound existence and the new creation where there is no more dying. You receive what He has promised: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise Him up at the last day” (John 6:54). At the Altar you taste “the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age” (Hebrews 6:5).

THE LORD'S SUPPER IS THE GOSPEL

When we look at the very earliest New Testament writings (Galatians, I & II Thessalonians, I Corinthians) we see four basic facts, drawn from the life of Christ, that constitute the Gospel. (They are, of course, found in the other New Testament books too.)

1. He died on a cross.

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2. He arose and appeared to His disciples.
3. He promised to return.
4. He gave us His Supper.

The Supper was not an after-thought, a decoration like icing on a cake or tinsel on a Christmas tree. It is part and parcel of the Gospel. It is part of the very foundation on which Christ's Gospel and Christ's Church are constructed. It is the continued Presence among His people of the resurrected man who is also God. The Supper guarantees us that He is not an "absentee God." The Supper is pure grace, just as His crucifixion, resurrection, and promised return are pure grace. The Gospel is all about forgiveness, life, and salvation. So is the Supper. When Jesus gave them His Supper, He told His disciples that His sacrificed body and blood, present now in bread and wine, are "given and shed for you for the remission of sins." And Luther adds, "where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." Jesus' Supper is Gospel – pure Gospel!

THE LORD'S SUPPER: A MYSTERY

No one can fully describe the awesome things that become ours under the humble forms of bread and wine in Holy Communion. Rather than try to explain it, come to the Supper ready to be touched by the Real Presence of your Savior Jesus. Here you meet the One who is "true God, begotten by the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the virgin Mary." It's "the medicine of immortality," to use the words of Ignatius, a 2nd Century believer. Time and space evaporate, and the body broken and the blood shed at the Cross invade our very body and soul and release into us forgiveness, life, and salvation! The powerful resurrected One joins us to Himself. The great Communion hymn puts it this way:

Draw near and take the body of the Lord
And drink the holy blood for you outpoured.
Offered was He for greatest and for least,
Himself the victim and Himself the priest.

With heavenly bread makes those who hunger whole,
Gives living waters to the thirsty soul.
The judge eternal, unto whom shall bow
All nations at the last, is with us now.

Luther wrote, "For us, the Sacrament is a street, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a stretcher, on which we journey from the world into eternal life." Mystery indeed.

THE LORD'S SUPPER: HE STOOPS TO CONQUER

It seems so unspiritual! Why would God want to use such earthly things as bread and wine – and water, while we're at it – to accomplish spiritual purposes? We are tempted to oppose our spirituality to the "sensuality" of the Lord's Supper. We like to oppose the physical to the spiritual. Perhaps that's why many people tend to put the Supper "on the back burner" as really not essential to their walk with God. We just don't see how physical things can accomplish spiritual tasks.

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But wait. Have you noticed how prominent physical things are in God's way of doing things? The Bible begins with His calling the physical world into existence. God creates us with bodies. Jesus uses mud and pool water as a means of healing a blind man and bringing him to faith. Most importantly, when God wanted to redeem us, it was decided that He who is the eternal Word must first become flesh! "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree" (I Pet. 2:24). And you are to present your body (not your "hearts," as we are prone to say) as a living sacrifice which is your "spiritual act of worship" (Rom. 12:1). For your Creator/Redeemer, there is no gap between the spiritual and the physical. In fact, your resurrection body will be a "spiritual body" (I Cor. 15:44), which does not mean a non-physical body (whatever that might be!) but a raised physical body that is totally dedicated to adoring and serving God.

Back to His Supper. That physical things in God's hands cannot accomplish spiritual tasks never entered into either Jesus' or the apostles' minds. In Jesus' hands, bread and wine become a means to refresh you spiritually – in other words, a means of grace – because He attaches powerful words to them. For Paul, lowly bread and wine consecrated by Jesus' words become the very locale of His body and blood that were given and shed for the remission of your sins: "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" (I Cor. 10:16). How kind of Him to stoop to conquer, and to occupy you - body, mind, and heart!

ONCE & FOR ALL, YET AS OFTEN AS YOU EAT & DRINK.

The Bible tells us that "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (I Pet. 3:18). Why, then, do we talk about receiving forgiveness through the Lord's Supper? Didn't that happen through His sacrifice at the cross? Or are we to believe that we are repeating in the Sacrament the sacrifice that was offered up once and for all two thousand years ago - and isn't that wrong? Certainly Jesus wasn't thinking like that when He gave the Supper to His disciples. The Sacrament of the Altar is neither something separate from, nor in addition to, Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. However, the One who was offered up at Golgotha is present through His Supper to gift us now with the fruit of His atoning death. Jesus is the Sacrifice, and He presents us with the very body and blood that were offered up once for all at Calvary. Holy Communion is something like the Fellowship Offering in the Old Testament. Here the worshippers ate in God's presence the very animal that had been sacrificed, consuming it in fellowship with the God who had accepted it and them. The Supper is not a grim exercise of recalling something that happened long ago at The Place of the Skull. The past is here in the present! Time and space disappear. The Lord Jesus Himself makes His eternally valid sacrifice contemporaneous with us! Because it is the risen Lord who unites us with His sacrifice, He also makes us partakers of His resurrection as well as His final victory over sin, death, and Satan. There is nothing to be added to the Sacrifice that was made once for all. However, that Sacrifice is personalized for you as often as you eat the bread which is His body and drink the wine which is His blood.

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This Is My Body
Miracle or mere metaphor?

+ + +

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Honolulu

Introduction

You kneel at the altar. You eat a piece of bread and drink a sip of wine as you hear the words, "This is the body of Christ..." and "This is the blood of Christ..." What is going on here?

There are two extremely opposite views of what happens in the Lord's Supper. One view makes you the one who acts. You remember. You recall Jesus and His death for you. That is the single and sole purpose of the Supper. The blessings you experience in the Supper flow from your act of remembering. There may be deep emotions; there may be profound change of life; there may be significant new commitments made. But, at bottom, the effect of the Supper depends on your act of remembering. The bread and wine are but symbols to help you remember.

The other view makes God the one who acts. Something supernatural and awesome is going on here. Bread and wine are means for His Son to touch your life afresh with the very body and blood that were given for you on the cross. Because the crucified and risen Jesus is there, forgiveness, life and salvation are there too. In your weakest and most painful moments, when even remembering is hard. He is still there for you, in full strength. It isn't so much that you commune with Him as much as He communes with you. It isn't that you're so successful in thinking of Him; it's the awesome knowledge that He is thinking of you.

Our Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod rejects the first view. It doesn't surprise us that many congregations that believe that way celebrate the Lord's Supper only once a year or once a quarter. It's a good thing to do, even inspiring, but not really essential to the life and mission of the church. We believe that this first view does not do justice to the Bible passages that talk about the Supper, nor to other interconnected Bible teaching. Read on and see why.

I. IS REMEMBRANCE ALL THERE IS TO THE LORD'S SUPPER?

"The only purpose that the Bible clearly indicates to us as a reason for communion is as a remembrance. All other reasons are purely man-made." So goes one of the common views of the Lord's Supper. Is this what the Bible tells us? Let's see:

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1. The most damning evidence against such a view of the Lord's Supper lies in the accounts of Jesus' institution of the Supper as recorded in the gospels of Matthew & Mark. (Matthew 26:26-29 & Mark 14:22-25)

When Matthew and Mark record Jesus' institution of the Supper, neither includes Jesus' statement, "Do this in remembrance of Me." Of course that doesn't mean that Jesus didn't speak these words. These words about remembrance are found in Luke 22:14-20 (as well as in I Corinthians 11:23-25). But the absence of the statement in Matthew & Mark is impossible to explain if remembrance is the sole reason for communion. One would expect that, if remembrance were the "only purpose" for the Supper, that the purpose statement is the last thing that would have been omitted.

2. If remembrance is the main significance of the Supper, the absence of this statement from these two gospels is all the more difficult to understand in the light of the fact that, for a number of years (some scholars would say for as many as 20 years), these were the only two gospels in circulation and available for the churches around the Roman empire to learn from. For up to 20 years, they were the only source of the churches' understanding of the Lord's Supper, and they make no mention at all of Jesus' words about remembrance.

(Traditionally, the Gospel of Matthew was viewed as the earliest gospel. Biblical scholarship of this century, including most conservative scholars, largely view Mark as the earliest gospel. Whatever the case may be, all would agree that these two gospels are the earliest, written sometime between 50 and 70 a.d., while Luke was not written until after 70 a.d. while John's gospel, which is not directly relevant to our subject since it does not record the institution of the Supper, was probably written sometime after 90 a.d. It is true that Paul, in I Corinthians 11, included the remembrance statement in his record of the Supper, and that this letter was written in the early 50's. However, this was written for a single congregation, and it was not until very late in the 1st Century, at the very earliest, that such letters began to be shared with other congregations.)

3. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to square I Corinthians 10:16 with the "sole purpose" of remembrance, or with the claim that we receive nothing in the Supper. I believe that one can do so only if one comes to this verse with the pre-existent bias that remembrance is the "sole purpose," and with a willingness to ignore the plain grammar of the two sentences: "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" (More on this verse later.)

II. IS THE LORD'S SUPPER ONLY A SYMBOL?

"Jesus was speaking 'figuratively' in the Lord's Supper..." Those who insist that remembrance is the "only purpose" of the Supper usually make this assertion also. Let's see if this is an adequate understanding of the Supper.

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1. Despite the fact that Jesus' conversation in the upper room with His disciples has a great deal of symbolic language, it must still be asserted that it would be highly improbable for Him to use figurative or vague language when it came to the instituting of a new ordinance to be observed forever by His Church, especially when not accompanied, at least somewhere in Scripture, by a straightforward explanation of His words.
2. Since His Supper is, in fact, the fulfillment of the Passover supper, one would not expect the Old Testament shadow to be replaced by another shadow (symbol replacing symbol). One would expect the symbolic Passover Supper to be replaced by some kind of Reality.
3. Furthermore, if symbol were the heart of the Supper, one must wonder why Jesus chose the bread rather than the lamb. The lamb would have been a far more striking symbol, representing the suffering and death of the Lamb of God far better than the bread.
4. If it is all symbolic, why not be consistent and take the word "eat" symbolically? There are many instances where "eat" is used figuratively. Why not "eat" the Supper mentally? The Quakers and Salvation Army insist on this, and reject the literal eating of the Supper. (They also reject the literal water of baptism.) One must at least admire their consistency here with symbolism.
5. Jesus' statement, "This is My body" is sui generis, i.e., in a class by itself. There is nothing comparable to it in the sayings of Jesus. Jesus makes a number of statements where He is the subject, i.e., "I am..." but nowhere does He say that something is He except in the statement, "This is My body." One must take all the greater care in imposing a metaphorical interpretation upon this sui generis statement (see the hermeneutical principle below, #6). Recognizing metaphor in Jesus' "I am..." statements (e.g., "I am the vine") in no way justifies finding metaphor in His statement, "This is My body," i.e., so that it means, "This represents My body."

"I am the door" is not a statement that parallels "This is My body," since in one case this (the bread) is the subject of the sentence and in the other case T (Jesus) is the subject. But even here the word "am" (like "is" in the communion statement, a form of the verb "to be") does not mean "represent." T is literal; "am" is literal (Jesus does not "represent" or "symbolize" a door); and it could be argued that even "door" is literal, since 1) one of the dictionary definitions of "door" is "means of approach," and Jesus is literally that, and 2) Jesus is not saying that He is like a door, but that He is the door (the definite article is there in the Greek).

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Where symbolism is involved in sentences that read: "am/is", the symbolism is not found in the verb, but in either the subject or the predicate.

1) Example of the subject being the symbol: This (pointing to a picture) is my father." The figure of speech is not in the word "is" but in the word "this." That is, the person

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portrayed by this picture literally is my father.

2) Example of the predicate being the symbol: When Jesus says, "I am the vine," the subject is literally Jesus, and "am" is also literal, since Jesus is literally what the vine represents.

3) However, in the statement "This is my body," neither the subject nor the predicate are symbolic: "this" literally refers to the bread in His hand; "body" is also literal here (though in some contexts the word can be used symbolically, e.g., for the Church) because here He further defines which body He is referring to: the one "which is given for you." Grammatically speaking, there is no room for symbolism in that entire statement.

6. One of the most basic hermeneutical rules for interpretation of Scripture, universally accepted by conservative Bible scholars, is: the plain, natural and literal meaning of a passage must be maintained as long as a) there is no clear indication that the words are meant figuratively (as, for instance, in the parables of Jesus), and b) the literal sense does not contradict a clear Bible doctrine. While there are certainly metaphors used in Scripture, the burden of proof in all cases lies with those who want to read a given biblical statement as metaphor. It must be remembered, metaphor has been used to twist and destroy the Scriptures by both cults (Christian Science treats the entire Bible as metaphor) and by liberalism (which *de-mythologizes" the Bible wherever it seems "primitive" to the "modern" mind, and which has turned the entire Apostles' Creed into symbolic statements).

Another way of saying this: "Those parts of Scripture containing divine commands, promises, warnings and doctrines must be guarded with the utmost care from all suggestions which, under the pretext of a figure, would deprive them of their real force" (A Summary of the Christian Faith by Jacobs).

7. John 6 does not refer to the Lord's Supper, for good hermeneutical reasons: a) the Supper had not yet been instituted; b) it contains no references to bread and wine; c) such an interpretation would force us to insist that one cannot be saved without receiving the Lord's Supper (v.53), a view supported nowhere else in Scripture.

III. I CORINTHIANS 10:16 & THE LORD'S SUPPER

"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?"

1. Compare the metaphorical interpretation of the Supper with Paul's interpretation:

a. Metaphorical: "The bread is a symbol of the body of Christ"

b- Paul (I Cor. 10:16): "The bread...is...a koinonia of the body of Christ" Notes:

1) The Greek word Koinonia = sharing of; participation in; communion with.

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2) Communion (KJV; NKJV; Amplified; Jerusalem Bible; New Evangelical ^Translation): com = with; 'union with' the body of Christ.

3) Grammatically speaking, Paul's statement asserts that communing with the body of Christ is directly related to the bread; "the bread.../s...a communion with the body of Christ" (subject, copulative verb, predicate). It takes two things to make a communion; It would be absurd to speak of bread as a communion with something in no way connected with it. The bread is a connection with, or a participation in, or a communion with Christ's body; so much so that whoever partakes of the one must, in some manner, become a partaker of the other.

4) What word(s) in Paul's statement can, with good reason, be taken metaphorically?

5) Not koinonia (union with) the Spirit of Christ, but with His body.

6) Are we in the impossible position of having to take "the cup" literally, when Paul (and Jesus in His words of institution) is obviously speaking of the wine?

No. There is a form of speech, universally recognized, called synecdoche, an abbreviated speech in which the containing vessel is mentioned instead of its content. There is a difference between being literal and natural in our interpretation, and being literalistic.

2. The context of this verse is, of course, verses 14-22, where we have three parallels:

- a. The sacrificial meal of the Jews (v. 18).
- b. The sacrificial meal of the pagans (w.20-21).
- c. The sacrificial meal of the Christians, or the Lord's Supper (v.16).

The common idea that underlies the triple parallel is: in each of these meals there is a true communion with, or participation in, the thing sacrificed. Through the thing sacrificed, the receiver is brought into fellowship with the being to whom it was sacrificed: the pagan with demons (w.20-21), the Hebrew with God as hidden in Old Testament type (v.18), and the Christian with God unveiled and incarnate in Christ (v.16). Just as "the cup of demons" is the means whereby people become "participants with demons," (v.20-21), so "the cup of the Lord" is the means whereby one has "participation in (communion with) the blood of Christ" (v.16). The entire passage is intended by Paul to underscore something far more serious than the mere eating of "symbols." There is some kind of supernatural union going on in each case; that is the only reason why there is great danger in drinking the cup of demons."

IV. THEOLOGY & THE LORD'S SUPPER

A. Theology as a Discipline

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Theology is a discipline which, when faithful to the Scriptures as the inerrant Word of God, seeks to faith-fully think through the implications of biblical teachings, and to bring those teachings together in a systematic way, so that one can see not only individual doctrines, but also see the interconnectedness of the whole (see B. below). Faithful theology may also draw inferences or implications from those doctrines, though this is to be done with great care that it illuminates, and does not contradict, the body of truth revealed in Scripture (see C. below).

B. The Real Presence and Its Inter-connection with the Incarnation & the Ascension

Good, biblical theology is a seamless garment. One would expect the Bible's teaching on the Lord's Supper to inter-connect with other teachings. The doctrine of the Real Presence does, in fact, inter-connect with the major doctrines of the Incarnation and of the Person of the Ascended Christ.

Faith in God, from the truly biblical view, is faith in the Incarnate God, the eternal Word made flesh, God the Son "who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man" (Nicene Creed).

"Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are (present tense) of the same family" - literally: 'are all of one' - or "are all of one stock" (NEB) or 'share a common humanity' (Phillips) - Hebrews 2:11. He is still man.

"Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared (perfect tense in the Greek, meaning He came to share and still shares) in their humanity..." - Hebrews 2:14. Jesus, as a human, still has "flesh and blood."

"Jesus Christ has come (perfect tense: it has happened and it continues to this day) in the flesh" - 1 Jn.4:2.

"From now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God" - Luke 22:69. He is forever man,' reigning over the universe.

"This same Jesus...will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven" -Acts 1:11. He ascends as man and returns as man; He remains man in the interim. The Incarnation is forever. Forever He is the God-man. Ever since the Incarnation, the divine nature of the Savior is united with the human nature in such a way that where one is, the other is. To believe anything less is not to take the Incarnation, or the Scriptures, seriously. Just as our salvation depends upon the fact that the eternal Son of God assumed our flesh and blood and really became man, so the Church lives in the certainty that He, the Incarnate One, is always with the Church both in His divinity and in His humanity. Christ is present not only according to His divinity; His ascended human nature participates in His omnipresence. (Ephesians 4:10: "He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe." Compare Acts 1:11: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you..." It is the

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same Jesus who walked the earth as man who now fills "the whole universe" as man.)

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It is only when one has a spatial conception of heaven, and when one assumes that Jesus' ascended, glorified body must be limited spatially as our bodies are, that one has problems with the above Bible teaching. "The right hand of God is everywhere" (Luther).

Having asserted all of the above, what is the connection with the Lord's Supper? If the ascended Jesus, God and man, fills the universe, then why do we need the Supper as a place to be in contact with His redeeming body and blood? The answer is that, though the whole Christ is always present with His people. He has specified a particular place where direct communion ("union with") takes place between His people and the whole Christ. (Crude analogy: radio waves fill your room, are "omnipresent" - but can only be received with the proper instrument, i.e., a radio.) Although He fills the universe. He is not available everywhere; He is available where He chooses to be. The Supper is the climactic place of communion with the crucified and risen God-man (I Corinthians 10:16). As true man, the Presence made available to us in the Supper is more than "spiritual" - if by "spiritual" we mean the common (but not biblical) idea that "spiritual" is the opposite of physical. (See Paul's reference to a "spiritual body" in I Corinthians 15:44, by which he does not mean that our resurrection bodies will be "non-physical bodies" - whatever that might mean! - but bodies in full harmony with, and in the total service of, God. For Paul, the opposite of "spiritual" is not "physical" - that is Greek thought. For Paul, the opposite is flesh" - Greek *sarx* - which is properly translated by NIV as "sinful nature.") We call His Presence in the Supper the "Sacramental Presence," i.e., the Real Presence of Jesus' glorified, resurrection body, in its state of exaltation, inseparably joined with the Godhead, and by that Godhead rendered everywhere present.

In sum, our insistence on the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament is an insistence on the reality of the Incarnation. "Whenever you can say, 'Here is God,' you must also say, 'Christ, the Man, is here too' (Luther). The Church has had to unceasingly fight those who, like the Gnostics in New Testament times, deny that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (I John 4:2-3 - whether that denial be deliberate or whether it be by implication of inter-connected but skewed teaching. That the Supper is "spiritual" communion with Christ as God but not with Christ as man is an example of such skewed teaching that carries dangerous implications for the doctrines of the Incarnation and of the Person of the Ascended Christ.

C. A Theological Inference: the Three Modes of Christ's Presence

As a good example of legitimate inferences that theologians may legitimately draw as they think through the theology of the Bible, one may refer to the helpful three modes" of Christ's presence as expressed by Luther

1. First, the comprehensible, bodily mode, as He went about in the body on earth and vacated or occupied space according to His size.

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2. Secondly, the incomprehensible mode of presence according to which He neither occupies nor vacates space out penetrates every creature, wherever He wills. This mode He used when He rose from the closed sepulcher, and passed through the closed doors (of the upper room), and in the bread and the wine of the Holy Supper.

3. Thirdly, since He is one person with God: the divine, heavenly mode, according to which all creatures must be far more penetrable and present to Him than they are according to the second mode. Where God is, there also must He be.

V. CHURCH HISTORY & THE LORD'S SUPPER

A. Church History As It Relates to Theology

Although the Scriptures are our only and final authority, the Holy Spirit did not at all cease teaching the church after the 1st Century, although what He has taught us has been but the further unfolding of the Bible's teachings. (The doctrines of the Trinity, of the two natures of Christ, of the Atonement, et. al., were enunciated in their fullest and classical forms, with all of their implications, only after centuries of study and debate and experience.) It would be arrogance to ignore 1,900 years of insights from our brothers & sisters in the faith.

However, unlike the Roman Catholic Church, evangelical Christianity rejects history and tradition as a source of doctrine. But good evangelical theology does not reject history or tradition out of hand, because it is a priceless resource. Here one learns of the theological struggles of the Church over the centuries in establishing orthodox teaching (so as not to repeat history's mistakes and so as not to reinvent the wheel). Here one might find corroboration for one's own theology or, on the other hand, may hear a warning that heresy lurks in one's theology. One does not lightly discard a teaching held and tested by the Church for centuries - though of course one must do so if the Scriptures clearly reveal it to be false teaching. And, on the other hand, one is encouraged by the discovery that one's understanding of Scripture has been held by Christians in many lands and over many centuries, especially if the scope of that belief has been universal.

B. Church History as Corroboration of Our Bible-Based Teaching on the Lord's Supper

In reference to the Lord's Supper, the Lutheran stance on the Real Presence is fully in line with 16 centuries of pre-Reformation theology. As they studied Scripture, the theologians of the Lutheran Reformation actually had less trouble with the Roman Catholic view of the Supper than they did with Ulrich Zwingli's views; at least the Roman view affirmed the Real Presence. But they rejected the Roman doctrine of Transubstantiation because it used human reasoning, based on Aristotelian philosophical categories, in an attempt to "explain" the Real Presence. According to Roman Catholic teaching, the "substance" of the bread is changed ('trans-') into the "substance" of

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Christ's body, even while the "accidents" - appearance, taste, etc. - of the bread remain. This teaching was a recent doctrine, formulated in the 13th Century (only 200 years before Luther). But the ancient teaching of the Lord's Supper is simply an assertion of the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood without rationalizing about it (see below).

The Lutheran reformers' rejection of the symbolic view of the Supper was on the same grounds as their rejection of Transubstantiation: both were attempts at rationalizing, even though based on different types of reasoning. It should also be pointed out that we reject the word "Consubstantiation" ("con" = "with"; the idea that the 'substance' of Christ's body & blood are together "with" the substance of the bread & wine) as a description of our understanding of the Supper, and for the same reason: it uses Aristotelian reasoning in a vain attempt to explain the Bible's simple, straightforward, but unexplained words about the Supper.)

The interpretation of the biblical passages on the Supper found in our confessions of faith is sustained by the universal teaching of the Church from the very beginning, and by the judgment of the church fathers, Greek and Latin. While this in itself does not establish the truth of the doctrine, it is a wonderful corroboration and confirmation of what we believe & teach:

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Ignatius (ordained, according to tradition, by Peter); ca. 43-107 a.d.: "The Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ. There is one cup for the uniting of His blood."

Justin Martyr (100 - 165 a.d.): The food over which the Eucharistic prayer has been made is the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus."

Irenaeus (discipled by Polycarp, disciple of John; died 202 a.d.): "When the mingled cup and the broken bread receive the words of God, it becomes the Eucharist of the body & blood of Christ."

Ambrose (died 307 a.d.): "We, receiving of one bread and of one cup, are receivers and partakers of the body of the Lord."

Chrysostom (died 407 a.d.): That very thing which is in this cup is that which flowed from His side, and of that we are partakers. Not only has He poured it out, but He has imparted of it to us all."

John of Damascus (died 750 a.d.): "As the body is united with the Logos, so also we are united with Him by this bread."

Seen apart from an anti-"Catholic" bias, (the simplistic idea that everything from the 2nd Century up to the Reformation was "Roman Catholic" and hence suspect), these quotations demonstrate the amazing unanimity with which the Real Presence has been taught through the entire history of the Church. If the teaching was wrong, then one

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must simply be scandalized at the way this awful heresy and perversion crept into the Church so early, persisted so long, and spread so universally!

The earliest challenge to the Real Presence did not arise until the 11th Century, by a man named Berengar. No one joined him. The next challenge did not come for 400 years, by the Englishman, Wycliff, followed by Zwingli in the 16th Century. Please note: for a full millennium, the Church held a unanimous, unchallenged understanding of the Lord's Supper! It was only after 1,500 years that the denial of the Real Presence became widespread (but even then, and to this day, held only by a minority of those who call themselves Christians).

Dr. Edward Pusey, eminent scholar in the study of the early Church Fathers, summed it all up for us: From Syria and Palestine and Armenia, from Asia Minor and Greece, from Thrace and Italy, from Gaul and Spain, from Africa Proper and Egypt and Arabia, and the Isles of the Sea, wherever any Apostle had taught, wherever any martyr had sealed with his blood the testimony of Jesus, from the polished cities or the anchorites of the desert, one Eucharistic voice ascended: 'Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and all Thy words are truth. Thou hast said, "This is My body, this is My blood." Hast Thou said, and shalt not Thou do it? As Thou hast said, so we believe.' "

With regard to the Lord's Supper, "if there is any risk of being mistaken - which she (the Lutheran church, db.), however, does not admit • she would rather run that risk by taking her Master at His Word, than by changing His Word. In childlike confidence and trust, she would rather believe too much than too little. She would rather trust her dear Master too far than not far enough. And therefore here she stands; she cannot do otherwise. May God help her! Amen." (The Way of Salvation by Gerberding).

Pastor Don Baron Honolulu, 1995

The Holy Scriptures in Greek and in English (NIV supplemented by many versions).
Christian Dogmatics, by F. Pieper
The Conservative Reformation, by C. P. Krauth
Here We Stand, by Hermann Sasse

The Structure of Lutheranism. by Werner Elert
A Summary of Christian Doctrine, by Edward W. A. Koehler
A Summary of the Christian Faith, by Henry Eyster Jacobs
This Is My Body, by Hermann Sasse
The Way of Salvation in the Lutheran Church, by G. H. Gerberding

Pastor Don Baron
Honolulu

ADDENDUM

Below is added an important article that was not touched on in this paper. DB

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The quote is from Dr. Edward Bouverie Pusey, Oxford U. professor, considered the greatest of the English patristic scholars, who was actually reared in the Calvinistic/Zwinglian view of the Supper. Quoted in C. P. Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*.

"I have now gone through every writer who in his extant works speaks of the Holy Eucharist, from the time when St. John the Evangelist was translated to his Lord, to the dates of the Fourth General Council, A.D. 451, a period of three centuries and a half...I have adduced the Fathers, not as original authorities, but as witnesses to the meaning of Holy Scriptures. I have alleged them on the...rule that what was taught 'everywhere, at all times, by all,' must have been taught to the whole Church by the inspired Apostles themselves...A universal suppression of the truths which the Apostles taught and the unmarked substitution of falsehood, is a theory which contradicts human reason, no less than it does our Lord's promise to His Church. There is no room here for any alleged corruption...However different the occasions may be upon which the truth is spoken of, in whatever variety of ways it may be mentioned, the truth itself is one and the same - one uniform, simple, consentient truth; that what is consecrated upon the altars for us to receive, what, under the outward elements, is there present for us to receive, is the body and blood of Christ; by receiving which the faithful in the Lord's Supper do verily and indeed take and receive the body and blood of Christ; by presuming to approach which, the wicked...become guilty of the body and blood of the Lord; i.e., become guilty of a guilt like theirs who laid hands on His divine person while yet in the flesh among us, or who shed His all-holy blood.

"Yes, along the whole course of time, throughout the whole circuit of the Christian world, from east to west, from north to south, there floated up to Christ our Lord one harmony of praise. Unbroken as yet lived on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit from on high swept over the discordant strings of human tongues and thoughts, of hearts and creeds, and blended all their varying notes into one holy unison of truth. From Syria and Palestine and Armenia, from Asia Minor and Greece, from Thrace and Italy, from Gaul and Spain, from Africa Proper and Egypt and Arabia, and the Isles of the Sea, wherever any Apostle had taught, wherever any martyr had sealed with his blood the testimony of Jesus, from the polished cities or the anchorites of the desert, one Eucharistic voice ascended: 'Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and all Thy words are truth. Thou hast said, "This is My body, this is My blood." Hast Thou said, and shalt not Thou do it? As Thou hast said, so we believe.' "

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God's great plan

God the Father designed it from eternity. (1 :3-6)

God the Son carried out the plan in history. (1:7-12)

God the Holy Spirit applies it NOW to you. (1:13-14)

1. Seal

*authenticity

*ownership

2. Deposit

TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY