



Introduction to This Issue

God's Word: Justice and Mercy

In the Lutheran theological tradition, one of the defining characteristics is the distinction between law and Gospel. Almost always when I read or hear references to Lutheran teaching about the law, the focus is on the *second use* (also called theological or spiritual use) of the law. The second use of the law is the function designed to convince us of our own sinfulness, convict us, and thereby prepare us to hear the good news of God's forgiveness, grace, mercy, and love in Jesus Christ: the Gospel!

By contrast, the *first use* (also called civil or proper use) of the law is that form of law by which God establishes an order through which society is structured. The reason this use of the law takes *first* place is because it has to do with the well being of society and creation. Luther refers to the civil righteousness due our neighbors according to the first use of law, in contrast to the passive righteousness based on faith alone in Christ alone delivering God's salvation in relation to the second use.

It would be salutary for Lutheran theology to focus on a more robust understanding of the civil use of the law. Were Lutherans to teach this as the first and proper use of the law, much confusion might be cleared away about the legitimacy of social statements

The *first use* ... of the law is that form of law by which God establishes an order through which society is structured. The reason this use of the law takes *first* place is because it has to do with the well being of society and creation.

and social messages by the church. There also would be greater clarity about the necessary calling of the baptized to exercise their roles as responsible citizens for the sake of neighbors in society. This issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* provides fascinating articles related to matters of the first use of the law and the Gospel: justice and mercy.

Heike Walz explores the legacy of the Franconian Lutheran pastor Wilhelm Löhe, born in Fürth, Germany, who was the founding father of the diaconal institutions in Neuendettelsau and missionary work, first of all in North America. The congregation

On the cover: Jan Shoger, "The Elder Brother," colored woodblock print, 1959. From the Jerry Evenrud Prodigal Son Collection at Luther Seminary.

in Fürth initiated process on how to deal with the memorial relief in the churchyard that depicts Löhe's emissaries and Native Americans. It bears the description that the missionaries are "preaching the gospel to the Indians [sic]." The author questions how we should deal with the ambivalent colonial-missionary heritage and proposes a reformatory postcolonial re-reading of mission as receiving. She proposes to celebrate the Reformation festival in honor of the Native Americans and to receive an ecological, cross-theological, and anti-racist mission for life from them. The lives of native people matter to God.

Jonah Fox describes how the Western world quickly continues to globalize, and the North American Church continues to grow less homogenous. This is something which ought to be celebrated. However, the Church faces an important question: "When faced with hermeneutical controversy, from which culture do we derive our norms?" In the Western Church, norms have typically been set by whiteness and masculinity. The author proposes a paradigm for listening to our siblings from around the world through the work of Palestinian Christian, Naim Ateek.

This issue features two articles by the New Testament Professor, **Yung Suk Kim**. In the first he discusses how the parables of Jesus deal with various issues in human lives, ranging from personal crisis to economic justice. The culture of competition and comparison has deleterious effects on the weak and marginalized. Some parables of Jesus address these problems: the "Father and Two Sons" (Luke 15:11-32), "Pharisee and Tax Collector" (Luke 18:9-14), "Wheat and Weed" (Matt 13:24-30), and "Vineyard Workers" (Matt 20:1-16). In these parables, Jesus challenges the merciless society and the culture of competition, asking his audience to see others through the lens of mercy.

In his second article, **Dr. Kim** discusses how the Gospel of John emphasizes the realism of the kingdom of God in the present. Given the Johannine community's expulsion from the synagogue due to its faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the members of this nascent community need assurance about their new place in Christ. They are comforted and encouraged to live as children of God, born from above and with new life through the Spirit. To maintain their discipleship with Jesus, they must keep his word and stay in the light. The Advocate will come to them after Jesus is gone, through whom God's reign continues to be seen, touched, and experienced in the present. As Jesus sends his disciples into the world, the Johannine community receives a new mission to love the world, testifying to the truth of God, following Jesus' word.

For ten years, **David Rhoads** taught Scripture by Heart, a course completely devoted to performing biblical selections for the community. Many students who participated in this class adopted the practice of memorizing a lectionary lesson as a way to prepare sermons and then present the passage by heart in worship. In this tutorial, Rhoads makes this practice available for a wider group of pastors and lay readers. The article addresses the purpose of presenting Scripture by heart in worship, how to learn a passage, how to perform it, and what the impact might be for worshipping communities.

W. Creighton Marlowe notes how the word "soul" is frequent in English Bible versions and is interpreted in popular culture in ways both similar to and different from the ancient meanings of the respective Hebrew and Greek words. Recently some scientists have proposed a meaning related to the brain's energy field. The question is raised whether "soul" is the best translation gloss for the passages where it appears in English versions. Do the related Hebrew and Greek words (*nephesh* and *psuchē*) in their original contexts mean what modern readers usually think when they encounter "soul" in a Bible version? This article provides a selective exegetical examination of pertinent passages and issues to help clarify when "soul" is an appropriate translation. This has implications for how we talk about the afterlife, and related issues, as we communicate internationally about biblical theology and the Gospel.

In this issue's **Currents Focus** feature, **Robert Albers** reflects on the disposition of scores of people he has worked with for decades in the area of addiction. Addiction is an insidious disease process that robs the person of her/his ability to exercise choice. This phenomenon cuts across every social, racial, religious, gender, economic, and ethnic boundary, but most of us delude ourselves into thinking, "It will never happen to me." The temptation to think in this manner may be particularly prevalent among those who are preparing for a professional ministry role or who are already engaged in ministry. It is imperative to state without equivocation, that "the call to ministry" does not exempt anyone from becoming ensnared in the web of addiction.

We are grateful to all the contributors to the fine set of **Preaching Helps**. From October through the end of December, we travel from the last Sundays of the Church year to the beginning of the new year in Advent. Two festivals — Reformation and All Saints Day — add color to the green season before we move to Advent's blue.

We encourage preachers to read all the articles in this issue, making sure not to miss David Rhoads' essay on presenting Mark's text aloud. May the articles in this issue lead us to deeper understanding of the way of justice and mercy!

Craig L. Nesson, Issue Editor

Enjoy reading *Currents*?

Get a notification of each issue of *Currents* as it is published!

Issues are published four times per year; for January, April, July, and October. You can receive an email notice of the publication of each issue by becoming a registered reader.

Register as a reader! Visit currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/user/register

2021 Ad Pricing and Specifications

The journal, *Currents in Theology and Mission*, is provided to readers as an online resource at <http://www.currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents>.

Individual articles are provided to readers as a PDF download. We offer advertising opportunities in any of our articles, with premium rates for sections with high readership, including the issue’s Introduction article, the Book Review section and the Preaching Helps section.

As advertisements are viewed online, they are visible to the reader in full color and allow live web-links. However, if a reader elects to print out the PDF, we do not have control over whether it is printed in color or black only.

Publication Dates and Deadlines

The journal, *Currents in Theology and Mission*, is published four times per year: January, April, July, and October. Ad deadlines for each issue are one month prior to publication (December 1, March 1, June 1, September 1). Late submissions may be published in the next issue. Issue-specific themes are available from the co-editors: [Craig Nesson](#) and [Kadi Billman](#).

Print Advertising Specifications

Please provide ads as an email attachment to our designer at kathryn@brewer-com.com.

- 300 dpi JPEG or PDF at full size.
- Color ads should be converted to CMYK.
- Embed all fonts when creating a PDF.

Size and Placement Options

Full page ads are placed at the end of articles. Fractional page ads are placed within articles. (We do not offer a bleed option.) You may specify an author, the Introduction article, or any of our sections: Book Reviews, Preaching Helps, Currents Focus. For specific article or section content per issue, please contact the co-editors: [Craig Nesson](#) and [Kadi Billman](#).

Premium placements are: at the end of the Introduction article, within Book Reviews, within Preaching Helps. These are our most popular sections.

FORMAT	SIZE	PREMIUM PLACEMENT	REGULAR PLACEMENT
• Full Page:	7.125” wide x 10” high	\$ 450	\$ 380
• One Column (vertical):	3.5” wide x 10” high	\$ 250	\$ 200
• Half Column:	3.5” wide x 4.75” high	\$ 135	\$ 115
• Half Page (horizontal):	7.125” wide x 4.75” high	\$ 250	\$ 200

25% discount for 4 consecutive placements from the same advertiser (content may change).

Website Advertising

We do not offer site advertising.

Billing

New advertisers must include payment with order. Checks should be made out to “Currents in Theology and Mission” and sent to: Currents in Theology and Mission, 1100 E. 55th Street, Box AA-1, Chicago, IL 60615. For questions or to pay by credit card, call the editorial offices at 773-256-0705.

Returning Advertisers: Bills are sent after publication.