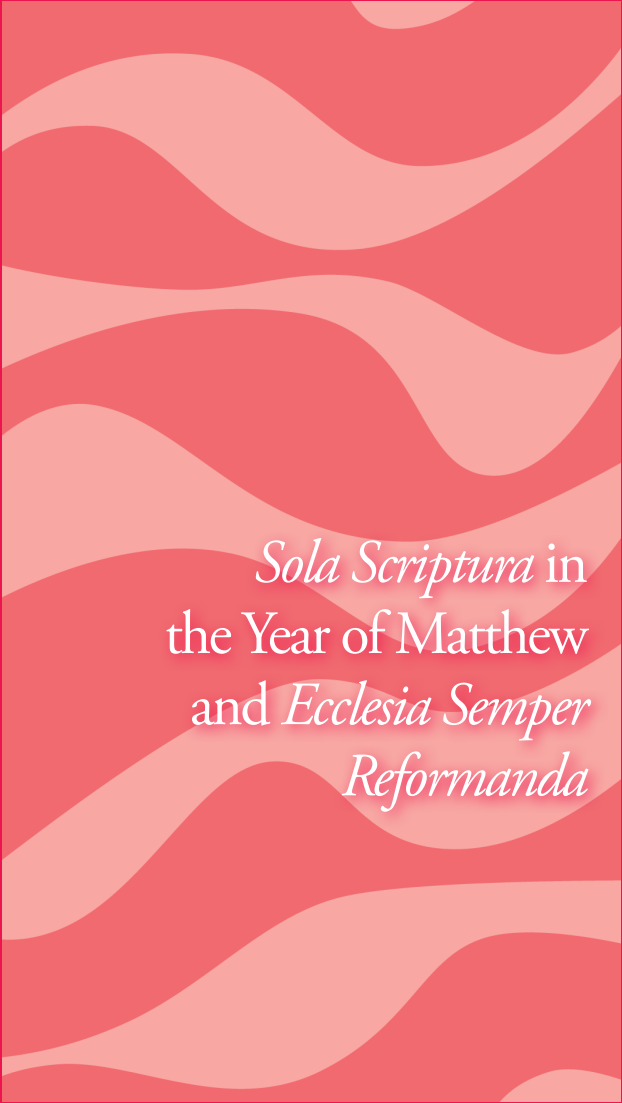


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Sola Scriptura in
the Year of Matthew
and *Ecclesia Semper*
Reformanda

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Sola Scriptura in the Year of Matthew and *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda*

The church always reforming! As the 500th anniversary of the Reformation approaches, we are challenged to reflect deeply upon the heritage we have inherited and how we live anew into this tradition as God is reinventing the church in our times. Holy Scripture witnesses through proclamation and teaching to Jesus Christ as God's living Word, whose life, death, and resurrection give us our identity and mission as the church. This issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* gives attention to two central Reformation themes, *Sola Scriptura* and *Ecclesia semper reformanda*.

God's living word breathes new life into the church week by week, year by year, generation after generation. The watchword of the Reformation, *Sola Scriptura*, lends orientation to the church's mission as we ground our common life ecumenically in the Revised Common Lectionary. Imagine what we easily take for granted, congregations of Christian people gathered around word and sacrament all around the globe, centering worship and mission each week according to the same set of texts! Together with the very pattern of the liturgy, nothing contributes more to the *catholicity* of Christ's church.

As we enter this Advent into the year of Matthew, three articles provide orientation to the coming lectionary year. **Troy M. Troftgruben** in "Lessons for Teaching from the Teacher: Matthew's Jesus on Teaching and Leading Today" provides focus on Jesus as teacher in the Gospel of Matthew and direction for the teaching ministry of the church. Matthew's very structure is ordered around five distinctive didactic discourses, which instruct readers in the necessity of integrity, call us to serve as Jesus' representatives, honor both heritage and innovation, and command us to treat others according to the way of Jesus Christ. More than the other Gospels, Matthew addresses the needs, concerns, and call of Christian teachers.

James L. Bailey offers a provocative and practical contribution to the reappropriation of the Sermon on the Mount for the life of the church in "The Sermon on the Mount: Invitation to New Life." Focusing on Matthew 5:21–26, instruction from Jesus about nursing anger and the call to reconciliation, we are introduced to a method for digging deeply into the text, understanding the cultural context, and engaging the meaning of the text for today. How does the nursing of anger detract from and destroy Christian community in our own congregations? The article, an excerpt from the newly published book, *Contrast Community: Practicing the Sermon on the Mount*, is accompanied by discussion questions and activities for group study.

Ralph W. Klein, founding editor of *Currents in Theology and Mission*, contributes a fresh translation and exegetical commentary on four psalms for the season of Advent in “An Advent Psalter.” Klein demonstrates how the original contexts of these psalms raise pertinent questions and address enduring themes for our times, such as the call for justice and care for creation. Planning to employ the psalms according to the seasons of the church year promises to enrich both corporate worship and personal devotions.

On June 5, 2013, **Margot Käsmann**, Special Envoy of the Evangelical Church in Germany for the Reformation Anniversary Celebration 2017, enlivened an assembly gathered at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) to hear a dynamic presentation titled “*Ecclesia Reformata Semper Reformanda*: Challenges of the Reformation Jubilee 2017.” Käsmann explores the relevance of this Reformation anniversary for the twenty-first century global church by exploring ten opportunities: the opportunity to take a critical look back at how Reformation celebrations have been shaped by their historical time and context; to celebrate this anniversary as an ecumenical event, marked by interreligious dialogue and repentance; to reconnect again with the “solae” of the Reformation heritage and learn how to communicate them afresh; to celebrate the “distinguishing feature of the Protestant church” that women can serve as ministers and bishops; to overcome divisions; to embrace the Reformation heritage of an educated faith, which includes using historical-critical tools to explore Scripture; to articulate the political consequences of the Reformation emphasis on freedom; to address an achievement-oriented society with the inner freedom the conviction of the grace of God’s justification brings; and to celebrate the Reformation with a global perspective.

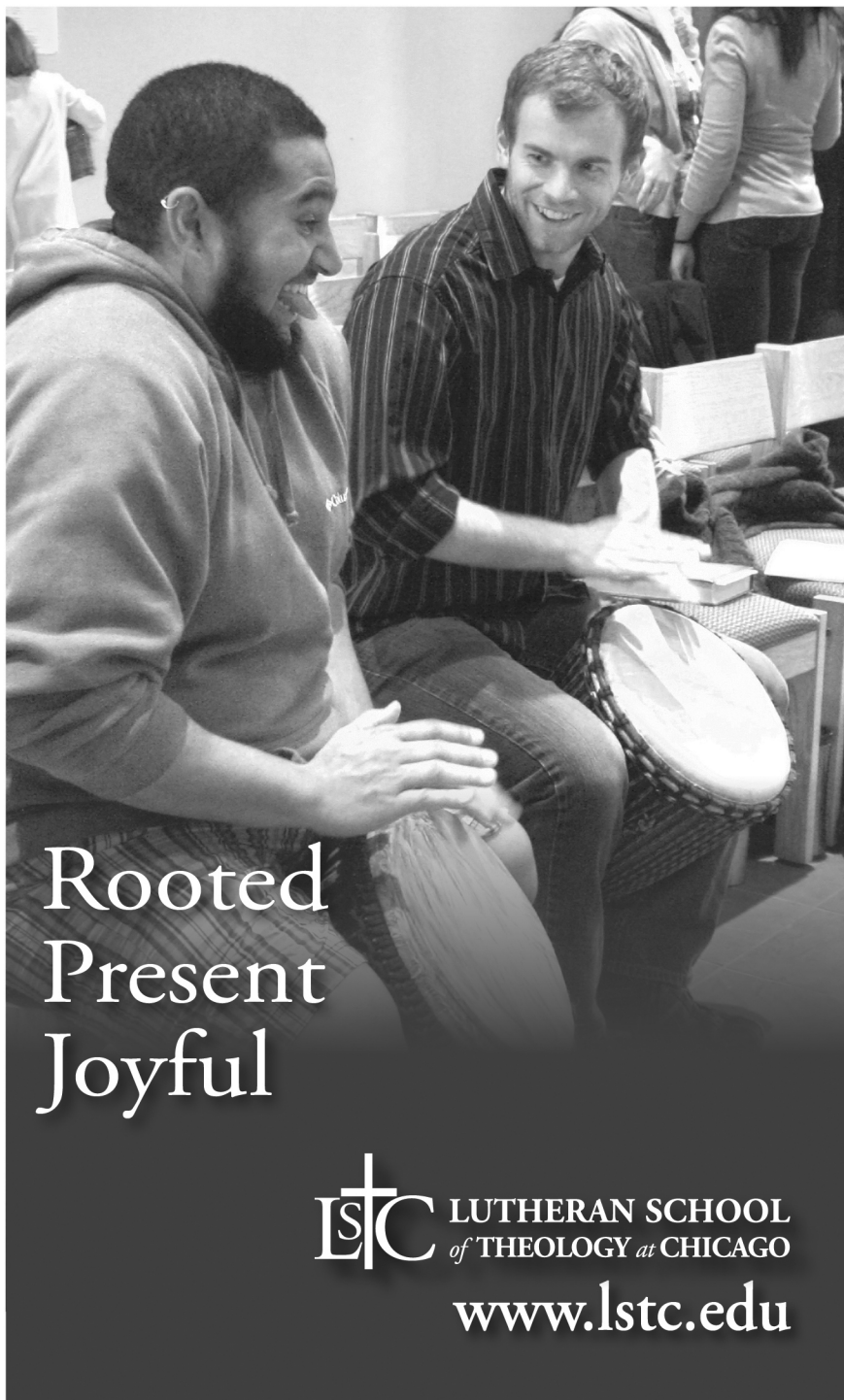
Three theologians responded to Käsmann’s presentation, and we are pleased to include these responses, giving readers some sense of the lively conversations sparked by this event. **Wayne Miller**, bishop of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the ELCA, chose four themes in Käsmann’s address that face particular challenges in the U.S. context. **Vítor Westhelle**, Professor of Systematic Theology at LSTC who holds the Chair for Luther Research in FACULDADES Escola Superior Teologia, Brazil, posed the question, “How do you awaken the ‘heretic’ spirit of the Reformation, and indeed of Luther?” **Anna Case-Winters**, Professor of Theology at McCormick Theological Seminary, focused on the Reformation Jubilee as a time for a “bold spirit” of ecumenical reconciliation and the exercise of “ecclesial imagination” in discerning what it means to be the church “in ways that better manifest our unity.”

We hope that this issue, with its orientation to the new lectionary year and serious re-engagement with the Reformation heritage, will be a promising gift to our readers, on the threshold of a new church year.

Our *Currents in Theology and Mission* editorial team seems to be always re-forming, too. With this issue we bid a grateful farewell to our friend and colleague Kurt Hendel, as he turns his attention to other projects and concludes his service as a member of the editorial team of *Currents*. Kurt, thank you for your dedicated and creative service! And welcome to Samuel Giere, Associate Professor of Homiletics and Biblical Interpretation at Wartburg Theological Seminary, as he joins the *Currents* team. We are grateful for the energy you have already brought to our plans and hopes for the future of the journal.

A blessed and fruitful new year to the church, and to all our readers!

Kathleen Billman and Craig Nesson
Editors



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Lessons for Teaching from the Teacher: Matthew's Jesus on Teaching and Leading Today

Troy M. Troftgruben

Assistant Professor of New Testament, Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa

Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary now dawns upon us—a year whose guiding focus is the Gospel of Matthew.¹ What can preachers and teachers expect from Matthew's narrative?

In all honesty, some readers find Matthew's gospel less attractive than Mark's and Luke's, for one simple reason: its literary prowess is not dazzling, at least at first glance. Whereas Mark dashes rapidly through events and leaves intriguing questions unanswered, Matthew tends to plod and pause to iron out narrative uncertainties. Whereas Luke has literary finesse and a focus on social injustice, Matthew has long discourses which create a choppy feel to the narrative. At least among narrative critics, Matthew's gospel is not famous among the Synoptic Gospels as a page-turner. Speaking from the perspective of narrative studies, Andrew Lincoln writes:

It is curious...that when one looks at literary approaches to the Gospels and Acts, one might well be forgiven for forming the impression that the work that has so far been done on Matthew is not on the whole as exciting, convincing or fruitful as that done on other narra-

tives, and that perhaps Matthew's story has proved to be the least fertile soil for a narrative analysis.²

Lincoln wrote these words over two decades ago, but his words still apply. Whereas Matthew's gospel has been a focal point for redaction criticism, historical criticism, social-scientific studies, and Jewish-Christian dialogue, when it comes to simply *reading* the Gospel as literature the First Gospel may not win the day.³

Some of the character of Matthew's gospel may be seen in its historic symbol. As a patron of the Reu Memorial Library at Wartburg Seminary, I regularly gaze upon a large etching in the western windows

2. "Matthew—A Story for Teachers?" in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield* (ed. Stephen E. Fowl, Stanley E. Porter, and David J. A. Clines; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 103. Lincoln writes this over and against Graham Stanton's comment, that "Matthew is undoubtedly the supreme literary artist among the evangelists" (Stanton, "The Origin and Purpose of Matthew's Gospel: Matthean Scholarship from 1945 to 1980," *ANRW* 2.25.3 [1984]: 1906).

3. For a different evaluation of Matthew as narrative, see Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (2^d ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), esp. 161–163.

1. I wish to extend my thanks to both Dr. James L. Bailey and Daniel Baldwin at Wartburg Seminary—who read earlier drafts of this piece—for their time, feedback, and constructive comments.

that features the historic symbols of the canonical Gospels: a man (Matthew), a lion (Mark), an ox (Luke), and an eagle (John).⁴ Many find the images of lion, ox, and eagle intriguing—even inspiring. Like dust jackets crafted by savvy publishers, they foster reflection on themes in their respective writings. By comparison, less attention goes to the man—the symbol for Matthew's gospel. The symbol is not particularly provocative: the image of a human being is simply too familiar to us human viewers. Moreover, the symbol is more traditional than “edgy”: it looks more like a traditional author's portrait than a creative new vision. Rightly or wrongly, these impressions make the symbol of Matthew an ugly duckling among the four.

Alongside Matthew's shortcomings, however, are priceless gifts. Like its historic

symbol, the First Gospel is “traditional” by engaging its Jewish theological roots in ways unlike any other Gospel. Moreover, like the image of a human being, Matthew's gospel is “familiar” in that it retains Mark's basic story, features recognized teachings of Jesus, and appears first in the canonical order.⁵ Finally, the image of a human being highlights one of Matthew's greatest and most characteristic features: more than any other gospel, Matthew's is a *teaching* gospel.⁶ Whereas in the ancient world animals represented divine powers and traits, human beings embodied intelligence, revelation, and instruction.

Two features of Matthew are particularly vital. First, Matthew's narrative entails

4. The crosshatching design is by Jeffrey J. Stoks, in collaboration with Philip J. Thompson (completed and hung in 1982). Association of the four gospels with these four animals stems from the visions of Ezek 1:5–14 (esp. v. 10; but cf. 10:14 [omitted by the LXX]) and Rev 4:6–7. The earliest documented identification of the Gospels with these images is ca. 185 CE (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.11.8 – note: Irenaeus associated Mark with the eagle and John with the lion), which has continued in various forms to this day. For discussion of the four historic symbols, see Theodor Zahn, “Die Theirsymbole der Evangelisten,” pp. 257–275 in *Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons und altkirchliche Literature* (Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1883), 2:257–75. For a more recent—and more readable—discussion, see Richard Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 23–32. On Irenaeus's words, see T. C. Skeat, “Irenaeus and the Four-Gospel Canon,” pp. 73–78 in *The Collected Biblical Writings of T. C. Skeat* (ed. J.K. Elliott; NovTSup 113; Leiden: Brill, 2004); Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 176–201.

5. In earlier centuries, this played a role in fostering the belief that Matthew's gospel was written first (see Papias's comments, ca. 130 CE, in Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 3.24.5–7; Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels* 1.2.3–4.)

6. Emphasized especially by scholars who have understood Matthew as a kind of teaching manual for the early church: Ernst von Dobschütz (“Matthew as Rabbi and Catechist,” in *The Interpretation of Matthew* [ed. Graham Stanton; trans. Robert Morgan; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 19–29), Rudolph Bultmann (*History of the Synoptic Tradition* [trans. John Marsh; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963], 356–358), Krister Stendahl (*The School of St. Matthew and its Use of the Old Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968]), and Paul S. Minear (*Matthew: The Teacher's Gospel* [Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2003] 12–23). Others with a similar approach are David Hill (*The Gospel of Matthew* [London: Oliphants, 1972], 43–44), John P. Meier (*The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* [New York: Paulist Press, 1979], esp. 26–39), D. Patte (*The Gospel according to Matthew* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 205), and Michael J. Wilkens (*The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel as Reflected in the Use of the Term* [NovTSup 59; Leiden: Brill, 1988] 172).

five major didactic discourses (5:1–7:27; 10:1–42; 13:1–52; 18:1–35; 24:1–25:46) which focus on matters of discipleship. Second, the overall flow of Matthew's gospel features a constructive progression of educational formation: from Jesus calling disciples (4:18–22), to teaching them (5:1–7:27; 10:1–42; 13:10–17, 36–52; 18:1–35; 24:1–25:46) so that they may be “discipled” (μαθητευθῆς) in the kingdom (13:52), to sending them out to teach others (28:18–20).⁷ While throughout the narrative Jesus alone is the teacher *par excellence*, at the conclusion he commissions his disciples to carry on his teaching ministry beyond the scope of the narrative.⁸ Resonating with its historic image (a human being), the Gospel of Matthew features a teaching Jesus, a focus on discipleship, and the call to carry on Jesus' teaching ministry beyond the reach of the narrative (Matt 28:20).⁹

7. For more detailed discussion of the structure of Matthew's gospel and its catechetical function, see K. Stendahl, *School of St. Matthew*, 20–29.

8. On this idea, see Jack Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 129–45; Andrew Lincoln, “Matthew—A Story for Teachers?” 122–125.

9. On Jesus' role as teacher in Matthew's gospel, see Samuel Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority and Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism and the Matthean Community* (ConBNT 24; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994); “Jesus as Messianic Teacher in the Gospel according to Matthew: Tradition History and/or Narrative Christology,” in *New Testament as Reception* (JSNTSup 230; ed. Mogens Müller and Henrik Tronier; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 83–100; John Yueh-Han Yieh, *One Teacher: Jesus' Teaching Role in Matthew's Gospel Report* (BZNW 124; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004); “Jesus as ‘Teacher-Saviour’ or ‘Saviour-Teacher’: Reading the Gospel of Matthew in Chinese

Building upon Matthew's heritage as a “Teaching Gospel,” this article highlights important aspects of closure within the narrative's teaching discourses. The conclusions to the five didactic discourses of Matthew (5:1–7:27; 10:1–42; 13:1–52; 18:1–35; 24:1–25:46) underscore important lessons for teachers and flesh out the nature of teaching ministry according to Matthew's Jesus. Barbara Herrnstein Smith points out: “the manner in which [something] concludes, becomes, in effect, the last and frequently the most significant thing it says.”¹⁰ The fact that such major movements of Matthew's narrative conclude with these messages implies that they are significant. After all, scholars have long noticed ways that Jesus' teaching in Matthew's narrative addresses not simply the narrative audience, but also the implied audience of Matthew's day.¹¹ The multifaceted ways that Matthew addressed disciples of the past opens up possibilities for calling disciples to carry on Jesus' teaching ministry in the present.

Contexts,” *HTS* 65:1 (2009): 61–90.

10. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968), 196.

11. On this, for example, see Ulrich Luz, “The Disciples in the Gospel According to Matthew,” in *The Interpretation of Matthew* (ed. Graham Stanton; trans. Robert Morgan; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 98–128; Günther Bornkamm, “The Authority to ‘Bind’ and ‘Loose’ in the Church in Matthew's Gospel,” in *The Interpretation of Matthew* (ed. Graham Stanton), 85–97; Paul S. Minear, “Disciples and the Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew,” *ATHR* (March 1974, Sup Series):28–44; J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew* (The New Testament in Context; Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press, 1996), 73–75; Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Interpreting Biblical Texts; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 63–70.

With an eye to this lectionary focus, I will highlight four distinctive lessons regarding the practice and ministry of teaching from the conclusions to Matthew's five discourses.

1. The necessity of integrity (Matt 7:24–27)

Matthew's first major discourse is his largest, and is widely known as the Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29). Although it entails defining theological ideas of the narrative (e.g., 5:17–20), this first major discourse also establishes a pattern that characterizes all five discourses:

1. An introduction that establishes a specific place and context:

- a. "When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying" (5:1–2).¹²
- b. "Then he summoned his twelve disciples..." (10:1).
- c. "That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying" (13:1–3a).
- d. "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked..." (18:1).
- e. "As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. Then he asked them, 'You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down. When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him

privately, saying..." (24:1–3a).¹³

2. A focus on the disciples as Jesus' primary audience (despite the presence of crowds):

- a. "...his disciples came to him" (5:1).
- b. "Then he summoned his twelve disciples..." (10:1).
- c. "Then the disciples came and asked him..." (13:10), "he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying" (13:36).¹⁴
- d. "the disciples came to Jesus and asked..." (18:1).
- e. "the disciples came to him privately, saying..." (24:3a).

3. A concluding parable (four of the five discourses; 10:1–52 does not have this)¹⁵:

13. The first, third, and fifth discourse introductions entail more detailed settings (vs. the second and fourth), and only the first and fifth use the same motif of Jesus sitting down upon a "mountain" for the significance of "mountain" imagery for Matthew's gospel and theology, see Terence L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology* (JSNTSup 8; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985). For more on Matthew's Jesus-Moses typology, see Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983), esp. 172–180, 254–256.

14. The third discourse (13:1–53) has a mixed audience: it begins with "great crowds" (13:1–9), then shifts to the disciples alone (vv. 10–17), shifts back to the crowds (vv. 24–35, see v. 34), then again returns to the private audience of the disciples for the remainder of the discourse (vv. 36–52).

15. Noted by Davies and Allison (*The Gospel according to St. Matthew* [3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988, 1991, 1997], 1:719). Davies and Allison also point out that most of these concluding

12. All scripture translations in this essay are my own, unless noted otherwise.

- a. The parable of the two builders (7:24–27).
 - b. The parable of a scribe trained in the kingdom of heaven (13:52).
 - c. The parable of the dishonest manager (18:21–35).
 - d. The parable of the sheep and the goats (25:31–46).
4. The same words of conclusion: “Now when Jesus had finished...”¹⁶:
- a. “Now when Jesus had finished saying these things...” (7:28–29).
 - b. “Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples...” (11:1).
 - c. “Now when Jesus had finished these parables...” (13:53).
 - d. “Now when Jesus had finished saying these things...” (19:1).
 - e. “Now when Jesus had finished saying all these things...” (26:1).

In this first major discourse, Jesus’ teaching casts a radical vision of reality (5:3–12),

parables—along with parables that precede them—conclude on a deeply eschatological tone. The warnings issued by each of the discourse conclusions warn with eschatological rewards and punishments (7:13–14, 15–20, 21–23, 24–27; 10:32–33, 34–39, 40–42; 13:44, 45–46, 47–50; 25:1–13, 14–30, 31–46) (the fourth discourse, 18:1–35 is an exception to this rule). This feature creates a flow to the discourses, then, that generally moves from present ethical injunctions toward future, eschatological concerns (Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:728).

16. First noted by Benjamin Bacon (“Five Words”). All five discourses use the same Greek words: Καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς (“Now when Jesus had finished saying...”). The first, fourth, and fifth discourses follow with the same direct object τοὺς λόγους τούτους (“these words,” 7:28; 19:1; 26:1), although 26:1 includes the word πάντας (“all”).

reinterprets the Torah (5:17–48), and offers new patterns of piety and justice (6:1–7:12).¹⁷ Following these instructions, four warnings urge hearers to put these ideals into practice (7:13–14, 15–20, 21–23, and 24–27). Only the final warning (vv. 24–27), however, serves to conclude the entire Sermon on the Mount by explicitly referring to the whole:

²⁴Therefore, everyone who hears *these words of mine* and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and fell upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been built upon rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears *these words of mine* and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!” (7:24–27, emphasis added).

While the referent for “these words of mine” (vv. 24, 26) is not named explicitly, the location of the warning at the end of 5:3–7:27 implies reference to the whole (see also 7:28).¹⁸ In this way the concluding

17. Donald Senior outlines the Sermon the Mount with a similar structure as mine (*Matthew* [Abingdon New Testament Commentary; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998], 68–69).

18. Immediately after the sermon, Matthew records: “Now when Jesus had finished saying *these things*, the crowds were astounded at his teaching” (7:28, emphasis added)—clearly a reference to the entirety of 5:3–7:27. The Greek phrase for “these things” (τοὺς λόγους τούτους) in both 7:24 and 7:28 is identical. Donald Senior rightly comments: “The phrase ‘these words of mine’ refers to the entire Sermon, which for Matthew is a distillation of Jesus’ teaching” (*Matthew*, 91). I call this form of closure “completion” (vs. resolution, for instance), where an ending resonates

warning both fosters closure to the sermon and simultaneously underscores the particular rhetorical message of the parable.

The conclusion (7:24–27) is a parable that illustrates the virtue of acting on Jesus' teaching (vs. simply hearing). The parable contrasts the "wise man" with the "foolish man": the former symbolizes those who hear Jesus' words and put them into practice, whereas the latter symbolizes those who merely hear and do not act. In both cases "the rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against (fell upon, v. 25) that house" (vv. 25, 27), but with differing results: whereas the wise man's house stood the test (v. 25), the foolish man's house "fell—and great was its fall!" (v. 27). These final words underscore how great is the ruin for those who do not translate Jesus' teaching into praxis.¹⁹

Within the context of Matthew, this message has heightened significance for leaders and teachers. First, throughout the narrative the cardinal sin of those explicitly condemned by Jesus is to know the good and yet not act upon it (11:20–24; 15:1–9; 21:43; 23:3; cf. 18:32–33). While the average disciple does well to heed the lesson (12:50; 18:32–33), Matthew's Jesus reserves more severe judgment for teachers who do not translate teaching into practice (see 23:3–36).²⁰ Second, immediately after

7:24–27 Matthew points out that Jesus' hearers are impressed that Jesus "taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (7:29). While the precise sense of this "authority" (ἐξουσία) is open to interpretation, in Matthew the great distinction between Jesus' teaching and that of the scribes boils down to authenticity: whether the teachers embody what they teach. Jesus embodies the ideals of blessing the poor in spirit, fidelity to God, and righteousness. The implication is that Jesus' disciple-teachers are called to do the same. As Jesus' parables and teachings show, it is easy to lead blindly and cause others to stumble (18:6–7, 8–14; 23:16–26). Disciples trained in Jesus' way, however, are called to a higher standard of integrity: practicing what one teaches and thereby embodying an authority that comes from without.

The conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount (7:24–28) highlights a fundamental characteristic of the teaching ministry of Matthew's Jesus: it is *transformational*. In contrast to the modern idea that teaching is merely relaying cognitive data, in Matthew Jesus' teaching aims to shape disciples whose lives incarnate the kingdom of heaven (10:40–42; 28:18–20). As the parable of 7:24–27 emphasizes, intellectual comprehension is merely a step in the right direction. The goal of Jesus' teaching is holistic transformation. Of course, this call can seem intimidating and overwhelming, since it aims for dynamic results and requires holistic integrity on the part of the teacher. However, alongside this "law" is the promise that education is much more than an intellectual sport, handled best only by the intellectually gifted. The transformational nature of Jesus' teaching ministry, according to Matthew, makes it equally accessible to both the wise and uneducated, both the mature and "infants" (11:25–26).

with earlier parts of the narrative. For more on closure in modern and ancient literature, see Troftgruben, *A Conclusion Unhindered: A Study of the Ending of Acts within its Literary Environment* (WUNT 2.280; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 45–60.

19. Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 1:724) suggest that the expression "Great was its fall!" was proverbial in the ancient world (cf. Philo, *Mut. Nom.* 55; *Migr. Abr.* 80; *Ebr.* 156).

20. "...do not do as [the scribes and Pharisees] do, for they do not practice what they teach" (23:3, NRSV).

2. The call to be Jesus' representatives (Matt 10:40–42)

In Matthew's second didactic discourse (The "Missionary Discourse"), Jesus authorizes the twelve disciples to follow his pattern of traveling, proclaiming, and healing. After an introductory word (10:1) and a list of the twelve (vv. 2–4), Jesus describes to his disciples their evangelical task (vv. 5–15), warns them of persecution (vv. 16–25), and encourages their perseverance (vv. 26–39). Jesus concludes the discourse by emphasizing the profound significance of welcoming the disciples as they carry on Jesus' ministry:

⁴⁰Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴²And whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones for being a disciple—truly I tell you, that person will by no means lose the reward (Matt 10:40–42).

The three descriptors of prophet, righteous person, and "one of these little ones" each describe the disciples, highlighting different qualities or roles within the singular call to carry on Jesus' ministry.²¹ The central idea is this: not only does Jesus authorize

the disciples to cast out evil and to heal (v. 1), he associates himself with them as they carry out his mission. Welcoming a disciple means welcoming Jesus, and welcoming Jesus means welcoming the God who has sent Jesus.

The second discourse focuses on those engaged in proclaiming the good news in word and deed. While the call is not specific to teachers or leaders, it pertains to them insofar as they proclaim the good news—a role that church leaders occupy on a regular basis. As a whole, the discourse calls disciples not simply to carry out tasks X, Y, and Z, but to carry on Jesus' own ministry (casting out evil, proclaiming, and healing) precisely as he has done. In doing so the disciples will "be like [their] teacher" (v. 25), experiencing the same hardships (vv. 16–25) and rewards (vv. 32–33, 39). As the concluding words (vv. 40–42) imply, those who carry on Jesus' ministry in this way effectively become his representatives.

The call is one that entails both demand and promise. The demand is the responsibility of representing Jesus in ministry, which calls for genuine integrity. The promise is Jesus' close association, no matter the circumstances. The promise is hardly a safeguard from hardship, difficulty, or harm. As the commission at the end of Matthew's gospel (28:16–20) implies, however, the promise of Jesus' presence is not limited to the specific occasion of Matthew 10. Where Jesus' disciples carry on his ministry of casting out evil, healing, and proclaiming—as well as making disciples, baptizing, and teaching (28:18–20)—there Jesus is with them.

3. The importance of honoring both heritage and innovation (Matt 13:51–52)

The third didactic discourse of Matthew's narrative features Jesus teaching through

21. So also Donald Senior (*Matthew*, 122), Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 2:227–28), and Ulrich Luz (*Matthew* [3 vols., Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2007], 2:120–121). "Little ones" in Matthew may refer to the socially overlooked and underprivileged, such as children (cf. 18:1–4; 19:13–15), but more likely refers generally to all members of the Christian community (cf. "little ones who believe in me," 18:6; also 18:10, 14; cf. "the least of these" in 25:40, 45).

parables, and the disciples' privileged place of understanding them. The chapter begins with an audience of "great crowds" (13:2), who hear several parables (vv. 3–9, 24–35). The majority of Jesus' discourse, however, is given only to the disciples (vv. 10–23, 36–53), to whom "it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (v. 11). In this way the chapter makes a stark divide between those who do not understand Jesus' cryptic teaching (the crowds) and those who do (the disciples).

Jesus' conclusion to the discourse (13:51–52) entails both a closing reference to the whole (v. 51) and a new idea (v. 52). While the closing reference summarizes what has preceded ("Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes," v. 51), Jesus' last word announces a new principle for disciples of the kingdom:

Therefore every scribe trained (μαθητευθεῖς) in the kingdom of heaven is like a household master who brings out from his treasury things both new and old (13:52).

The context of the discourse (13:1–52) implies that things "new" refer to the new teaching associated with Jesus, while things "old" are the traditional teachings of the Torah. The "scribe trained in the kingdom of heaven" is a disciple of Jesus who discerns the value of both.²² Following Jesus' pattern, the disciple aims not to abolish the Messiah's theological heritage (5:17–20), but retains it in relationship to the new revelation of Jesus.²³ Much to the

22. Donald Senior aptly summarizes: "The Christian scribe, therefore, was one who could mediate both dimensions for a community stretched across a turning point in history" (*Matthew*, 159). For further nuances and possible understandings of these ideas in Matt 13:52, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:447–448.

23. Much has been written on the

frustration of scholars, Matthew's gospel does not clarify precisely the envisioned relationship between Jesus' teaching and the heritage of the Jewish Torah. It only makes clear that this heritage is not to be left behind.²⁴ The conclusion to Matthew's third discourse underscores the virtue of disciples who appreciate the best of both worlds, who can hold the two in tension for a community that needs both.

The shift of perspective from "disciples" to "scribes" in Matt 13:52 suggests that this word pertained especially to "scribe[s] trained in the kingdom" (i.e., educated disciples) in Matthew's own day. Ulrich Luz concludes that the role of the "biblically literate" (or "theologian") was unique and important in Matthew's

meaning of Jesus' words, "I have not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it" (Matt 5:17). See R. G. Hammerton-Kelly, "Attitudes to the Law in Matthew's Gospel: A Discussion of Matthew 5:18," *Biblical Research* 17 (1972): 19–32; Ulrich Luz, "The Fulfillment of the Law in Matthew (Matt. 5:17–20)," in *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 185–218; Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Matthew and the Law," in *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies* (ed. David R. Bauer and Mark Allan Powell; SBLSymS 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 69–98; Hans Dieter Betz, "The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Interpretation," in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (ed. B. A. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 199), 258–275.

24. On this topic, see Donald Senior's discussion in *What Are They Saying about Matthew?* 62–73. For an intertextual conversation with Pauline theology on this topic, see Kelly R. Iverson, "An Enemy of the Gospel? Anti-Paulinisms and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Unity and Diversity in the Gospels and Paul: Essays in Honor of Frank J. Matera* (ed. Christopher W. Skinner and Kelly R. Iverson; Early Christianity and Its Literature 7; Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 7–32.

church.²⁵ More than simply a disciple, those trained biblically and theologically are called to share their resources for the building up of all. Matt 13:52 lifts up this calling by underscoring the importance of holding “old” and “new” in relationship. The call is to discern and appreciate both the values of heritage and also new venues for fidelity to God. While the context of Matthew saw this in terms of its Jewish theological heritage, the same principle extends to matters of ministry today. Faithful ministry entails both a sense of the past as well as vision for the future. Abrogating either of these threatens the vibrancy of the whole. In teaching, proclaiming, and ministering, Matthew's gospel calls leaders to be “masters” of both worlds, drawing on both old and new for the sake of serving as discerning teachers.

4. Treating others in the community as Christ (Matt 25:31–46) and according to Christ (Matt 18:23–35)

While the final two discourses (18:1–35; 24:1–25:46) are quite different from each other, they conclude with complementary ideas. The first, Matthew's fourth discourse, emphasizes community discipline in the context of childlike humility and forgiveness (18:1–35). The second, Matthew's fifth discourse, centers on eschatological expectation and faithful living in the meantime (24:1–25:46).

The fourth discourse emphasizes humility (18:1–5), warns against causing others to sin (vv. 6–14), and counsels on managing community discord (vv. 15–20). The discourse concludes on the note of limitless forgiveness (vv. 21–35), as introduced by a question:

²¹Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the Chris-

tian community (Greek: “sibling”) sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²²Jesus said to him, “I tell you: not seven times, but seventy-seven times” (18:21–22).

Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a forgiven slave who does not reciprocate forgiveness to another indebted to him and for this reason is punished (vv. 23–35). Jesus concludes: “So will my heavenly Father do to you, if you do not forgive

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your sister or brother from the heart” (v. 35). Jesus' strong words emphasize the critical importance of forgiveness within the Christian community, and his parable characterizes individual members as servants first forgiven by their master. The idea is not merely an ethical one. It stems from a core theological principle: because God in Christ has forgiven the Christian disciple, s/he in turn is called to reciprocate with forgiveness toward others (see also 5:43–48; 6:14–15). In short, Christ's followers are called to imitate God's practice of forgiveness. Wherever humility (18:1–4), concern for others (vv. 6–20), and forgiveness (vv. 21–35) characterize the relationships within Christian com-

25. Luz, *Matthew*, 2:288. See also all of pp. 288–289.

munity, there God's ideals are manifest.²⁶

The fifth and final didactic discourse of Matthew's gospel (24:1–25:46) is eschatologically oriented. The discourse describes events surrounding the end of the age (Matt 24:1–31; cf. Mark 13:1–32), encourages vigilance and fidelity in the meantime (Matt 24:32–25:30), and concludes with a parable featuring the Son of Man as judge (25:31–46). The final parable shows “all nations” (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) before the Son of Man, who calls them to account for how and whether they fed, nourished, welcomed, clothed, cared for, and visited Jesus—represented by “the least of these my sisters and brothers” (v. 40, cf. v. 45, “least of these”)—when he was in need. The parable is commonly interpreted as endorsing care for the poor and socially marginalized, inside and outside the Christian community. Attractive as that may be, the context of Matthew and focus of the passage center on members of the Christian community (“the least of these *sisters and brothers of mine*”).²⁷ While

concern for the poor and marginalized reflects theologically grounded Christian practice, the focus is the community of faith.²⁸ Where people have cared for “the least of these,” they have cared for Jesus—although unknowingly. The upshot is that Jesus directly associates himself not simply with leaders of the Christian community, but also with the “least”: presumably the least important, the least significant, and the least impressive—those not recognized as embodying Jesus. As such, Jesus' association is not limited to particular categories of believers, but even extends to the unrecognized within the community of faith.

The conclusions to Matthew's fourth and fifth teaching discourses highlight related ideas: the disciple is called to treat others in the Christian community as Christ himself (25:31–46) and as Christ has treated them (18:23–25). Where humility, concern for others, care for other's needs, and forgiveness apply, there Christ is among them (18:20; 25:40, 45). This

26. Donald Senior writes: “Taken as a whole, this community discourse (18:1–35) presents a remarkable portrayal of the virtues that Matthew's gospel considered essential for the Christian community” (*Matthew*, 212).

27. On this, see esp. Ulrich Luz, “The Final Judgment (Matt 25:31–46): An Exercise in ‘History of Influence’ Exegesis,” in *Treasures New and Old* (ed. David R. Bauer and Mark Allen Powell; trans. Dorothy Jean Weaver), 271–310. (Much of the same content appears in Luz's commentary, *Matthew*, 3:263–284.) Also Donald Senior, *Matthew*, 280–86. Senior takes what Luz calls “the exclusive interpretation” of the passage, referring to a judgment of the “Gentiles” (i.e., pagans, vs. “all nations,” Gk. πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) on the basis of how they have treated Christians (for Senior, esp. Christian missionaries sent out), whereas Luz advocates for the “classic interpretation,” referring to

a judgment of “all nations” (Christians and non-Christians) on the basis of how they have treated the poor and lowly within the Christian community. For an argument for the “universal interpretation” (most common today), see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.428–430.

28. So also Ulrich Luz (*Matthew*, 3:263–84) and Russell Pregeant (*Matthew* [Chalice Commentaries for Today; St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004], 175–176). I concur with Luz, that itinerant Christian missionaries are not implied here because nowhere in Matthew's gospel are they given special status (Luz, *Matthew*, 2:62–63 and 3:281–282; Pregeant, *Matthew*, 175–176; pace Senior, *Matthew*, 3:280–286). Of course, the rhetorical power of the parable is the fact that those who overlook/care for Jesus *did not recognize the fact* when they did so. This simple observation checks any sense of confidence we have in identifying precisely whom the parable represents.

call entails both demand and promise. The demand is to treat others with no less dignity, care, and grace than one would treat Christ himself. The promise is that Christ associates himself with members of the community of faith—both leaders at work in his name (18:20) and “the least” significant members (25:40, 45). In this way, the promise of divine presence (1:18; 28:20) applies to the entire faith community without distinctive limits.

This call pertains especially to teachers and leaders, and in a special way. The two discourses compel leaders not only to teach the practices of forgiveness and charity, but also to foster a community where special statuses among members have no significant place. Both discourses encourage the practices of humility (18:1–4), forgiveness (18:23–35), and, above all, care for “the little ones” and “the least of these” (18:5–14; 25:31–46). The comprehensive picture constitutes a community ethos of limited structure and deliberate recognition that associates Christ with each member.²⁹ The conclusions to these discourses call on teachers both to instruct and embody a leadership style that is unassuming, affirming, egalitarian, and attuned to the underprivileged and overlooked.

Conclusion

More than its canonical counterparts, Matthew's gospel addresses the needs, concerns, and call of Christian teachers. From the narrative's wealth of didactic content to Jesus' role as a teacher to his disciples, the First Gospel informs and models ways that church leaders may carry on Jesus' teaching ministry in their

29. Donald Senior writes: “The community, and in a special way its leading members, was to be characterized by a child-like humility, not seeking special status but willing to change their perspective and take on a new life” (*Matthew*, 212).

The conclusions to these discourses call on teachers both to instruct and embody a leadership style that is unassuming, affirming, egalitarian, and attuned to the underprivileged and overlooked.

own contexts. A passage from Matthew 23 brings together a number of these themes:

⁸But you are not to be called Rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all sisters and brothers. ⁹And on earth you are not to be called Father, for you have one Father who is in heaven. ¹⁰Neither are you to be called instructors, because you have one instructor, Christ. ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²And all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted (Matt 23:8–12).

In the conclusions to the didactic discourses—and throughout Matthew's gospel—the evangelist envisions teachers who practice humility, service, aversion to social recognition, and reverence toward God and Christ.³⁰ In practicing these things,

30. Ulrich Luz comments: “The chris-

teaching disciples strive not to be greater than their Master Teacher, but instead to be like him (10:24–25a), to incarnate the kingdom of heaven (13:52), and to carry on the Teacher's work (28:18–20).³¹

The conclusions to Matthew's didactic discourses address in unique ways the call to carry on Jesus' teaching ministry.³² They call

tological and basic theological arguments in vv. 8b, 9b, and 10b for the three warnings make clear that the evangelist is interested in more than a warning that might apply only to a particular situation.... A Christian teacher who is committed to the teaching of Jesus but who is not "humble" (ταπεινός) as Jesus is, is an impossible figure" (*Matthew*, 3:106–107).

31. "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor is a slave above the master. It is enough for disciples to be like their teacher, and slaves to be like their master" (Matt 10:24–25a). "Jesus said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them* to observe all that I have commanded you. And see I am with you always until the end of the age'" (Matt 28:18–20, emphasis added).

32. Paul S. Minear states: "The author of this Gospel was a *teacher* who designed his work to be of maximum help to *teachers* in Christian congregations" (*Matthew: The Teacher's Gospel*, 3, emphasis original).

on leaders and teachers to model integrity (7:24–27), to represent Christ's presence (10:40–42), to discern the value of both old and new (13:51–52), and to treat others in the faith community as Christ himself (25:31–46) and as Christ has treated them (18:23–35). While these ideas apply to disciples of all kinds, they apply in special ways to those serving as teachers, leaders, and preachers—in Matthew's day and beyond. Collectively, they characterize a way of teaching that is transformational, a way of leading that is egalitarian, a way of relating that reflects Christ, and a way of ministering that incarnates the kingdom. Like an orchestra with deliberate movements, Matthew's narrative is composed from major movements of teaching which conclude with lessons especially pertinent to teachers "trained in the kingdom" (13:52). As the lectionary year unfolds, we do well to consider our own ministries of teaching in light of Matthew's Jesus, whose manner of teaching inspired, instructed, and introduced many to a whole new way of being.

The Sermon on the Mount: Invitation to New Life¹

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Today many things seem to demand our attention at once. We often give only fleeting thought to what swirls through our day and, as a result, can feel frustrated and frenzied. Yet we long for centering activities that bless us with meaning and hope. Right at the time when most people seem too busy for gathering as church, one characteristic of thriving congregations is lively worship combined with serious dialog around biblical texts. To engage groups deeply in such study takes careful planning. But if time is given, both leader and participants discover that these words and stories make a difference in the way they view the world and live in it.

No portion of Scripture has been more influential in changing church and society than Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1–7:29). Recently I have authored a book that is a result of years of engaging the Sermon on the Mount (SM) with classroom and church groups. Each chapter focuses on a text in the SM and

begins with the passage lined out on the page to make clear its form and structure. In the first section "Getting into the text," I attempt to take seriously *what the text says and does not say* as well as *how it says it* to prevent importing our own thoughts and times into the text before us. In the section "Knowing the cultural context," scholarly descriptions of the first-century world are included. These are intended to assist readers in appreciating how Jesus' words might have impacted the earliest hearers. In "Engaging the text today," suggestions are offered about how we might understand and appropriate the text today—taking seriously both its actual content and form in its cultural and historical context.

Finally, participants are invited into a deeper and more holistic "Dwelling in the text" by various methods: pertinent *quotations* worth pondering, a series of *questions* designed for exploring the world of the text and its intersection with our own, *application exercises* that enable participants to appropriate and embody the life-giving ways of the text, *songs* that allow the group to feel and imagine the reign of God of which Jesus speaks, and *prayers* as reminders of the group's openness to the Spirit's stirrings.

A chapter from this book—which is to be used creatively and flexibly by leaders—titled "Blessed Community—Freed from Nursing Anger" based on Matt 5:21–26 is offered here as a contribution to our preparations for the Matthew lectionary year.

1. This article appears as Chapter 3 in James L. Bailey, *Contrast Community: Practicing the Sermon on the Mount* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2013) and is used by permission of Wipf and Stock Publishers <www.wipfandstock.com>. The book includes thirteen chapters on the major texts of the SM along with an introductory chapter on the place of the SM in the Gospel of Matthew and an appendix describing the multi-sensory methods employed in engaging each biblical passage.

Matthew 5:21–26

- 5:21 *You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder”; and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.”*
- 5:22 *But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool,” you will be liable to the hell of fire.*
- 5:23 *So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you,*
- 5:24 *leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.*
- 5:25 *Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison.*
- 5:26 *Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.*

Getting into the text

The longer section in 5:17–48 of the SM concentrates on the type of “righteousness” or “justice” (Gr. *dikaïosynē*) that is to characterize the behavior of the members of Jesus’ community as ones beckoned to follow God’s way here on earth. According to 5:20, their righteousness is not to be tightfisted but abundant and overflowing, far surpassing that of the scribes and Pharisees. Beginning in 5:21–26, Jesus lays out six examples of how living by specific commandments of the Torah is to be understood generously rather than narrowly, in ways that promote healthy and honest relationships within the community and beyond.

In the first of what scholars call “the six antitheses” (“You have heard that it

was said to those of ancient times...*but I say to you...*”), Jesus quotes “You shall not murder” in 5:21, a command familiar from the Decalogue (see Exod 20:13 and Deut 5:17). But the surprise comes in 5:22, where Jesus provides his interpretation of this prohibition. He appears to equate the crime of murder with a person’s angry outbursts against a brother or sister in the community. Note the three-fold repetition in 5:22 where the offenses seem of equal seriousness while the corresponding penalties dramatically escalate. Everyone who is angry with another person in the community “will be liable to judgment” (Gr. *krisis*); and whoever says to a brother or sister, “You numbskull” (Aramaic *Raca*)² will be liable to the Sanhedrin (the highest Jewish court); and whoever says, “You fool” (Gr. *mōron*) will be liable to the Gehenna of fire (eternal punishment).

It is noteworthy that the verbal form translated as “are angry” in this verse occurs in the present tense, suggesting *continuing* and *simmering* anger, like nursing a grudge against the other person. Hence, the text is not proscribing a one-time angry outburst that arises spontaneously in reaction to a situation but rather long-term holding of hostile feelings towards a fellow Christian. Such smoldering anger easily erupts into verbal insults that demean and dismiss the other person, even though these abusive labels are often not taken all that seriously by the one who utters them.

Jesus, however, takes such dismissive language quite seriously. His intentional use of exaggerated rhetoric in 5:22 suggests

2. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd edition revised and edited by F. W. Danker, 2000) 903, states that *Raca*, a word derived from the Aramaic, is “a term of abuse/put-down relating to lack of intelligence, *numskull*, *fool* (in effect verbal bullying).”

he understands the destructive power of these abusive terms (*numbskull* and *fool*). Jesus' heightened rhetoric seeks to grab the hearers' attention so they will confront the havoc that grudges and insults wreak within the life of the community. Nursing anger and name-calling are not innocuous; they hurt others and damage the communal spirit.

After Jesus' striking interpretation that connects murder with holding grudges, two examples in 5:23–26 are

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linked by “so” (meaning “therefore”) to the previous section in 5:21–22, offering concrete illustrations of the need to channel the emotional energy of anger into the constructive activity of reconciliation.

The first illustration in 5:23–24 focuses on an individual person who, while offering a gift on the altar, recalls that a brother or sister in the community has something against the worshipper. The phrase “has something against you” seems intentionally vague, indicating neither the nature of the problem nor who is to blame. What hearers of the text do know is this: there is a rupture in the relationship between the one offering the gift at the altar and someone else in the community.

Remembering this matter intrudes on a most sacred obligation, that of making an offering at the temple in Jerusalem. As Matthew's quoting of Hos 6:6a in 9:13 and 12:7 underlines (“I desire mercy, not sacrifice”), merciful activities in the community can even take precedence over worship activities. There might even be a playful exaggeration involved in Jesus' example if the original or later hearers of this text lived in Galilee at considerable distance from the Jerusalem temple. Leaving a gift in the temple, journeying home to Galilee and then back to Jerusalem, could easily require a week's travel. Hence, Jesus' call for reconciliation takes precedence and entails significant time.

The second concrete illustration in 5:25–26 entreats a person to become reconciled to an adversary in a lawsuit while accompanying that accuser on the way to court. Jesus thus urges control of anger and even making friends with the opponent in order to avoid the serious consequences of an appearance before a judge—imprisonment and demand for payment in full, the latter difficult to accomplish while in jail.

Knowing the cultural context

Jesus' warning about anger was originally directed to his Galilean followers, who lived in agrarian village communities, where interpersonal conflicts could have easily erupted in their daily face-to-face interactions. The text's mention of “brother or sister” (Gr. *adelphos* in 5:22) might initially have referred to one's neighbor in such a village community. By the late first century, however, when Matthew incorporates this saying on anger into his Gospel, Jesus' words also address conflicts among brothers and sisters in small Christian communities in an urban context. Close-knit communities need to maintain social

order and harmony to exist and function.

Jesus' second illustration in 5:25–26 pictures a situation where one peasant villager owes a small debt to another who needs to be repaid (see also Luke 12:58–59). In this context, failure to act as friends and come to some arrangement would jeopardize the debtor's family and have larger repercussions within village relationships. In a similar situation in 1 Cor 6:1–8, Paul argues that the church-community in Corinth has its own wise leaders who should be able to arbitrate disputes between Christian brothers or sisters rather than involve non-Christian judges. The disharmony within the faith community projects an appalling witness to the larger society.

In the Jewish tradition itself, certain proverbs demonstrate awareness of the destructive power of angry words or quick-tempered acts: "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but the one who has a hasty temper exalts folly" (Prov 14:29), or "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov 15:1). It is the fool who does not control his anger (see Prov 12:16, 12:18, and 14:17).

Finally, note that the full passage from which Jesus quotes the second great commandment ("You shall love your neighbor as yourself" in Matt 22:36–40) warns against seeking revenge or bearing grudges: "You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Lev 19:17–18). Note that the passage urges the constructive action of "reproving" as a way to avoid taking revenge. Verbally confronting the neighbor can be an expression of love.³ Not only

are vengeance and grudges damaging to community, but they also are contrary to Jesus' vision of the rule of God.

Engaging the text today

These words of Jesus are often misunderstood in present times. It is assumed that Jesus is forbidding angry feelings. Psychologists inform us that anger is a basic human emotion not simply banished by rational thoughts. In fact, anger can be a healthy response in situations of loss and grief or where injustice occurs. It is also the normal reaction to insult. Just recall your emotional reaction to another driver who cuts in front of you perilously or who makes an obscene gesture at you while overtaking your vehicle.

The purpose of Jesus' words in 5:22 was not to deny spontaneous anger but to remind us that our failure to deal constructively with anger causes serious damage to ourselves and community. In fact, nursing grudges and resentments can easily lead to contempt for the other person and result in verbal attacks on that person. The prevalence of name-calling in today's society in person or on the Internet is perhaps at epidemic levels. The list of nasty and demeaning labels is long.

Insults to a person predictably trigger feelings of shame and intense rage that can erupt in violent and destructive ways or smolder beneath the surface. The old

The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000) 1648, writes: "The opposite of hating in the heart is reproof in the open (i.e., to his face), a point that is indeed underscored in Prov 27:5 ['Better is open rebuke than hidden love']... One of the ways to love your fellow, according to this unit (vv. 17–18), is to reprove him openly for his mistakes. And, conversely, the only admissible rebuke is that which is evoked by love, not by animosity, jealousy, or lust for power..."

3. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus* 17–22.

adage, “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me” is patently false. Words—particularly when they attack a person’s sense of identity and self-worth—take their toll on individuals, communities, and societies. The societal cost can be long-lasting. I recall a study, done some decades ago, that documented the effects of racist labels on young black children. The researcher requested every child in a racially mixed class to draw a picture of its classroom showing itself and the other children. The white children drew themselves as large and full figures in the picture. The black children, however, drew their white classmates as robust

“**W**hen you harbor a grudge, it is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.”

figures but themselves as diminutive and insignificant ones in the picture. Hearing “nigger” and other contemptuous terms directed at their parents and themselves over the years directly affected how they imaged themselves.

We can test this dynamic in light of our own experience. Remember past hurts, particularly when another person unmercifully ridiculed you for being overweight or not good at speaking or having a pimply face, or even worse, of being repeatedly humiliated as “dumb” or “stupid” by a parent or teacher. Simply recalling ear-

lier experiences of belittling, especially if constant in early life, can resurface intense feelings in us—feelings of disgrace and shame and or even a sensation of rage.

In a family or congregation, grudges and name-calling can set off a nasty cycle of insults and even violence, rather than a circle of care and respect. Such insults have created long-lasting rifts and even warring factions that not only do irreparable harm to the community itself but also undermine that congregation’s witness within the larger society. This is why Jesus surprisingly elevates unchecked anger to the level of murder. Nursed and rehearsed, anger can result in murder, but even far short of such a horrendous outcome, it can shatter a community of faith. Jesus’ words in 5:21–26 do not deny that we frequently become angry and upset with one another in community. Rather, words are calling us to find responsible and respectful ways to handle such angry feelings so that contempt and caustic comments find no lasting home within the life of the Christian community.

Dwelling in the text

The Bible study facilitator has the responsibility to plan the group’s engagement with Matt 5:21–26 carefully by determining what from the following material is actually used in the time allotted for the session.

Quotes for pondering the text:

“Jesus is saying, then, that murder really begins when one loses his respect for human personality and the infinite worth of every individual. When a man spits in the face of his brother and looks with contempt upon him because of his race or some other fictitious difference, he has in his heart a spirit which may result in murder. ...When one says ‘nigger,’ or ‘wop,’ or ‘chink,’ he is more of a murderer

than he realizes.”⁴

“When you harbor a grudge, it is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.”⁵

“For he who gives no fuel to fire puts it out, and likewise he who does not in the beginning nurse his wrath and does not puff himself up with anger takes precautions against it and destroys it.”⁶

Questions for engaging the text:

If the Bible study session is less than an hour, it is best to use only the starred questions.

Focus on 5:21–22

*What is Jesus saying about anger? How can anger be as serious as murder?

How would these words of Jesus impact the first-century hearers?

What makes you angry?

*How does anger turn into a grudge?

In what way does harboring anger affect the angry person?

What are examples of nasty epithets used today in our society?

Can you remember an instance when in anger you called another person a nasty name?

How did this name-calling make you feel?

Focus on 5:23–26

*Can you offer an example where grudges

and name-calling harmed a congregation?

How do Jesus’ examples in 5:23–26 offer us guidance as we deal with anger in our congregation?

*Is Jesus’ teaching good or bad therapy? Why?

How can a church-community deal constructively with anger?

*How does the story of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection address our problem of anger?

Exercises for experiencing the text:

1) In pairs, share a time when someone called you a nasty name. What was the abusive label (if you are willing to share), and how did being labeled make you feel? Make sure that both persons have opportunity to share.

2) Give each person a pencil and a piece of paper. Take the group into the worship area of the church building to be in the presence of the altar. Instruct them to offer a gift (imaginary or real) at the altar, and then have them interrupt that process as they remember someone with whom they are at odds. Participants should go away from the altar (leaving their gift there) and take time to compose a dialogue with the other party against whom they hold ill feelings. Instruct participants to draw a line down the middle of their paper, writing down on the one side what they would ask the adversary. Next, they should write down on the other side what the other person would say in response. Continue the dialogue on paper by writing what would be said next, followed by its rebuttal, and so on. Each participant should use about fifteen to twenty minutes to develop the imagined dialogue with the other person. When done, the participants will return

4. Clarence Jordan, *Sermon on the Mount* (Rev. ed. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1952), 55–56.

5. This saying was shared by a participant in the St. Mark Center Brown Bag Ecumenical Bible Study in Dubuque, Iowa.

6. Plutarch, as quoted in Carol Tavris, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion* (Rev. ed. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 131.

to the altar and re-offer their gifts. Finally, reassemble the group for a brief discussion on what the participants have learned about the biblical passage and themselves by doing this exercise. Close with prayer and sharing the peace.

3) Have the group members sit in a circle. Instruct the participants to stand and shout out any invectives or nasty names used to demean other people (e.g., dummy, slut, nigger, shit). Encourage them to shout out the derogatory names randomly and even if others are shouting at the time. After a few minutes of doing this, ask everyone to stop and be seated. After some silence invite them to think of names bestowed (by God) on others in the community of faith. Bid them to call out gently all the names God would have us employ in addressing one another (e.g., child of God, sister, beloved one, brother).

Songs for singing the text:⁷

“God, When Human Bonds Are Broken” (ELW, 603; HFTG, 155; WOV, 735; W&R, 416)

“At The Altar” (BC, 2:551)

7. The following hymnals are the ones in which the songs appear: *Borning Cry* by John Ylvisaker (BC), *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW), *Glory to God* (GTG), *Hymns for the Gospels* (HFTG), *The New Century Hymnal* (TNCH), *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (TPH), *Worship & Praise* (W&P), *Worship and Rejoice* (W&R), and *With One Voice* (WOV).

“Go, My Children, with My Blessing” (ELW, 543; GTG, 547; TNCH, 82; W&R, 719).

“Oh, Praise the Gracious Power” (TPH, 471; WOV, 750)—especially verses 1 and 2

“What Have We to Offer?” (W&P, 156)

“Not for Tongues of Heaven’s Angels” (W&R, 400)

Prayers for praying the text:

O Compassionate God, you have mercifully absorbed the worst of human anger and rage in the crucifixion of Jesus. Free us daily from any contempt we might harbor towards others, and help us to risk taking steps of reconciliation towards those with whom we feel at odds. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Or you may choose to use a prayer circle to close your session.⁸

8. One way to close the session is by inviting all to join hands in a circle and to complete first the sentence *I thank God today for...* and then *I ask God today for...* before the group prays the Lord’s Prayer together. The leader begins by sharing his or her one-sentence prayer of thanks. After sharing, the leader squeezes the hand of the person to the right. This invites the next person to share his or her prayer. If the person does not choose to share aloud, that person can simply squeeze the hand of next person. When the pulse comes back to leader after the second cycle, he or she begins the Lord’s Prayer.

An Advent Psalter

Ralph W. Klein

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Others can tell you why all or parts of Psalms 122, 72, 146, and 80 were chosen for our Advent Sunday worship services in series A. Rather than trying to decipher the line of reasoning of those who devised the Revised Common Lectionary, I have decided to judge their results by reflecting on how these psalms can work together in our time and place. My strategy is simple: I provide my own, fresh translation of each psalm¹ and then offer brief exegetical comments and homiletical reflections. My hope is that these psalms might even be read daily in individual or family devotions. How to be emulated (see my comments under Psalm 146) are all those who will do this.

Psalm 122—Advent I

I rejoiced when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of Yahweh!” (1)
My feet were standing
within your gates, Jerusalem. (2)
Jerusalem—built to be a city
where people come together in unity. (3)
There go up the tribes,
the tribes of Yahweh,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks for the name of Yahweh. (4)

1. Over the years I have written my own translations for about two-thirds of the psalms, and these renderings can be found on my website, “The Old Testament and the Ancient Near East” (<http://prophetess.lstc.edu/~rklein/>). The psalms are listed in six groups under the fourth drop-down menu “Documents by RWK.” These translations are copyrighted, but feel free to use them in private or corporate worship, and to improve them wherever possible.

For there were set up thrones for justice,
thrones for the house of David. (5)

Ask peace for Jerusalem:

“May they prosper who love you. (6)

May there be peace within your walls,
and security within your towers.” (7)

For the sake of my relatives and friends

I will say, “Peace be with you.” (8)

For the sake of the house of Yahweh our God,

I will seek your good. (9)

Psalms 120–134 are usually called pilgrimage psalms for use during trips to Jerusalem, and that is especially appropriate for Psalm 122. The psalmists and their companions in this psalm associate themselves with the temple or house of Yahweh in vv. 1–2 and 8–9. The importance of Jerusalem as goal of the pilgrimage is described in vv. 3–4 and 6–7.² At the center of the psalm, in v. 5, is the house of David and its responsibility for justice. The outline of the psalm thus forms a perfect chiasm.

Pilgrims and the house of Yahweh vv. 1–2

Jerusalem vv. 3–4

The house of David v. 5

Jerusalem vv. 6–7

Pilgrims and the house of Yahweh vv. 8–9

While the responsibility of the government for justice is highlighted in v. 5, this role is embedded in the greater significance of

2. The First Lesson for Advent I, Isaiah 2:1–5 promises a pilgrimage of all nations to Jerusalem, where they will beat their swords into lawnmowers and their spears into laptops, that is, into things that are useful and not wasteful.

Jerusalem and its temple, signs of God's presence and God's reign.

Three times a year Israelites were mandated to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem according to Deut 16:16, and Jerusalem's significance is spelled out in vv. 3–4 and 6–7. My translation of v. 3 is indebted to the NEB and denotes Jerusalem as a place that leads to the unity of the whole people of God. The usual translations in NRSV and NIV refer somewhat obscurely to Jerusalem's architectural purpose. Verse 4, on the other hand, reminds worshipers that the central purpose of worship is doxological: we are to give thanks for the name of Yahweh. That name, revealed in the context of the Exodus from Egypt, reminds worshipers of God's accompaniment of them throughout life's pilgrimage.

The second paragraph on Jerusalem, vv. 6–7, focuses on the peace or wholeness of Jerusalem. The words ask, peace, Jerusalem, prosper, peace, and security are all alliterative in Hebrew. When Jerusalem has peace so do the relatives and friends of the psalmists, and when Jerusalem has peace, the temple, sign of God's presence, also experiences wholeness.

The fact that the psalmists pray for the peace or wholeness of Jerusalem imply that Jerusalem is not peaceful. By entering Jerusalem, however, the psalmists enter a new world where they live for God's sake (v. 9) and for the sake of others (v. 8).

Advent celebrates the three-fold coming of God—at the birth of Jesus, at the end of time, and in our hearts. For Christians Jesus represents what the temple symbolized: God's presence in space and time. We all fall under the indictment of Jesus in Luke 19:42—that we often do not recognize the things that make for peace. In fact, they are sometimes hidden from us. The house of prayer becomes the place where we flee from seeking justice (Luke 19:46).

Reading Psalm 122 in light of Luke 19 raises haunting questions. James Mays puts it poignantly: "As we pray for the peace of church and city, have we recognized the things that make for peace? Do we know that unless we go with Jesus the pilgrimage toward peace will find no Jerusalem?"³

Psalm 72—Advent II (Verses 1–7, 18–19)

The king as an agent of justice

For Solomon

God, give your acts of justice to the king,
your righteousness to the king's heir. (1)
May he rule your people with righteousness,
your poor with justice. (2)
May the mountains bear peace/wholeness
to the people,
and the hills righteousness. (3)
May he help the poor of the people to
obtain justice,
may he save those who are needy,
may he crush the oppressor. (4)

Verse 1 is the only direct petition to God, but the rest of the psalm consists of a series of petitions and requests that are tied back to this petition. In its Old Testament setting, the psalm sets a goal of what should be expected of the king in Jerusalem (Solomon and his successors), but in its Advent setting it expresses our hope for Christ's mission⁴ and for what we should seek to accomplish through our own participation in society. God's commitment to justice is the rationale for what the rest of the psalm prays for and it offers the reason to hope that justice will

3. James L. Mays, (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 304.

4. The First Lesson for Advent II is Isa 11:1–10, a passage that promises that the messiah will rule the poor with righteousness and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

be done in the world.

Righteousness means living up to the obligations of one's relationships, and the obligations of the king to God and people should automatically result in justice. God's people in general and the poor and needy in particular are the focus of the king's rule. The king marshals the natural resources of the land—here represented by mountains and hills—to bring peace, or better wholeness, to all.

The king as caretaker of nature

May he lengthen his days while the sun endures,

and as long as the moon lasts, generation after generation. (5)

May he be like rain on mown grass,

like showers that soak the earth. (6)

May the righteous person (or righteousness) flourish in his days.

may there be an abundance of peace (prosperity) until the moon is no more. (7)

The prayer in v. 5 for the king's long rule, mimicking that of the sun and moon, recognizes that institutional stability is a benefit to any people. The energizing power of the sun to produce prosperity is joined to the power of the king, whose attributes should be like rain and showers that soak the earth. While the Hebrew text in v. 7 asks that the righteous person flourish under good government, the Septuagint asks that same benefaction for righteousness itself. It all depends on which vowels are added to the three Hebrew letters to determine whether we are speaking of the righteous person or righteousness itself. God gives to humanity abundance and sets no time limits for God's generosity.

The king's universal rule

May he rule from sea to sea,

from the river Euphrates up to the ends of the earth. (8)

May his foes bow down before him,

may his enemies lick the dust. (9)

May kings of Tarshish and the islands bring tribute,

the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts.

(10)

May all kings bow down to him,

all nations serve him. (11)

God had promised Abraham that his descendants would rule from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates (Gen 15:18). That promise comes true in the rule of the Jerusalemite king, but there is a nationalistic tone here that does not go down with us so easily: the king's foes bow down before him and his enemies lick the dust. That vision is modified and contextualized by the messianic promise in Zech 9:10—"He shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth," and of course by the universal reign of God that Jesus inaugurated by his coming.

The king as an agent of justice

For he delivers the needy when they cry for help,

the poor and those without any helper.

(12)

He has pity on the weak and the needy,

he delivers the lives of the destitute. (13)

From oppression and violence he redeems their life,

their lifeblood is precious in his eyes. (14)

The justification for the king's worldwide reign comes from that little word "for" in v. 12. It is because the king is for the little person that he merits a great reign. The word "helper" often refers to the stronger or more important person who cares—in this case the king or Christ—but a reminder that when Eve is chosen as a helper to Adam, hers is not a second-rate vocation.

The king is the first hope and the last resort for those who are destitute. Those on the bottom of the economic chain are often not there accidentally. The wealthy are often content with the way the system works to their benefit. Good government reverses economic hardship and protects the weak from violence and oppression.

The king as caretaker of nature

Long may he live!

May they give to him gold from Sheba.

May they pray for him continually;

May they bless him all the day. (15)

May there be plenty of grain in the land,
on the top of the mountains may it shake.

May its fruit be like Lebanon,

may its sheaves flourish like the grass of
the earth. (16)

May his name last forever,

may his fame increase as long as the sun
endures.

May all families of the earth bless them-
selves in him,

May all nations declare him happy. (17)

The king needs the support of the governed. International trade and legitimate taxes are the grease that makes the machine of government function. Leaders then and now deserve the daily prayers of the people. Verse 16 returns to the theme of the abundant life that comes from the creator's hand. There is enough for all if the resources of a country are equitably distributed. The promises of Gen 12:3 and 28:14 come true in the king's rule. All peoples prosper from the king's just rule, and they wish in turn for the king's happiness.

The end of Book Two of the Psalter

Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel,

who is the only one who does marvelous
things. (18)

Bless his glorious name forever

May his glory fill the whole world.

Amen! Amen! (19)

The prayers of David the son of Jesse are complete. (20)

The Psalter is divided into five books (1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; and 107–150). This prayer that God will be blessed forms a fitting end to the second book, but it also praises the God who gives acts of justice to the king and righteousness to the king's successors. As we pray this psalm we ask for the good news to reach the whole world, and give our own ringing cheer: "Amen! Amen!" Verse 20 looks back to "David's petitions" in Psalms 51–72 and alerts the reader to expect the Asaph compositions just ahead in Psalms 73–83.

When the psalms for the Revised Common Lectionary were selected, the committee recognized that most congregations would not have the time or the attentiveness to say this whole psalm in the morning service, but they selected vv. 1–7 and 18–19 that put the emphasis clearly on the hope for justice through human government and Christ's reign, and they underscored that our God alone does marvelous things, among which especially is the empowering of people to announce and implement justice.

Psalm 146—Advent III (Verses 5–10)

Praise Yahweh!

Let my whole self praise Yahweh! (1)

I will praise Yahweh throughout my life;

I will chant praises to my God as long
as I exist. (2)

Do not trust in princes,

in human beings, through whom there
is no deliverance. (3)

When their breath leaves, they return to
their land;

on that very day their plans perish. (4)

How to be emulated are those whose help is
in the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in Yahweh their God, (5)

who made the sky and the earth,
 the sea and everything that is in them,
 who stands guard over faithfulness forever; (6)
 who brings about justice for the oppressed;
 who gives bread to the hungry.
 Yahweh sets prisoners free; (7)
 Yahweh opens the eyes of the blind;
 Yahweh raises up those who are bowed down;
 Yahweh loves those who are righteous. (8)
 Yahweh stands guard for the resident aliens;
 Yahweh supports orphans and widows,
 but the way of the wicked he falsifies. (9)
 Yahweh will reign forever,
 your God, O Zion, for all generations.
 Praise Yahweh! (10)

The opening and closing imperatives on this psalm are the Hebrew word *Hallelujah*, and that's true for every psalm from here until the end of the Psalter. The abridgement of this psalm in the Lectionary by omitting the first four verses hides that point. The name of the book of Psalms in Hebrew is "Praises," and after all the highly important laments, it is in praises that the Psalter ends.

The psalmist commits herself to lifelong praise and then warns against the folly of trusting many human leaders. They are mortal after all, and once their lives end, so do their schemes and their plans, strategic or otherwise.

But the heart of the psalm that focuses on Yahweh's passion for justice is captured by the Lectionary. How to be emulated⁶ are those whose help is in the

5. The reader will have noted that I strive for an inclusive translation wherever it can be accomplished without being awkward. First person pronouns are prominent in Psalm 146, and it surely is probable in antiquity as well as today that hiding behind the anonymous "I" are many women.

6. For the philological and theological rationale for this translation, see Waldemar Janzen, "Ashr□ in the Old Testament," 58

God of Jacob, whose hope is in Yahweh their God. Many translations call those who seek help from God and place their hope in God "happy" or "blessed." But I think the meaning comes out better in my somewhat awkward "How to be emulated." We all are invited to be like those persons who balance their hesitancy about human leaders with boundless trust in God.

What kind of God? Creator, of course, but also dealer of justice to the oppressed, giver of bread to the hungry, a God who sets prisoners free.⁷ We who long for God's coming in Advent so that God might feed all the hungry who live in a country that wants to balance the budget on the stomachs of the poor. God sets prisoners free, and yet we in the United States have by far the highest incarceration rate in the industrialized world, and the figures are even worse when broken down by racial and ethnic categories. For this kind of divine coming to work will require our hands and even our votes.

All evidence to the contrary notwithstanding in ancient Israel or in our broken society, our psalmist confesses that Yahweh will reign, dare we say it, in Christ's way, the way of the justice-loving Jesus. The believing community—Zion—is personified in v. 10 and reminded that the hope that God will reign forever means in every generation, including our own.

Psalm 80—Advent IV (Verses 1–7, 17–19)

Shepherd of Israel, lend an ear,
 you who lead Joseph like a flock. (1)
 You who are enthroned on the cherubim,

(1965): 215–226.

7. The First Lesson for Advent III, Isa 35:1–10, looks forward to God's new age: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy."

shine forth
before Ephraim, and Benjamin, and
Manasseh.

Stir up your power,
and come for our deliverance. (2)

God, bring us back;
**send out light from your face and we
will be delivered.** (3)

Yahweh of the heavenly armies,
how long will you breathe out smoke
against the prayer of your people? (4)

You have made them eat tear-stained bread;
You have made them drink draughts of
tears. (5)

You have made us an object of contention
for our neighbors;

Our enemies mock us. (6)

God of the heavenly armies, bring us back
**send out light from your face and we
will be delivered.** (7)

You uprooted a vine from Egypt;
You cleared out the nations and planted
it; (8)

You made a clearing in front of it;
it sent out its roots and filled the land. (9)

Its shadow covered the mountains;
its branches covered God's cedars. (10)

It sent out its boughs to the sea;
its shoots to the river. (11)

Why have you breached its walls,
so that all the passers-by pluck it? (12)

A boar from the forest ravages it;
tiny animals from the fields feed on it. (13)

God of the heavenly armies, please turn;
look down from heaven and see;

inspect this vine, (14)
the stock which your own right hand
planted,

the child you made strong for yourself.
(15)

They have burned it with fire;
they have cut it down;

may they perish at the rebuke of your
face. (16)

Let your hand be upon the person of your
right hand;

on the human being you made strong
for yourself. (17)

We will never turn back from you;
grant us life and we will proclaim your
name. (18)

Yahweh, God of the heavenly armies,
bring us back;

**send out light from your face and we
will be delivered.** (19)

While the Lectionary only assigns vv. 1–7
and 17–19 for our worship, even this
selection of verses incorporates all three
refrains: **Yahweh, God of the heavenly
armies, bring us back; send out light
from your face and we will be delivered**
(vv. 3, 7, and 19).

But the shortening in this case also
does serious damage to the psalm. Verses
8–11 recount the glorious and pain-filled
history of Israel: the Exodus from Egypt,
the gift of the land, Israel's growth and
imperial successes. But then came enemy
attack and ruin, with wild animals, that
is, unkempt nations, feeding on God's
people. You, Yahweh, were behind those
reverses. The psalmist will not let God off
the hook.

All of this calls for a revised refrain
in vv. 14–15. No longer does the psalmist
pray "Bring us back," but rather, "God, it
is you who must change!" Look at us in
our misery. See the vine your right hand
once planted, the child you once bore. We
are still the people of God's right hand,
human being whose strength has but one
divine source. This bold petition is marked
by a bold promise: We will never (again)
turn back from you.

The psalm begins with a prayer for
the shepherd God to listen and to pay at-
tention to God's diverse people: Ephraim,
Benjamin, and Manasseh. No one knows
why only these three tribes are mentioned,
all of them Rachel tribes, descendants of
Joseph and Benjamin, Rachel's children.

Rachel, who knew the pain and the promise of infertility, came to know the disappointment of descendants who did not measure up. God always listens and never sleeps, we say. But sometimes God seems not to pay attention to listen. So the psalm begins: "Shepherd of Israel, lend an ear."

Verse 2, of course, has an adumbration of our own Advent collects:

Stir up your power, and **come** for our deliverance.⁸ We are the wayward and ruined vines, and we know where to get help and receive the power to make

promises: We will never (again) turn back from you (v. 18).

Conclusion

Most of us love to chant or read the psalms antiphonally. This article is an invitation to consider the psalms in short seasonal bunches, to use the psalms in weekly worship and in daily devotion. Each of these psalms in the Advent Psalter speaks in a fresh way of God's good news for our bad situations. That God is understood first of all as the saving God of the Hebrew Bible, who in these last days has revealed Godself once more in the Christ.

8. The First Lesson for Advent IV, Isa 7:10-16, reminds us that our help comes from Immanuel, the God who is with us.

Ecclesia Reformata Semper Reformanda: Challenges of the Reformation Jubilee 2017

Margot Kässmann

Special Envoy of the Evangelical Church in Germany for the Reformation Anniversary Celebration 2017

This essay is from a lecture given at The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago on June 5, 2013. The responses that follow were also a part of that event.

The year 2017 is the 500th anniversary of the publication of Martin Luther's theses in Wittenberg. From a historical viewpoint it is questionable whether Luther actually nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the Castle Church, whether it was somebody else, or whether they were only distributed in printed copies. But these theses, which categorically denounced the church's practice of granting indulgences, have been regarded ever since as the starting point of all the various happenings which are gathered together under the heading of the "Reformation."

A few years ago, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) decided, in co-operation with public bodies and tourist associations, to launch a Luther Decade from 2008 to 2016, leading up to the Reformation anniversary and making preparations for it. The year 2008 saw the opening of the Decade by Bishop Wolfgang Huber. In his inaugural speech on September 21, he stated: "As much as we value Luther's contribution to German culture, especially his impact on the formation of the German language,

we have all the less reason to repeat the claims to superiority in which Martin Luther is associated with a supposed 'German identity.' For a long time the figure of Luther was used to mislead Germans both at home and abroad into confusing patriotism with nationalism." This has set the tone for our thoughts. In 2017 we want to celebrate not a German Luther Jubilee but an *international* Reformation Jubilee with a clear ecumenical dimension. So I will share some of our preparations and thoughts with you. I am also interested in your comments and your own planning.

The years of the Luther Decade have **had and will have the following themes:**

In 2009 the theme was "**Reformation and confession,**" with a special emphasis on the Reformer John Calvin.

In 2010 the theme was "**Reformation and education,**" with a special emphasis on the Reformer Philipp Melancthon.

In 2011 the theme was "**Reformation and freedom,**" which explored questions about the roots of freedom. What does freedom mean for a Christian in the twenty-first century?

In 2012 the theme was "**Reformation and music.**" In that year St. Thomas Church in Leipzig celebrated the 800th anniversary

of church, choir, and school in the place where Johann Sebastian Bach worked as choirmaster from 1723 to 1750. The Reformation was rediscovered as a singing movement and many congregations up and down the country played an active part. A number of other events such as the Handel Festival in Halle were also linked into this anniversary year.

For this year, 2013, the theme is **“Reformation and tolerance.”** This will focus our view on the darker side of the age of the Reformation, with its sometimes disturbingly sharp demarcations, and also on the learning process that has followed.

The year 2014 will concentrate on the relationship of **“Reformation and politics,”** the very question of the Reformation. What are the two regiments and what does that mean for a church today?

The celebration in 2015 will be titled **“Reformation—Art and the Bible,”** in recognition of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Lucas Cranach the Younger. Cranach’s pictures had an enormous effect on a lot of people at a time when many were unable to read.

The year 2016 will focus on **“Reformation and one world,”** posing the question of what Reformation means in a globalized world and in an era of world-wide ecumenism.

The Decade will lead into a series of central celebrations for the anniversary year, beginning with Reformation Day in 2016. They will focus on five main activities:

- The first one is the Opening on October 31, 2016. It has yet to be seen whether it will be possible to integrate into this a gesture of reconciliation, drawing Roman Catholics and others together in ecumenical fellowship.
- Second, Reformation Day 2016 will also see the start of a journey with various

stopovers—rather like the Stations of the Cross. Ninety-five Volkswagen buses will gather in front of Berlin Cathedral, and then head for ninety-five Reformation cities throughout Germany and Europe, collecting one thesis from each of them. By the end, if all goes well, there should be ninety-five theses from ninety-five cities, which together will add up to the ninety-five theses for today. Synod President Katrin Göring-Eckart told the EKD Synod in November 2012: “We will gather together a wide variety of Reformation insights and their consequences—right across Germany and Europe, if Reformation cities such as Strasbourg or Zürich are willing to join in. One aspect or insight, or maybe a problematical outcome or even fierce conflict will be highlighted, taken note of and collected in each city. The various places will reveal their own quite specific approach to the Reformation; in Speyer it will be different from Marburg, in Worms different from Geneva.”

- Third, the activity at these stations will lead to a kind of “World Exhibition of the Reformation” in and around Wittenberg, to which everything that has been collected, learned, and recognized on the journey will be taken. In addition, there will be contributions from culture and civil society, as well as from churches in other countries and continents. The town itself may be turned into an exhibition showground for ninety-five days in the summer of 2017. Among the things to be seen and experienced will be an upside-down church from Canada, a video message from China, a collection of pamphlets from the time of the Reformation, a prayer room from Tanzania, and much more. Right in the heartland of the Reformation, people will experience the wide variety of church life all over the world, with all its cultural consequences.

- Fourth, a significant central event will be a huge service of worship on May 28, 2017, which is planned to take place at the Wittenberg city gates, in association with the German Protestant Kirchentag in Berlin the days before that. We are hoping that this will be an unforgettable experience for everyone.
- Finally, there will be a Youth Camp. Our particular wish is that the younger generation will discover the Reformation and also the cities of the Reformation. There will be concerts and film festivals, as well as services of worship and times of prayer and, of course, all kinds of discussions (about God and the world, as the German saying goes). A summer camp with dancing and praying, singing and talking, laughing and loving, will hopefully be an unforgettable Reformation experience for confirmation candidates and young people from many countries. People will make arrangements to meet on the Internet and Luther will hold his own Twitter session. Perhaps we will succeed in building an online and offline congregation showing that there is a sense of real enjoyment about faith in our church, which at the same time touches the depths of the soul. I hope that many people will remember this and say: "Reformation year 2017—yes, we were there."

This gives you a glimpse of the preparations-to-date and the forward planning in Germany. During my visit in the United States on the one hand, I want to invite you to participate. Bring back to Wittenberg, what came from Wittenberg! But, on the other hand, apart from activities, we mainly need to ask questions about the actual content. What is the significance of a Reformation anniversary in 2017? What is there to celebrate? Please allow me to pick up ten aspects that I regard as relevant.

1. A critical look back

Reformation anniversaries and commemorations of Luther have always been shaped by their own time.¹ This is also true for your country. While nobody celebrated Luther's birthday in 1783 there were enormous celebrations in 1883, in which all denominations of the Reformation participated. In the tributes it was even said that had there not been Martin Luther in Germany there would not have been George Washington in the United States! But in 1917 there was reluctance to celebrate. In April the United States entered World War I on the side of the Allied forces, and "German" became a synonym for "militaristic" and "non-democratic," and American Lutherans were in a defensive mode. In 1983 apparently there was some activity of lectures, for instance in Houston. So it will be interesting to see what 2017 could mean in your multi-confessional country.

But let's go back to Germany:

In 1617, the jubilee served as confessional self-reassurance. In 1717, Luther was stylized, on the one hand, as the godly, devout man of the Pietists and, on the other, as an early Enlightenment figure speaking out against medieval superstition. The commemoration of 1817 was orchestrated as a religio-nationalist festival in memory of the Battle of the Nations near Leipzig in 1813, and Luther became a national German hero. In 1883, with the 400th anniversary of his birth, Luther was promoted to being the founding father of the German Empire and in 1917, along with Hindenburg, he became the Savior of the Germans in a time of great adversity. In 1933, the year when the National Socialists seized power, Luther was surrounded on his 450th birthday with the aura of the

1. The following is based on Hartmut Lehmann, (Göttingen, 2012).

God-given great Führer who was followed only by one greater “Führer” named Adolf Hitler. And then on the 400th anniversary of his death he was seen as the comforter of the German people—in 1946 when comfort was bitterly needed. In 1983 on his 500th birthday, there was a kind of competition over Luther’s legacy in the East and the West. In the German Democratic Republic Luther was no longer the servant of princes but the representative of early bourgeois revolution.

Looking back like this must make us sensitive to the fact that Reformation anniversaries are tricky points in time. How will the generations that follow us judge the events of 2017? Will they say that the Protestants wanted to raise their profile at the cost of others? Will it be seen as an attempt to gain publicity for the Christian faith? Or will it be clear that this was an occasion when we grappled with our own heritage critically and constructively, as good Protestants should do?

I am convinced that there will be no “Luther cult,” as is feared by many. Protestantism in Germany and Lutheranism worldwide are confident enough not to gloss over the dark side of their great role model and above all not to limit the Reformation to him and his own persona. It is evident that the Reformation was a movement that covered several decades. The year 1517 is a symbolic date. And the Reformation was driven by many people; Martin Luther is just the symbolic figure. This is demonstrated beautifully in an altarpiece by the Italian artist Gabriele Mucchi, which can be seen in the little church of Alt-Staaken in the outskirts of Berlin. Below the image of the crucified Christ in this wall painting there are gathered twelve historical figures who played an important role in the sixteenth century in the renewal of the church and of our view of the world: Nicholas Copernicus, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, Ignatius

Loyola, Thomas More, Katharina von Bora, Martin Luther, Thomas Müntzer, Johannes Bugenhagen, Philipp Melancthon, Lucas Cranach, Erasmus of Rotterdam. That is a splendid symbol of this being a widespread movement, an enormous breakthrough. I find it very moving that in this picture they are all reconciled beneath the cross. So for me it is also particularly important that I am a special envoy not for Luther but for the Reformation anniversary! We must make it clear that this was a diverse movement that changed both state and church, and is still having an effect up to today.

It will be important to be open to a critical look back and to appreciate the Reformation as an overall event.

2. Ecumenism

This is the first anniversary following one hundred years of the ecumenical movement. On the one hand, that involves Roman Catholicism. The churches of the Reformation regard themselves—just as much as the Roman Catholic Church—as the inheritors of the ancient church (Luther, “Against Hans Worst” 1541) and it is therefore a matter of our common history. The Reformation era changed everything. The Roman Catholic Church of today is not the same as the church with which Luther and the other Reformers came into such deep conflict in the sixteenth century. For example, a century after Luther the Council of Trent (1645–1663) said farewell to the practice of selling indulgences for money and in the twentieth century the Second Vatican Council introduced the saying of the Mass in the vernacular. Of course, many of the questions raised in the Reformation about the papacy, the veneration of the saints, and the understanding of ministerial office still remain in force today. But Martin Luther wanted to reform his own church

and not to split it. So for Protestants to set themselves apart in commemorating the Reformation would not make any sense.

Suffragan Bishop Jaschke of Hamburg has declared that today Luther's ninety-five theses would also be accepted from the Roman Catholic side and said that he shares Luther's criticism of the trade in indulgences at that time.² And in Augsburg in 1999 the Roman Catholic Church and The Lutheran World Federation signed the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. They asserted that the condemnations issued by the two churches in the sixteenth century do not apply to their teaching today. The signing of the Official Common Statement on the Joint Declaration in Augsburg on October 31 was an occasion for celebration. It did not mean—as was clear to all those who took part—that from now on the theoretical teachings of the different traditions would be based on exactly the same understanding. But the signing was welcomed as a step on a necessary path toward convergence. A breakthrough seemed close, meaning, this declaration will not eliminate our differences, but will hopefully lead to the possibility of being able to invite one another as guests to Communion. We can be grateful that it at least succeeded in finding common wording on a theological question that was once the cause of unity being broken.

In this respect there is now a chance to give a clear ecumenical dimension to the Reformation anniversary. Indeed, the latest call by prominent Roman Catholic lay people is encouraging. It is crystal clear that whatever the differences and whatever the nature of our own profiles, there is

more that binds us together than separates us. And also, in a secularized society the common witness of Christians is of great significance. The more strongly we speak out together, the more we will be heard.

But this is also a matter of worldwide ecumenism, which has existed as a movement since 1910 and has been institutionalized since 1948 with the World Council of Churches, as well as having a voice through The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). How about links to the churches in the wider world? What contribution is offered by Protestants? What does this anniversary mean in Brazil, in South Africa, in Tanzania? For this reason there are good contacts with the world Christian families, with the LWF and the WCRC as well as the World Council of Churches.

2017 will be a Reformation anniversary with an ecumenical dimension.

3. Dialogue of religions

2017 is the first anniversary of the publication of the "95 Theses" since the Holocaust. The anti-Judaism especially of the late Martin Luther set a path for a terrible error of the church named after him. It is almost unbearable to read today what Luther wrote in 1543. But the failure of Christians in regard to the Jews in the National-Socialist era has triggered a learning process. Today the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) says whoever attacks Jews, attacks us. After sixty years of Jewish-Christian dialogue, wonderfully expressed in the awarding of the Buber-Rosenzweig Medal to the EKD Council Chair Nikolaus Schneider, we can see that the Reformation church is capable of dialogue. The Reformers themselves said that the church must always be reforming itself and this is a

2. Cf: Suffragan Bishop criticizes the trade in indulgences at the time of Luther – Jaschke, "Catholics accept Luther's theses," in (epd), central edition 212/31.10.2008, p.11ff.

decisive point which has proved true in the learning process.

That also holds true with respect to Muslims. Although Luther may have ranted against the Turks, today we are living together in the same country. At the same time, Christians throughout the world are the most persecuted religious community. We need dialogue and it must be grounded in theology.

A learning process is also revealed by looking at social movements and the dispute between Luther and Thomas Müntzer. The question of the conflict between the command to be subject to authority and the command to obey God rather than human beings has been hotly debated ever since the time of the Third Reich.

And with respect to those who were persecuted as Anabaptists and Enthusiasts in the Reformation era, the 2010 LWF Assembly featured an act of repentance and plea for reconciliation with the Mennonites, as their spiritual heirs.

For the Reformation anniversary in 2017, religious dialogue must prove to be a major concern for Protestantism.

4. Concentrating on the “solae” in a secular age

In 2017 we will be celebrating a Reformation anniversary in an age of secularization. Here the four “solae” (“by faith alone,” etc.) may be helpful in providing a focus and communication of the faith.

Secularization makes it more difficult to explain what faith means. Many people have turned away; an immense loss of faith and, indeed tradition, is to be noted in the land of the Reformation. Many people no longer have any connection with religion. In Eisleben, the town where Luther was born and baptized, today seven (!) percent of the population are Christians.

The churches of the Reformation

should confront this challenge head-on. After all, they developed from spiritual life and reflection on the Bible. Luther’s monastic experience was as important to him as his biblical study, and Zwingli began to preach in 1518 after a period in a monastery in Zürich. At the same time, it is crucial to find a form of language for faith issues in the world of today, just as Luther and Zwingli managed to do, each in their own way. Translating the whole Bible into German, having the Mass in the language of the people, publishing other writings in German—Luther was deeply concerned to enable people to talk about their faith for themselves. “Listening to the man or woman on the street” does not mean telling them what they want to hear.

Even if it is debatable how many “solae” there were, and when they arose in this particular combination, the focus was helpful in conveying the core concerns of faith.

Solus Christus (“through Jesus Christ alone”)—Christ and not the church is the authority for the faithful.

Sola gratia (“by grace alone”)—God’s grace alone justifies your life, not anything that you do or achieve.

Sola scriptura (“by scripture alone”)—the Bible is the foundation of faith, not church dogma or teaching.

Sola fide (“by faith alone”)—faith is crucial, not anything that you do or accomplish, nor the things you may fail to do.

In a secular age it is important for the churches to utilize the communication skills that are part of our Reformed heritage, in order to communicate the faith.

5. Women

This is the first anniversary for which the vast majority of the Protestant churches

throughout the world have accepted women in the ordained ministry and even as bishops. For Martin Luther it became more and more clear that baptism is the central event and sacrament. This is where God promises human beings divine grace, love, care and a sense of the meaning of life. All the failures and aberrations of life cannot cancel that out. If we go back to our baptism, we need no repentance, no sacrament of repentance. We are redeemed, we have long been the children of God.

Baptizatus sum—"I am baptized." Martin Luther reminded himself of this in his darkest hours and found support and comfort.

Baptizatus sum—"I am baptized." Martin Luther reminded himself of this in his darkest hours and found support and comfort.

And, declared Luther, everyone who has emerged from baptism is priest, bishop, pope. And from there, Luther also developed respect for women. They are baptized and therefore they are on an equal footing. That was an outrageous position to take in his time! Women were regarded as unclean when they were not virgins, witch-hunts were rampant—and unfortunately Luther did

not take a strong line against them. Only after long debates was it conceded that women have an immortal soul. In such an age to say that we are baptized and so we are equal before God was a theological breakthrough and at the same time a social revolution. This understanding of baptism gradually developed through the centuries into the conviction that women should in fact be able to exercise any office in the church. For me it is important to clarify these underlying theological grounds, especially in cases where in other churches the ordination of women to the office of minister and bishop is called into question.

A celibate life was then regarded as being more respected before God, the direct way to heaven, as it were. For many Reformers the step towards marriage was a signal that living in a family, with sexuality and children is also a life blessed by God. The public marriage of previously celibate priests, monks, and nuns was a theological signal. Ute Gause, a professor of Reformation history, explains that it was a symbolic action that "wanted to make clear something elementary to the Reformation: the new faith's turning toward the world and the pleasures of the senses."³ Actually the Protestants in Germany are considered to be less prone to sensory enjoyment than the Roman Catholics or Orthodox. But the Reformers wanted to make it quite clear that living in the world is of no less value than life in the priesthood or the monastery. It is all a matter of living our faith in the everyday things of the world.

This has had a lot of consequences. One, for example, is that in the first Church Regulations drawn up by the Reformers, midwives were valued as custodians of the church. A woman who had given birth

3. Ute Gause, inaugural lecture, unpublished (German) manuscript, p. 2.

was no longer regarded as unclean, but she should be cared for and looked after.

Incidentally, Luther could be tremendously modern in this respect. There's the question of whether grown men make themselves a laughing stock if they wash the baby's nappies (diapers). Here is a short extract from the original words of Martin Luther:

When a man goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his children, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate idiot, though that man is acting in...Christian faith, my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling, not because the man is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but the devil's fools."⁴

This means it's not the silly nonsense spoken by other people that matters. What matters is that I know who I am, that I live out my life before God and trusting in God and in doing so give an account of the hope that is in me. And also, it is all part of God's creation that we should bring up children, it is part of the very existence of men and women. Or, "From the manner in which they both interact with each other in everyday tasks, this demonstrates if they truly believe what they confess."⁵

The 2017 anniversary makes it clear that a distinguishing feature of the Protestant

4. Martin Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1552).

5. Ibid.

church is the theological conviction that women can be ministers and also bishops.

6. Overcoming divisions

The Reformation anniversary in 2017 is the first one since the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973.

The Reformation movement was itself subject to division and within Protestantism there have been repeated splits, as most recently in the Lutheran churches in the United States over the question of sexuality.

In Europe, the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973 sent a strong signal that such divisions could be overcome and it showed a way to do this. Despite all their differences, Reformed, Lutheran and United Churches are, on the basis of the Agreement, able to recognize one another mutually as churches, along with their ministerial orders, and to celebrate Holy Communion together. Even though this fellowship of churches with different confessional backgrounds has on a number of occasions been discredited as "minimalist ecumenism" and Cardinal Kasper declared that the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches could not follow the same model, it is a real-life model of how to overcome division. Differences do not necessarily have to be divisive.

The Reformation anniversary in 2017 can promote the Leuenberg Agreement as a living model of how to overcome division.

7. Education

The Reformation anniversary in 2017 is the first to be marked in an age when the historical/critical method of biblical exegesis has been widely recognized.

Leaving the conceptions of the Middle Ages behind him, what really concerned Luther in practicing the "Freedom of a

Christian” was that every woman and every man should be able to confess faith in the triune God and affirm their faith in Jesus Christ. For Luther, the precondition for a mature faith was that everyone could read the Bible for themselves and was educated enough to be able not only to learn the Small Catechism by heart, the confession of faith for everyday use, but also to share it with others and thus be empowered to speak of their faith. The basis for this was education for all and not just for the few who could afford it or who got an opportunity for education by entering a religious order.

Martin Luther was the first to make equality and opportunity in education a public issue and to declare himself a vehement supporter of it. He had theological grounds for this. For him, faith meant an educated faith, and thus a faith not based solely on convention or spiritual experience, but also on an affirmation of the liberating message of the gospel. That faith is always an educated faith is deeply entrenched in his own biography. It was only through an intensive theological study of the Bible, together with the writings of St. Augustine, that he worked out his liberating insight into the meaning of justification. For Luther, faith is always an autonomous faith. The individual Christian must be answerable to God for him/herself and is loved by God as an individual. The church is the community of the baptized, but not the mediator of salvation for the individual. Faith, as an educated and autonomous faith, forms the essential theological motivation for Luther’s vehement support for public education, available to every citizen, both male and female. In Germany we have Luther to thank for the elementary school system as “schools for all.” It is interesting that from his theological approach came a simple consequence—he also stood up for girls’ education.

All the Reformers underlined the importance of education. Melancthon was a passionate teacher, and was indeed dubbed the “teacher of the Germans” on the basis of his efforts to reform the university system. Martin Bucer is regarded by both Lutherans and the Reformed as a doctor of the church. Ulrich Zwingli learned Greek in order to be able to read the original text of the New Testament edited by Erasmus of Rotterdam. He owned what was for that time the huge number of one hundred books and in 1510 he founded a Latin grammar school in his parish house in Glarus. And then there was the Geneva College, founded by John Calvin, which took the Reformed education movement to many regions of Europe.

These were and still remain essential Reformation issues: being able to think, reflect, speculate, understand, and to be allowed to ask questions. Instead of that, right up to today religion has been imputed with an attitude of not asking questions, simply believe! Fundamentalism—whether Jewish, Christian, Islamic or Hindu in origin—does not like education and enlightenment. Each and every manifestation of fundamentalism sets itself against one of the core messages of the Reformation—think for yourself! You are liberated through God’s promise of life. In your conscience you are subject to no one and you are not dependent on dogmatic teaching, religious precepts or authorities of the faith.

Perhaps one of the most important contributions of the Reformation is that it is concerned with educated faith, a faith that wants to understand, that is allowed to ask questions, even when relating to the book of the Christian faith, the Bible. It is not about having faith out of obedience, convention or spiritual experience, but rather about a personal struggle for one’s own faith.

Today we can say that this study of the Bible also includes an awareness of the origins of the biblical books and the application of historical-critical exegesis. Recently, following a televised sermon in Wittenberg, in which I said we didn't know exactly who had actually written the letter to the Ephesians, a student wrote to me saying that he could help me on that, it was very simple, after all at the end there stood the name: Paul.

The Reformation anniversary in 2017 must make clear that the churches of the Reformation are concerned with an educated faith and this also includes a historical-critical approach to the biblical texts.

8. Freedom

The year 2017 will be the first Reformation anniversary on which in Germany, along with most nations of the world, there is a clear separation of church and state and a clearly declared acceptance of constitutional law and human rights.

The further development of Luther's concept of freedom has led to many of the freedoms of today. "Liberty, equality, fraternity," the slogan of the French Revolution, has its roots in the thinking of Luther's "Freedom of the Christian," even though the Enlightenment often had to be pursued in the face of opposition from the church as an institution. The question will be whether Christian men and women are sufficiently aware of their heritage to be energetic advocates of freedom—on their own behalf, but also, and above all, for the freedom of other people. First and foremost it is about the freedom that Christ gives to us and, consequently, about freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, and freedom of opinion.

Today we can see it as a central achievement of the Reformation that faith and reason remain alongside each

other and also that it prepared the way for the Enlightenment, however much and for however long the churches resisted it. Today we can say it is good, for both sides, that there is separation of religion and state. A kind of "theocracy" or indeed a "religious dictatorship" does not promote freedom. Thank God that we live in a free society, in which men and women can be members of a religious community, or not. That fits with the "Free-dom of a Christian."

This also has political consequences. After the experience of the failure of the church and the ease with which it was led astray in the Nazi period, the lesson was learned that the church must hang on to the freedom to speak out when human rights are trampled underfoot. That was also the experience of the church in the German Democratic Republic. That is also the experience all over the world—for example in South Africa, Argentina, and Iran.

The Reformation anniversary in 2017 must also point up the political dimension of the Reformation concept of freedom.

9. Justification

In 2017 we will celebrate the Reformation anniversary in an achievement-oriented society. Many people do not immediately understand Luther's question about a gracious God, but they are worried about whether their life has any purpose. What if I can't keep up because I don't have a job, I don't earn enough, don't look good enough? The promise for life found by Luther—that God has long since endowed you with significance, regardless of what you can achieve for yourself—needs to be given a new translation for our own age. You are a person of high standing because God sees you as such. Your current account for life is in the black and nothing that you do, nothing that you fail at,

can bring it into the red as far as God is concerned. The inner freedom that such a fundamental conviction brings with it can also be shown today.

The Reformation anniversary in 2017 will be able to clearly articulate the discrepancies in an achievement-oriented society.

10. Globalization

The year 2017 will be the first Reformation anniversary celebrated in a global perspective.

We live in a globalized world. But that was already the case in the sixteenth century. Anyone who closely examines the records of the Imperial Diet of Worms in 1521⁶ will realize that Luther's appearance there, while important, was only one of the topics dealt with. The Emperor Charles V was striving for a reform of the empire. Belgrade had been conquered by Sultan Suleiman I and the supposed "Turkish threat" was high on the agenda. Securing sovereignty in the region of Spain was also an urgent matter, with an eye to the colonies. Movements for social revolution had

risen in the kingdom of Valencia. Britain, France, and Italy were also on the scene. We can see that, in the face of European expansion, particularly in the direction of Spanish and Portuguese colonies, Luther himself had a very restricted view of the world. Heinz Schilling writes in his new biography: "The world view of the Reformer remained a continental one to his death, and was rarely touched by the emerging new worlds." And yet the Reformation was a European event which very soon took on international proportions.

The Reformation anniversary in 2017 must be seen in a global perspective.

These ten pointers bring out the main features of the Reformation anniversary in 2017 for both church and society: diversity, ecumenism, religious dialogue, focus in a secular world, the role of women, division, education, freedom, justification in an achievement-oriented society, and globalization. The Luther decade leading up to it can contribute toward opening up these issues.

6. *Der Reichstag zu Worms von 1521*, Fritz Reuter, ed., (Worms, 1971).

7. Heinz Schilling, *Martin Luther*, (Munich, 2012) p. 26.

Response to Dr. Margot Kässmann

Wayne Miller

Bishop of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

To begin, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Kässmann for her thoughtful paper on the significance of the Reformation legacy, as we now approach the 500th anniversary of those transformative events in Europe.

Each of the ten points she has raised deserve continued conversation, but given the brevity of time allotted for this response, I would like to focus on just four of the ten points, which I found particularly provocative in my own context.

1. “Freedom” is a theme that has been central throughout my life and work as a primary feature of the Reformation legacy. But in this cultural context, where freedom is often confused with individualism and personal license, I think it is increasingly important for the Reformation traditions to speak about the inseparability of personal freedom and communal responsibility, perhaps under the biblical mandate that, “I am a slave to no one; but the servant of all.” The confusion in our culture about the relationship between personal freedom and communal responsibility has once again manifested itself in the ELCA’s debates about gender orientation. In this debate, the notion of “bound conscience” is increasingly being used to bind us apart from community with one another into a state of isolated personal opinion, when, in fact, the formulation was intended to express the importance of communal connection with those
2. Dr. Kässmann has rightly emphasized the fact that the so-called “*solae*” of Reformation theology: that is, “Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone, Scripture Alone,” continue to be a central defining concept of Reformation Protestantism. But even though, for Luther and the early reformers, this formulation was an expression of deep personal religious experience, history has transformed them. During the period of Protestant Orthodoxy, the *Solae* increasingly took on the character of an ideology demanding intellectual assent. By the time of the Thirty-Years War (1618-1648), which destroyed one third of the population of Europe, this intellectual assent had become something of a fealty oath with life or death implications. I believe that one of the challenges to the ongoing vitality of Reformation Protestantism will be whether we can successfully reestablish the *Solae* as a deeply internalized religious experience rather

than a mere idea. To say that I agree with Luther about grace, faith, Christ, and scripture is really quite different from a daily remembrance that "All that I am and all that I have comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone." The latter statement is not just what I think; it is who I am.

3. Dr. Kässmann's observation about the role of women in church leadership, grounded in the central importance of our baptismal identity, is provocative on two levels. At face value, it is an important conversation about gender in a time where there is deep division even within Protestantism itself about gender equality. But beyond this, her observations point to the broader issue of the appropriateness of all privilege structures in the church—social structures created on the basis of race, gender orientation, wealth or social position, and even clericalism in the leadership structures of the church. After all, I have not been invited to respond to this paper by virtue of the fact that I was baptized in 1950 as Wayne Nolan Miller. I am not even here as a result of personal intellectual ability or achievement. I have been invited to respond to this paper purely by virtue of a privilege that attaches itself to the office of bishop. And it is unclear in the conversation about these privilege structures whether our ethical and theological objective is to eliminate the structures of privilege, to radically democratize all positions of leadership and authority, or, instead, to open access to the structures of privilege so that social categories formerly excluded from privilege may now be included in the structures of privilege. These are two very different ends achieved by very different means. The question then becomes whether it is possible to create a body of Christ with differentiated roles and functions based on gifts and abilities without this differentiation implying a hierarchy or distinction of personal worth.
4. Finally, I was drawn to the conversation about "globalization," which, in contemporary Western society, is really more than an observation about human migration patterns or multiculturalism. Globalization is now a technical term referring to neo-liberal capitalist economic theory—an economic ideology increasingly grounded in a separation between economy and community. When economic interests and the relentless pursuit of personal wealth are divorced from the context of relational community, accountability to any sense of economic ethics disappears. People are dehumanized into clients, customers, or laborers to be exploited, rather than those with whom we share life. And the devastating human impact of hyperbolic wealth disparity and unrestrained greed is ignored, normalized, and even valued as a virtue that benefits macro-economic development as a whole. Human beings become unfortunate collateral damage in a system that works. Whether or not a Reformation theology that is rooted in the problem of "justification" has the resources in its understanding of "sanctification" and "stewardship" to deal adequately with these enormous ethical challenges remains to be seen.

Response to Dr. Margot Kässmann

Vítor Westhelle

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It was a great pleasure to hear this presentation of Dr. Kässmann, with her ten points preceded by an introduction, and concluding each one with a short thesis. If this lecture represents the true intention and the scope of the jubilee celebrations, and I believe it does, it must be appreciated by all those (including Lutherans) who are committed to live out the freedom of God's creatures, and all creatures, with engaging respect and commonly shared responsibilities and a concern for justice. I say this in profound deference for the plans being laid out and the way Dr. Kässmann presented her interpretation of the ongoing decade leading to the 2017 celebrations of the EKD. Her first point, setting the tone for the rest of the presentation, is about having a self-critical view of the Reformation, and from there she goes through the promising positive contributions in the areas of ecumenism, dialogue with other religions, secularism, gender issues, Protestants' schismatic tendencies, education, freedom, justification, and globalization. It is quite an ambitious agenda to be inferred from the Reformation credenda, when it was not always explicitly spelled out as such 500 years ago. It is about honoring a shaping event in Western history while trying hard to avoid being raptured in euphoria or falling into complacency.

This is indeed a difficult task when we consider the Reformation as a disruptive event—and the Reformation was and should be considered as a disruptive event! However, grafted in the subconscious of societies affected by it erstwhile, the Reformation turned into the institutional

patterns of European culture and politics. How do you make an institutionalized reality an *event* again? Or to put it in other terms, how do you make an "orthodoxy" find again its "heretical" roots? The tendency to accommodate difference under the guise of inclusivism, dialogue, and ecumenism can indeed become a blinder to deep-rooted fragmentations resistant to assimilation. This is my concern. While I am involved in an international project on "Radicalizing the Reformation," in Denmark with the Aarhus University Project on "The Reformation and the Economy," and I hold (for half a year) a "Chair for Luther Research" in Brazil geared toward the Reformation jubilee I continue to ask myself, "How do you awaken the 'heretic' spirit of the Reformation, and indeed of Luther?"

As Dr. Kässmann correctly observed, "Luther himself had a very restricted view of the world." (One should remark that Bucer was the only Reformer, to my knowledge, who wrote incisive criticisms of Conquistadores and their abuses in the New World.) Yet those who were conquering the world were not so oblivious about Luther. During the second quarter of the sixteenth century the *autos-de-fé* used in the New World colonies contained this line to define the heretics: "They left this kingdom to become Lutherans." And little did they know about Luther's theology. (Though the infamous Ginés de Sepúlveda, who argued against Las Casas for the inhumanity of indigenous people, is probably the first to issue a criticism of Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio* immediately

after Luther's text was released in 1525.) Luther had indeed become a cypher for freedom and rebellion. But those were the times in which the Reformation territories in Europe served as the measuring stick to define heresy, rebellion, freedom, and non-conformity to the hegemonic Holy Roman Empire.

I suggest three points for the jubilee agenda to take into account. I say this because I confess being in tune with the Reformers in saying that no one defines freedom without first defining what hegemony is. And this is what pertains to our task today.

1. Lutherans were last to follow the large world communions (Roman Catholic, Anglican Presbyterian, Methodist, etc.) to find its majority migrating to the south of the planet. The ecumenical communions have been severely depleted of their original regional control. In less than one hundred years, way more than 40 percent of Lutherans are now outside of what The Lutheran World Federation defined as the three main "blocks," Central Europe, Scandinavia, and the United States. (The other communions have already surpassed the 50 percent mark.) And the statistics are changing so fast that it would not be a surprise to find that by 2017 more than half of those who confess themselves as Lutherans will be in non-traditional Lutheran territories. How theology will follow this trend and define Lutheranism not only by the letter of the Weimar Edition of Luther's works or the Book of Concord, but by the *viva vox* of an *ecclesia semper reformanda*, is a challenge. These Lutheran people in new contexts that the old barely knows have become the "new heretics." There is no *auto-de-fé* being read now, but a

condescending attitude that dismisses the theological competence of these new "heretics" is still prevalent, particularly in Europe. Yet it is not only the melody that is changing. The scores in which to place the notes are also alien.

2. These Lutherans in new contexts are becoming the majority of the Lutherans worldwide. Unlike the ones of traditional Lutheranism, they are an upcoming *majority* in contexts in which they are a *minority* surrounded by other faiths and confessions. This recognition is also what should be part of the celebration of the jubilee. The contours of the Reformation are not to be defined against its own internal strives, or against Roman Catholicism, secularism, and not against other religions, but over against other powers and principalities (the systems of domination). The Reformation defined them then; but it is left for us to name them today.
3. Finally, I would like to go back to Luther as a cypher, or as a figure. I mean this not against Luther scholarship, but as something to be understood before other "deeper" aspects may be scrutinized and discerned. Can we understand that again? What was Luther if not a *figura*, a cypher in the years that followed 1517, before the pamphlets of 1520 were widely recognized, not to mention before *The Bondage of the Will*, before the *Confession* of 1528, before his massive writings of the 1530s? Luther was a cypher, a *figura*, who stood for something that was defined only by bare caricature lines. But that is what helped decisively to launch a movement called the Reformation, way before any of the substantial issues defining differences between factions the

Reformation took from the early 1520s on. To read 1517 from the standpoint of 1525 (with the Anabaptist disputes), or 1529 (with Zwingli), or 1530 (with Melancthon in Augsburg and Luther in Coburg), or 2013 will never get you into the Reformation. One needs to look at the figure and how it is transfigured. Here are some questions that might offer us a more promising start: Why were the condemned people in the Indies in the early 1500 called Lutherans? Or to investigate more recent “transfigurations” of Luther: Why did Michael King Jr. change his birth certificate in 1957 to officially adopt the name of Martin Luther King Jr.? Why did Eduardo Hoornaert, a Brazilian Roman Catholic historian say that Luther was the “theologian that taught the church to think with the people and from the people”? Why did Leonardo Boff call Luther

the “precursor of liberation theology”? Why did the Italian Roman Catholic philosopher Gianni Vattimo say “we need a new Luther”? The examples can be multiplied, but the answer seems to be a simple one. It is because they did not read the Reformation starting from the dense texts of a Luther, a Zwingli, a Calvin, etc. Instead, and this is the crux: they started with one event in which a *figura* appeared, a cypher that stands for what they identify themselves with as well as a way of deciphering the signs of the times and places. They appeal to the Reformation to set themselves apart and resist the forces of assimilation. Is this not what *heiresis* means?

With my profound gratitude I thank Dr. Kässmann for leading us into this discussion with her inspiring lecture.

Response to Dr. Margot Kässmann

Anna Case-Winters

Professor of Theology, McCormick Theological Seminary

It is a great pleasure to be part of this conversation. As we gather here we are at one and the same time looking forward and looking back. We look forward to the Reformation Jubilee anticipating so many considered and creative plans for celebrating and commemorating—I love the ninety-five buses idea! And we look back with gratitude to God for Luther—whom Calvin called the pathfinder. It was fascinating to hear the history of celebrations of Luther and how in different eras; it is a *different Luther* that is celebrated. We look back to the Reformation itself with an honest appraisal of its insights, and its oversights, and its *unfinished business*. I will focus on this last—the unfinished business of the Reformation—in relation particularly to your important observation: that “2017 will be a Reformation anniversary with an ecumenical dimension.” I hope you are right. This is a *kairos* moment for the church that portends reconciliation of what has become divided.

This could be a time not only of celebration and commemoration but also of much needed repentance—*metanoia*—a “turning around” that is a turning toward those from whom we have long been estranged. Not only by that early original divide but also in the divisions since then among the churches of the Reformation. Some say that the Reformation set a precedent for dividing in the face of difference. Now we have “developed a habit of splintering”—even our splinters have splinters! We have too often been content to live apart—complacent with separation.

I hope that churches of the Reformation will use this auspicious occasion to take some further steps toward reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church. Though we hold that the Reformation was necessary; the divisions that followed were tragic. There is a brokenness that stands in need of healing. Recognizing this could be part of the “honest appraisal” you were commending, I think. I am not saying, “Let’s all return to the mother church.” I am not assuming a unity of uniformity. But what about a “reconciled diversity”? What about something like what Cardinal Walter Kasper called “a communion of communions”?

This is some unfinished business of the Reformation. Luther (and Calvin with him) thought the division in the church was scandalous. As you say, neither reformer aspired to founding a new church. Martin Luther, even after his excommunication in 1521, constantly strove for dialogue. He was completely convinced that Rome would come to see the necessity of the reforms and he cherished a hope that the pope would convene a General Council. John Calvin shared Luther’s profound regret over the division of the church. He expressed his deep concern in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury (Thomas Cranmer). He declared that the division of the church “is to be ranked among the chief evils of our time.... Thus it is that the members of the Church being severed, the body lies bleeding. So much does this concern me, that, if I could be of any service, I would

not grudge to cross even ten seas.”¹ Calvin’s depiction of Christ’s “dismembered” body is a powerful and compelling image. His discussions of the Lord’s Supper insist that we cannot separate communion with Christ from communion with one another.

I take hope when I think of some of the wonderful advances made in recent years. The signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was a momentous accomplishment of agreement upon one of the church-dividing issues of the Reformation. *And* it established a new model for reconciliation in its differentiated consensus format—affirming what we can affirm together and then allowing remaining differences to be articulated rather than obscured. It testifies that differences need not divide. Progress toward reconciliation is possible.

Closer to home, I hope that churches of the Reformation will seize this moment to turn toward one another. Lutheran and Reformed communions have a shared history in the Reformation, a shared understanding of the church, convictions of the centrality of word and sacrament. We even have shared agreements such as Leuenberg that have been in place for decades. And yet churches have not claimed the fullness of shared life available to them. Here in the United States we have the Formula of Agreement declaring full communion, yet our realizations of the communion we have declared are partial and fragmentary.

I heard one person joking that our situation is the reverse of the practice of many young adults today who live together but are not sure about getting married. We are fine with being married, but we are not sure about living together!

Have we reached our ecumenical limits? By no means!

In ecumenical work we often say that our unity is a gift of God. If it is, then it is like one of those gifts you sometimes find under the Christmas tree that are marked “assembly required.” The artist’s rendering of the altarpiece that depicts of key figures of the reformation—*assembled*—reconciled at the foot of the cross is a powerful one. Here is some unfinished business of the Reformation. We are going to need a bit more “ecclesial imagination” to find new ways of being church that make our unity a visible and lived reality.

I take hope in the moments of reconciliation/restoration we have seen in recent years. Some are from the vantage point of serving on the Joint Commission for Lutheran-Reformed Relations.

- There is a growing commitment to *union churches*. An example would be the “United Churches” in Germany, which combine Lutheran and Reformed traditions. I understand that the plan is that new church developments in the context will be done together, and the churches will be founded as union churches.
- In Argentina, there is a seminary in Buenos Aires (*Instituto Superior Evangelico de Estudios Teologicos*) that all Protestants attend together. They receive the same foundation in theological education with a few specialized courses in their particular traditions. They are set on a path of partnership in ministry.
- In France, the Lutheran and Reformed churches this year came together to form the United Protestant Church of France. In Namibia, most of the work done in the area of HIV and AIDS is done together. Church leaders there say, “Why have two separate mission efforts here? Why not pool resources, avoid reduplication of efforts, form a coalition for advocacy efforts?” Very wise.

1. Letter to Cranmer (1552), *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, pt. 4.

- And here we are: McCormick Theological Seminary (Presbyterian) and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, ideally situated for partnership. We are already sharing in some resources, staff, building spaces, and have a shared library. We participate in an ecumenical cluster of seminaries where students may freely cross denominational boundaries.

Common witness. Common work. There is a lot going on that would encourage the ecumenically committed. And there are some truly extraordinary occurrences in global ecumenical endeavors.

I had the privilege of attending the 2010 Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

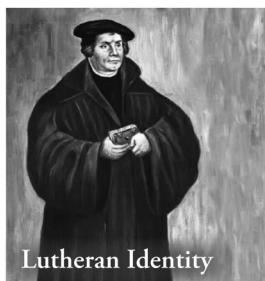
meeting in Stuttgart as a Reformed representative. I was there for the service of reconciliation where the LWF confessed the persecution of the Mennonites and engaged in an extraordinary act of repentance and a plea for reconciliation. It was beautiful, so moving, so needed.

This is a time for *ecclesial imagination*. What does it mean to be church and how may we live together as church in ways that better manifest our unity? This is a time to embrace unity as both gift and calling. What will they say of our 2017 Reformation Jubilee looking back some years hence? I hope they will say that we discerned the *kairos* and turned toward one another in the bold hope of reconciliation.



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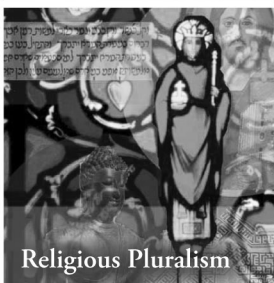
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Book Reviews

The Season of Creation: A Preaching

Commentary. Edited by Norman C. Habel, David Rhoads, and H. Paul Santmire. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-8006-9657-3. vi and 234 pages. Paper. \$35.00.

The Season of Creation is designed to amplify liturgical attention to God's creation by focusing four worship services per year on the theme of creation, our relationship to creation, and through creation to our relationship with God. It is intended to augment the Revised Common Lectionary, with three cycles of four weeks each. Additional liturgical resources are available at <http://seasonof-creation.com>.

Part One of the book covers background, both historical (such as the season's origins in Australia and in Dimitrios I of Constantinople declaring September 1 to be "Creation Day") and theological (making the case for lifting up the idea of God as creator, discussing the ways the parts of the order can be understood as pointing to God the creator, and calling for a scriptural hermeneutic that eschews anthropocentrism). I find these pieces to be the most valuable, especially their trinitarian understanding of Christ's role in creation.

Part Two of the book consists of the "lectionary" and commentary from twelve scholars, one for each Sunday. The commentary is excellent. The selection of the texts themselves, however, leaves something to be desired. There is no discussion of how the texts relate to one another, other than to mention they all are supposed to relate to the theme of the Sunday. Even with this guideline, some of the texts seem to overreach. For example, why is John 3:1-16, and not John 15 assigned to Forest Sunday? However, for other Sundays, like Land Sunday, the texts are complexly related and offer an abundance of possible interpretations.

In a world where competing lection-

aries vie for our attention, this project is a welcome break from that trend. It is clearly conceptualized and is not meant to supplant the Church Year. Most of us can devote four weeks to this theme. Moreover, the theological argument of Part One applies to the entire year.

*Timothy Andrew Leitzke, Pastor
Tree of Life Lutheran Church
Odessa, Del.*

The Israelite Samaritan Version of the

Torah. Edited by Benyamim Tsedaka and Sharon Sullivan. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6519-9. xxxvi and 522 pages. Cloth. \$26.00.

The Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) first came to the attention of Western scholars in 1616 by Pietro della Valle. While very similar to the standard Hebrew text (MT), it differs according to a study made in the nineteenth century in approximately 6,000 readings, half of which are orthographic (different use of vowel letters).

The variant readings are of two types. The SP refers consistently to the location of the temple as the place that God has chosen (Mount Gerizim) rather than the place that God will choose in MT (Jerusalem; see Deut 12:5 and some twenty other times). Appended to the Ten Commandments in both Exodus and Deuteronomy in SP is a commandment to build an altar on Mount Gerizim. The second type of variant readings is harmonization (additions in Exodus and Numbers on the basis of Deut 1-3; filling out how commands were fulfilled; linguistic corrections) or the usual variant readings that crop up in all manuscripts.

One of the great boons coming from study of the Dead Sea Scrolls is the identification of the second type of variant reading as pre-Samaritan, that is, these identical or similar variations were found in manuscripts that lacked the sectarian readings of the first type. Hence the Israelite Samaritan community used a well-known Hebrew text type to which sectarian readings were introduced. In



pre-Christian times there were a variety of textual versions of most biblical books.

Tsedaka, the principal translator and editor, is a member of the small surviving Samaritan community living in places like Nablus, Holon, and Tel-Aviv in Israel. He has arranged the translations of the SP side by side, indicating variations between the two texts in bold face. Where one text is longer than the other, ellipses are added in the shorter version. The translation of MT is that of the Jewish Publication Society of 1917. The translation of SP is by the editors. Personal names in SP are given according to Samaritan pronunciation, which is often significantly different: Eloowwem (SP) vs. Elohim (MT) or Qamoowwel (SP) vs. Kemuel (MT).

This book will greatly assist individuals not expert in Hebrew to learn much more about SP. Unfortunately, the editors did not conform their translation of SP to the style of the JPS translation when the Hebrew is identical. Hence the reader must assume that “Of their flesh ye shall not eat, and their carcasses ye shall not touch; they are unclean unto you” (JPS) is identical in Hebrew to “You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses. They are unclean to you” (SP; Lev 11:8).

Ralph W. Klein
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Rudolf Bultmann: A Biography. By Conrad Hammann, Philip E. Devenish, translator. Salem, Ore.: Polebridge Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-1-5981-5118-3. xii and 610 pages. Cloth. \$60.00.

Here is the definitive biography, with a theological analysis of his scholarship, of a, perhaps even *the*, dominant theologian of the twentieth century. Hammann has gathered, examined and interpreted Bultmann's publications, unpublished archival materials, and reactions from theologians and his students to give a comprehensive picture of his life and work. Hammann sets Bultmann into the cultural and political environment of his life, from his birth in 1884 till his death in 1976.

Bultmann's life was not an easy one fi-

nancially or academically. He suffered in the years of the Weimar Republic with its massive inflation, lived through the oppression of the Nazi regime, and experienced the physical hardships of life immediately after World War II. Throughout this changing world he was academically productive, raising theological and social issues that often dominated New Testament, dogmatic and philosophical theology. His participation in dialectical theology, his refusal to sign “required” documents in the Nazi period, his raising the issue of *Entmythologisierung* and other writing often set the agenda for German—and in some cases, international—theology. Reading this biography will be like reading the theological history of much of the last century. The bibliography (537–575), lists almost every significant theological publication of the period, and Hammann has used them all. Forty-three plates provide visual context for Bultmann's life.

Anyone interested in the last century of theological history must devour this book. It is an outstanding achievement.

Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Cultivating Unity: within the Biodiversity of God. By Anne Primavesi. Salem, Ore.: Polebridge Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-1-5981-5031-5. v and 209 pages. Paper. \$20.00.

Irish systematic theologian Anne Primavesi has written extensively on ecology and particularly the theological implications of the Gaia hypothesis. In *Cultivating Unity* she analyzes the Christian tradition with regard to biodiversity. Primavesi argues the tradition has undermined respect for biodiversity through an anthropocentric bias and a distorted, imperial view of God. The God of Jesus suggests a radically different understanding of God's kingdom which recognizes the interdependence and indiscriminate value of all things. Jesus is a parable of God, the embodiment of God's kingdom—of *koinonia*—in the world.

In a context of increasing awareness



about environmental interconnection and alteration Primavesi raises important questions for scholars, clergy, and lay Christians to contemplate. She draws attention to eco-theological concerns about the doctrine of incarnation (What does it mean for the human's and God's relation to other forms of life?) and ethical concerns about the nature of community while maintaining diversity and of how to promote radical nonviolence.

While Primavesi engages significant questions, her scholarship does not dig deep enough to provide satisfying, logically consistent, or revolutionary answers. Her proposal of nonviolence across species would be an example. Primavesi does not adequately address the complexity of ethical questions such as how, as a species requiring the consumption of other species—plant or animal—for survival, one can live with such radical nonviolence. A further issue lies with inconsistency between logical style and the proposed ethic. Primavesi utilizes a style of persuasion common in arguing a passionately held position: she creates dualisms. One might ask, though, whether creating antagonistic opposites in logic or style of discourse unintentionally furthers the very method by which violence works. Consequently, the text can be recommended as a primer to important theological and ethical issues for the Christian today, but not necessarily for the proposed resolutions.

Terra S. Rowe
PhD candidate, Drew University
Madison, N.J.

God's Saving Grace: A Pauline Theology.

By Frank J. Matera. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6747-6. 283 pages. Paper. \$28.00.

This interpretation of Pauline theology is distinctive in two ways. One is that Matera is writing a theology of the Pauline letters, not of Paul himself. Thus all thirteen letters under Paul's name are covered, even though Matera does question the authorship of some of the disputed letters. The other distinctive aspect is that Matera grounds all of Pauline theology in Paul's call/conversion experience, when

the appearance of the risen Christ changed Paul's life through an experience of God's saving grace. With the clarity and confidence of a mature scholar of Paul, Matera works his way from an examination of Paul's experience through christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, ethics, eschatology, and finally Paul's understanding of God. Matera's approach is to draw out the distinctive emphases of each letter, recognizing that Paul works out his theology in response to the particular situations of the letters. He also finds a deep coherence in Paul's theology, even seeing lines of continuity and development in letters that may not be by Paul himself. However, this approach tends to downplay the serious differences between Paul and the later letters. It seems to me that this kind of literary/historical descriptive theology, though well done in this case, fails to appreciate adequately the larger social and political context of Paul's churches. Matera cannot in a book of this scope give a full discussion of the vast and contentious scholarship on Pauline theology, yet in his copious footnotes he opens a helpful window into the discussions. This book will be a useful resource for anyone who wants a clear and concise introduction to Pauline theology and for those who need a handy reference tool when exploring a particular theme for preaching or teaching.

David Kuck
United Theological College
Kingston, Jamaica

Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today.

By Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder. New York, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2011. ISBN: 978-1-5707-5911-6. xi and 194 pages. Paper. \$35.00.

Prophetic Dialogue is written under the rubric of God's mission undergirding the church as missionary by its very nature. Its direction is characterized by a spirituality which is closer to David Bosch's term, "bold humility." In defining mission as dialogue in a prophetic sense, the authors seek to break through the



colonial mentality of conquering the world for Christ. A Trinitarian characterization of God's very nature in dialogue upholds mission as a prophetic dialogue. In fact, mission is not an innocent word but calls for acts of repentance, orthopraxis, confidence, and discernment. In defining mission as prophecy, the authors include components such as witness, proclamation, being a contrast community, and speaking truth to power.

The authors further to seek the relationship between prophetic dialogue and contextual theology, so that missional theology is qualified and enriched by the character of contextual theology. Adopting the contextual theological approach to mission, missional theology entails a constructive horizon in terms of reconciliation between various factions and enemies, driven by dialogical and prophetic conversation concerning the complex reality of injustice and ecological sustainability.

The authors bring an important contribution to scholarly integration of systematic theology with missional-contextual theology in a constructive-hermeneutical manner. As Christians we live out mission in terms of dialogue with and discerning our context. Thus we correlate the context with the broader and older Christian tradition for the sake of proclamation, witness and recognition of the other. I highly recommend this book for those interested in missional responsibility for the world, especially in dialogue with different faith communities.

Paul S. Chung
Luther Seminary

Reading the Bible for All the Wrong

Reasons. By Russell Pregeant. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-8006-9844-7. x and 136 pages. Paper. \$16.99.

This is a book about hermeneutics: what it means to say that we "believe the Bible," and therefore how we ought to read it. Pregeant

argues that the Bible is often abused because readers bring historically and theologically inappropriate questions to it. This short book dismantles those abusive ways of reading, and suggests more appropriate and life-giving ways to understand the Bible's role.

In the first two chapters, Pregeant explores what the Bible is and what kind of authority it carries; distorted readings come when we forget that, from the beginning, the Bible's primary role has been to nurture the community's faith. Chapters 3-5 deal with issues where misuse of the Bible has been particularly egregious in recent times: setting the Genesis creation accounts in opposition to the science of cosmology and evolution, bending biblical prophecy into an attempt to foretell the future, and replacing the biblical call to seek shalom in our ethical decisions with a focus on identifying and enforcing supposedly eternal regulations. Finally, chapters 6 and 7 suggest faithful ways for us to hear the Bible in relation to Christian doctrine and discipleship.

This book grew from adult Sunday school classes, and it would work very well in that setting. Pregeant's writing is very accessible, and he uses vignettes from conversations and ministry experiences to ground the discussion of hermeneutics in the concrete realities of life. This kind of clear, compassionate, and insistent explanation of what the Bible is good for and how we ought to read it is what many of our congregations largely failed to do when we began ordaining women, and what many of us are failing to do again in more recent discussions about sexual orientation. Given those failures, we should not wonder when it seems as though the Bible is either abused or ignored in our congregations. Pregeant's book offers a clear and useable remedy.

Brian Peterson
Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary



Briefly Noted

The second edition of *The Disciples According to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate* by C. Clifton Black (Eerdmans, \$45.00; ISBN: 978-0-8028-2798-2) simply reprints the first edition (1989) with an "Afterword: Mark's Disciples and Markan Redaction after Twenty-Five Years." (pp. 297–340) This addition brings a valuable work up-to-date, including an updated extensive bibliography.

Edgar Krentz



A medal from 1817, commemorating the forcible unification of Lutheran and Calvinist churches (the Prussian Union)

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Preaching Helps

Epiphany 4 to Lent 4

A Shift in Perspective

I seldom preach in my current ministry as a professor of pastoral care, and even less since I said yes to the invitation to play keyboard in our congregation's music ministry team, which keeps me occupied not only on Wednesday evening for practice but several hours on Sunday. I now look back at my preaching ministry of long ago, when I served as the pastor of a congregation, from the perspective of someone who sits in the pew and listens, hoping for the gospel to touch and illuminate my life and *our* life together.

Thus it was with deep interest that I read the Rev. Sarah Trone Garriott's commentaries from Epiphany 4 to Lent 4. Sarah is currently on leave from call in the Virginia Synod and in the call process in the Southeastern Iowa Synod. She left her call to Martin Luther Evangelical Lutheran Church in the mountains of Bergton, Virginia, in May so that her husband Will could accept a new teaching position at Drake University in Des Moines. When she sent her commentaries she included a note that expressed her deep gratitude for the years she shared with friends, church family, colleagues, bishop, and synod staff in that corner of the world. She spoke of missing them all dearly, and of her hope that through these commentaries she might again be at the table in Southern Kitchen Restaurant, where her pericope group might set out a cup of decaf in remembrance and thanksgiving for life together and for the shared ministry of preaching the gospel.

I paid particular attention to two strong convictions conveyed in Sarah's reflections: that the gospel invites *embodied* response from those who dare to proclaim it, and that *children* are vital members of the congregation who hear that gospel proclaimed. Her reflections on messages to children are a unique and welcome contribution to this edition of Preaching Helps. I expect that Sarah and Will's children, Ian (age 3) and August (age 1), have been blessed by their preaching mother, who seeks to bring the Word to life for young children, and I hope other children will be blessed by the suggestions Sarah offers us as we imagine children as "hearers and doers of the Word." More than once I have heard adults give profound witness to what *they* took away from a children's sermon. I also have heard preachers express trepidation about preaching the gospel to children. May Sarah's thoughtful reflections offer abundant preaching help to all who want to invite children to hear and participate in the good news of the gospel!

Kathleen Billman
Temporary editor, Preaching Helps

The Word has become flesh in the birth of Jesus Christ—now what? Recovering from the Christmas season, the preacher and the congregation may be inclined to coast along until things heat up again with Lent. And yet, the season after Epiphany is an excellent time to encounter the Word in a fully embodied, active, living way. However, having just been handed four straight weeks of lecture from the “Sermon on the Mount,” this is no easy task for the preacher to facilitate. Keep in mind that the disciples were never meant to receive this teaching in isolation from their active participation in the ministry of Jesus. What they will learn here on the mountaintop will immediately be followed up with real life encounters and hands-on experiences. In their time with Jesus they were not only told, but also shown and invited to participate. Don’t forget: at the end of the Gospel of Matthew the disciples were invited back up to the mountaintop in Galilee to sit and listen before beginning the ministry all over again.

In order to encourage this interplay of listening/doing/witnessing/participating I have offered two angles that are not customary in these preaching notes: gospel proclamation and children’s sermons. From my own experience in the pew, the gospel often comes across as simply something to get through so that the preacher can get on to the sermon. While we should all agree that the preacher’s words are ancillary to the gospel, I have seen the gospel proclamation get short shrift far too often. Greater care in our preparation to proclaim the gospel and more effort in the actual proclamation will benefit the listener as well as the preacher. Meanwhile, children’s sermons challenge the preacher to think about communicating the gospel message in active and experiential ways. From the Gospel of Matthew we know

that the disciples needed to actively experience their faith. The same is true for modern day disciples. Therefore, don’t be afraid to include the entire assembly in these lessons! I will not be commenting on the other lectionary texts. In keeping with the theme of Epiphany, I will focus exclusively on how Jesus reveals himself to us in these texts from the Gospel of Matthew.

February 2, 2014

Epiphany 4

Matthew 5:1–12

Context is everything. Remember that this sermon comes at the beginning of the ministry. Jesus takes his disciples away from the crowd and the world below to prepare them to experience everything from an entirely new and counter-cultural perspective. During the days that follow, they will not only be with these “blessed” ones, they will also become them. From their new vantage point they will receive the gifts of mercy, purity of heart, and peacemaking. They will also be given the not-so-welcome treasures of persecution, rejection, and slander. The ministry of Jesus will turn the world upside down: sickness into health, weakness into strength, weeping into joy, death into new life. Jesus’ words are a promise and a warning for all that is to come, telling them (and us) to hang on.

Proclamation: How does proclamation change when it comes from a different place? If the gospel is ordinarily read from a text, what might the impact be if it comes from the heart (memory)? If the congregation is accustomed to hearing the gospel from the pulpit, how does it sound in the midst of the people? If the pastor is

usually the one speaking the gospel, what may it mean when the people experience the words coming from their own mouths? What would the impact be if gospel phrases were juxtaposed with images, or the sharing of brief personal experiences of mourning, mercy, peacemaking, rejection? The act of gospel proclamation itself can become an illustration for preaching, to be reflected on and unpacked with the congregation.

Children's sermon: We get glimpses of God's kingdom when we experience the world from a different perspective: sitting down with the down and out, being with the lonely, reaching out to the outsider. Encourage the children to look at the world around them from a number of different perspectives: lying on the floor, up in the pulpit, held upside down by an able bodied high-school student. Encourage the congregation, too, to turn around in their seats, or even (the horror!) sit in a different spot. What blessings do we receive when we experience the world from a different perspective? Why is this so difficult to do? How does the church help us to step outside our comfort zone?

February 9, 2014

Epiphany 5

Matthew 5:13-20

Jesus sets some impossibly high standards for his followers. How can salt keep its taste? How does one come to shine? It sounds like there are only two options: out-Pharisee the Pharisees, or give up. But remember the context. The disciples are gathered around Jesus, close enough to touch him, hanging on his every word. Because this is such difficult teaching, they will have to stay close to the teacher

in order to follow it. It is easier now, up here on the mountaintop with no distractions and nothing threatening to come in between. Down in the valley, among the crowds, in the midst of controversy and conflict, following will prove to be much more difficult. It is only by sticking close to Jesus, watching him, listening to him, being in close relationship with him that there will be any possibility of shining for the world to see. He is the source. After all, salt and light were both given their natures by the creator. And from Genesis, we remember, it was through the word that light came to shine.

Proclamation: What kind of proclamation really catches our attention? What kind of communication really sets us on fire? A number of suggestions were made last week for adding some salt to the proclamation of the gospel. This week, think about how Jesus was speaking this word. He was not addressing the crowd but, instead, a small group in an intimate gathering. Is there a way to make this message more personal for your people? Ask them to set aside their bulletins so that you can make eye contact. Come down into the assembly, moving from person to person. Or, consider inviting members to speak certain lines to their neighbor, "you are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world."

Children's sermon: What does it mean to be a light in Christ? A light bulb cannot shine without a power source. A candle-wick will not burn until it encounters a flame. Use something flashy (batteries and a flashlight, flood lights and an outlet, flash paper and the Christ Candle) to illustrate Christ as the source for our shine. What important aspects of this relationship can you illustrate through your example? How does the faith community (scripture,

prayer, service) help us plug in, charge up, keep shining?

February 16, 2014 Epiphany 6

Matthew 5:21–37

There is a difference between taking the Scripture literally and taking the Scripture seriously. The next time anyone claims that they take Scripture literally, check to see how many limbs they still have. By the standards Jesus is setting out here, no one could make it through this life with body fully intact. As Luther's Small Catechism makes clear, the commandments are not simply a checklist of dos and don'ts. The commandments are also matters of the heart, and therefore impossible to fulfill. Jesus is not serious about using self-mutilation to stay on a faithful course. However, Jesus is dead serious about the devastating effects of sin, and he underscores it with gore and blood. In last week's gospel, Jesus revealed that he is the one who can and will fulfill the impossible law. This dramatic teaching draws the disciples in even closer to Jesus. They are not learning how to fend for themselves, but instead, how to cling to him. This will be the only way through the often difficult (and sometimes terrible) days to come.

Proclamation: Sometimes we need an in-your-face kind of warning to really grab our attention. Recall a time that you were given (or gave) such a warning. What did it look, sound, and feel like? The graphic imagery of this gospel begs for passionate delivery. Jesus meant every word to hit hard and lodge itself in the audience's mind. How can you do the same? This would be an excellent passage

to deliver by heart. Find a good sport or two who will agree to let you "get in their face" during the proclamation. Or at the least, consider delivering the gospel with gestures for the cutting, plucking, and throwing away. I know of one pastor who brought a chainsaw into worship space and let it rip. Consider your context and push the envelope just a little farther than is comfortable.

Children's sermon: This Scripture is frightening and for good reason. Jesus uses an age-old parenting tactic to warn the straying children of God. Imagine a parent warning a small child who is about to run into the street. They sound angry and they may say things that are frightening to the child. Yet, the parent speaks out of fear for the child's safety. Ultimately, the parent wishes for the child to take hold of their hand and let them guide the way. What are some frightening warnings that parents, health care providers, public safety officials, and other caregivers give to children? What are the loving reasons why they were given? If there are doctors, dentists, teachers, law enforcement officers in the congregation, invite them to do a children's sermon cameo and share these warnings and their reasons.

February 23, 2014 Epiphany 7

Matthew 5:38–48

There are many Christians who would prefer to stop listening at verse 38. But as we have heard over the past several Sundays, Jesus takes the dominant paradigm and subverts it. Who is blessed? It's not who you think. And for that matter, blessing does not mean what you may have imagined. How does one get into

the kingdom? Maybe not the way you thought. What does it mean to follow the law? Well—guess again. And today, what does justice look like? For starters, it's not a Clint Eastwood movie. Everything the disciples thought they knew about the world, the coming kingdom, God, righteousness has been turned upside down up here on the mountain. And now here's the itinerary for their ministry: go beyond the accepted boundaries of generosity, service, love, and forgiveness. In transgressing these boundaries they will come to experience, maybe even take part in, the heavenly Father's perfection. But once again, this will only be possible through Jesus. It will take a good push from Jesus to go into new territory. Jesus will often be dragging them to places they do not want to go. And as we will see in Matthew, there will be many occasions for the disciples to drag their feet, dig in their heels, and even run in the other direction.

Proclamation: While we would all like to nod our heads and say that we agree wholeheartedly with Jesus, the truth is—we don't. A quick glimpse at the nightly news, an ear to local gossip, or a seat at the congregation's last council meeting reveals our true inclination. Make some space for the congregation to react to each scenario that Jesus puts forth. Pausing after each hard teaching will give time for the listener to let the words sink in. During these pauses, it may be effective for the speaker to express the confusion, surprise, or outrage at what Jesus is asking (looks that say, "Wait a minute! Huh? Excuse me?!"). When it is acknowledged that we are in the company of other sinners, it is a little easier to face up to our own sin.

Children's sermon: When faced with these scenarios, there is a significant difference between what Jesus is asking us to do

and the things that we would really like to do. If these encounters were played out for us in a real-life way, many in the congregation would admit wanting instead to strike back, hold back, hate, and curse. There may be some willing thespians in your community who could act out each scenario, demonstrating two possible responses (the world's way and Jesus' way). When each encounter is brought to life, it drives home how hard it truly is to live the way that Jesus is asking. What can help us strive for this perfection? How are we given opportunities to repent and begin again each time we fall short? It is clear that we need a supportive, accountable, forgiving community with Jesus at the center. How does worship help us experience this?

March 2, 2014 Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1–9

For the past four weeks we sat with the disciples taking in Jesus' teaching. Up high on the mountain, we had a privileged view, far above the troubled world below. Up there, we were among a small group of chosen ones set apart from the noise and confusion in the crowd. On this Sunday, we are again perched on the mountain peak, but not for long. This transitional gospel leads us and the disciples back down to earth, and onward, into the dark valley of Lent. Peter, always the foil, reflects our own desires to remain in the highs of faith. But Jesus is calling us to follow him to the cross. It takes a heavenly rebuke to remind us to listen to Jesus instead of our own desires, and get our feet moving.

Proclamation: This is such a dramatic gospel! Booming voice from on high, trembling disciples groveling on the ground,

tension rising as Jesus calls us into the terror and glory that still await us. Have some AV expertise in the congregation? Let those heavenly words resound from the rafters with an unexpected and offstage voice. Draw attention to the up and down movement of the text with your hand gestures. Or, make use of the architectural highs and lows in your worship space, beginning the lesson up by the altar and working your way down the aisle toward the exit.

Children's sermon: There is a great deal of vertical movement in this gospel. Up on the mountain and down into the valley. The disciples standing on up their own two feet, then falling down to the ground. Peter feeling uppity enough to make suggestions before he is taken down a peg or two. Jesus lifting the disciples up out of their fear, only to then lead them down into the valley. The foreshadowing of Jesus being lifted onto the cross, lowered into the tomb, and finally raised to new life. Lutherans are familiar with the ups and downs of worship: standing, sitting, kneeling, confessing sins, singing praises. Rouse the congregation from their pre-sermon slumber by moving them through the ups and downs of this narrative. Children will especially love hitting the deck with the pastor as they imagine being those terrified disciples. Ups and downs are an important part of our liturgical year and a fact of our faith life. We don't just live our faith in the high points, but also in the down low times. It is only after the lowest low (the grave) that we will come to experience the highest high (the new life of resurrection). All the while, Jesus is there, lifting us up out of our fear and helping us to keep moving forward.

LENT

The extended teaching of the season after Epiphany revealed a world turned inside out and upside down by the Word made flesh. Now it's time for all of us to experience this new world first hand, as we follow Jesus down the mountainside and on to the cross. The cross does not happen to be on our way. We are not following Jesus if we are simply sitting in our seats, living out our same old routines, stuck in the same old ruts. Lent is a time for active faith that moves us in new directions—the way that Jesus is leading. Unfortunately, the way that Jesus is leading always happens to be in the direction we'd rather not venture. As we were reminded on the Transfiguration mountaintop, we need to really listen to him in order to keep following.

In order to spur the preacher in new directions I have been including two aspects of preaching that are not common to these preaching notes: gospel proclamation and children's sermons. I am aware that some pastors and congregations have one way that they prefer to deliver/receive the gospel. Lent is the perfect time to breathe new life into the proclamation by trying something outside the comfort zone. After all, God chose to make the Word flesh rather than deliver it in neatly typed bulletin inserts. The Word will go somewhere quite unexpected and do some surprising things when it is made flesh. Meanwhile, children's sermons are a wonderful time for the preacher to experiment with more active and creative ways of communicating the gospel message. Many adults are willing to oblige unorthodox methods if it is "for the kids." But these same adults (including the preacher) may be pleasantly surprised by how these experiences move them to new appreciation for the gospel and the sermon. In order to devote full

attention to Jesus' journey to the cross, I will only provide commentary for the gospel texts in these notes.

March 5, 2014 Ash Wednesday

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

We go straight from the mountaintop to a real downer: Ash Wednesday. In my last parish this was the least attended service of the year. On Shrove Tuesday the church was packed with revelers for the pancake supper and the talent show. Ash Wednesday I would be realizing that I had seriously overestimated the amount of ashes we needed. On Facebook, many friends of the congregation “liked” the church’s status update “Get your ash to church.” But in real life, very few actually did. What is our motivation for spiritual practice? The gospel is clear: we should not be motivated by the esteem of our peers. As we begin our Lenten journey we may need a reminder (like this gospel, or a mostly empty worship service, a litany of confessions, and greasy ashes) to set us off on the right foot. We are forewarned that this may be a difficult and lonesome journey with few earthly perks. However, we will not be alone, no matter how lonely the sanctuary seems. In the shadows, in the emptiness, in the dust—God is with us.

Proclamation: In this lecture on spiritual practice, the word “whenever” is key. Stress this word to make clear that Jesus expects the faithful to engage in spiritual practice. The lesson is in our intention. Play up the contrast between the two approaches to almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. When compared to the positive example, there is much comedy in the portrayal of arrogant, puffed-up, and

self-important piety. It is laughable how foolish human beings can behave when it comes to these matters. We can only imagine how comic—and how tragic—it seems from God’s perspective.

Children’s sermon: The tactile aspects of the service lend themselves readily to children’s involvement. They may appreciate the opportunity to explore the ashes with their own hands. Just as in gardening, we need to get our hands dirty to connect with the creator’s opportunities for new life. No kids to be found? Do not let the absence of children stop you from offering a more experiential aspect to your preaching. If a separate children’s sermon does not make sense, why not incorporate the elements of one into the sermon? A mirror could be used to demonstrate where our focus should be in spiritual practice: not reflecting out to others (to show them their faults), but reflecting back at ourselves (to give us an honest view).

March 9, 2014 Lent 1

Matthew 4:1–11

The devil can quote scripture just as well as anyone. How often the people also use scripture to justify ungodly behavior! The temptation Jesus is facing here is to have all that he wants and to have it right now: the world fed, the Word made flesh known, the kingdom come. This will all come to pass, but God’s plan requires that it will come by a more circuitous and tortuous path. The devil offers an appealing shortcut—for a price. Followers of Jesus take note: the ends do not justify the means. Only after this valuable time of testing is Jesus ready to take on his ministry and to do it God’s way. May Lent be a time of

training for us to grow in spiritual strength for ministry and also be renewed in our commitment to God's way.

Proclamation: If this gospel lesson is simply read, it is far too easy for the three tests to blend together. Each temptation has its own particular appeal. Like the devil, consider offering each test from a slightly different location. In matter of temptation, it is often the context that makes us vulnerable. Movement from one place to another in the worship space can also emphasize the distinct nature of each temptation. What the devil is saying is very familiar to our culture: why wait when you can have it now? His is the persuasive voice of good deals and no money down. Rather than the cackling of an evil mastermind, imagine the voice of a marketing genius. Meanwhile, Jesus sounds like a stubborn hold out, heaven-bent to do things the hard way.

Children's sermon: Lent is a time for renewed spiritual commitment and discipline. However, many in your congregation may be unfamiliar with active spiritual practices. Consider getting the people moving in their faith with some "spiritual exercises." With upbeat music and liturgically appropriate sweatbands, lead the people through a spiritual "work out." The gospel offers some possible moves: listening for God's word, prayer, sharing the good news, acts of service. Also consider the movements of the worship service: receiving forgiveness, singing praises, sharing the peace, standing up, sitting down, etc. We all feel clumsy and worry that we look silly when trying some new exercise. How much easier it is to get over that feeling when we can laugh at ourselves, together.

March 16, 2014

Lent 2

John 3:1–17

Suddenly we depart from Matthew for three episodes from the Gospel of John. At this time, it may be worth reminding the congregation that each Gospel has a distinct voice. In the coming weeks, John offers us some unique characters and situations that are not to be found in any other Gospel. Nicodemus will reappear two more times in John, offering some quiet defense for Jesus to his colleagues (7:45–51), and tip-toeing in as the sun sets to assist Simon with Jesus' burial (19:38–42). The arc of their relationship is significant. On one end, Jesus is trying to teach him about birth from above/being born anew. On the other, Nicodemus assists with Jesus' burial into the tomb from which he will be born into new life. In neither encounter does Nicodemus fully grasp what is happening. But, Nicodemus is in good company. The featured characters in John move from misunderstanding to belief. Notice that I did not say misunderstanding to understanding. The process of coming to faith, of coming to new life, is mysterious and not in our control—much like the process of childbirth. In childbirth the one who is given birth to is not in control. And, as one who has given birth, I can attest that neither the mother nor the health care provider is in control. Birth is a power of creation. Regardless of our interventions, the process is ultimately beyond our control and understanding. At most, the parties involved can work with it or against it.

Proclamation: The gospel texts of Lent 2, 3, and 4 beg for performance. With their witty dialogue, unspoken emotional

content, and developed characters, the episodes in John are very cinematic. While it may be challenging to memorize such sizable lessons, the effect is well worth the effort involved. Memorization gets easier with practice. Consult the works of scholars like David Rhoads and biblical storytellers like Dennis Dewey for more guidance. If memorization seems out of the question for you, there may be willing performers to be found in your area through biblical storytelling groups. Otherwise, consider breaking up the scripture into parts for a small cast to perform. Nicodemus' confusion is comical and many can relate to it, but that won't come across in a dry reading. Also, prepare the assembly for the proclamation of such long gospel lessons. Encourage the people to sit down, set aside their bulletins, and look up for the proclamation of the good news.

Children's sermon: Nicodemus was in the dark, figuratively and literally, when he came to Christ. How many of us would rather fumble along in the darkness of confusion, rather than risk revealing that there are things we don't understand? Taking a large dark sheet or blanket, gather with the children underneath to experience darkness. Try to move down the aisle together. How difficult is it get anywhere in the dark? What if we had some help, someone to let a little light shine in? Stopping to ask for help to lift up one corner of the blanket, see how different the experience is now. Christ is the guiding light for our lives, until that day that we are finally born fully into the light of new life. How can the church offer us a safe place to ask questions and find illumination?

March 23, 2014

Lent 3

John 4:5–42

Misunderstandings abound in John. Last week we heard of Nicodemus' confusion over actual re-birth through an earthly mother versus being born into new life from above. This week there is confusion over the distinction between real water from a well and the living water Jesus is offering. John also likes to feature the wrong people coming to faith. Last week it was the inquiring religious insider, this week it is the cynical religious (and in many other ways) outsider. There are many other contrasts to be considered. The woman encounters Jesus in public at the brightest hour of the day. She did not intentionally seek out Jesus. Moved to faith and evangelism, she returns to Jesus a short time later with many others in tow. She does not have all the answers and yet she can trust in Jesus and invite others to "come and see." The woman also stands in contrast to Jesus' own official disciples. They return with no one, only to stand gawking, very possibly offended by Jesus' choice of conversation partner and clearly confused by his words. It seems that not all laborers have been truly helpful when it comes to bringing in the harvest.

Proclamation: In effective communication delivery is just as important, if not more so, as content. This is true of Scripture as a whole, and particularly in the Gospel of John. This is the reason why the Word became flesh. In your gospel proclamation, remember the same is true. In the back and forth dialogue, the audience moves along with the character from confusion to belief. The questions are placed on the character's lips so that we can hear the answers. The comedy in

their confusion over the obvious helps us to see what we've been missing out on in our own understanding. Whether it is through your own inflection, or with the help of other proclamation partners, give each character a distinct voice. Put up that woman's tough front, and then little by little reveal her softening attitude and growing openness to Jesus. Lift up both the bewilderment and the belief in her declaration of faith. Imagine the disciples as comic relief for an intense scene. It may be worth acknowledging to the assembly that the scriptures are at times intended to be funny. It's okay to laugh! A living word, after all, would have a full range of human emotions.

Children's sermon: With such colorful, emotion-filled, action-packed encounters in John, there are many active places to go with a children's message. Like we see in our gospel, questions are an important part of growing in faith. Plant some question askers in the assembly, consider building a well from which to draw up buckets full of questions, go on a question scavenger hunt that leads from one place in the worship space to another. Jesus is like a well full of answers *and* more questions that draw us deeper into faith. Or for another angle, focus on the emotions of the encounter. Tell a short-hand version of the story by inviting volunteers to demonstrate the emotions and attitudes that arise. There is always an opportunity to grow in faith—no matter where we may be at the moment.

March 30, 2014

Lent 4

John 9:1–41

There are no stupid questions in the Gospel of John. Each question is given voice

precisely because it is out there: lingering in the audience's thoughts, silently played out in their day-to-day lives, spoken only in hushed whispers. There are not many today who would openly speak of sin as cause for disease, disability, and disaster. However, how often do we follow up the bad news with a not so altruistic question? Oh, cancer...did he smoke? A car accident, how terrible...had they been drinking? Raped, oh my...what was she wearing? If we can find some sin to point to, a personal failure or violation of some kind, then there may be an explanation for the misfortune—and a way to save ourselves from it. Jesus will not allow us the false comfort of easy answers. He refuses to let us make things nice and neat. Instead, he introduces the truly troubling idea that rather than sin, God's glory is to blame for the man's lifetime of blindness. Jesus then tests the theory of "you get what you deserve" by breaking the Sabbath law (in not just one but two ways) and piling multiple social transgressions into this messy healing. The result is a sign of God's glory. However, many of the onlookers will not be able to look beyond the spit and mud to see it.

Proclamation: This offensive act underscores the offense of Jesus' teaching; however, a modern audience may miss out. Even if the underlying reasons are explained, the listener may not be able to comprehend the reaction of Jesus' ancient antagonists. But imagine for a moment how the people would react if the preacher spit at their feet during the gospel. Imagine if the preacher then reached down to smear the saliva with whatever filth they found on the floor. Imagine if those slimy, dirty hands then reached out and touched another on the face! Many congregations say no thanks to the common cup, others refuse foot wash-

ing, and some won't pass the peace. So, how would saliva go over? Reflect on your community's (and your own) resistance to bringing messy, impolite, rule-breaking behavior into worship—and into faith life in general. Is there a way to help the assembly experience the revulsion and outrage felt by the Pharisees? Could this vicarious disgust help the people realize the challenge posed to the world's wisdom by the Word made flesh?

Children's Sermon: Jesus is not afraid to get his hands dirty. How many of us would be put off by the offer of saliva and dirt? Kids

love a good gross-out, and will happily play the part of the Pharisees by running away and shrieking, "Yuck!" The children's sermon may be your opportunity to show Jesus' homemade medicine in real-life, disgusting detail. But there is more than shock value here: the healing that Jesus offers is offensive. It is very difficult to accept it. And, unless we are so vulnerable and needy that we have no other choice, we often refuse. What are the things that gross us out and cause us to turn away from Jesus' healing touch? How can we open ourselves to Jesus' healing?



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