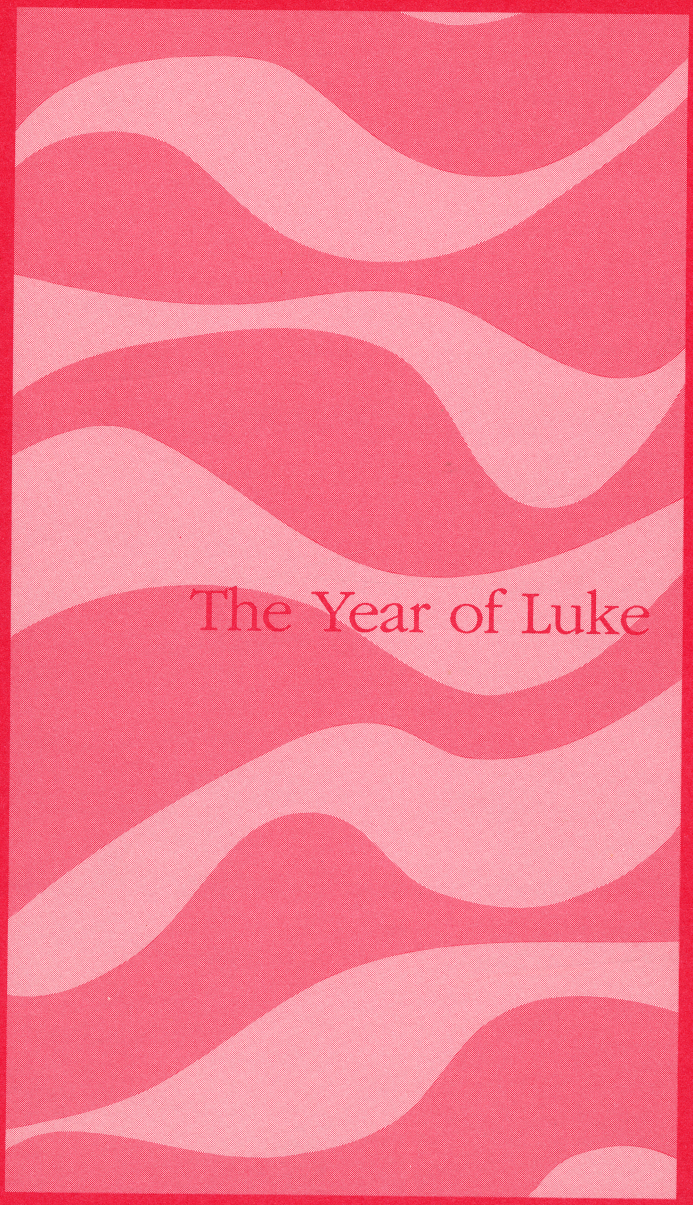
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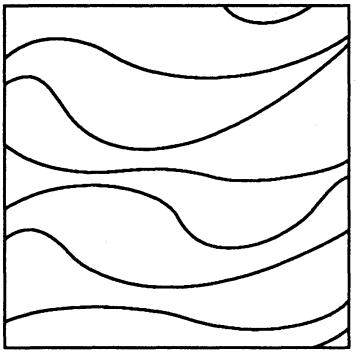
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The Year of Luke

A recent study of Luke-Acts (The Anchor Bible Dictionary) points out that this two volume work

- has a positive view of the world
- offers a prophetic critique of human religious expectations and values
- seeks not the destruction of the wicked but the saving of the lost
- addresses the people through the prophetic word of God
- demands a turning and acceptance of the prophetic word
- defines faith as an obedient hearing of the word and patient endurance

Just as God's visitation of the people is a revelation of his loving-kindness above all to the outcast, so, according to Luke-Acts, his people are to reach out in love to all. The mission itself can be described as the word of God growing and expanding.

Barbara E. Reid, O.P. demonstrates that although there are more stories about women in Luke than in the other Gospels, the Third Gospel is not easily seen as a Gospel *for* women. Women receive limited roles in the story, and they seem to "choose the better part" only when they are silent and receptive. How rarely they follow, proclaim, witness, teach, heal, forgive, or feed, and there are no instances in which a woman is clearly "sent." Hence, if Luke's narratives are to be used to offer an egalitarian vision for today's disciples, their patriarchal framework must be unmasked and addressed head-on. The transition from Luke to Acts offers a model for this process. Although Jesus had no mission to Gentiles in Luke, they are fully included in Acts. The church's leaders endorsed a new direction under the guidance of the Spirit. If we are to present women as equally gifted disciples, sharing in the same mission as men, we will need to read with new eyes *against* Luke's own intent.

Linda M. Maloney and **Elizabeth J. Smith** also affirm that the stories of Luke are problematic for many women today, and they describe strategies that will enable parishioners and preachers to work through the difficulties and achieve a positive outcome. They suggest retelling the stories from a woman's point of view, or putting Luke's women characters into conversation with one another. Mary and Martha both need to be presented to today's women as followers of Jesus, theologians, church leaders, and women of grace. The authors invite us to name that anonymous woman who had been bent over double for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17) and to identify the spirit that held her bound—the spirit of patriarchy. They conclude with a hymn which celebrates some of the women of Luke, and which reminds us that the story of Christian faithful women does not end with the women of Luke.

Robert C. Tannehill reassesses the role of the Pharisees in Luke. While often portrayed in conflict with Jesus, there are also scenes which hold open for them the possibility of insight and change. Does the story of Simon the Pharisee illustrate the rejection of Jesus because he is a friend of sinners? Yes, but Simon did invite Jesus to dinner, recognized him as a prophet, and became an open character with new understanding. The majority of church members today are not social outcasts like the woman in this story but are rather more like Simon in the story. Viewing Simon as an open character with possibilities for growth helps us recognize our resistance to Jesus and our possibilities for significant change. We can learn from the woman the depth of God's forgiveness. When Jesus comes to our homes, the sinful woman comes, too. It is a package deal. We cannot accept Jesus without accepting the outcast woman whom he forgives. Her experience is vital to our understanding of God.

R. Alan Culpepper explores the motif of sight in Luke as a metaphor for receiving the kingdom. This motif appears in the story of the Good Samaritan, in the healing of the blind man in Jericho, and in the story of Zacchaeus. What outrageous good news in the story of rich Zacchaeus—a camel passed through the eye of a needle! The kingdom can be seen in the compassion of a Samaritan, the faith of a blind man, or the repentance of a tax collector. When the Samaritan saw the man in the ditch, he saw much more than the priest or Levite had. When the

beggar asked for his sight, he was given more than the ability to see. Zacchaeus saw not just Jesus but God's salvation.

Richard A. Jensen proposes that the hermeneutic of an oral culture—such as the Middle East and late 20th century America—is that it thinks in stories. Hence the goal of a sermons is to invite people to participate in the reality of the gospel in, with, and under your stories. Luke often comments on one story by telling another story or many other stories. After examining several stories that are in the lectionary, he urges us to let the people of these stories live in the hearts and minds of the parishioners as traveling companions through life, helpful to them at a variety of stops along life's way.

Finally, we include a sermon for Advent (by **Robert W. Bertram**) and for Christmas (by **Marc Kolden**), and an Epiphany parable (by **Kenneth R. Storck**). We will also publish additional articles on Luke in the next issue.

Luke's story takes forty-seven pages to tell in my NRSV. Add in Acts and you have one fourth of the New Testament. This year of Luke is surely the time to proclaim once more the year of the Lord's favor (Lk 4:19), release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind. The word and the church grew and expanded from Luke to Acts. How might they grow and expand as they move from printed page to the living voice of the gospel? God's visitation of his people is both a revelation of his loving-kindness and a prophetic critique of human religious expectations and values—yours and mine. It's a package deal.

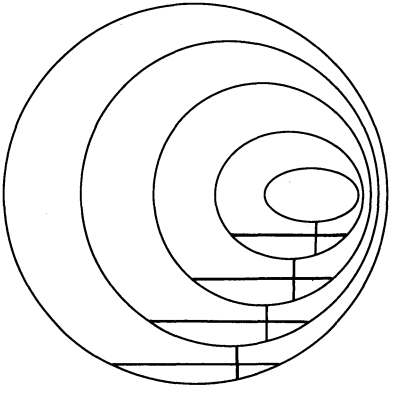
One can't be luke warm in the year of Luke.

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

Luke: The Gospel for Women?

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It is frequently thought that Luke, having more stories about women than any of the other gospels, is the best gospel to promote equality of women in the church. Only in Luke do we find the stories of Elizabeth (1:5-7, 24-25, 39-45, 57-66); Mary (1:26-56; 2:1-52; Acts 1:14); Anna (2:36-38); the widow of Nain (7:11-17); the woman who loved much (7:36-50); the ministry of Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and the other Galilean women (8:1-3); Martha and Mary (10:38-42); the woman who utters a blessing (11:27-28); the woman bent double (13:10-17); the parable of the woman who searches for a lost coin (15:8-10); the parable of the widow demanding justice (18:1-8); and the women of Jerusalem lamenting Jesus on the way of the cross (23:26-32).



In addition to these are the stories shared with Mark and Matthew featuring: Simon's mother-in-law (4:38-39); Jairus' daughter and the woman with a hemorrhage (8:40-56); a woman baking bread (13:20-21); a widow who gives her all (Lk 21:1-4); the Galilean women who witness Jesus' death and burial (23:44-49, 50-56) and who discover the empty tomb (24:1-12).

Only Luke, in his second volume, gives us the traditions about the women among the disciples in the upper room (Acts 1:14); Sapphira (5:2-11); Tabitha (9:36-43); Lydia (16:1-40); the slave girl of Philippi (16:16-24); Damaris (17:34); Priscilla (18:2, 18, 26); and Philip's four daughters who were prophets (21:8-11).

It is this abundance of stories involving women that has led commentators such as Alfred Plummer to remark, "the Third Gospel is in an especial sense the Gospel for *women*... all through this Gospel they are allowed a prominent place, and many types of womanhood are placed before us."[1] Robert O'Toole lists the passages which he believes Luke has designed as parallel pairs of stories of men and women, that "suggest an equality. Men and women receive the same salvific benefits. God, Christ, and the disciples act in their lives in similar fashion. Women and men have similar experiences and fulfill similar functions. They believe and proclaim the gospel message."[2]

Recent feminist interpreters have noted, however, that Luke's portrait of women is ambiguous[3] at best, and dangerous at worst.[4] Mary Rose D'Angelo has demonstrated the limited roles assigned to women in Luke-Acts. Focusing on the prophetic ministry, she shows that Luke's purpose is to restrict and control women: beyond the infancy narratives (where "women prophets belong to the exotic biblical past") no woman speaks except to be corrected by Jesus.[5] Women are beneficiaries of Jesus' ministry and engage in charitable works, but are seen to have "chosen the better part" when they remain silent and receptive (10:42). Jane Schaberg likewise shows that in Luke "women are included in Jesus' entourage and table community, but not as the equals of men."[6] Luke "shows only the men empowered to speak and act and bear responsibility within the movement."[7] In his examination of Acts, Jacob Jervell shows that although the number of women is considerable in Luke's community, they retreat noticeably in the second volume.[8]

Such scholars rightly alert the modern reader to the danger of exalting Luke as an ally for women's equality without critically examining the roles he assigns them. No one questions that there were women disciples of Jesus. But closer study reveals that women disciples who appear in Luke-Acts do not share the same mission as their male counterparts.

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[1] Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to S. Luke* (5th ed. ICC. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), xlii-xliii.

[2] Robert F. O'Toole, *The Unity of Luke's Theology. An Analysis of Luke-Acts* (Good News Studies 9; Wilmington: Glazier, 1984), 118-26.

[3] Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Women in Luke-Acts: A Redactional View," *JBL* 109/3 (1990), 441-61.

[4] Jane Schaberg, "Luke," *The Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 275-92.

[5] D'Angelo, "Women in Luke-Acts," 452, 460. See Lk 10:41-42; 11:27-28; 23:28.

[6] Schaberg, "Luke," 291.

[7] Schaberg, "Luke," 281.

[8] Jacob Jervell, "The Daughters of Abraham: Women in Acts," tr. Roy A. Harrisville, in *The Unknown Paul. Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 146-57.

Discipleship in Luke

There is no definition of discipleship given in the Third Gospel. But by examining the instructions of Jesus and by looking at what he does, we conclude that the ongoing demands of Christian life involve: following Jesus, proclaiming, witnessing, praying, communal living, the sharing of material possessions.[9] A disciple participates in Jesus' mission by doing what he did: preaching, teaching, healing, exorcising, forgiving, feeding, serving, and enduring conflicts and persecution. This is possible when disciples are commissioned and filled with the Holy Spirit. Examining each instance of these actions in Luke-Acts yields a fairly consistent result.

Following (ἀκολουθέω)

There is only one reference in the Third Gospel to anonymous Galilean women following Jesus (23:49) and no story of a woman called to do so. In contrast Simon, James, John (5:1-11), Levi (5:27-32), and the man healed of blindness near Jericho (18:35-43) follow Jesus. The gender of the three potential followers in 9:57-62 is not known; most presume they were male. Another man, a rich official, who was invited to follow (18:18-23) evidently did not overcome his sadness at the demands of discipleship and refused. That Luke has in mind only male followers becomes clear in 18:29-30 where Jesus assures Peter, "there is no one who has left house or *wife* or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life" (cf. Mk 10:29 where "wife" is not listed).

Proclaiming (κηρύσσω, ἀναγγέλλω, ἀπαγγέλλω, διαγγέλλω, εὐαγγελίζομαι, καταγγέλλω)

In Jesus' inaugural preaching at the synagogue in Nazareth he declares that his mission entails proclaiming release to captives and the year of God's favor (4:18-19).

Recent feminist interpreters have noted that Luke's portrait of women is ambiguous at best, and dangerous at worst.

He continues proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea (4:44) and throughout Galilee (8:1). The mission entrusted to the twelve includes proclaiming the reign of God (9:2), as does the final commission to the disciples (24:47).

There is only one instance in which women proclaim. In Lk 24:9 the women returning from the tomb "announced all these things" to the eleven and the rest. But, Luke goes on to say, "their story seemed like nonsense and they did not believe them" (24:11). On the one hand, Luke's audience knows the women's proclamation to be true and they are ultimately vindicated. But on the narrative level this pericope reinforces an attitude that women only speak nonsense

[9] See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (AB 28, 28A. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981, 1985), 235-57; O'Toole, *Unity*, 191-224.

We can presume women were present in the communities that are said to pray, but they are not explicitly mentioned.

and are not to be taken seriously. This vignette ends with Peter running to the tomb to verify their report (24:12), and it is to him that Luke attributes the first sighting of the resurrected Christ (24:34, cf. Jn 20: 1-18).

In Acts only males proclaim: Peter and John (4:2; 8:25), Philip (8:5, 12, 35, 40; 21:8), Barnabas (13:5, 32; 14:7, 15, 21, 27; 15:4, 35, 36; 16:17), Paul (9:20; 13:5, 32, 38; 14:7, 15, 21, 27; 15:4, 35, 36; 16:10, 17; 17:3, 13, 18, 23; 19:13; 20:20, 24, 25, 27; 26:23; 28:31), "the apostles," whom Luke equates with the twelve (5:42; 8:4), and "some men of Cyprus and Cyrene" (Acts 11:20).

Witnessing (μαρτύρομαι)

As the Gospel approaches its climax, Jesus tells his disciples that the coming persecutions "will give you an opportunity to testify" (21:13). And in their commissioning in 24:48 he asserts, "You are witnesses of these things." In Acts the theme of witnessing becomes even more pronounced. In his parting instruction, Jesus tells the disciples, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Repeatedly, Peter and Paul claim to be witnesses (2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15; 23:11; 26:16). The seven chosen for ministry of the table in 6:3 are "witnessing men." Paul speaks of Stephen as a witness whose blood was shed (22:20). No women are said to witness; that they were among those commissioned by Jesus to do so remains obscure.

Praying (προσεύχομαι)

At the outset of the Third Gospel, "the whole assembly of the people" are praying (1:10). Zechariah (1:13) and Anna (2:37) are singled out as specific individuals who pray. Beyond the infancy narratives, however, only Jesus is shown to be at prayer (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 10:21-23; 22:32, 39-46; 23:46). In a few instances disciples accompany him while he prays (9:18, 28, 29; 11:1; 22:40-46), but they are not said to be praying. One parable told by Jesus features a widow as an example of persistence in prayer (18:1-8).[10] In Acts, there is only one explicit reference to women praying: 1:14 lists "certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus" as those who were among the believers gathered in the upper room praying. We can presume women were present in the communities that are said to pray in Acts 2:42; 4:31; 12:5, 12; 13:3, but they are not explicitly mentioned. One may also infer that Lydia and the women who Paul found gathered at the river, where he supposed there would be a place of prayer (16:13), were, indeed, praying there.

In contrast, the prayer of the men: the Twelve (6:4); the apostles (6:6); Peter (3:1;

[10] The parable itself illustrates persistence in the pursuit of justice. Luke's introduction in v. 1 interprets it as "a parable about the need to pray always and not to lose heart."

8:15, 24; 9:40; 10:9; 11:5; 12:5); John (3:1; 8:15); Stephen (7:59); Cornelius (10:2, 4, 30, 31); Paul (9:11; 14:23; 16:13, 16, 25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 26:29; 28:8), Barnabas (14:23); and Silas (16:25) stands out as exemplary and efficacious. Women disciples who pray are scarcely mentioned in Acts. No impressive stories of women effecting healings, exorcisms, resuscitations, or reception of the Spirit by their prayer are recounted in Acts.

Sharing life in community

Throughout his public ministry Jesus is not portrayed as a lone itinerant prophet, but rather one who is surrounded by a community of disciples. Accordingly, the life of his disciples is life together in community, characterized by corporate mission, shared decision-making, accountability to one another, networking, hospitality among the communities, and sharing of material possessions.[11]

Luke infrequently names women as contributing to the communal life. Although six missionary pairs are named in Acts, only one includes a woman: Peter and John (3:1, 3, 11; 4:1, 13, 19; 8:15, 17, 25); Paul and Barnabas (11:30; 12:25; 13:2, 3, 7, 42, 43, 46, 50; 14:1, 12, 14, 20; 15:2, 12, 22, 25, 35, 36); Judas and Silas (15:22, 27, 32); Paul and Silas (15:40; 16:19–17:10); Silas and Timothy (17:14, 15; 18:5); Priscilla and Aquila (18:2, 18, 26). No women are explicitly said to be among those sent out by Jesus, although many envision women among the seventy[-two] missioned in Lk 10:1-12.

With regard to decisions shared by the community (Acts 6:1-7; 11:1-18, 27-30; 15:1-35), only by presuming that women were among the "whole community of disciples" in Acts 6:2 and "the whole church" in 15:22 do we glimpse their presence. The networking of Christian communities is accomplished predominantly by male apostles: Peter, John, Philip, Barnabas, Paul, the apostles and presbyters in Jerusalem (8:4-8, 14; 11:1-18, 22-26; 15:1-35). Along with her husband Aquila, Priscilla is the only woman who is said to participate in inter-community work (Acts 18). Among those who offer hospitality, the majority are male. In the Gospel there are: Simon (4:38); Levi (5:29); Simon the Pharisee (7:36); a leader of the Pharisees (14:1); and Zacchaeus (19:5). In Acts we find: Judas (9:11); Simon the tanner (10:6); Jason (17:5); Titius Justus (18:7); Philip (21:8); and Manson of Cyprus (21:16). Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42), Mary of Jerusalem (Acts 12:12), and Lydia (Acts 16:40) are the exceptions.

Although most of the stories about disciples who exemplify right use of possessions involve male characters (Lk 5:11, 28; 19:1-10; Acts 3:6; 10:2, 4, 31; 18:3; 20:34-35; 21:24), there are also Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and the other Galilean women who gave financial backing to the mission of Jesus and the Twelve (Lk 8:1-3) and the poor widow of who gave her last coins to the temple (Lk 21:1-4). Tabitha (Acts 9:36) is noted for her almsgiving. Sapphira, with her husband Ananias (Acts 5:1-11), provides a negative example.

Commissioned/sent forth (ἀποστέλλω, ἀπολύω, ἐκπέμπω)

Just as Jesus had been sent by God (Lk 4:18, 43; Acts 3:20, 26), so Jesus commissions the Twelve (9:1-2) and the further seventy[-two] (10:1-12). There are no instances in the Gospel or Acts in which a woman is clearly commissioned or sent

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[11] See Charles H. Talbert, "Discipleship in Luke-Acts," *Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 71-73.

forth. If Luke envisions women among the pairs of disciples sent forth in Lk 10:1-12, he does not make this obvious. In Lk 24:47-49 those whom Jesus names as witnesses and who are given the promise of the Spirit are presumably "the eleven and those with them" (24:33). However, in Acts 1:4 when Luke is recapping the instructions to those who will receive the promise, the audience is "the apostles whom he had chosen" (Acts 1:2), presumably the twelve men (Lk 6:13-16). And in Acts 1:11 the two men dressed in white address the "witnesses" as "men of Galilee." In Acts 1:13-14 Luke gives the impression that it is the twelve men who return to the upper room, where they join the women and Mary and Jesus' siblings. In other words, the women are not present at the commissioning at the ascension. In the remainder of Acts, only male disciples are named as apostolic emissaries sent forth by the Christian communities, God, or the Spirit: Peter and John (8:14); Ananias (9:17); Saul and Barnabas (13:1-4); Judas and Silas (15:27, 33); Paul and Silas (17:10); Timothy and Erastus (19:22); Paul (22:21; 26:17).

Teaching (διδάσκω)

One of Jesus' prime activities in his ministry is teaching.[12] In the Gospel, once Jesus begins his ministry, no else is called teacher[13] and no follower of Jesus teaches. In Acts the Jerusalem community "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (2:42). Further references to the apostles' teaching are made in 5:21, 25, 28, 42. In 4:2 the Jewish leaders are disturbed because Peter and John "were teaching the people" and forbid them to teach further in 4:18. Gamaliel, "a teacher of the law," is cited in 5:34. Five teachers in the church at Antioch are named in 13:1: "Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul." The teaching activity of Barnabas and Saul/Paul in Antioch is noted in 11:26 and 15:35. References to Paul's teaching appear in 13:12; 17:19; 18:11; 20:20; 21:21, 28; 28:31. Apollos "taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John" (18:25).

All those named as teachers or said to be teaching are men. The one woman in Acts who is usually thought to be teaching is Priscilla, along with her husband, Aquila. In 18:26 Luke relates that they heard Apollos preach in Ephesus, and "they took him aside and explained (ἐξέθεντο) the Way of God to him more accurately." However, here Luke does not use the verb "to teach," διδάσκω, but rather ἐκτίθημι, meaning, "to explain, set forth." One wonders if this is deliberate, so as to restrict the teaching ministry to male disciples.

Healing

Jesus commissions his disciples to heal the sick and cure diseases (9:1, 2, 6; 10:9), as he himself does. All those who take up this part of the mission in Acts are male: Peter and John (3:1-10); Peter and the apostles (5:15, 16; 9:32-35); Philip (8:7); Paul (14:8-10; 19:12; 28:8, 9). In no instance does a woman disciple share in the mission of healing.

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[12] Jesus is said to be teaching in Lk 4:15, 31, 32; 5:3, 17; 6:6; 10:39; 11:1; 13:10, 22, 26; 19:47; 20:1; 21:37; 23:5. The numerous Lucan parables are also didactic. In Acts 1:1 Luke claims to have dealt with "all that Jesus did and taught" in his first volume.

[13] In Luke 2:46 the twelve-year-old Jesus is found "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." Tax collectors coming to be baptized address John as "teacher" in 3:12. Jesus is called "Teacher" in 7:40; 8:49; 9:38; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13; 18:18; 19:39; 20:21, 28, 39; 21:7; 22:11.

Exorcising

Jesus gives the Twelve power and authority over demons (Lk 9:1-2) as he himself has (Lk 4:31-37, 41; 6:18; 8:26-39; 9:37-43; 11:14). The seventy[-two] are also able to subject demons (10:17). In Acts all those who cast out unclean spirits are male: the apostles and Peter (5:12-16), Philip (8:7), and Paul (16:18; 19:12). No women are said to participate in the ministry of exorcism.

Forgiving (ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν)

A particular emphasis of Luke is forgiveness of sins (ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν). John the Baptist, Jesus' predecessor, "went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (3:3). In his inaugural proclamation of his mission, Jesus says he has been sent "to proclaim release (ἄφεσις) to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (4:18). Jesus' teaching on forgiveness is frequent: 6:37; 11:4; 17:3-4; 24:47. Narratives in the Gospel that highlight forgiveness by Jesus include the story of the paralytic (5:17-26), the episode with the woman who loved much (7:36-50), the forgiveness of Jesus' crucifiers (23:34) and the criminal hanged with him (23:43).

Although both women and men are portrayed as beneficiaries of Jesus' forgiveness, only Peter (2:38; 5:31; 8:22; 10:43) and Paul (13:38; 26:18) preach forgiveness in Acts.

Feeding

A notable aspect of Jesus' ministry is satisfying peoples' hungers. Although Jesus is more frequently portrayed as a guest at table, in Lk 9:12-17 is his famous feeding of the five thousand. In similar fashion, Jesus presides at the Last Supper with his apostles (22:14-20), and in the post-resurrection meal with Cleopas and his companion (24:30). Acts 2:46 and 20:7 speak of the community of believers gathering to break bread. In the second instance it is Paul who breaks the bread (20:11). Paul urges all the sailors to eat during the storm on the Adriatic Sea. When he breaks bread and eat they do likewise (27:33-36). There are no stories of women feeding others or breaking bread.

There are no stories of women feeding others or breaking bread.

Serving (διακονεῖν)

In the farewell instructions Jesus gives his disciples (22:26-27) he tells them that the one who would be the leader among them must be the one who serves (ὁ διακονῶν). He points to the example he himself has given them, "I am among you as one who serves (ὁ διακονῶν)." The verb διακονεῖν occurs in three episodes in the Gospel.[14] In 4:39, after Jesus rebuked her fever, Simon's mother-in-law immediately "got up and began to serve (διηκόνει) them." In 8:2-3 Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and many others accompanied Jesus and the Twelve as they journeyed through Galilee, and "provided for them out of their resources" (διηκόνουν αὐτοῖς). Finally, in Lk 10:40 Martha asked Jesus,

[14] It also occurs in Lk 12:37 and 17:8 in parabolic sayings of Jesus.

"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work (διακονεῖν) by myself? Tell her then to help me."

In the Gospel only women characters are the subject of διακονεῖν. In contrast, the verb διακονεῖν and its noun form, διακονία, are used only of men in Acts. In Acts 1:17, 25, where Judas' successor is chosen, the noun διακονία refers to the apostolic ministry of the Twelve. In 6:1 the Hellenists complain against the Hebrews that their widows are being neglected in the daily distribution (διακονία). The solution devised by the Twelve, who want to devote themselves solely to the ministry of the word (διακονία τοῦ λόγου, 6:4) is to have the community select seven men to serve at table (διακονεῖν τραπέξαις, 6:2). The noun διακονία is used of the relief mission to the community in Judea (11:29) carried out by Barnabas and Saul (12:25), and of Paul's ministry (20:24; 21:19). The participle form of διακονεῖν describes Timothy and Erastus, two of Paul's assistants (19:22).

Enduring persecution

From the start Jesus' Galilean ministry provoked rage among some (4:28; 6:11). Herod wanted to kill him (13:31) as did the chief priests, scribes, and leaders (19:47; 20:19; 22:2). Three times Jesus speaks to his disciples about his impending death (9:22, 43-45; 18:31-34). In his Sermon on the Plain Jesus assures his disciples of their blessedness when they are persecuted (6:22-23). In two other instances he speaks to his disciples about having courage under persecution (12:2-8; 21:12-36).

In Acts the only instances in which women believers are said to have been persecuted are when Paul dragged "both men and women" to prison before his conversion (8:3; 9:2; 22:4). Throughout the rest of the narrative it is the male disciples who are suffer arrest, imprisonment, persecution, stoning, beating, flogging, and even death: Peter (4:3; 12:3-10); John (4:3); the apostles (5:18); Stephen (7:54-60); James the brother of John (12:2); some men of Cyprus and Cyrene (11:20); Barnabas (13:50); Silas (16:23); Jason (17:5-9); and above all, Paul (9:23; 13:50; 14:19; 16:23; 18:12-13; 20:23; 21:30-31; 22:22-30; 23:1–28:31). Other early Christian works give ample testimony to the persecutions and martyrdom suffered by women believers. For Luke, however, this fate belongs only to the men who exercise the visible, public ministries.

Filled with the Holy Spirit

What empowers disciples of Jesus is the gift of the holy Spirit. The action of the Spirit in Jesus and his disciples is a theme that is particularly emphasized by Luke. In the Gospel, the only characters besides Jesus who are said to be filled with the Spirit are found in the infancy narratives: Elizabeth (1:41), Zechariah (1:67), John (1:15), Mary (1:35), and Simeon (2:25-27). These figures are not disciples of Jesus, but are bridge figures from the "period of Israel" (see Lk 16:16). Once Jesus' ministry begins, only he is said to be filled with the Spirit (4:1, 14, 18; 10:21). He speaks of the promised Spirit to his disciples (11:13; 12:12; 24:49), and they experience the power of the Spirit throughout Acts.

In Acts there are no individual women disciples who are said to be filled with the Spirit or who are directed by the Spirit or who speak or act through the Spirit, as do Peter (4:8; 5:32; 10:19, 24, 44; 11:12, 15; 15:8), Stephen (6:5, 10; 7:55), Philip (8:29, 39), Barnabas (11:24; 13:1-2, 4), Symeon, Lucius, Manaen (13:1-2), Paul (9:17; 13:1-2, 4, 9; 16:6-7; 19:6, 21; 20:22, 23; 21:4), Silas (16:6-7), Timothy (16:6-7), and Agabus (11:28; 21:11). David (4:25) and

Isaiah (28:25) are affirmed in what they spoke through the Spirit. Groups of men who act by the Spirit appear in Acts: the apostles (5:32; 15:8, 28), presbyters (15:8, 28), the seven chosen for table ministry (6:3), the twelve men in Ephesus (19:6-7), the Ephesian elders (20:28).

The only mention of women in connection with the Spirit is that they were in the gathered community at the first outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (2:4 with 1:14, 15 and 2:17-18). It may be that Luke presumes the presence of women among the three thousand persons who accepted Peter's message (2:41), the community in Jerusalem (4:31), the Samaritans (8:15-17), the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria who lived in the comfort of the Holy Spirit (9:31), Cornelius' relatives and friends (10:24), the disciples at Antioch in Pisidia (13:52), and the disciples in Tyre (21:4). But no stories of women ministering by the power of the Spirit are related in Acts.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that there are women disciples in Luke-Acts. In Acts 9:36 Tabitha is explicitly called μαθήτρια. Women as well as men are specifically said to believe in Acts 5:14; 8:12; 17:12. Individual women who have faith are: Mary (Lk 1:45); the woman who loved much (Lk 7:50); the woman healed of a hemorrhage (Lk 8:48); the mother of Timothy (Acts 16:1); Lydia (Acts 16:15); and Damaris (Acts 17:34). Although women receive the word, believe, are baptized, follow Jesus, and host house churches, their role is presented by the third evangelist as clearly different from that of the men. There are no narratives showing women as called, commissioned, or filled with the Spirit. Women in Luke-Acts do not imitate Jesus' mission of preaching, teaching, healing, exorcising, forgiving, feeding, or praying.

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The powerfully prophetic women Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna in the infancy narratives are not disciples and belong to a different era. Women who speak in the rest of the Gospel are reprimanded by Jesus or are disbelieved. Women in the Third Gospel are healed by Jesus and are objects of his compassion. One (7:36-50) is exemplary for her great love, but nothing is related about how the love she demonstrated toward Jesus achieves a missionary dimension. The Galilean women who had been healed ministered to Jesus and the Twelve (8:1-3). The precise nature of their service is a matter of much discussion. The impression Luke gives is that theirs is an ancillary service to the mission of Jesus and his twelve chosen male apostles. In Lk 10:38-42 Mary is praised for listening to Jesus, but nothing is related of what she does with what she hears. Martha, who is busy serving (engaged in visible, active ministry?), is reprimanded. In Acts Tabitha "was devoted to good works and acts of charity" (9:36), making tunics and clothing. Philip's

four daughters gifted with prophecy never speak (21:8).

Since Luke claims to have investigated "everything carefully from the very first to write an orderly account" (Lk 1:3) it is unlikely that he does not know of women who participate actively and visibly in the mission of Jesus alongside the male disciples. Abundant references to such are found in Paul's letters. We must suspect that Luke, like the author of the Pastoral letters, is intent on restricting women to silent, passive, supportive roles. He is conveying the message that women and men have different ways of being disciples.

It is entirely anachronistic to expect to find Luke promoting twentieth century notions of gender equality. His was a patriarchally structured world and his version of the gospel reinforces such. If today we wish to promote a vision of church in which both women and men are called equally to discipleship and to share in the same mission of Jesus, then stories such as those preserved in Luke-Acts cannot be taught, preached, or passed on uncritically. Luke is a master storyteller, and each of his episodes has a powerful identity-forming potential. If his narratives are to be used to offer an egalitarian vision for today's disciples, then their patriarchal framework must be unmasked and addressed head-on. If Luke-Acts is not subjected to a process of reinterpretation, then preachers and teachers reinforce rather than challenge patriarchal role divisions.

Luke himself provides us with a model for such a process. The Third Gospel tells of no mission extended to the Gentiles by Jesus. Yet Acts attests that the later Christian communities' struggles with this new development ended with the decision that full inclusion of Gentiles—without having to be circumcised or observe all the Jewish dietary regulations—was most faithful to the vision of Jesus, and, indeed, was foreshadowed in his ministry. Acts 15 describes how the Jerusalem leaders, in union with all the believers, listened to the testimonies about the new things God was doing in their midst, came to new understandings of Scripture, and endorsed a new direction under the guidance of the Spirit.

A similar process of reflection on the experience of believers, critical study of the original contexts and meanings of Scripture and tradition, under the leadership of the Spirit will result in an acceptance of women as equally gifted disciples, sharing in the same mission as men. To arrive at this conclusion we will need to read with new eyes against Luke's intent.

The Year of Luke: A Feminist Perspective

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To those engaged in the enterprise dubbed "feminist exegesis"—which, in our definition, approaches scripture from the perspectives of women in many cultures and conditions—the Gospel of Luke is a frustrating dialogue partner. The heart of the problem is that this gospel has long been acclaimed for its attention to women, and indeed, women do appear in its pages with greater frequency than in the other gospels. On the other hand, the mere appearance of women in numbers is no guarantee that the texts in which they figure will always, or even often, be affirmative and supportive of women as equal human partners in the life of the church. If a scriptural book consistently portrays women as ideally subservient and silent, it cannot engage the church today, for that condition of things (if it ever existed at all) will not return.

In fact, the Gospel of Luke does not present a consistent portrait of women as fitting into any one category of personality or behavior: women are not universally stereotyped in this gospel or in its companion volume, the Acts of the Apostles. But these books do contain a significant number of texts that are negative for women, and these even include some that appear positive on the surface. That is what makes the Third Gospel so insidious. And yet, when feminist scholars raise objections to the use of certain passages from this gospel to shape a portrait of the ideal Christian woman, or to deduce the divine will for women as a group, many people who have traditionally assumed that this is the "women's gospel" are confused, and even become angry and defensive.

In this article, we will approach several examples from the lectionary for the Year of Luke that illustrate this problem; show how and why the stories or sayings are problematic for many women today; and describe some possible approaches to the text that may enable preachers and/or parishioners to work through the difficulties to achieve a positive outcome. (Such an outcome might involve rejection of the text as it stands and a "rewriting" for a changed context. This, too, is a way of taking the Bible seriously!)

Three lectionary texts

1. The Sinner: Luke 7:36-50 (4 Pentecost)

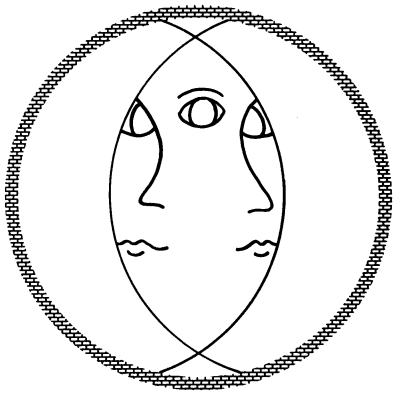
This is the story of the forgiveness of a notorious but unnamed sinner. Mary Magdalene, apostle to the apostles on the day of resurrection (Lk 24:10-11, Jn 20:17-18), has spent centuries fighting off an identification with this Lukan woman. Mary has the misfortune to be named in the verses immediately following this story, among the women benefactors of Jesus and his mission (Lk 8:1-3). The fact that she is so carefully introduced in 8:2, and by name, is an obvious indication that she is *not* the nameless woman of the preceding story. Luke tells in chapter 7 of a banquet where Jesus' host, Simon the Pharisee, failed in his hospitality, and was reproached by the sinner's lavish treatment of the guest and Jesus' pronouncement of her forgiveness. Women reading this story hear the woman's love praised, but Luke does not allow her to speak for herself, except by her action. That action, too, Luke constructs as an act of exemplary hospitality; the other gospel writers, when they tell of women anointing Jesus close to the time of his passion, allow prophetic stature to the gesture (Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9) or make it a foretaste of Jesus' own ministry at his friends' feet (Jn 12:1-8; 13:1-17). Only Luke's notorious sinner, however, is included in the Sunday lectionary, so that women worshipers are left with no prophet or Christ-figure as a foremother in faith, but only another sexually disreputable woman, upon whose tears they should presumably model their own repentance.

The significance of this story for feminist readers, in the version told by Mark and Matthew, is clearly illustrated by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's choice of a title for her pathbreaking work on feminist exegesis: *In Memory of Her* (cf. Mk 14:9; Mt 26:13).[1] Jane Schaberg's article on Luke in *The Women's Bible Commentary*[2] succinctly summarizes the differences between the Lukan and the Markan/Matthean and Johannine accounts, showing how Luke's changes have diminished the stature of the woman. Instead of the story of a woman's prophetic gesture performed in anticipation of Jesus' death and hinting at the royal anointing of the "Christ/Messiah" (=the anointed one), we find here a vignette, placed in Galilee early in Jesus' ministry, illustrating the penitence of a sinner and Jesus' compassion. The focus of the story shifts very quickly from the nameless woman to Jesus. Ironically, in the Lukan text Jesus has just identified himself as the emissary and child of Sophia, Lady Wisdom (Lk 7:33-35)—in a passage omitted from the Sunday lectionary—yet this is followed immediately by a version of the anointing story that makes the woman not a prophet of Wisdom but solely the object of Jesus' compassion. Jesus' words, and the parable he tells about the two debtors, point to her exemplary love. Unfortunately, our society's exclusive associations of women with lavish displays of affection and long-suffering love are not of positive value for women called to prophetic Christian lives in the twentieth-century churches. It is a further irony that our lectionaries permit only this story, and not its strong counterparts, to be told "in memory of her."

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[1] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

[2] *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol H. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (London and Louisville: SPCK and Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 275-92, at 285-86.



Imagination-stretching exercises can help interpreters move from the anointing story to sermons that will make Luke's world life-giving for today's women. A good first step is to re-tell the story from the woman's point of view. Give her a name—Ruth, perhaps, in honor of another faithful woman who exchanged gestures of hospitality with a man in potentially scandalous circumstances. Have "Ruth" tell worshipers two thousand years later how she came to be in the Pharisee's house; have her report her conversation with Jesus after he spoke the words of forgiveness; have her tell of joining the women disciples of the verses immediately following, obeying Jesus' commission to "go in peace" by sharing her travels with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and the others on the road.

Another attempt to see the world of Luke through women's eyes can be made by putting Luke's women characters in conversation with one another. "Ruth" and Mary Magdalene, for example, a woman forgiven and a woman healed of seven demons, will have a lot to say about Jesus to the women in the cities and villages Jesus passed through. Construct their conversation at the well, or at the communal bread oven, of one of those villages, where they encourage the women of the community to come and listen to Jesus' teaching the next day when he speaks in the synagogue.

Moving away from Luke's focus on the woman as a notorious, almost certainly sexually immoral, sinner can also help connect Luke's world with today's world. Not many of the women who sit in church pews listening to sermons on this pericope are notoriously sinful in their communities; not many will count sexual immorality among their recent transgressions. Yet women are human, and we are sinners, and we need to know that Jesus' message of peace is offered even to the not-so-scandalous, even to those whose guilt and grief are not open to public comment. A preacher might spend time with today's women, listening to them speak about the actions and attitudes they name as sinful in themselves, and about the ways they bring their sin to Jesus' attention. A litany of confession could be constructed from data obtained in this way; words of absolution or a song of forgiveness could be shaped from Jesus' "Go in peace" and his insistence that the love the woman has already shown is evidence of her repentance and God's grace toward her.

2. In Martha's House: Luke 10:38-42 (9 Pentecost)

The two women of this story have been turned into cardboard cut-out figures who would be more at home as stereotypes in a parable than as living, breathing women in Jesus' ministry team. Luke gives them names, but those names have become codewords for Active Life and Contemplative Life, for domestic busyness and scholarly detachment. Luke's Mary has offered a few women the encouragement to study theology, against social expectations to the contrary. Luke's Martha has provided many women with evidence that women who

speak up about their needs can expect to be silenced. The story as a whole is about sister set against sister; about woman not speaking to woman; about all women, in the end, being silent about both their hopes and their frustrations, so that the real authorities may continue to speak.

The story is a "set-up" for women, who are supposed to identify with Mary. The fact is, however, that most do not. In a workshop we conducted, we found that one woman out of ten found Mary a figure of liberation and a validation for her hatred of housework and domesticity; the others resented the implication that the tasks they do, if not gladly, then willingly because of their love for their families, churches, and communities, are "unimportant" or even "unnecessary." (How much resentment of feminism has been manufactured by its enemies out of this very conflict—as if all feminists were smug "Marys," and the "Marthas" of the world were permanently second-class! This obviously represents a caricature of feminism, but the appearance of this story in the gospel narrative illustrates how very old the divide-and-conquer technique is.)

Feminist theologian Dorothee Soelle has written of her childhood frustration at hearing this story, seeing it depicted in stained glass (with Martha as a powerful harridan while Mary was slender, sweet, and humble), and hearing Luther's dictum: "Martha, your work must be condemned and regarded as worthless.... I want no work but that of Mary, which is faith."[3] She calls for a two-step process of recovery for the text: rediscovering Martha, and receiving Martha and Mary together, as women united and not divided. Rediscovering Martha demands re-evaluating what is said of her in Luke's text: first, that *she* receives Jesus into *her* house, in itself an unusual situation and a clue to her status in Christian memory; second, that the work she is engaged in, usually translated "much serving" or "many tasks," is in fact *diakonia*, a word that began by meaning table service and in the New Testament was elevated to encompass all forms of Christian leadership-as-service.

A second step in the rediscovery will be comparing the Lukan text with what is said of Martha and Mary in John 11-12. We recognize in the Johannine text some of the same character features of the sisters that appear in Luke: Martha takes the initiative; in fact, in Jn 11:27, she makes the christological confession that is reserved for Peter in the Synoptic Gospels. Mary is again found "at [Jesus'] feet" (11:32), but she and Martha are, as it were, "singing on the same page," since each opens the conversation with Jesus in the same words: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (11:21, 32). In a subsequent scene (12:1-9), we find Martha serving, but Mary active as well, for it is here that she is named as the woman who anoints Jesus in anticipation of his passion. This account of the sisters' acting and speaking harmoniously needs to be brought forward as a corrective to the Lukan account of divided and quarreling siblings.

Once an interpreter decides to allow Martha and Mary to be real women, not merely stereotypes, and once what John's Gospel has to tell about the two women has been added to the picture, an astonishing range of creative possibilities opens up. Two elements are essential: the sisters must be encouraged to talk with one another; and each one must be seen to participate in a full range of Christian ministries—learning and

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[3] "Mary and Martha," in Dorothee Soelle, *The Window of Vulnerability. A Political Spirituality*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 93-94.

leading, speaking and serving, proclaiming good news in word and action.

A study group discussing the readings prior to the writing of a sermon on this pericope might consider literary activities based on "Dear Martha," an advice column for apostles: "Dear Martha, Peter's mother-in-law suggested I write to you for some suggestions on serving. I like cooking, but I preach well, too, and half the neighborhood comes to me for spiritual direction. Lazarus wants me to take his place on the Board of Evangelists. I'm going crazy trying to do it all! How do I decide what is necessary? (This letter comes from Deborah, at Caesarea Philippi.)"

Mary, too, will have some literary output: perhaps "Miss Mary," a column to tell you what the well-ordered Christian house church is doing: "Dear Mary, My mother-in-law wants to become a traveling evangelist, but my father-in-law's church doesn't want to lose their best cook, so they're saying she should stay home and 'just sit at Jesus' feet.' What can we do to help her, and the church? (This request is from Bathsheba, in Antioch.)"

Lazarus, still at home in Bethany, might get postcards from his traveling sisters, recounting the perils and progress of their evangelistic efforts in Rome, Athens, or Alexandria. Intrepid feminist archaeologists might discover a dusty document that could be the private journal of Mary, from the days when all anyone saw her do was listen; but her silence did not mean she was not making sense of it all. In Martha's old age, perhaps she wrote her memoirs for her granddaughter, now married to Simon Peter's grandson, telling of some of the battles the older generation fought over who it really was who first named Jesus as the Christ, the son of God. Perhaps Martha and Mary should have done some team-teaching in the Christian Education curriculum devised for the newly-converted Saul; if their lesson-plans had not been lost, what might Paul's later teaching have been like on the roles of women in the church?

There are too few named women in Luke's Gospel to let any of them dwindle into two-dimensional types of femininity.

There are too few named women in Luke's Gospel to let any of them dwindle into two-dimensional types of femininity. Martha and Mary both need to be presented to today's women as followers of Jesus, theologians, church leaders, and women of grace. Exercises like these can help restore them to full dignity.

3. The Widow Seeking Justice: Luke 18:1-8 (22 Pentecost)

The woman in this Lukan story really is part of a parable. If characters in parables needed names, hers might be Persistence. Only her demand, "Grant me justice against my opponent," is heard, although Luke quotes at some length the mental processes of the cold-hearted judge to whom she addresses her cry. Is she brash, strident, unreasonably demanding? Has she been through the appropriate channels? Is there something about the way she makes her case that may excuse the judge's lack of respect for her? Could she, should she set

about gaining her goal in a quieter, more womanly, more widowly way? When contemporary women find themselves asking this kind of question, we are applying the parable to situations in the church and the world today, where women seeking justice are often labeled as strident and over-assertive.

Jesus' parable depicts a situation familiar enough to his hearers: a judge who "fears neither God nor human beings" refuses justice to a poor widow. Judaism has always enjoined special care for widows, orphans, and strangers, the most vulnerable members of the community and therefore especially dear to YHWH. In reality, however, the situation presented in the parable was all too common. The judge has probably been bribed to find in favor of the wealthier party, evidently a man. The case would, in all likelihood, involve the woman's marriage portion or other inherited property that was to support her in her widowhood, as guaranteed by Jewish marriage law. She is indeed poor, for she seemingly has no adult son or other male relative to appear on her behalf. A widow without a son or male protector was as close to a non-person as anyone could be in that place and time. (Cf. Lk 7:11-17, Jesus' raising of the young man of Nain, and the deep pathos of the description: "He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow.") The only weapon left to this woman is her persistence. She is making a public spectacle of herself, and this again suggests that she has no family, since otherwise they would try to prevent her from shaming them by getting out of her "place" in society. So persistent, and so public, is her resistance that the judge finally breaks down and gives judgment on her behalf.

At this point most English translations water down the sharp irony of the Greek text. Verse 5b really means something like: "for fear she will give me a black eye by her constant coming." The term is borrowed from the vocabulary of boxing, and its double meaning is well rendered by the English expression "to give someone a black eye." One commentator suggests we imagine a bag lady confronting a sleek gentleman and perhaps actually slugging him. But, however tempting it may be to have a laugh at the sleazy judge's expense, we should be careful, lest this approach trigger the same kind of shock and alarm at the widow's behavior that many "liberals" of our own day direct at liberation theology and radical nonviolence. While eyebrows are raised at any suggestion that poor people, like this widow, might advocate or even engage in resistance to their plight that can somehow be labeled "violence" (even if it consists only of sitting down in a doorway), the daily and hourly violence suffered by the poor and marginalized—in this case, the widow's being robbed of her livelihood—is blandly ignored or treated as a matter of course. The judge's statement should be read as a cynical joke quite in keeping with his character, and a cover for his real fear of public exposure in face of the righteous anger of a woman.

Imagination applied to a parable can result in new parables, or in the historicization of the story. Given the way this Lukan parable recalls Mark's and Matthew's story of the foreign woman confronting Jesus with a demand for healing that he is initially unwilling to provide, both strategies may usefully be applied here. Letting the woman in Jesus' story have her own story, letting her do more than merely stand for a quality like persistence, can help today's women tell of their own reasons for seeking justice. On the other hand, letting the parable be a parable, and focusing on the fact that the virtue Jesus wishes to praise is personified by a woman, can help worshipers construct new stories in which women

have agency, authority, and positive religious identity.

A new parable, then, might replace this widow with a woman of color, a lesbian, a welfare mother, or a refugee; how does the authority figure see her, and why is her request granted at last? A new parable might replace Luke's male judge with a woman, perhaps one who has achieved a measure of power at some cost to her integrity. Would such a judge give the same reasons as the man in Luke's parable, when extending justice for the plaintiff? What kind of conversion experience is called for here?

In the Lukan version, this is a parable about prayer. There is nothing surprising in the gender-roles here, with the authoritative male pointing to God and the helpless though persistent woman pointing to the believer. It would be a fine challenge to rewrite the parable choosing characters and gender-roles that would upset sex-related stereotypes for God and for God's chosen ones.

Letting go of the parable, and treating the woman as a historical person, means giving her a name. Call her Hannah, after another woman in distress who stood praying before God, and was rebuked by the priest of the temple for her unseemly behavior. Have "Hannah" write her speech for the judge, in which she sets forth the details of her case. Have her meet with a support group of women, the other widows, perhaps, of Luke's Gospel: Anna, the prophet, who tells everyone about the coming of the child Jesus; the widow of Nain; the widow who puts her three small coins into the temple treasury, giving her whole life in another foretaste of Jesus' own self-giving. These widows will have much to say to each other about widowhood, poverty, and justice; about prayer and answers to prayer; about what it is like to be chosen by God. As a preacher allows the women of Luke's Gospel to talk to each other, the women of today's church will find themselves drawn into the conversation, and the community's prayer will flourish as a result.

> Imagination applied to a parable can result in new parables, or in the historicization of the story.

A story that didn't make the cut

The Woman Praising God: Luke 13:10-17

Zacchaeus and the Good Samaritan are two of many uniquely Lukan stories that the lectionary embraces among the Sunday gospels this year. Somehow, though, a woman whose story is told by Luke alone has slipped through the cracks in the lectionary, and she will remain unremembered unless preachers act to return her to the attention of worshipers. The tale of the woman bent double in the synagogue, the daughter of Abraham who praises God on the Sabbath, could well be included as an extension of the gospel reading for the Third Sunday in Lent. That Sunday, the verses immediately preceding the woman's healing are set: Lk 13:1-9. The reading thus includes a call to repent ("or you will all perish just as they did") and a parable of divine patience ("if it bears fruit next year, well and good"). Adding the woman's

The woman in the story did not come to the synagogue to ask for healing. She came to praise God.

story here would add a show of divine impatience on Jesus' part, for eighteen years, he says, is too long to suffer, and healing will not be delayed even one day more until the Sabbath is over. When today's women approach this story, longing to offer praise to God with strong bodies and whole hearts, there can be power and delight in the words of Jesus: "Woman, you are set free." There can also be frustration at the way Luke gives none of the woman's words of praise or thanksgiving, but rather turns her healing into yet another story where powerful men take over center stage, as the Master teaches them a lesson.

Because of the way Luke has shaped the story—as a Sabbath controversy—it is usually considered a "twin" to the story of the man with the withered hand (Lk 6:6-11). But if we take the story for itself, as a woman's story of healing rather than as a combat between male figures about the meaning of the Sabbath, we will achieve a different perspective on the action. The woman hears Jesus' call, experiences the laying on of hands, stands upright and praises God, who has freed her from bondage. She has moved from margin to center, from invisibility to presence, from silence to the praise of God. We also begin to perceive that the story contains the standard features of a "call to discipleship," something which is obscured by the usual practice of focusing on the periphery rather than the center.

The text invites us to name the woman, and also to name the spirit that has held her bound: we might call it Patriarchy, for example. In the story, Jesus, born with the privileges of a Jewish male, focuses attention on the woman bent double and insists that she must be healed. Emulating Jesus today could mean that those in positions of privilege are called to join women in the struggle to overcome the infirmity and bondage imposed by patriarchy. Women, in turn, can follow the woman by acknowledging that we have been deformed by patriarchy, and by refusing to be "saved" as individuals: as long as any of us is infirm, we are all bent down.

The woman in the story did not come to the synagogue to ask for healing. She came to praise God. Perhaps the most important creative task flowing from this gospel reading is that of finding the words for the freed woman's praise. Call this woman Miriam, after another woman who praised the God of Israel with her sisters in triumph after the crossing of the Red Sea. Let "Miriam" now sing to the Lord with the words that come with freedom after eighteen long years bound by Satan. Singing with her will be a chorus of other daughters of Abraham, all the women whom Luke shows being healed by Jesus: Peter's mother-in-law, Jairus' daughter, and the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. Synagogue and church can ring with the praises they offer.

Bring "Miriam" into conversation with the women who are still waiting for deliverance in the churches today, and women who have found their voice in the worshipping assembly despite great opposition. Have them tell each other about the years of

waiting in the shadows, the pain of diminished lives, the shock of hearing themselves called over to Jesus and being given freedom.

By the use of this kind of process in the interpretation of the biblical text, women get used to the sound of their own voices testifying to the mighty works of God. Then, the women of Luke's Gospel, and the women who are Christians today through the witness of that gospel, can continue to proclaim the good news as they have heard it.

To conclude, we offer a hymn text that congregations might sing to celebrate some of the women of Luke, and to remember that the story of women of Christian faith does not end with the women of Luke.

1 When one of us was called to bear
God's own child, she said "yes,"
and all the world still honors her
courage and faithfulness.

2 When one of us was touched and healed
by Jesus, she said "yes"
to following the one who gave
the gift of holiness.

3 When one of us poured perfume out
for Jesus, she said "yes,"
with love, to God's anointed one,
the Christ whom we confess.

4 When one of us can shine and grow
and flourish, she says "yes"
to God's abundance filling her
to strengthen and to bless.

5 Thank God for each and every one
whose life proclaims her "yes"
to hope, and love, and justice done:
God's good news, nothing less.

Words: Elizabeth J. Smith, 1994
Music: Capel, Marsh Chapel, or other suitable CM tune

Should We Love Simon the Pharisee?

Hermeneutical Reflections on the Pharisees in Luke

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Recent literary interpretation of the Gospels may avoid old issues about historical accuracy, but in its own way it seems to rob the Gospels of their innocence. Rather than simply telling stories about Jesus which are "natural" because "that's just the way it was," the new literary criticism explores the subtle ways in which literature advocates "ideological" positions. In presenting characters in the narrative, the Gospels seldom take a neutral stance.

The Pharisees in Luke, for instance, frequently resist what Jesus says and does, and since the Gospel of Luke is so strongly pro-Jesus, a negative view of the Pharisees seems the inevitable result. Does Luke as a literary work necessarily cause negative stereotyping of the Pharisees, if we accede to its point of view? If by negative stereotyping we mean viewing people as having only negative traits which are unlikely to change, I would say that this is a possible but not a necessary result of Lukan descriptions of the Pharisees. The text does not constrain the respectful reader to negative stereotyping. It leaves the reader a significant area of freedom in interpreting characters.

Stereotyping, then, becomes an issue of how we read, and how we read becomes an ethical test. The way that we treat people in daily life may not be exactly the same as the way that we interpret characters in a story, but there is likely to be significant overlap. If we are content with prejudice in the one case, we are more likely to show prejudice in the other. Awareness of this possibility should make us more careful preachers. I will explore this issue first in relation to recent studies of the Pharisees in Luke-Acts and then by focusing on the story of the sinful woman in the Pharisee's house (Lk 7:36-50).

There has been considerable debate in recent scholarship over Luke's view of the Pharisees. J. A. Ziesler, working within a redaction-critical perspective and so emphasizing Luke's differences from Matthew and Mark, concludes that Luke "finds it possible to depict them [the Pharisees]

favourably at least in part."[1] More recently Robert Brawley has argued that Luke responds to Jewish antagonism not only with apologetic but also with efforts at conciliation. Reflecting this, "the Gospel already tends to present the Pharisees in comparatively favorable light," while "in Acts, Pharisees and Christians are kindred spirits."[2] Jack T. Sanders goes so far as to accuse Luke-Acts of anti-Semitism, yet his treatment of the Pharisees is not completely negative, for, in Sanders' opinion, the Pharisees who oppose Jesus on *halakah* are representatives of "traditionally Jewish Christians" and "the friendly, non-Christian Pharisees in Acts underscore the linkage between Christianity and the ancestral Israelite religion."[3] According to David Gowler, "The portrait of the Pharisees in Luke is primarily negative, whereas the portrait of the Pharisees in Acts is primarily positive." In Luke "signs of hope occur infrequently, but overall their characterization is rigorously closed off. They reject the purpose of God for themselves.... Yet in Acts the various levels of response to Christianity generate a sense of openness" and hope for the Pharisees.[4]

Two other scholars interpret Luke's portrait of the Pharisees as more consistently negative. According to Jack Dean Kingsbury, the religious authorities have the role of "antagonists" in Luke's story. They can be treated as a "group character," for "they are the stereotypical opponents of Jesus."[5] Kingsbury denies that Luke is more favorable toward the Pharisees than Matthew or Mark, even in Acts. Thus Luke's comment that the Pharisees have "rejected the purpose of God" (Lk 7:30) "is of programmatic significance."[6] John Darr reaches similar conclusions by studying Lukan characterization from the perspective of reader-response criticism. Like other reader-response critics, Darr discusses how the reader interacts with the text as the story unfolds sequentially. The reader must "build" the characters, guided by the narrator. That is, the reader must fit the bits of information into a consistent pattern to provide an overall understanding of a person or group. The interpreter must respect the "linearity" of the reading process. Failure to do this has led to misinterpretation of the Pharisees in Luke-Acts. Early in Luke they are introduced in strongly negative terms, and this beginning will condition the reader's understanding of the Pharisees through the rest of the story. The "derogatory image of the Pharisees" is "nearly indelible"; therefore, we cannot speak of a positive view of the Pharisees even in Acts.[7] I think Darr poses the issue in a helpful way, namely, as an issue of *reading*. Therefore, I will follow his initiative, even though I will modify his conclusions.[8]

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[1] J. A. Ziesler, "Luke and the Pharisees," *NTS* 25 (1978-79):156.

[2] Robert Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 84, 155.

[3] Jack T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 97.

[4] David Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 301, 314.

[5] Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 21-22.

[6] Kingsbury, "The Pharisees in Luke-Acts," in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, ed. F. Van Segbroeck et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 1497-1512 at 1510.

[7] John Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 37-59, 85-126 at 125.

[8] Other studies of the Pharisees in Luke-Acts which should be consulted: John T. Carroll, "Luke's Portrayal of the Pharisees," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 604-21; Mark Allan Powell, "The Religious Leaders in Luke: A Literary-Critical Study," *JBL* 109 (1990): 93-110.

We must first admit that there is considerable truth in the negative interpretation of the Pharisees in Luke. They are introduced with great regularity as opponents of Jesus and his teaching. This has a rhetorical function. It is the narrator's way of emphasizing certain issues by presenting them as matters of controversy and a way of contrasting Jesus' position with the position of others, making Jesus' teaching stand out sharply. The contrast not only heightens the reader's awareness of the radical implications of Jesus' words but also suggests that a choice must be made. Thus the Pharisees' role as opponents of Jesus contributes to a rhetoric of decision that is an integral part of the Lukan message. If Jesus had no opponents, his words would have less impact. It is also convenient for the narrator to be able to address dangers in the church by depicting them in the Pharisees.[9] The fact that the Pharisees are regularly given the role of opponents inevitably influences their characterization in Luke. If this role completely dominates their characterization in Luke, they are simply negative stereotypes. Their humanness has been sacrificed for the Gospel's rhetorical purposes.

If Jesus had no opponents, his words would have less impact.

But that may depend on whether the text requires us to read as Darr reads. Since the reader is so important in Darr's approach, we must understand how he constructs this reader. The reader must be constructed from the text (the text anticipates a particular kind of reader, one for whom this text will be understandable and meaningful) and the extratext (a body of knowledge that constitutes the "cultural literacy" that may be assumed for the time and place of writing). Nevertheless, this reader is always to some extent the modern reader who is trying to read the text through this reconstructed ancient reader.[10] With this I have no quarrel, except that an author, then and now, must anticipate a range of readers who will differ somewhat in opinion and social location. It is a somewhat dangerous simplification to speak of *the* reader. This observation will require us to be more cautious than Darr in stating how the reader will respond to particular developments in the narrative. Since we must think of a range of readers, we must also consider a range of possible responses. The difference in social position among members of first-century churches is one important factor to be considered.[11] Since the reader's social position, as well as unpredictable individual traits, affects the reading experience, we must recognize that the text has limited control over the responses of its readers.

When we consider the reader's appropriation of narrative for her or his own life, we must distinguish narrative from law or doctrine. Narrative tells about another time and place; it does not generalize about all times and places. Its relevance to the present

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[9] Brian Beck provides a good discussion of Luke's use of the Pharisees to warn the church against similar attitudes. See *Christian Character in the Gospel of Luke* (London: Epworth Press, 1989), 127-44.

[10] Darr, *On Character Building*, 25-29.

[11] I have tried to suggest the significance of this for a reading perspective in an article entitled "'Cornelius' and 'Tabitha' Encounter Luke's Jesus," *Interpretation* 48:4 (1994).

is indirect, suggestive. It is the reader's responsibility to apply the story to the present with appropriate cautions and adjustments. With respect to stereotyped characters, this may require recognizing that stereotypes, while useful in instruction, are not real people. At most they reveal some aspects of real people. Furthermore, even when we ignore questions of relevance and consider only the story as such, we should recognize that there are huge gaps in the Lukan narrative.[12] We are not told the complete life story of anyone, certainly not of the Pharisees. They appear only in a few brief scenes. The relative consistency of their role may give us some sense of persistent character, yet this need not preclude the possibility of change. Indeed, we encounter not just a group but individuals, like Simon the Pharisee in Lk 7:36-50, yet we are told nothing of his life story before and after the one scene in which he appears. Developments before and after might change our attitude toward him, and there is a significant gap within the scene itself that could affect our view of Simon. The Pharisees are without possibilities only if we choose to ignore the gaps that the narrative has left to test our imaginations.

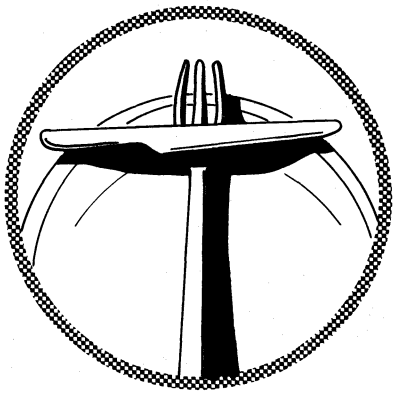
Darr emphasizes that reading is linear; we must follow the narrative in sequence if we are to understand its effect. He chooses to focus on the experience of the first-time reader, who must try to understand the characters in a scene in light of the information given about those characters up to that point in the narrative (not later, for that is not yet part of the reading experience). It is true that reading narrative requires us to combine what we read about characters into some overall pattern of meaning and that our understanding of a character at some point in the narrative will be influenced by what the narrator has told us up to that point. But we cannot be sure in advance (and sometimes not in retrospect) how the previous narrative should be used to interpret the next scene, for the linearity of reading need not imply that the same characters will always do the same thing. If it did mean that, linearity would be a formula for producing stereotypes in reading. What we have learned previously may serve to set off a development as *new*, contrasting with previous actions of these characters. Or the next scene may be partly similar and partly different, enriching the portrait of the characters. In various ways our previous reading contributes to our experience of the story, but it will be a boring story if the narrator simply repeats what we were told previously about the characters.

These remarks are relevant to the role of the Pharisees in Acts. The narrative in Acts reckons with significant new events: the resurrection of Jesus, its public announcement by the apostles, and the Spirit's coming to the church. It is legitimate, then, for the reader to wonder whether these events open new possibilities for the Pharisees. The logic of the narrative does not require them to act as they did in Luke.[13] And if they are no longer rigid opponents in Acts, they were not as hopeless in Luke as they might have seemed.

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[12] Darr is aware that the reader must fill gaps in the narrative in order to make sense of it and illustrates this by the story in Lk 7:36-50 that I will consider later. However, he does not notice the gap in the story that I will discuss below, and this affects his understanding of Simon the Pharisee. See Darr, *On Character Building*, 18-20, 32-35.

[13] This is a response to Kingsbury's argument that Gamaliel in Acts 5:33-39 cannot be open to the possibility that the apostles' mission is from God, for he was part of the Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus. See Kingsbury, "The Pharisees in Luke–Acts," 1506.



A strong statement of a group's opposition can serve to highlight the contrasting behavior of an exceptional individual. In the interrogation of Jesus before the Jewish council in Jerusalem, the opposition to Jesus appears to be unanimous, for "all" ask Jesus whether he is the Son of God, and, hearing his reply, "they said, 'Why do we still have need of testimony?'" Then "their whole assembly brought him to Pilate" (Lk 22:70–23:1). It is a surprise when we later discover that Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the council, did not agree with its decision (23:50-51). Even seemingly clear and sweeping statements about opponents may be modified later in the narrative.

Other religious authorities in Luke may not be as favorably described as Joseph of Arimathea (who, the narrator says, was a "good and righteous man"), but, even when suspicious or critical, they sometimes agree with Jesus on important points, and the scene can end without the religious authorities rejecting Jesus' statements. In these scenes the final reaction of the religious authorities is still open; they could react either positively or negatively. Consider the case of the "lawyer" (*nomikos*) in Lk 10:25-37. "Lawyers" are also mentioned in 11:45, and 11:53 shows that this is another name for the scribes. When the Pharisees are first introduced in 5:17, they are accompanied by "teachers of the law" (*nomodidaskaloi*). These, too, are scribes, for the scene continues by referring to "the scribes and the Pharisees" (5:21). These teachers of the law or scribes are repeatedly associated with the Pharisees in their first appearances in Luke (5:17, 21, 30; 6:7), and they show the same opposition to Jesus. They may have a different social role than the Pharisees, but their initial attitude toward Jesus is the same. It is not surprising, then, that the lawyer in 10:25 is suspicious of Jesus and wishes to "test him," nor that he wishes to "justify himself" in 10:29 (compare the Pharisees in 16:14-15). Nevertheless, the scene does not present the lawyer as lacking all religious insight, and Jesus does not respond to him as a hardened opponent for whom there is no hope. Unlike Matthew and Mark, in Luke it is not Jesus but the inquiring religious leader who quotes the double love commandment as summary of the law. Jesus readily agrees with the lawyer. This, of course, leads to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" (10:29), but Jesus and the lawyer begin their discussion in fundamental agreement. Furthermore, after the story of the Good Samaritan, the lawyer correctly answers Jesus' question, showing that he has understood the parable. Therefore, when the scene ends with Jesus' command, "Go and do likewise," it is possible for us to imagine that the lawyer has a new understanding of the command to love neighbor and will begin to treat non-Jews differently.

Commenting on a recent collection of essays on "Characterization in Biblical Literature," Robert Fowler wrote, "Most of these authors want to break away from static or monolithic views of characters. Most want to crack characters open, to give

them some wriggle room, to allow for fluidity and multiplicity in characterization."[14] This is a welcome development, I think. Contributing to these essays, David McCracken emphasized the tendency of biblical narrators to present characters "on a threshold," i.e., "at a potential turning point," so that "their responses are unpredictable and unknowable until the moment when they respond to the words addressed to them."[15] The lawyer who hears the parable of the Good Samaritan is "on a threshold," and the narrator leaves him there. The scene begins with the lawyer's suspicious testing of Jesus; it ends with a new possibility.

If we pay attention to the setting in which Jesus tells the story of the Prodigal Son, we will find the situation to be very similar. "The Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling" because Jesus was welcoming sinners and eating with them (Lk 15:2). In response to this criticism, Jesus tells three parables, with the Prodigal Son as the climactic member of the group. In Luke's narrative setting the sinners whom Jesus welcomed are mirrored by the younger son and the Pharisees and scribes by the elder son, who objects to the father's welcome of his younger brother. In light of this, it is striking that the father shows as much concern for the elder son as for the younger. He leaves the party in order to urge his elder son to share in it. He reassures his angry son by saying, "You are always with me, and all that is mine is yours" (15:31). Then Jesus leaves the elder son on a threshold. The story breaks off at the dramatic moment of decision as we wait to learn the elder son's response to his father's appeal. The Pharisees and scribes are also left on a threshold. Their importance is affirmed in the parable. They have heard the father's earnest appeal, but their response is not indicated.

We see, then, that the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders are regularly presented in conflict with Jesus, but there are also scenes which hold open for them the possibility of insight and change. Such people are more than stereotypical opponents, for growth remains a possibility. This is also true of Simon the Pharisee in Lk 7:36-50, but before discussing him, I want to respect Darr's request that we interpret characters by reading the narrative in sequence. What are we told about the Pharisees in Luke that might influence our understanding of them when we come to the story of Simon the Pharisee?

The Pharisees are introduced at the beginning of a series of controversy stories. There are several significant differences between the Lukan version of these stories and the parallels in Mark. Most remarkable is the fact that the first scene is set in Luke by noting the presence of "Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem" (5:17). This introduction indicates that the Pharisees show a high degree of interest in Jesus; it also allows Pharisees from every part of the Jewish homeland to witness the healing of the paralyzed man and to ponder its implications. The scene involves conflict, for the scribes and Pharisees object to Jesus' claim to forgive sins. Nevertheless, "Amazement seized all" who

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[14] Robert Fowler, "Characterizing Character in Biblical Narrative," *Semeia* 63 (1993): 97. Moreover, several scholars have recently argued that characters in ancient literature, contrary to the supposition of some interpreters, are not necessarily simple, static types. See David Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend,* 77-176; Fred Burnett, "Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels," *Semeia* 63 (1993): 6-19.

[15] David McCracken, "Character in the Boundary: Bakhtin's Interdividuality in Biblical Narratives," *Semeia* 63 (1993): 32.

witnessed the healing, "and they were glorifying God" (5:26). Presumably the large group of Pharisees and scribes is included. They are not yet hardened opponents.

However, the following scenes reinforce their role as objectors to Jesus' and the disciples' actions. "The Pharisees and their scribes" grumble when Jesus and the disciples eat with tax collectors and sinners (5:30). They also object to Jesus' disciples feasting while others are fasting (5:33). "Some of the Pharisees" accuse the disciples of breaking the sabbath by plucking grain (6:2), and on another sabbath "the scribes and the Pharisees" are watching Jesus in order to find a basis for an accusation (6:7). The last statement shows a significant increase in hostility. The Pharisees have learned Jesus' views about the sabbath. Now they are contemplating action against him. Furthermore, this scene ends with a clear negative reaction to what Jesus has been saying and doing: "They were filled with fury and were discussing with one another what they might do to Jesus" (6:11). Now we seem to have hardened opposition that is willing to take action to remove Jesus.

Yet no action results. We next hear of the Pharisees in 7:30. In contrast to the people and the tax collectors, "The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by" John. This is a direct statement about the Pharisees and lawyers by the narrator (not one of the characters in the story), and since most narrative critics believe that the biblical narratives use a "reliable narrator" (not one like Huck Finn, whom we are supposed to recognize as biased and ignorant), this statement would seem to be clear indication of the Lukan view of the Pharisees. Furthermore, Luke-Acts is very concerned with the realization of "the purpose of God," which is salvation for both Jew and Gentile.[16] To reject it is a very serious matter. Yet Meir Sternberg wisely warns us that, in the Hebrew Bible (and I would apply this to Luke-Acts), the narrator tells the truth but not the whole truth. Sternberg explains that the narrator's "statements... are rarely complete, falling much short of what his elliptical text suggests between the lines. His *ex cathedra* judgments are valid as far as they go, but then they seldom go far below the surface of the narrative, where they find their qualification and shading."[17] We have already noted that there is some later "qualification and shading" in Luke's presentation of the religious authorities.

After the narrator's remark about the Pharisees in 7:30, Jesus speaks of those who reject him because he is a "glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (7:34). Does the story of Simon the Pharisee that follows illustrate this reference to rejection of Jesus because he is a friend of sinners? Yes, but it also provides "qualification and shading."

Careful study of this story shows that it is rhetorically shaped to highlight the words of Jesus so that they will make a strong impact on the reader or hearer. As soon as the scene is set, our attention is focused on the woman and her unusual actions. She provokes a response from Simon and then from Jesus. Simon's response is given first so that Jesus can comment upon it. In v. 40

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[16] On the importance of God's saving purpose for understanding Luke-Acts as a unified narrative, see Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1, *The Gospel according to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 2-3, 21-22, 40-42.

[17] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 51.

Jesus takes control of the scene in order to defend the woman and set Simon straight. The rhetorical shaping of the scene by the narrator is clear when we notice that it is built upon contrasts. Simon and Jesus make contrasting judgments about the woman. But the woman and Simon also behave in contrasting ways toward Jesus. This contrast is reserved for the climax of Jesus' short speech. We are not told at the beginning of the scene, where we might expect it, how Simon received Jesus. We are only told this by Jesus as he contrasts, point by point, Simon's limited hospitality with the woman's extravagant acts of love (vv. 44-46). The contrast is then summarized in v. 47 as the forgiveness of many sins leading to great love, while little forgiveness yields only little love.[18] Finally, Jesus turns to the woman and reassures her in light of the social condemnation she risks in acting as she has.

It is clear that Simon is to some extent a foil who, in making a negative judgment about Jesus and the woman in v. 39, provides the occasion for Jesus to make the opposite case. It is also clear that Jesus is the figure of authority in the scene and that the narrator assumes that Jesus carries the day. Nevertheless, the scene does not reduce Simon to a caricature, a mere collection of negative qualities that invites neither sympathy nor hope. Note the following:

1. The very facts that Jesus' previous encounters with Pharisees in 5:17–6:11 ended with a high degree of conflict and that the negative picture of the Pharisees was reinforced in 7:30 makes it surprising that a Pharisee would invite Jesus to dinner. Here, it seems, we have a Pharisee who has not yet formed a negative opinion of Jesus.

2. When he does express a negative opinion in v. 39, he says, "If this man were a prophet...." This reflects the crowd's statement about Jesus in 7:16. We can also take it as an indication of Simon's motive in inviting Jesus. That is, one way of filling a gap in this narrative (Why did Simon invite Jesus?) is to assume Simon had heard that some viewed Jesus as a prophet and wanted to find out for himself. Thus the connection between 7:16 and 39 allows us to view Simon as initially open to recognizing Jesus as a prophet.

3. When the Pharisee cannot square Jesus' contact with the woman with the claim that he is a prophet, Jesus turns to him and addresses him by his name, "Simon." It is unusual for a character who appears in only one scene in the Gospels to be named. Here the scene takes on the intimate quality of direct, one-on-one encounter, and readers are encouraged to view Jesus' dialogue

Readers are encouraged to view Jesus' dialogue partner not merely in light of group characteristics ("one of the Pharisees") but as an individual.

[18] There is an ambiguity in the Greek of v. 47. I believe that "because she loved much" in v. 47 expresses the cause of knowing that she has been forgiven rather than the cause of forgiveness. To make acts of love the cause rather than the result of forgiveness conflicts both with the preceding parable and the following statement about little love.

partner not merely in light of group characteristics ("one of the Pharisees") but as an individual. This opens possibilities in the narrative. Will the expectations attached to the group guide events, or will individual characteristics prove to be more important? As we will see, the narrator leaves this question open.

4. Jesus does not simply condemn Simon but helps him to understand. He begins with a parable, which can put a new perspective on the situation by looking at it indirectly through a comparable case. Simon participates in the interpretation of the parable by answering Jesus' question in v. 42, and he answers correctly. By his parable and question Jesus is trying to teach and persuade, not simply condemn. This remains true in vv. 44-47, even though these verses imply criticism of Simon. We might add that Jesus is not Simon's only teacher in vv. 44-47, for, we might say, Jesus is trying to get Simon to accept the woman as his teacher. "Do you see this woman?" he says. She has something to teach you about forgiveness and love.

5. There is a crucial gap at the end of the scene. We are not told how Simon responded to Jesus' persuasive speech. Simon is left "on a threshold," and we can imagine either that he rejects what Jesus has said or that he begins to understand and agree. There are no clear indications of either outcome in vv. 40-50. In v. 49 we do find a reaction from the dinner guests to Jesus' statement to the woman in v. 48. The question "Who is this who even forgives sins?" is an echo of the objection of scribes and Pharisees in 5:21, but it is not as sharply formulated. It could express rejection or just surprise. It is also not clear whether Simon is to be included in those responding in v. 49. The narrator leaves us to ponder how Simon might have responded. Simon's characterization hangs on that response.

The issue of whether Simon is an "open" character or merely a negative stereotype is worth arguing because it affects the story's use in preaching. If he is a negative stereotype, we are simply being asked to reject Simon and what he stands for. If he is an open character, the hearer's relation to Simon may be more complex. Members of first-century churches, and members of churches today, even though they want to identify with Jesus' position, may recognize that they are like Simon. Here the factor of social position, and religion's possible role in social position, must be recognized. Simon is a person of high social standing in his society, and he shuns contact with a woman who is a social outcast. Those who are not social outcasts (the majority of church members today) must recognize that this fact distinguishes them from the woman and places them with Simon in the story. A completely negative picture of Simon will block this salutary recognition, but if Simon is teachable, we can listen with him and learn what he needs to learn. The lesson is not necessarily that we, too, are sinful outcasts (an outcast is defined by *social* position); it concerns our response to outcasts. Jesus says, "Do you see this woman?" Learn from her. You, whose experience of sin is rather mild because it has not meant *social* alienation, can learn from her the depth of God's forgiveness and the resulting power of love. This lesson we must learn if Jesus is to be our guest, for when Jesus comes to our homes, the sinful woman comes, too. It is a package deal. We can't accept Jesus without accepting the outcast whom Jesus forgives, not as a second-class citizen in the church but as one whose experience is vital to our own understanding of God.

Simon is defined by his contrast with the sinful woman and also by his initial conflict with Jesus. These contrasts are important for the story's function; they sharpen

the hearer's awareness of a decision that must be made by the hearer. But the story does more than draw sharp distinctions. Simon is a complex character and awakens a complex response. Because Simon resists Jesus and his message, the story encourages Jesus' followers to move away from this resistance, but some of Jesus' followers must also recognize that Simon represents their own social position and religious experience (little forgiveness and little love). Therefore, the way to move away from Simon's resistance is to learn with Simon what Jesus is trying to teach him. It is important that we view Simon as an open character with possibilities for growth, for this helps us recognize our resistance and our possibilities. The story, I believe, could work in a similar way in the setting of the early church.

I began this essay by discussing certain developments in the literary criticism of Luke that have, in some cases, led to strongly negative interpretations of the Pharisees. Negative stereotyping, I have argued, is a reading strategy that is not required by the text of Luke, where there is enough shading and sufficient gaps to produce complex and open characters, if we respond with sympathetic imagination. This discussion has implications for preaching. If the Gospel text presents the Pharisees as negative stereotypes, it is difficult to fault preachers for doing the same. If, however, this is not the necessary effect of the text but the result of ways of reading that do not engage our better selves, then preachers can and should stop treating the Pharisees as merely negative stereotypes, for this robs the Gospel stories of some of their power and value for the church.

Augustine proposed the following hermeneutical principle: We find the true understanding of scripture and its parts when we discover how it builds the love of God and the love of our neighbor. This principle can easily be misused to deny the difficulties and variety in scripture. Nevertheless, taking this definition of the center of scripture as a guide to reading can produce helpful reflection. In much of the biblical narrative it is up to us as readers whether our reading will be guided by the love of neighbor.[19] Our reading of the brief story about Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman is a case in point. Do we in our reading and interpretation show our love for both Simon and the woman?

> When Jesus comes to our homes, the sinful woman comes, too. It is a package deal.

[19] Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958), 30.

Seeing the Kingdom of God: The Metaphor of Sight in the Gospel of Luke

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In the Gospel of Luke references to seeing and hearing often evoke reflection on the perception of the kingdom of God. To the disciples, Jesus offered a private beatitude: "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it" (Lk 10:23-24). Because seeing and hearing involve both gift and responsiveness, John Darr has called this motif Luke's "rhetoric of recognition and response."[1] Luke emphasizes the importance of hearing well (8:9-18). To the disciples it was given to know the secrets of the kingdom, to see and perceive and to hear and understand (8:10). They are the good soil, but they must give light with what they have seen and make known what they have heard (8:16-17), and be careful how they listen (8:18).

Whereas Mark announces the theme of Jesus' ministry by reporting that Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mk 1:15), Luke relates Jesus' preaching in Nazareth:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives *and recovery of sight to the blind*, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Lk 4:18-19)

The motif of seeing and hearing appears again when Jesus responds to the messen-

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[1]John A. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 58. Sections of this article reproduce or abridge material that will be published in the forthcoming commentary on Luke in the New Interpreter's Bible (Abingdon Press).

gers sent by John the Baptist by saying: "Go and tell John *what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight*, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, *the deaf hear*, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them" (Lk 7:22). Several other themes are prominent here also, but the recurrence of references to seeing and hearing prompts the reader of Luke to listen closely to those passages that speak of seeing and hearing.

Let us listen once again, therefore, to three passages in Luke that develop the motif of sight as a metaphor for receiving the kingdom. A close reading of episodes that develop allusions to hearing would be equally rewarding, but to illustrate Luke's attention to this theme we will examine the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the healing of the blind man in Jericho, and the story of Zacchaeus, paying special attention to references to sight and seeing. Each in its own way contributes to the fulfillment of Jesus' announcement of the kingdom.

The Good Samaritan, Luke 10:29-37

Like most societies, first-century Judaism was ordered by boundaries with specific rules regarding how Jews should treat Gentiles or Samaritans, how priests should relate to Israelites, how men should treat women, and so on. Because the boundaries allowed certain groups to establish their positions, power, and privilege, maintaining the boundaries was vital to social order. It was a religious duty. The command to love one's neighbor (Lev 19:18) immediately prompted the lawyer's question, "And who is my neighbor?" (10:29), which was a request for Jesus to define the limits of required neighborliness. Lev 19:34, for example, required that an alien should be treated as a citizen: "Love the alien as yourself."

The central character in Jesus' story is noticeably undefined. He is not characterized by race, religion, region, or trade. He is merely "a certain man," who by implication could be any one of Jesus' hearers. The phrase "a certain man," however, is a common feature of the Lukan parables (12:16; 14:2,16; 15:11; 16:1,19; 19:12; 20:9). Jesus' audience no doubt imagined the man was Jewish, but Luke's audience may have assumed he was a Gentile. The point is that he is identified only by what happened to him.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notoriously dangerous. It descended nearly 3300 feet in 17 miles. The road ran through narrow passes at points, and the terrain offered easy hiding for the bandits who terrorized travelers. This unfortunate man had been stripped, beaten, and left for dead. His assailants had left him with nothing to identify his status except his desperate need. The story is told from the point of view of the beaten man, who could be anyone, and the audience could easily identify with this innocent victim of random violence and brutality.

The next words signal hope. "By chance" there was another traveler, one who might come to his aid. Moreover that traveler was a priest, one who could be expected to help, and he saw the man. The end of the sentence (v. 31) dashes the hope kindled by its beginning: the priest passed by on the other side. No reason is given, but in the end no reason justifies his neglect of the man in need. Could one really argue that pressing duties prevented him from stopping? If a priest on a journey found a corpse, he had a duty to bury it (*m. Nazir* 7.1). The Levite's response is described in the same terms: he too saw the man and passed by on the other side. In both cases, their seeing the man renders them culpable.

Jesus turns the issue from the boundaries of required neighborliness to the essential nature of neighborliness.

The story has reached its turning point. By the storytellers' convention, the audience can expect that in a series of three, the third character will break the pattern created by the first two. Moreover, the expected sequence would be a priest, a Levite, and then an Israelite (*m. Gittin* 5.8; *m. Horayoth* 3.8). The story would then have an anticlerical edge to it. The ordinary Israelite would do what the priest and Levite would not.

Shattering all expectations, the third traveler is a Samaritan. The story does not pit an Israelite against a priest and a Levite. By making the hero of the story a Samaritan, Jesus challenged the long-standing enmity between Jews and Samaritans. The latter were regarded as unclean people, descendants of the mixed marriages that followed from the Assyrian settlement of people from various regions among the people of the fallen northern kingdom (2 Kgs 17:6, 24). By depicting a Samaritan as the hero of the story, therefore, Jesus, demolished all boundary expectations. Social position—race, religion, or region—count for nothing. The man in the ditch, from whose perspective the story is told, will not discriminate among potential helpers.[2] Anyone who has compassion and stops to help is his neighbor. The question is thereby turned when viewed from the perspective of the one in desperate need. The alteration of the expected sequence by naming the third character as a Samaritan not only challenges the hearer to examine the stereotype regarding Samaritans, it invalidates all stereotypes. Community can no longer be defined or limited by such terms. The three on the road are each identified by social class, but the man in the ditch is not identified by any such labels.

Like the first two, the Samaritan saw the man; but seeing him, he had compassion for him. The detailed account of the Samaritan's care for the beaten man stands in sharp contrast to the sparsity of detail in the first part of the story. Count the verbs in verse 34: "He *went* to him and *bandaged* his wounds, having *poured* oil and wine on them. Then he *put* him on his animal, *brought* him to an inn, and *took care* of him." Pouring wine on a wound would help to cleanse it; the oil would keep it soft. The next day the Samaritan went on with his business, but he left two denarii (equivalent to two days' wages) to pay for the beaten man's care at the inn—not a lavish amount, but perhaps enough to provide for him through his recovery. If more were needed, the Samaritan pledged to pay it on his return. By his care for the beaten man, the Samaritan had already demonstrated that he was a faithful man. The innkeeper would not have to worry about whether he would repay his debt.

Jesus then turns the question back to the lawyer, and the lawyer is caught on the very question with which he intended to impale Jesus. "Which of these three was a

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[2]See Robert Funk's reading of this parable in "From Parable to Gospel: Domesticating the Tradition," *Forum* 1,3 (1985): 3-24.

neighbor?" The multiple choice question forces such a distasteful answer that the lawyer will not even use the word "Samaritan." He says instead, "The one who showed him mercy," but ironically his circuitous answer provides an accurate description of a neighbor. Jesus has turned the issue from the boundaries of required neighborliness to the essential nature of neighborliness. Neighbors are defined actively, not passively. As an Arab proverb says, "To have a good neighbor you must be one."

The lawyer had initially asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus has now answered his question by telling a story about a Samaritan who kept a beaten man from dying. Jesus had steered the lawyer to quote the commandments to love God and love one's neighbor. The first round of the contest between Jesus and the lawyer ended with Jesus' injunction: "Do this, and you will live" (v. 28). The second round ends with a similar command: "Go and do likewise" (v. 37). But this time there is no promise attached to the command. The duty of neighborliness is an expression of love of God and love of others, and those who show mercy show that they belong among the heirs of the kingdom, but the duty of neighborliness transcends any calculation of rewards. The Samaritan could not have expected any reward or repayment for what he did for the beaten man. One who shows mercy in order to gain a reward would therefore not truly be doing "likewise."

Jesus' parable shatters the stereotypes of social boundaries and class division and renders void any system of religious *quid pro quo*. Neighbors do not recognize social class. Neither is mercy the conduct of a calculating heart, nor eternal life the reward for doing prescribed duties. Eternal life—the life of the age to come—is that quality of life that is characterized by showing mercy for those in need regardless of their race, religion, or region—and with no thought of reward. Mercy sees only need and responds with compassion.

The story of the good Samaritan therefore gives new meaning to Jesus' blessing on the disciples who had gone out preaching and caring for the sick: "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!" (10:23)

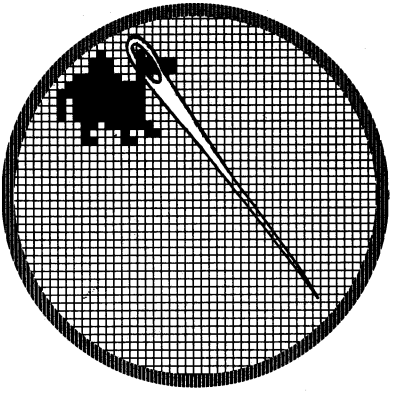
The blind beggar, 18:35-43

Jericho and Bethany are the staging areas for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. The events that occur in these places set the context and the themes for his arrival in the holy city. Jesus heals the blind man in Jericho who acclaims him as the son of David. He continues his ministry to the tax collectors by bringing salvation to a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus. These scenes prepare the reader for Jesus' arrival and the disciples' shouts of "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" (19:38)

Significant linkages connect the scene with the foregoing material in Luke. Although Luke regularly portrays the disciples in a more positive light than Mark, Luke adds the explanation of the disciples' inability to understand (see 18:34). This explanation may well be Luke's substitute for the longer demonstration of the disciples' obduracy in Mk 10:35-45. Significantly, Luke states that these things were "hidden from them." Now he relates Jesus' ability to enable even a blind man to see.

Other linkages with the foregoing material can be seen in the parallel between the disciples' act of preventing the children from coming to Jesus (18:15) and the response of "those who were in front" (which may be a reference to the disciples) who ordered the blind beggar to be silent. In both contexts the verb is the same: they

"sternly ordered" (cf. 18:15 and 18:39), and in both cases they acted to stop powerless, marginalized persons from coming to Jesus. In the end, the blind man followed Jesus, something the rich ruler was unable to do, but then, as John Nolland has observed, the blind man had nothing to leave behind (cf. 18:22, 28, 43).[3] The blind beggar, therefore, is an antitype for both the disciples and the rich ruler. He gains his sight (which the disciples will not do until after the resurrection—see 24:31, "Then their eyes were opened") and follows Jesus (which the rich ruler was unable to do).



Jesus' healing of the blind man also fulfills part of the program for his ministry, drawn from Isaiah and announced at Nazareth: "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (4:18). Although Lk 7:21-22 alludes to other healings, this is the only account of the healing of a blind man in Luke. The stage has been carefully set therefore by preceding references so that the reader may hear the overtones of Luke's account of the healing of this blind beggar.

Verse 35 sets the stage and introduces the new character. Whereas Mark relates the event as Jesus is leaving Jericho, in Luke Jesus is just arriving at Jericho, a change that Luke may have made in order to place the healing of the blind man before Jesus' meeting with Zacchaeus in Jericho (see 19:1). Earlier Jesus had told a parable about a priest and a Levite who would not stop for a man beside the road because they were on their way to Jerusalem. The beaten man had been on his way to Jericho (10:30). Now Jesus—on his way to Jerusalem—stops for a man by the road in Jericho. Earlier Jesus had told the parable of the man who ordered his servant to go out into the streets and lanes and bring in "the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" (14:21). Now Jesus orders his followers to bring the blind man to him. The dishonest steward was too ashamed to beg (see 16:3), but the blind man had no choice.

Luke omits Mark's report that the blind man was named Bartimaeus and revises Mark's account to introduce the crowd in verse 36. When the blind man hears that "Jesus the Nazorean" is passing by, he hails him as "Jesus, Son of David." Why did the blind man call Jesus "son of David"? Did he see what the sighted persons around him could not see? Was the association communicated by the term "Nazorean"? Was a healer understood to be a son of David, or is the term purely political? In its literary context, which furnishes the most plausible explanation, Luke's use of the term resonates with Luke's notice that Joseph was from the house of David (1:27; cf. 1:69; 3:31) and the promise at Jesus' birth that "the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (1:32-33). The blind

[3]John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, WBC 35c (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 901-2.

man's use of this title also prepares the reader for the royal overtones of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and the debate over the title "Son of David" in 20:41-44.

At the beginning of Luke 18 Jesus promises that God will "grant justice to his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night" (18:7; cf. 9:38). Now the blind beggar "cries out" to Jesus, "Have mercy on me!" It is the same as the desperate plea of the rich man to Abraham (16:24) and the ten lepers (17:13). Just as the disciples had sought to stop those who were bringing the children to Jesus, so those who went before Jesus ordered the beggar to be silent. Their efforts only provoked the man to cry out more insistently. The verb that Luke uses here (*krazein*) is one that he has used earlier to describe the deranged cries of the demon possessed (see 4:41; 9:39). In a reversal of the action of this scene, when the Pharisees later challenge Jesus to order his disciples to be silent, he replies, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out" (*krazein*; 19:40).

At Jesus' command, the blind beggar is brought to him. Jesus' question, "What do you want me to do for you?" ironically is verbatim the same as the question with which Jesus responds to James and John in the Markan scene that Luke has omitted (see Mk 10:36, 51). The man's response is that of a beggar, literally, "Lord, that I may see again" (18:41). Jesus' response is equally direct: "See again!" There is no indication of touching, washing, or any other means of healing. Neither is there any indication that Jesus violated the Sabbath by this healing. Instead, its thematic value lies in another direction. This scene and the next conclude Jesus' ministry to the outcasts, the oppressed, and the overlooked on his journey to Jerusalem. The giving of sight also marks Jesus' fulfillment of the program he set forth at the outset of his ministry (4:18), and in the immediate context demonstrates the power of God to save those who call out for mercy—like the tax collector who prayed, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" (18:13). Jesus therefore responds: "Your faith has saved you" (cf. 7:50; 8:48; 17:19). What is impossible for human beings is possible for God (18:27). Just as Jesus' response to his pleas for help was twofold, sight and salvation, so Luke's report of the effect of Jesus' words is twofold: immediately, the man regains his sight and begins to follow Jesus. By following Jesus, the beggar has joined the company of Jesus' disciples on the way to Jerusalem. Others left everything to follow Jesus (see 5:11, 28); this man gained what he wanted most.

Calling others to follow him was not the ultimate purpose of Jesus' ministry, however. That purpose is signaled by Luke's further description of the blind beggar's response. He followed Jesus, "glorifying God," and all the people "praised God" (18:43). Both notices contribute to the doxological theme in Luke. Jesus healed by the power of God: the Spirit of the Lord was upon him (4:18), and "the power of the Lord was with him to heal" (5:17). Therefore, the response of the beggar and the crowd, like that of the Samaritan leper who praised God (17:15), not only recognizes that Jesus acted by the power of God but also fulfills his mission to announce God's kingship on earth. The pattern of all praising God because of the healing that had come to one through the mercy of Jesus is itself a vision of the nature of the kingdom.

The story of the healing of the blind man carries important theological freight. It affirms that Jesus acted by the power of God. It declares God's mercy on those who have been damaged or incapacitated by life and by human society. It evokes again Jesus' identity as the Son of David. It

illustrates the power of pleas for God's mercy, and assures us of God's readiness to respond to those who cry out for mercy. Finally, both the recovery of sight and the people's response with praise to God give us a glimpse of the nature of the kingdom Jesus announced.

Zacchaeus, a son of Abraham, 19:1-10

Luke's account of Jesus entering the house of Zacchaeus stands fittingly as the last of Jesus' encounters with outcasts before his entry into Jerusalem. Earlier, Jesus was mocked as "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (7:34; see also 5:27-32; 7:29; 15:1-2; 18:9-14). In Luke the tax collectors function as the prototypical outcasts. Roman officials contracted with local entrepreneurs to collect the prescribed indirect taxes, tolls, tariffs, and customs fees in a given area. These entrepreneurs, the "chief tax collectors," were required to pay the contract in advance. They would then employ others to collect the taxes with the hope that the amount collected would yield a profit. The system was therefore open to abuse, and Jews who collected taxes for the Romans were assumed to be dishonest and were hated for their complicity with the Gentile oppressors.

Jesus' meeting with Zacchaeus artfully picks up threads of the narrative in the previous chapter of Luke. Jesus declared that "all who humble themselves will be exalted" (18:14), and Zacchaeus cast aside all regard for his own dignity by climbing a tree in order to see Jesus. Jesus challenged the rich ruler to sell all he had and give it to the poor (18:22), but the ruler went away sad. Joyfully, Zacchaeus responds to Jesus' declaration that he would stay at Zacchaeus' house by declaring that he would sell half of his possessions and give to the poor. The difference between half and all is not the issue. Rather, it is Zacchaeus' eagerness to do what is right for the poor. The salvation of Zacchaeus is therefore told in the form of a miracle story. Jesus was demonstrating the power of God at work in the announcement of the kingdom: "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God" (18:24-25). Finally, the story of Zacchaeus is coupled with the healing of the blind beggar: both occur as Jesus is passing through Jericho; the blind man wanted to see, and Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus; in both the crowd serves as an impediment to the one who desires to see; the verb "stood" (*statheis*) marks a dramatic turn in both stories (18:40 and 19:8); joy or the praise of God accompanies the "healing" (18:43; 19:6); and in both the effect is immediate ("immediately," 18:43; "today," 19:9). In the first story Jesus is called "Son of David" (18:39); in the latter he refers to himself as "the Son of Man" (19:10).

The new character is introduced in stages: a man, named Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector—rich. The emphasis falls heavily on the last word. The rich have not fared well in Luke. Jesus pronounced woes on the rich (6:24), and God called the rich farmer a fool (12:16, 20) and required his soul of him. The rich man went to Hades while Lazarus went to the bosom of Abraham (16:19-31), and Jesus observed how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God—it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle (18:23, 25). The reader may therefore initially expect that Jesus is about to meet one on whom he will pronounce a severe judgment or one whose dishonesty will be dramatically exposed.

On the contrary, this rich man plays the role of the blind man in the previous scene. He desires to see Jesus but cannot because of the crowd. Zacchaeus was small of

stature, so he could neither push his way through the crowd nor see over those in front. Clever and with singular purpose, Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree. In doing so, however, he exposed himself to ridicule on two counts. It was considered undignified for a grown man to run, and a man of his importance would certainly not climb a tree. The reader who is attuned to the social codes of the day can imagine the glee of the crowd at seeing the little tax collector running and climbing a sycamore tree because he could not get through the crowd. A sycamore (or sycomore, *Ficus sycomorus*) was a large evergreen tree with large, low branches that would have been ideal for his purposes.

The sense of movement is conveyed repeatedly in the two Jericho stories, with recurring references to approaching, going by, passing by, following, entering, passing through, and passing that way. Jesus moves with an entourage of disciples and onlookers around him as he makes his way with intensifying urgency toward Jerusalem and the fate that awaits him there. Zacchaeus' excitement over Jesus' coming was conveyed by his running. Now Jesus signals the urgency of the kingdom proclamation by commanding Zacchaeus to hurry (19:5) and come down from the tree. Zacchaeus' receptiveness to Jesus is again conveyed by the report that he "hurried down" and welcomed Jesus, "rejoicing" (compare the less than satisfactory translation in the NRSV: "and was happy to welcome him").

The declarative nature of Jesus' pronouncement is signaled both by the emphatic, initial position of "today"—"Today I must stay in your house" (author's translation) and by the verb *dei* which can be used as a divine imperative—"I must stay at your house." By staying at Zacchaeus' house Jesus was again crossing the barrier of ritual purity. A tax collector would regularly be rendered unclean by entering houses and inspecting goods. By entering Zacchaeus' house, Jesus was also acknowledging the chief tax collector's dignity and standing in the community. Jesus, who was being followed by the crowds, would have brought honor to whatever house he entered. He therefore conferred a special honor on Zacchaeus by offering to receive hospitality from him. Today, inviting oneself to someone else's home would be a violation of etiquette even for a famous personage. In this case, however, Jesus offered Zacchaeus, who merely wanted to see Jesus, an opportunity to be recognized prominently before the whole community. Jesus was exalting a man who had "stooped" to running and climbing a tree.

Both the recovery of sight and the people's response with praise to God give us a glimpse of the nature of the kingdom Jesus announced.

The reactions of both Zacchaeus and the crowd echo the theme of the parables in Luke 15. In 15:1-2, "the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling (*diegogguzon*) and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." Jesus responds by telling parables that emphasize the rejoicing that occurs when one that is lost is found (15:5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 23, 24, 32). Here, "all who saw" what had happened grumbled (*diegogguzon*), while Zacchaeus rejoiced. The blind

man had desired to see (18:41), and Zacchaeus had desired to see Jesus (19:3). Now the crowd sees Jesus doing the work of the kingdom, and they grumble. Jesus had declared, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!" (10:23), but here are eyes that see but do not see (8:10). All they can see is their predetermined judgment that Zacchaeus is a "sinner" (19:7).

The interpretive crux of this story occurs in Zacchaeus' declaration in verse 8. The pronouncement is introduced by the report that Zacchaeus stood up (*statheis*; cf. 18:40). Traditionally, this verse has been read as an indication of the genuineness of Zacchaeus' repentance. Henceforth, he will sell half his possessions and give to the poor, and if he has wronged any, he will repay them four times over. More recently, several interpreters have read it as Zacchaeus' protest of the injustice of the crowd's assumption that he is a sinner: he regularly sells half of his goods and gives the proceeds to the poor, and if he has wronged anyone he repays them four times over.[4] The verbs here are present tense as in the RSV, not future as in the NRSV. The choice between these two readings is difficult. There is no other indication of Zacchaeus' "repentance." Moreover, although the verbs in question are clearly present tense, they may either report Zacchaeus' customary actions or his resolve henceforth to rectify his past injustices.

The latter part of verse 8, however, tips the scales in favor of the traditional reading. Zacchaeus is not protesting his customary action to the disbelieving crowd. Instead, he is freely declaring his resolve to make amends for his past wrong doings as a result of the honor that Jesus has bestowed on him. Zacchaeus does not envision the possibility of defrauding others in the future, nor does he regularly defraud others and repay them. Rather, Zacchaeus vows to repay all those whom he has defrauded in the past (and by implication to take care not to defraud anyone else in the future).

Zacchaeus' pledge conforms to both Old Testament laws of restitution and the standard advanced by John the Baptist. Old Testament laws varied, so Zacchaeus offered to follow the most stringent standards. According to Lev 6:5, "you shall repay the principal amount and shall add one-fifth to it. You shall pay it to its owner when you realize your guilt" (similarly, Num 5:7). If a stolen animal was found alive in the thief's possession, the thief was required to pay double (Exod 22:4). If the stolen animal was slaughtered or sold, the thief was required to pay fivefold for an ox and fourfold for a sheep (Exod 22:1; 2 Sam 12:6). On the other hand, according to later rabbinic interpretation, if a man confessed his guilt, he was not required to pay double, fourfold, or fivefold restitution (*m. Kethub.* 3.9). Zacchaeus, by contrast, volunteered to repay fourfold.[5]

Similarly, Zacchaeus' pledge conforms to the standards set by John the Baptist. "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none" (3:11)—one half his possessions. Tax collectors should collect no more than the amount prescribed for them (3:13), and soldiers were not to extort

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[4]The former interpretation is favored by I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 697-98; Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 906. For the latter interpretation, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)*, Anchor Bible 28A (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 1220-22; Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 387.

[5]Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 176.

money from anyone by threats or false accusations (3:14).

Jesus responds, confirming Zacchaeus' status as a "son of Abraham," just as he had pronounced the woman freed from her stooped condition a "daughter of Abraham" (13:16). John the Baptist had warned the crowds to bear fruits worthy of repentance and not even to consider saying "we have Abraham as our ancestor" (3:8). Zacchaeus, however, bore fruits worthy of repentance, and Jesus declared that he was a true son of Abraham. Again, it is more likely that Jesus is confirming the change that has occurred in Zacchaeus than that he is defending Zacchaeus as an exemplary rich man. A camel could not pass through the eye of a needle, but God could lead a rich man into the kingdom of God (see 18:25-26), and God could raise up children of Abraham from stones (3:8)—or even from among tax collectors. Zechariah's prophecy has been fulfilled by John, but even more by Jesus: Jesus has become a "horn of salvation" (1:69), and he has given "knowledge of salvation to his people" (1:77). What outrageous good news: a camel passed through the eye of a needle!

The hero of the story is Jesus, not Zacchaeus. The last line appropriately returns to the issue of what this scene has revealed about Jesus: "the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (19:10). In Ezek 34:16, the Lord declares, "I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed." Again, therefore, Luke reminds his readers that Jesus fulfills "Moses and the prophets" (see 24:27, 44). The pattern of his ministry among the lost points to his true identity.

The story of Zacchaeus is a story of unexpected twists and reversals. A chief tax collector embarrasses himself by running and climbing a tree, but Jesus' ministry to the outcast and despised reaches the rich as well as the poor, tax collectors as well as harlots. Jesus has sought out and saved one who was lost. Because of Jesus' bestowal of favor, unexpected and unmerited, on Zacchaeus, the rich tax collector joyfully pledged to offer "the fruits of repentance." Zacchaeus thought he was seeking to see Jesus (19:3), but in reality Jesus was seeking Zacchaeus (19:10).

Zacchaeus thought he was seeking to see Jesus (19:3), but in reality Jesus was seeking Zacchaeus (19:10).

Each of these stories contributes to the metaphorical significance of seeing in Luke. When the Samaritan saw the man in the ditch, he saw more than the priest or the Levite; when the beggar asked for his sight, he was given more than the ability to see; and Zacchaeus saw not just Jesus but God's salvation. The kingdom can be seen, therefore, in the compassion of a Samaritan, the faith of a blind man, or the repentance of a tax collector. The blind beggar wanted to gain his sight. Zacchaeus just wanted to see Jesus, but like Simeon, by the end of the story both they and the attentive reader can exclaim in praise to God, "my eyes have seen your salvation" (2:30).

Telling Luke's Story: A Narrative Approach to Preaching on the Third Gospel

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In my recent book on preaching, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-literate Age* (CSS, 1993), I argue from the basic premise that the hermeneutic of an oral culture is that they "think in stories." I am indebted to Thomas Boomershine, professor of New Testament at Dayton Theological Seminary, for this seminal insight.

Kenneth E. Bailey makes a similar point in his recent work titled *Finding The Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15* (Concordia, 1992). Be sure to purchase this book for its marvelous insights into Luke 15 for your Cycle C preaching! In his Introduction Bailey writes:

> At least since the fifth century B.C., and the great days of classical Greece, the Western mind has done its serious thinking in concepts. In most forms of discourse, we from the West begin with an idea and then occasionally *illustrate* the idea with a simile, metaphor, or parable. The conceptual language is primary and the metaphor or parable is secondary.... Middle Eastern creators of meaning do not offer a concept and then illustrate... with a metaphor or parable. For them the equation is reversed.... The Middle Eastern mind creates meaning by the use of simile, metaphor, proverb, parable, and dramatic action. The person involved is not *illustrating* a concept but is rather creating meaning by reference to something concrete. The primary language is that of the metaphor/parable and the secondary language is the conceptual interpretation of the metaphor that in Biblical literature is often given with it. (pp. 15, 16)

In his own way Bailey affirms the reality that "thinking is story" is the way the Middle Eastern mind, and I would add oral cultures, *think*.

In *Thinking in Story* there is laid out as an educated guess what it must have been like to take a homiletics course in a "thinking in story" culture. In this hypothetical

course one would probably learn some or all of the following as the way of preaching.

1. The basic task of sermon construction is to stitch stories together.

2. Repetition of the basic reality of the sermon is vital if you want the hearers to remember what you have said. (The heart of any sermon ought to be the *lived reality of the gospel*, not *points about* the gospel!)

3. Always begin with a concrete story or situation and then move to universal applications.

4. Stories will usually have a "tone of conflict." (This works well with a *Christus Victor* model of the saving work of Jesus Christ.)

5. Make your appeal to the right brain.

6. Let your stories create meaning.

7. Think in stories! The goal of your sermon is to invite people to *participate* in the reality of the gospel in, with and under your stories.

With the advent of literate culture this whole approach to preaching died. Literate culture first came to birth in ancient Greece and was propelled forward as the hermeneutic of the modern world through the invention of the printing press. Literate culture changed the basic way people think. Walter Ong has written that "writing reshapes human consciousness." "Thinking in concepts" replaced "thinking in stories" as the basic Western form of thought.

Homiletical theory changed radically with the advent of literate culture. A typical homiletics course in a literate culture makes the following kinds of points about sermon construction.

1. The sermon should be structured in a logical—meaning linear—way as *ideas* are developed. (Sermons now become *points about* the gospel.)

2. Your first task is to structure your ideas in space, i.e., to create an outline.

3. Propositions, ideas, concepts are the main points.

4. The sermon writing process *and the exegetical process* are *analytical* in nature.

5. Sermons should be targeted to the left brain.

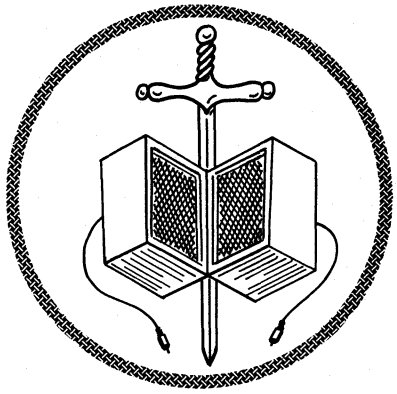
6. Stories, parables etc. may be told to illustrate the propositions.

7. Sermon construction is fundamentally controlled by "thinking in ideas."

The argument of *Thinking in Story* is a simple one. It is based on the premise that with the dawn of electronic communication we no longer live in a literate culture. Radio and television have replaced reading as the second most common way that we receive information. The most common way to receive information has always been face-to-face communication. Today face-to-face communication is actually threatened with demise itself from the electronic gadgetry known as *virtual reality.*

Walter Ong and others refer to electronic communication as "secondarily oral" in nature. *Sound* returns. The world of "silent print" is abrogated by the "sounded" world of radio and television. Sound, of course, was the dominant form of communication in an oral culture. For this and other reasons I have argued that preaching technique might best move forward by going *back to the future.* We can learn a lot about preaching in a world of sound from oral cultures! The above list of the characteristics of preaching in an oral culture needs to be dusted off and put to use in our new world of sound. Preaching, that is, needs to move from a world of "thinking in ideas" to a world of "thinking in stories."

There are, of course, many sources of stories for our use in preaching. We can use stories from the Bible, stories from our own autobiography, stories from church history and present tense personal stories of faith, stories from our culture (TV, movies, novels, theater, popular music), and stories



which we create for our own use. As I have worked with this "thinking in story" method for the past several years I have been seized by the power of biblical stories themselves as the *primary source of sermon story telling.*

Let me use the language of conversion. I have been converted! I have been converted to the power of biblical story telling. This conversion also happened to me at the feet of Tom Boomershine. At his story telling workshop several years ago each student was asked to memorize for oral presentation one of his or her favorite Bible stories to tell to the group on the final evening of our time together. So we did it. Twenty of us. We sat outside on the grass and told biblical stories to each other for two hours. That was one of the fastest two hours of my life! It was an incredible experience. I have always believed that the Bible is a means of grace. On this night several years ago I experienced the Bible as means of grace in a way that I had never experienced it before.

The most fundamental thing I learned during that story telling evening is the power of biblical stories. Biblical stories are dynamite. They are powerful in and of themselves. They are powerful without any explanatory help from us. They work. They do what they promise to do. Biblical stories participate in the reality of the grace which they announce.

I have put this experience of the power of biblical stories to use. I preached countless sermons on Lutheran Vespers in this format, i.e. by simply telling biblical stories. Listener response was enthusiastic. I have preached around the country using this method. The positive response to this form of preaching has simply overwhelmed me! This positive response has been just as strong from clergy with whom I have worked in enabling them to get back to the simple telling of the story.

I think I learned part of the reason for the positive response to the telling of the biblical stories from a couple of retired school teachers. They liked hearing the Bible stories, they said; "We never hear them whole!" That may indeed be the heart of the matter. Laity have heard us analyze these stories and explain them and reduce them to nice points about grace, but they have not heard us tell the stories whole! When we tell the stories whole they can stand pretty much alone. How did it ever occur to us that we could improve on the story of the Prodigal Son, for example, by reducing it to ideas? Who taught us that? Why did they teach us that? When we take to explaining this or any other parable or story it ought to be powerfully clear that *analysis* of stories has replaced the *telling* of stories as the heart of the preaching.

And now to Luke's Gospel. Luke, like the other Gospel writers and most of the Old Testament authors as well, "thinks in stories." Narrative or Literary Criticism is coming to understand this fact as it proposes quite new ways to approach a gospel like Luke. In his work titled *The Art of*

Biblical Narrative (Basic Books, 1981), Robert Alter proposes that a primary tool for exegesis of the biblical text is what he calls "narrative analogy." Narrative analogy assumes that "...parallel acts or situations are used to comment on each other in biblical narrative" (p. 7). In other words, biblical stories *talk to each other.* This is one of the ways that "thinking in stories" works. Luke, for example, often comments on one story by telling another story or many other stories. A fundamental role of exegesis in approaching Luke's Gospel, therefore, is to ask of each story if there are other stories in Luke's Gospel that help to throw light upon it. Our exegesis, therefore, cannot just be an analysis of the verses before us. We must begin to see a given lectionary story in the light of its much larger context. We must, that is, learn to "think in stories" as our way of being taken up in the greater story before us.

My assumptions are now all on the table. People in oral cultures tend to "think in stories." Most of the biblical writers (Paul is the most obvious *literate* exception) "think in stories." Story tellers often tell other stories (narrative analogy) in order to help us understand their message. This story telling approach to communication works quite well in our newly post-literate culture. One of the ways to approach the task of preaching, therefore, is to think of preaching as a story telling art. Since the biblical story tellers often provide totality of meaning and message by telling several stories, *our preaching task could well be understood to be the telling of a number of biblical stories on the way to our gospel proclamation.*

Such is my theory. I have put this theory into practice in my own preaching. I have also taught this practice to pastors. During the summer of 1994 I worked with pastors at Luther Seminary and at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, encouraging them to preach by telling stories from Luke's Gospel. I think every student I had would tell you that this method of proclamation of the biblical story is extremely effective. I would urge you to give serious consideration to preaching a number of sermons on Luke's Gospel by setting the assigned textual story in the context of other Lukan stories. Let the stories work their power! Believe me, the Bible and its stories are a powerful means of grace.

The most helpful commentary on Luke that will provide you with the narrative context of most Lukan texts is *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts, A Literary Interpretation,* by Robert C. Tannehill (Fortress, 1986). Tannehill works with the assumption that "Luke-Acts has a unified plot because there is a unifying purpose of God behind the events which are narrated, and the mission of Jesus and his witnesses represents that purpose being carried out through human action" (p. 2). A major thrust of Tannehill's commentary, therefore, is concerned with the connections between Lukan stories. "I am concerned with a text not as an isolated datum but as a functional member of the total narrative. I am also concerned with the meanings and suggestions of meaning which emerge when we note how part interacts with part" (p. 3). I urge you to purchase this commentary for the year of Luke.

The first text that occurs *in Lukan order* in the season of Advent is Lk 1:39-45 [46-55]. This text is assigned for Advent 4. The problems and promise of narrative analogy are unmistakably clear when we confront this text. The problem is a very simple one. Chapter 1 of Luke's Gospel is a wonderful story of two annunciations of the birth of two boys who will usher in a new age in the salvific work of God. The angel Gabriel makes an annunciation to Zecha-

riah that Zechariah and his barren wife, Elizabeth, will bear a son named John who will prepare the way for the Lord. Even though Zechariah is terrified at the sight of the angel in the Temple, he has enough presence of mind to express his doubts about such angelic nonsense. "How will I know that this is so?" Zechariah, man of half-faith, asks of Gabriel (1:18). Gabriel, in turn, announces a word of judgment upon Zechariah's half-faith: "...because you did not believe my words... you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur" (1:20).

Six months later the angel Gabriel has moved north to a city of Galilee called Nazareth to speak to a virgin whose name is Mary. The birth of another son is announced. "And now," says Gabriel to Mary, "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus" (1:31). Mary, like Zechariah, asks a question; hers, however, is more a question of faith than a question of doubt. "How can this be," Mary says, "for I am a virgin?" (1:34). Gabriel promises that the Holy Spirit will make it all happen. In an act of instant faith Mary responds to the angelic announcement, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (1:38).

All of this is prelude to the text for Advent 4. That is the problem: not a word of it is included in the lectionary! The lectionary story, the very first words from Luke that occur in the lectionary cycle, announce that Mary went to see Elizabeth. The mothers of the boys-to-be engage in a most interesting conversation. But we begin here in the middle of a much longer story. How can we possibly begin talking about Mary's visit to Elizabeth without telling the annunciation stories? It is the annunciation stories that set up this pericope for its proclamation. Without the annunciation stories this visit between two women has no context whatsoever. What happens so very easily in the homiletical task at this point is that we can take this out-of-context story and put it in any context we so determine. Then *we determine the meaning* of the stories. How unfair that is to Luke, who has labored for thirty-eight verses to put this story in a very precise context.

So much for the problems of this isolated block of Lukan material. Now to the promise that the method of narrative analogy affords us. That promise is simple. We will not take this out-of-context story and put it in any context we dictate. We will stay true to Luke's own context. We will tell this story of Mary and Elizabeth within the context of the annunciations. That means we have several stories to tell for our sermon. We will tell the story of Gabriel and Zechariah. We will tell the story of Gabriel and Mary. We will tell the story of Mary and Elizabeth. That's three stories we can stitch together. That might be quite enough for any sermon.

Let's define a narrative sermon as *stories told on the way to proclamation*. What is the gospel proclamation that emerges from the telling of these stories? We have already discovered that *faith* is a central reality in these stories. Zechariah did not believe the words of the angel. He was punished for his unbelief. Mary did believe the words that she heard. "Let it be with me according to your word," she said. In the verses assigned for this Sunday, Elizabeth underscores the faith of Mary. "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (1:45).

Luke has told us a fairly long story which sketches for us his understanding of faith. Faithful people believe the word and promise of God. Unfaithful people, people like Zechariah, do not believe the word and promise they hear spoken from God. We

could tell these stories from the human side of things and create quite a judgmental sermon. "Don't be like Zechariah," we could threaten. "Be like Mary. Believe the promises of God." This is proclamation all right: proclamation of law!

Seen from the other side, however, seen from God's side of the story, there is a word of gospel just waiting to emerge from these stories. We may need to add one more story to our story-stitching task. We'd better also tell the story in Lk 1:57-79. This is the story of the birth of John the Baptist. When Zechariah and Elizabeth took their newborn son to be circumcised there was popular sentiment to name the boy after his father. Zechariah would have none of that. He motioned for a writing tablet and wrote these words: "His name is John." Everyone was amazed at this. And then old half-faith Zechariah got his voice back. He began to speak and to praise God. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he sang eloquently of God's plan of salvation and of John's role in that plan. God finally got Zechariah to a place of faith! Sometimes it takes God a little longer to get through to people. Mary came to faith in the moment that the words of promise washed over her being. Zechariah came to faith slowly, very slowly.

So we have a fourth story to piece together from Luke 1 for this sermon on Advent 4. Our word of proclamation is also in view. The fact of the matter is that both we as preachers, and our listeners, are much more like Zechariah in these stories than we are like Mary. Many of us come to faith just as slowly as the aged Zechariah. Here is the crux of the good news: *God did not give up on Zechariah.* In our preaching we can put that proposition in the mouth of God. Speaking for God, we can join Gabriel for a third annunciation of good news. "I did not give up on Zechariah," we can say to our people, speaking for God. "I got done through Zechariah what I wanted to get done through Zechariah. John the Baptist was born! I kept my promise to Zechariah. I will keep my promise to you as well. I will not give up on you, though you may stumble at times in Zechariah's world of half-faith. I did not give up on Zechariah. I will not give up on you."

How can we possibly begin talking about Mary's visit to Elizabeth without telling the annunciation stories?

Now back to this text for Advent 4. There is another problem. Notice how the text is listed: Luke 1:39-45 [46-55]. The brackets mean that verses 46-55 are optional. Mary's Magnificat is optional! Maybe you have noticed in other years as you worked your way through Luke's Gospel that Mary's Magnificat sets forth the basic themes of Luke's entire Gospel. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the remainder of Luke's Gospel consists of stories that sing the themes of the Magnificat. Yet this text is optional!

The assigned pericope for Advent 4, therefore, presents us with two very serious problems. We have addressed the problem that isolating our attention on verses 39-45 wrenches these verses totally out of their Lukan context. We simply must tell this story in its full Lukan context. Only such an approach takes the canon of scripture seriously. Treating this text in isolation from its

context runs the risk of turning these verses into simply a pretext around which we can build our own contexts and say most anything we want to say. I urge upon you that we are called to a deeper sense of textual fidelity than this.

And the second serious problem: If we omit the Magnificat from our textual consideration we are omitting a vitally central text in the whole of the Lukan story. Let me illustrate this reality by looking at two verses from the Magnificat. In 1:52 we hear Mary sing, "God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly...." This is not just an isolated sentiment in Luke's Gospel. Story after story is told in Luke's Gospel which could have this verse as its *theme*! A first example of this might be Lk 7:36-50, the text for Pentecost 4. This story centers around two people. One is a man, a Pharisee, a religious leader with the proud name of Simon. The other is a woman, a nobody, a sinner with no name at all. In this story the powerful one is pulled down from his throne, so to speak, and the lowly sinner is lifted up. Stories in 13:22-30; 14:11, 12-14 (Pentecost 15), 15-24, and chapter 24 (Easter) are other Lukan tales in which the mighty are put down and/or the lowly are exalted.

Luke 1:53 has even more overtones throughout Luke's Gospel. There we read: "...God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." This verse could be the theme of the following Lukan texts: 6:17-31 (Epiphany 6); 12:13-31 (Pentecost 11); 16:19-31 (Pentecost 19); 18:18-30 and 19:1-10 (Pentecost 24).

Such a reading of the Lukan text given for Advent 4 (Lk 1:39-45) in the light of the larger Lukan story does cause certain problems. We can't begin to touch upon the context of this passage and all of the ramifications of the Magnificat in a single sermon. We have at least two options. In some years we might consider preaching the whole of the Advent season on chapter 1 of Luke's Gospel. Or, when the Magnificat's themes appear throughout the year in other stories from the Lukan Cycle, we can use one or more of those occasions to underscore the crucial importance of the Magnificat in the whole of Lukan story telling.

Let's take another example. The Lukan text assigned for Epiphany 1 (the Baptism of Jesus) is Lk 3:15-17, 21-22. This passage is important for many themes. Of central importance is the heavenly announcement which proclaims Jesus' identity: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." The theme that Jesus is Son of God is one of the basic ways that Luke has of speaking about Mary's son. This motif began with the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that the child to whom she would give birth would be called "...the Son of the Most High..." (Lk 1:32) and "...he would be called Son of God" (1:35).

Several stories follow this pericope which are meditations on the meaning on what it means to be "Son of God." In other words, if you want to know what Luke means by Son of God, *keep reading!* In most of the earlier years of my ministry that is the last thing I would have thought to do. I would, rather, have consulted theological dictionaries and theologians of my tradition to discover what Son of God meant. In this manner I would simply turn the text into a pretext for making some points about Jesus as Son of God which I would have derived from other sources.

Keep reading! The very next story is a genealogy of Jesus which traces his origin through Adam to "Son of God." Genealogies bore us! (You can rest assured that it is not included in the Lukan pericopes.) No. Let's get to the good part. But this *is* the good part! This is the way people in oral cultures fix their identity. They know their

genealogy: they can trace their identity back through many generations. But they cannot trace their identity back as far as this genealogy goes. Jesus is someone different from them. He is a real person. He is not a spirit being. And he comes from God. This the genealogy attests. Luke puts this genealogy after the baptismal story because this is the most exciting way he can think of to explicate the meaning of the word of God to Jesus in his baptism that he is "Son of God."

In the next story Luke reminds us that Jesus' identity as Son of God is so important that the devil rushes in to help Jesus supply meaning to God's word (Lk 4:1-13, Lent 1). "If you are the Son of God...." That's the devil's seductive word. The temptation story is clearly related to the baptismal event. The devil seeks to tempt Jesus into believing that seizing equality with God is a thing to be grasped (Phil 2:6). Jesus should use his power in his own self interests. "Why run around incognito all your life, Jesus? Show them you've got the right stuff. Let them see what being God is all about." Jesus says, "No, Mr. Devil! You don't understand at all what it means to be Son of God."

And then Jesus goes to Nazareth, to his hometown, and visits the synagogue there as was his custom (Lk 4:14-21, Epiphany 3). Jesus is invited to read, and he reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," Jesus began, "because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18-19).

Jesus gave the scroll back to the attendant and sat down. Everyone was staring him down. He spoke. "Today," he said, "this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). Isaiah—and not the devil—understood what Son of God is all about. This is what Son of God is all about. The Son of God does not use divine power for his own ends. The Son of God uses his power to bring good news and release and sight and liberty! That's what it means to be Son of God.

I have cited four textual stories appointed for three different Sundays in the lectionary cycle in order to begin to come to grips with the reality of Jesus' baptism into heavenly identity. There are other Lukan stories which deal with this reality as well, such as the transfiguration story in 9:28-36 which is appointed for Transfiguration Sunday. At some point in the Church Year I urge you to stitch these stories from Luke 3 and 4 together into a sermon that touches upon the reality of Jesus as Son of God. Again, these stories can be stitched together on the road to proclamation. These stories might come to a climax when we speak for God, when we let God define God's reality for us. "I have come to preach good news to the poor," we announce at sermon's end. "I have come to release you from your captivity. I have come open your blinded eyes. I have come set you free from your oppression."

I commend Luke's marvelous story to you. Get a copy of Tannehill's commentary. Read and re-read Luke's entire Gospel until the story as a whole starts to make sense to you. Luke thinks in stories. When he does so a simple form of preaching commends itself. *Tell Luke's stories!* As much as possible, let the stories speak with their own power. They don't need much homiletical help from us. Let the stories live. Let the people of these stories live in the hearts and minds of your parishioners as their traveling companions through life, helpful to them at a variety of stops along life's way.

Advent is Adventure

Robert W. Bertram
Saint Louis, Missouri

Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come.

Remember those six words, "Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come." Now, please, may I ask you to repeat them? During this sermon you will have several opportunities to interrupt by saying, "Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come." What will make you want to interrupt, I hope, is this cue from the preacher: "For Christ is coming soon."

There was this baby boy named John, who was grievously ill and on the verge of death. When the physicians despaired of saving his life, his young parents, both strong believers, prayed that in view of his impending death his life be taken quickly. At the mother's suggestion, the father even put their prayer to music, using the bold words from the twenty-second chapter of the Book of Revelation, asking the Lord Jesus, please, to hasten his return. Meanwhile the parents' friends had started a prayer chain, and what *they* were asking God is that little John be restored to health. Now, years later, I am pleased to report that John, one of my favorite students, is full grown, in good health, and a pastor in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The anthem which his mother Ruth prompted her husband to compose has been sung by the choir of Saint John's College, Cambridge, England, and at the Vatican for Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, and in just a moment it will be sung by our choir in this service. John's father, who wrote the piece, is sitting up there by the organ, Paul Manz. He has taught us all how to listen for that cue from Revelation 22, "For Christ is coming soon."

Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come.

Brothers and sisters, I don't dare mislead you. It is no small thing for sinners like us to sit here, big as life, and calmly tell the Lord Christ to speed up his coming. Indeed, that is extremely nervy of us. Truth is, it is downright risky. For as Revelation 22 makes quite clear, when the Lord Jesus does come back he will come back as our judge. Behold, he says, I am coming soon, bringing recompense, to repay everyone for what they have done. And he warns that this time there will be no room, as he says, for "sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." In other words, at his second coming we shall all be getting what we have coming to us.

As for myself, frankly, I find it terribly sobering to tell him, as you just did, to hurry back. You Christians must be very sure of yourselves, sure that you somehow can survive his coming judgment. Those six little

Advent is a way of beating the Final Judgment to the punch, by passing through it now with Christ ahead of time.

words which you are addressing to him could sound, at least to an outsider, like an invitation to disaster. You must know something the world does not know. Tell me once more, what is it you say when I say, "For Christ is coming soon"?

Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come.

I thought that was what you said. And now I see why you did. As I look again at Revelation 22, I notice from the text that for some folks Christ's coming in judgment is actually something they dare to look forward to. And who are those daring folks? They are the ones Christ calls "the righteous" and "the holy," by contrast with "the evil" and "the filthy." "The righteous" and "the holy" are you, I gather. No wonder you can afford to urge Christ to hurry. But then, how bold of you to believe that you *are* "the righteous" and "the holy"! Just *believing* that must take a special kind of chutzpah.

All the more so when I read what it is that *makes* you "the righteous" and "the holy." It is not, so far as I can tell from this text, that you haven't also been "filthy" and "evil." It is just that you are the ones whose filth has been washed away, as Christ here says. *That* is why, says he, you "have the right to the tree of life": not because "the river of the water of life" has always flowed through your system naturally, but rather because, panting and parched, you have gulped that "water of life" out of sheer thirst and dehydration. *That* is why you are the ones who will be allowed to "enter the city by the gates": not because you are inherently presentable and sweet-smelling, but because you have washed your robes in the disinfecting, freshening blood of the Lamb. But then all the more, how sure you must be of that Lamb that you dare say to him, when I say, "Christ is coming soon,"

Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come.

I am beginning to catch on. Advent is adventure. You dare to urge Christ to hurry back, judgment and all, not because you will be exempt from judgment but because you trust you will survive it. And you trust you will survive the judgment because you have already done that once before: you have previously undergone that judgment with him, the Lamb, the first time he was here, all the way into his death—and all the way out the other end in his Easter. That is why, already washed in his blood, his name already signed on your foreheads with the death-mark of a cross, you can sound almost cocky when you say to the coming Judge, Come on then, we are ready for you—thanks to you, Your Honor, who came ahead of time as a Lamb, as our fellow-culprit. You dare to believe you have that kind of pull with the One on the bench, owing to an earlier liaison with him.

You are right, Advent is adventure. Advent is a way of beating the Final Judgment to the punch, by passing through it now with Christ ahead of time. I apologize for using such rough language, "beating it

to the punch," the language of the boxer. I could have said, "beating to the draw," the language of the gunslinger, or "heading off at the pass," the language of the outlaw, or "preemptive strike," the language of the warrior. Or I might have said we "scoop" the last judgment—the language of the pushy newspaper reporter. But that is still pretty rough talk. On the other hand, what other language is there except from those shady areas of society where one party somehow "gets the jump" on the other but only by taking enormous risks? The trouble here, with Advent, is that in scooping the Last Judgment we are trying to get the jump on God, thereby risking blasphemy. Our only hope is that the one who assumes our risk is also God, the same God, God's Son. And *in* that breathtaking hope we boldly say, "Christ is coming soon."

Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come.

Advent is adventure. The church ought to caution people about that. We could issue bumper stickers: "If you like bunjee-jumping, you'll love Advent." Or: "Advent is getting what you have coming to you, Jesus Christ." Or: "The Lamb is coming—sooner better than later." I don't mean that Advent is for thrill-seekers. It is for God-seekers. Better, it is for a God who is a sinner-seeker. And that is thrilling.

Our Advent language reflects the thrill of that adventure. "Hark, a thrilling voice is sounding!" For example, the voice of the Virgin Mary. George Hoyer once said, "Imagine young Mary with her new baby standing in front of the census-taker in Bethlehem. He, without so much as looking up, barks at her, 'What's the kid's name?' And she answers, starry eyed, 'Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.'" I imagine that nowadays, being a teenager, she might have said, "Wow, he's like, you know, cool—totally awesome." Hark, her thrilling voice is sounding! Or imagine the old seer, Saint John the Divine, exiled to the island of Patmos, receiving the vision which is now our Book of Revelation. Hark, his thrilling voice is sounding, like a New Testament version of rap:

"Blessing
and glory
and wisdom
thanksgiving
and honor
and power
and might
be unto our God
forever
and ever.
Amen and
Amen."

And hark, *your* thrilling voices sounding: "For Christ is coming soon."

Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come.

"Dominus Vobiscum": Luke 1:26-31

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It's all over the place, in the lesson from Luke and in the carols we are singing: the Lord is with us, in the flesh, born today, residing with us. Despite its awkwardness, the phrase from "Joy to the world" perhaps puts it best: "the Lord is come." We don't talk that way; we say that the Lord "has" come or "came" or "did come." But still we know exactly what the carol means by "the Lord *is* come."

What is so striking to me in the carols is that we have no tentativeness, no embarrassment, no hesitation in these awesome declarations. Not just that a baby has been born but that the Lord of heaven and earth is come! The Word of God become flesh may be scandalous for our reason, but it is joyful proclamation for our faith. It is a pity our worship is not always this daring or exuberant.

In the middle of this century the fruits of ecumenical cooperation began to affect the publication of denominational worship materials. For those of us in the more catholic or conservative Reformation churches this did not make much difference, since we had retained much of the liturgical heritage of the church. But to those in the Calvinist or radical Reformation traditions, who had discarded all forms that hadn't come straight from scripture, these new orders of worship could seem, if not shocking, at least very puzzling. Both ordinary worshippers and theological scholars in such traditions kept asking, "what does this mean?" about each strange expression.

Seemingly one of the least of these forms was what is usually called the "Salutation," which occurs both immediately before the Prayer of the Day and at the beginning of the liturgy for Holy Communion, where the presider says, "The Lord be with you," and the people reply, "And also with you." Nearly every liturgical textbook treats this formula in a most perfunctory way, as merely a "greeting," with some suggesting that the phrase comes from the book of Ruth (2:4), although the response there is different. (Sometimes a footnote to some arcane Latin or German tome is included.) Such non-explanations may satisfy us in the so-called "liturgical" churches, who are used to saying things we don't understand, but it scarcely sufficed in the staunchly Calvinist Reformed Church of



the Netherlands, where if something didn't come word for word from the Bible it had no business being part of worship.

One of their New Testament scholars, W. C. van Unnik, undertook a lengthy investigation of this salutation, which is usually called by its first two Latin words, *Dominus vobiscum.* His question was one that seemed obvious to anyone encountering the words for the first time: why was it translated in all modern languages as "The Lord *be* with you" rather than "The Lord *is* with you"?

The problem arises because there is no verb in the Latin. This is not uncommon. In many languages the "to be" verb can be omitted, as it is here, where we have simply *Dominus* (the Lord) and *vobiscum* (with you). And when the verb is omitted, it is customary simply to supply "is." This construction is common also in Greek and it is true for the words of the angel to Mary in our reading from Lk 1:28, where it says in both the Greek and the Latin of the Vulgate, "Hail, O favored one. The Lord with you." (Here the "you" is in the singular; that is the only difference.) And this is always translated, "The Lord *is* with you." Why not also in our worship services? Why leave it merely as a wish or a pious hope: "May the Lord be with you"?

Unable to find anything very helpful in liturgical sources, van Unnik turned to the Bible and discovered that there were no exact parallels for this construct as a greeting or even in any of the worship materials in the Bible. The parallels came rather in the way that the Bible speaks of God "being with" someone. Here the Great Commission from Matthew 28 is typical, where Christ's "Lo, I am with you always" refers not to some perpetual divine presence but to his presence *for mission.* This follows from what has been true all along in Jesus' ministry: the thing that distinguishes him is that God is with him—in his miracles, healings, casting out demons, forgiving sins. But God being with him is described not as a static permanent presence but as a *dynamic power.*

A second feature of God's being with someone in the Bible is the association with the word "Spirit." Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us," precisely because of the Spirit, which is the active powerful presence of God to save, the mighty wind of God that blows where it wills, that no one can control. This is evident also in the continuation of the passage from Luke 1. After the angel's announcement Mary asks, "How can this be, since I have no husband?" And the answer is, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." Van Unnik concludes that to translate the angel's opening words to Mary as merely "The Lord *be* with you" is seriously to underestimate the importance of what is being said. Rather, that phrase announces the indispensable prerequisite that God's Spirit is given to people to enable them to do the work of God.

Dominus vobiscum is neither merely a greeting nor any other sort of carryover from earlier worship practices but a creation of the early Christian community under the impact of the Spirit of the risen Lord. Its earliest setting, van Unnik thinks, is in the Great Thanksgiving, where, before we can lift up our hearts or give thanks, and surely before we can take and eat and drink, the dramatic announcement of the Lord's presence must be made. Where people are gathered in the name of Jesus, Immanuel, the dynamic presence of the Spirit is found; only then does it make sense to do what we are about to do. Similarly with the Prayer of the Day: we can only pray if the Lord is present and all prayer takes place in the Spirit. When minister and people tell each other that the Lord *is* present, there is nothing else to do except pray.

It is not clear from the word itself whether *Dominus* (The Lord) refers to Yahweh, Jesus, or the Spirit, but what *is* clear is that it does not refer only to the Christchild. Even in the words to Mary the reference was not to a child within her. The declaration of the dynamic presence of God, even in the Christmas carols, is never limited to the babe in the manger. The birth of Jesus in itself never saved anyone. It is his whole ministry, including his death and resurrection, that constitutes the incarnation, the enfleshment of the divine word, and that is for us God's saving event. Only then is the name bestowed that is above every name, that Jesus is Lord, and then the Spirit is the *divine availability* of this crucified, risen, and ascended Lord.

Except for the angels, no one sang Christmas carols at the birth of Jesus. It was not until after his death that humans began to know him as someone to sing about. We "miniaturize" the Christmas gospel if we think it is only about the baby Jesus. Christmas is about the dynamic presence of God on earth in the astonishing concreteness of the one who ends up on a cross. And for that reason our worship must be equally daring and concrete, not content with piously wishing the Lord's presence on each other, but confidently proclaiming "the Lord *is* with you" as the sole basis for all that we are and do.

That is van Unnik's conclusion about the salutation. New Testament scholars as diverse as Raymond Brown and Krister Stendahl endorse his view, and the elder statesman of Lutheran worship in the U.S., Henry Horn, suggested 25 years ago that we should recover this usage in our liturgy: "The Lord is with you." "And also with you."

How about doing so as a Christmas gift to ourselves? It is liturgically indeterminable. It is linguistically permissible. It is biblically commendable. It is theologically desirable. And I think it is spiritually necessary if we are to be shocked out of our slumbers by this one who *is come* as Mary's child and Lord.

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Henry Horn, *The Christian in Modern Style* (Fortress, 1968), 128-29, and see there a reference to an article by Krister Stendahl, 181 n. 10.

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Book Reviews

Out of Every Tribe and Nation: Christian Theology at the Ethnic Roundtable. By Justo Gonzalez. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992. 244 pages. Paper. $16.95.

More than four years of formal dialogue among ethnic minorities have made this book possible. Native Americans, Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans, together with their corresponding sub-groups, were particularly concerned about making their contribution to the church at large. Female and male, lay persons and theologians, approached the main theological doctrines. In so doing, they denounced the way in which the mainstream of Western North-Atlantic theology has done violence to scripture.

The central claim of *Out of Every Tribe and Nation* is the true catholicity of the church. Based on the reinterpretation of what "according to the whole" means, from that follows that the opposite of a pluralistic theology and church is not parochialism or sectarianism; it is heresy. The ethnic minority theologians would argue that the classical Western theology must exorcise its modern versions of Docetism, Gnosticism and Marcionism. Consequently, the church will be the church, that is, the church of the last and the least.

This is an honest work which does not reflect impressionistic ideas of individual scholars; quite the contrary. It is the voice of those communities who for centuries have been stigmatized. In order to illustrate its point, this book refers to some "horror stories": for instance, when Jonathan Edwards baptized the war against Native Americans by satanizing them.

Out of Every Tribe and Nation represents a more faithful interpretation of the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a vexing book. It literally shakes the sand foundations on which the classical theology and mission have been built.

Although the book possesses a rigorous methodology, Justo Gonzalez added the virtue of writing it in a very readable style. Any active, non-specialist reader can profit from it. This work can very well be used in theological training, in reading circles, and obligatorily by preachers and Sunday School teachers.

Eliseo Pérez-Alvarez
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Dead Sea Scrolls Today. By James C. VanderKam. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. xiii and 210 pages. Paper. $12.99.

It has been 47 years since the Dead Sea Scrolls were found—"the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times"—and they have profoundly affected biblical studies in the second half of the twentieth century. Publication of the scrolls has been exasperatingly slow, especially for the many documents from Cave 4, but this can be attributed to the busy schedules of the few scholars originally assigned to them and inefficiency of administration rather than to any attempt to suppress the scrolls by an alleged scrolls "cartel." VanderKam is one of more than fifty scholars who are editing the remaining fragments.

His book retells the story of the discovery of the scrolls and the excavation of the Qumran site, identifies the contents of the major documents among the 800 manuscripts in the eleven caves (25% of the manuscripts are biblical texts), situates the authors in early Jewish history (he follows the Essene hypothesis and effectively refutes its critics), and relates the importance of the scrolls for Old and New Testament studies. A final chapter interprets the various controversies about the scrolls. Throughout VanderKam writes authoritatively, in a non-technical fashion, and with great balance. Here is *the* book pastors should turn to in order to get up to date on the scrolls.

The biblical commentaries at Qumran assumed that the prophets addressed the latter

days, not their own time, when they wrote, and the commentators assumed they were living in those latter days (such *pesher* exegesis also appears in Matthew). A scroll still to be published ("Some of the Works of the Torah") identifies twenty-two points of law on which the people of Qumran disagreed with their opponents. The Temple Scroll also shows the centrality of law in the life and thought of the community and claims to be an inspired work. The residents of Qumran included in their category of authoritative works (canon?) several works that never became part of the Hebrew Bible, namely, Jubilees, parts of 1 Enoch, and the Temple Scroll. VanderKam emphasizes the importance of the scrolls for textual criticism, favoring some of the theories of Emanuel Tov over those of his own teacher Frank M. Cross.

It is indeed refreshing that such an authoritative introduction is so accessible and easy to read.

Ralph W. Klein

A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period. Volume I: **From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy.** By Rainer Albertz. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994. xvi and 367 pages. Cloth. $32.00.

This may well be *the* book of the 90s in Old Testament studies! Albertz, professor at the University of Siegen, published his two-volume history of Israelite religion in German in 1992. In it he combined for the first time social *and* political history, without neglecting comparative religion, and he gave even-handed treatment to the crucial exilic and post-exilic periods (the latter are discussed in Volume 2 [forthcoming]). Throughout he investigates official religion, which included the prophets and other reformers as its opponents, as well as the substratum of personal piety. Occasionally he even identifies the theology of the village community as a third group.

Albertz investigates sociologically the Deuteronomic movement and believes that it arose from the "free farmers," court officials, and a large part of the priesthood in Jerusalem, with the full support of the supreme court. In Pentateuchal criticism he follows E. Blum, who denies the existence of J and E, but proposes instead a D composition (late deuteronomic, pre-priestly) and a later priestly composition. The so-called Book of the Covenant is linked to Hezekiah and the Decalogue to the time of Josiah. The covenant itself is late, not before Deuteronomy. One of the great boons of this book is that it will make available in English and in a comprehensive synthesis the current German late-dating of many Old Testament texts for a thorough airing in North America.

While many of his opinions may seem radical for those trained in Bright's popularization of the Albright school, they are mainstream in the last generation in Europe, and Albertz at times argues strongly for the antiquity of the tradition (e.g., an inherent tendency to monolatry in Israel; much of Israelite religion developed in the exceptional situation of a revolutionary process of liberation and the extreme conditions of the wilderness). He and other Germans criticize Alt's hypothesis about the god of the fathers, and he notes that patriarchal religion is actually a kind of typical family piety. He rejects the conquest, migration, and revolution models for Israel's entry into the land, favoring instead an out-migration from Canaanite cities due to political instability and urban economic downfall. His reconstruction of pre-state Israel is acephalous (no head of state) and egalitarian. There were divine competitors of Yahweh in the early years and only in the late monarchy do personal names formed with the name Yahweh clearly predominate. He claims that El and not Yahweh was the God of the tribal alliance, not paying enough attention in my judgment to the argument that Yahweh himself was an El figure (Cross).

The court theologians made Yahweh, once the symbol of liberation from state oppression, into the guarantor of state power, and the state built up new mechanisms of oppression not only of alien peoples but also of its own society. Ninth century prophets combined defense of traditional farmers' rights with a passionate defense of traditional Yahwism against state syncretism. The later prophets claimed Yahweh one-sidedly for the weak and the oppressed.

Deuteronomy accepted in principle the kingship theology of the ancient Near East, but emptied it of all the political and sacral competences that Israelite kings had claimed. Similarly, Deuteronomy accepted Jerusalem as God's chosen city, but detached it from any political or theological connection to the monarchy.

No one, of course, will accept all the opinions offered here since much depends on reconstruction and imagination. But Albertz gives a coherent and comprehensive picture that reflects the best of German scholarship at the end of the 20th century. The footnotes are massive—125 pages!—unfortunately placed at the back of the book and not at the bottom of the page as in the original. John Bowden has provided an excellent and readable translation though not without a few errors. Items: read 730s for 830s, p. 162; read 630s for 730s, p. 198; the Deuteronomic reformers replaced renunciation of agricultural use with a renunciation of debts (p. 217 reverses the two!); notes 122 and 123 (p. 276) should read "below" and not "above"; "hardly" is omitted in note 223 (p. 37=65)—the omission reverses the intended meaning.

The second volume will be of crucial importance for anyone who loves the religion of Israel, including its heirs in both Judaism and Christianity.

Ralph W. Klein

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Briefly Noted

Eighteen scholars from six countries honor Prof. Marinus de Jonge in the Festschrift **From Jesus to Paul: Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology** (Sheffield Academic Press, $75) by treating aspects of de Jonge's own work or interests. They include such people as Wayne A. Meeks, Dieter Lührmann, John J. Collins, J. Louis Martyn, James D. G. Dunn, Morna D. Hooker, Christopher M. Tuckett, and Leander E. Keck. The other ten are equally competent. Topics range from the messianism of Qumran, through the historical Jesus, to Pauline and Johannine theology and the need to renew the study of New Testament Christology. No short notice can do justice to their variety and interest. They are worthy of the scholar they honor and significant contributions to New Testament scholarship. Only the price of this hard-bound volume will discourage many would-be buyers from adding it to their shelves. *Edgar Krentz*

Donald Juel examines the interpretation of the Old Testament in early Christianity in **Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity.** The book was hailed as a major contribution when published in 1988; Juel argued that the confession that Jesus was the King-Messiah of Jewish expectation was the earliest Christian creed and therefore also the starting point for the [re-]interpretation of the Old Testament. The recent reprint (Fortress, $14.95) puts this valuable work into readers' hands at a nominal cost. I hope it sells out rapidly; it deserves to. Juel is Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. *Edgar Krentz*

Literary analyses of New Testament books multiply. In **Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative**, William Kurz provides a useful interpretation of Luke-Acts that combines literary and canonical criticism to correct and supplement historical critical interpretation (Westminster-John Knox Press, $15.99). Kurz discusses the method of analyzing narrative in terms of implied author, implied readers, plot, and what he calls "gaps" (assumed information that underlies the differences between the conclusion of Luke and the beginning of Acts, the end of Acts, etc.). He then examines the prologue, narrators in Luke and Acts, and the claims of the "We" passages in Acts. In all of this he says careful identification of the narrator is the key to understanding. He finds that Luke uses irony and the motif of misunderstanding as key factors in shaping his narrative. Finally, he argues that this literary approach is more congruent with the character of Luke-Acts as canonical scripture and useful for mediating between historical critical interpretation and canonical authority—and for recalling the orality of this literature.

Edgar Krentz

Joseph Barber Lightfoot's massive five-volume edition of the Apostolic Fathers (Clement of Rome, Ignatius, the Didache and Polycarp) was a landmark of nineteenth century scholarship; its commentary changed the course of the critical debate on the dating of John's Gospel and set a standard of critical historical scholarship still worthy of emulation. After Lightfoot's death his student J. R. Harmer published the Greek text and translation in 1891, supplementing it with texts and translations of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Epistle to Diognetus. Michael Holmes published a revision of Harmer's translation in 1989, including the fragments of Papias. Now, in **The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of Their Writings** (Baker, $17.95), he gives a second edition of the translation and a revised Greek text, both supplied with useful critical notes. Holmes has revised the general introduction and the introductions to the individual works and provided up to date, helpful basic bibliographies. In brief, this useful, one-volume edition now becomes a fundamental text for the library of scholars of the New Testament and the early church and should give Lightfoot a new and, one hopes, an extended life. It is a welcome publication.

Edgar Krentz

Isaiah 56-66. By Grace I. Emmerson (Sheffield Academic Press, $9.95). Third Isaiah plays a prominent role in the lectionary even though its interpretation is not an easy task. E. finds a symmetrical structure in these chapters and insists that they must be understood in their own right *and* in relation to the whole canonical book of Isaiah. She opts for multiple authorship and the probability that these chapters arose over a long period of time. While appreciative of Paul Hanson's attempt to locate these chapters sociologically, she also identifies telling weaknesses in his hypothesis, including his identification of contending parties and the alternate interpretations of key passages that are possible. Her conclusion to a very helpful and accessible book: "These chapters affirm that the heart of true religion consists in putting into practice in daily living Yahweh's own commitment to social justice." RWK

Hosea. By Graham I. Davies (Sheffield Academic Press, $9.95). D., who wrote a commentary on Hosea in the New Century Bible Commentary series, digests his findings for this volume in the Old Testament Guides. In a new interpretation of Hosea's "marriage" D. proposes that Hosea slept with but did not marry Gomer (chapter 1) and in this process represented Baal, one of Israel's lovers. When Hosea took back the wayward woman of chapter 3, his actions represented Yahweh's seeking out faithless Israel. D. finds the roots of Hosea's teachings in the northern Psalms 80 and 81. He also interacts helpfully with all the significant literature about Hosea in the last generation. RWK

Preaching Helps

Ash Wednesday—Good Friday, Series C

On the Crossroad

Sometimes when you cry "Ouch!" you get heard. A while back I raised the question whether any readers out there might like to participate in the task of producing some "Preaching Helps." One of the positive responses came from a group of pastors in the Peoria, Illinois, area. They already met as a text study group and volunteered to take on the season of Lent by composing both the First Readings and Pastoral Reflections. What a gift! As an added bonus they offer us some gems called "Luther for Preachers."

As it turns out, they even wrote paragraphs of introduction, focused on "Keeping the Cross in Lent." Lent, they wrote, "is a remembering walk in the way of the cross for all Christian pilgrims. But Christians today live in a cacophonous postmodern world where any *via dolorosa* but our own can be tuned out all too easily. Still, Lent has perennial potential to reconnect us in a shared pilgrimage into our foundational story: the life-giving, redemptive Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"The Lenten challenge set before all bearers of the Word is to call us back to this core proclamation of our corporate faith: *He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.* Proclamation that matters must go beyond mere creedal repetition. Proclamation must show us afresh our Lord's wounds and the enduring love that whispers (or shouts?), even from the cross, *'for you, for the forgiveness of sin.'*"

Individual members of the group wrote the First Readings. The Pastoral Reflections were generated in the give and take of group discussion.

Paul S. Park (B.A. in Asian Studies from Augustana College, Rock Island; M.A. in Special Ed., Northern Illinois University at DeKalb; M.Div., Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg) is Chaplain for Pediatrics at St. Francis Medical Center in Peoria. A native of Mt. Morris, Illinois and former public school teacher and parish pastor, Paul enjoys bicycling and jazz.

Chicago native **William H. Callister** (B.A., North Park College; M.Div., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago) serves St. John's Lutheran Church in Toluca, Illinois.

Steven P. Tibbetts (M.Div., Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary) is Pastor at Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Peoria, Illinois. Hailing originally from Canoga Park, California, Steven is a former banker and accountant. Ambitions include being the first bishop on the moon. Prefers it not be in exile.

Webster, South Dakota native **Dani Jo Ninke-Greaver** (M.Div., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago) is associate pastor at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Washington, Illinois.

Mark D. Boorsma (B.A. in English from St. Olaf College; M.Div., Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary) serves St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bartonville, Illinois as associate pastor. A native of Minneapolis, Minnesota, Mark is a former English teacher, maintenance mechanic, and goatherder.

Barry A. Long (B.A. in English from the University of California at Berkeley; M.Div., Yale Divinity School; Certificate of Advanced Theological Study, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary) is Pastor of St. Timothy Evangelical Lutheran Church, Wyoming, Illinois. Pastor Long grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area. Due to psychological forces well beyond his control, he finds himself compelled to spend most of his free time musing over the fate of Lutheranism in the United States. In the rare moments he shakes loose his muse, he can be found watching 1950s detective films, or reading Raymond Chandler.

Nathan C. P. Frambach has served as an ELCA parish pastor for the past five years in the Peoria area, and is currently a doctoral student at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, in the area of youth and family ministry. Nate and his wife Diane currently live in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. Diane works as a guidance counselor and Dean of Students at Wayzata High School.

Many thanks to these good volunteers, and good preaching to you readers as you move along the crossroad toward Good Friday.

Robert H. Smith
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Ash Wednesday
March 1, 1995

Psalm 51
Joel 2:12-19
2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:2
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

First Reading

"Create in me a clean heart, O God..."
—Ps 51:10
"...rend your hearts and not your garments."
—Joel 2:13
"We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."—2 Cor 5:20b
"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."—Mt 6:21
"As disciples of the Lord we are called to struggle against everything that leads us away from love of God and neighbor."
(Exhortation—*LBW* Ash Wednesday Liturgy)

The Ash Wednesday texts are about our struggle to be in relationship with God. The repentance of Ash Wednesday is not so much about things and activities, as it is about our relationship to God.

The psalmist is so certain that he is totally dependent on God, that he does not even attempt to talk his way out of his sin. The psalmist believes not only that his *physical* healing comes from God, but more important that his *spiritual* healing does as well. Ultimately, the psalmist believes the true meaning of penance is not just atoning for particular sins. Rather, it is the surrender of one's whole self to God.

The call of Joel (like the psalmist) is also to repentance, but in Joel's case it is a call to *communal* repentance. Joel believes that Israel is not self-sufficient; ultimately Israel's very existence is dependent on God.

There is much disagreement about what catastrophic event Joel is describing in chapter 2. Some would assert that it is the same locust event as in chapter 1, but I find Hans Walter Wolff's image of the coming of God's Apocalyptic Army much more compelling (Hermeneia; Fortress, 1977). Whatever the event, Joel believes that the only way Israel will escape destruction is true

spiritual repentance (surrendering to God).

The historical and literary questions surrounding 2 Corinthians are immense. The study of 2 Corinthians is a field in which there are more theories than facts. The congregation at Corinth was a pastor's nightmare, and 1 Corinthians (it would appear) did not solve all of the pastoral and theological issues in that Christian community.

Regardless of the timing or intent of this portion of 2 Corinthians, Paul feels compelled to once again spin out the peculiar relationship between message and messenger. Paul is convinced that the proclamation of the gospel is neither narration of past events, nor philosophical instruction. Preaching itself is a salvational moment. Paul declares that for the church at Corinth now is the time for surrender to God.

The Gospel text comes from Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. The text contains reflections on the three great acts of religious devotion in Judaism (almsgiving, prayer, fasting) as well as a reflection on possessions. These radical formulations ring with the echoes of Jesus' voice.

For Matthew, these devotional acts do not happen in order to get into relationship with God. They are to be observed because God has already created the relationship.

The psalmist, Joel, Paul, and Matthew take their relationship with God so seriously that the only response possible is to surrender one's own self to God. PSP

Luther for Preachers

"A true and penitent heart sees nothing but its sin and misery of conscience. He who still finds any counsel and help in himself cannot in all earnestness speak these words; for he is not yet altogether miserable but feels some comfort in himself, apart from God's mercy." (*LW* 14:166, *The Seven Penitential Psalms—1525*)

Pastoral Reflections

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Imposition of Ashes—*LBW* Ash Wednesday Liturgy)

There is a powerful fifth text for Ash Wednesday—the liturgy/ritual itself.

On Ash Wednesday the preacher must be very intentional about enhancing the ritual, rather than distracting from it.

At the time of the sermon, people do not have just some random swipe of ashes on their foreheads; but rather, the ashes are cruciform.

What has God done about our dusty lives? God has done the cross—the cross which is now on our and the congregation's foreheads. The cross with which we were joined in our baptisms. The cross which both reminds us just how dusty we are and, at the same time, proclaims to us that dust is not the final chapter of our lives.

We live in the tension of baptismal waters and Ash Wednesday ashes, but both find their meaning in the cross.

How does this interplay of ritual/proclamation and dust/water get spun out? At the minimum there are two options—Joel's theme of repentance and Matthew's theme of discipline (hopefully—at least during Lent).

Joel, the psalmist, and Paul all would assert that repentance is not a *choice*. Because of God's activity in our lives, we have no choice. We simply repent. Repentance takes place because the cross is a living reality. Ritual/proclamation and dust/water exist because of God's activity on and beyond the cross. It is because of that Christ Event that Paul can proclaim *now* is the time (*kairos*) for repentance. As we are God's people—we do repent.

Joel, the psalmist, and Paul call us to hear that proclamation—but the ashes do as well. As we go home from worship and wash off those cruciform ashes we are reminded again that "...the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance...." (Luther's Small Catechism)

Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting—the three great acts of religious devotion in Judaism. It is those same three acts that Matthew declares are also to be central to the Christian life.

As strange as it may seem (at least by today's standards), we Lutherans assert the same thing: "Repentance, fasting, prayer, and works of love—the discipline of Lent—help us to wage our spiritual warfare." (Exhortation, *LBW* Ash Wednesday Liturgy)

The cross (now on our foreheads) calls us to those powerful activities. As with repentance,

there is not choice. The God of dust and water calls us to take seriously our role as God's people in this world.

For a people used to instant everything, 40 days seems a very long time to do things as foreign as almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

God declares 40 days is just a beginning—the beginning of surrendering ourselves to God.

A surrender that can be seen, marked on our foreheads. PSP & Co.

First Sunday in Lent March 7, 1995

Psalm 91
Deuteronomy 26:5-10
Romans 10:8b-13
Luke 4:1-13

First Reading

"Desert experiences" are common to our human experience. We know what it is like to face trials and temptations. These desert experiences help us better understand our utter dependence on God for our salvation. It is in the desert where God meets us and we learn to trust in God above all else. Trust in God's promise is a theme that runs through these texts for the first Sunday in Lent. We can trust our Lord to see us through any trial we may face because we are sure of the Lord's identity.

In the first lesson instructions are given as to the prayer that should be said when the offering of the first fruits is made. The people of Israel could give of the first fruits of the harvest because it was the Lord their God who brought them into the good land they occupied. They could trust God's promise and give of their labors because they realized that it was the Lord who gave them all they had, "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power." As the people of Israel were in the desert, they came to know God as their Lord and savior as they experienced God's radical activity in history on their behalf: the parting of the Red Sea, the manna and quail, and water from a rock.

In the second lesson we find ourselves in the middle of Paul's argument in the tenth chapter of Romans where he reminds his readers that even for the people of Israel, throughout their history, it was trust in God rather than adherence to the Law that brought them God's promise, "for one believes with the heart and so is justified and one confesses with the lips and so is saved." The word used for "believe," πιστευω, implies not just an intellectual belief, but a relationship with Christ. We can trust in Christ as our savior because of the relationship he has built with us where he reveals himself to us as our savior.

In the Gospel we have Luke's account of Jesus' temptation in the desert. Jesus is in the desert forty days. There he is tempted by the devil, who tempts Jesus to trust in himself and the devil more than in God. The devil challenges Jesus' identity, "If you are God's Son...," and tempts him to use his powers to satisfy his hunger, to trust in himself to find an easier way to glory than the one his father has in mind, and to trust in his status to prove his identity.

Jesus was able to do what the people of Israel were unable to do throughout their history and what we ourselves are incapable of doing: to trust in God and God's plan completely. Jesus trusted in God completely, in spite of the terrible plan of the cross, and was victorious over the powers that oppress us. It may be only natural that we dread the desert, but we can also trust that when we enter the desert we enter it with the one who faced the desert first, and who came through it victoriously. WHC

Luther for Preachers

"In all temptations we should keep our gaze fixed on the image of Christ, and keep close to it. For Christ goes on, however much it hurts, and He is full of courage. Therefore we must pray that He will also give us His courage and spirit, that we too may learn to be strong in the midst of weakness and to overcome in the days of affliction. In this way, Christ comes to us not as an image. He implants in us all His courage so that we too can endure." (*WA* 10.III.77, from Martin Luther, *Day by Day We Magnify Thee*, trans. Margarete Steiner [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982], 128)

Pastoral Reflections

The desert is a rich and compelling image in these texts. Desert experiences are a part of the human experience of alienation and isolation. All can relate to the feeling of being tested to the point where our own resources are no longer sufficient, and we are tempted to put our trust in someone or something other than in the God who saves us.

There are different ways one may react when confronted by the desert. We may dread it, we may deny it, or we may try to escape the desert by embracing a desert of our own choosing (which turns out to be no desert at all) rather than accepting the one set before us. In our society we think of desert experiences as bad times best to be avoided, but our biblical tradition reminds us that it is in the desert where God meets us, and where we learn to put our absolute trust in the God who saves us.

It is only natural that we dread the desert. The desert is a lonely, desolate place where no one in their right mind would choose to be. We find ourselves thrust into the desert and feel disoriented and terrorized. We enter into a survivalist mode, and find it impossible to give of our first fruits for fear of exhausting our resources along the long, desert trail. We dread the desert because we can only see in it our pain and alienation, and are blinded to the possibility of God's activity in its midst.

Some may choose to deny the desert at all. There are many people today who would rather deny that they are in the desert than to face its reality. The people we serve are individuals whose desert experiences include marital conflicts, abuse in the family, addictions, and depression; and most often they would rather pretend not to have a problem than to work through it. Many of us are also serving dying congregations which are content to continue as if nothing is wrong. We choose to deny the desert when we believe nothing good can come out of its experience, thus denying God's power to see us through it.

Another form of denial is embracing a desert of our own choosing rather than accepting the real desert set before us. We may look to ourselves busy doing things, sacrificing, exclusively focused on our own pain, and self-satisfied in managing the desert on our own. We choose our own desert because it is more manageable than the real desert set before us, and thus we deny ourselves the privilege of calling on the Lord our God to save us.

The desert is not a self-imposed trap which we can choose to enter, but a place where we discover that all our resources have been exhausted and we come to a point of decision between trusting in God completely, choosing another god, or despairing. When we are in the desert we come to the realization that our resources are not sufficient. We cannot survive on our own. We must trust in a strength outside of ourselves to see us through this desert.

The texts for this first Sunday in Lent challenge us to a Lenten discipline which puts our trust completely in the God who saves us. Our God meets us in the desert where those who have gone before us were met by our Lord and learned the lesson that our Lord could be trusted to see us through any trial we face. We are challenged to trust in the Lord's promise that the Lord will indeed save us. Most important of all, however, when the desert is at its bleakest and loneliest, we are challenged to trust that we are not there alone. The Lord, who first faced temptation and overcame it, now is in the desert with us; and his victory over the forces that separate us from God becomes our victory. We can survive the desert only because he survived first, and gives us the strength to survive. WHC & Co.

Second Sunday in Lent
March 12, 1995

Psalm 91
Jeremiah 26:8-15
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 13:31-35

First Reading

"Nice sermon, Pastor...."

That's certainly not how the priests and prophets greet Jeremiah after his sermon in Jeremiah 7, briefly recounted just before this pericope. "You shall die!" they respond, and he is off to be tried before the authorities.

"He has spoken against our city!" goes the charge against Jeremiah. Blasphemy against Jerusalem is the same as blaspheming the Lord, and there are plenty of witnesses who have heard his words.

Jeremiah's defense is simple enough. These are the Lord's words. Obey Yahweh, and save your city. Do with me as you please. Just remember, though, how the Lord takes to the shedding of innocent blood. Cain and Abel, he insinuates. Remember them!

"Nice sermon, Jesus." The Pharisees rarely ever say that, but perhaps they thought it, for (unusual in Luke's Gospel) here they warn our Lord that Herod wants his head. Jesus is not worried about Herod. Prophets are not killed in Galilee, but in Jerusalem. Jesus' destiny, on this journey, in his earthly pilgrimage, is Jerusalem. His work—the cross—will be accomplished in that city.

"Nice sermon, Paul." Certainly not what Paul is trying to evoke here. Your choice is clear, he says to the church at Philippi. You can follow those of us who preach the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, or you can follow those "Christians" who place their eternal destiny in their own hands.

But remember what the Messiah has promised through that cross, the cross that protects your community as Rome protects your city. Remember what we expect of our Messiah, and what we know of those who try to work out their own salvation.

"Nice sermon, pastor." SPT

Luther for Preachers

"In this manner [Christ] sought to give us an example, that, as He laid aside His glory and never abused it for His own pride, power and splendor, but used it for the good of His servants, we should do the same. We should never exalt ourselves because of our gifts, never abuse them as an occasion for pride, but serve our neighbor with them to the very limit of our power." (*WA* 52.215f, *Sermon on Maundy Thursday 1544* [in *Day by Day We Magnify Thee*, 137.])

Pastoral Reflections

A temptation for the preacher this week is to simply cut loose and let 'em have it. It is still early in Lent, yet also far enough along (especially with midweek services) to wonder if people are taking the season seriously. Concerned that people are getting tired of this "Lent stuff"? Then preach about those "whose minds are occupied on earthly things and whose god is the belly."

Of course, Jeremiah did cut loose. Being stoned by parishioners is probably not the response one seeks to evoke. Add that to a commitment to preach the grace of God, and another temptation is to look past the more "cross-ish" parts of the Lenten Gospel. The anxious preacher could easily give the balm of grace before the wound of our sin has been completely felt.

Jesus may have felt as if he was in a similar position. Today the Pharisees look past his healing and preaching, and advise Jesus to watch his neck. His response? The lament for Jerusalem. "People," he sighs, "you just don't get it."

Our Lord's image is the hen gathering her chicks. In contrast to the usual Good Shepherd image (a gentle, "pastoral" scene), here our Lord is frantically running every which way, healing here, teaching there, gathering his (her?) brood, each of whom is aimlessly running around. That hen is persistent. But finally, if there is a chick that persists in the refusal to be gathered in, the hen may stop running after it.

"Your house is left to you," Jesus says. The prophets speak. The apostles beseech. God showers his people with grace. The Son keeps gathering this brood around the cross. And in the fullness of time we risk resisting for too long the

God who chooses us. "I have longed to gather you in. I have yearned for you. But I must move on. If you insist, I'll stop bothering you."

How often did I desire, Jesus laments, and you were not willing. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. SPT & Co.

Third Sunday in Lent
March 19, 1995

Psalm 126
Exodus 3:1-8b, 10-15
1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Luke 13:1-9

First Reading

Even in theophany, God remains somewhat hidden. The introduction of a personal name, 'Yahweh,' points us to God's transcendence rather than to God's identity. The call of Moses occurs *after* the first two chapters of Exodus in which the silence and apparent absence of God is conspicuous. The significance of Moses' birth is as yet unknown, his ironic rescue from Pharaoh by Pharaoh's own daughter is somewhat forgotten in light of his botched attempt to liberate his fellow Hebrews and his fearful retreat to Midian. A theophany of God and the appearance of a hero are long overdue. "The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out."

God heard the cry and remembered the covenant, even though the Israelites had forgotten God (v. 13). It is God who approaches Moses, not the other way around. The day of deliverance has come. The seemingly God-forsaken have been observed, their sufferings known, their cries heard (v. 7). God answers Moses' queries as to his identity by reminding Moses of the divine history, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," coupled with divine responsiveness, "I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them."

Just as God would not be defined in a single revelation to Moses, the justice of God may not be reduced to predictable human formulas. When Jesus is informed of the death of certain Galileans at the hand of Pilate, he uses the opportunity to challenge the dogma of the day that particular sins brought particular consequences. Jesus' warning that "unless you repent you will all likewise perish" dismisses the people's demands for explanations about the nature of God, and urges them instead to repent, to turn towards this incomprehensible God for mercy.

The parable of the fig tree warns us that although mercy is available, the time for repentance is finite. Given the absence of fruit and the disappointment of the owner in the parable, the grace already accorded is undeserved even by human standards. The ministrations of the patient gardener have been effective, for a time.

Paul warns that one cannot assume they know Christ well enough to put him to the test. God's displeasure is a dangerous thing; God's fidelity is sure and God's testing is not God's final word. In the words of the psalmist's confident prayer, "May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping bearing the seed for sowing shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying in their sheaves."

The grace of God is unexpected in each case: in desperate Egypt among a seemingly forgotten nation of slaves, upon a fruitless fig tree, amid testing, and upon fields sown with tears. DJN-G

Luther for Preachers

"...as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:13, 'God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.' This is true. When the suffering and affliction is at its worst, it bears and presses down so grievously that one thinks he [or she] can endure no more and must surely perish. But then if you can think of Christ, the faithful God will come and help you, as He has always helped His own from the beginning of the world; for He is the same God as He has always been." (*LW* 51:20, *Sermon at Coburg on the Cross and Suffering—1530.*)

Pastoral Reflections

If God called upon me to announce that a Day of Deliverance had come for my congregation, if God called upon me to challenge my congregation to prepare to realize some radical hope... how would I introduce such a God? Who would I say was the God who spoke to me? How would I describe this God? The days when the answer, "The God of your ancestors," was a satisfactory response have passed. In most cases, it takes keen insight, inspired imagination, and wise discernment to describe to people, "Look at what God has done for us lately!" "See what grace has already been bestowed upon us!" Such descriptions remind us of how powerful and trustworthy God is.

The Exodus account provides a case study for St. Paul's maxim, "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it." God, in God's own time and in God's own manner, provides a way out of the suffering.

Preaching about suffering is a very delicate matter. We confess that testing is sometimes given by God for reasons known to God alone. Sometimes we are able to look back and see that what felt like painful testing was really God's grace masked beyond our recognition. Sometimes the trials we suffer are just consequences of our own sin or foolishness. Sometimes, we suffer a trial which we conclude is a random instance of tragedy. The exact nature of God's involvement in this day's suffering may not be clear. But we believe that God is faithful, God is gracious, and God will provide for us a way out.

It is a faithful and gracious God who sent the Son to be our Savior. That Son reminds us that no matter how faithful and gracious God is, there is an urgency in the vineyard. The time for repentance is now! The time to trust and believe that God is faithful and gracious is now! The time to bear fruit is now! DJN-G & Co.

Fourth Sunday in Lent March 26, 1995

Psalm 32
Isaiah 12:1-6
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Luke 15:1-3,11-32

First Reading

Joy? In Lent? The boxed and buried alleluia grows restless and knocks against its coffin lid. A dawning glimmer of Easter joy begins to intrude upon our liturgically correct sackcloth-and-ashes penitence. Both Isaiah 12 and Psalm 32 start with awareness of sin, but both also move the penitent into singing and shouting for joy. Confession and forgiveness ring out in the psalmist's words, "'I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.' Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin." The penitent confesses; God forgives and restores, moving penitents back into grace-filled whoops and shouts of joy.

Paul moves us into the beckoning paradox of the cross, urging a Lenten awareness that our one true and lasting joy was won in our Lord's Passion. The cross is indeed folly to a perishing world, no less so today than when Paul preached. A crucified Messiah is ever and always foolishness apart from faith, but to those "who are being saved" the cross is life-giving and transforming. The cross, God's ultimate giving of self, is "for you, for the forgiveness of sin." In Christ crucified, the penitent is embraced by the paradox of a "folly" that excels and upends conventional wisdom.

A compassionate father's embrace of a prodigal son—a timeless image of God's boundless mercy, and an invitation into sheer grace. The well-known Prodigal Son story is part of Jesus' response to murmuring by "religious" people against One who receives sinners and freely breaks bread with them. A son asking his living father for his inheritance is tantamount to saying, "Drop dead, Dad." Yet the father freely and graciously complies, and the son sets out to spend his bounty. When it's all gone, and he's so hungry he's drooling over pig food, the son plans and re-

hearses a penitential speech. Speech firmly in mind, the son sets out for home. But before he even gets close to the home place, the father (whom he rejected and whose inheritance he's blown) runs to embrace him. The son begins but never finishes his practiced speech. The father's loving compassion and mercy have already preceded the prodigal's penitence. What is left but the ache to embrace?

There is a prodigal in each of us, but is there not an elder son as well? Have we never deeply envied mercy and favor freely granted to another? Have we never begrudged merrymaking and showy feasts of fatted calf given for those less "deserving" than ourselves? It never seems to dawn on the elder son that the whole of the father's remaining estate is held in trust for him. The present opportunity to rejoice in his brother's redemption is sullenly ignored by our brooding elder son. Is the elder son merely a foil in the story to contrast the joy of the parent and child reunion? Or can he hold a mirror to our own lovelessness and spite, that can so easily blind us to God's compassionate mercy, as abundantly present and operative in our neighbors as in ourselves? Grace can't be hoarded, after all. May God kindle in us the expansive grace and compassion of the prodigal's father.

God's word to us today lights a dawning joy in our Lenten pilgrimage, and casts a warming ray from the crucified One in whose light we stand redeemed. Our remembering walk in the way of Christ's cross bids us to our only true and lasting joy. Our boxed and buried alleluia struggles to break free and burst into its Easter song. MDB

Luther for Preachers

"Christ is certainly the most precious 'wagon' made by God for our righteousness, sanctification, redemption, and wisdom, as the Apostle declares in 1 Corinthians 1[:30]. I am a sinner, but I am borne by His righteousness which is given to me. I am unclean, but His holiness is my sanctification in which I ride gently. I am an ignorant fool, but His wisdom carries me forward. I deserve condemnation, but I am set free by His redemption, which is a safe wagon for me." (*LW* 42:164, *Fourteen Consolations*)

Pastoral Reflections

The prodigal story exerts a powerful pull over other possible preaching options. Your choice in the end may be to focus either on the prodigal story alone, or in conversation with the other texts or the Lenten journey. What about the prodigal in the context of the cross as folly? Or what about connecting to the liturgical journey? Where are our people now in their Lenten journeys? Yawning? One could draw out the image of a "dawning glimmer of Easter joy." Or the "boxed and buried alleluia" now knocking on the coffin lid, especially if some such sign-act was done in your congregation.

The prodigal haunted our dialogue, and a nagging question refused to go away: "Are we the older brother?" Some older siblings, who have the abundant inheritance at hand, still begrudge sharing it. The malady can vary. A mission congregation, with many previously unchurched persons, might identify readily with the prodigal. But there comes a time in the history of any congregation when we are *not* as open, *not* as loving and caring, and can easily forget our prodigal days.

Are we the older brother? We who are camped out in our Father's house? Who are our modern prodigals? Maybe some are the folks we call "inactives." Are our inactives the prodigals with all their rehearsed speeches, all their excuses and explanations down pat? What might that look like when there's no need for the speech? When there's just an open and welcoming embrace? Can our hardened ears still bear to hear the exultant whoop of a forgiven sinner?

Local context matters. Hopefully, in any growing and dynamic congregation, all three principals are there: not only the prodigal and the older sibling, but the loving parent as well. There are those who genuinely, even though they themselves have worshiped here forever, truly rejoice at prodigals coming home. As opposed to the elder sibling who grumbles, "Get away! You haven't been here for twenty years, and you don't deserve to be here now."

With the elder son, there is no buried alleluia. There is just a desolate emptiness. And yet, he's "wise." We always make him out to be such a creep. Actually, he's the "wise" one. It's the

father who's foolish, accepting this profligate back. Try to imagine the servants talking. You can almost hear them buzzing, "What a fool this father is. The fatted calf, even! If that boy were mine, why...." We miss the boat in Lent if we disregard the cross. We also miss it if we can't ever celebrate. We can be left as desolate as the elder son. The father, giddy with joy, embodies sheer foolishness in the eyes of the world. A celebrating father and a crucified Messiah are both supreme folly to those who are perishing.

The elder son, so joyless, has it pointed out by his father in sad irony: "You have always been with me. This stuff has been yours to use at any time." But the elder son has self-imposed a rigid definition of what it means to be with the father—to do the work, to take care of things, not to have any fun. One can imagine the father's private concern: "Why doesn't that boy ever have any *fun*? He should ask me for a kid—I'd gladly give it to him. He should have a party!" The son's own alienation blinds him. When he sees what the fullness of the kingdom gives to his younger brother, his resentment blinds him from seeing what he already has. In the language of Isaiah 12:3, "*Draw* the water from the wells of salvation!" The well's there. Stop living in a box. Take joy! MDB & Co.

Fifth Sunday in Lent
April 2, 1995

Psalm 28:1-3, 7-11
Isaiah 43:16-21
Philippians 3:8-14
Luke 20:9-19

First Reading

One way to approach the lessons for this Sunday is through the Prayer of the Day (*LBW*, p. 19). This prayer lifts up themes that can be found in each of the lessons.

"*Renew us....*" The first lesson presents us with the major theme and paradox of Second Isaiah: that God's new saving event will be like the Exodus (vv. 16-17), but at the same time, that God's people should forget about what happened in former times (v. 18). This promise of renewal is an old prophetic theme for Judah, who constantly proved complacent about God's unmerited election, who constantly debased the worship of the temple, and who misused her knowledge of God for her own ends. This is what makes the new order of salvation so startling—for instead of final judgment, there is final hope—a hope that couldn't be based upon the broken past no matter how glorious, a hope founded upon a newly created future which makes the former things extraneous.

"*...that we may... proclaim Your reign of love.*" In the second lesson, Paul describes the hope that has motivated him to give up all self-serving claims to righteousness. The apostle has already urged the Philippians to a kind of fellowship that expresses itself in service to others, and now the reason is plain—for only in such a fellowship is it possible to be found "in Christ." For Paul, to be found (*heuretho*) in Christ has an analogy to Christ's being found (*heuretheis*) in the form of a human being; that is, as Christ humbled and emptied Himself, so also will those who are in Christ pursue humility and be emptied of all human claims to special status (Luke Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 347). Yet, in being empty, Paul discovers the gift that God gives in Christ—the righteousness that comes by faith (3:9). This living according to the pattern of Christ's life means sharing his sufferings now, and even "becoming like him in his death." But that is not the end—for the promise of the Christian life is that we should also share Christ's resurrection glory.

"*...we have failed....*" It is often assumed that with its ties to Old Testament prophecy (cf. Isa 5:1-4) and the reaction of the leaders of the people (Lk 20:19), that the parable of the Wicked Tenants is a simple condemnation of the self-serving qualities of the scribes and chief priests. But Jesus seldom tells parables with only one target in view. The issue at the heart of the parable is that the tenants refuse to deliver to the master the fruits of his vineyard, and instead try to keep them for themselves. Ultimately, we must see

ourselves as the tenants in the vineyard that God has planted: we must confess that we would seek to gain the vineyard for ourselves by denying both God and the obligations that his gifts bring to us. This parable forces us to see what such a denial of God ultimately leads to: our rejection and murder of the master's son, and our own destruction. BAL

Luther for Preachers

"'The people whom I have formed for Myself.' Now [God] begins to make a distinction between people and people, between the people of the church and the people of the Law.... The people of the old law formed and fashioned themselves. They are their own people. But this is My people, formed by Me, together with their office, kingdom, and priesthood 'That they might declare My praise.' To declare the praises of Christ is the priesthood and kingdom of Christians. In the act of praising, we become priests and kings. The people of the old law, however, [only] praise their own endeavors." (*LW* 17:97-98, *Lectures on Isaiah, 40-66*)

Pastoral Reflections

The Gospel lesson is a sharp slap: in the wicked tenants, we see what human acquisitiveness can drive us to, and we confront the price of the owner's patience—a beloved child dies. In this parable we see that, in spite of the anticipation of joy last week, we stand with the Pharisees— we sit on the coffin lid to keep the alleluia from getting out (to borrow Pr. Boorsma's image in 4 Lent). How do we do this? We do it by refusing to let go of our pasts or presents. We feel that we have worked too hard to become who we are. The struggle of the alleluia to escape and bring forth God's future challenges us to let go of what we have made of ourselves in order to let God do the making in Christ.

So, we live in a tension between our pasts which tug at us through unresolved pains or personal pride, and God's future which gently pulls us towards trusting his promises to us in Christ.

This allows us to see the tenants as more than wicked people: they are people like us—unwilling to let go of what they worked to produce. The only future they can imagine is one they can create through their own power. The relation of the tenants to the field's owner reminds us of one of Luther's early insights: we are unable to want God to be God, but rather we want to be God ourselves. This is deep sin, and if we are to live in right relationship to God it needs to be rooted out of us. This is why the cross stands between us and Easter.

Paul and Isaiah approach this same theme in different ways. In Philippians, Paul urges us, on the other side of the cross, to become so tantalized by the promises of God in Christ that we leave behind all that we made of ourselves. But Isaiah's words, "consider not the former things...," suggest that we cannot even see God's new work in Christ without letting go of the past. This lesson is difficult to preach, for it requires an understanding of how radical it would be for Israel to let go of the Exodus. Today we have nothing culturally that plays the same role in shaping our self-understanding as the Exodus did for Israel. The more individual question, "Is there anything in your life without which you would not be who you are?" can open up the text and allow people to see how everything they have faced, good and bad, has contributed to who they are. We must accept our pasts before we let them go. But what it means to "let go" of the past is open to interpretation. Does it mean "don't let it control... don't dwell in it... don't let it define," or is a real forgetfulness called for? Can we be so caught up with the future in Christ that we join Paul in counting the past as rubbish?

If we go with that 'forgetfulness,' then we are back in the desert of 1 Lent. But this time we do not face the tempter. In facing our sin and God's promise in Christ, we come to this desert to be purified. BAL & Co.

Sunday of the Passion
April 9, 1995

Psalm 31:1-5, 9-16
Deuteronomy 32:36-39
Philippians 2:5-11
Luke 19:28-40 (22:1–23:56)

First Reading

"Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk 13:35, Lent 2). The King is coming. As the nature of this King's kingship is made known to the people, he will be challenged... mocked... crucified. Throughout the history of Israel and the people of God, many people, nations, and gods have challenged the will and power of YHWH, the Holy One of Israel. But this God will prevail! God will conquer Satan and all the forces of evil and death and vindicate the innocent King of glory, "the One who comes in the name of the Lord."

In the Song of Moses the psalmist reviews Israel's history and contrasts God's faithfulness with Israel's faithlessness. Here lies a word of praise for the Lord, the faithful protector of a faithless people. The people of Israel were tempted by so-called other gods who challenged YHWH's power, but God alone will prevail. These other gods are gods in name only; ultimately they are impotent (vv. 37-38). YHWH is the One alongside of whom there is no other. YHWH will vindicate his people (v. 36). Verse 39, of course, is the homiletical point for the inclusion of this text on this Sunday of the Passion. This God will vindicate the innocent and obedient Christ, "the One who comes."

Paul's hymn of praise to the total mystery of redemption is *paraklesis*, encouraging appeal: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus," the One who comes in the name of the Lord. We see here the most appropriate posture for those who are in Christ—humble service and counting others better than oneself. The hymn reveals a three-stage Christology: (1) Christ exists in glory, as the heavenly Adam (2:6); (2) He freely exchanges his God-like form (*morphe*) for human form (2:8); (3) As the one obedient to death on a cross, Christ reveals the glory of God's love and is exalted. He was innocent yet obedient; mocked and chastised yet faithful. Jesus models servanthood; he is the supreme exemplar for those who would follow him.

Although it is certainly appropriate for the longer Lukan account of Jesus' passion to be read on this Sunday of the Passion as a beginning of the "Great Week," the Lukan "Palm Sunday Gospel" is another option for proclamation. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, announced in 13:35, comes to fruition. This King "who comes in the name of the Lord" brings with him a paradoxical kingship. Abasement is joined to exaltation. Luke anticipates exaltation, even knowing about the humiliation to come.

King Jesus, humbled and humiliated, innocent and obedient, yet remains in control of his destiny. Satan tried to seduce Jesus at the beginning of his ministry and failed (Lk 4:1-13, cf. Lent 1). Satan now works through Judas for a final showdown with Jesus (22:3). However, even in the face of Judas' betrayal, Jesus remains in control. The One who comes does so in the name of the Lord, the God beside whom there is no other! Crucified innocence prevails over all that would challenge the total mystery of redemption. NCPF

Luther for Preachers

"Wherever in the Psalms Christ complains and prays in bodily affliction according to the letter, there, in the same words, every faithful soul, born and trained in Christ, complains and prays, confessing that it has been tempted to sin or has fallen into sin. For to the present day Christ is spat on, killed, scourged, crucified in us ourselves. Even now there lie in ambush for Him without ceasing the flesh with its feeling, the world with its pleasures, and the devil with his offers and temptation." (*LW* 10:139, *First Lectures on the Psalms*)

Pastoral Reflections

I just returned from the 1994 ELCA National Youth Gathering, "2 B Alive," in Atlanta, Georgia. 37,000 of God's teenage saints and their adult leaders were there. It was a massive experience, both in terms of touching the spirit and trying one's patience from time to time.

Of the many things that touched my spirit,

one sticks in my mind. A Native American from the Lakota Sioux nation spoke to us one morning. He told of a time in his life when, upon waking early one morning, he went outside and saw a strangely overwhelming sight. Birds—as far as the eye could see—birds covered the fields like a huge blanket. As he stood and pondered more closely the sight before him, he noticed that these were hawks—all different kinds of hawks. He was so moved by the sight that he went to speak with one of the elders. The elder told him that he, too, had witnessed something like this before, only he had seen a gathering of owls. "Once in a lifetime," he said—"a person is blessed if once in a lifetime you can witness the gathering of a nation." Indeed, that night we were not only witnessing, but also participating in, the gathering of a nation.

We know, however, being the human people that we are, that when a nation gathers, strange and unexpected as well as blessed things can happen. On Friday evening of the youth gathering, after listening to Tony Campolo and getting pumped up, we were to follow a festive processional out of the Georgia Dome, along International Boulevard and through a massive door into the Georgia World Congress Center for "The Party of Your Life." Unfortunately, moving that many thousands of people from one place to another is easier said than done. For many of us it turned into mayhem, being caught up in a sea of humanity, swept along, inching our way up the hill in a downpour of rain.

In the midst of this unexpected situation, Diane, one of our adult youth leaders, turned to me with a look of amazement on her face and said, "For some reason, as I look up the hill to the cross imprinted on the banner lifted high in front of us, I have an overpowering feeling of going to the crucifixion. Who's in charge here, anyway?"

How easy it is for a party to turn into chaos. The home team wins the championship, and there is rioting and plundering in the streets. The star player accidentally scores a goal for the other team in the big soccer match, and he is gunned down in the streets. A people gather to celebrate the coming of a king only to find out he's not the kind of king they want, and the party turns into a crucifixion. How quickly the king is turned into an innocent criminal. Who's in charge here, anyway? Thank God we know.

As our "nations" gather on this Palm Sunday, this Sunday of the Passion, we are challenged to fight another of our built-in inclinations: to skip the passion and stay with the palms and the party. Jesus is in charge. He knows where he is going. To be open to the Holy Spirit is to allow our Palm Sunday party to move into Holy Week passion; to be propelled, thrust by the Spirit of God into the week that indeed leads to Golgotha and beyond.

It doesn't take much for a party to become a crucifixion. Thank God Jesus is in charge. He knows where he is going—and goes anyway. It is the only way. This King, this One who comes, does so in the name of the Lord. Our call is to follow this One who is the supreme model for servanthood, even and especially when we know where it might lead. Ultimately the crucified, innocent Jesus prevails. Only the power of God in Christ can allow a crucifixion ultimately to become a party—the coming Reign of God.

NCPF & Co.

Maundy Thursday
April 13, 1995

Psalm 116:10-17 (*LBW* Versification)
Jeremiah 31:31-34
1 Corinthians 11:17-32
John 13:1-17, 34
Psalm 22 (Recessional Psalm)

First Reading

"...I will be their God, and they shall be my people."—Jer 31:33
"I will offer you the sacrifice of thanksgiving...." —Ps 116:15
"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."—1 Cor 11:26
"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another...."—Jn 13:34
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me...."—Ps 22:1

Finally—Absolution! Day 38 has arrived, and the 40th day is finally in sight. Maundy Thursday is a day of very mixed emotions and celebrations. What was begun on Ash Wednesday *culminates* on this day; and yet, at the same time Maundy Thursday is the *beginning* of the Triduum.

Paul reminds us of the power of the Eucharist, and John presents the simplicity of foot-washing. The psalmist in Psalm 116 shouts thanksgivings to God, while the psalmist in Psalm 22 is in utter torment. In the midst of the paradoxes there is the powerful proclamation of Jeremiah—we are God's people.

John Bright in his Anchor Bible commentary describes Jer 31:31-34 as "one of the profoundest and most moving passages in the entire Bible." Bright would assert that this passage is the high point of Jeremiah's theology. Six times in this short passage *God* is the one who *acts*—I will make, I will put, I will write, I will be, I will forgive, I will remember no more. Whether it is Eucharist or foot-washing, thanksgiving or torment, absolution or preparation for the cross, it is God who is in charge. Jeremiah and Maundy Thursday celebrate that we are God's people.

Whether it was sickness or persecution that the psalmist in Psalm 116 was delivered from cannot be known for certain. What is certain is that it was God who delivered the psalmist. The psalmist learned first hand: we are God's people.

As we know from the Ash Wednesday first reading, the Corinthian congregation was a pastor's nightmare—even the Eucharist was misunderstood. The exegetical material on this text is vast. Paul asserts that the Corinthians have destroyed the essential character of the Eucharist by their conduct. Paul makes it clear that the eucharistic tradition that he shares is from the Lord. The words of institution are a part of a fixed, pre-Pauline tradition. To eat God's Meal is to be God's people.

Jesus' new commandment in John 13 is not *eros* or *philia*, but *agape*—the love which we do not create, the love which cannot be purchased on the Home Shopping Network, but the love that is pure gift from God. God's people are called to do *agape* love.

It is Jesus who makes Psalm 22 famous. Both Jesus on the cross and the psalmist are in utter despair. Both cry out to God. Both cry out as God's people.

On this mixed-up Maundy Thursday, one assertion remains certain: we are God's people. PSP

Luther for Preachers

"To love does not mean, as the sophists imagine, to wish someone else well, but to bear someone else's burdens, that is, to bear what is burdensome to you and what you would rather not bear. Therefore a Christian must have broad shoulders and husky bones to carry the flesh, that is, the weakness, of the brethren." (*LW* 27:113, *Lectures on Galatians—1535*)

Pastoral Reflections

I am Chaplain for Pediatrics in a Level III, Regional Trauma Center, and there are periods of time when I and the rest of the Trauma Team see more seriously injured children than our emotions and spirits can handle. This has been the case recently.

During this recent intense period, the Chief Trauma Surgeon and I were having a casual conversation when I said, "You have been doing some good work lately." She replied, "I don't know about good—but it certainly has been a lot." I continued, "No, it has been good. Look at Eric!" She responded, "Now, Chaplain, you and I both know, I had nothing to do with that healing."

The Trauma Surgeon understands Maundy Thursday well. She has a deep appreciation for what Jeremiah, the psalmist, Paul, and Jesus have to say. She knows (like her biblical predecessors) that God is in charge.

The fact that we are God's children is not our decision; it is God's.

It is God who initiates the new covenant in Jeremiah, it is God who gives the gift of Eucharist in 1 Corinthians, it is God who washes feet in the Gospel of John.

We become God's people as God breaks into our lives, as God claims us.

There is a tendency in parts of American Protestantism to want to make Jesus our buddy. The bumper sticker "Jesus is my Copilot" would come out of that movement. Maundy Thursday

(and its texts) would argue otherwise. Instead of the buddy image, the Jesus of Maundy Thursday is totally other. In the midst of betrayal and alienation, in the midst of the stark reality that the palms of Sunday are not the end of the story, in the midst of the looming cross, the love (*agape*) of Jesus calls us into deep mystery—a mystery we participate in most intimately in the Eucharist.

Based on their actions, it would appear that God's people deserve to be chastised; instead they are blessed. They are blessed with a new covenant, a new meal, and a new washing. The blesser (Jesus) is Lord.

There is a stillness about Maundy Thursday. The Hosannas of Sunday are growing very faint and the Crucify Him of Friday is drawing near. In that continuum there is Maundy Thursday, this paradoxical day of Eucharist/foot-washing and thanksgiving/torment.

Proclamation, absolution, barren chancel: all are Maundy Thursday.

In the stillness of Maundy Thursday, God's Love (*agape*) resonates.

On a donkey or on a cross, Jesus is Lord. PSP & Co.

Good Friday
April 14, 1995

Psalm 22:1-23
Isaiah 52:13–53:12
Hebrews 4:14-16
John 18:1–19:42

First Reading

The heart of the passion: God exalts the suffering One who submits to the will of God.

In Isaiah's fourth Servant Song it is the servant Israel whom God will exalt. They were "living death" in exile in Babylon, among the pagans. However, obedient acceptance of their plight and suffering is an act of repentance to which God promises mercy and pardon.

It is interesting to note that virtually nothing from the passion narrative is directly or explicitly dependent on any of Isaiah's servant texts. Subsequently, the church has followed the lead of the book of Acts and identified Jesus with the Suffering Servant. And the focus is his victory; victory that takes precedence over his disgrace and death. Jesus was the innocent crucified One, submissive to the will of God and the mystery at the heart of God's *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history). The victory of Jesus the Suffering Servant lay not in his suffering but in his submission to God's plan for the salvation of God's whole creation. This is the heart of passion.

In Hebrews Jesus is the great high priest. The theme again is innocent suffering as a result of obedient submission, which thus leads to the throne of glory. Jesus chose this option. The temptation for us is to choose another option. Temptation is to feel the pull of an attractive option that goes against the will of God. Jesus no doubt felt the pull, but he resisted, remained constant in obedience.

Good Friday is a day of triumph; it is victory for Jesus and for us. His death brings life. The Great Week and this Friday we call "Good" provide an opportunity to focus on how boldly we approach the throne of grace, how confident we are that Jesus our victorious high priest can indeed "give help in our time of need." Our *homologia* (confession, v. 14) is belief in Jesus as Son of God and high priest. Holding fast to our confession is holding fast to the One who offers mercy and grace in order to let go of the tempting options, no matter how attractive.

The passion narrative in John's Gospel is a vast tapestry, the story woven together with no small amount of theological genius. There is a thread at the heart of the passion: Jesus the innocent One is fully aware of his own fate and is in control until the end and beyond. He is submissive to his "fate" because it is nothing less than the will of God, who is both author of the drama and chief actor in it. All of the other characters—Pilate, the crowd, Peter, Judas, Annas—are just that: characters. They are not "the enemy;" the enemy is "the world," that which challenges and goes against the Johannine *aletheia*—the truth of God in Jesus Christ. The passion narrative is the culmination of all that precedes it in John's Gospel, just as Jesus the suffering, innocent, victori-

ous Truth of God made flesh is the culmination of all that precedes him in the vast tapestry of the *Heilsgeschichte* of the cosmos. NCPF

Luther for Preachers

"They contemplate Christ's passion aright who view it with a terror-stricken heart and a despairing conscience.... And if you seriously consider that it is God's very own Son, the eternal wisdom of the Father, who suffers, you will be terrified indeed. The more you think about it, the more intensely will you be frightened. (*LW* 42:8, 9; *A Meditation on Christ's Passion*)

Pastoral Reflections

One of the many things I remember about community life while in seminary at Trinity in Columbus, Ohio, is the theatre production. One a year. One was enough. Paul Harms taught homiletics, directed the theatre, and had a knack for picking plays that cut to the quick and hit you square in the face with the Johannine *aletheia*—the truth of God in Jesus Christ. During my seminary years one of the productions was "Cry Dawn in Dark Babylon." Each year, as the season of Lent crept into our lives and Holy Week loomed in the not-so-distant future, Dr. Harms would remind us of some words from the play: "Good Friday is known in the bone. And Easter a chocolate egg."

One of Harms' plays was enough for each year; the same holds true for Good Friday. The Good Friday worship experience is most often quite intense, primarily because it means preaching "Christ crucified" with the fullness of its power. It means worship that is "mind-stretching, soul-searing, gut-wrenching, and a generally exhausting experience" (Robert Shaw). It must be this way. "Good Friday is known in the bone. And Easter a chocolate egg." Good Friday is about crucifixion; without crucifixion Easter is reduced to a chocolate egg.

Good Friday is "known in the bone," in part because it reminds us of cruelty: the crown of thorns, the flogging, the mocking, the stripping, and the spitting.

It reminds us of the kinds of cruelty that our bones know: a drive-by shooting; an abandoned, helpless child; the school bus or playground bully; the taunting of a mentally disabled person; the assault on an elderly person; the words "you're no good... you will never amount to anything" spoken to a child; the words "I hate you" spoken to a parent; the words "I wish that I had never married you" spoken to a spouse.

Cruelty disfigures, brutalizes, despises, rejects, ridicules, oppresses, afflicts, victimizes, and criminalizes. Cruelty is doing whatever it takes to get what you want. Cruelty is self-centeredness—selfishness—without a heart. Cruelty is ambition without love. Cruelty is the will to survive without a conscience. Hans Reudi-Weber puts it this way: "We have an infinite capacity to crucify"—to crucify others mentally, emotionally, physically, just as Jesus was crucified.

Thank God that God has an infinite capacity to recycle our garbage into grace and mercy. Jesus answers cruelty with a crucifixion; God responds to crucifixion with a resurrection. We must preach cruelty crucified. We must preach Christ crucified. If we don't, Easter will always be a chocolate egg; and we know that Easter is more than just a chocolate egg. Easter, too, can be known in the bone. "God died for us. There is nothing more amazing than that. The task of the church is to keep that sense of amazement alive" (Kitamori). On Good Friday may we dare to look and looking, see not death alone, but the beginning of new life. Dare to look. Amen.

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Epiphany Parable

Kenneth R. Storck
Storm Lake, Iowa

Pine needles on a white sheet brought back the smell of Christmas. Mary carefully laid the tree on the white sheet. She wrapped it as though she were wrapping it in swaddling clothes. The season's celebration had ended, and now it was time to bury the remains.

Lifting the tree was like lifting a body. A flood of memories poured through her mind—Uncle Jake's last Christmas with the family when he was diagnosed with leukemia... the time her best male friend, Henry, moved into town and they sang together in the Children's Choir at Christmas... the high school concert where Helga began to sing and forgot the words. Then there were the boxes of candy given out each year at the church's Sunday School Christmas program. She laughed as she thought of the year of the silver Christmas tree with the colored flood lights.

Mary gently wrapped the tree and carried it to the station wagon. A tear ran down her cheek when her arms felt the weight of the tree. It was like she was carrying little Anne, her first-born, and fastening her into the car-seat for her first midnight service.

The tree was now in the station wagon, and Mary began to drive to the distant field. The tree seemed to take on the shape of a body under the old sheet. The funeral home on the way reminded her of the Christmas that the family buried mother—faithful mother, always there baking Christmas Stollen, dressing her warmly so she could use her sled in the snow. Mother, singing hymns from the heart, never giving up hope.

Now she approached the open field. The scent of burning trees was fresh. Carefully, slowly, like a fine liturgy on Christmas Eve, her ritual continued as she carried the tree, unwrapped it, and placed it on the fire. She had finally joined the others in this annual event. The night sky was lit up with the pyre of pine, and the scent of Christmas past filled the air of that small town. It was the annual Epiphany celebration—the burning of the Christmas trees.

Everyone in their own way had carried Christmas to this place each year: remembrances of birth and death and the laughter in between.

The embers of endings glowed in the night, and the fire of new beginnings warmed their cold hearts. The Christmas tree burning ceremony ended with everyone holding hands in a circle and singing the Epiphany hymn, "Brightest and Best of the Stars of the Morning." Christ the Light was present in the ritual of remembering, creating new lives from the ashes of the past.

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