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ANGLICAN
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IN OVER 165 COUNTRIES



Liberated by God's Grace: Anglican–Lutheran Reflections



Liberated by God's Grace:
Anglican–Lutheran Reflections

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Preface

In 2013, the newly created Anglican–Lutheran Coordinating Committee—ALICC—began its work. One of the tasks given to ALICC included acting as a catalyst for the development of Anglican–Lutheran relations and to collaborate in the observance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

ALICC decided to take up the official LWF theme for Reformation 500, *Liberated by God's Grace*, and commissioned forty-two Anglicans and Lutherans from around the world to write a series of reflections for a six-week period, as a way of engaging both global communities in a common celebration of the Reformation anniversary. The happy result is the text before you now, *Liberated by God's Grace: Anglican–Lutheran Reflections*. Like the LWF theme and sub-themes themselves, *Liberated by God's Grace: Anglican–Lutheran Reflections* proposes that the Reformation initiated in the sixteenth century is ongoing and is vital for the renewal of Christianity today, and in particular, our two global communions of churches.

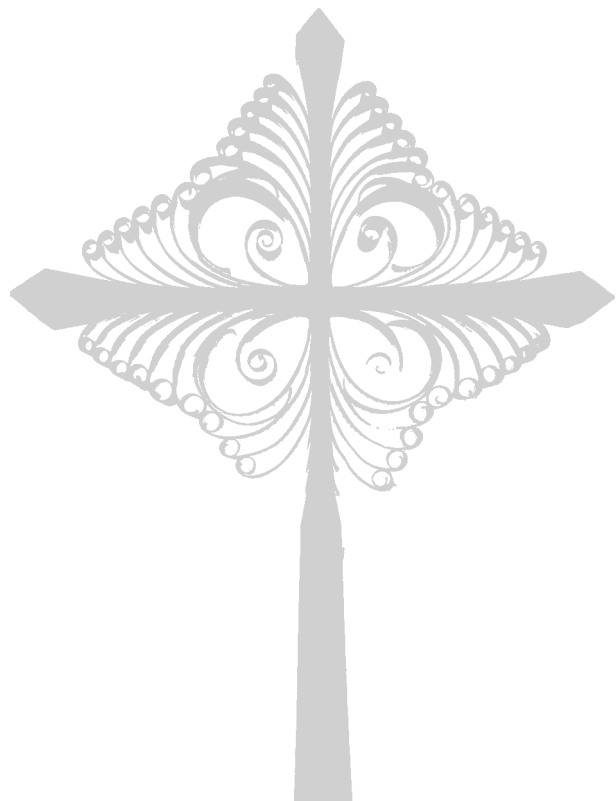
Liberated by God's Grace: Anglican–Lutheran Reflections represents a new kind of text prepared by an international bilateral committee. It is not an agreed statement between the Lutheran World Federation and the Anglican Communion, nor does it seek to resolve outstanding theological questions. Rather, it is a devotional resource for common reflection on what, in God's grace, we are called to be as Anglican and Lutheran congregations and parishes as the Church today. It is the hope of ALICC that such common reflections, drawing on a range of contributors and experiences, may in our common experience of God's grace draw our two families of churches closer together in this extraordinary year.

There are three parts to each devotion: a biblical text, a reflection and an accompanying text from either the Lutheran or Anglican traditions, and especially from the sixteenth century.

The text can be used by small groups or by individuals. It could be read as a devotional resource during the six weeks of Lent, or in the weeks between Easter and Trinity Sunday. It can be read at any other time in 2017. And it is our hope that the global reflections will continue to be a resource for our churches long after the year 2017 has passed.

Our common experience of God's abundant grace, and especially as fellow-travelers in continuing reformation, is a powerful point of convergence in our desire to deepen our common life.

The Right Revd Dr Timothy J. Harris, Anglican Church of Australia (co-chair, ALICC)
Bishop Dr Michael Pryse, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (co-chair, ALICC)



Introduction to the Daily Reflections

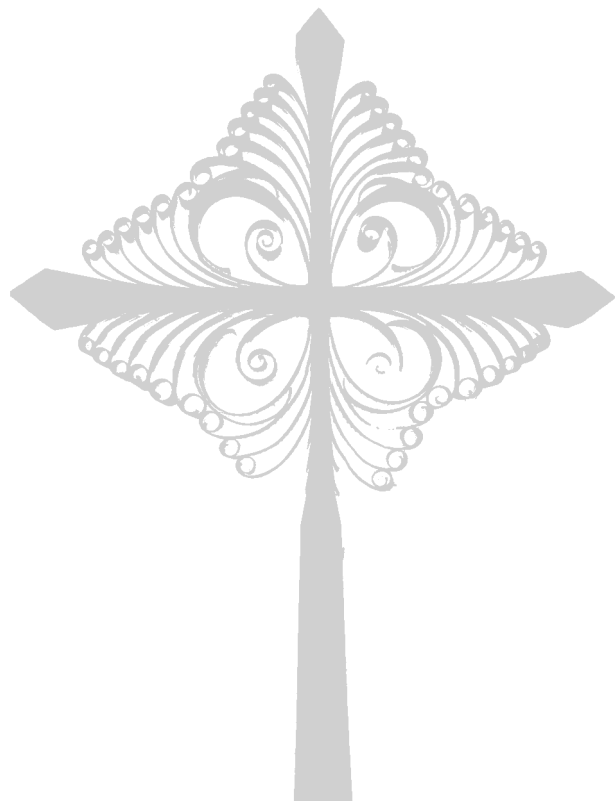
Why is it important for Anglicans and Lutherans to mark this 500th anniversary of the Reformation together?

The obvious answer is: this is what friends do. They mark one another's big events and commemorations. And, since today Anglicans and Lutherans share a close and increasingly deepening relationship in the world of ecumenism, we want these relationships to be celebrated across the globe. There are agreements of full communion (Porvoo,¹ Waterloo² and Called to Common Mission/USA³) in addition to those that facilitate mutual recognition and reconciliation (Common Ground,⁴ Meissen,⁵ Reuilly⁶ and others) and many ongoing studies that have grown out of joint worship, service and mission. Thus, as the liturgical calendar allows Anglicans and Lutherans annually to mark Reformation Sunday, so this 500th anniversary of the Reformation provides the impetus for the various joint commemorations.

Historically, as communions that shared in the same reformation movement, Anglicans and Lutherans recognize its bittersweet quality. There is regret over the wounds of disunity caused to the Body of Christ, but also appreciation for the rediscovery of the gospel message of salvation through faith by grace. The scholars who were enthusiastic about the new theology and writings flowing from Luther's pen and printing presses at the White Horse in Cambridge—such that it became known as “Little Germany”—and others from St Andrews and Glasgow to Oxford and London, exerted an unmistakable Lutheran influence on Britain's emerging Anglican churches. That Luther and Henry VIII failed miserably to see eye to eye may have truncated that budding Lutheran impact and opened the door to later Calvinist influences, not least in Scotland. Against the background of wider nineteenth- and twentieth-century conflicts, which included Anglicans and Lutherans, the many attempts at “the healing of wounds” have been an important element in many churches in Europe and throughout the world.

It is against this background that Anglicans and Lutherans together look forward to the 2017 Reformation commemoration. There is the hopeful expectation that it will foster a time of renewal. Through study, prayer and joint witness, opportunities are being sought to celebrate the Spirit filled revitalization in both ministry and mission. Anglicans and Lutherans continue to stimulate and enlighten the bilateral and multilateral talks, also with other denominations, by delving into the riches of their Reformation past, present experiences and future hopes.

The following daily reflections are a contribution to this movement of God's grace in the lives of those who have contributed with such candor and thoughtfulness. The Committee expresses its sincere thanks and appreciation.



Week 1: The Mission of God

Introduction

Timothy J. Harris, Anglican, Australia

We come to a deeper understanding of God by observing God in action. Recognizing this helps us enormously to understand what it is that God expects of us as the people of God and members of the one Church of God. It was the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann who expressed this so profoundly: “It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.”⁷

This opening section of our reflections starts at precisely this point. It is one of the most significant questions that lie at the heart of a whole range of human experiences, regardless of culture or context: What on earth is God doing? The further we explore that, the more we find that the biblical narrative provides a love-centered and hope-filled response to that.

It is rare that we can answer the question of why certain things happen in the way that they do. What we do find abundant evidence for, however, is that God is not distant, but very present in and through the realities of life and in the fullness of history. God is at work in this world, and that work is life-giving, creative, redemptive, and above all, characterized by an incomparable quality of love. Such love is demonstrated in action, driving God’s mission in this world: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

As we reflect on God, viewed through the lens of the mission of God, we note that our God is a “self-sending” God, as evidenced in the mission and example of Christ and the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. As we are invited and drawn into God’s work, our own sense of vocation emerges. In our baptism we are called by God to be followers of Christ and to serve in God’s name. Both personally and as church communities we are called to be a light to the world, a community that provides sanctuary and is gathered to be an “extended family on mission together.”

Just as our understanding of mission starts with God’s self-sending, so too it continues in and through the working of God throughout every dimension of creation, and reaches its goal in all things, in heaven and on earth, being drawn into Christ (cf. Eph 1:10).

week 1, day 1

“The General Thanksgiving,” *The Book of Common Prayer*

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men; [*particularly to those who desire now to offer up their praises and thanksgivings for thy late mercies vouchsafed unto them.] We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

God is in Action (Genesis 1:1–5)

Anna-Maria Klassen, Lutheran, Germany

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

According to the Bible, only God can create life: The Hebrew verb *bara'* [create] is not used for human actions; this is a clear limitation and, at the same time, a relief for us. God bears the ultimate responsibility for God’s creation; therefore God does not leave God’s creatures on their own but cares for them like a parent and preserves them. God gives God’s children everything they need in “due season” (Ps 104:27). Believing in God the Creator means realizing “that none of us has life—or anything else that has been mentioned here or can be mentioned—from ourselves, nor can we by ourselves preserve any of them”⁸ and being thankful for the things God gives us day by day.

God sees that it is good. Can this description of God’s action really be framed in the present tense? Is creation good? Every day we watch and listen to news that appear to confirm that this world has been corrupted. Calling it “good” might even appear sarcastic. But calling it good can also signal that one does not stop believing in the potential that God planted in God’s creation which, no matter what, God holds on to and will be revealed one day. Believing in God the Creator means realizing that only God can see the bigger picture and hoping that this picture is and will be good in the end.

God calls God’s creatures by their names. God’s Word has the power to give God’s creatures life. To name something or someone means giving them an identity. Calling a person by name means recognizing their personality. Because God calls God’s creatures by their names God gives them dignity that cannot be annihilated by earthly powers. God says that God’s people belong to God in all their fragility. “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isa 43:1). Believing in God the Creator means realizing that our dignity is founded in God’s action and being confident that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39).

week 1, day 2

“The Freedom of a Christian (1520),” Martin Luther

Just as our neighbour is in need and lacks that in which we abound, so we were in need before God and lacked his mercy. Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbour through our body and its works, and each should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.

God in Community (Romans 8:9–17)

Rospita Siahaan, Lutheran, Indonesia

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

When I was a doctoral student at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong, I was one of sixteen students who were accepted for a study trip to Israel in June 2013. I was so sure that I would have a special encounter with Jesus there. Seeing the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Old City of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, the Sea of Galilee and many other holy sites and praying there was marvelous; yet, I did not feel what I had been longing for. Until the last day, no special feeling, no extraordinary encounter with the Divine.

While waiting for the flight to Hong Kong we had dinner at Tel Aviv airport. Two students from Hong Kong and I agreed to eat typical Israeli food: falafel and hummus. We ordered them together with soup. As we were carrying our food to our table, I asked my friends which was the falafel and which the hummus. We burst out laughing because we did not recognize the dishes. A man walking by stopped and told us which was the hummus, but it turned out that there were no falafels. We were very disappointed because it seemed that the seller had tried to fool us.

Our new friend accompanied us back to the vendor. He showed him our receipt, saw to it that we were given falafels and then left. We finally had our falafels and ate them with abundant happiness, not because of the taste, but because we had understood what it means to meet Christ in your neighbor. We did not know this man—not even his name. Probably he has forgotten us but we have not and will not forget him.

Where do we meet God? We meet God in our community with others, beyond the boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, religion and denomination. Where is God? God is in community with us, because we are children of God: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Rom 8:14).

week 1, day 3

“The Call,” poem from *The Temple*, George Herbert

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
Such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move:
Such a Love, as none can part:
Such a Heart, as joyes in love.

God and the Fullness of Life (Ephesians 1:3–10)

Susan Bell, Anglican, Canada

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

According to his biographer, Izaak Walton, the great reformed English poet and priest George Herbert said that his poetry was “a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul, before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus my master: in whose service I have now found perfect freedom.” Here is a timeless soul struggling with the weight of God’s love.

Herbert, like all of us, wanted to continue to uphold the idea that he was the master of his own destiny. In order to preserve our autonomy, we often try to minimize the impact that a life in Christ has on our own desires by not allowing God to make God’s home fully in us by holding the effect of Jesus in our lives to a minimum, not immersing ourselves in the abundance of Christ and therefore not permitting ourselves to share that love and that life with others.

But, if we have the courage in the power of the Holy Spirit to offer ourselves wholly, there is a new kind of freedom for our life in Christ. This is so because a profound generosity, modeled by God, lies at the heart of our faith. This fullness of life is not to be found in a self-centered spirituality but in offering ourselves and the gift of faith to others. God has gifted us so profoundly with freedom and love, and in turn, we offer out of the abundance of what we have been given.

We cannot simply be Christians; we must share our faith. We are the people who are sent to proclaim the Good News. We are the people who go out to heal in God’s name, to love in God’s name and to preach and teach in God’s name.

It was always meant to be this way. From all eternity God created us to be open-hearted; looking with the eyes of our hearts to see where the Lord is at work in our world and to bless it with energy, with love and with service.

This is freedom. This is God’s mission. This is fullness of life.

week 1, day 4

“That These Words of Christ, ‘This is My Body’, etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics (1527),” Martin Luther

[God] must be present in every single creature in its innermost and outermost being, on all sides, through and through, below and above, before and behind, so that nothing can be more truly present and within all creatures than God himself with his power.

God in Residence (Exodus 15:17)

Tapio Leinonen, Lutheran, Finland

You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, O Lord, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established.

Where does God reside? Is there a certain place where God can be found? How much space does God need in God's residence?

God is more than anything we can conceive of—we cannot build or even imagine a house or a church large enough to house God. We cannot make God fit into a single place. Still, God is present in our churches, our places of worship and the houses in which we live. God has given us God's creation in which to live: to exist with every cell in our body, to breathe the air, to feel the sun, to love and fulfill our tasks as God's images. God resides in God's creation, but cannot be captured within its limits. But if God is everywhere, where should we look for God?

While fasting, we make room in our hearts for God. God is already there for God has created us in God's image—of that we can be certain. Our Lenten discipline is not for God's pleasure. Rather, it is so that we can empty our hearts of all things that prevent us from loving God and knowing God's will and presence. Love and the presence of God can make us flourish and our hearts glow, and help us to see more clearly.

In the book of Exodus, Moses and the Israelites sing praise to God who has promised to lead them to God's residence, to plant them on God's mountain. We can join that praise and pray for God to lead us to God's holy place of residence, the altar. The altar is where we cannot only find God, but also meet God in God's Son, Jesus Christ, who is present in the sacrament of the Eucharist. At the altar we can truly take root in the soil where God resides, that is in God's Word and sacraments. But God does not remain at the altar. God sends us to the world to fulfill God's mission through service and love and resides with and in us.

God is so mighty that we cannot situate God wherever we want. We have our limits. But God chose to position Godself within our limits; God came to us in God's Son, to reside with us as one of us. And God will be with us, to the very end.

week 1, day 5

From a hymn by Bishop Thomas Ken, 1637–1711

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

God in Glory (Exodus 40:34–38)

Paulo Ueti, Anglican, Brazil

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.

I would like to start this humble reflection by quoting two passages that lift up my spirit and compel me to move forward:

The glory of God is a living human being; and the life of a human being consists in beholding God (Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, Book 4, 20:7, *Gloria Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis, visio Dei*).

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom 12:2).

Creation is the horizon and the *locus* of God's mission—in the past, the present and the future. The outcome of God's passion is broken and existence itself is jeopardized. As people of faith we must not be mute or passive in light of the reality we face daily: increasing inequality; impoverishment; violence; discrimination; exclusion and their consequences. God's name and theological discourse are frequently used to justify these.

Our faith is always "praxis" (*ora et labora*—prayer and action). We try to read the signs of the times, reflect on our faith and values and act accordingly to fulfill the deep desire to experience God in glory. Throughout history we have learned from God's experience, passed on through biblical texts and great testimonies: "to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (Isa 1:17) and "let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord" (Jer 9:24).

Our faith moves us to this direction and calls us to continue to pursue the passionate (Song of Songs) and transformative (Prophetic tradition) desire to be the parable of the kingdom in the midst of desperation and destruction. Hope strengthens our stubbornness to continue to move with others, never alone, despite the peculiar context in which we live. God in God's glory has revealed to us the capacity within us to change and to be changed. This is our calling. It is expressed in the deep commitment in our hearts, thoughts, discourses (theologies) and actions (mission/development)—*ora et labora*—to work toward revealing the will of God and to eradicate poverty, violence, discrimination, privileges, loneliness and every system that oppresses humanity and nature.

By the unlimited mercy and grace of God, let us be blessed and empowered to keep moving together in love as one in diversity.

week 1, day 6

“The Collect from the Sixth Sunday after Trinity,” *The Book of Common Prayer*

O GOD, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that wee, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God who Gathers (Mark 1:16–20)

Anne Tomlinson, Anglican, Scotland

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

George Herbert’s poem, *Love III*, begins, “Love bade me welcome.” That is how God calls and gathers us. Not in a pressured or coercive manner; not with regard to any merit or worthiness on our part; not by demanding prior proof of performance. God does not call or gather in that way.

No, God’s liberating grace comes to us in tones of love, “sweetly questioning”; the gift is offered freely, unconditionally, by one who runs towards us all the while. And if we open ourselves to this prodigal invitation, we find ourselves suddenly swept up in God’s embrace, drawn into God’s activity, God’s mission, εὐθὺς, immediately.

This embrace is at the heart of the Godhead, and expressive of God’s self-revelation. God is a communion of persons, and mission the activity of that Trinity of love. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of this embrace towards the world that God loved so much that “God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him” (Jn 4:9).

This embrace is for all and, in its warm grasp, we find ourselves alongside others, fishermen and fools, the ones whose company we do not greatly like, the ones we did not choose. That is the breadth of this embrace. It is for all.

This embrace inspires us, sends us forth, to share this love with others, to utter words of proclamation and invitation in turn. In acts of diaconal service to extend to others the same shelter, refuge and protection that we experience. To participate in a cascade of divine grace.

That’s what these two sets of brothers experience at the Sea of Galilee. All it takes are the words “follow me,” uttered with complete simplicity by “quick-eyed Love.” And immediately they are caught up in the mission of God, sent out to cast their nets in a new way. “Quick now, here, now, always”

Likewise, love gathers us into its embrace. It sends us out in the same breath to repeat its message of love; turns us outward for the sake of others. Let us then participate in God’s reconciling mission towards the world with thankfulness and the fishermen’s fervor and ready response.

week 1, day 7

“A Prayer at Compline”

Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God and Rest (Matthew 11:25–30)

Samuel Dawai, Lutheran, Cameroon

At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

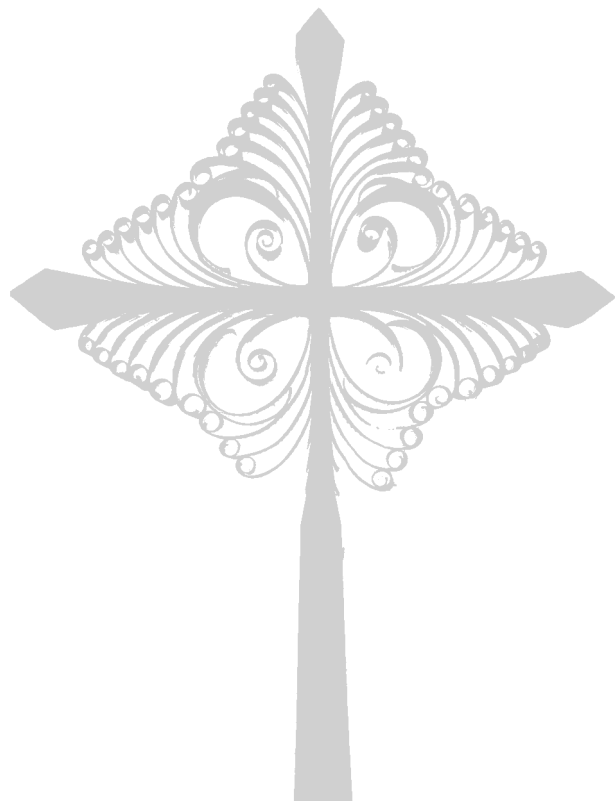
If “rest” is defined as a break from work, motion or activity, then it can be understood as being no more than a time of calm and quiet. The rest that comes from God is a gift, given even to those who do not expect it.

In the reading from Matthew, the rest that God grants us gives us access to the Father and to salvation. It can only be given by the Son, sent by the Father. This Good News has been rejected by the “wise and the intelligent.” The Father has revealed it by his gracious will to “infants” and has hidden it from the “wise and the intelligent” (Mt 11:25–27).

The Good News is not received by those who we assume might be open to the message of Jesus. To receive God’s gift of rest, we must come to God with open hands—like beggars, like children. The “wise and intelligent” are not capable of understanding the message of Jesus; as long as they believe that they can understand God, they cannot know God. The rest that comes from God is not simply handed out, but must first be desired. God’s grace goes hand in hand with responsibility

Matthew speaks of Jesus’ teachings as follows: “my yoke is easy, and my burden light.” Here, Jesus uses the paradoxical language of heaviness and fatigue in order to point to the exact opposite, for his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

The rest that God grants us is not merely there to recognize that Jesus is sent by the Father, but also to receive him, who does not impose yokes and burdens. Jesus’ message is easy and light to bear for those who are tired of searching for God by their own efforts, or those who have been overburdened by the traditions that Christianity has added beyond the Scriptures. We do not come to know God on our own. We come to God humbly, like a child who is hungry or thirsty. Jesus promises a spiritual rest and interior refreshment and renewal.



Week 2: Liberated by God's Grace⁹

Introduction

John Lindsay, Anglican, Scotland

"Liberated by God's Grace" is the umbrella title of the set of booklets produced by the Lutheran World Federation for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and echoes its theme. In the introduction to the first of the booklets, Anne Burghardt, LWF Secretary for Ecumenical Relations, comments on both the centrality of this theme to reformation doctrine and its two-sidedness. She cites Gottfried Brakemeier's question in the first essay in the booklet, "Liberated by God's Grace—from What, to What?"

The grace that pours out its unconditional acceptance and mercy on both humanity and creation can only be faithfully matched by a corresponding love and service that are wholehearted and unreserved. We love because God loved us first, and not to earn favor or reward but to show our appreciation and gratitude in our day-to-day lives as both individuals and societies.

It is as if the universe were resounding to a great canticle of versicle and response, the outpouring of God's love, as in William H. Vanstone's *Hymn to the Creator*, drawing forth a song of thanksgiving in lives renewed and creation transformed. The readings for week two offer the versicle; and the reflections for each day suggest a response. As you listen to both, you might be inspired to add your own experiences of being liberated by God's grace from the fear that deadens to the faith that quickens.

week 2, day 1

“The Collect from the Second Sunday in Advent,” *The Book of Common Prayer*

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

God the Giver (Romans 11:33–36)

Stephen Ju, Lutheran, Hong Kong

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

God is the giver, and we are the receivers. The book of Romans declared that this plays a key role in the relationship between God and human beings. The pure gospel declares that God is not a stern taker, but the generous giver in Christ. The Holy Spirit gives the salvation that Christ won on the cross to everyone who hears the gospel and receives it by faith (Rom 1:16–17).

When Martin Luther understood that in the epistle to the Romans the righteousness of God is an uncompromised, stringent requirement, he was in despair. He realized that he himself could never reach the standard required by this righteousness. When he rediscovered and learned the true meaning of the phrase “God’s righteousness,” he understood that righteousness was actually given by God—it was God’s gracious gift. Suddenly Luther saw the light. That which had prevented him from understanding the Bible was removed and the door to heaven opened. For justification by faith means to believe that God’s righteousness cannot be earned but is God’s gracious gift that we receive by faith. It is the gift that calls all sinners to repent and become righteous.

God created us and bestowed upon us the breath of life—the body, the hands, the feet, etc. All of these are gracious and free gifts. None of it was earned by our hard work or our faithfulness. As Paul says, “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift” (1 Cor 4:7). In his “Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper, 1528,” Luther said, “The Father gives himself to us, with heaven and earth and all the creatures, in order that they may serve us and benefit us.”

Likewise, the new life given in Christ is the same as the life received in creation. The Son reconciled us with the Father, bringing us back to the Father. No wonder that, after finishing his discourse, Paul gives praise to God: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! [...] ‘who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom 11:33–36).

Here and now, Christians still daily receive grace in their lives. Through the Word and the sacraments, the Holy Spirit distributes to us the gift of forgiveness, and turns us into a gift for our neighbors. In the “Small Catechism” Luther said, “Where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.” We have eternal life; this implies trusting in God completely, having the most intimate relationship with God and daily enjoying God’s goodness. Eternal life does not only have a place in the future, but it is also a promise to become a member of God’s royal family here and now, and to be appointed to reign with God. As mentioned in Revelation, “you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth” (Rev 5:10). Therefore, whether in creation or in redemption, now or eternally, God is always the giver, and we are the joyful receivers.

week 2, day 2

“Evening and Morning,” verse 4,
Paul Gerhard (1607–1676)

To God in heaven all praise be given!
O God, we offer and gladly proffer
Gifts from your hand; these alone you will prize:
Hearts that receive you and faith to believe you;
Hymns that adore you are precious before you
And to your throne like sweet incense arise.

Amazing Grace (Ephesians 2:4–10)

Camilla Weiss Bohl, Lutheran, Paraguay

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

The theme of God's grace has always caught my attention. It gives me great joy to know that we have a God who is so good and does not ask anything in return; a God who is not for sale and out of love cares for us and protects us.

Sometimes it is hard for me to understand the grace of God. We are so used to being expected to do something in return for everything and I was really surprised freely to receive the love of God. Thanks to my confirmation class and the church youth camps, I could see that God does not ask anything in return from us and gives us God's love, forgiveness and salvation for free.

We had an enriching experience with our youth group. At Christmas time, we visited a young man who had had a motorbike accident, which had left him quadriplegic. We visited him at his home to sing songs, bring joy and share Holy Communion with him. I was truly impressed by this young man. Despite needing assistance when undertaking any physical activity, he was filled with joy and faith. Our youth group had the impression that we, the ones who had visited him, received far more from him than he did from us.

That experience marked my life and helped me to see with my own eyes the grace of God which, rather like wanting to see the wind, is so hard to see but, like a gentle breeze on my face, so nice to feel.

Wherever you are, as you are, I invite you to receive the goodness of God, because it comes by grace and love.

week 2, day 3

“A Collect from Morning Prayer,” *The Book of Common Prayer*

O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom: Defend us, thy humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Freedom and Liberty (Luke 1:46–55)

Zephania Kameeta, Lutheran, Namibia

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." (Lk 1:46–55).

Mary's song of praise based on Luke 1:46–55¹⁰

Today I look into my own heart
and all around me, and I sing the song of Mary.
My life praises the Lord my God
who is setting me free.
He has remembered me, in my humiliation and distress!
From now on those who rejected and ignored me
will see me and call me happy,
because of the great things he is doing
in my humble life.
His name is completely different from the other names in this world;
from one generation to another,
he was on the side of the oppressed.
As on the day of the Exodus, he is stretching out
his mighty arm to scatter the oppressors
with all their evil plans.
He has brought down mighty kings
from their thrones
and he has lifted up the despised;
and so will he do today.
He has filled the exploited with good things,
and sent the exploiters away with empty hands;
and so will he do today.
His promise to our mothers and fathers remains new and fresh to this day.
Therefore the hope for liberation
which is burning in me
will not be extinguished.
He will remember me, here now and beyond the grave.

week 2, day 4

“The Large Catechism,” Martin Luther

“A “god” is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart. As I have often said, it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true one. Conversely, where your trust is false and wrong, there you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, is really your God”

Knowing God (Deuteronomy 4:35–39)

John Gibaut, Anglican, Canada

To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him. From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, while you heard his words coming out of the fire. And because he loved your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them. He brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, giving you their land for a possession, as it is still today. So acknowledge today and take to heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.

In the not-so-distant past, people used to say that the most important thing is “not what you know, but who you know.” With the advent of social media such as Facebook it is no longer who you know but how many people you know. There is confusion about what it means to know and to be known. Knowing about someone, or even having someone on a contact list or amongst one’s Facebook friends is not quite the same thing as knowing another person.

The root of the English word “know” is related to the Latin word *cognoscere*, which goes back to the Greek word *gnosis*. These words convey the sense of perceiving, recognizing, being familiar with another person. Here knowing and being known arise from a lived experience of another person, which leads to an almost intimate knowing of one another.

It is in this sense that the Bible understands what it is to know God, as distinguished from knowing a little or a lot about God. It is about the experience of God, and of being known by God. “Be still, then, and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10), writes the psalmist. “Now I know only in part,” writes St Paul, “then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor 13:12).

The book Deuteronomy calls on the post-exodus people of Israel and their descendants to know God, to “acknowledge that the Lord is God” (Deut 4:35). The basis of their knowing was neither speculative nor theoretical, but historical, arising from their experience of being liberated by God: “And because he loved your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them. He brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power” (Deut 4:37).

The biblical journey is our own. To know ourselves as liberated by God’s grace is to know ourselves as loved and freed to become who we are, the daughters and sons of God.

week 2, day 5

From the baptismal liturgy of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia

E te whānau a te Karaiti / Dear friends in Christ,
God is love, God gives us life.
We love because God first loves us.

In baptism God declares that love;
in Christ God calls us to respond.

Known by Name (John 10:1–6)

Te Kitohi Wiremu Pikaahu, Anglican, New Zealand

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

The question of identity is a critical part in the life of any individual, particularly for a Christian. It is especially so for a Maori Christian in Aotearoa New Zealand today.

It is fundamental to how a person relates to their relatives, and what it means to belong to a community. With that sense of belonging come certain responsibilities and duties. The knowledge that one's *tūpuna* (ancestor) was converted to Christianity almost 180 years ago does more than just reassure me of who I am and who I belong to. It speaks of the power of God in a person's life in and throughout history. That power is the power of God's love, of God's grace and of God's peace. The effect of this is to transform, to renew and to liberate the lives of individuals and people of faith in every generation.

My first name was given to me by my maternal grandfather. He named me after himself on the day I was born. My second name comes from him as well. It was his father's first name. It means a lot to me as a Maori and as a Christian. My surname, Pikaahu, belonged to my paternal great-great-grandfather. Literally it means “young hawk.” It was his birth name given by his father in memory of his own great-great-grandfather. It means everything to me as a Maori and as a Christian.

My *tūpuna* (ancestor) was Pikaahu. He was baptized as an adult by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary, Rev. Henry Williams, on 24 April 1837. The baptism register records his baptismal name as Henry William Pikaahu. What interested me most was that although he was baptized along with a number of local chiefs, all of whom were given new names, his was the only entry whose new identity was not a transliteration in Maori of an English name, but an actual English name. He seems to have been comfortable with it. He must have trusted the missionary, his namesake, with registering him on his behalf.

What is important for me is that he was known as Pikaahu all his life by his *whanau* (family), *hapu* (sub-tribe) and *iwi* (tribe). He was known by the missionaries as Henry William Pikaahu. There does not seem to be a tension for him at all as he names his youngest son (my great-grandfather) Henare, the Maori form of Henry. At that point he takes Wiremu (William) as a first name. It is the name that Rev. Henry Williams was known by Maori. It is the name he was known by in the church for the next forty years of his life until he died in 1894.

For me it was this new faith in God in which he received his identity in Christ. Being known, and respected, by the community that named him first, his *whanau*, his *hapu* and his *iwi* with his baptismal name never changed who he was to them. He lived comfortably in two worlds, Maori (indigenous) and Pakeha (missionary). He was able to reconcile two separate worlds, two universes: from the old world to the new world, from past reality to future hope to salvation in Christ. The story of the origin of my *whanau* name, binds me not only to the *tūpuna* through my genealogical link, but also connects me to the faith that transformed his life, giving him a new identity. Through my *whakapapa* (genealogy) I am bound to the Christian faith expressed by *Te Hahi Mihingare*. This same faith comes with the name and is passed down from generation to generation, transforming my own life as a Christian.

week 2, day 6

“Be not Afraid,” John Michael Talbot

Be not afraid.
I go before you always.
Come follow me, and
I will give you rest.

Do not be Anxious (Matthew 6:25–34)

Marko Tiitus, Lutheran, Estonia

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

At a leadership training course a business executive found that fifty-four percent of his worries related to things that were unlikely to happen; twenty-six percent related to past actions that could not be changed; eight percent related to the opinions of people whose opinions really did not matter to him; four percent concerned personal health issues that he had since resolved; and only six percent concerned real issues worthy of his attention. By identifying and then letting go of the worries he could do nothing about or that were a complete waste of his energy, he eliminated ninety-four percent of the problems that had plagued him.

However, letting go of all or most of one's worries is not merely a matter of mental technique; rather it is the outcome and fruit of trust. Jesus, talking about worrying about clothes, food and drink, says, "indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." The basis of trust is an experience that, in spite of the instability, unpredictability and controversialism of life, the course of the world and our own life are ultimately in the hands of God. Trusting in God is about giving up one's own strength and accepting oneself as weak and helpless. Paradoxically, there is nothing more secure than to feel one's own weakness; this is connected to understanding that one's vanity is embraced by an inexplicable power. My experiences will help me to grasp that this inexplicable power is nothing but my Heavenly Father.

Human beings who discover in themselves even a tiny bit of trust in God and in life are relieved of the stress of constantly worrying, and awake to see their present and future more clearly. Their lives are getting more and more interesting and colorful. What type of job can I do? What am I going to do together with my family or friends? Are there any new hobbies waiting for me? These questions become important when one's energy and time are relieved from constant worrying, and devoted to living more fully in communion with God and one's neighbors.

week 2, day 7

“The Blessing at Holy Communion,”
The Book of Common Prayer

The peace of God,
which passeth all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,
be amongst you and remain with you always. *Amen*

The Peace of God (Philippians 4:4–9)

Mark MacDonald, Anglican, Canada

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Thus the remembrance that we have come from earth never allows anger to awaken. Let the earth, always present and remembered, be an ally to reason.

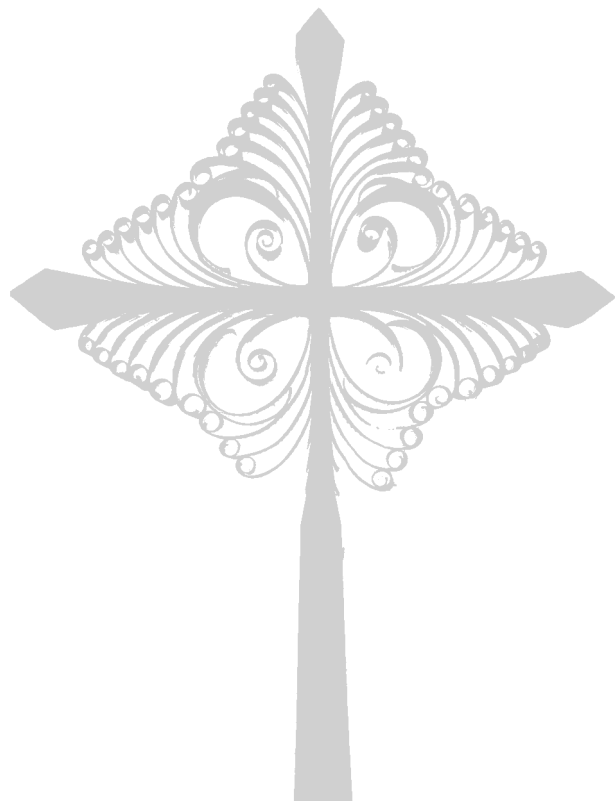
— St. Basil the Great

Our ancestors remembered creation's importance in the ordering of life and the peace of God that emerges within it. Today, not so much, and we have to be reminded that the peace that God offers is intimate with creation.

Modern Christians have struggled to find peace while living in a culture that is progressively alienated from creation. The comforts of modern life distance us from creation; positive developments with negative consequences. Science, too, reveals so much but often obscures the complexities of our symbiotic relationship to creation by reducing it to scientific technique. As we multiply the understanding of the intricate details of life, we seem ever more incapable of effectively recognizing our intense and extensive place within the larger fabric of life.

We are stressed by creation's suffering, a suffering accelerating from its defilement by an economic ordering of life that is heedless of consequences. The stress is constant these days, as a dull ache made of relentless bad climate news and a growing sense that we have crossed a line toward irreparable harm.

Great goodness would come from recognizing that the peace that comes from God includes creation. The simple acknowledgement that God has made us to live, as much as possible, in harmony with creation could change attitudes and behavior. There is no other context for the life of holiness and happiness we are designed for. Even if it is too late to stop some of the harm of climate change, the strength of our future peace will be found with our reconciling human life in the rest of creation.



Week 3: Salvation—Not for Sale¹¹

Introduction

Sonia Skupch, Lutheran, Argentina

Today I am going to buy a lottery ticket to see if it can change my life or make my day.

There's a new church in my town. The pastors there preach that, if I give them all the money they ask for, God will bless me in a very powerful way and I will be saved.

Those advertising new fashion brands imply that if I buy their product I will always be recognized, loved and acclaimed.

In my country, Argentina, there's an old adage: what you buy expensively, you do not sell cheaply. That is the logic according to which our society functions. Many people believe that in order to acquire something, be valued and recognized as a person, and even to receive affection and dignity before God, I need to sacrifice something, to give something very valuable. And in this sense, salvation from poverty, salvation from the lack of opportunities, salvation from guilt and salvation from failure are permanently for sale.

The theme for this week is "Salvation—Not for Sale." It is a very strong statement in our context where everything is bought and sold. The Word of God breaks with the prevailing logic and reminds us that what we receive from God, namely our salvation, is not a consumer article; you cannot buy or sell it. You can only receive salvation by the grace of God. It is a gift and we do not need to give anything in return for it. We receive it undeservedly but with infinite gratitude in our hearts. Having experienced being saved by faith, we are called to live showing love to others.

week 3, day 1

“An Anglican Baptismal Covenant”

Celebrant Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

People **I will, with God's help.**

Celebrant Will you persevere in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People **I will, with God's help.**

Celebrant Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?

People **I will, with God's help.**

Celebrant Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?

People **I will, with God's help.**

Celebrant Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People **I will, with God's help.**

Celebrant Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God's creation, and respect, sustain and renew the life of the Earth?

People **I will, with God's help.**

Salvation Cannot be Bought (Acts 8:17–22)

Mitzi J. Budde, Anglican, USA

Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money! You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.

Salvation cannot be bought. Turning to God in love and awe, trust and hope, we experience for ourselves God's boundless grace. When we put our occupations, our families, our finances, our health, indeed, our entire lives, into God's hands and seek to put our wills in conformity with God's, praying "your will be done," then we are freed to serve our neighbors and led to give of our gifts in joyful response to God's unmerited favor.

Martin Luther said in the "Large Catechism": "Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God." This is the challenge to each one of us: where do I put my trust? So often we try to control God, to curry favor through our goodness, to impress God with our sanctity. But grace cannot be earned by our good behavior.

We receive everything we need as a free gift from God, day by day, just as the Israelites received manna each morning in the wilderness. In a 1938 confirmation sermon, Dietrich Bonhoeffer identified the manna with faith: "God gives us always just precisely so much faith as we need for the present day. [...] So it is with all God's gifts. So it is with faith too. Either we receive it anew every day, or it decays."¹² Jesus is the risen Savior who walks the Emmaus road of our lives beside us. He is also the one who goes before us to prepare a place for us, who is already in our future.

God chose us in baptism, nourishes us through communion with Christ, speaks to us through the Scriptures, daily provides us with the grace that we need to live in the community of faith and sustains us through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit provides power to face each day, presence in time of need and peace in the face of the world's turmoil. Salvation cannot be bought; it has already been freely given through the priceless gift of Christ's death and resurrection.

week 3, day 2

“A Modern Anglican Collect for Christmas Day”

Almighty God, you wonderfully created
and yet more wonderfully restored our human nature.
May we share the divine life of your Son Jesus Christ,
who humbled himself to share our humanity,
and now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and
forever. Amen.

Why We Cannot Make Deals with God (Mark 10:35–40)

Sifiso Ivalinda Sithole, Anglican, Swaziland

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

The first chapter of Genesis explains how God created the universe (vv. 1–26) and humanity (v. 27). This means that God owns the entire universe, including us. We own absolutely nothing. Instead, we are wholly dependent on God just as children are dependent on their parents. Furthermore, Job 1:21 points out “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return.” Therefore, deal-making with God is not a practice of the kingdom of God and deal-making assumes that we possess something God needs and is longing to have.

Being created in God’s own image (Gen 1:27) we are spiritual beings, housed in physical bodies and mortal. We rely on God’s Word for spiritual uplifting as believers so that one day we can become Christlike. Through the inheritance of our sinful nature from Adam and Eve, we are born sinners and must repent in order to see God one day. Romans 10:9 reminds us that we need to confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, and then we will be saved. “You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Pet 2:3). This forms the firm foundation for our spiritual growth and development. Salvation is priceless since Jesus paid the price when he was crucified in Calvary.

God’s love is abundant, continual and unconditional as documented in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” We live by the grace of God, whose mercy endures forever. God is sovereign and gracious. It is only through seeking first God’s kingdom and righteousness that all these things will be given to us as well (Mt 6:33). God likes us to grow towards fulfillment of our lives. As we reflect on these truths, let us appreciate God’s grace and that Christ is our intercessor through whom we can one day see God.

week 3, day 3

“A Prayer after Communion,” *The Book of Common Prayer*

O LORD and heavenly Father, we thy humble servants entirely desire thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; most humbly beseeching thee to grant, that by the merits and death of thy Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood, we and all thy whole Church may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of his passion. And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee, that all we, who are partakers of this holy Communion, may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction. And although we be unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounden duty and service; not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences, through Jesus Christ our Lord; by whom, and with whom, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all honour and glory be unto thee, O Father Almighty, world without end. Amen.

Mercy (Titus 3:4–7)

Jennifer Leung, Lutheran, Hong Kong

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

It is the heart of mercy that makes people human and this is also one of God's attributes. It is the mercy of God that justifies us by faith. What is mercy? It is an expression of compassion and love. What is God's mercy? It is the grace of God, a free gift that shows the love of God; therefore mercy and love are inseparable. If we see things using God's heart, we will be able to cultivate the heart of grace.

Among the verses in the Holy Bible that refer to grace, the one that impresses me most is the miracle of the five loaves and the two fish. "As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things" (Mk 6:34). Subsequently, in the miracle of feeding the four thousand people, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat" (Mk 8:2), and then Jesus worked the miracle of feeding them all. Jesus showed his heart of mercy to those who were lost, who were in need and who were hungry and treated them with love. He not only provided them with food to satisfy their physical needs but he also bestowed upon them the food of life to nourish them spiritually so that they will never be in lack again.

When we face those in need and those who are underprivileged, have our hearts of mercy been touched so as to love and care about them? Practicing justification is not that difficult—it is actually a demonstration of a life justified by faith. "But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy."

week 3, day 4

“The Collects,” *German Mass*, Martin Luther

Almighty God, who art the protector of all who trust in thee, without whose grace no one is able to do anything, or to stand before thee: Grant us richly thy mercy, that by thy holy inspiration we may think what is right and by thy power perform the same; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Compassion (Matthew 9:35–38)

Marjaana Toiviainen, Lutheran, Finland

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Compassion: noun, sympathetic consciousness of and a feeling of deep empathy for others' misfortune and distress together with a desire to alleviate the suffering.

A prayer

Jesus, through your existence, body, actions, blood and words you lead me onto the path of compassion. You do it in two, very distinct ways.

First you patiently lead me with your advice, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Lk 6:31). What a merciful guideline—a considerate minimum. You know our limitations and human constraints: quite often, we can only grasp the needs of others through a lens of our own. So you come and live in this incompleteness and shape it into a tool for compassion: Do to others as you would have them do to you.

But that is not what you do. Through your own actions you teach a second way—much more profound and much harder. Jesus, you never rushed into doing things you wished people had done to you. Your compassion turned things upside down. You healed every disease and sickness—starting with the question, “What do you wish I do to you?”

Jesus, remind me often of those two ways to true compassion. First, help me figure out what on earth “I would have them do to me” means. Demand self-reflection. In your merciful presence I can recognize my true needs: those that lead towards the kingdom of God and soundness. Not those that lead towards addictions, hurtful detachment and solitude. I mix those up way too often.

Second, please take me further (with baby steps). Compassionate healer, guide me to ask others, “What do you wish that I do to you?” Remind me to ask, even though I think I know better.

Charity is quite common, but solidarity rare. Oh, how the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Lead me towards compassionate courage: let me see and be seen in all the messiness and craziness, vulnerability and limitations. Make our communities haphazard, undefined, obscurely equal and confusingly healing. Let compassion lead us into mutual transformation through our shared story. When it comes to suffering, we all are part of the problem and part of the solution. Sinners and saints.

In the midst of that mess, harassment and helplessness, travel through our towns and villages and pour your compassion over us.

week 3, day 5

“A Mighty Fortress is our God (1529),” verse 2, Martin Luther

Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right man on our side,
the Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth, his name,
from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.

Faithfulness (Deuteronomy 32:3–4)

Martin Junge, Lutheran, Chile

For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he;

It is not because of who you are or what you do, but because of who God is and what God does that new life is offered to you, for free and as a gift. This is how I used to convey the core message of justification by faith alone, the theological breakthrough that the Reformation in the sixteenth century articulated and put at the center of its theological system. With its sober self-awareness about the limitations of human nature, which only the eyes of faith can bring forth, it focuses on what again only the eyes of faith recognize as God's intention to bring salvation into this broken world. In such an approach, Christ becomes the center in which God's intention to bring salvation are both articulated and achieved—so that all may live. In and with Christ, God's justice is placed in a totally different context. This runs so deeply counter to how human beings tend to understand justice: it is the empty-handed, those crying for compassion and mercy, who are healed and incorporated into new life because of their faith.

In and with Christ, “faithfulness” also becomes recognizable as a fundamental and permanent feature in God's relationships with the created world, including us human beings.

It is this faithfulness that Moses grasped while singing praises to the Lord (Deut 32:3–4). He does so while looking ahead, seeing the contours of God's promises becoming clear and tangible, and looking back, understanding the ups and downs of a long journey from the perspective of God's promises. Placed in this rich moment so full of history and an anticipated future—a meaningful description of how believers may want to understand every day of their lives—it is the concept of faithfulness that emerges as the one carrying Moses' existence. This explains the red thread running throughout. God is faithful. Not because of who we are and what we do, but because of who God is and what God does.

week 3, day 6

Article XI, “Of the Justification of Man,” *The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings: Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

Faith, Hope and Love (1 Thessalonians 1:2–5)

Brian Williams, Anglican, Argentina

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake.

There are times in one's life when one can feel anxiety, fear and doubt and is overwhelmed by worries, apathy and the strong feeling that one's existence is meaningless. This might happen when facing loss, illness or significant changes in life. However, it may also occur for no apparent reason.

The Word of God copes with these feelings, using three terms: hope, faith and love. When hope is lost, anxiety and despair step in; when faith crumbles and falls, uncertainty, doubt and the sense of living a meaningless life emerge; when love breaks into pieces, mistrust, fear and apathy may appear.

Bishop Desmond Tutu said, "Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness." Hope does not deny the reality but assumes that tomorrow will be better than today. Psalm 30:5 puts it this way, "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning." This is why what in the past were our hopes, may today become our achievements.

While hope is the desire to get to a better place, faith is the assurance of how to get there. It gives meaning, direction and purpose to life. Faith is about knowing and believing in God. Its concern is to overcome doubts and to nail down the truth regarding God in your life. Faith lets us see that the course of events is determined by God. Every aspect of life gets a new meaning when faith in God breaks in.

Through faith we experience God's love. Love is the world's most powerful energy, driving people to achieve great goals. It erases loneliness, sweeps away fear, liberates us and gives us a sense of belonging. Love commits us to one another. It allows us to forgive and helps us to accept those who are different. In human relationships people tend to ask, What can I get? or, What do I need to give in return? Love calls us to turn our eyes towards others, to act out of compassion without asking for a cost benefit. You need faith to be inspired, hope to persevere and love to accomplish the job.

week 3, day 7

The Morning Blessing, “The Small Catechism,” Martin Luther

I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger. I ask that you would also protect me today from sin and all evil, so that my life and actions may please you. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Assured (Romans 8:31–39)

“Stephanie,” Anglican, Australia

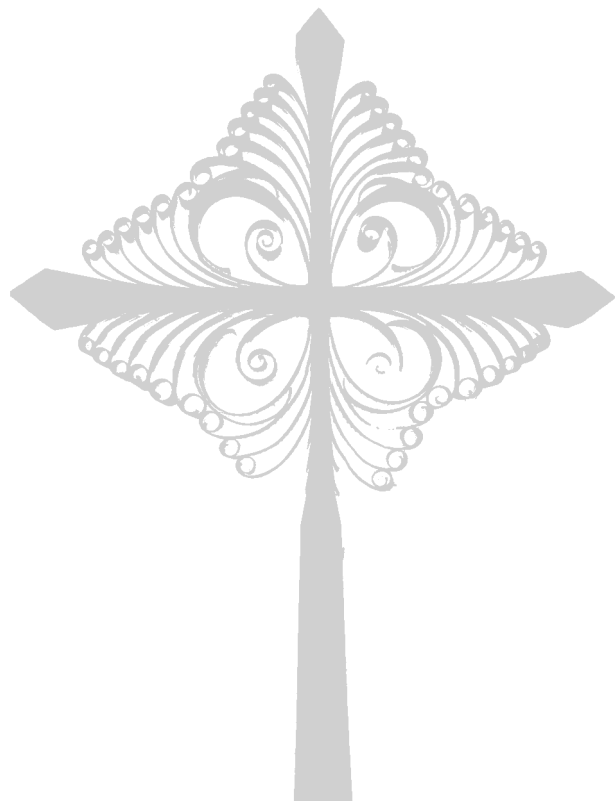
What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In Central Asia, I seem to live in a world of assurance. My friends constantly assure me that Jesus did not die; they assure me that he is not the Son of God; they assure me that God’s forgiveness is free, not requiring a sacrifice; and they assure me that no one can know God’s mind and be sure of God’s continued favor. Where does that leave me as a Christian?

I had a terrifying experience early on in my time in Central Asia. I woke up suddenly one night at 2 a.m. It was as if the world had suddenly come into focus and I could see the truth: everything I believed in was a lie. Jesus could not possibly be God. It was all a conspiracy. Every part of Christianity was lie. It was pure tradition, not the truth. Of course no one had been so bold as to say this to me, but completely immersed in my Muslim context, it had seeped in under my skin in a dozen little ways. At that moment, I felt that my world was falling apart. I desperately wanted to believe in Jesus, but I could not continue to participate in a lie. Where was my promised assurance?

I vaguely recalled a pastor once saying that the entirety of the Christian faith hangs on 1 Corinthians 15. Indeed, if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is our faith. And so I turned to 1 Corinthians 15 and read and reread time and again the evidence for, and defense of the resurrection. In God’s kindness, the internet was working and a godly sister was there via Skype to talk me through it and pray with me. Gradually, the darkness receded and I went back to sleep.

I woke up the next morning, able to recognize the episode for what it was: a spiritual attack. I felt an overwhelming sense of relief that God had brought me through it, and an abiding thankfulness that God had clung to me when I had no faith of my own. For truly there is no power that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Assurance indeed!



Week 4: Human Beings—Not for Sale¹³

Introduction

Dalcy Dlamini, Anglican, Swaziland

When God created the world, God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, male and female God created them.” Created in the image of the Triune God, every human being is created for community, rather than as a commodity. John 10:10 proclaims, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” From the beginning, life in abundance has been God’s dream for humanity.

Abundant life is God’s free gift to every human being, regardless of gender, race, color or sexual orientation. It is therefore imperative that human beings treat one another with love and respect. Justice must be shown to all human beings, regardless of their circumstances, whether living with HIV/AIDS, emotional, mental or physical disabilities, albinism or other challenging conditions, and the dignity of all must be respected. Therefore, human beings are never for sale; they are not in any way to be treated as a commodity that can be bought or sold.

God created women and men with the ability to love and to bring about peace and justice. Therefore, we are called to be agents of abundant life for all. Whether one is rich or poor, from the global North or the global South, all of us have the duty to be agents of transformation so that all people will have life, and life in abundance.

week 4, day 1

Article XVII, “Of Predestination and Sin,” *The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*

Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through Grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.

As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal Salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God...

Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture: and, in our doings, that Will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God.

Human Beings and the Image of God (Psalm 8:3–9)

Thamesha Watson, Lutheran, Guyana

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

There is a paradox, a mystery—fouled by sin, and yet we believe that we should behave justly; so corrupt by power, but we have supremacy over other living beings; so inferior to God, and yet called honorable by God; so fragile and broken, yet so precious and cherished in the sight of God. We are wonderfully created, tarnished by sin, loved by a perfect God and redeemed through God's Son.

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion’ ...” (Gen 1:26). It is clear that we human beings are fearfully and wonderfully made in the “image of God.”

Creative, intelligent, aesthetic, moral, relational, loving, spiritual—these qualities reflect the image in which we have been created. An image is a reflection of the original. Images can sometimes be hazy and distorted but they do not exist on their own. Similarly, we cannot exist on our own. We need our original image, God, in order to exist. However, this image has been cast aside. Instead of reflecting God's perfect image, we reflect exactly what we crave and consume in our worldly pursuits.

We see a colossal escalation of ineptness, ignorance, ugliness, immorality, separation, hatred, godlessness; this questions our humanity. Do we reflect God's true image? Are we rational, ethical, companionable beings hungering after God? When we look into the mirror of our souls, whose reflection do we really see?

Because of this, God sent us the perfect similitude, Jesus Christ, to remind us of the image from the beginning when it was only God who existed. This image not only helps us to see who we really are, but whose we are and who God is.

God continues to extend God's loving arms of grace and beckons us to a relationship that once was and that will be forever. A perfect coexistence between God and humankind, the way it was in the beginning. Amen.

week 4, day 2

A prayer based on *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Augustine of Hippo

Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless
till they find their rest in you;
so lead us by your Spirit
that in this life we may live to your glory
and in the life to come enjoy you for ever;
through Jesus Christ our Lord
who is alive with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.
Amen

Humans and the Likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–27)

Josiah Idowu-Fearon, Anglican, Nigeria

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

On the eve of 1517, the diverse peoples of Europe were united in a common faith and overwhelmingly belonged to the Western Catholic Church. Christians in late medieval Europe also shared a common fear of Islam, especially since from the mid-fifteenth century the Ottoman Empire expanded into Eastern Europe. One of the major concerns that resulted from the rapid divisions within the Western Church was a practical one: the weakening of a united Christian Europe in the face of Islam. We see and hear many of these same fears today in the USA, Europe and Africa. In my own country, Nigeria, such tensions between Islam and Christianity are a daily reality.

One of the major differences between 1517 and 2017 is the recent history of fruitful interreligious dialogue between Christianity and the other great world religions such as Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Indigenous Traditions, and of course, Islam. The impetus for such conversations is mutual understanding, cooperation, finding common holy ground and peacemaking. The theological basis is the book of Genesis, when God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” (Gen 1:26). I am an Anglican Christian committed to interreligious dialogue. In my own encounter with Islam, I have discovered that the Qur’an comes very close to the Bible on this point, and that Muslims and Christians can together assert their common humanity, created in the likeness of God. The Qur’an affirms both the oneness of humanity as well as the diversity within the human community as a gift from God, who has created us with a common humanity, within different nationalities, languages, ethnicities—and even religions—so that we may understand one another:

O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know (understand) each other... (Q 49:13).

Since all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, the Bible insists that no human being is for sale; no human being may be trafficked; every refugee deserves dignity, care and welcome; racism, xenophobia and religious intolerance are contrary to God’s design for humanity. As people of their own particular time, most sixteenth-century Western Christians would probably have found such an attitude difficult, whereas it lies at the very heart of what all reform and renewal in the life of the church affirms.

week 4, day 3

“Now thank we all our God (1636),” Martin Rinckart

Now thank we all our God,
with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
in Whom this world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;
and keep us still in grace,
and guide us when perplexed;
and free us from all ills,
in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given;
the Son, and him who reigns
with them in highest heaven;
the one eternal God,
whom earth and heaven adore;
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.¹⁴

Value and Human Dignity (Psalm 139:1–14)

Angelika Hofmann, Lutheran, Germany

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it. Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

Human dignity is inalienable. Just like the relationship between God and human beings, it is never ending. Human dignity and value are God’s unconditional gift, belonging to human beings in every phase of their lives. Human dignity is a fruit of the relationship with God and extends beyond the limits of life on earth. As the psalmist assures us: “If I make my bed in Sheol, [the underworld] . . . and settle at the farthest limits of the sea . . .”—God is still there.

Wonderfully made by God means being cherished, above all when you are at the end of the sea, at the end of your life, growing weaker and increasingly becoming dependent on the helping hands of family members, neighbors or professional caregivers. You are cherished above all when you are down, making your bed in Sheol in the middle of a depression, or lying in a hospital bed having been diagnosed with a terminal illness. You are cherished above all at the beginning and at the end of life, powerful and weak, playful and efficient, handicapped and empowered—God is always there.

Some people are afraid of knowing and feeling that God is always there, knowing every word I will speak, every thought I will think and every feeling I will have. Martin Luther was one of those people during his early days. He was afraid of a stern and unforgiving god, who judges rather than shows appreciation. During many unhappy days and nights, plagued by fears and anxieties, Martin Luther wrestled with God just like Jacob did on the banks of the river Jabbok. But, just like for his forefather in faith, it became a blessing for him too. By delving into the depths of biblical hermeneutics and fleeing from God to God Luther reached the understanding that God made every human being wonderfully and gave every living soul dignity and value, which are never lost but, rather, found when you begin to feel God’s love. Human dignity is inalienable, because you can find and be found by God everywhere.

week 4, day 4

“Treatise on Good Works (1520),” Martin Luther

We must offer resistance to all wrong, wherever truth or righteousness are violated and abused. We dare make no distinction of persons, as do some who fight most actively and busily against the wrong which is done to the rich, the mighty, or their own friends, but who are quite quiet and patient when wrong is done to the poor, or to those of low estate, or to their own enemy. These people see the name and the honor of God not as it is but through a colored glass. They measure truth and righteousness according to the persons, and are not aware that their eye, which looks more on the person than on the truth of the matter, deceives them. They are hypocrites under the skin and only appear to be defending the truth. They know quite well that there is no danger in helping the rich, the mighty, the learned, and one's own friends. In turn, they can enjoy their help, and be protected and honored by them.

Value beyond Culture and Race (Psalm 67)

Angela Olotu, Lutheran, Tanzania

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, (Selah) that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. (Selah) Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us. May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him

This psalm is about the blessings, salvation and mercy that God bestows upon all human beings, regardless of their culture, gender, race, age and social and economic status. God desires and has the power to provide us with what is good and best for us.

God blesses and extends God's mercy to everyone—the just and the unjust; believers and non-believers; the “good” and the “evil.” In God's eyes all people are alike. Matthew 5:45 affirms this by saying “so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”

The psalmist refers to the whole world and shows no preference for one specific ethnicity, creed, gender, sexuality, age or ability to praise God and to respond to God's care, love and blessings. The way in which God acts, blesses, loves, cares and rules is beyond our comprehension, expectations and wishes.

Human beings are considered sacred and equal before God, because we are God's people, created in God's image and likeness. We have an inherent and immeasurable worth and dignity. The image of God in humanity is sometimes blurred. However, the unfolding of events in the history of humankind attests to the rebirth of God's image in us. Examples of this are the efforts to end the slave trade and the apartheid regime.

Each and every person has great value; each and every person has the right to respect, justice, peace and freedom. Therefore, we have to acknowledge and practice the “value system of equality” by respecting, loving and valuing one another as equal human beings.

week 4, day 5

A hymn by Bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith, 1962

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Savior shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his Name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age to same;
his holy Name--the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

Value beyond Age and Gender (Mark 10:13–16)

Rebecca Sangeetha, Lutheran, India

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

“Keep quiet” is what many women and children from my part of the world grow up hearing. The subtext is loud and clear—you are not worthy of having a voice, your opinions do not matter. Women and children are on the whole advised to keep quiet in the name of convention (within the family), in the name of tradition (within the church) and in the name of stigma (in the face of abuse). Having a voice signifies having value and women and children are largely shut off from that.

One of my favorite biblical stories is the healing of Namaan in 2 Kings 5. Here the words of an unnamed, foreign, captive slave girl help cure Namaan of his leprosy. Sometimes I wonder what if the girl had been asked to shut up. What if her words had not been taken seriously by Namaan’s wife and Namaan? What if she had been asked not to interfere in matters beyond her work as a slave? The story of Namaan’s healing shows how even a child’s words can lead to human flourishing.

I cannot help thinking, what if there had been a group of people like Jesus’ disciples around the girl shutting her up? Jesus’ disciples come across as people who are stern, preventing those on the margins—children (Mk 13–14), the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:23) and blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10:48)—from approaching Jesus. Jesus’ attitude however is different. “[Do] not stop them,” he says (Mk 10:14).

Jesus challenges his disciples. Participation in God’s kingdom is not possible unless they change and become like children (Mt 18:3). It is a challenge for those with privileged access to power to give up power. In a context where “value” is often gendered and associated with age, the ethics of the kingdom of God where “the first become the last and the last become the first” is an important way to rectify existing inequalities. Therefore, affirming value beyond age and gender calls for a discipleship of self-emptying through which fullness and the flourishing of life become possible not just for some but for all.

week 4, day 6

“The Collect for the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany,” *The Book of Common Prayer*

O LORD, we beseech thee to keep thy Church and household continually in thy true religion; that they who do lean only upon the hope of thy heavenly grace may evermore be defended by thy mighty power; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Disability and Bearers of Grace: Jon's Gifts (2 Corinthians 12:9–10)

Timothy J. and Fiona Harris, Anglican, Australia

[B]ut he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Our son Jon is 31. He has the mental age of a five-year-old, can at times be quite anxious and finds it hard to keep up with the pace of this world. He is a gift of God, and a remarkable bearer of God's grace.

Jon has the capacity to show a quality of love and friendship that is all too rare in this world. He is not unique in this. People with disability frequently demonstrate these qualities. They take delight in the achievements of others, and share the joys of their friends' small victories.

Jon has his struggles, and can be quite draining at times. He is no angel. But he does have a deep faith, a wonderful prayer life, loves the Bible (although he cannot read), and Jesus speaks to him in his dreams.

One of Jon's greatest delights is in the greeting of peace in our church. He works the room, seeking out those who are often overlooked. To receive a hug from Jon is a deeply enriching moment.

Jon is Jon. In many ways, we would not have it otherwise. Of course we dream of a life where he has greater freedom, fewer anxieties and can keep pace with others. Yet God's gifts through Jon witness profound human qualities to us and come to us as an invaluable bearer of grace. Human value systems are superficial by comparison. We love having Jon in our lives and are blessed with the grace of God in and through his life.

week 4, day 7

“Conclusion of the Intercessions,” *The Book of Common Prayer*

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

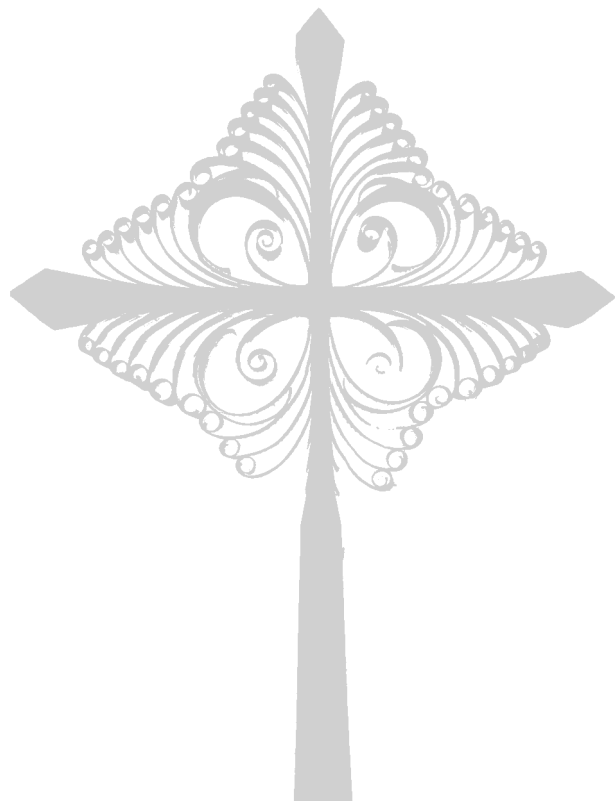
Adoption: Being before Doing (Galatians 4:1-7)

Matthias C. Der, Anglican, Hong Kong

My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are the owners of all the property; but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God

Are we human beings or human doings? In the competitive city of Hong Kong where I reside, we are increasingly reduced to human doings not human beings. Companies assess the value of a staff person solely based on their productivity. Young children at the age of three are dragged to class after class so that they can become multilingual, socially adaptable and academically astute, ready for kindergarten entrance interviews. In 2016, during a period of eight months, close to thirty secondary and university students committed suicide, succumbing to the pressures of life. Are we human beings or human doings? Have we sold our humanity to become human machines for gain or success?

One of the greatest gifts we have received in life is that of our adoption as God's daughters and sons through faith in Christ. We were not only created in God's image and not only loved by God. Rather, we are God's precious children. How precious it is that we can call God, "Abba! Father!" (Gal 4:6) We tend to forget this sacred identity in each one of us and in the people we meet. Our worth does not come from what we have produced, how much we have earned, what influence we possess or the "packaging" in which we have clothed ourselves. It comes from the simple fact that we are God's very own, loved by Christ and redeemed through his blood. It is through this that we can live life with love, thanksgiving, hope and peace. We can forgive those who have wronged us, care for the marginalized and extend a smile to a stranger. Do not forget that we are first and foremost human beings, loved and filled by God's spirit, long before we start doing things. Let us allow ourselves to come to Christ, to be open to him, to obey and to walk with him. Then we can be free, can love and live.



Week 5: Creation—Not for Sale¹⁵

Introduction

Nicholas H. F. Tai, Lutheran, Hong Kong

From the earliest days of God's creation until today human beings have exploited God's created world. They seem determined to go down the path to the original abyss of a formless void and darkness (*tōhū wābōhū*). Today's environmental degradation is the result of human greed, and global warming and the deterioration of our world are accelerating as a consequence of our endless consumerism. Some people claim this is so because human beings are simply fulfilling their biblical mandate over and against the created world. For example, in Genesis 1:26–28 we read that God created human beings in order to “subdue” and “have dominion” over nature. We might think this kingly concept of “subdue and have dominion” inevitably leads to the exploitation of the earth by human beings, or that such abuse is supported by the biblical statement. Such a view is a deliberate misinterpretation of the text and a misunderstanding of the human being's God-given role.

Actually, the task of the human being over nature is to “subdue” and “have dominion over” according to the biblical concept of a monarch. We must therefore bear in mind that, in the Bible, the king's power and authority are not unrestrained. Instead, the ideal Israelite king rules by divine law. This means the king rules in accordance with God's justice and righteousness (Ps 72:1), in which case the whole created world will be blessed (Ps 72:6). Consequently, the king rules responsibly and is accountable to God as a steward of God's creation. According to such an understanding of the biblical statement “subdue and have dominion over,” human beings must never exploit the created world. Instead, it is the human being's duty to ensure the state of goodness in God's eyes.

After the recent Paris climate change agreement and despite the euphoria surrounding the success of the Paris climate conference, we remain pessimistic for the future of our environment. The will of individual countries to carry out the decisions of the conference and the actual reduction of carbon emissions seems a matter of “too little, too late.” For example, the Kyoto protocol, signed but never ratified by the USA. The 2009 Copenhagen Accord was not much of an improvement and only gives us further reason to be pessimistic. However, as people of God, with faith in Christ and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, we care deeply about our relationship with nature. Therefore, we continue to stand against every form of exploitation of nature and against all attempts to turn nature into a mere commodity. Instead, we will work to keep and manage God's good gift of the earth.

week 5, day 1

From a hymn by Isaac Watts, 1719

Our God, our Help in ages past,
Our Hope for years to come,
Our Shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal Home!

Under the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
And our defense is sure.

Before the hills in order stood
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the same.

A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its years away;
They fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

Creation and *Shalom* (Psalm 85:7–13)

Tetty Sabrina Rotua Tambunan, Lutheran, Indonesia

Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

Life flows from the past into the present and the future. While human memory is important, we are also aware of its fragility. The way we remember things from the past can influence our present and future. Bitter experiences of the past—both at the personal as well as the collective level—can make us more cautious about life in the present, as well as in the future.

The eternal memory of God who is the past, present and future is different. In Psalm 85, the psalmist, in the present, remembers God's favor in the past and seeks restoration and peace—*shalom*—in the present and the fulfillment of God's faithfulness in the future. While we do not know any details of the psalmist's life, clearly it was not ideal. And yet the psalmist is able to look ahead and believe that God's *shalom* will be declared (Psalm 85: 9–14).

In the midst of unknown difficulties, the psalmist proclaims that God will grant us *shalom*, giving us the strength to live in the present and promising us a glorious future. God's *shalom* is not only safety from an enemy but also stands for justice and the welfare of the people. *Shalom* is a Hebrew word meaning peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquility. It means more than the absence of war and conflict, but includes wholeness and health.

In Psalm 85:10, God's salvation is understood as a meeting of steadfast love (*kheh'-sed*) and faithfulness (*eh'-meth*). While the Hebrew term *kheh'-sed* includes elements of grace, kindness, friendliness, compassion, the word *eh'-meth* includes elements such as sustainability, correctness, reliability, predictability, stability. God's grace and goodness are manifest in God's actions in the continuous relationship with Israel, regardless of mistakes made by Israel in the past. God declares righteousness and peace for Israel, and for you and me.

For Christians, the memory of God's goodness is rooted in Christ's work on the cross, where steadfast love and faithfulness have met, where righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Remembering God's love in the present and God's faithfulness in the past becomes a promise that can be experienced as *shalom* of God's people throughout the ages. And so we dare to meet the future!

week 5, day 2

A hymn by Folliot Sanford Pierpoint, 1854

For the beauty of the earth,
for the glory of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies;
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise

For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon, and stars of light;
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise

For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony,
linking sense to sound and sight;
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild;
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise

For thy church, that evermore
lifteth holy hands above,
offering up on every shore
her pure sacrifice of love;
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise

For thyself, best Gift Divine,
to the world so freely given,
for that great, great love of thine,
peace on earth, and joy in heaven:
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise

Stewardship (Genesis 1:28–31)

Patricia Lenton, Anglican, Argentina/England

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Creation cannot accept an act of contrition—extinct species will not come back with a confession, and deforested areas will not be green again just because of a spoken apology. We need to do more than to admit our guilt—we need radically to change our behavior, reverse our past mistakes and become responsible stewards. All of humanity needs to embrace genuine stewardship, care and responsibility that go beyond faith but are firmly rooted in a loving Creator God. We need radical and responsible stewardship. Where understanding overtakes greed there will be life; where collaboration overcomes selfishness there will be creative mission.

Creation is not for sale; it is not a trophy for hanging on the wall. Ours is a time to walk the ways that are pleasing to God and to try to reduce the damage done to God’s creation by reversing trends of destruction and opening our eyes to the inequalities that result from the disproportionate and inappropriate use of creation by those pursuing only their self-interest.

We cannot take wealth, fame or reputation to the grave. It will all stay behind. We must change our apathetic behavior so that no more species are driven to extinction. We must change our behavior before more people, cultures, civilization and parts of God’s creation are driven to their graves. Creation is not for sale.

week 5, day 3

“Table Talks (1532),” Martin Luther

When some birds built a nest in his garden and always flew away when he passed by, he [Martin Luther] said, “Dear little bird, don't fly away. I wish you nothing but good. If only you'd believe me! [Then he turned away from the nest and said,] This is how we should believe God – that he wishes us well with his whole heart. He who has given his Son for me certainly doesn't want to kill us.

Care and Use, not Exploit or Abuse (Genesis 2:15)

Martin Kopp, Lutheran, France

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

What if the earth were to be regarded as a garden? I spent my entire childhood in a small village called Schillersdorf in Alsace, France, where cows outnumbered inhabitants. Our house had a huge garden.

My mother had green fingers and the garden was her passion and her joy. She spent hours outside, bent over the ground, planting, digging, sowing, watering, harvesting, each in its own time. It was an organic garden as she used no chemicals.

I remember her flushed cheeks, the sweat on her forehead, the soil under her nails and on her old trousers, the tiredness on her face. But also her smile, her lengthy wanderings and the endless discussions with passersby—gardeners themselves or admirers of these fifty shades of green.

She cultivated the earth and we enjoyed the beautiful result of a garden of mixed flowers and vegetables that provided natural beauty and tasty and healthy organic food. Care and use—simple, plain, evident.

Of course, by definition, a garden is not an untouched, wild, natural place. It is a part of creation, cultivated and transformed by human hands. Hands that can wound as much as they can heal; that can nurture as much as they can exploit; that can protect as much as they can abuse. We can live with open palms or clenched fists.

I cherish this memory of my childhood in Schillersdorf. There might be much more to this story than appears at first sight. After all, both Adam and Eve were needed to fulfill God's command to till and guard the Garden of Eden.

week 5, day 4

From the “Canticle of the Sun,” ca. 1225, St Francis of Assisi

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord,
All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour and all blessings.

To you alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour,
Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
In the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
And fair and stormy, all weather's moods,
by which You cherish all that You have made.

Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,
So useful, humble, precious and pure.

Praised be You my Lord through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You my Lord through our Sister, Mother Earth
who sustains and governs us,
producing varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

God's Glory and the Whole Earth (Psalm 72:16–20)

Lena Edlund, Lutheran, Sweden

May there be abundance of grain in the land; may it wave on the tops of the mountains; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field. May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun. May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen. The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended.

Christians often start their spiritual journey by learning about God, the Creator (Gen 1:1), who made day and night, animals and humankind—made them in God's image to care for God's creation.

We disappoint God by going against God's plan for creation (Gen 3:6–7). In all that God has made, God sees goodness; humankind has the ability to do good but we fail over and over again. We dishonor God—life itself. Still things are as they have been since creation: humankind is fully responsible for God's earth.

Instead of changing our responsibilities, God changes our relationship. God sends Jesus to experience human life. Jesus is the link between heaven and earth, true God and true human. Jesus is both pre- and post-creation (Jn 1:12–3). Christ is the embodiment of a God who outstrips the human perception of God. Our physical link to Christ today is the sacraments—bread, wine and baptism—and they are also a reminder of the calling given to us by our Creator.

How can we live up to God's calling? First, we should realize that as God is One, we should be one as humankind (1 Cor 12:12). This means God calls all humankind. It also means that we should care not only for all living things and earth itself, but also for all people, regardless of nation or creed—all of humankind.

Where do we begin to take on this huge responsibility?

We start where God started—creation. We honor life. We consume responsibly by not throwing away food; buying locally produced groceries in season; eating less or no meat (God gave us plants and fruits to eat, Gen 1:29, and animals to keep us company, Gen 2:18–19); trying, whenever possible, to buy organic foods or growing them ourselves. There are lots of ways to care for earth.

God, who is relational and, at the same time, living in unity in Godself (Father, Son, Spirit), encourages us to be like God. To strive for relationship and unity, not only with God, but with all of creation (Mk 12:30–31). This is how we truly accept and honor God's calling: we care for all and all things.

week 5, day 5

A prayer from the *Didache*, ca. AD 95

As the grain once scattered in the fields and the grapes once dispersed on the hillside are now reunited on this table in bread and wine, so, Lord, may your whole Church soon be gathered together from the corners of the earth into your kingdom. Amen

Creation and Community (Acts 2:42–47)

Chris McLeod, Anglican, Australia

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

The climate changes; the seas rise; droughts last longer due to variations in rainfall; the seasons seem unpredictable; the eco-system is under threat; various animal species risk extinction; there is a great deal of uncertainty for those who earn their income from the land—the harsh realities of living in Australia in the twenty-first century. Those most affected are the Aboriginal and Torres Islanders in remote communities, whose living conditions are becoming almost unbearable. Yet, all of us are affected in one way or another as we witness the results of the poor stewardship of God's creation.

The earliest believers experienced God's generosity in community. Goods were shared and they "had all things in common" (Acts 2:4). There was a deeply held belief that each member of the community was responsible for the other (Acts 2:45). All this was experienced under God's guidance and supported through prayer and worship (Acts 2:47). The pursuit of the common good was at the forefront of the earliest Christian belief.

This sense of community is found amongst many of the world's indigenous peoples. We are here to live together, and our responsibilities are to the community first and foremost. Seeking to care for God's creation is to care also for the community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians cannot separate care for the community from care for creation. The two are inextricably linked: neglect creation, you damage the community. The creation is God's sharing gift to the world community. Christian responsibility demands that we seek to reform our relationship with God's creation and our global community, with the same righteous fervor that inspired Martin Luther and the reformers.

week 5, day 6

The Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Common Wealth (Deuteronomy 15:7–11)

Thabo Makgoba, Anglican, South Africa

If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,” and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.”

The gospel is at its heart a revelation of the nature and character of God and its narrative conveys how God has expressed God’s loving power through Jesus. The proclamation of God’s redemptive action in Jesus is often understood as arising from God’s love for humanity and subsequent intention to save us. But while the biblical witness emphasizes God’s concern for humanity, this can only be adequately understood in relation to God’s fundamental commitment to the entire created order. God’s covenantal relationship with humanity is part of a broader covenantal relationship with the whole of creation.

God’s relationship with creation is an expression and reflection of the dynamic, self-giving relationship of love that exists among the persons of the Trinity. God’s goal is that the community of creatures should share in the freedom, rest and joy that characterize divine life, a goal expressed in the concept of *shalom*. The gracious conditions under which we live are summarized in the creeds—we not only believe in but relate to God the Father as Creator of all, to Jesus Christ, who lived in history on earth, suffering and dying in order to redeem us, and to God the Holy Spirit, who brings new life, the new creation within our reach.

When we state Creation—Not for Sale it must be in the context of a God-centered world in which God is involved in all our human endeavors: in politics, economics, technology, the sciences—in all of society. God’s grace is present in creation and always embraces us. In practical terms, this requires that we respond to the common wealth that God has gifted to us in creation by sharing it; that we become gracious in the use of our time, our talents, our money and our possessions. In this way we can realistically address the challenge of making the Christ of yesterday the Christ of today and ourselves as Christians the stewards of the whole of God’s creation.

week 5, day 7

The Third Commandment, “The Large Catechism,” Martin Luther

Our word “holy day” or “holiday” is so called from the Hebrew word “Sabbath”, which properly means to rest, that is, to cease from work; hence our common expression for “stopping work” literally means “taking a holiday”...[W]hen you are asked what “You are to hallow the day of rest” means, answer: “Hallowing the day of rest means to keep it holy.” What is meant by “keeping it holy”? Nothing else than devoting it to holy words, holy works, and holy living. The day itself does not need to be made holy, for it was created holy. But God wants it to be holy for you. So it becomes holy or unholy on your account, depending on whether you spend it doing something holy or unholy.

Sabbath and Jubilee (Leviticus 25:1–12)

Neil Vigers, Anglican, England

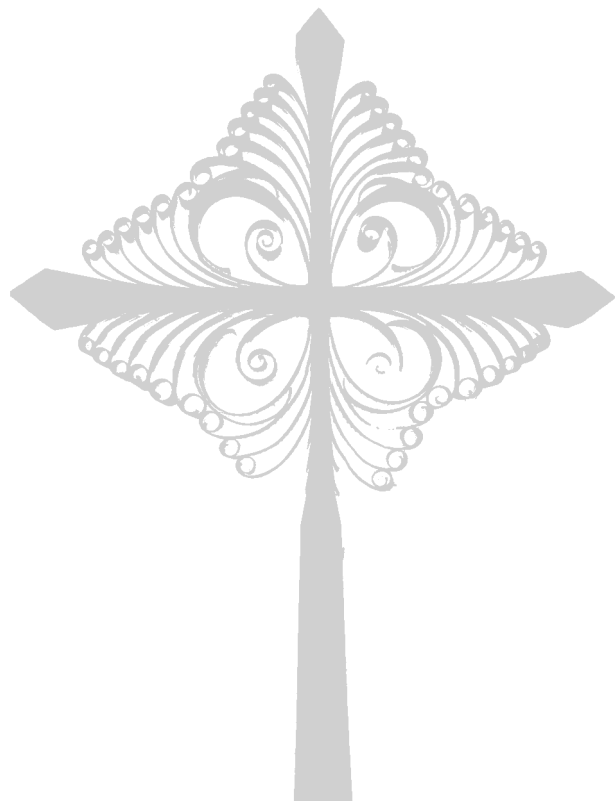
The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food. You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.

The three “Not for Sale” themes of “Salvation,” “Human Beings” and “Creation,” all have roots in Sabbath and Jubilee. The Sabbath Day gives rest once a week. Here the creation, with which human living is so closely entwined, is allowed time of “complete rest” as well on a sevenfold pattern of years. This pattern of personal and agricultural rest is deeply beneficial. Jubilee brought great benefits to the people who lived and worked as part of the creation and the land. It required that all be set free from debts and from poverty, and that all the land be made available to God’s people, because the land belongs to God alone.

Sabbath and Jubilee declare that all that exists belongs to God, and that the creation and history will only find their purpose and fulfillment in their return to God. Both creation and people depend entirely on God for salvation. Jubilee is God’s response to sin; the opportunity for repentance; and the gift of redemption through God’s grace. Forgiveness and restoration are offered to Israel, which is itself a sign of God’s will for the whole world.

Jesus plants Sabbath and Jubilee at the heart of his preaching in Luke 4 about the year of the Lord’s favor. He is God’s Jubilee. All of God’s grace and generosity, in redemption and new creating, are summed up and fulfilled in Christ. “[B]y grace you have been saved” (Eph 2:5) is a message of Jubilee, as well as a central part of the preaching that characterizes the Reformation.

Today, as in the first proclamation of the Jubilee, many live in debt and poverty, alienated from land and work. The earth’s resources are abused and hoarded. Millions are still in need of salvation and of God’s true rest.



Week 6: Freed to Serve—Diakonia

Introduction

Helene Tärneberg-Steed, Anglican/Lutheran, Ireland

Go in peace—to love and serve the Lord!

Arriving at the hospital, just as the ambulance had brought in our seriously ill, one-week-old son, we were greeted by a warm, kind hospital chaplain. We were a four-hour journey away from our home. From that meeting I only remember one sentence. In a quiet voice the chaplain said, “I have made up the guest bed.” Joyce’s guest bedroom became our home for the next two months, until that January Saturday, when William died.

I share this with you, because Joyce and William taught us in such a profound way what discipleship is all about. William, our premature, tiny son, revealed the insights of what life and love are all about. He taught us that true love is always unconditional, never earned, never rewarded. It is. We had nine weeks with our son and those weeks filled us with warmth and love. By inviting us to share her home, Joyce tended to us when we were more vulnerable than we had ever been. She showed us compassionate care and served both us and the Lord.

The last week of devotions takes us back to the very essence of discipleship—to live our Christian faith, in our everyday lives. In other words, we are encouraged to live the gospel. That is to love and serve the Lord and to love and serve our neighbors, known and unknown. Jesus said, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). This is not an optional extra, it is an imperative and we call it diakonia. All believers are commissioned to participate in this ministry.

Diakonia takes various forms and shapes. Because each part of the world is different, because people around us are vulnerable in various ways and have diverse needs, therefore diakonia is not the same. It is contextual, distinct in different countries and at different times. Diakonia, however, has this in common; it addresses vulnerability and it is service motivated by love. When it is lived, it offers a foretaste of the kingdom of God. It is prophetic witness; advocacy; seeing; addressing basic human needs—physically, emotionally and spiritually; empowering the weak; showing compassionate care; and exposing injustice and whatever causes it.¹⁶

You will see as you pray during the next days, diakonia is not just a repair ministry, putting on a sticky plaster. It is part of our very being. It is to love and serve the Lord.

week 6, day 1

“The Second Collect, for Peace, Morning Prayer,” *The Book of Common Prayer*

O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom: Defend us, thy humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

People with a Mission (Luke 4:18–19)

Mary Lewis, Anglican, Australia

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."

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." So Jesus opens the scroll from Isaiah 61 and reads a familiar passage to the gathering in the synagogue—a message announcing the time of God's grace and celebrating God's judgment and the destruction of their enemies. But Jesus stops; he interrupts the reading; Jesus reads the announcement of the year of the Lord's favor and sits down. All attention is on him as he begins, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). Jesus' arrival heralds an extended time of God's grace. The fulfillment—the judgment and restoration of Zion—will come, but not yet. In this day of grace Jesus has come to serve—to seek and to save the lost and set free the imprisoned and oppressed. The conquering Messiah waits.

When we were working in Nepal as medical missionaries, we received help to enable us to concentrate on our mission. What freedom for us to come home to clean rooms, hot food and pressed clothes! What grace for us, especially when the days at the clinic and classroom had been tiring, frustrating and difficult to understand. We thanked God for the help we received to do other things—to teach, to work in the clinic, to catch up with students, to share the Good News of Jesus.

We live in the "year of the Lord's favor—God's grace." Ourselves being freed and anointed by the Good News, we are sent out with the good news that God offers freedom and healing to the world through the Lord Jesus. We are the people of this day—this day of grace and healing. The call is urgent—when might the day end? We are God's people of mission—God's servants to the world. Don't just stand on the doorstep; because of Jesus you are not bound or trapped anymore. Step out in the freedom of the Holy Spirit and serve others so that they also may taste freedom.

week 6, day 2

Article VI, “The Augsburg Confession, 1530”

Likewise, they teach that this faith is bound to yield good fruits and that it ought to do good works commanded by God on account of God's will and not so that we may trust in these works to merit justification before God. For forgiveness of sins and justification are taken hold by faith, as the saying of Christ also testifies [Luke 17:10]: “When you have done all [things] ...say, ‘We are worthless slaves.’” The authors of the ancient church teach the same. For Ambrose says: “It is established by God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved without work, by faith alone, receiving the forgiveness of sins as a gift.”

Service as Freedom (Romans 13:8)

Tron Fagermoen, Lutheran, Norway

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Lately I have been reading the books to my children that my parents used to read to me. Their definite favorite is *When the Robbers Came to Cardamom Town* by the Norwegian author Thorbjørn Egner. I can understand their fascination. The book tells a captivating story about how three robbers, by being met with forgiveness, love and recognition, give up their criminal activities to become highly respected citizens in the local community. Still, reading the book again as an adult, I have become increasingly uneasy with the moral vision of the book.

One of the many oddities of Cardamom town is that it is governed by one and only one law: one must not bother others, one must be nice and kind, otherwise one may do as one pleases. At a first glance this may appear to be a good law. But on further reflection, I am not so convinced. For what is actually being said here? That the meaning of life is to do as one pleases? That freedom is to be free from the constraints of the community; from being bothered by others?

Parallel to reading *When the Robbers Came to Cardamom Town* for my children at night, I have, together with colleagues, been working on a collection of Luther's texts. One of the texts we have prepared for printing is *On the Freedom of a Christian*. In this text, Luther says something that resembles the Cardamom law, namely that a Christian is free from the law and subject to none. However, he does not stop there. He goes on to say that at the same time a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. Christian freedom is, in other words, not a freedom from, but a freedom to—a freedom to serve. And this, I believe, is also the message of Paul, when he says in his letter to the Romans, "owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."

week 6, day 3

“A Prayer for the Christian Life,” ca. 1912, commonly attributed to St Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

A Diaconal People of God (Matthew 25:35–40)

Ildikó Berei Siska, Lutheran, Hungary

[F]or I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

I saw them—mother and child, hungry, cold, naked, persecuted. In their eyes, I recognized fear and uncertainty. They were scared by sudden movements or the occasional loud voice. While the media tells us a lot about people in need, the first personal encounter is still shocking and may become a life-changing experience. Even now, eight years later, I can still recall the children’s and the mother’s names, their inappropriate clothing, the words with which they described how they suddenly had had to flee to an unknown city. Even today I clearly recognize that their greatest and only asset was the opportunity to stay together.

It must be gruelling to accept such a situation and it is crucial that those of us who are standing on the “other side” open our doors wide and accept our responsibility. Their first encounter in this broken existence is with us, those who will tend to them. We give the hungry something to eat and the thirsty something to drink. But tending to someone is not only about physical care.

For a child, who has regularly seen its mother being abused by its father, it is not clear that God takes care of you, just as a loving father would, and that God is with you, even in such a situation. In addition to physical assistance, mental and spiritual care will vary in each case. The coat is not much use if the mother is still freezing inside. Food is useless if a child cannot consume enough love. No one should feel cold, neither in the physical nor the emotional sense. No one should feel unloved. These children and parents are hungry for love, thirsty for loving words and cold because of the rough world from which they have had to flee.

As Christians, our most valuable contribution is to show real love to those who hunger for it, to show God who leads our paths to the thirsty; to clothe them with the promise that God, the Father of Hope, will never forget us. This promise will provide “clothing” that no child will ever grow out of, that no weather will ever destroy, but which will provide a firm basis for the rest of their lives.

week 6, day 4

Article VII, “The Augsburg Confession, 1530”

Likewise, they teach that one holy church will remain forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere. As Paul says [Eph. 4:5,6]: “One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...”

Partnership in Mission (Philippians 1:3–8)

Moti Daba Fufa, Lutheran, Ethiopia

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

Paul kept in close contact with the Philippians, remembering them individually and collectively, as he earnestly prayed for them. In spite of the obvious peril to their lives, the Philippian believers were united with Paul in his missionary work, which he considered to be the work of God. For churches today, this work is an opportunity to show their partnership through Christ's love, forgiveness and unity, and to bridge the gap that threatens to divide us in terms of theological and ethical issues. Let us see what partnership in missions means in essence:

Partnership implies recognizing that the relationship we have with one another reflects the relational character of the Triune God. We do not exist alone. As we confess in the Apostolic Creed, we are all part of the one Body of Jesus Christ. He called us collectively to participate in mission.

Partnership becomes concrete in our relationship with one another. Jesus is the sustainer of our good works. Although we are sinners, we try to set an example for our brothers and sisters in the world by living peacefully, being forgiving, witnessing, sharing the common good and loving our neighbor.

Partnership means globally walking together in total oneness until the last coming of Jesus Christ. During his last earthly ministry, Jesus prayed for unity among his sisters and brothers. Likewise, by God's grace, we have to work hard to overcome traditional barriers and together to work toward cooperation.

In faithfulness to our common call, we must seek the full visible unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. As we journey together we become confident in the gospel of Jesus Christ and, at the same time, partake in the grace of God. This opens our hearts and lives to our brothers and sisters in the same movement and leads to sharing in God's love.

Finally, the text reminds us that to be partners in missions means to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ and to commit ourselves to pray for others. That is why Paul has plenty of reasons to praise God.

week 6, day 5

“The Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity,” *The Book of Common Prayer*

O GOD, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. Amen

Incarnation and Presence (Isaiah 43:1–3)

Cynthia Haynes-Turner, Anglican, Canada

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

Service and servant ministry—words we frequently use in church, frequently enough that there is a danger that they lose their power. When Jesus told his disciples that he came not to be served but to serve and that they were to do the same, it was shocking to them—their teacher, rabbi, healer and friend assuming such a lowly position. While we may not have the same power structures today, we do have hierarchical structures based on economic, political, social or celebrity status. The idea of service and servanthood goes against societal norms and is still revolutionary.

A young woman I know, who works in health care, once told me that it never bothered her to attend to the physical needs of sick or elderly bed-ridden people as it brought them both relief and comfort. While she is paid for her work, what makes this real service is the spirit in which she cares for the patients—it is what she has to offer. Those being served feel cared for and respected.

When we serve, we are faced with temptations not unlike those Jesus faced, and resisted, at the beginning of his ministry—we can be lured by the position of power it gives us over another, by the desire to be a miracle worker and make everything right. At times, we can even be irritated if the person served does not appear to be grateful enough or does not say thank you. That, however, is the antithesis of service.

Jesus chose to offer himself in response to the individual person or situation, without concern for whether they were clean or unclean, Samaritan or Jew, man or woman. Often what he did restored their dignity or value as human beings.

Through God's grace, we are freed to serve without expectations, in acts freely given.

We serve to engage the best part of ourselves, the spirit of Christ within. We are not bestowing a gift, with or without strings attached. We are offering ourselves in service to God, through serving those whom God created.

week 6, day 6

“Sermons on the First Epistle of St. Peter,” Martin Luther

[E]veryone should pay attention to his qualifications, to the kind of gift given to him. When he is aware of this, he should use his gift in the service of his neighbour.

Gifts are for Sharing (1 Peter 4:10)

Norberto Rasch, Lutheran, Argentina

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received

I live in the world of disability. In my church, I am responsible for carrying out a pastoral ministry for people with disabilities. My son has a disability as a result of an accident. Many people, inside and outside the church, consult me about their loved ones with disabilities. Daily I hear the words “he is not able to do this” and “she does not know how to do that,” especially from people accompanying a person with disabilities, but also from others.

In my church there are many who say “he or she is not able to do this or the other” referring to people with disabilities. It is clear that perhaps the person cannot do what for most of us is easily done in our lives and celebrative worship. The point is that our relationship with God is framed by these simple things. All sing in unison: “they are not able to do it”; we all kneel in the same liturgical act: “they cannot do it”; we all read the Bible, but the blind “are not able to do it”; etc.” We can make a long list of “not able to” and we do not realize that we are excluding from the community of faith those who are no less God’s children than the ones with “abilities.”

We could look at many issues in order to see what unsuspected gifts are ready to be shared with us. We preach and teach over and over again that God has given us gifts and we must be ready to share them, and not to be selfish with them. Therefore, why do we often think that people with disabilities have no gifts to share?

Have you ever come close enough to a disabled person and discovered their gift of love, or heard their voice glorifying God from deep inside their heart?

All gifts are to be shared, and no less those gifts with which God has provided people with disabilities. Let us be ready.

week 6, day 7

A Prayer of St Augustine

Eternal God,
who are the light of the minds that know you,
the joy of the hearts that love you,
and the strength of the wills that serve you;
grant us so to know you
that we may truly love you,
and so to love you
that we may fully serve you,
whom to serve is perfect freedom,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Labor not in Vain (Proverbs 16:3)

Alice Wu, Anglican, Hong Kong

Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.

We live in a world where imperfections are measured against and highlighted by ideals of perfection that are constantly redefined and reengineered. We are never beautiful, skinny, young/old, smart, rich, fast, talented or successful enough—and if all else fails, our kids aren't cute enough. We are incapacitated by the restless pursuit of potential unreachable and results unattainable, fears of drowning in disappointments and sucked dry by vain regrets, hollow pleasures, idle dreams and missed opportunities.

Living for ourselves and the self-serving virtues the world advocates deliver us into dungeons of jealousy, resentment and conflict. The ever-moving goal posts and thus the endless judgments that accuse us of persistently falling short, are modern day controls and dictates that are there to enslave.

But as Christians we are already set free—we cannot and do not have to labor for grace. We can break from the chains of worldly expectations set perilously high, the shackles of our fears and the crippling thought that all has been for naught.

And in Christian service, we are freed from futility because by committing ourselves and all our work to God, nothing is in vain. In Martin Luther's words in "The Freedom of a Christian," we work "without thought of gain," "without hope for reward." "[C]onsidering nothing except the need of a neighbour," our work "takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain and loss."

I pause every time I come across this—"whose service is perfect freedom"—in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Serving God is being a part of a mystery beyond our comprehension: to be a witness to and a participant in God's creation.

Endnotes

- 1 *The Porvoo Common Statement*, Järvenpää, Finland, 9–13 October, 1992.
- 2 *Called to Full Communion: The Waterloo Declaration*, approved by the National Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, Waterloo, Ontario, 2001.
- 3 *Called to Common Mission: A Lutheran Proposal for a Revision of the Concordat of Agreement*, adopted by the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the 2000 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 1999.
- 4 *Common Ground: Covenanting for Mutual Recognition and Reconciliation between The Anglican Church of Australia and The Lutheran Church of Australia*, Report from the Anglican-Lutheran Dialogue in Australia, 2001.
- 5 *On the Way to Visible Unity – A Common Statement*, Meissen, Germany, 18 March 1988.
- 6 *Called to Witness and Service*, The Reuilly Common Statement, 1999.
- 7 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 64.
- 8 Here and ff. all quotations from the Small and Large Catechisms are taken from Robert Kolb and Timothy J Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).
- 9 <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-reformation-booklet-liberated-gods-grace>
- 10 This paraphrase of the Magnificat was first published in Zephania Kameeta, *Why, O Lord? Psalms and Sermons from Namibia* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986).
- 11 https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/salvation_0.pdf
- 12 Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (eds), *A Testament to Freedom. The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 310.
- 13 https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/human_beings_1_0.pdf

- 14 Translated from the German by Catherine Winkworth, 1829–1878.
- 15 https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/dtpw-2017_booklet_creation_0.pdf
- 16 See also the Jerusalem Report of the Anglican–Lutheran International Commission (ALIC III), *To Love and Serve the Lord. Diakonia in the Life of the Church* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation/Anglican Communion Office, 2012).

This devotional resource was prepared by members of the Anglican–Lutheran International Coordinating Committee (ALICC) for reflection on what we are called to be as Anglican and Lutheran congregations and parishes as the Church today.

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