

Leavening the Sermon: Preaching to a Christian Congregation

A paper submitted to the Joint Education Seminar “Giving of the Truth of Heaven: Using Our Talents”

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I preach periodically at my (Methodist) church, and also at a nearby Nursing Home¹. As one who has been a dedicated reader of *The Urantia Book* for almost 50 years, I try to infuse my sermons with some of the insights and, even more so, the spirit of the Urantia revelation. In so doing, I never reference *The Urantia Book*. Indeed my wife, a good Christian who does not read *The Urantia Book*, has enjoined me from mentioning the Book in church. Incidentally, besides preaching at my church, I have participated in Bible study and have conducted various Sunday School classes, including How the Bible Was Written, Dante and the Afterlife, The Golden Rule, The Family Metaphor in Jesus’ Teaching, and Sacred Chaos. In these activities also I have maintained silence about *The Urantia Book*.

We should realize that there is considerable overlap between the teachings of Christianity and the teachings of *The Urantia Book*. Indeed, David Kantor has gone so far as to assert that The Urantia movement should be considered a sect within Christianity. I disagree, but there is certainly a great commonality. Consider Appendix A, “The Spiritual Teachings of *The Urantia Book*”, by Dr. Ken Glasziou.

On the other hand, consider Appendix B, a listing of what Dr. Sadler thought were new concepts in *The Urantia Book*. I think we can all agree that it would be neither appropriate nor productive to present most of these concepts to a Christian audience.

¹ The Nursing Home labels preaching a “homily.”

What then would be appropriate and helpful? In Appendix C, I present several of the sermons I have preached, which illustrate the answer to this question.

Appendix C1 contains the text from a homily, “The Faith of Jesus,” that I preached at Bella Terra Nursing Centre. As you can surmise, my primary inspiration for this message was paper 196 of *The Urantia Book*, “The Faith of Jesus.” In addition I made use of the human sources for Paper 196, as identified by Matthew Block:

- (1) Walter E. Bundy, *The Religion of Jesus* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1928)
- (2) Walter E. Bundy, *Our Recovery of Jesus* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1929)
- (3) Edwin Lewis, *God and Ourselves: A Plea for the Reality, Adequacy and Availability of God* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1931)
- (4) Rees Griffiths, *God in Idea and Experience: or, The A Priori Elements of the Religious Consciousness* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1931)
- (5) H. A. Overstreet, *The Enduring Quest: A Search for a Philosophy of Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1931)

As a rule I avoid direct appropriation of *The Urantia Book* text. For one thing, this helps me fly “below the radar.” I would prefer that a curious listener to my sermon not be able to Google a phrase and be directed to *The Urantia Book*. Occasionally, though, I have copied from the Book. The fourth paragraph of this homily reads “Jesus saw God as holy, just, and great, as well as being true, beautiful and good. For Jesus, all these divine qualities comprised the “will of the Father in heaven.” The first sentence of this paragraph is a direct steal from *The Urantia Book*. And a Google search does point to *The Urantia Book*, though it references other works, as well.

I usually prefer to paraphrase the Book or the source material from which a phrase is derived. Consider paragraph five of my homily:

Faith for Jesus was not a means of escape from a world of troubles and conflicts. It was not an illusory consolation for the trials and problems of life, an avoidance of the harsh realities of life. In the face of all life’s tribulations, he enjoyed the thrill of living, by faith, in the very presence of

the Heavenly Father. This faith was a triumphant source of personal power and security. As the theologian Wilhelm Bousset has put it, “Never in the life of any one man was God such a living reality as in the life of Jesus.”

A Google search for the Bousset quote does finger *The Urantia Book*, but it also references nine other sources, including Dostoyevsky and several documents of the Catholic Church (though not Bousset).

My homily also quoted another source author, Walter Bundy:

“Walter Bundy has commented that [Jesus] interpreted religious living wholly in terms of the divine will.” He points out that Jesus never prayed as a religious duty, but rather as “an expression of need, a release of soul, a relief of inner pressure, an elevation and enrichment of mind, a reinforcement and refreshment of spirit, a clarifying of vision.” Bundy goes on to say that “Not in visions and voices, but in prayer and communion with God...Jesus learned the divine will and found the personal power to perform it.”

I would urge you to take advantage of Matthew Block’s research, available at www.UrantiaBookSources.com. For this homily, I also made some use of Meredith Sprunger’s essay, “Jesus in The Urantia Book: The Living Religion of Jesus,” available on *The Urantia Book* Fellowship website.

Those who preach or desire to preach can also benefit from traditional Christian guidelines for preparing and delivering a sermon. I attach a useful compendium of such guidelines in Appendix D. Let me single out one item, on page four, of this **Appendix: The Lectionary** (adapted from *The United Methodist Book of Worship*)

The Revised Common Lectionary (1992) is a calendar and table of suggested scripture readings for a three-year cycle (Years A, B, C). The readings for each Sunday and holy day typically include one each from the Old Testament, the Epistles, the Gospels, and the Psalms. This provides a systematic approach to using scripture in worship and covering the many texts found in the Holy Bible.

The Lectionary follows the outline of the Christian year. It celebrates the central mystery of our faith: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The lectionary is a tool for voluntary use in planning and leading worship. <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/>

Another sermon of mine is “Jesus’ Father and Our Father”—See Appendix C2. This sermon feeds off the passage in John 20:17 wherein the risen Jesus tells Mary Magdalene, “Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Interestingly, if you look at Dwayne Faw’s Paramony, you will see that there is no exact parallel to this statement in *The Urantia Book*. But of course, the message that “God is the loving Father of all men” is strewn throughout the Book. One of many examples is on page 2067. John 20:17 is a cornerstone of the book *The Family Metaphor in Jesus’ Teaching*. I have referenced John 20:17 in several of my sermons.

Appendix C3 contains the text of my sermon, “Discovering Jesus.” A couple of noteworthy points: My discussion of the Star of Bethlehem follows the account in *The Urantia Book* of the three-fold conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter. Incidentally, the Adler Planetarium in Chicago publishes a booklet, “The Star of Bethlehem,” which cites this conjunction as a likely source of the legend of the Star. This sermon presents a narrative of my spiritual journey, from Judaism to agnosticism to yoga to, eventually, coming to know Jesus. I stated disingenuously that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John led me to Jesus, when, in actuality, it was *The Urantia Book*. I did so in order to stay “under the radar.” You will recall the conversation in which Jesus constrained his comments because he was unwilling to reveal his divinity.

My sermon “Miracles” appears in Appendix C4. I shared a draft of this sermon with my pastor, who criticized it. She said that what I wrote was not a sermon, but an essay on miracles. I had, for example, talked about Thomas Aquinas’ view of miracles. Moreover, she said I had not given any practical direction to my listeners. I had thought that describing Jesus’ gospel of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man was direction enough, but, in response to her feedback, I added the discussion at the end of our disturbed world and how to relate to it in faith.

Another of my sermons was on “The Golden Rule” (see Appendix C5). For this sermon I relied on the discussions in *The Urantia Book* on this topic, but also on Jeffrey Wattles’ superb book of the same name, among other things. By the way, Wattles nowhere refers to *The Urantia Book*, except to list it in his bibliography. I

also brought in other relevant material, such as the incident in David McCullough's biography of John Adams where Abigail Adams cites The Golden Rule.

Paper 102, "The Foundations of Religious Faith," begins by paraphrasing a passage of Bertrand Russell's that proclaims that only materialism is real. In my sermon, *Is God Real?* (Appendix C6) I quote the Russell passage before going on to debunk it. I go on to assert the reality of the values beauty, goodness, truth, and love, in a way that echoes, but does not quote *The Urantia Book*.

Blessed is He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord (Appendix C7), *Only Speak the Word and Let My Servant Be Healed: What is this Thing called Faith?* (Appendix C8) and *His Eye is on the Sparrow* (Appendix C9) provide additional illustrations of using information and insights from *The Urantia Book* without quoting it.

"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Appendix A:

The Spiritual Teachings of The Urantia Book

Contents of this Synopsis

by Dr. Ken Glasziou

- [THE UNIVERSAL FATHER](#)
 - [The Personality of God](#)
 - [The God-Spirit-Within](#)
- [THE NATURE OF GOD](#)
 - [The love of God](#)
 - [The Goodness of God](#)
 - [Divine Truth and Beauty](#)
- [THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD](#)
 - [God's Universal Knowledge](#)
 - [The Father's Primacy](#)
 - [God's Supreme Rule](#)
 - [God's relation to the Universe](#)
 - [God's Relation to the Individual](#)
 - [The Presence of God](#)
- [GOD IN RELIGION](#)
 - [Our Consciousness of God](#)
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 - [Real Religion](#)
- [JESUS AND TRUE RELIGION](#)
 - [Religious experience, live loyally each day](#)
- [SPIRITUAL GROWTH](#)
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 - [How far can we go?](#)
- [THE REALITY BASIS OF RELIGION](#)
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- [FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY](#)
 - [Proof and Validity](#)
- [RELIGION -- CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES](#)
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- [MEETING WITH DIVINITY](#)
 - [The Privilege of Choosing](#)
- [BRIDGING THE GULF](#)
- [FUNCTIONAL UNITY](#)
- [WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?](#)
 - [The Teachings of Jesus](#)

- [Jesus' Purpose](#)
 - [His Teachings](#)
 - [Jesus' Teachings About the Soul](#)
- [GOODNESS AND TRUTH](#)
 - [Our task](#)
- [JESUS' LIFE](#)
 - [More on His Teaching](#)
 - [His program](#)
- [WARNING AGAINST CREEDS](#)
 - [Love is the rule of living](#)
 - [Primary Importance of the Spiritual Kingdom](#)
- [FUNCTION OF THE INDWELLING SPIRIT](#)
 - [Rule for Living](#)
 - [The Indwelling Spirit](#)
 - ["I have come into the world"](#)
- [EXEMPLIFY IN YOUR LIFE](#)
 - [A New Religion](#)
- [SELF ESTEEM](#)
 - [Casting your Lot](#)
 -
 - [More on the Kingdom](#)
- [GRACIOUSNESS](#)
 - [Loving your Neighbor](#)
- [RESPONSIBILITY](#)
 - [Do not attack their errors!!](#)
 - [The Remembrance Supper](#)
- ["WITH THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH . . ."](#)
 - [Mobility of Love](#)
 - [Our Chores](#)
- [FEAR, ANGER, EVIL, FORGIVENESS](#)
 - [Salvation](#)
 - [Righteousness and Mission](#)
- [WORK FOR GOD](#)
 - [The Spirit of Truth](#)
- [POST-PENTECOST](#)
 - [Jesus and Revelation](#)
 - [Experiential Religion](#)
- [JESUS' RELIGION](#)
 - [God-consciousness](#)
 - [What has Value?](#)
- [THE INDWELLER](#)
 - [Value Creation](#)
- [ON SECURITY](#)
 - [Our Great Adventure](#)

Appendix B:

New Concepts in The Urantia Book, per Dr. Sadler

1. **The Eternal Son of Paradise**: For the first time in human records clearly designated and personally identified.
2. **The unique Conjoint Actor**: The concept of the Third Person of Deity is both unique and original in the Urantia Papers.
3. **The Paradise Trinity**: In *The Urantia Book* the Paradise Trinity finds its only present-day identification and recognition.
4. **The Central Geographic Residence of Deity**: For the first time the world knows exactly where God lives.
5. **The absolute Isle of Paradise**: The original concept of Paradise as the absolute of non-deity reality.
6. **Multiple Creator Sons**: Recognition of more than 700,000 Creator Paradise Sons.
7. **Concept of the Absolutes**: The concept of the Unqualified, Universal, and Deity Absolutes is original with the Urantia Book.
8. **Doctrine of Evolutionary Deity**: While I saw an intimation of finite Deity in one of Pratt's books about the time of the coming of the Urantia Papers, I am sure that the concepts of the **Supreme Being** and **God the Ultimate** are original.
9. **Concept of the Triunities**: The Triunities are an original Urantia concept.
10. **Havona Universe and Natives**: The billion world picture of Havona and its inhabitants is a wholly new and original concept.
11. **The Concept of Space**: Notwithstanding the theory of an "exploding cosmos," the space concept of *The Urantia Book* is new and original.
12. **The Grand and Master Universes**: The overall concept of the Master cosmos is not only original, but it far transcends all previous ideas.
13. **The Seven Orders of Trinity-Created Days**: While one of these seven orders, the "Ancients of Days," is mentioned in the Bible, the whole presentation is both new and original.
14. **The Paradise Sons of God**: The story of Magisterial and Trinity Teacher Sons in addition to Creator Sons is entirely original with *The Urantia Book*.
15. **Trinitized Sons of God**: The story and technique of the trinitization of divine Sons is unique and original in the Urantia Papers.
16. **The Seven Master Spirits**: While the Bible makes mention of seven Spirits of God, it is only in *The Urantia Book* that these Spirits are identified and their work fully described.
17. **The Vast Family of the Conjoint Actor**: The vast and far-flung family of the Infinite Spirit -- supernaphim, seconaphim, Solitary Messengers are but briefly foreshadowed by the Biblical narrative of seraphim and cherubim.
18. **The Universal Circuits**: The gravity, personality, spirit, and mind circuits are original teaching of *The Urantia Book*.

19. **Universal Reflectivity - Majeston**: The amazing story of universal reflectivity is a wholly new and original presentation of the Urantia Revelation.
20. **Power Directors - Force Organizers**: The whole concept of intelligent and purposive control of cosmic energy is original with *The Urantia Book*.
21. **Evolution of Energy - Matter**: While some phases of the Urantia story of the evolution of energy may have been foreshadowed by scientific discovery, nevertheless, the concept as a whole is new as presented in the Urantia Papers.
22. **The Ultimatton**: At the time of the suggestion of the Ultimatton in the Urantia Papers, I had never heard of such a concept in scientific literature. During the past five or six years, I have noted several different intimations of the possible existence of some physical factor analogous to the ultimatton concept .
23. **Origin of the Solar System**: While the Urantia narrative of the origin of the solar system includes some features of the Moulton-Chamberlain theory, the whole story is so complete and unique as to make it practically an original presentation.
24. **The Architectural Worlds**: Worlds made to order of specifications is original with *The Urantia Book*.
25. **Universe Administration**: From the inhabited world to the management of the grand universe the administrative scheme of *The Urantia Book* is entirely new.
26. **The Life Carriers**: Nothing like the concept of the Life Carriers has ever been suggested to humankind in all past history.
27. **Origin of the Human Race**: While the Urantia story of the origin of the human race validates doctrine of evolution, nevertheless, it presents such a detailed and unique narrative as to constitute an all but original presentation of human origins.
28. **Origin of the Colored Races**: The Urantia story of the origin of the Sangik races is the only such narrative in existence.
29. **Source and Nature of Personality**: While *The Urantia Book*, like science, fails to define personality, it does designate its origin and gratifyingly portrays its magnificent destiny.
30. **The Concept of Thought Adjusters**: While the Bible talks about the "true light which lighteth every man coming into the world," the story of Thought Adjusters as revealed in the Urantia Papers is so replete and unique as to constitute a new and original story.
31. **Evolution of the Soul**: The concept of the origin, nature, and evolution of the soul is original with *The Urantia Book*.
32. **Identification of the Holy Spirit**: Pointing out the Holy Spirit as the presence of the Local Universe Mother Spirit is altogether new and original in the Urantia Papers.
33. **The Seven Adjutant Spirits**: While the Bible makes mention of seven spirits and in Isaiah partially identifies them, the Urantia narrative is so full and unique as to make it an original presentation.
34. **Local Universe Sons of God**: The whole story of Local Universe Sons is new and original.
35. **The Ascension Plan — Be You Perfect**: While Jesus propounded the mandate "Be you perfect," etc., the unfoldment of the Paradise ascension plan in *The Urantia Book* is an all but new and original concept.
36. **The Seven Mansion Worlds**: While the Master alluded to the "mansion worlds," the replete story of their nature and province is both new and original.
37. **The Morontia Concept**: The whole morontia concept — the stage between the material and the spiritual is new and original.

38. **Celestial Artisans and Reversion Directors**: Both of these concepts are new in *The Urantia Book*. The concept of celestial play and spiritual humor is all but new.
39. **Concept of Permanent Citizenship**: This is wholly original with *The Urantia Book*.
40. **The Urantia Midwayers**: While the Old Testament does refer to the "Nephilim" the citation is so indefinite as to constitute the Urantia story of the midwayers as a new and original narrative.
41. **The Superhuman Planetary Government**: The story of the planetary functions of the Most Highs, the Reserve Corps, and the planetary seraphim is original, notwithstanding the allusion to the work of the Most Highs in the Bible.
42. **The Billions of Inhabited Worlds**: At the time of the arrival of the Urantia Papers, there was no literature dealing with inhabited worlds other than our world. The idea was new. In recent years we frequently run across speculations regarding other inhabited planets.
43. **Clarification of Sin and Rebellion**: The unique clarification of sin and rebellion is original with *The Urantia Book*.
44. **Identification of Adam and Eve**: The factual narrative of the legendary story of Adam and Eve is original.
45. **Clarification of Melchizedek**: The Melchizedek story as clarified in the Urantia narrative is really a new and original concept.
46. **Concept of the Ages of Light and Life**: The fruition of mortal evolution as portrayed in the concept of the ages of light and life is altogether new and original.
47. **A Unified History of Urantia**: Nowhere else in all the world can you find a consistent and unified history of our world. For the first time we have a chronology of human affairs.
48. **Diseases**: The Book presents a new and original explanation of microbic diseases.
49. **Antigravity**: The whole concept of antigravity-is unique and original with the Urantia Papers. Only during the last year has any scientist promulgated a theory of antigravity.
50. **Jesus' Birthday**: For the first time during the Christian era, we know the real birthday of Jesus--August 21, 7BC.
51. **Experimental Planet**: The fact that Urantia was a decimal planet — that the Life Carriers had permission to attempt new features of biologic evolution. This is information not heretofore known on the planet.
52. **The Evolution of Religion**: While you can read much about the evolution of religion on Urantia, nevertheless, the straightforward story told in the Urantia Papers is unique and original.
53. **The Unique Reason for Jesus' Bestowal**: *The Urantia Book* presents a new, unique, and original reason for Jesus' life and death on our world.
54. **A Chronological Story of Jesus' Life**: The Book presents the only complete story of Jesus' life on this world.
55. **Identification of the Twelve Apostles**: The Urantia story is the first time the confusion of the 12 Apostles has been straightened out.
56. **The Unique Story of Mary**: The story of Mary, the mother of Jesus, is unique and original.
57. **The Water and the Wine**: As far as I know, *The Urantia Book* presents an original explanation of this supposed miracle.
58. **Explanation of Unintended Miracles**: The Book presents a possible explanation of numerous unintended miracles.

59. **Jesus' Attitude toward Art and Athletics:** The Master's attitude toward art and athletics is nowhere else revealed.
60. **The Sermon on the Mount:** I am, of course, not familiar with all the literature on the Sermon on the Mount. But as far as I know, the interpretation of this address in *The Urantia Book* is new and original.
61. **The Women' s Evangelistic Corps:** This story is new, notwithstanding the brief mention of this matter in the New Testament.
62. **Rodan of Alexandria:** This whole story is original with *The Urantia Book*.
63. **The Story of Abner:** The unique story of the head of John the Baptist's apostles is original with the Urantia Papers.
64. **David Zebedee' s Intelligence Corps:** This entire story is exclusively Found in *The Urantia Book*
65. **The “Keys of the Kingdom.”** The explanation of the meaning of the “keys of the kingdom” is new and original as found in *The Urantia Book*.
66. **Clarification of the Kingdom Concept.** The kingdom concept is clarified. The religion of Jesus and the religion about Jesus are fully differentiated.
67. **Clarification of the Second Advent.** The clarification of [Matt 24](#) and the second coming of Christ is complete and original.
68. **New Concept of the Lord’s Supper.** The significance of the Lord’s Supper is new and original.
69. **Clarification of the Crucifixion.** While there is much in the New Testament regarding the crucifixion, the Urantia story is complete and in many phases wholly original.
70. **Nature of the Resurrection.** While the New Testament authenticates the resurrection, only the Urantia narrative presents a new and original account of this transcendent event, including the actual disposal of the [material body of Jesus.](#)
71. **The Morontia Experience of Jesus.** The full and complete story of the morontia experience between the resurrection and the ascension is found only in The Urantia Papers.
72. **The New Picture of Pentecost.** The Urantia picture of Pentecost is so enlarged as to constitute a new portrayal of the coming of the Spirit of Truth.
73. **The Faith of Jesus.** The final chapter of The Urantia Book presents a new concept of believing *with* Jesus rather than believing *on* him.
74. **The Corps of the Finality.** The actual destiny of mortal ascenders in the corps of the Finality is a new and original concept of mortal destiny.

Appendix C1:

The Faith of Jesus

A sermon preached by Daniel Love Glazer at Northbrook United
Methodist Church

July 17, 2016

[Note: the hymn preceding the sermon was *Jesus Walked this Lonesome Valley*]

I am retired from my career in the computer field. At one time I used to teach computer classes at corporate sites around the country. I would fly in to a city Sunday night, teach Monday through Friday, then fly back home. I liked the teaching, but did not like the travel, especially with a wife and two kids at home, so after a while I quit.

One week I taught a class to about 20 programmers, each one of whom had a computer for doing the class exercises. One of my students was in a motorized wheelchair. He wasn't able to use his legs, which hung limply. He could hardly use his arms, except for the minimal effort required to move his wheelchair. And he couldn't talk; he could only grunt. In order to use the keyboard to type in programming commands or to send me a message he had a prong attached to a headband. He would lean forward and use the prong to press the keys, one by one.

[I illustrated this story by putting on a headband, to which I attached a two-foot prong]

When I saw how this fellow, who was evidently a successful computer programmer, coped with his handicaps, I resolved that the next time I had a hangnail, I would not feel sorry for myself.

I know nothing of this student's faith or his personal relationship with God, but it must have required great courage and a genuine faith of some sort for him to be a successful computer professional. Like Jesus, he had to walk that lonesome valley. Indeed, each one of us also has to walk the lonesome valley. We may not have the afflictions this programmer had or we may have even greater afflictions—of body, of mind, or mistreatment by the world. But whether we have been lucky or unlucky, every one of us, in the depths of our soul, has to walk the lonesome valley in which we find God for ourselves. Every one of us, rich or poor, strong or weak, healthy or unhealthy, must face the ultimate question: Is life, with all of its contradictions and cruelties, nothing more than a random combination of atoms, or does life conceal some higher purpose? Could it be true that this world, with all its horrors, was created by God who called it good, who created mankind in his own image and who sent us his divine Son, Jesus, to be the way, the truth, and the life and to guide us into a glorious destiny?

Some people have questioned whether Jesus really had to walk the lonesome valley. After all, wasn't he the Son of God, who declared "I and the Father are one"¹? If the only record we had of Jesus was the Gospel of John, this would be a plausible view. In John's Gospel, Jesus knows who he is, all that he has ever been and is to be from the very beginning. He is presented as a divine being, an object of veneration, but not as a human being needing faith or religion himself. But the other three Gospels, those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, present us with a different perspective on Jesus, one that emphasizes that he was not only the Son of God, but also the Son of Man.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we see a very human Jesus, a man in need of faith, a man whose supreme religious aspiration is the discovery and

¹ John 10:30

performance of the divine will. And he achieves this goal by a terrific struggle and stress of soul

Yes, Jesus walked the lonesome valley, as each one of us must do. He was a religious man—the most religious man ever—who by his fervent and undaunted faith achieved the knowing and doing of the divine will.

The human Jesus had a faith in God that was absolute and exultant. Like every mortal creature, he experienced the highs and lows of daily existence, but he never for one moment doubted the certainty of God's protection and loving care. Jesus' faith was the result of the activity of the divine spirit working within the ground of his being. His faith was not just an adherence to tradition or acceptance of a dogmatic belief; nor was it simple an intellectual exercise. His faith was completely personal and wholly spiritual.

Jesus saw God as holy, just, and great, as well as being true, beautiful and good. For Jesus, all these divine qualities comprised the "will of the Father in heaven."

Faith for Jesus was not a means of escape from a world of troubles and conflicts. It was not an illusory consolation for the trials and problems of life, an avoidance of the harsh realities of life. In the face of all life's tribulations, he enjoyed the thrill of living, by faith, in the very presence of the Heavenly Father. This faith was a triumphant source of personal power and security. As the theologian Wilhelm Bousset has put it, "Never in the life of any one man was God such a living reality as in the life of Jesus."

Jesus' faith was rooted in his personal experience with God. Theologians may intellectualize and dogmatize faith, but in the human life of Jesus, faith was personal, original, and spontaneous, like the attitude of a child toward his parents. Jesus' faith in God was not something he held, but rather something that *held* him. His experience of God was so real and so deep that it dissolved all doubts or contrary desires. No disappointment, frustration or distress could shake his all-consuming faith. His trust in God was absolute, totally loyal. Not even a cruel death could dent his faith.

For Jesus, the kingdom of God encompassed all spirit values. He said, "Seek First the kingdom of God."² The heart of the prayer he taught his disciples was, "Your kingdom come, your will be done." He devoted himself to the realization of the will of God with utter self-forgetfulness and total enthusiasm. Yet he never succumbed to the fury of the fanatic or extremist. This spiritual attitude dominated all of his praying, his preaching, his teaching, his thinking, and feeling.

Even so, when someone came to him with the question, "Good teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus immediately replied, "Why do you call me good? None is good save one, even God." When we behold this incredible self-forgetfulness, it becomes easier to see how God the Father was able so fully to manifest himself to Jesus and reveal himself through him to others. As the theologian Heiler has written, "The greatest of all offerings that the religious man brings to God is the surrender of his own will in complete obedience." This is just what Jesus did: the dedication and consecration of his own will to the majestic service of doing the divine will.

Walter E. Bundy, in *The Religion of Jesus*, has commented that "[Jesus] interpreted religious living wholly in terms of the divine will." He points out that Jesus never prayed as a religious duty, but rather as "an expression of need, a release of soul, a relief of inner pressure, an elevation and enrichment of mind, a reinforcement and refreshment of spirit, a clarifying of vision. Bundy goes on to say that "Not in visions and voices, but in prayer and communion with God...Jesus learned the divine will and found the personal power to perform it."

Jesus proclaimed, "Except you become as a little child, you shall not enter the kingdom."³ Here Jesus is not recommending a childish immaturity, but rather the attitude of trust and confidence that a child has in his parental environment. The child has a sense of absolute security, free from skepticism and disturbing doubts. Like such a child, Jesus was assured of the watchcare and guidance of his heavenly Father. Bundy says, "His

² Matthew 6:33

³ Matthew 18:3

dependence of the divine yielded a sense of absolute security, a wholesome optimism.”

When Jesus was nailed to the cross, he said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” He could not have so mercifully forgiven his executioners unless his entire life had been dominated by thoughts of love.

Jesus’ great demand is, “Follow me.” He urged his followers not so much to believe **in** him, but rather believe **with** him, to accept the reality of the love of God and confidently feel the assurance of sonship with the Father in heaven. He challenged his followers to believe not only **what** he believed, but **as** he believed.

Christians glorify the risen and divine Jesus, and it is right and proper that we do so. But he has ascended on high as a man, as well as God. He belongs to men; men belong to him. Let not the discussions of the humanity or divinity of the Christ obscure the saving truth that Jesus of Nazareth was a religious man who, by faith, achieved the knowing and the doing of the will of God.

If, in walking the lonesome valley, we come to realize, by faith, God’s loving acceptance of us, his children, we are assured of spiritual peace in this life and of salvation, continuing life in the world to come.

Thanks be to God!

Amen!

Appendix C2:

Jesus' Father and Our Father

A sermon preached by Daniel Love Glazer at Northbrook United Methodist Church

July 20, 2014

Happy Father's Day! What, you say, "This isn't Father's Day; Father's Day was a month ago." Well, if you look at the calendar or ask greeting card companies, they will tell you that Father's Day is the third Sunday in June. But when we consider our Heavenly Father, the Father Absolute who is the creator, controller, and infinite upholder of the universe, we realize that today and every day is Father's Day.

Toward the end of his life, Jesus told his followers numerous times that he would be killed, and he also said that on the third day he would rise from the dead. Very few of his disciples believed him. They didn't think he could die. But, in fact, he was crucified and died a painful death. The question then became, would he rise from the dead, as he predicted? Again, very few of his disciples believed that he would.

One of his most loyal disciples was Mary Magdalene. In today's scripture passage from the 20th chapter of John, we are told that on the morning of the third day following Jesus' crucifixion, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb where Jesus had been laid. And, lo and behold, there she met Jesus, who indeed had risen from the dead! And Jesus said to her, "Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"¹ In this passage, Jesus is proclaiming that God is not only his father, but he is also the father of every person. As Christianity developed, it emphasized that God was the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, but it often neglected the more robust truth that, as Jesus himself declared, God is also the loving father of each one of us. In this

¹ John 20:17

regard, we are equal with Jesus. Of course, Jesus is unique in other ways, such as having divine power. But we are each one of us a child of God, as Jesus is.

And because we are all God's children, we are all brothers and sisters to each other. Jesus said, "all of you are brothers and sisters....you have one Father, who is in heaven."²

Jesus' God is not far away, but is readily available and ever full of tender mercy. God is not just **the** Father, but "**our** Father."³

Yes, we are all God's beloved children and, by faith, simple trust in God, we can realize this saving truth. If we do so, we will be "born from above." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."⁴ Jesus is not telling us to become **childish**, but rather **childlike**, to trust God as a child trusts his earthly parents.

What kind of father is God? Perhaps we can answer this by considering the scripture we have heard today of the parable of the Prodigal Son, as told by Jesus.⁵ This parable introduces us to two very different brothers. The older brother is responsible, serious, and hard-working, but also self-centered and conceited. The younger brother avoids responsibility; he likes to enjoy himself; he is cheerful, lively, and lazy. It's no wonder that the two brothers did not get along.

The younger brother decides to leave home. He approaches his father and asks to be given the 1/3 share of his father's estate that will be his due upon the father's death. When you think about it, this is pretty insulting: it's as though the son is wishing his father dead. But the father agrees to the request. The son proceeds to leave home and travel to a distant land. There he indulges his appetites in riotous living, until he has wasted all of his wealth.

And then this far country is afflicted with famine. In hunger and despair, the son goes to work for a man who has him feeding pigs. And he wishes he could eat

² Matthew 23:8-9

³ Matthew 6:9

⁴ Matthew 18:3

⁵ Luke 15:11-32

what the pigs eat. Finally, he “comes to his senses.” He realizes that while he is starving, his father’s servants are well-fed. He recognizes that he has sinned against heaven and his father and resolves to go back home and ask that he be treated not as a son, but as a servant. So he sets out on the long journey home.

His father, meanwhile, has been mourning him and hoping for his return. When the son is still far away from home, the father sees him, rushes to him, and hugs and kisses him. “Father,” the son blurts out, “I have sinned against heaven and against you.” But the father cuts this confession short. He calls his servants and instructs them to bring the finest robe, a ring for the son’s finger, and sandals. He tells them kill the calf they have been fattening and to celebrate with a feast. He is elated, because his son, who was lost, has now been found.

Meanwhile, the older son, who has been working in the fields, comes back to the house and hears sounds of merrymaking. He asks a servant what is happening and is told that his brother has returned and the father has called for a celebration. This dutiful son is angry and refuses to join the party. The father comes out and pleads with him to come in, but this son is too proud and too stubborn. He complains that, though he has always been the good son, doing what his father asked for and what his duty required, the father never even gave him a baby goat so that he could party with his friends, while the younger son, who has wasted his father’s money, is rewarded with a celebration.

My son, the father replies, everything I have is yours. Anytime you could have had a party for your friends. But it is right that we celebrate, for your brother was dead and now he is alive; he was lost and now is found.

Henri Nouwen has suggested that this parable, instead of being called the parable of the prodigal son, might better be called the parable of the compassionate father. Indeed, the father’s compassion shines brightly. He isn’t even interested in hearing the confession of the younger son, but simply rejoices in his return. And his compassion extends to the older son, whom he urges to join the celebration.

Have you ever had an experience like that of the prodigal son? I have. When I was in college in New York, I was very unhappy. I had no interest in school, and spent

most of my time in the downtown pool halls. I got involved in gambling at pool halls and at the race track. I wanted money to fund my gambling habit and I thought of a way to get it. My grandfather had long maintained a savings account in my name. Whenever I would visit him at his apartment in Brooklyn, he proudly showed me the passbook that indicated how much money he had put away for me. I decided to get this money. I paid a visit to my grandfather, and when it was over, I shut the door as if I were leaving, but instead, went into the second bedroom and hid under the bed. I lay there, covered in dust, for several hours, until I heard my grandfather leave the apartment. Then I got up, took the savings passbook from the drawer where he kept it, left, and went to the bank, where I withdrew the \$600 in the account.

I then proceeded to lose all the money in a poker game. I had become the prodigal son, but I never “came to my senses” like the son in the parable. I don’t know what would have happened if I had gone to my grandfather and confessed my misdeed. Perhaps, like the father in the parable, he would have forgiven me and embraced me, but I was too afraid and ashamed to find out.

The father in the parable does not judge, punish, or even criticize the prodigal son. He is simply joyful that the son has come back home. And he also embraces the stubborn older son, encouraging him to join in the joy of celebration. Note the contrast between the attitude of the father in this parable and the attitude of God the Father in much of Christian theology, which insists that a punishment must be enacted to satisfy God’s justice and enable us to be reconciled to him. In contrast, for Jesus, God’s love and mercy overshadow his justice. His forgiveness requires no bribe or sacrifice.

When the paralyzed man had his friends remove tiles in the roof so they could lower him to be by Jesus, Jesus said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.”⁶ Salvation is offered right away, in response to honest spiritual desire. Many times, Jesus said to people, “Your faith has made you well”⁷ or “Your faith has saved

⁶ Luke 5:20; cf. 7:48

⁷ Matthew 9:22, and elsewhere

you.”⁸ He also assured us, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”⁹

Jesus declared that “the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”¹⁰ And that God is even “kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.”¹¹

Dear brothers and sisters, let us rejoice that our Father in heaven requires no payment to bestow his grace and salvation on us. He loves each of us with an infinite love and it his great joy to embrace us, like the father in the parable, and to welcome us home.

Happy Father’s Day!

⁸ Luke 7:52, and elsewhere

⁹ Luke 12:32

¹⁰ Luke 19:10

¹¹ Luke 6:35

Appendix C3:

Discovering Jesus

A Sermon preached at Northbrook United Methodist Church
January 2, 2011

By Daniel Love Glazer

One Sunday afternoon, a drunk stumbles by the riverside, where a baptismal service is going on. He proceeds to walk into the water and stand next to the preacher. The minister notices the old drunk and says, "Brother, are you ready to find Jesus?" The drunk looks back and says, "Yes, preacher, I sure am." The minister dunks the fellow under the water and pulls him right back up. "Have you found Jesus?" "Nooo, I didn't," said the drunk. The preacher then dunks him under for quite a bit longer, brings him up, and says, "Now brother, have you found Jesus?" "Noooo, I have not, reverend." The preacher, in exasperation, holds the man under for at least 30 seconds, brings him out of the water, and says, "My God, man, have you found Jesus yet?" The old drunk wipes his eyes and says, "Are you sure this is where he fell in?"

The scripture from Matthew today tells us that the Magi, or wise men, from the East, found Jesus by following a star. What was this star?

Several natural phenomena have been put forth as candidates for this Star of Bethlehem, including a supernova and a comet. The most popular hypothesis involves a rare three-fold conjunction of the planets Saturn and Jupiter. A planetary conjunction occurs when two planets appear to be in close vertical proximity to each other. Saturn and Jupiter are usually in conjunction about every 20 years, but in 7 B. C., shortly after the Caesar Augustus decreed that a census should take place in the Roman Empire, they appeared in conjunction three times, a phenomenon that occurs only every 120 years.

Perhaps this triple conjunction inspired the magi to travel to Bethlehem. Or perhaps there was another cause: maybe a dream or vision that the "light of life" would be born among the Jews inspired their journey. Perhaps subsequent believers seized upon the triple planetary conjunction to concoct the appealing story of the Star of Bethlehem as a sign of Jesus' birth.

In any event, Matthew tells us that magi from the East traveled to Bethlehem to behold the infant Jesus and worship him.

In the 2000 years since Jesus was born, countless people have been inspired to find Jesus and to worship him. Many have been blessed by parents who knew Jesus themselves and introduced him to their children.

I did not have that experience. I was reared by Jewish parents, to whom Jesus meant nothing. My parents had a strong sense of Jewish ethnic identity, which they passed on to their children, but they were not religious. We did not belong to a synagogue and, indeed, never went to synagogue, not even on the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur. We did celebrate Passover and Chanukah. And my parents sent me to a non-denominational Hebrew School and Sunday School, and I was bar-mitzvahed.

Though my parents were not religious, **I was**—God knows why. In the Jewish tradition, I fasted on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement—no one else in my family did. And I prayed every night.

My religiosity ended in high school, when I started reading philosophy, especially Bertrand Russell. Russell's philosophy, purporting to base everything on logic and nothing on metaphysical assumptions, won me over to agnosticism. As for Jesus, I vividly remember reading Russell's book *Why I Am not a Christian*, in which he asks, "If Jesus was as holy and as powerful as Christians believe him to be, why did he not banish illness from the face of the earth, instead of merely healing a few random lepers?" This seemed to me to be a knock-down argument.

Several years later I got into spirituality through the door of yoga. It was the sixties, and all manner of spiritual and esoteric movements were in the air. I became interested in hatha yoga, the yoga physical discipline of postures, breathing exercises and relaxation techniques. At first I disdained the occasional references in my yoga books to meditation, enlightenment, and God, but eventually I became intrigued by them: Maybe there was a spiritual reality, after all. Maybe, as the yogis claimed, it was possible to experience a higher consciousness and become enlightened.

In time, I found myself a guru, a charismatic swami from India. Under his influence, I gave up meat, fish, eggs, caffeine, alcohol, drugs, and sex, and dedicated myself to meditation and other yoga practices, in hopes of achieving enlightenment. But after a few years, I couldn't help noticing that I continued to experience conflict, tension, confusion, and other distinctly non-enlightened states of mind. For a while, I thought that I just needed to do more meditation and yoga exercises.

But, eventually, I allowed myself to entertain the possibility that something in the yoga path itself might be at the root of my trouble. I looked deep within and asked to be shown the truth. When I did so, it became clear to me that my yoga practice had some false and unhealthy aspects. One of these was the guru trip. I came to realize that enlightenment could not be attained by following in the footsteps of someone else, however enlightened he might be, and by obeying his commands. Second was the realization that my effort, in the yoga tradition, to transcend my individual personality and become absorbed in the Absolute Being of the universe was ultimately false and impossible. So I left my guru. After a while, I moved to Washington, D. C. and became a computer programmer for the Federal government.

For the next five or six years I didn't bother much with questions of ultimate reality. I was leading a "normal" life: working, taking night classes to finish my degree, playing chess, square dancing, listening to jazz. But, in time, I was reawakened to the sense that there **was** something

spiritual going on in the world. I was determined to find out what it was and to do it right this time. My constant meditation, day and night, became “What is the truth?” I explored zen, Edgar Cayce, est, Sufism, Meister Eckhart, Hazrat Inayat Khan, Alice Bailey, the Seth material, Krishnamurti, and more.

My best friend, Arthur, a psychotherapist and former yoga student of mine, laid it on the line for me. He forcefully told me that I needed to accept Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross as atonement for my sins, or else I was going to hell. This seemed strange to me, but I prayed, “God if this is the ultimate truth, let me know and I will accept it, but I must know from you that this is it.” Meditating on this proposition with my entire being, I got an answer from beyond myself: “**No**, this atonement doctrine, this idea that God must be appeased by the sacrifice of a being almost equal to himself to satisfy the demands of justice, does **not** express who God is, who you are, or what you must do to be saved. Indeed the only possible requirement for being saved is your wholehearted desire to know the truth and to follow it.” Along with this saving insight, came the assurance that I would be guided into further truth.

Within a few weeks, I found myself looking at Jesus in a fresh way, free from the dogma of the atonement doctrine. I meditated on this Jesus and read about his life and teachings in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

I was profoundly impressed with Jesus’ teachings, such as:

- God is the loving heavenly Father of everyone.
- We are all, therefore, brothers and sisters.
- The kingdom of God is within you.
- You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

Beyond his supernal teachings, I felt the thrill of getting to know Jesus as a person. As a man living on earth, Jesus evidenced utter trust in God. Like everyone, he experienced highs and lows, but he always showed absolute faith in God’s guidance and care. Jesus seemed to live, by faith, in the very presence of the heavenly Father.

Though Jesus was divine in origin, he chose to bestow himself on mankind as a mortal of the realm, to live life as a human being, a man completely dedicated to following the Father’s will. He possessed divine attributes, but he used his power sparingly, usually, it seemed, when compelled by his infinite mercy.

Above all, in meditating on Jesus, I experienced the supreme thrill of coming to know him personally and of feeling his love for me.

Jesus demonstrated to the entire universe, and to God the Father himself, what the ideal life of a human being could be. His mission was to live his life as a faithful human being, even when others came to brutalize and, eventually, murder him. He refrained from using his superhuman power to rescue himself and to defeat his enemies. Other men do not have the ability to avoid pain and death, and his mission was to demonstrate to all mankind, as well to all intelligences in the universe, even to God the Father, how a human being could live and die in total dedication to the Father’s will.

Refusing to exert his divine power to save himself, Jesus was arrested, scourged, and put to death on a cross. But this outcome was the wholly natural result of the actions of cruel and prejudiced men. His death was in no way necessary to secure human salvation. Our salvation, through faith in God, was just as available before Jesus' death as afterwards, and it is in no way dependent on any sacrifice on his part.

After he rose from the dead, he appeared to Mary Magdalene, according to John 20:17, and said, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

All of us who know Jesus can be assured that we will ascend to join him in the heavenly kingdom.

Thanks be to God!

Appendix C4:

Miracles

A sermon preached by Daniel Love Glazer at Northbrook United Methodist Church

January 29, 2017

[Scripture: Mark 1:21-28]

No one who knows my mother would consider her to be religious. She is a Jew and proud of her Jewish identity, but her Judaism does not encompass a conscious devotion to the Holy One of Israel. Even so, she describes the experience of giving birth to me, her first-born child as a “miracle.” Perhaps you women who have given birth feel similarly. For my part, I can simply say that birth is a wonder.

Our scripture passage for today relates an incident early in Jesus’ public ministry in which he is said to drive out an evil spirit from a possessed man. Does this represent a miracle? Skeptics have suggested that, rather than being delivered of an evil spirit, the man had epilepsy and was mimicking the behavior he understood that demon possession would require. Remember that in Jesus’ day, no one knew of or understood the disease of epilepsy. So, while in this event Jesus evidently healed the man, he may not have cast out an evil spirit. Even so, curing him of epilepsy could plausibly be termed a miracle.

And speaking of miracles, the Gospels relate many incidents when Jesus healed someone of disease.

Here are just a few examples:

- Curing a man who had been blind since birth of his blindness¹
- Healing a man with a withered hand²

¹ John 9:1-41

- Healing the paralyzed man whose friends lowered him from an opening in the roof³

A Google search for “miracles of Jesus” yields a list of 35 miracles, including the casting out of demons, many healings, and, not to be forgotten, the spectacular miracles of feeding the 5000 with two fishes and five loaves, and the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead.

None of this should be surprising for us Christians who consider Jesus to be the Son of God. Jesus was a miraculous person. His incarnation as a babe, born of Mary can certainly be deemed a miracle—and I say this, quite apart from Mary’s alleged virginity.

When the Son of God was on earth, incarnated in the likeness of mortal flesh, and overflowing with compassion for the struggling mortals of the realm, it was inevitable that extraordinary things should happen. But we should not approach Jesus through miracles; rather we should approach the miracles through Jesus.

Jesus did not want to become known primarily as a miraculous healer. Such a reputation would attract unfavorable attention from the religious authorities and would detract from his true mission. Consider Mark 1:40:

A man with a skin disease [leprosy?] approached Jesus, fell to his knees, and begged, “if you want, you can make me clean. Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand, touched him, and said, “I do want to. Be clean.” Instantly, the skin disease left him, and he was clean. Sternly, Jesus sent him away, saying “Don’t say anything to anyone. Instead, go and show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifice for your cleansing that Moses commanded. This will be a testimony to them.” Instead, he went out and started talking freely and spreading the news so that Jesus wasn’t able to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, but people came to him from everywhere.

When I was in high school, I read Bertrand Russell’s book *Why I Am Not a Christian*. In this book Russell asks, “If Jesus was as powerful and as merciful as

² Luke 6:6-11

³ Msark 2:3-5

Christians believe him to be, why didn't he banish illness from the face of the earth, instead of just healing a few random lepers?" When I read this, I thought, "That's a knock-down argument."

But Jesus' mission on earth was not to perform miracles. It was to portray the Truth. He declared, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." ⁴ Moreover, he said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."⁵

What is the truth which Jesus came to portray? It was the truth of the Kingdom of God, which embodies the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Jesus taught that "God is your heavenly Father." Indeed, Jesus referred to God as "your Father" or "your heavenly Father" 15 times in Matthew chapters 5 and 6 alone, as well as elsewhere.

Toward the end of the gospel of John, Mary Magdalene cries at the tomb where Jesus was buried. And the resurrected Jesus appears to her. He says, "Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, 'I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God,'" ⁶ Jesus here makes clear that God is not only the Father of Jesus', but is also the Father of each one of us. He has also affirmed, "You are all brothers" ⁷ and "The Father himself loves you." ⁸ And also, "Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." ⁹

We live in a disturbed world. Whether due to demonic influence or the faulty free-will decisions made in a finite, evolving world, we cannot open the newspaper or peruse the TV news without realizing that evil and tragedies abound. I'm sure you can all provide a list of horrors that are all too real. I will cite only one: in Chicago last year, 700 people were murdered. The victims included little children. My wife used to teach high school on the South Side of Chicago. She said that all of her students knew someone who had been shot.

⁴⁴ John 18:37

⁵ John 8:32

⁶ John 20:17

⁷ Matthew 23:8

⁸ John 16:27

⁹ Luke 12:32

For the most part, you and I live fairly comfortably here on the North Shore. It's unlikely that we knew any of the 700 murder victims I just cited. But, in lesser ways, we are not immune from pain and suffering. We may struggle with one or more of a variety of problems: physical infirmity, broken relationships, a wayward child, dying parents, unemployment, not to mention internal demons such as addiction that may control our lives. Still, we can take heart in what Jesus taught us: that we are all the children of a Fatherly God, who loves each one of us with an infinite love, and who has provided for our welfare in this life and in eternity. If we realize this eternal truth, we will not only be comforted in our souls, but we will be inspired to bring comfort and hope to our fellow brothers and sisters.

In his book *The Spiritual Life of Children*, Robert Coles tells of a girl named Mary, not yet ten, from a region of the country often called backward. Mary told him, "I don't want to waste my time here on earth. When you're put here, it's for a reason. The Lord wants you to do something. If you don't know what, then you've got to try hard to find out what. It may take time. You may make mistakes. But if you pray, He'll lead you to your direction. He won't hand you a piece of paper with a map on it, no sir. He'll whisper something, and at first you might not even hear, but if you have trust in Him and you keep turning to Him, it will be all right."

Thanks be to God!

Appendix C5:

The Golden Rule

A sermon preached by Daniel Love Glazer at Northbrook United
Methodist Church

August 31, 2014

John Adams, the second President of the United States, was married to a brilliant woman named Abigail. In one of Abigail's letters to her husband, she relates an incident that occurred when John was out of town:

One of her hired hands, named James Prince, was a free black boy she had taken under her wing. He asked Abigail whether he might attend evening classes in town at a new school for apprentices. Abigail, who had taught James to read and write, heartily approved, but soon a neighbor asked her to withdraw James from the school. If James was not withdrawn, the neighbor said, the other students would refuse to attend, and the school would close. Abigail asked whether James had misbehaved. No, the objection was simply because he was black.

Abigail replied, "The boy is a freeman as much as any of the young men, and merely because his face is black is he to be denied instruction? How is he to be qualified to procure a livelihood? Is this the Christian principle of doing unto others as we would have others to do to us?"

She requested that the other students be sent to her. "Tell them...that I hope we shall all go to Heaven together." And this she was pleased to report to her husband, ended the controversy. She heard no more on the subject; James continued in the school.

So Abigail met this crisis by citing what she called "the Christian principle of doing unto others as we would have others to do to us," in other words, by what is known as The Golden Rule.

This Golden Rule, of course, is not peculiar to Christianity. It appears, in one variation or another, in almost every religion and philosophy.

For example, take Confucianism. Several hundred years before the birth of Jesus, in the Analects of Confucius, we find the following dialogue:

Tzu-kung asked, "Is there a single word which can serve as the guiding principle for conduct throughout one's life?" Confucius replied, "Yes, it is the word 'consideration' [shu] Do not impose on others what you do not desire others to impose upon you."

Ancient Greek philosophy contains a number of expressions of the golden rule. I will reference two examples. The philosopher Thales says "never do ourselves what we blame in others." Epictetus, who was born a slave, but became a philosopher of the school of Stoicism said, "What you avoid suffering, do not attempt to make others suffer. You avoid slavery: take care that others are not your slaves."

Jewish literature is particularly rich in golden rule thinking. Of course, there is the passage in Leviticus 19:18 that we heard earlier.

Then there is the famous incident when a student challenges Rabbi Hillel to teach him the whole Torah while the student stands on one foot. Hillel said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary thereon; go and learn it."

Now we come to the Golden Rule as proclaimed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Who among you will give your children a stone when they ask for bread? Or give them a snake when they ask for fish? If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him. Therefore, you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you; this is the Law and the Prophets.

.Note that Jesus here places the Golden Rule in the context of fatherly love. Fatherly love implies more than a rule of reciprocity or equity. The golden rule means to love as a loving parent loves.

Note also that the golden rule, as proclaimed by Jesus, is formulated positively. Previous formulations were negative: “Don’t do to others what you don’t want them to do to you.” But Jesus said, “Do unto others what you would have them do to you.” For Jesus, to follow the golden rule requires one to be morally active. And what better illustration of being morally active is there than the life of Jesus? We could say that the golden rule is fulfilled in Jesus’ life and teachings.

Let me tell you a story that illustrates the golden rule.

The two monkeys and the fish

On an island, there once lived a monkey and a fish. The monkey followed the golden rule, always trying to treat others as he wanted to be treated. But he sometimes applied the golden rule foolishly. Now one day a big flood came. As the threatening waters rose, the foolish monkey climbed a tree to safety. Then he looked down and saw a fish struggling in the water. He thought, "I wanted to be lifted from the water, so that must be what the fish would like." So he reached down and grabbed the fish from the water, lifting him to safety on a high branch. Of course the fish died.

Kita, who lived on the same island, was a wise golden-rule monkey. She knew that fish die when taken from water. When the flood came, she considered taking a fish from the water. But she imagined herself in the fish’s situation. She thought, "If I were in the same situation as the fish, without the ability to survive out of water, would I want to be taken from the water?" She answered, "Gosh no: this would kill me!" So she left the fish in the water.

The foolish monkey applied the golden rule literally: *treat others as you want to be treated*. He wanted to be taken from the water, so he took the fish from the water. He didn't consider how fish and monkeys differ. Being taken from the water saves a monkey but kills a fish.

This story illustrates that in applying the golden rule, we need wisdom. We must first ask how our action affects others, then imagine what it would be like to have this done to us in the same

situation. We should act toward others only as we are willing to be treated in the same situation.

The German theologian Adolf Harnack summarized the teachings of Jesus as the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the infinite value of the individual soul. The presentation of God as a father indicates that he transcends every individual, yet is close to us, that we may experience the divine presence.

This concept of the family of God harmonizes sublimely with the golden rule. When we experience by faith that we are a son or daughter of God, we will live as a brother or sister in relation to others. So the golden rule becomes the principle of the practice of the family of God.

At the close of Jesus' life, he gave us the command, "Love one another as I have loved you." What a challenge! In conjunction with his teaching, "Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me," this may be considered as Jesus' supreme proclamation of the golden rule.

What a glorious ideal! Every one of us can think of situations in our own lives where we are challenged to meet this standard. We are all brothers and sisters in the family of God. Let us love one another as Jesus loves us. If we do so, we will satisfy the golden rule.

Amen!

Acknowledgements:

My argument follows, in great part, that of Jeffrey Wattles' superb book *The Golden Rule*. See <https://sites.google.com/a/kent.edu/jwattles/home/golden-rule-home>

The story of Abigail Adams comes from David McCullough's biography *John Adams*.

The story of the two monkeys and the fish is an African folk tale retold by Henry Gensler. See <http://www.harryhiker.com/goldrule.htm>

Appendix C6:

Is God Real?

by Daniel Love Glazer

Northbrook United Methodist Church

June 7, 2009

I have a question for you: How many of you believe that there is a teapot that orbits the sun? No one? I see. Here is another question: How many of you believe in God? Ah! Well, do you know that Richard Dawkins, a prominent intellectual, asserts that to believe that God exists is just as absurd as to believe that a teapot orbits the sun?

Is God real? Is faith in God justified? Dawkins is one of a number of prominent contemporary thinkers who say, “No, God is not real, and faith in God makes no sense.”

Richard Dawkins is a biologist, a professor at Oxford University, and a gifted writer about science. For example, his description of the life of bats in his book, *The Blind Watchmaker*, has been praised as a superb example of scientific explanation for a popular audience.

But Dawkins’ latest book is not about science. It is called *The God Delusion* and it expounds his contention that “There is almost certainly no God.” Belief in God, says Dawkins, is infantile, like faith in the Tooth Fairy or in Santa Claus, and can be described as a “virus of the mind.” Dawkins insists that the universe has “no design, no purpose, no evil, and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.” So it is not surprising that he maintains that “bringing up children within a religious tradition is a form of child abuse.”

Dawkins is not the only contemporary critic of religious faith. Another prominent skeptic is Christopher Hitchens. Hitchens, a well-known journalist and political commentator, has written a book entitled *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons*

Everything. Religion, Hitchens says, is man-made. "God did not create man in his own image. Evidently it was the other way about....Religion spoke its last intelligible or noble or inspiring words a long time ago."

Hitchens lists "four irreducible objections to religious faith: it "wholly misrepresents the origins of man and the cosmos; it combine[s] the maximum of servility with the maximum of solipsism; it is both the result and cause of dangerous sexual repression," and "it is ultimately grounded on wishful thinking." He concludes the first chapter of his book by saying, "As I write these words and as you read them, people of faith are in their different ways planning your and my destruction and the destruction of all hard-won human attainments. Religion poisons everything." In making this statement, he does not single out a particular group of religionists, about whom such a warning might be plausible, but he talks generally, of "people of faith," planning destruction in their different ways.

Another debunker of religious faith is Sam Harris, author of the best-selling book *The End of Faith*. Harris compares religious faith to alchemy, the medieval pseudo-science that attempted to transmute base metals into gold. Harris says "Alchemy fascinated human beings for over a thousand years, and yet anyone who seriously claims to be a practicing alchemist today will have disqualified himself for most positions of responsibility in our society. Faith-based religion must suffer the same slide into obsolescence."

Of course attacks on religious faith are nothing new. Over a century ago, the renowned philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote this passage:

" [Man's] origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins -- all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand."

What is the common thread that unites Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris, and Russell, in their rejection of religious faith? It is materialism, the belief that nothing exists in the universe but matter, and, moreover, that the scientific method is the only valid way to gain knowledge about the universe.

It is undeniable that material reality exists. [*Whack!—(preacher brings his fist down on lecturn)*] We are here today celebrating our faith within a building that is most certainly made of an arrangement of atoms. It is also undeniable that the scientific method is a highly successful way to investigate the behavior of the material world and to change it. A few years ago I got sick with a case of pneumonia. My doctor prescribed an antibiotic; in two weeks I was able to return to work, and, soon after, all my symptoms were gone. My mother tells me that her grandmother, like me, contracted pneumonia in her 50's, but at a time when antibiotics did not exist. She soon died. So we must give the material world, and the science that has investigated this world, their due.

But is the material world all there is? I have a few questions to pose to those who make that claim. To Bertrand Russell, I would ask, if you are nothing more than an accidental arrangement of atoms, how did you come to the realization that this was so? And, if every one of us is nothing more than an arrangement of uniform atoms, how can your atoms come to a different conclusion from my atoms? For that matter, how can differing views arise on any issue? It is inescapable that to make a judgment, whether correct or incorrect, about the material world, there must be a judge who in some way stands apart from that world.

I would also ask these materialists, "Is there such a thing as beauty?" If so, how could a mere arrangement of atoms come to appreciate beauty? Also, how in a purely material world, however its atoms were arranged, could there be judgments about right and wrong, about good and evil? As we have seen, Richard Dawkins denies that there is such a thing as good and evil. Would he say, then, that there is no way to decide whether his book and its arguments are good? And how do arrangements of atoms discern truth? Even to assert that there is no good or evil is a truth claim. How can a mere agglomeration of atoms make that claim? And, skeptics, please tell us: what about love? Is love, like God, a delusion? If not, can an arrangement of atoms love? Or, rather, as Hamlet suggests to Horatio, might there "be more in heaven and earth than is imagined in your philosophy"?

The eye of the material mind may perceive material things, but it is insufficient to evaluate those things. It is also unable to apprehend values such as beauty, goodness, truth, and love. You and I know that these values are real, because we have personally experienced them, even if the scientist cannot isolate them in his test tube. We know that beauty is real, because we have heard the music of Mozart and beheld a wondrous sunset. We know that goodness exists, because we have seen people do good deeds. We know that truth is real, because the Spirit of Truth has enabled us to taste its spiritual flavor. We know that love exists, because we have been loved. We perceive values, not by the material eye, but by the eye of the spiritualized intellect. Yes, the material world is real, but so is the spiritual world. Human beings are indwelt by the divine spirit; therefore we can apprehend the reality of God, who is spirit, as well as the truth that God loves us.

The Apostle Paul knew this. In his letter to the Romans, from which we heard earlier, he tells us that “those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God....When we cry, ‘Abba, Father,’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are God’s children....If we are children then we are heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” We can share Christ’s service. We can share his love. We can share his joy. And we can share his sonship with God the Father.

In the lectionary passage from John, Jesus tells Nicodemus and us that if we are reborn of the Spirit, we will have eternal life. In John 20:17, the risen Jesus says, “I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.”

So, my brothers and sisters, let us rejoice! We have been reborn, reborn by the spirit into eternal life! The Spirit has told us that we are God’s children, the children of the everlasting Father who loves each of us with an infinite love.

If we are reborn of the Spirit, we know with certainty that, of all facts, God is the most real; of all truths, God is the most alive; of all friends, God is the most loving; and of all values, God is the most Divine.

Yes--God is real!

Amen!

Appendix C7:

Blessed is He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord

A Homily Preached at Bethany Terrace Nursing Center

by Daniel Love Glazer

Palm Sunday, April 1, 2012

Happy Palm Sunday! I thought about riding in today on the back of a donkey, but I remembered a story a pastor friend of mine told me. She once rented a donkey to use during a Palm Sunday service. As the donkey came down the aisle of the sanctuary, he had a huge bowel movement. I decided not to take that chance.

This is a happy day, indeed, for today we celebrate the triumphal entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. For most of Jesus' ministry, he avoided seeking popular acclaim. For example, when he healed someone, he almost always said, "Tell no one about this." Of course, many times, the beneficiary of his healing ignored him and went about telling everyone what the prophet from Galilee had done. Still, up to now, Jesus has avoided playing to the crowd.

Yet on this Sunday, Jesus decides to make a very public entrance into Jerusalem. Why? Was it a desperate grasp for power? An attempt to stir up the people to support him? I don't think so. The Jewish rulers, the Sanhedrin, had declared the death sentence for Jesus. With his divine power, Jesus could have defied them, but he had decided that to use his divine power to save himself would be a betrayal of his mission.

What was his mission? His mission was to establish the rule of the heavenly Father in the hearts of men. He incarnated as a man on earth in order to reveal God to mankind, to proclaim that faith alone is sufficient to win salvation, and to demonstrate what a human being who was totally devoted to doing the Father's will could be. Ordinary men do not have the option of using superhuman powers to avoid death, and Jesus was determined to live and die as a man.

The Hebrew Scriptures contain a number of passages that were associated with a coming Messiah. In Jesus' day, many Jews were longing for a Messiah who would sit on the throne of David and, by emulating the miraculous methods of Moses, free the Jews from Roman rule and reestablish the material kingdom of Israel. But Jesus was not this kind of Messiah. He repeatedly said, "My kingdom is not of this world." His kingdom was a spiritual kingdom.

This explains why he chose to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. A warrior king would ride into a city on horseback, but a king on a mission of peace would ride on a donkey. As Jesus approached

the city on his donkey, a large crowd greeted him. Recall that this was few days before Passover and therefore many thousands of Jews from all over Palestine and elsewhere in the Roman Empire had come to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover feast. It may well be, too, that once Jesus announced he was going into Jerusalem, some of his apostles may have gone into the city ahead of him and alerted the crowd that Jesus was about to enter the city.

Our reading from the Gospel of Luke says that “When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples!’ “I tell you, he replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.’”

At this point, comes one of the most touching moments in Jesus’ life. Luke tells us, “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept.” He wept “over the city and and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.’”

And, indeed, Jesus' prophecy came true. In 70 A. D., the Roman army leveled Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and scattered the Jews living there.

What happened after Jesus entered the city and arrived at the temple? Luke says, “Then he went into the temple and began driving out the traders.” Matthew’s Gospel puts it this way: “Jesus went into the temple and drove out all who were buying and selling in the temple precincts. He upset the tables of the money-changers and the seats of the dealers in pigeons.”

You may wonder what money-changers and animal dealers were doing in the courtyard of the temple. At this time, the Jews coined their own money, and temple dues of one-half shekel needed to be paid with this money. The Passover celebration attracted Jews from many different provinces. These pilgrims came with 20 different kinds of money, which they needed to change into shekels in order to pay the temple dues. The money-changers, who were allowed to set up their tables in the temple courtyard, changed various coins into shekels for a large fee and also conducted other banking activities. Profits from this activity enriched the temple treasury as well as the temple rulers themselves.

As for the animal dealers, they sold pigeons and other animals required for sacrifices, and sold them at exorbitant prices. The common people, especially the pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover, greatly resented this commercial activity. Now Jesus is trying to preach, but he is unable to do so because of the noise from the money-changers and from the animals. Jesus becomes angry. He drives the animals out of the courtyard and the pilgrims overturn the tables of the money-changers. As he did this, he quoted the Hebrew Scriptures, “My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it into a den of robbers.”

This episode demonstrates Jesus’ attitude toward commercializing religion. This incident also shows that Jesus did not disapprove of using force to prevent a minority from unfairly oppressing and exploiting the majority.

Luke tells us, “Day by day he taught in the temple. The chief priests and scribes, with the support of the leading citizens, wanted to bring about his death, but found they were helpless, because the people all hung on his words.” Perhaps this explains why Jesus allowed the people to cheer him. In the face of popular support, his enemies were reluctant to arrest him, and thus he was free to continue teaching.

But we should realize that this popular support would not last. Later in the week, when it became clear that Jesus was not going to establish a material kingdom in accordance with the popular expectation and once the Sanhedrin took a final stand against him, this same crowd abandoned him.

After the cleansing of the temple, the stage is set for the unfolding of the remaining events in Holy Week, including the Last Supper, Judas’ betrayal of Jesus, the crucifixion, and, finally, of course, the glory of the resurrection on Easter Sunday. Truly, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Appendix C8:

Only Speak the Word and Let My Servant Be Healed: What is this Thing Called Faith?

A sermon by Daniel Love Glazer
Delivered at Northbrook United Methodist Church
June 2, 2013

When I was growing up in the 1950's, in Akron Ohio, the paperback book revolution was in full bloom. You could buy quality paperbacks for what now seems like a pittance. Here is an edition of Machiavelli's *The Prince* that I bought back then. How much do you think I paid for it? _____
It cost me 35 cents!

Once a week or so, my best friend Beaner and I would ride our bikes the six blocks to a book store that sold nothing but paperbacks. We would leave our bikes outside the store—no need for locks—and spend an hour or so browsing the shelves. Several times I bought a book by my favorite philosopher, Bertrand Russell. Indeed, I read so much Bertrand Russell that friends called me “Bert.”

I particularly remember Russell's book *Why I Am Not a Christian*. In that book, Russell asks, “If Jesus was as powerful and merciful as Christians believe, why, instead of simply healing a few lepers, did he not banish disease from the face of the earth?” To me, that seemed a knockdown argument.

Russell's philosophy purported to base everything on logic and nothing on metaphysical assumptions. In one passage, he wrote:

" [Man's] origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins -- all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand."

And, of course, Russell is not the only prominent thinker to embrace materialism. In our day, there has arisen a movement called “The New Atheists,” whose partisans loudly reject God and

consider religion to be a poison. Perhaps the most prominent of this group is Richard Dawkins, a professor of biology at the University of Oxford. Consider what Dawkins says in his book *The God Delusion*: “There is almost certainly no God.” Belief in God, says Dawkins, is infantile, like faith in the Tooth Fairy or in Santa Claus, and can be described as a “virus of the mind.” Dawkins insists that the universe has “no design, no purpose, no evil, and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.” So it is not surprising that he maintains that “bringing up children within a religious tradition is a form of child abuse.”

Well then, shall we all just go home and resolve to stop abusing our children by raising them as Christians? What response can we give to the materialists? What justifies our faith?

We cannot prove that God exists by scientific experiment or by the pure reason of logical deduction. No, God can be realized only in the realms of human experience. Against Russell and the New Atheists, we believers maintain that God created mankind in his own image.ⁱ Does this mean that we are like God in form and physique? No, rather, it means that we are indwelt by the divine spirit. Yes, we have physical bodies subject to material laws. But as the Apostle Paul says, “Your body is the temple of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the Spirit is God’s gift to you.”ⁱⁱ We have something from God himself that actually dwells within us.

Jesus taught that “The Kingdom of God is within you.” It is possible to ignore or obscure this indwelling Spirit that is the deepest, truest part of us. But when we search for God with all our being, we discover the indwelling Spirit that is part and parcel of the divine. It is this Spirit that is the source of our faith. The wholehearted search for God ultimately leads the seeker to recognize that to doubt God’s existence or his goodness would be to deny the deepest and most real part of himself—the divine spirit within.

The prophet Jeremiah, speaking for God, said “When you call me and come and pray to me, I will give heed to you. You will search for me and find me, if only you seek me wholeheartedly.”ⁱⁱⁱ

I know the reality of Jeremiah’s declaration from my personal experience. I was born into a Jewish family and was bar mitzvahed. In high school, under the influence of Bertrand Russell, I became an agnostic. Some years later, I discovered yoga, which presented a vision of spirituality and a spiritual path that appealed to me. I devoted myself to yoga and almost became a swami. But after several years, I came to realize that the yoga goal of attaining enlightenment by losing your individuality in the Absolute ocean of Being was an illusion. I left the yoga path and for several years did not think about ultimate things.

But in time, I became reawakened to the idea that, beneath the surface, there was a spiritual reality. I resolved to devote myself heart and soul to realizing this spiritual truth. When I did so, the Spirit within answered me. It gave me the assurance that my passion for seeking the truth and following it wherever it led had earned God’s favor. And shortly thereafter, the Spirit made Jesus known to my hungry soul.

Do we realize what a gift this Spirit is? It is nothing less than the will of God abroad in the universe. By aligning our will with God’s will, we can achieve the sublime and dynamic peace

that passes all understanding, the peace that comes from our confidence that our career in time and eternity is wholly in the hands of an infinitely wise, powerful, and loving God. We can become like Paul who said, “I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else shall be able to separate us from the love of God.”^{iv}

It is the divine presence within that enabled the Roman centurion to have such faith in Jesus.

This Spirit is also the inspiration for our aspirations to discern truth, experience beauty, and recognize and achieve goodness. God is not the psychological projection of our yearning for truth, beauty, and goodness. Rather God is the very source of the yearning for these supreme values.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, tells us that “those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God....When we cry, ‘Abba, Father,’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are God’s children....If we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”^v We can share Christ’s service. We can share his love. We can share his joy. And we can share his sonship with God the Father.

In the scripture passage from John, Jesus tells Nicodemus and us that if we are reborn of the Spirit, we will have eternal life. In John 20:17, the risen Jesus says, “I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.”

So, my brothers and sisters, let us rejoice! We have been reborn, reborn by the spirit into eternal life! The Spirit has told us that we are God’s children, the children of the everlasting Father who loves each of us with an infinite love.

If we are reborn of the Spirit, we know with certainty that, of all facts, God is the most real; of all truths, God is the most alive; of all friends, God is the most loving; and of all values, God is the most Divine.

ⁱ Ge 1:27

ⁱⁱ 1Co 6:19

ⁱⁱⁱ Je 29:12-13

^{iv} Ro 8:38-39

^v Ro 8:15b-17

Appendix C9:

His Eye Is on the Sparrow

A homily by Daniel Love Glazer
Preached at the worship service of
Bethany Terrace Nursing Center
January 15, 2012

Sing:

Why should I feel discouraged,
Why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely
And long for Heav'n and home.
When Jesus is my portion?
A constant Friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know he watches me.

Have you ever wondered how this inspiring hymn came to be written? This is the story, as told by Civilla Martin, the woman who wrote the lyrics:

Early in the spring of 1905, my husband and I were sojourning in Elmira, New York. We contracted a deep friendship for a couple by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Doolittle—true saints of God. Mrs. Doolittle had been bedridden for nigh twenty years. Her husband was an incurable cripple who had to propel himself to and from his business in a wheelchair. Despite their afflictions, they lived happy Christian lives, bringing inspiration and comfort to all who knew them. One day while we were visiting with the Doolittles, my husband commented on their bright hopefulness and asked them for the secret of it. Mrs. Doolittle's reply was simple: "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me." The beauty of this simple expression of boundless faith gripped the hearts and fired the imagination of Dr. Martin and me. The hymn "His Eye Is on the Sparrow" was the outcome of that experience.

Yes, brothers and sisters, God's eye is on the sparrow, and we know that he watches over us. Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap or gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [Matthew 6:26] He also told us, "Be not anxious. Be of good cheer. It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. [Luke 12:32] And also, "The Father himself loves you." [John 6:27] These were his constant words of encouragement. And Jesus not only exhorted us to have faith in God's watchcare, he demonstrated this faith in his own life.

Though Jesus was of divine origin, he chose to incarnate on earth as a human being. And he led his human life with complete faith in the Father's watchcare and guidance. He experienced the

ordinary highs and lows of human existence, but he always showed absolute faith in God's direction and care.

Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God." [Matthew 6:33] The heart of the prayer he taught us was, "Your kingdom come, your will be done." This living faith dominated his entire life. Jesus brought to God, as a human being, the greatest of all gifts: the dedication of his own will to the majestic service of doing the divine will. Even when faced by apparent defeat or by disappointment and threatened despair, he remained calm, conscious of the divine presence, and free from all fear and doubt.

Jesus showed what the ideal life of a man could be. When enemies brutalized and, eventually, murdered him, he refused to use his superhuman power to rescue himself and to defeat his foes. Other men do not have the ability to avoid pain and death, and Jesus' mission was to demonstrate to all mankind, as well as to all intelligences in the universe, even to God the Father, how a man could live and die in total dedication to the Father's will.

The human Jesus trusted God much as a child trusts his earthly parents. He said, "Unless you become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom." [Matthew 18:3] In so urging, Jesus is not asking us to become **childish**, but rather **childlike**: to trust God as a child trusts his parents and, in full confidence accept the assurance of the Father's infinite love, in this life and beyond. Jesus challenged us not only to believe **what** he believed, but **as** he believed: to have faith in the loving watchcare of the infinite Father, and to selflessly serve our brothers and sisters, as Jesus serves us. If we do so, we will fulfill Jesus' supreme commandment: "Follow me."

Sing:

"Let not your heart be troubled,"
His tender word I hear,
And resting on his goodness,
I lose all doubt and fear;
Though by the path he leadeth
But one step I may see:
His eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know he watches me.

Thanks be to God!

Appendix D: Guidelines for Preaching

Derived from the materials for the Advanced Preaching Course for Lay Speakers conducted by the Rev. James Preston at the Chicago Northwestern District Lay Academy, February 23 and March 1, 2008, at the First United Methodist Church of Park Ridge, Illinois.

Helpful Tips for Public Speaking and Preaching

(developed with adapted resourcing from A Research Guide for Public Speaking by I. Lee of Toastmasters)

1. Know the needs of your audience and match your content to their needs. If you are speaking to a group the first time, contact your host and have a brief discussion about the community. Always arrive early and get a feel for space and persons. Always test microphones and stand that the podium, space, or pulpit from where you will be speaking.
2. Know your material thoroughly. You should have reviewed your speech or sermon several times and even spoken it aloud at least once.
3. Perception is critical. Dress appropriately for the occasion avoiding clothing that is distracting. Big red polka dots or orange ties are not helpful. Present the desired image you want others to see.
4. Body language is so important. Standing, walking, or moving about with appropriate gesture or facial expression is preferred to sitting down or standing still with head down and reading your manuscript. Do not over-gesture!
5. Presentation is so important. Look pleasant, enthusiastic, confident, proud but not arrogant. Remain calm. Appear relaxed, even if you feel nervous. Speak slowly, enunciate clearly, and show appropriate emotion and feeling relating to your topic. Establish rapport with your audience. Do not mumble or overuse phrases or words.
6. Speak to the person farthest away from you to ensure your voice is loud enough. If using a P.A. system, test ahead of time and adjust to your voice quality. Vary the tone of your voice and dramatize when necessary.
7. If using visuals or PowerPoint, make them attractive and easy to read. Be very familiar with transitions in using these avenues.
8. Speak with conviction as if you really believe in what you are saying. Persuade your audience effectively. Do not read from notes or manuscript for any extended length of time, although it is quite acceptable to glance at your notes infrequently.
9. Maintain sincere eye contact with your audience. Use the 3 second method—look straight into the eyes of a person in the audience for 3 seconds at a time. Have direct eye contact with a number of people in the audience and also glance at the whole audience from time to time.
10. Pause and allow time for people to hear and think. Do not race through your presentation. Always be aware of things you can cut or add if time allowance changes.
11. Add humor when appropriate and possible. Keep your audience interested. Balance examples and be in tune that not all examples will fit everyone.
12. Know when to STOP talking. Leave your listeners with a clear line, a positive impression, or a direction to take. Always be prepared for the unexpected.

Ten Tips for Reading Scripture in Public Worship

Taken from *Public Reading of Scripture* by Clay Schimt

- Acknowledge that public Scripture reading is an important ministry. If you are asked to do so, say no if you don't have the gift or have no time to get ready. If you accept, be sure to prepare. If you are in charge of finding Scripture readers, look for people who are comfortable working a mike, have an emotional range in their own personality, and are confident in front of a group. "If God hasn't placed such a gift in your church, you might pray it arrives in a new person," Schmit says.
- See for yourself how interpretation makes a difference. Consider the words "Her name was Elizabeth." Say it aloud four times, each time emphasizing a different word. How does your emphasis change the meaning of that simple sentence?
- Make sure you understand the meaning of the passage you will read during public. Your pastor can suggest commentaries that have the right take for your denomination and congregation.
- Get comfortable with expressing an emotional range. Just for fun during practice, go overboard with gestures and vocal style. Read the same sentence in different ways to suggest different emotions. Try falsetto, trilled "r" sounds, deep, sing-song, staccato, chanted, fake foreign accent, disgusted, whiny, ultra smooth, monotone, and other voices.
- Next read some children's books aloud. "When you're reading to kids or talking to kids, you sometimes become *excessively expressive*, don't you? *Yes*, you *do* Now back it off about a quarter and you'll have a good voice for reading Scripture in church," Schmit says.
- Use pauses effectively. Note the difference in these readings of Luke 2:16:
 - They went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in a manger.
 - They went with haste (pause) and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in a manger.
 - They went with haste (pause) and found Mary and Joseph (pause) and the child lying in a manger.
- Look up from your reading only to reinforce the message. "Avoid the bobbing head effect," Schmit says. "The eyes are the mirror of thought and imagination, so it's fine to look off into space as you're thinking of an image, say when the father looked up and saw the Prodigal Son at a great distance...or the Psalmist says 'I lift my eyes to the hills.' If you do this, look far off, not at individual people." Other good times to look at worshipers would be on a sentence such as Jesus asking his storm-tossed disciples, "Where is your faith?" or Paul's admonitions in Colossians 3 to "set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."
- Read; don't act. "People understand you are reading, so don't think you have to move your body or gesture a lot," Schmit says. Simply stand tall so your voice projects, use the mike, and read the text. However, do try to read so that your facial gestures are evident, even if you have to hold the Bible above the lectern.
- Prepare ahead of time by reading aloud. Simply reading silently to yourself will not help you identify potential problems of pronunciation, pauses, and pacing.
- Consider forming a small group of people to meet for six to eight weeks. Together you can practice reading aloud, critique each other (for the congregation's benefit), and gradually invite new people into your group. Schmit says such groups sometimes become ongoing small groups that bond and pray together.

Some easy suggestions for reading scripture in public

1. Pre-read your passage(s) at least two or three times before. Make sure that you read it aloud when doing so.
2. Wait for complete silence when you read. Never start while the congregation is talking or distracted.
3. Introduce the text you are reading. You may want to say a simple thing like, "This morning's reading is from" or "Listen now for the Word of the Lord as it comes to us from..." You could do a few sentences of introduction but do not offer a sermon here.
4. Read from your Bible or the Pulpit Bible. Do not read from an insert, PowerPoint, or piece of paper.
5. Do not read too fast.
6. Communicate with worship coordinator etc. if you are to ask the congregation to stand for the Gospel Reading.
7. Pray about God's work through your reading.
8. Conclude with a blessing or response. A common one is **The Word of the Lord Thanks be to God.**

The Lectionary (adapted from *The United Methodist Book of Worship*)

The Revised Common Lectionary (1992) is a calendar and table of suggested scripture readings for a three-year cycle (Years A, B, C). The readings for each Sunday and holy day typically include one each from the Old Testament, the Epistles, the Gospels, and the Psalms. This provides a systematic approach to using scripture in worship and covering the many texts found in the Holy Bible.

The Lectionary follows the outline of the Christian year. It celebrates the central mystery of our faith: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The lectionary is a tool for voluntary use in planning and leading worship.

The Christian Year (adapted from *The United Methodist Book of Worship*)

ADVENT (purple or blue)

Begins the church year and consists of four Sundays. Themes include preparation and watching for the coming of Jesus Christ, both in birth and at the end times. The Advent Wreath is often central to the season.

CHRISTMAS (white and gold)

12 days celebrating the birth of Jesus. It begins on Christmas Day (Dec. 25) and ends on January 6 (Epiphany)

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY (Green)

Season that follows The Epiphany (Coming of the Magi), continues with Baptism of the Lord Sunday, and ends on Transfiguration Sunday before Lent begins.

LENT (purple and gray/sometimes black)

40 days long not counting Sundays. Season of preparation, repentance and reflection. Begins with Ash Wednesday, continues through Holy Week (Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday), and ends with Easter.

EASTER (white and gold)

The great 50 days begins with Easter Sunday and concludes with Pentecost. It celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his ministry of appearances. Also includes Ascension Sunday. Pentecost Sunday is the last day of this season and celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). Color for that day is red.

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST/ORDINARY TIME (Green, though some keep red up for a while)

Begins with Trinity Sunday, includes All Saints Sunday, Thanksgiving, and ends on Christ the King Sunday. It is a time of celebrating the ministry of Jesus' earthly work as well as learning about the prophets and others in the Old Testament.

Basics of Preaching

(adapted from Preaching by Fred Craddock, lectures by Dr. William McElvaney, Dr. Zan Holmes, Dr. Beverly Sawyer, and Dr. John Holbert)

Saint Augustine said:

Preaching is to teach the mind, touch the heart, and to move the will.

Dr. Bill McElvaney said:

In preaching, we should get the wider biblical picture and then relate as well to reason, tradition, and experience.

Dr. Beverly Sawyer noted that there are five questions central to biblical preaching:

1. Who is God?
2. Who are we human beings in relation to God?
3. What on earth is God up to?
4. What does God want from us?
5. What may we expect from God?

Dr. Fred Craddock indicates that:

Preaching is a pastoral act. It is an integral part of the entire ministry of the church. It cannot be isolated to just the one or two hours on Sunday. The sermon should connect with the familiar but introduce new challenges without overloading people's minds and hearts. The sermon must call persons to think for themselves, to chew on the sermon all week, and to change life and seek wholeness. (paraphrased from Preaching by Fred Craddock).

Key Thoughts and Elements for the Sermon

1. Gospel: Is the Good News celebrated? Does the sermon center on what God has done and is doing?
2. Biblical: Is the sermon faithful to the biblical text? Is it faithful to the contemporary situation?
3. Clarity: What is the preacher talking about? Is one idea clearly articulated and developed?
4. Significance:
 - a. Is it true to the Gospel?
 - b. Is it relevant to the situation in which it is preached?
 - c. Does it move beyond simplistic statements
 - d. Does one find a saving word – a liberating command in this sermon?
 - e. Does the sermon call for special responsibility rather than special privilege in response?
5. Structure: Is the structure appropriate to the scripture text and to the message. Is it helpful to the listener?
6. Delivery:
 - a. Is the preacher clearly involved in the Word?
 - b. Does the sermon offer caring and concern for the hearer? Is there rapport with the listener?
 - c. Is the delivery genuine and authentic with clear direction for the Holy Spirit?
 - d. Is there clarity of diction, sufficient voice variety, and appropriate intensity?
7. Inclusive: Is language sensitive and inclusive of the congregation? Are the situations and examples inclusive?
8. Simplicity: Is the language accessible? Are there “you’s” instead of “we’s”? Was there too much technical or unknown language? Were assumptions made about biblical literacy?

Sermon Sentence:

The sermon sentence should be created before the sermon is completely fleshed out. It should be one or two statement sentence that summarizes the message of the sermon in two lines or less. This should be done for every sermon to guarantee clarity and focus. If you are unable to create one sermon sentence, you are probably preaching too many ideas and/or are not focused.

Example: Joshua 3: 7-17

As God provided a way for the Israelites and Joshua to pass over the Jordan into Israel, God will also make a new way for us in our journey as Christians.

Some Types of Sermons (many may be one or more types)

Invitational: Call persons to change, forgiveness, commitment, renewal, salvation, sacrifice or confession. Opportunities for commitment should be offered within the sermon and possibly after it. Variations could included sermons on leadership, mercy ministry, etc.

Missional: Similar to Invitational but focus on the need for mission to change lives. Clear ideas for persons.

Stewardship: Clear call to giving of spiritual gifts, talents, or financial commitments.

Christian Justice: Calls people beyond the acts of mercy to long term change for social change related to faith. Requires a sense of humor, vulnerability, varied points of entry, and good research on both biblical and secular sources.

Christian Marriage: Sermons for weddings and renewal of vows. Rarely offered by lay speakers.

Funeral: Sermon should be a celebration of a persons life in the context of the powerful message of resurrection in Christ. This is not a memorial eulogy.

Styles

Persons can do a variety of sermon styles and presentation modes. They include narrative, teaching, story telling, front door, sandwich, back-door, first person narrative, drama-based, dialogue, film-clip included, literature based, topic focuses..etc.

Last Thoughts:

- Read and listen to various sermons of others; it gives you help in developing your own style.
- Read literature and watch films. That enriches your sermon delivery and illustrations.
- Balance examples of your own life and other examples.
- Keep the sermon focused and simple. Remember most people do not know the Bible. Never assume people know who anyone is or what they have done.
- Take time to read various translations and paraphrases to enrich your knowledge, depth, and experience of God's Word.
- Many persons are manuscript preachers. That is fine, but experiment with an outline or no notes at all.
- Video tape or tape-record your sermons periodically. It is a good way to see how you are doing.
- Whenever you preach, have someone evaluate with you briefly afterward. It helps make you a stronger preacher.

A Process for Developing and Writing a Sermon

1. Two or three weeks out. Choose passage whether lectionary or not. Read it and write down key words. Pray and sit with it for two weeks. Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire your work and thinking. I recommend no commentaries at this point. Live with the text. Get a theme word if you can. Also, this is a good time for your lectionary or sermon preparation groups to be discussing the text. It can happen later as well.
2. The Monday before the Sunday preaching, read the passage aloud several times from one translation. Make notes and begin to write down key teaching words or key themes. Begin to develop a possible sermon sentence. Also read the passage aloud from three other translations. I recommend: NRSV, NIV, New Jerusalem, and the TEV. Most of us are not Greek or Hebrew scholars. The reading of multiple translations helps us to see the depth and power of these languages in communicating God's Word. *The Message* and *Living Bible* are helpful, but do not count them as translations as they are paraphrases. Paraphrases help us get ideas and thoughts, but they are not true translations. PRAY!
3. On Tuesday, begin to read commentaries. I recommend at least three if not five. Make notes and discern how your earlier thoughts have connected and conflicted with the commentaries. Highlight those areas and compare to your emerging sermon sentence. Begin to explore online or in your own mind what illustrations might work. Pray for guidance and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Begin to pull elements of the worship service together if needed.
4. On Wednesday, I take a break. I only pray and read the scripture aloud.
5. On Thursday, I begin to pull the sermon together. Putting together pieces and writing elements in sections. I reread a few commentaries and translations for renewed information. Sometimes, I will turn to a Bible Dictionary or Pronunciation Guide for help. Topics and key words are reexamined and fleshed out.
6. On Friday, I finish the first complete draft of the sermon. I preach it aloud and make notes of what does not flow well and pray for direction in strengthening those areas.
7. On Saturday, I complete the final draft, rehearse it twice aloud, and then leave it. I pray over it and turn it over to God for the Holy Spirit's work and movement.
8. On Sunday morning, I rise early. I always read one of my commentaries again. I preach the sermon aloud one time. I then pray over the sermon and ask God to use me as an instrument of proclaiming the Word. I mark my bulletin and the liturgist's.
9. When I arrive at the church, I check microphones and other logistics related to worship and the sermon. I walk through the entire service with the liturgist and others. I pray in my office before praying with the choir.
10. Then I turn it over to God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Remember that some preachers preach best with:

- 1. A manuscript**
- 2. A set of notes**
- 3. No notes and from memory**

Choose your style and method! Be authentic to who you are called to be!

The Bibliography

Preaching helps, Bibles, books, and commentaries

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Harper Collins One Volume Commentary edited by Mays
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Texts for Preaching Series
John Wesley's Sermons edited by Albert C. Outler and Richard Heitzenrater
Pulpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching by Justo Gonzalez and Pablo Jimenez
The Global Commentary by Abingdon Press
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Why We Can't Wait by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Preaching and Worshiping in Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany by Abingdon Press (More volumes)
The Holy Spirit and Preaching by James Forbes
The Preaching Life by Barbara Brown Taylor
Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes by Robert McAfee Brown
Craddock Stories by Fred B. Craddock

Worship, Liturgy, and Music Resources

Seasons of Light and Hope: Prayers and Liturgies for Advent and Christmas by Blair Meeks
Igniting Worship Series by Dottie Escobedo-Frank and SpiritFilms
United Methodist Hymnal by Cokesbury
United Methodist Book of Worship by Cokesbury
Faith We Sing by Cokesbury
United Methodist Music and Worship Planner by David Bone
Taught by Love by Lavon Baylor
Gathered by Love by Lavon Baylor
Led by Love by Lavon Baylor
When We Gather by James G. Kirk

Literature to Read:

A Prayer for Owen Meany by John Irving
The Glad River by Will Campbell
The Color Purple by Alice Walker
Telling the Truth by Frederick Buechner
Cry, The Beloved Country by Alan Paton
The Chosen by Chaim Potok
The Book of Sorrows by Walter Wangerin
Night by Elie Wiesel
Anything by Flannery O'Connor

Websites for Preaching and Worship

www.Textweek.com
www.cokesbury.com
www.sermonillustrations.com
www.clergyresources.com
www.gbod.com (General Board of Discipleship – click on *layspeaking* and on *worship*)