Call to Worship

Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Eucharist

Volume 56.3

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Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music*

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Eucharist

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Epiclesis around the Ordinary

Sally Ann McKinsey

The Eucharist reshapes the service, pulling itself to the center," writes columnist Colleen Cook in her contribution to this issue. The last few years have brought much to consider about the practice of ministry amid a global pandemic, continued widespread hunger and racial injustice, and rapid change in the way the faithful worship. In the midst of these many challenges, the Eucharist *pulls itself to the center* as it reshapes us, becoming a lens through which we consider all of life.

The authors whose works make this issue invite readers to consider the increasingly permeable boundaries between home and sanctuary, conversations between pastoral theology and sacramental theology, and the relationship between ancient form and contemporary practice in the words and actions of the Eucharist. Among them, Alex Lee-Cornell considers particular questions of practice in the midst of congregational health concerns and pandemic experience, wondering about the intersection between sacramental form and theology in the nuanced concerns of today.

"The whole action of the eucharist has an 'epikletic' character because it depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit," we read in the sixteenth point of the Eucharist section of *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no. 111, produced by the World Council of Churches forty years ago. In this issue, writing and artwork join in highlighting this epikletic character as a central component of both Reformed eucharistic theology and the ecumenical faith expressed in the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* document. Epiclesis, the invocation of the Holy Spirit, holds a profound function in this contemporary moment to enliven our practice and deepen our incarnational faith. Indeed, the Eucharist pulls itself to the center, continually reshaping the way we worship. In their articles for this issue, Brant Copeland and Ronald Byars explore the process of worship renewal in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and eucharistic liturgy in the *Book of Common Worship*. Brant Copeland investigates the function of the epiclesis in the structure of spoken liturgy at table and asks what it means to live creatively into this structure as presiders here and now.

Alexandra Jacob reflects on an experience of receiving communion as a member of the body that taught her, one who usually presides, the gifts that celebrants bring in caring for the body. In what she calls the improvisatory hope of the liturgy, she invites others to leave room for the Holy Spirit in the practice of presiding at table.

Hannah Soldner explores the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of making liturgy in a profoundly beautiful piece about her experience of communion in her worshiping community. With wit, rhetorical wisdom, and poetic imagination, she explores what it means to make liturgy together, even through a Zoom interface. She wonders about the surprising relationship between the experience of sharing communion online and the experiences of the first disciples as they developed sacramental practice amid ordinary everyday life.

A Maundy Thursday sermon by Cecelia Armstrong and an Easter sermon by Christopher Vogado, both printed in this issue, also imagine the experience of the disciples who shared meals with Jesus before and after his death. What do Gospel texts about meals with Jesus teach us about what it means to follow the one who died and rose from the dead? These preachers also call us to reflect on the relationship between preaching and the celebration of Eucharist. They show some of the ways a sermon can live into the many functions of eucharistic liturgy—to proclaim the work of God, actively remember the death of Jesus, represent and anticipate the kin-dom, give thanks and intercede, and commune with the faithful.

Music and art, too, can embody some of these functions in visual and material language. Phillip Morgan writes about music around the table, calling us to consider what we sing with intention and recognizing music as a vital piece of the

liturgy. Columnist Mary Margaret Flannagan writes about music at the dinner table and the function music can play in shaping our theology from an early age. Ann Laird Jones explores the liturgy at table as a "choreography of grace" through a discussion of works of art that illustrate and interpret the sacrament biblically and liturgically. How do visual artists proclaim the presence of God in the communion meal? In his column for this issue, David A. VanderMeer also shares visual art that illuminates and expresses eucharistic theology. Artist S. Beth Taylor shares her fiber work in the Work of Our Hands section, exploring intersections between prayer language, music, and quilting. She offers prayers of thanksgiving and intercession in color and texture as she shares her vocational story, revealing the importance of encouraging one another in artistic endeavors.

Though varied in expression, the articles, sermons, poetry, and artwork in this issue are all concerned with the holy *material*, the epiclesis around the ordinary. Paul Galbreath investigates the history of the sacrament with relation to feeding. How did our practice become so estranged from functional mealtime? And how does the sacrament call us to more responsibility toward feeding and solidarity with others as humans? Karen Ware Jackson writes about the relationship between Eucharist and meal sharing, as well, considering table friendship at home and the intersections between liturgy and faith formation outside the sanctuary walls.

Indeed, "the whole action of the eucharist has an 'epikletic' character." *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* continues this way: "In the words of the liturgy, this aspect of the eucharist finds varied expression." May the diverse liturgical expressions of epiclesis across the church reveal and proclaim what we hold vital in the midst of anxiety and change—the holy ordinary, the bread and wine that invite us into the presence of God-with-humanity through the Holy Spirit.

Sally Ann McKinsey, Managing Editor

Feature Articles

Eucharist and Hunger: Who Gets to Eat?

Paul Galbreath

Introduction

The celebration of the Eucharist involves eating and drinking. Who gets to eat and drink and what they get to consume has been a much-contested matter in the history of the church. It is an issue that is worth pondering in these days when the division between the rich and poor grows exponentially each year. Further complicating matters, the climate crisis that threatens the health of the planet continues to add to the problem of food insecurity for poor people around the globe. Given these realities, access to healthy food and clean water are among the top challenges that we will face in the coming decade. The questions that are posed in this essay are these: Does our gathering around the Lord's table have anything to do with the needs of the hungry who live in the shadows of many of our church buildings? Does communion have anything to do with the hunger pangs that our brothers and sisters feel on a daily basis? In order to address these questions, we will briefly examine snapshots in the history of the development of the Eucharist by paying attention to the role of food and drink in the practices of Christians who gather to offer thanksgiving for God's grace.

Starting with Scripture

In the fashion of classic Reformed theology, we begin by turning to Scripture and looking at a key passage for clues about the description of one of the first communion gatherings depicted by Luke in the book of Acts. The earliest depictions underscore the primary role of food and drink and the importance of providing nourishment for everyone. Acts 2 offers a portrait of the nascent Christian community as it explored ways to maintain Jewish temple practice while also gathering to remember the life of Jesus. Following the experience of Pentecost, Luke describes the daily practices of these Jewish followers of Jesus by noting these defining features:

(1) Sharing the stories of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, alluded to in Peter's sermons in Acts and summed up by Luke as "devoting themselves" to the apostles' teachings in Acts 2:42. These memories constitute the earliest *kerygma* as a form of gospel proclamation in which the memories of encounters with the historical Jesus signal the divine redemptive presence pictured as the reign or kingdom of God.

(2) *Koinonia*, or the fellowship of spending time together (it is important to note that this gathering is the result of the pilgrimage of Jews across the Mediterranean to celebrate the Jewish harvest festival of Shavuot in Jerusalem). Those who responded to Peter's sermons and identified as Jewish followers of Jesus came from different places and backgrounds (for example, note the description of the Ethiopian eunuch as an example of a person of influence and wealth who is attracted to this movement). Luke contrasts this portrait by noting the presence of those who are poor and in need of the community providing for their basic needs. Taking time to get to know one another and recognizing the diversity of the community (geographically and socio-economically) is a defining feature of the Jesus movement.

(3) Daily eucharistic practice includes the sharing of a meal. Luke makes this connection to the Eucharist by using his signature linguistic reference of the "breaking of the bread" (twice, in vv. 42 and 46 just in case we miss it!), which is a phrase used throughout both the Gospel of

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His most recent book is ***Re-Forming the Liturgy***, Cascades Press, 2019.

Luke and the book of Acts as a theological (and potentially sacramental) claim of a central practice that stands at the middle of Jesus' public ministry. This is a practice that becomes an identifying mark as a continuation of Jesus' ministry and serves as a basic commitment to a meal gathering that defines the Christian community in its early decades across the vast terrain of the ancient Roman Empire. It is critical to note (especially for our purposes) that this gathering was a shared meal that provided food for all. For Luke, the daily breaking of the bread led some to sell their possessions to ensure that there was equitable access to food for all who were in need. These actions produced two tangible results: first, it brought joy to the community who shared their meals with "glad and generous hearts" (v. 46) and second, it led to a rapid growth in the community as they quickly grew in number (v. 47).

(4) Finally, Luke notes that they continued to participate in the daily prayers at the temple in Jerusalem (vv. 42 and 46). Here the continuity between the Jewish faith and the teachings of Jesus is affirmed as a practice that sustains the believers as they navigate the complex reality of making sense of the messianic claims of Jesus, particularly in light of his crucifixion and the accounts of resurrection.

Eucharist and the Early Church

Several streams of research on the historical development of the Eucharist have emphasized the centrality of food and eating in the early Christian communities. We will take a brief look at some of this work in order to help us maintain our focus on the role of hunger in the celebration of communion in the early centuries of the church. Liturgical scholars have emphasized the importance of the *Didache* as a key source in showing the development of Jewish table blessings (*berakah*) for the Christian eucharistic gathering. This text dates to mid first century CE and was written around the same time as the earliest books of the New Testament. The thanksgiving (*eucharist*) for the cup and the bread are given christological frameworks as a way of placing the blessing within the context of the Christian assembly. Following the sharing of the elements, "after you are satisfied with the food," a concluding prayer offers thanks to God for providing "food and drink to men [sic] for their enjoyment" and for "spiritual food and drink" given to the Christian community.[1]

Another important area of research has been on the role of the Greco-Roman meals as providing a template for the central meal of early Christian communities. New Testament scholars Dennis Smith and Hal Taussig authored important works to show how widely accepted meal customs of their day were adapted by early Christian gatherings.[2] The banquet tradition, shared by both religious and civic organizations, offered a familiar pattern for gathering around a shared meal. The meals were provided by a sponsor and held in homes or public spaces. They offered a time for conversation and at times even debate around stories and presentations (in this instance around the shared memories and teachings of Jesus). These gatherings were also important ways to promote core values shared by the community—including hospitality and *koinonia*. Andrew McGowan adds to these insights by noting the role of food in the ancient world, particularly among the poor, which would have been the majority of Christians in the first couple of centuries following Jesus' death. McGowan notes that the daily meal for the working poor usually consisted of bread, wine, and water.[3] Thus, what we have come to consider as the basic eucharistic elements were the staples of daily existence. Sponsors for the eucharist banquets/gatherings might provide other food for participants. For example, Paul describes the eucharistic meal of the church in Corinth and notes the different amounts of food and wine that are consumed by the rich and poor (an observation that provides the grounds for his ethical indictment that unequal sharing is unworthy of the name of the Lord's Supper). Different Christian gatherings included a wide variety of foods beyond the basics of bread, water, and wine: oil, vegetables, salt, milk, honey, and olives just to name a few. The variety of food included in the meal was largely dependent on the sponsor and affluence of the community. The diversity of these practices was widely accepted until the Synod of Hippo in 393 CE restricted communion to bread, wine, and water.[4]

Sharing food and providing for the needy are the common ingredients in this history of eucharistic development. While scholars continue to debate theological interpretations and sociocultural influences, there is (at last!) a consensus that the basis of early eucharistic practice consists of gathering for a meal and serving the poor either

by inclusion in the meal itself and/or by collecting food and funds to take food to those who were hungry.[5] In his brilliant book *The Eucharist* Thomas O'Loughlin extends these insights by linking them with the ways in which food is central to rituals and the creation and sustenance of relationships within communities. O'Loughin points to the ways in which these practices provide a roadmap for the emerging practices of discipleship within the early Christian communities by weaving together the human desire for meal sharing with the meal practices of Jesus (and its emphasis on inclusion and hospitality), creating an active way of remembering the story of Jesus and exploring its significance for the life of the community.[6] This act of remembering as a blessing around the table took the pattern offered by the historical Jesus in giving thanks and expressing our dependence on God the Father/Creator as the source of life and as the one who provides us with our daily bread. These meal practices sustained the life of the community, and its radical hospitality and commitment to providing for the poor was a major source of growth during the first couple of centuries. As Christian communities grew in size, it became increasingly difficult to preserve the centrality of the meal with its emphasis on food. O'Loughlin concludes, "Because the meal, given its place in practice and memory, could not be abandoned altogether, . . . it was curtailed until it reached a minimal point and. . . was then re-validated by a theological narrative."[7] In place of the shared eating and drinking connected to the practice of giving thanks to God, "the Eucharist became one more memory-producing ritual that could prompt minds to think of the truths of revelation where the encounter with the divine had only a mnemonic origin in something actually done by Christians."[8] Or to put it another way, the question of who gets to eat was largely left behind—both for those who participated in these gatherings and especially for those who depended on the sharing of the food that had been a central part of Christian evangelism. The symbolic tokenism of food was used as a link to reinforce a prescribed theological message that took shape around an imaginative historical version of Jesus' Last Supper. Increasingly, eating and drinking were primarily seen as practices offered for and by the clergy, who served as guardians of the sacred memory that became reenacted at the altar.

O'Loughin points to the ways in which these practices provide a roadmap for the emerging practices of discipleship within the early Christian communities by weaving together the human desire for meal sharing with the meal practices of Jesus (and its emphasis on inclusion and hospitality), creating an active way of remembering the story of Jesus and exploring its significance for the life of the community.

Calvin on the Lord's Supper

"Do this in remembrance of me." These words of Jesus provide the dominical command that prompts John Calvin's rejection of the medieval Roman Catholic mass. What Calvin considered as the spectacle of the mass had little in common with the New Testament portrait of the Lord's Supper. What constitutes the "this" from Jesus' command, though, is much more difficult to ascertain. Two key insights for Calvin were the significance of table fellowship and the desire for frequent communion by all who participated in the service. These changes represent dramatic alternatives to the practices of his day. Calvin does away with the altar in order to make the theological point that there is no sacrifice being made during the service. The significance of this move even as an architectural change must have been disorienting to worshipers. Ripped off the wall of the transept, the table was now presented as a place for gathering to receive the bread and wine. The space provides a common meeting ground for the covenant community to remember the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is important to note, though, that while Calvin gives significant attention to the upper room/Last Supper narratives, the celebration of communion shows little actual interest in the Passover tradition. Passover remains a theological gloss in terms of an Old Testament archetype from which to draw homiletical points. It does not, however, inform the type of food placed on the table and shared by all participants. For Calvin, restoring communion in both kinds, with the bread and wine, is central to

participating in the body and blood of Christ. The hope for Calvin is that this will become a regular (weekly), defining feature of Christian life shared together (and to this end household piety practices of prayer and Scripture reading are associated with family meals at home).

The hunger that Calvin seeks to cultivate and feed is nearly exclusively a spiritual hunger. Calvin's theological fear of any form of idolatry pushes him to minimize the eating and drinking that he desperately wants to reclaim as central to regular participation around the table. On the one hand, the downplaying of materiality threatens the stress on incarnation that Calvin wants to claim as central to his theology. On the other hand, given his historical context and the tendency to accept literal objectifications of the bread and wine, one can understand and perhaps even sympathize with many of the bold moves that Calvin makes to reclaim and re-orient table practices as a basic part of Christian communal life.

Yet the question of who gets to eat is strangely codified in terms of proper participation in the covenant community. To this point, participation is defined in terms of worthiness rather than hunger (justified by a particularly forced reading of 1 Corinthians 11[9]). Calvin's penchant for discipline and desire to see the signs of regular participation in the life of the community serve as the norms for determining who should come to the table. Those who fail to live up to these expectations find themselves in trouble with the clerical and civil authorities. As we will see, it is this complex legacy that Presbyterians continue to struggle with as we seek to address the issues related to eucharistic celebration and hunger.

From Spiritualization to Liturgical Renewal

The Reformed movement drew on Calvin's fears of idolatry and his opposition to practices that resembled Roman Catholicism. This is particularly evident in credal statements like the Scots and Westminster Confessions. Calvin's emphasis on Word and Sacrament and the restoration of the table provided openings for a recovery of eucharistic practice that drew from a broader reading of biblical narratives of Jesus' teaching and ministry in meal gatherings in the New Testament. Rather than pursuing these possibilities, though, the biblical warrant of the Lord's Supper as a Passover meal provided the justification as well as the mood for this version of table fellowship. Calvin's determination to link the supper with the atonement theory of his day straitjacketed the interpretive options of the gathering with the primary result of the bread and cup serving as symbolic references to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. As Calvinism spread to the "new world" it brought along an understanding of sacraments that increasingly split the "outward sign of inward grace." Fear of materiality continued to de-emphasize the food and drink themselves, and they became tokens of little importance (a cube of bread and a sip of grape juice). The separation of the sacrament from its material elements linked with the infrequent celebration of this "spiritual supper" left the practice of communion disembodied and malnourished when it came to the question of who gets to eat and drink at the eucharistic table.

Change came through the determined efforts of two related movements: ecumenical dialogue and the liturgical renewal movement.

Change came through the determined efforts of two related movements: ecumenical dialogue and the liturgical renewal movement. Twentieth-century commitments to dialogue emphasized similarities between denominations and slowly chiseled away at the stereotypes that Protestants and Roman Catholics had created of one another. This worked hand in hand with an emerging emphasis on the historical development of the sacraments. Over time, these movements were key factors leading to Vatican II, which brought enormous change to eucharistic practice in the Roman Catholic Church while also prompting a critical reassessment of practices within Protestant congregations. For Roman Catholics, moving the altar to a central location and restoring communion of both bread and wine brought back connections to table fellowship. Protestant communities were inspired to focus attention on providing new eucharistic prayers (drawing on a growing shared vocabulary) while also prompting attention to the question of the frequency of celebration (in Reformed churches producing a relatively dramatic shift from quarterly to monthly celebration). While a new focus on the elements resulted in a more dramatic presentation

of the breaking of the bread, it often did not lead to the sharing of this bread in ways that reconnected to the biblical/historical memory of meal practices with a particular attention on providing for the physical needs of the hungry. Nevertheless, the fruits of this attention of sacramental renewal brought noticeable change to eucharistic practice in local congregations. When these efforts came alongside a growing amount of research on the history of early eucharistic development, a new emphasis on food and concern to provide for the needy emerged alongside a strong eucharistic theology with an emphasis on hospitality.

Two key congregations illustrate the emergence of a eucharistic celebration with a commitment to recovering the roles of food: St Gregory's of Nyssa in San Francisco and St Lydia's in New York City. At St. Gregory's the architectural attention to the altar surrounded by icons of dancing saints created a setting for a liturgy that understood active participation in the service as central to creating community. The use of the altar as a place for hospitality following the service became a way to point to an implied meal in which the altar was connected to both the eucharistic elements as well as to the coffee and sweets that people ate. Linking these practices with a food pantry provided a bold way to reclaim the link between eucharistic celebration and providing for the poor. In her book *Take This Bread* Sara Miles testifies to the ways in which this practice brought faith to her life and modeled this connection in the life of the community and neighborhood. At St. Lydia's, the emphasis on supper church emerged as an attempt to fully reclaim shared food as central to Christian worship and as open for all who came. The importance of the full meal as an integral component of Christian gathering and a basis for communal identity were highlighted. Other congregations adapted a simpler version of this approach, known as "brunch church," as a way to keep food at the center of the eucharistic liturgy but ran the risk of highlighting a liturgical trend to serve the appetite of those who already had ample access to food.

COVID as Interruption: Virtual Communion as Norm

The rapid spread of COVID-19 caused a dramatic shift in communion practices. While some congregations were already experimenting with virtual communion, the pandemic accelerated the trend that quickly became widely accepted in Protestant communities. My point here is not to question the practice of virtual communion—it is surely here to stay—but to raise the question about the role of food in its current iterations.

Two central concerns have emerged from my analysis of widespread virtual communion practices. First is the tendency to try and recreate the congregation's previous communion practices. For example, one congregation provided directions that included buying grape juice, pouring it into small cups, and cutting up small cubes of bread as preparation for the virtual communion. Minimalized elements provide a continuity between in-person and virtual communion. A second strategy is to encourage congregation members to simply choose what they want to eat and drink and to have it ready alongside their computers. While this method expands the options, it runs the risk of commodifying communion according to our individual tastes.

Ironically, both of these approaches to virtual communion are dependent on the clergy for saying the "proper words"[10] that allow the gathering to be recognized and experienced as an authorized (by the session) version of the Lord's Supper. Protestants who have long criticized the hierarchical dominance of the priesthood have adopted a practice that reifies the pastor's words as that which provides the link for the virtual service to be recognized as communion.

Alongside the concern of clergy dominance lies our question of who gets to eat. The current forms of virtual communion reinforce the predominant practice of Eucharist as serving our own self-interests. In minimalized versions of distance communion, token amounts of food and drink deprive everyone of material sustenance and underscore a gnostic spirituality that denies the needs of our own bodies while also failing to acknowledge the rising food insecurity that plague our communities. In alternative versions, we satisfy our hunger by simply sating our own appetites while giving little thought to the growing lines at food banks in our neighborhoods. Surely the proponents of virtual communion need to take a closer look at current practices and make adjustments that connect our table fellowship to the hunger of the world.

Which Way Forward?

The central concern of this essay is to examine the history of eucharistic practice by exploring the role of food. The primary goal in this examination is

to rid ourselves of insular practices by recovering that emphasis on the central role of the meal and its importance for providing food for those who are hungry. While we face difficult choices in reforming our current practices, I remain hopeful that the Spirit will move among us and prompt us to let go of our old habits and to explore new ways of gathering around the table—ways that will bring us new life and will address the pressing needs of those in our local communities. In Luke's Gospel, we read the account of the feeding of the five thousand. A crowd has gathered to hear and respond to the teachings of Jesus. As the day wears on, the disciples become concerned that the crowd will grow restless with hunger. The disciples try to persuade Jesus to send the crowd away. Instead, Jesus orders the disciples to feed the multitude. Again, the disciples are pictured as clueless. How can we possibly find enough food to feed so many people? they ask Jesus.

I wonder if this doesn't capture the current status of many of our churches. The problems of global hunger are clearly too much for our congregations to address. We are desperately trying to keep our churches open and worship services available in an unprecedented time of change. And yet, I am struck by the way in which Luke portrays Jesus as responding to the needs of those who are hungry. He orders the disciples to start collecting food to share with the crowd. Then, in his signature way, Luke uses his eucharistic vocabulary to present this meal as a communion service: Jesus takes, breaks, blesses, and gives the loaves of bread and sends them out to be shared along with the fish so that all will have food to eat. In this dramatic act, the disciples discover that not only is there enough food to go around but that there are baskets of leftovers that will continue to provide food for those who are hungry.

In his classic essay "Where Will the Poor Sleep?" Gustavo Gutiérrez writes, "If there is no daily friendship with the poor and an appreciation of the diversity of their desires and needs as human beings, we can transform the search for justice into a pretext."[11] In this essay, I am posing the question, Where will the poor eat? For those of us who are Reformed Christians who have taken theological pride in dedicating ourselves to reclaiming more vibrant sacramental practices, the issue of global hunger and the Eucharist presents us with a challenge and possibility. The challenge is to open up our table practice in ways that directly connect it to the physical and spiritual hunger of those in our neighborhoods. As we have seen, the historical development of eucharistic practice offers us a variety of clues and patterns that can guide us. The promise in this effort is that we are instructed in this task of evangelism by the risen Christ, who challenges us to look beyond our minimal supplies and expectations and to trust the Spirit to lead us to experience the bountiful miracle of God's presence as we break bread and share the cup with all.

Notes

1. *The Didache*, ch. 9 and 10, https://reformedwiki.com/read-didache-kirsopp/.
2. Dennis Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Church*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). Also Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).
3. Andrew McGowan, "'The First-Fruits of God's Creatures': Bread, Eucharist, and the Ancient Economy," in *Full of Your Glory: Liturgy, Cosmos, Creation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).
4. Andrea Bieler and Luise Schotroff, *The Eucharist: Bread, Bodies, and Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Fortess Press, 2007), 115. Note as well that the passing of a law does not mean that everyone will follow it.
5. One important example of this pattern is outlined in Justin Martyr's *Apology*, which describes the eucharistic service in terms of sharing the food, distributing it to those who are absent, and collecting contributions to provide for orphans, widows, the sick, those in prison, and visiting strangers. See Justin Martyr in Lucian Deiss, *Springtime of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1979), 94.
6. Thomas O'Loughlin, *The Eucharist: Origins and Contemporary Understandings* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2015), 88.
7. O'Loughlin, 93.
8. O'Loughlin, 97.
9. For more on this point, see Galbreath, *Leading into the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowhan & Littlefield, 2015), 21ff.
10. Interesting to note that for Reformed Christians this required text is the so-called "words of institution" which in the Latin mass is spoken as "hoc est enim corpus meim" ("this is my body"), which many believe is the source for the colloquial expression "hocus-pocus."
11. Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Where Will the Poor Sleep?" in *On the Side of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2015), 118.

A Place at the Crowded Table

Karen Ware Jackson

If your family table is anything like mine, it's *never* clean. In order to eat (or write), you've got to make space in a place crowded with baseball cards, crafting supplies, stacks of mail, homework during the school year, goggles and spray sunscreen during the summer heat. Some of the mess is just passing through, dropped here due to exhaustion and the chaos of family life, but some of it belongs here just as much as dinner. It's the best place in the house to spread out a big project, sit side by side working through a reading passage, play a round of UNO Attack, or even join a Zoom meeting while painting your nails.

Even when we aren't setting out the silverware, for many of us the family table is the heart of the home. It centers and grounds our household life, giving us a place not only to eat but also to work and laugh and pray together. Whether we're sorting through bills or passing the pasta, we're united here in a common effort not so different from what we may find in a sanctuary. The Westminster Catechism tells us our purpose is to glorify and enjoy God forever.[1] Jesus frames it as a call to love God and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).[2] While the words are different, the family table and the communion table echo the same roots of love, service, and connection to God and one another.

Theologian and gastronomist Kendall Vanderslice points to the Last Supper as not just the first but also the central act of Christ in forming a new community: "When Jesus established his church, he did so around a table. He asked his followers to eat together in remembrance of him, knowing the process of sharing a meal communicates something vital about who we are and how we relate to God."[3] For Vanderslice and many Christian communities through the ages, the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion or mass continues as the central act of the church's worship.[4] It is the place where the Holy Spirit works so that we experience a mystical communion not only with Christ through his body broken in bread, but also with the church, Christ's body re-membered in community. In the same way, the family[5] dinner table calls us to a single place to share and connect, to remember our individual identities as we relate to one another in our shared life.

My co-pastor and I celebrate our most sacred meal every Sunday after church with our two children. I wish I could tell you that I pull a home-cooked roast out of the oven, ladle delicious stew from our hardworking crockpot, or even pick a bevy of salad greens from our backyard garden. But unfortunately, I don't like to cook (and our "backyard garden" consists of a healthy basil plant, a few sprigs of volunteer dill and mint, and three anemic tomato plants). Our favorite family meal requires a drive through the popular North Carolina takeout chain Cook Out on our way home from church. The kids have to share their fries, but they get their very own chocolate milkshakes while the adults load up giant cups of diet soda in order to be properly caffeinated for Sunday evening meetings. It's an informal meal, but one bound by rituals of love, grace, and connection.

As we settle around the table in our sunroom, we pass out the ketchup and spoons and straws, divvy up the fries, and debate whose turn it is to pray. We don't eat before the prayer, and we don't say the prayer until everyone is at the table and has food. Sometimes that means we've got someone hopping up soon after the prayer for the restroom or to change out of their church clothes. At least one child will spill their milkshake and end up with paper napkins stuffed down the front of their shirt

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As a pastor, I mirror the words of Christ at the communion table, "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matt. 26:26). We all learn from his pattern of blessing, breaking, sharing, and eating. In the same way the sensory elements of cooking a family meal remind us of beloved family members, actions at the communion table connect us to the communal memory of generations of Christians. If we listen closely, we might hear the Lord's voice echo, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

lest the cold, wet cloth make contact with their skin (horror of horrors). But we enjoy at least a few moments with all of us eating around one table.

We like to ask each other about our "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" for the day so far. The delicious (and the less desirable) coffee hour snacks often make an appearance on the list, but sometimes the kids surprise us: "I liked the story Mommy told in church" or "I *loved* that we *finally* got *real* bread again for communion." (Yes, even the kids are tired of pop-top communion.) Soon we move on to casual conversation: "Did you see Daddy splash the water out of the font? It was hilarious!" "Do I *have* to go to children's choir this afternoon?" As the meal winds down, they're asking to be excused and being reminded to throw away all their trash. We don't tend to keep them at the table because these pastor-parents are exhausted and hoping for a sacred Sunday nap.

With kids' activities and church meetings quickly rebounding from pandemic pause, it may be days before we eat together again. While my family is not quite as excited for my culinary efforts as they are for french fries and milkshakes, these meals follow much the same fashion—the preparation, the prayer, the meal, and the cleaning up. We have our own set of norms for how these actions proceed. I can imagine this basic pattern is not all that different for families the world over. At the communion table, too, we follow a pattern of preparation, prayer, celebration, and sending that unites us as a Christian community. While the language and liturgy may vary, when we sit at the Lord's Table, we connect our table to the one Jesus set for his disciples on the night he was arrested; we connect our table to those early Christian feasts where the words became an institution; we connect our table to disciples across denominations for the holy meal.

The Preparation

"Alexa, make an announcement" (me, speaking to our Amazon Echo device on any given night of the week. She is always listening).

"Okay, what's the announcement?" (Alexa, from inside the Amazon Echo device, her synthetic voice perpetually calm yet curious).

"It's time for dinner!" (me).

"It's time for dinner!" (Alexa, echoing my recorded voice through every device in the house. If you know, you know).

I've already established that I am not the most eager or adept of cooks, but there is more to preparing a family meal than chopping vegetables and watching the grill. Vanderslice posits that cooking tells "embodied stories, allowing future generations to physically take part in the continuation of a memory."[6] Growing up, my twin sister and I loved to bake alongside our mother and grandmother. We learned how to measure and mix as we eagerly waited to lick the beaters once the batter was complete. My own daughter likes to knead and shape bread but isn't interested in cookies and cakes. It's my son who revels in knowing the *secret ingredient* we use in almost every recipe. As I help him hold the measuring cup steady, I can almost feel my Nana's arms wrapped around me, mirroring the same practiced movements. I remember what she taught me not just about baking, but about life, and I remember how she made me feel: strong, capable, brilliant, and deeply loved.

As a pastor, I mirror the words of Christ at the communion table, "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matt. 26:26). We all learn from his pattern of blessing, breaking, sharing, and eating. In the same way the sensory elements of cooking a family meal remind us of beloved family members, actions at the communion table connect us to the communal memory of generations of Christians. If we listen closely, we might hear the Lord's voice echo, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

As we consider the connections between the communion table and the dinner table, it's important to note that, as sacred as family meals may be, they are *not* a sacrament. Even without the specific liturgy, theology, practices, and ordering of various Christian denominations and communities, the power of the family meal lies in its intimacy. Many families do invite neighbors, friends, and hungry newcomers to their table. Some families remember loved ones who cannot be present. A family may use the meal to be mindful of and grateful for all the people whose labor allows them to eat. But even the most welcoming household is still limited in their ability to invite all people to the table. The same might be said of any single Christian church, but it is vital to note that the reconciliation and sharing that occurs within a family meal is only a fraction of that demanded by the Eucharist.[7] That's okay! The more we practice the hard tasks of love with those closest to us, the more open we may be to larger work of justice and connection in the world.

Once the meal is prepared, we call everyone to the table. My family of introverts is often scattered to their respective hidey holes, so we tend to rely on our faithful Echo (Alexa) to broadcast the invitation. We put down our books, turn off the television, rouse ourselves from the end-of-day stupor, and make our way to the kitchen to complete the final preparations, filling glasses, setting out utensils, and carrying dishes to the table. Even when we haven't made the meal together (and let's be honest, we usually don't), there is always a moment of chaotic togetherness before we finally find ourselves at rest at the table. While it doesn't always immediately precede the Lord's Supper, I think the passing of the peace most closely resembles this gathering moment. Congregants move throughout the sanctuary greeting friends and visitors, grabbing extra bulletins and all too often dropping vital pieces of information to their distracted pastor as they settle into the shared experience of worship.

The Prayer

"Who wants to pray?" (the adults).

"Me!" (hungry children, eager to dig in).

"God is great. God is good. Let us thank God for our food. Amen." (all).

Despite our best efforts to expose our children to different forms of mealtime prayer (songs, chants, prayer cubes, extemporaneous prayer, even silence), our nine- and eleven-year-old inevitably choose the Protestant classic. It's not quite the Great Thanksgiving appropriate for the Eucharist, but it covers the bases of praise and thanksgiving quickly and efficiently. The prayer may be the place where the similarities and differences between the two tables show up most clearly. Both cover praise and thanksgiving. Both typically point to God as the creator of the world, the one who makes the meal. It's common for mealtime and communion prayers to include some sense of the meal's purpose—to bless, to remember, to sustain, to connect.

A communion prayer will reflect the vital theology of those gathered, including but not limited to God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. The Directory for Worship outlines the prayer to a triune God, "giving thanks for God's creative power, providential care, and covenant faithfulness, along with particular blessings of the day; remembering God's acts of salvation through Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and promised return, as well as Jesus' institution of the Sacrament (if not otherwise spoken at the invitation to the table or the breaking of the bread); and calling on the Holy Spirit to draw worshipers into the presence of the risen Lord, nourish them in the body and blood of Christ, unite them with Christ in the communion of saints and the Church in every place, and send them in mission to the world."[8]

Only my grandfather, renowned for his extensive prayers at large family gatherings, might cover the ground at the dinner table we expect before a communion meal, but most mealtime prayers, however short, will similarly reflect what is most important to those gathered. A family that offers thanksgiving for farmers and day laborers who harvested produce may have a strong connection to the land or a desire to be conscious of food justice. A family that offers specific prayers of thanksgiving or supplication for those seated at the table may hold togetherness in high regard, may have specific needs they want to keep in mind, or might just want each person to feel recognized and blessed. Sung prayers common to summer camps and youth groups (the Superman Blessing, anyone?) reflect the joy and energy of the space.

The Meal

In the poem "God Made Spaghetti," the poet Cynthia Rylant imagines God preparing a meal alone—struggling to determine if the noodles are

cooked just right, filling up a big bowl, and sitting down to eat with just a copy of *The New Yorker* for company. The poem goes on:

> And He would actually
> have liked somebody
> to talk to
> (He didn't like eating alone),
> but most people
> think God
> lives on air
> (apparently they've not noticed
> all the *food* He's created),
> so nobody ever,
> invites him over
> unless it's Communion
> and that's always
> such a letdown.
> God's gotten used
> to one place at the table.
> He lights a candle anyway.[9]

I wonder how often we invite God to eat with us at our family tables, to linger beyond the Amen and join in the cacophony of conversation, the gentle back and forth of curiosity and care, even the companionable silence wrought by busy mouths and busy minds. How might our meal be different if we set a place for the Lord or lit a candle to remind us of Christ's presence or the Spirit's fire in our midst? In a sermon titled "Taste and See" preached at the 2022 Worship and Music Conference at Montreat, Rev. Aisha Brooks-Johnson reminds us that "the tables we set offer a tangible embodiment of love."[10] When we gather in a home, we hope our love for those around the table is visible and evident, even as the chatter often revolves around sharing the events of our days, chewing on new ideas, and digesting the news of the world. There are many ways to be more intentional about discussions of faith as part of these conversations. Some families read a Scripture or a storybook Bible around the table. Big Ideas in Youth Ministry has created a set of cards called Word Teasers, Faith Edition with a question, definition, and Scripture to help folks build a faith vocabulary. The Muddle Fork makes simple Pray and Play cards that are fun for younger children.[11] These and similar products can be a fun and lively way to keep God in the conversation.[12] But inviting God to the meal can be as simple as asking the question, "Where did you see God today?" Our conversations about faith can be woven into those about our daily life. This can be especially helpful for more concrete thinkers. We start with "What is something beautiful you saw today? When did you feel happy and loved today?" and then help them make the connection that God created the beauty in the world, the people, places, activities, and relationships that bring us joy.

As important as it is to invite God to our family table, it's equally important to welcome the whole family of God to the Lord's Table.

As important as it is to invite God to our family table, it's equally important to welcome the whole family of God to the Lord's Table. We do this verbally with our invitation and physically by making sure that everyone can access the elements safely (allergen free, non-alcoholic, within reach of all), but I fear some of our traditional liturgical practices put more focus on the personal spirituality of the meal to the detriment of the communal power of the shared experience. The last few years, most of us have been sitting in our pews and quietly peeling one cellophane for the "bread" and another for the juice, but even when we come forward to receive or pass the plates down the rows, it can feel more like a private practice done in public, similar to what we might experience in a silent prayer of confession or a time of meditation after the sermon. It's easy for communion to slant towards personal devotion. After all, eating is inherently an individual act in that we cannot taste the bread or drink the thimbleful of juice for another person. We receive the elements as individuals, but in that moment we are not alone. We are connected to Christ and to one another. In receiving and remembering Christ, we re-member or make whole the body of Christ that is the church.

The members of Community in Christ Presbyterian Church in Greensboro, North Carolina, practice communion in a way that reflects some of these sensitivities and focuses on the sacrament as a communal meal. The congregation comes up in small groups to form a circle around the table, passing the bread and cup from hand to hand, smiling at one another as they wait patiently to serve and receive. When everyone in the group has

received the elements, the officiant offers a brief prayer with the circle followed by a resounding "Amen." I'll admit, it is not quick. The worship service tends to take longer than an hour when it includes communion, but isn't this a powerful, communal moment worth the time? As we begin to reconnect and reimagine worship in a COVID-endemic world, perhaps communion should hold more space in our worship life. It's difficult and not always wise to change the sacramental rhythms of a community, but we can investigate why they are powerful in a particular congregation. It might be that receiving communion in small groups limits our exposure, answering two concerns of the current season at once. Even if this particular practice would not be a helpful change in your context, there are other ways for our actions at table to focus us toward the community. Some congregations make an effort to receive the elements all together, synchronously, to symbolize their unity with one another and the larger church, for example.

The Cleaning Up

"Can I be excused?" (children, seeking to move on to the next activity).

"Yes, but be sure to take your plate," (adults seeking to instill a sense of common purpose in the household—and also desperately needing a break).

A family table does not clean itself. There are no bus-persons waiting in the wings to whisk the plates to the dishwashing crew. Whether empty plates, partially-completed home improvement projects, or laptop computers clutter the table, it's got to be cleared to make way for its next use—cleared *by* the family *for* the family. The same is true in the sanctuary. A large part of living in community is caring for the communal spaces. It's not just about spreading the load. It's about spreading the love. When we work together, stacking chairs, recycling bulletins, or clearing away the bread and juice, we connect for a common purpose.

A few months ago our church shared homemade bread during communion for the first time in over two years. It was *gloriously delicious*, but it was also *messy*! After worship, I walked down a crumb-strewn aisle offering giant hunks of leftover bread to any who desired. Two of our youngest members, a four- and five-year-old brother and sister, joined the church mid-pandemic and have never known anything but tasteless wafers. They reached out their hands, eyes wide. "We can have *all* of this? WOW!" This was a win not only for delighted children but also for good theology and right practice, with elements being consumed or returned to the earth.[13] By the time I got to the narthex, two industrious folks had plugged in the vacuums and were making their way to the sanctuary to clean up what was left of our meal. Going from a vacuum bin to a trash can is not quite the holy end we hoped for those morsels, but the way they were gathered—with joy and care for our common life—was holy.

In our Reformed tradition, the Word may be the center of our worship, but the meal is its heart. The Directory for Worship in the PC(USA) ***Book of Order*** says it this way, "The Lord's Supper enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's sustaining grace offered to all people. The Lord's Supper is at once God's gift of grace, God's means of grace, and God's call to respond to that grace."

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In their country hit "Crowded Table," The Highwomen offer a cozy vision of the kin'dom of heaven when they describe the kind of house they want to inhabit. They sing, "I want a house with a crowded table and a place by the fire for everyone." The song gives attention to the ethics of interior space, but it does not neglect the calling beyond this space, either, as they croon, "Let us take on the world while we're young and able and bring us back together when the day is done."[15] There is a reason Jesus spent so much of his ministry gathering people around a table to share the same expanse of

level space, to speak and listen, to hold with tender courage what makes us broken, and to seek a wholeness beyond what we can imagine. We bless; we break; we take; we eat; we love. "Everyone's a little broken and everyone belongs."

Notes

1. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1.
2. Mark 12:29–31; Matthew 22:34–40; Luke 10:26–28.
3. Kendall Vanderslice, *We Will Feast: Rethinking Dinner, Worship, and the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2019), 168.
4. "The Institution of the Eucharist," *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).
5. Throughout this essay, the word *family* is used to describe those with close personal relationships and often, those who share a household. It is not limited to genetic or legal relationships.
6. Vanderslice, *We Will Feast*, 20.
7. "The Meaning of the Eucharist: D. The Eucharist as Communion of the Faithful," *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, paragraph 20.
8. "Great Thanksgiving," Directory for Worship, *Book of Order* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2019), W-3.0412.
9. Cynthia Rylant, "God Made Spaghetti," *God Went to Beauty School* (New York: HarperTempest, 2003).
10. Aisha Brooks-Johnson, "Taste and See" (sermon, 2022 Worship and Music Conference, Montreat, NC, June 28, 2022).
11. Pray and Play Cards, https://www.themuddyfork.org/product/pray-play-cards/6?cp=true&sa=true&sbp=false&q=false&fbclid=IwAR3p3ORlzJDTbLugmEkhHT2oGFvsoVxd3zaW4mfajWAi6r8mrNaIXhx0KrQ/.
12. Word Teasers, Faith Edition, http://www.bigideasym.com/store/p1/CLICK_HERE_TO_Purchase.html?fbclid=IwAR0qQ1rLZ7vycD7ZjnZnaKvpe-rSoF2-VHBLRkTLpZVUQ1rsJEKNctM3f1A/.
13. "Communion," Directory for Worship, W-3.0414.
14. "Theology of the Lord's Supper," Directory for Worship, W-3.0409/.
15. Highwomen, "Crowded Table," Genius, 2022, https://genius.com/The-highwomen-crowded-table-lyrics/.

Man, Alone
ink on paper
Jennifer Bunge

Singing around the Table

Phillip Morgan

> And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.
>
> —Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26 (KJB)

My earliest recollections of hearing that particular verse from Matthew are from the celebrations of the Lord's Supper on the first Sunday of each month as a child. After we had sung and prayed through the meal, the pastor would conclude with that verse. It resonated with me deeply for two reasons. First, the name of our church was Mt. Olivet Baptist Church. I always thought this verse must have been special to the faithful who had formed our congregation, and to me this meant the verse must be especially important. And second, this was the only time I heard about Jesus singing. I remember hearing a lot about Jesus preaching and praying, but this important act of praise and worship was missing. It turns out this is the only moment in the Gospels where singing is mentioned. Just before departing to do the will of the one who has sent him, Jesus remembers that it is essential to give thanks in song and offers a moment of beauty in the face of trial. And thus this moment helped shape my thoughts about the Lord's Supper: we too should remember to add a touch of beauty to the joyous feast.

One of the best ways we can make a more beautiful celebration is by remembering to add music. There is an old adage that says, "Where words end, music begins." The implication is that there are some ideas and experiences that are too much for words to convey alone. The language of music can allow our minds to explore those experiences in a more profound way. All our words around the celebration of communion can cause us to forget that the Lord's Supper cannot be expressed by words alone. The language of music invites us into deeper experiences of communion. There are perfectly valid and practical reasons for forgetting the role of music in our worship planning around the Lord's Supper. But unfortunately, in our planning I find that we too often forget about the beauty music brings.

David Gambrell tackles the subject more broadly in his book *Presbyterian Worship: Questions and Answers*. He poses a question from the viewpoint of those interested in what worship means in a Presbyterian sense, asking, "What's the least we have to do for a valid celebration of Communion?" His answer begins, "Instead of asking, 'What's the least we have to do for the sacrament to "count"?' why not ask, 'What's the most we might do to glorify God and nourish God's people?' Instead of settling for validity, why not strive for vibrancy, search for variety, and stretch for viability in Christian worship?"[1]

I would add that the concern for validity is also rooted in mere practicality. Since most churches don't celebrate the sacraments in weekly observances of Services for the Lord's Day, worship preparation can feel the weight of keeping the celebration succinct and uncomplicated. I think there are some creative and easy ways to make the experience we offer to our congregations gathered around the table both vibrant and accessible.

Rediscover the traditions and patterns of music during communion.

In the section on prayerful participation in the Directory for Worship, we are reminded that

> the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is a vital and ancient form of prayer.

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> Singing engages the whole person, and helps to unite the body of Christ in common worship. The congregation itself is the church's primary choir; the purpose of rehearsed choirs and other musicians is to lead and support the congregation in the singing of prayer. Special songs, anthems, and instrumental music may also serve to interpret the Word and enhance the congregation's prayer. Furthermore, many of the elements of the service of worship may be sung. Music in worship is always to be an offering to God, not merely an artistic source of entertainment.[2]

Here is a clear call to remember that congregational song is prayer, and, therefore, more of our liturgy can actually be sung. Given the vast amount of congregational song written to guide us through the Eucharist, I am surprised at how seldom we sing eucharistic acclamations. I think the overwhelming hesitation is, again, that we will overcomplicate the liturgy or wade into unfamiliar and lengthy prayer. But if we remember that we are all participating in prayer as we sing, it seems almost imperative to include moments of prayerful participation from the entire congregation. Without these responses it can seem that the celebration of Eucharist is entirely the work of ministers of Word and Sacrament. Communion is not a meal at a restaurant where we are seated and served, but rather a family dinner that we have all prepared and enjoy together. Congregational song during the celebration reminds us of this. One of the many gifts of *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* is the expanded collection of music for use during the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving.

In the midst of the continued realities of COVID-19 and the struggles of re-entry into communal worship spaces, the two biggest challenges I have often discussed in worship planning have been singing and distribution of communion. In an effort to be as safe as possible and in an abundance of caution, the celebration of communion has often been the biggest victim to our precautions. We stopped coming forward to receive communion, instead receiving pre-packaged elements. And in an effort to reduce singing, we removed the eucharistic acclamations. Though these precautions may have been very necessary, the celebration seemed dull in comparison to the taste of freshly baked bread accompanied by a community singing. These elements are essential to the beauty of the meal.

Again, I turn to Gambrell's answer. "Instead of settling for validity, why not strive for vibrancy, search for variety, and stretch for viability in Christian worship?"

Find the connection between spoken word and music.

Often we parcel out parts of the liturgy as either spoken or sung. I find there is deeper meaning and connection when we consider ways that these actions can be joined. This bit of creativity I first experienced in a worship service at the 2018 PAM Worship & Music Conference when a Great Prayer of Thanksgiving was mostly sung. The liturgy by Margaret LaMotte Torence also appeared in volume 55.3 of this journal, the issue titled "New Topics in Music." For the publication of that issue Margaret offered this introduction and liturgy:

> Several years ago, Eric Wall suggested using "O Lord, How Shall I Meet You" (now GTG 104) as the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving. It seemed to me that the hymn text was missing both the component of salvation history and an epiclesis, so I wrote a couple of extra verses and composed this table liturgy.

Invitation to the Table
(*spoken*)
The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving
The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Let us pray.

O Lord, how shall I meet you, how welcome you aright?
Your people long to greet you, my hope, my heart's delight!
O kindle, Lord most holy, a lamp within my breast,
to do in spirit lowly all that may please you best.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

You breathed us into being; you named us as your own;

and when we wandered from you,
you grieved our hearts of stone.
You sent to us your prophets, your
poets and your priests
who told us of your mercy, the
promised day of peace.

Therefore, we praise you, joining our voices with choirs of angels and with all the faithful of every time and place who forever sing to the glory of your name:

Love caused your incarnation;
love brought you down to me;
your thirst for my salvation procured
my liberty.
O love beyond all telling, that led you
to embrace
in love, all loves excelling, our lost
and fallen race.

Great is the mystery of faith:
Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ
will come again.

Pour out your breath upon us,
and on this table spread,
that we might come to meet you in
cup and broken bread.
And bind us to each other that we
might live to see
your grace in blind eyes opening and
captives breaking free.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and
forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors; and lead
us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. For thine is
the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever. Amen.

The Words of Institution

The Sharing of the Bread
and the Cup

Prayer after Communion
Gracious God,
truly you have met us here;
we have tasted your love,
and glimpsed your image reflected in
our neighbor's.
Continue to burn in our hearts, we pray,
until we recognize your coming
wherever bread and hearts are broken.
For we pray in the name of Jesus, whose
every breath was praise.

You come, O Lord, with gladness,
in mercy and goodwill,
to bring an end to sadness and bid
our fears be still.
In patient expectation we live for that
great day
when your renewed creation your
glory shall display.[3]

This experience led me to consider other ways music might enhance liturgy at the table and to lean into my skills as an improviser. As a musician I often hear underscoring of music when I'm listening to beautiful, spoken liturgy, especially if the liturgy references a text that is traditionally sung. Such was the case when I encountered a particular prayer from the newly revised *Book of Common Worship*. The prayer[4] begins with the lines "God of our weary years, God of our silent tears," the first lines from the hymn "Lift Every Voice and Sing." I am often asked about the appropriateness of using this particular hymn in worship in predominately white spaces, and my answer is often that we should remember that this is a hymn written for the use of praise to God and that if we truly believe that all people, regardless of race, are children of God, then we should strive to be singing more songs from other traditions, not less. Finding a way to incorporate "Lift Every Voice and Sing" into the Reformed tradition through liturgy honored that goal and led to a moment combining the strains of music with spoken word.

Two of the last three sections of the prayer end with the refrain "And let the church say, Amen." This refrain is common in the African American tradition, and its liturgical use is common. This refrain also brings to mind the traditional spiritual "Amen" (GTG 600). It seemed a natural fit to end the prayer by singing the familiar spiritual. Below is a general

outline for weaving musical ideas into the text. On the Sunday this prayer was used we sang "Amen." Except for the ending sung refrain, the music was improvised, and I simply allowed myself to pray at the piano alongside the celebrant. I didn't use any printed music to be timed with speech; rather, I gave myself guideposts for where I wanted to be in the tune by the designated section. The goal was that by using familiar tunes connected to the text, the congregation would, in their minds or even aloud, begin to sing the strains of these tunes and pray through the liturgy in song. It took just a bit of rehearsal and imagination, but the experience was definitely vibrant and varied.

Music begins with the opening tune of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (GTG 339) as the words of the prayer below are spoken.

> God of our weary years,
> God of our silent tears,
> you have brought us this far along the way.
> In times of bitterness
> you did not abandon us,
> but guided us into the path of love and light.
>
> In every age you sent prophets
> to make known your loving will
> for all humanity.
> The cry of the poor
> has become your own cry;
> our hunger and thirst for justice
> is your own desire.
>
> In the fullness of time,
> you sent your chosen servant
> to preach good news to the afflicted,
> to break bread with the outcast and despised,
> and to ransom those in bondage to prejudice
> and sin. (BCW, p. 127)

The second section of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" begins ("Sing a song full of the faith . . ."). The Words of Institution (BCW, 142–43) are included here, if not elsewhere.

The final section of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" is played ("Facing the rising sun . . .") and transitions to "Amen" (GTG 600).

> For as often as we eat of this bread
> and drink from this cup
> we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
> (BCW, 127)

The Memorial Acclamation is spoken (BCW, p. 143). The tune of "Amen" becomes very clear by the end of this section.

> Remembering, therefore, his death and
> resurrection,
> we await the day when Jesus shall return
> to free all the earth from the bonds of slavery
> and death.
> Come, Lord Jesus!
> And let the church say, Amen. **Amen.**
>
> Send your Holy Spirit, our advocate,
> to fill the hearts of all who share this bread
> and cup
> with courage and wisdom to pursue love
> and justice
> in all the world.
> Come, Spirit of freedom!
> And let the church say, Amen. **Amen.**
>
> Join our prayers and praise
> with your prophets and martyrs of every
> age that,
> rejoicing in the hope of the resurrection,
> we might live in the freedom and hope of
> your Son.
> Through him, with him, in him,
> in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
> all glory and honor is yours,
> almighty Father, now and forever. **Amen.**
> (BCW, p. 128)

All sing "Amen" (GTG 600),

Don't Forget the Hymn.

Two years ago, in the spirit of *Invitation to Christ*, Central Presbyterian Church in Louisville, where I serve as music director, decided to rethink our Maundy Thursday services. After talking to some great friends and colleagues, we borrowed a tradition from Central Presbyterian in Atlanta. We would have services in homes with our Lenten book study groups. Other groups that included those who had not participated in a book study were also formed so that everyone was involved.

In our initial planning, the service ended with the celebration of communion followed by a prayer and dismissal. The liturgy included several options for singing, but eventually we decided that singing was perhaps a little too much for the small groups. Some wouldn't have a piano to accompany a hymn, and singing a cappella might be too difficult or uncomfortable. Sharing the meal was the important part for us and what we wanted to be the central experience, so we did not initially include any options for singing.

Just before the bulletins went to print, however, I remembered those words of Scripture from my childhood, when Jesus sang. Even though music has always been a part of sacramental action for me, I had almost forgotten how essential it really is. I immediately said to my colleagues that we had to include a hymn. When they asked why, still thinking of the limitations some would face making that happen, I told them I could not forget that verse from Matthew. If that scene in Matthew was the pattern we were hoping to recreate, we had to follow Scripture all the way through the departure. The meal isn't finished until we've sung. Not until we have sung a hymn can we go out to our own Mount of Olives to pray, discern, and do the will of the one who has created us. The invitation we were extending to our congregation to rethink communion had to also include the invitation to sing. The limitations that we faced would enrich us in the end as we discovered the gift of music in a context we may not have been used to. Music is not reserved for the sanctuary. It is a part of our worship wherever we are.

On Maundy Thursday we arrived at the home of our hosts, some of us with covered dishes, excited to share a meal with friends. It made me wonder who had brought the bread and wine to the upper room the night Jesus broke and blessed it. The conversation was lively and robust. The group I was in had been having profound discussions each week as we dived into *No Innocent Bystanders*, a book about becoming fuller allies for racial justice by Shannon Craigo-Snell and Christopher Doucot. That night we told more stories about our lives surrounding those themes and even traded a recipe or two as we ate.

After a brief liturgy, with the manicotti and brownies still on the table, the freshly baked biscuits and potato bread we had eaten for dinner became the gifts of God given for the people of God. The blessed feast had a wholly new meaning to us. I went to the piano, situated in the dining room, and began to lead those gathered in "What Wondrous Love Is This." Then, mostly in silence, we packed up the leftovers, washed the dishes, and went home. But we did not leave the way we had come. It was an experience like none we'd had before.

The same sentiments were echoed for weeks by those who participated, and when people told me their stories of that night, I always asked if they had sung after the meal. The responses moved me. Everyone had found the singing to be an important part of the service. I heard about people leading a song unaccompanied from the dinner table and even learned that some hosts who had pianos that often sat unattended had found a reason to sit down and play again. The music had given the service deeper meaning, and the whole experience had enriched our sacramental lives.

I recently encountered the 1987 film *Babette's Feast* for the first time. The film, which won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film that year, tells the story of two sisters who lead the religious community started by their father. The community's focus on piety often leads them to shun what they perceive as extravagance. After their French housekeeper, Babette, receives a great monetary prize, she offers the gift of a great meal to help the sisters celebrate a major anniversary in the life of their community. All are incredibly hesitant around the decadent meal and fear what participating might say about their faith. They are afraid of the beauty and bounty. But to the delight of everyone, the meal is delicious. Babette has used the great gifts of her culinary training she thought she had left behind in France.

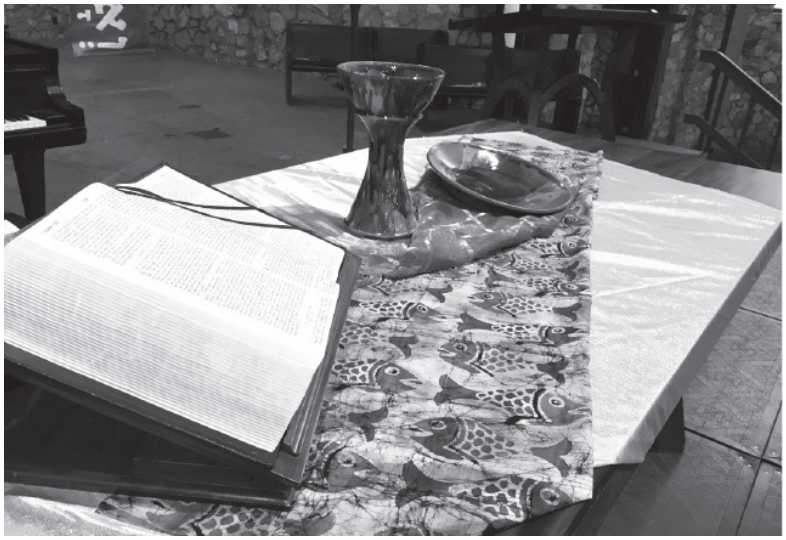
After the meal is finished, everyone enters into the night to find that they are surrounded by more beauty. It has begun to snow. Their response is not to hesitate but to join hands and sing in the town square. After they sing the hymn they depart, changed by an experience of beauty.

Notes

1. David Gambrell, *Presbyterian Worship: Questions and Answers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 40.
2. Directory for Worship, *Book of Order* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), W. 2.0202.
3. Margaret LaMotte Torrence, "Sung Table Liturgy Using 'O Lord, How Shall I Meet You,'" *Call to Worship*, vol. 55.3, p. 55.
4. Prayer 7, *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 127.

Art and the Lord's Supper: Choreography of Grace and Table

Ann Laird Jones



Anderson Auditorium table, Montreat Conference Center, 2022, photo by Ann Laird Jones

Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors, and . . ." With this little rhyme, many children learn with their hands that the church is all about those gathered. Step into any sanctuary, and there, right before your eyes, is the communion table, the heart of the church. This table is at once the focus of grace, the space for remembering, the place where the presence of Christ is realized, and the fulcrum of sacramental theology. It is where we gather. And it is where our hands break a loaf of bread in two, pour wine into an awaiting silent chalice, offer and receive the elements. It is where we come face-to-face with God and our hands touch.

The Lord's Supper is not merely a series of words and phrases with a few actions thrown in, but a choreography of gathered grace. Even in an empty sanctuary as we are drawn to this Lord's Table, we imagine the choreography, the action about to take place. Writer Adam Gopnik quotes Soviet dissident author Andrei Sinyavsky's description of a novel: "The most rudimentary thing about literature . . . is that *words are not deeds*."[1] *Words are not deeds*. The Lord's Supper is not just words, but action, deeds. Visual at every turn, it is about people and place, memory and hope. As you gaze upon this table, what do you see? What do you remember? What do you imagine? Art and the Lord's Supper: visible action embracing invisible grace upon grace, the presence of Christ, the action of God with us forever.

But back to that table. In 1962 Pope John XXIII convened Vatican II, a liturgical "reformation" designed not only to modernize the Catholic church but also to study the rituals and liturgical practice of worship. The resulting liturgical revival changed the way the church worshiped, including how the church viewed the eucharistic meal. The communion table was moved into the middle of the people, away from the back wall, out of obscurity. The congregation and the clergy were now face-to-face.

Rev. Dr. Ann Laird Jones is a Presbyterian minister (PCUSA), currently serving in her twenty-ninth year as the arts ministry director at Montreat Conference Center as she continues the conversation between art and theology.

First Presbyterian Church in Asheville, North Carolina, a Gothic Revival style church built in 1884, made the decision to remodel their sanctuary in 2013. They opened up the entire chancel, enlarging it and bringing wood from the back portions of the chancel area to construct liturgical furniture. The large, new, round communion table now occupies center stage in the chancel. Here is a table that dominates not only the chancel area but the entire sanctuary: a table with no beginning or end, to which all are welcomed. Even the lighting above the table echoes the circular design. The bold metal circular light installation above echoes the form of the table below, embracing the space with light cast from twelve lanterns. The vision of the table extends and emulates font and pulpit, as the action moves outward.

Liturgical furniture by Erich Thompson, First Presbyterian Church, Asheville, NC. Photo by Cathie Dodson

How are the actions of communion, the sharing of grace in the Eucharist, depicted in art? What are the liturgical movements in these artistic renderings of the Last Supper? Who is moving, and where is the agency? Artists have been imaging the scene in the upper room for the last two thousand years, each asking these questions for themselves. Some of these include Fra Angelico, Leonardo da Vinci, Hannah Garrity, Catherine Kapikian, Sadao Watanabe, and Corita Kent.

The regrettable iconoclasm of the Reformation led to the destruction of countless altarpieces and visual depictions of the life of Jesus. Altarpieces, stained-glass windows, paintings, sculptures, and visual depictions of the life of Jesus were systematically destroyed and removed from sanctuaries over concerns about idolatry. However, much art about the Last Supper survived destruction. Surviving paintings and carved sculptures support the theory that even in the midst of iconoclasm, there was a curiosity about the role and presence of Christ at table. Images of the Last Supper show a clear intimacy between Jesus and the people who follow him and reveal the human need to somehow imagine God's presence visually. Even as the Reformation reimagined visual space in Protestant churches, the table remained a central visual element within that space. There is scholarly evidence that visual depictions of the Last Supper continued to be made on altarpieces and in paintings. Perhaps *because of* the sparse and fearful visual imagination in this post-Reformation time, the church realized anew that theological imagination of sacramental presence *must* include visual language.

Depictions of the Last Supper in paintings and carved sculptures helped explain the eucharistic meal, particularly the role and presence of Christ at table with his disciples. Throughout his ministry Jesus is frequently observed at table, over meals, often in houses with friends, outcasts, tax collectors, and those no one would ordinarily invite to a banquet feast. How many parables point to guests who don't show up, leaving room for those not usually invited? No wonder the table must occupy front and center space in our churches and in our theology.

Following are two classic understandings of this gathering at table with Jesus, one a fresco by Fra Angelico, *Communion of the Apostles*, and the other a painting by Juan de Juanes, *Last Supper*. In both paintings, categorized as "communion of the disciples" by art historians, Jesus is both the host of the meal and the one offering the host to eager disciples.

In Fra Angelico's fresco, the composition feels weighted on the left side, as if the disciples behind Jesus at table are leaning into him, compelling him forward. His bare feet are showing—still to be washed in the hour of his death? Four stools await four kneeling disciples—perhaps the Gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke, John? A woman kneels in the lower left-hand corner of the fresco: Mary? The composition finds balance in the well to the right: living water? Jesus holds what appears to be a chalice with a plate on top as he offers bread and

wine to each haloed disciple. Immediately outside the two arched windows are other buildings, each with similar open windows. The background is not a landscape stretching to infinity, but next-door neighbors. The scene takes place in real time, in a real house, with the real and present Jesus.

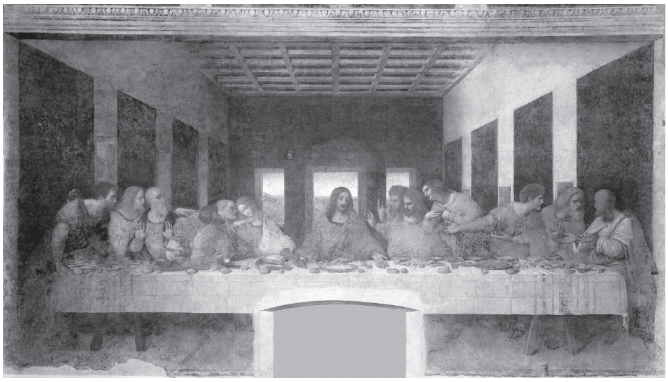
Fra Angelico, *Communion of the Apostles*, fresco, Museum de San Marco, 1440

In Juan de Juanes's painting *Last Supper*, Judas (in yellow) holds a bag of coins and sits on a stool inscribed with his name. He is the only disciple without a halo and looks as though he is about to leave the scene. Jesus' gaze seems to focus on him. Even the knives on the table point to him. The role of betrayal is woven into the theology of grace.

Juan de Juanes, *Last Supper*, Museo del Prada, 1562

The *Wroclaw Last Supper* is an anonymous fifteenth-century relief sculpture showing an intimate moment frozen for all time. This beautiful sculpture was not destroyed in the iconoclasm period but remains today as a moving example of visual liturgical choreography. We see a variety of postures among the disciples: prayer, beseeching, reaching, receiving, holding, hands opened, hands clasped, gathered around table together. Their hands point in many directions, leading the eye around the table and carrying liturgical meaning, helping viewers understand that there are many ways to pray and to receive communion. Jesus is larger in scale and seems more at ease than his disciples. The meal is relaxed even if the anxious disciples are not. John leans into Jesus' embrace. We see the (giant!) bare feet of a disciple at the bottom of the sculpture as he washes the feet of the one next to him, even as his feet have just been washed by another. Everyone is in motion. Nothing is static. The realized presence of Jesus in this meal is not something to wait for, but something that is happening right now.

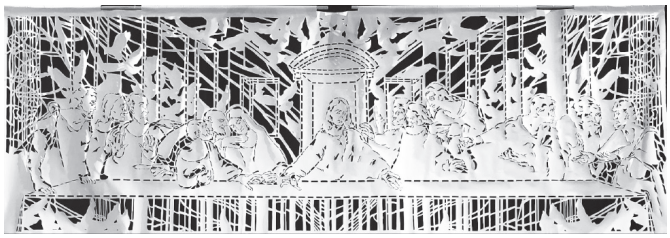
Wroclaw Last Supper, Anonymous, circa 1490, Poland. This file is made available under the Creative Commons (CCCO 1.0) Universal Public Domain.



Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper*, Museo del Cenacolo Vinciano, 1495–98

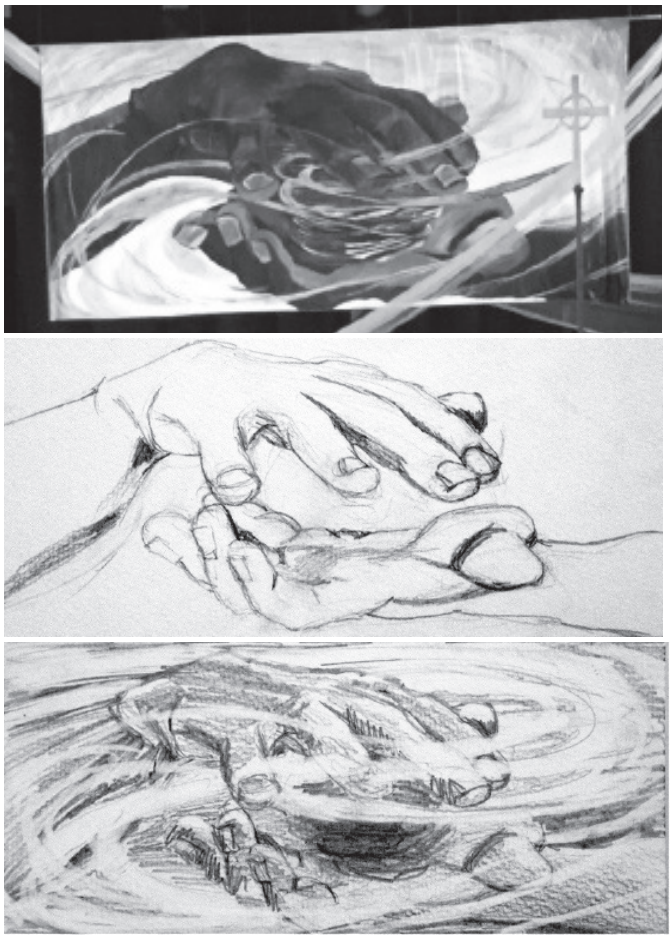
Leonardo da Vinci's mural of the Last Supper from the 1490s at the Santa Maria del Grazia monastery in Milan is widely considered to be the first work of the High Renaissance due to its harmonious integration of subject, setting, and theme. Rather than a round table, typically seen in earlier thirteenth-century Byzantine depictions of the Last Supper, this long, rectangular table depicts the symmetry and angular clarity of the later Renaissance. Even the cloth on the table is straight, unwrinkled, and completely symmetrical with the rest of the painting, despite the chaotic theological action already in motion. Leonardo da Vinci had no experience working on such a large expanse (this piece is twenty-nine feet long) nor in this medium (painting on plaster). With this work he experimented with tempura paints, applying them directly onto the dry, sealed plaster wall rather than following the normal fresco procedure, which involved mixing pigments with the wet plaster. Though the painting is damaged and the paint peeling, this depiction of the Last Supper has greatly influenced the Western cultural conception of the eucharistic meal to this day.

Of note in da Vinci's *Last Supper* is the use of linear perspective, a technique developed in the Italian Renaissance to create depth on a two-dimensional surface. The method includes using a horizon line and vanishing point to which all lines in the composition recede, creating depth by tricking the eye. In Leonardo's *Last Supper*, the vanishing point is actually right behind Jesus' right temple. Everything emanates from this point, placing the primary focus on Jesus and secondarily on the disciples' reaction to his announcement of his impending betrayal. Instantly all hands fly up: "Is it I, Lord? Is it I?" *Immediately* we are brought into a scene of penitential confession. The expression on each face is that of fear of possibly imminent loss. Da Vinci uses not only facial expression, but also the hands and postures of the disciples to express motion and drama, to project meaning into the eucharistic meal, and to create a scene where grace and love must prevail. Implicit in each reaction is the relationship between disciples and Jesus. The table is filled with food to the very edges. There is grace for all at this table.



Hannah Garrity, *Last Supper*, papercut banner installed in Anderson Auditorium, Montreat Conference Center, on the final summer Sunday worship service, 2012

Hannah Garrity, the liturgical artist for Montreat Conference Center, made a papercut banner in 2012 using da Vinci's *Last Supper* as an influence. In Hannah's interpretation, the disciples point to Jesus with a focus on their relationship with him instead of pointing to themselves with recriminating "Is it I?" They still do not understand Jesus' impending suffering, but they have begun to know and trust the love of the one they follow. The starkness of this moment shows that Jesus' identity is still hidden from the disciples, but their response to grace is clear. Even though they lack understanding, they come to this table with both memory and hope, gathered around their Lord. Their hands reach out to him, changing the direction of their attention away from themselves. Hannah made the decision to increase the movement in the composition by using a company of doves as a reference to the Holy Spirit's action in the scene. In this way the well-known work is transformed, changed from "color by number" or a copy of the da Vinci image to a dynamic, motion-filled Lord's Supper. The change in visual motion articulated a theological change from fear and guilt to celebration and joy. It is as though the viewer can feel a rush of wind, the Holy Spirit represented by flying doves. Bread is broken, the cup of salvation is shared, and eyes are opened to grace upon grace in God's real presence.



Hannah Garrity, *Last Supper: God's Hand Meets and Holds Ours*, installation photo and planning sketches, Montreat Conference Center, 2017

In her 2017 work titled *The Lord's Supper: God's Hand Meets Ours*, Garrity imagines how disciples' hands and the Lord's Supper are visually related to the experience of communion in Anderson Auditorium at Montreat Conference Center, a very large, cavernous space. Hannah's question was about how to keep a sense of intimacy in such an enormous auditorium. By using long pieces of sheer fabric in conjunction with a large painting, Hannah activates the space. Instead of focusing on a wide, horizontal table, emphasizing the wideness of the auditorium space, Garrity uses strips of fabric to draw the eye upward. "The painted hands are a representation of God and her people meeting, joining in the same space, in the sacrament of communion."[2]

What do we mean by the presence of God at the table? It's the action of God's hand on ours. God holds us in God's embrace.

Catherine Kapikian is founder and director emerita of Henry Luce III Center for the Arts and Religion at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., where she served as a professor and distinguished artist in residence from 2009 to 2020. Kapikian is a working artist, a theologian, a seminary graduate, and the author of *Art in Service of the Sacred*. She has made hundreds of large installations around the globe, many of which involve participants from the community in the making process. She calls this *participatory aesthetics* and says this about the process:

> In the shared experience of fabricating (painting, sewing, needle pointing, constructing, cutting, hammering, gluing, etc.), the community comprehends design choices, understands the necessity of reciprocity in seeking meaning from the work, and flourishes in a joyful process. Deep correspondences exist between participation in creative processing and spiritual formation.[3]

On January 29, 2019, Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA) invited Kapikian to write about her work called *The Last Supper*, which she created for, and with, the Wesley Theological Seminary community in Washington, D.C. Designed to be installed on the soffit in the refectory at Wesley, the installation reminds the community about the sacramental experience of gathering at table right in the midst of where the community gathers at table every day.[4]

Catherine Kapikian, *Last Supper*, 44' x 5' 5 3/4", painted wood relief, 2020

Using the Fibonacci mathematical principle of expansion without termination, Kapikian emphasizes and makes visible what might be invisible in Leonardo da Vinci's interpretation of the Last Supper, realizing in visual form the transformation that happens around table together. Above you will see the 7-foot mockup made for the initial presentation to the seminary community. She made more than

a thousand drawings of hands as she prepared the design, which spanned the entirety of the 44-foot length of the seminary's 44-foot by 5-foot-5 3/4-inch refectory soffit. Five vertical panels provide the installation vertical tension, giving the sense of touching the divine even as the meal intensifies. Kapikian describes this magnificent work this way:

> The division of light and dark shapes that define this recasted, traditional iconographic image emanate from a centralized point that sets in motion the Fibonacci Mathematical Principle. The power implicit in this prescience "Last Supper" interpretation overrides its symbolic suggestion of church-imposed barriers inferred in the vertical wood reliefs adding visual interest when walking along side or beneath it. The bracketing set of hands giving communion symbolize the sending forth task of Wesley students and draw attention to the genius of Leonardo da Vinci's gesturing hands.[5]

Kapikian's rendering of the hands of Jesus and his disciples was executed by the hands of a community that worked tirelessly for many months sawing, painting, and finally installing this work. One moment in time conveys the history of all creation, in present tense, with past and future tenses in every shadow.

Kapikian firmly believes that "to be created in the image of the Creator is to be creative." This meal, this Lord's Supper, is the embodiment of this creative movement: gesture and longing, the realized presence of God with us. The meal is the moment when our hands touch. Kapikian remarks on the role of hands in her piece when she writes,

> I regard da Vinci's gesturing of the disciples' hands as brilliant, so I decided to pick up on this motif in my rendering. I emphasized the hands by de-noting them with different colors, and I bracketed the Last Supper image with a pair of hands lifting the cup and a pair of hands lifting the bread.[6]

The focus in Kapikian's *Last Supper* is the interaction between Jesus and his disciples around the table, exemplified through the gesturing, moving hands. These hands express all sorts of emotions, including fear, anxiety, anger, love, joy, and strength, not to mention the desire to make this moment last forever. For Kapikian, bringing the Eucharist into the context of the refectory was essential, drawing together another very beloved community gathered for a different kind of daily bread. Her re-imagined *Last Supper* is a visual reminder to the Wesley Seminary community that when they gather around table together, Christ is always present. Christ reaches out his hands to us in complete love. Christ's hands touch ours as we share the cup of grace and break bread together. Catherine Kapikian's influence throughout the church is profound. She brings the invisible moment of Christ's transformative presence into gigantic, beautiful, visible form, and invites us to that table.

The *Last Supper* installation was built by the Wesley community over a period of many months, completed a week before COVID-19 lockdowns closed the campus. The installation has yet to be dedicated.

Sadao Watanabe, *Last Supper*, print, 1973, author's collection

Twentieth-century artist Sadao Watanabe was born in 1913 and was integral to the spread of the *mingei* folk arts and crafts movement. He is considered to be Japan's foremost Christian artist of the twentieth century. Sandra Bowden, coordinator of exhibitions for the Christians in the Visual Arts organization, is drawn to Watanabe's "unique Japanese perspective on the great biblical narratives."[7] Watanabe uses a process called Katazome, a traditional Japanese stencil art form for dying kimonos that uses stencils, paint, and resist-paste to make an image. In *Beauty Given by Grace: The Biblical Prints of Sadao Watanabe*, Sandra Bowden writes that the Katazome process is an "intricately choreographed folk art form, requiring loving attention to detail and to the vagaries of natural materials."[8] Watanabe was influenced by the strong outlined forms of Georges Rouault's work.

Last Supper is a hand-colored *kappazuri* stencil print on *washi* handmade paper. Watanabe's process is part of the power of the work. Bowden describes his materials:

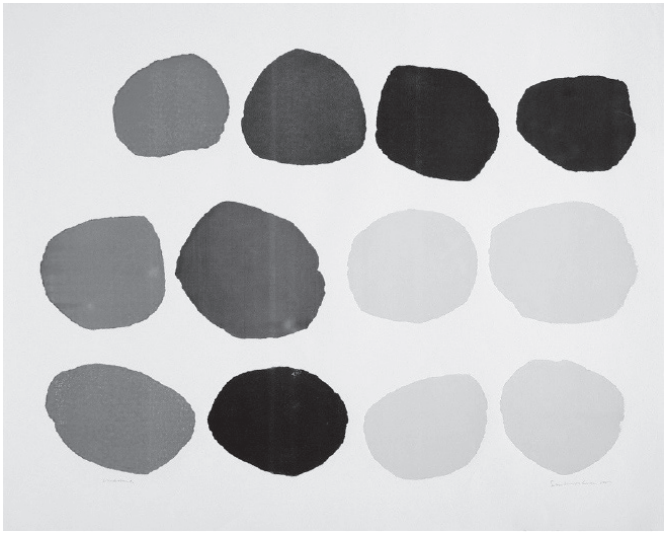
> Watanabe only used natural materials: the stencils and print paper were all made from the fibrous bark of *kozo* (the paper mulberry tree) by farmers in northern Japan. His *shibugami* (stencil paper) consisted of three-ply sheets of *kozo* paper, hardened with persimmon tannin, then dried and cured in a smokehouse, which gave it a brown coloring. . . . Black was made from pure carbon and white from crushed seashells. Red came from the pulverized bodies of the female cochineal, a cactus-feeding insect, and blue came from the leaves of the indigo plant.[9]

In *Last Supper*, the disciples sit side by side, indistinguishable from the table. The traditional paschal lamb is exchanged for a giant fish in the middle of the table. The disciples focus on Jesus, but also on one another. Jesus' hand is outstretched over the plate of broken bread in front of him. The scene is intimate, cozy, comfortable, and natural. It is exactly how I imagine a supper with people I love the best. Bowden comments on Watanabe's ability to capture emotion:

> One striking feature of Watanabe's biblical characters is their impassive, tight-lipped faces. They inhabit a different spiritual space from the swooning, open-mouthed saints who roll their eyes heavenward in grief or ecstasy in much Western religious art since the baroque period. The notion that expressed emotion reflects deep devotion is foreign to Japan, where social convention discourages the public display of feelings. Watanabe's figures resemble actors in the Noh theater, who perform behind masks and communicate emotion through body language. Look away from the faces in Watanabe prints and focus on the gesticulating, oversized hands, and razor-sharp fingers. Hands with palms outward command attention and offer blessings; hands with palms inward signal fear, wonder and joy.[10]

For Watanabe the practice of making art was a form of worship: "As I grow older, my work becomes less of myself and more of my Lord."[11] His depiction of the Eucharist includes us all at this deeply spiritual level of being one with God at this table of grace. No one disciple is lifted up or left out, not even the one betraying Jesus. All are welcome in this place. All are home at this table.

Corita Kent imagined the table in new forms and new ways, with new images to tell the story. Both an artist and a nun, Sister Corita Kent visually interpreted the wonder of the Lord's Supper in terms of twelve slices of bread in a print called *Wonder Bread*.



Sister Corita Kent, *Wonderbread*, screen print, 1962

Writer Michael Wright speaks of Corita Kent's inspiration:

> In 1962, Sister Mary Corita walked into a West Hollywood gallery to look at paintings of Campbell's soup cans. . . . Andy Warhol was democratizing art in new ways, and it sparked an epiphany for this artist-nun. "Always be ready to see what you haven't seen before," she said. It's how we "make contact with what is really there, uncluttered by old thoughts and prejudices."[12]

Wright continues:

> It reminded her of the Eucharist, and copying it twelve times evoked the liturgical year. It's a playful meditation on sacred time, wonder, and communion—a different kind of bread inspiring our imaginations year after year.[13]

Corita Kent took what she saw on the table and imagined a connection between the world which the table beckons and the moment of eucharistic transformation. She was fascinated, for instance, with the word *wonder* in connection with bread and saw it as a bridge to understanding the presence of Christ at the Lord's Table. Michael Wright remarks on the role of religion in Kent's work:

> These prints don't depict a Christian scene, but they're the end result of a distinctly Christian *creative process* and a *reforming imagination*. And we can join in—as artists, as appreciators, and as people.[14]

Ray Smith, director of the Corita Art Center in Los Angeles, reflects on the reasons for contemporary interest in Kent's work when he writes:

> She took words and graphics meant to be read and understood instantly and tricked you into looking at them longer. She did this by both re-contextualizing common messages and manipulating familiar images.[15]

Corita Kent's focus was always on the people in her presence, those who are around the table, as they engage with what is on the table.

As a potter, I have long been intrigued with sacramental theology and the role the physical objects play in the celebration of communion. For years I focused primarily on the liturgical vessels themselves, caught up in a love affair with the chalice form, studying endlessly about the historic development of this particular form. In liturgical rites in the earliest days of the church the chalice was actually a very large bowl, capable of holding wine and water enough for all who gathered to share. Over time the cup was gradually withdrawn from the laity and reserved for clergy. The choir screen separating priest from congregation went up; the cup got smaller, the stem taller, elevating the cup. In present times, particularly in the aftermath of COVID separation, gathering at the Lord's Table together has taken on new meaning. We are hungry to be together again. We thirst for God's presence in scary times. The performative action at table is the one place where we see the actual bread broken, wine poured, and the cup of salvation offered to us, as a community. The table itself and those gathered around it become the image of the Lord's Supper.

May we never again walk into a sanctuary and see emptiness, but rather imagine only fullness at the table of grace. May we see a world of God's beloved people crowded around this table, jostling next to the saints who have gone before us, crowding in to touch the hands of Jesus as he offers the bread of life and the cup of salvation. May we know the radical freedom afforded by visualizing and imagining God's presence with us at table, and may we forever go forth from that table imbued with grace upon grace, filled with joy and delight, knowing God's hand and ours have touched.

Then Jesus took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:17–20).

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul
drew back.
Guiltie of dust and sinne.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me
grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack'd anything.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkinde, ungrateful? Ah, my deare,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let
my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, sayes Love, who bore
the blame?
My deare, then I will serve.
You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste
my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

~ George Herbert[16]

Notes

1. Adam Gopnik, "Salman Rushdie and the Power of Words," *New Yorker Magazine*, Daily Comment (August 13, 2022), https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/salman-rushdie-and-the-power-of-words/, emphasis added. "Literature exists in the realm of the hypothetical, the suppositional, the improbable, the imaginary. We relish books for their exploration of the implausible which sometimes defines a new possible for the rest of us."
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4. Catherine Kapikian, "On Installing The Last Supper," the website of CIVA, January 29, 2019, https://civa.org/civablog/on-installing-the-last-supper/.
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8. Bowden, *Beauty Given by Grace*, 84.
9. Bowden, *Beauty Given by Grace*, 84–88.
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11. Anne H. H. Pyle, "A Christian Faith in the Tradition of Japanese Folk Art," *Printing the Word: The Art of Sadao Watanabe* (New York: American Bible Society, 2000), 26.
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13. Wright, "The Listening Heart."
14. Wright, "The Listening Heart," emphasis in the original.
15. Ray Smith, "An Artist Who Sees Holiness in Wonder Bread," blogpost, August 27, 2015, Getty.edu.news, commenting on the 2015 Corita Kent retrospective show at the Pasadena Museum of California Art, *Someday Is Now: The Art of Corita Kent*.
16. George Herbert, "Love Bade Me Welcome."

Purify My Heart
acrylic and ink on wood
Jennifer Bunge

On Communion

Hannah Soldner

Author's note: This poetic proclamation is adapted from a talk that was given as part of a meeting of Not So Churchy, a worshiping community in New York City, in November of 2021. Not So Churchy is a place of healing and hope, where queerness and curiosity expand the spiritual journey beyond boxes and binaries. We meet once a month over Zoom; however, we sometimes have in-person events, including "pods" of people who will gather in a household to be on Zoom together. This poem was delivered in the hybrid online/in-person space of one such pod.

Okay, so before we start, a fun fact for those of you who like sacraments and institutional memory:

This month marks the sixth anniversary of my baptism.

And at the Not So Churchy service six years ago, I was in front of everyone giving a talk about that sacrament.

It makes sense that I'd be here today,
six years later,

to talk about communion.

I love the way we do communion at Not So Churchy.

I love the homemade banana bread that was a staple for years when we met in person.

I love that for the first years I was a part of this community, we made our own grape juice.

We did it ourselves, and it was powerful.

We had a term for this we came up with one year at a retreat,

for the fact that we made our own communion elements,
for the fact that at each service, we unpacked out of boxes and made our place.

We called it "tabernacling."

We build this place ourselves, and we build it new every time.

It was true, but it was also deeper than just a fact.

We are here and we commune in a space built for us.

Not a space we have to fit into,
Not a space we have to ask permission to be in,

but a space built *for* us.

And the next month it is built for us again.

Which is great, because it gives us a chance to try again, if it wasn't right

or if there wasn't enough space.

It is a process that reminds us to keep trying instead of settling into *comfortable*.

Hannah Soldner (she/her) is a Brooklyn-based writer, overthinker, and occasional artist. She attends three different churches, which is not actually as impressive as it sounds.

If there's a time when "unsettled" is the rule,

it's a pandemic.

Eighteen months into pandemic, I feel like it is
common for many of us,
this feeling:
. . . that we are not actually doing as well as we
are letting on . . .

Maybe *this* is the time to embrace what it means
to be trying something new every time.

I was talking to a friend the other day and we
agreed
that we are kinda just barely keeping it together.

We fear: what comes next?

Maybe what comes next is easier to hold knowing
that in our communion,

it doesn't matter if we fall apart—

we are going to build it new again

every time.

Communion over Zoom is nothing if not new
every time.

I can't tell you all the foods I have used for
communion these past eighteen months:

tea,
water,
a slice of mango,
cookies.

Sometimes the bread part is grapes and I am sure
the grape juice part will eventually be beer.

All of this becomes sacred in the moment.

Last month when we met I had COVID,

and the phrase from our communion liturgy
"Smell, taste as you create" lands differently
when you can't really smell, and everything you
taste tastes rotten.

I am still building meaning out of that.

I have a Bible study that I am part of,

a group of trans folx that meets once a month
and . . .

occasionally reads the Bible.

Recently, we have mostly just been . . .
hanging out,
because "communion," in the sense of gathering
and being together,
being *in* communion,
is the sacred we need right now.

In that group we have a communion ritual:

we all bring something that is sacred or
meaningful to us,

a food we love,
a drink we have precious memories of,
or maybe just something that's part of our
everyday life, our daily bread,
in the form of a breakfast sandwich from
the bodega

and we offer it as the elements of communion.

And together we share each of these things, and it
reminds us of two things:

One, that *we* deserve to be part of the sacred too,
and the things that are important to *us*, they are
sacred as well.
And two, that maybe we don't actually know
all the things that were at the table for the
Last Supper.

We know what a Passover meal looks like, of
course, but maybe one of the disciples brought
something a little different, a little queer, to the
table. And they decided, "Fuck it, let's include
that too!"

I think about this ritual,
about the random, or maybe not so random, things
I have had for communion during this time,
about tabernacling,

and there is a similar energy in all of them,

and it's super queer.

I think, as we meet on Zoom, we are still building
it new each time.
I think we are still showing up saying this thing,
right here, is sacred,
and I think we are still figuring out. And honestly,

I kinda hope we never stop doing these things.

I hope we never say, "Okay, *now* we have it all
figured out."

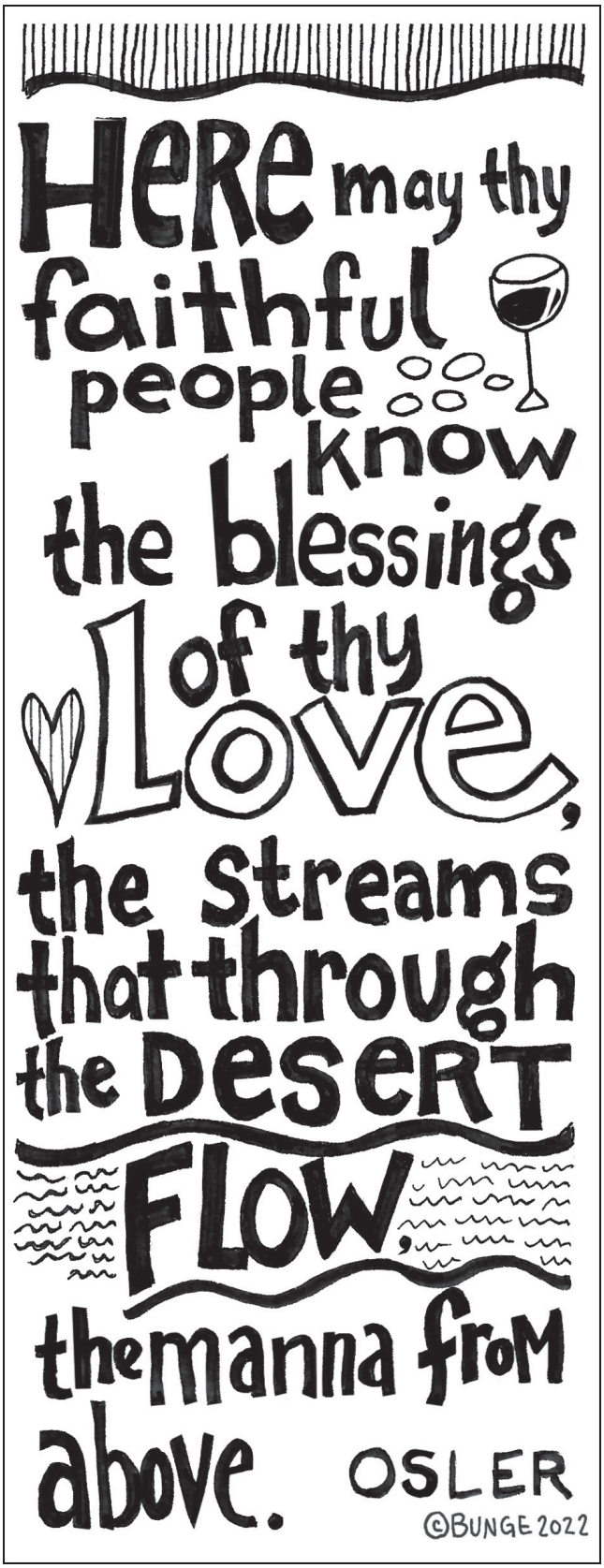
Because this here *is* the communion, us together.

The people who came tonight
brought the things with them this specific time.

And this is what we are using to make Church
today.
This is what we are claiming as holy.

The gifts of God.

For the people of God.



Manna from Above
ink on paper
Jennifer Bunge

Virtual Communion: Treading New Ground

Alex Lee-Cornell

In 2018, I was serving as the interim associate pastor for a medium-sized congregation in north Texas. The congregation was in a time of transition, and the head of staff and I began leading the session in discussions about how the congregation celebrated the Lord's Supper.

All the congregations I had previously been a part of served communion in one of two ways. "Communion by passing" involves trays of miniature cubes of bread and cups of wine or grape juice being passed among the worshipers, who serve one another while remaining seated. "Communion by intinction" requires communicants to exit their pews, form a line in the aisle, and approach the chancel one by one to be served by the clergy and elders, who offer a common loaf and common cup.

I value the practice of passing the elements along the pews because it emphasizes the priesthood of all believers, giving each worshiper the opportunity not only to be served but to serve someone else rather than restricting the privilege of serving for only the clergy and an elder or two. I value the practice of intinction because of the way it emphasizes the unity of the gathered body—members of the congregation share a common loaf and cup rather than each individual taking their own single and personal serving of the elements.

The congregation I served in north Texas, however, didn't subscribe fully to either method. Indeed, their communion practice combined what I once described as "the worst of both worlds." When they observed the Lord's Supper, worshipers would exit their pews and form a line to come forward to the servers, who stood in front of the chancel holding trays containing pre-sliced personal cubes of bread and pre-filled personal cups of juice or wine, thereby eliminating the symbolic reminders of both the priesthood of all believers and the unity of the body.

"Why would any congregation elect to administer communion in such an impersonal, theologically-impoverished manner!?" one may ask. As is the case with any community we may serve, the reason is highly contextual. Even back in 2018, public health was a concern for this congregation. Multiple members of the congregation were survivors of blood cancers or had immune systems that were otherwise compromised. During cold and flu season, they went so far as to require servers to use tongs when distributing the bread! Though it may have been easy for me to judge the theology these communion practices connoted, the community's pastoral concerns were at work in them. Their custom for celebrating the Lord's Supper meant to protect, include, and show hospitality toward the most vulnerable members, those who otherwise would not have felt safe to participate in the sacramental meal. This, too, is sacramental theology at work in this particular context, embodied in the materials and practice of communion.

Admittedly, in 2018 this rationale sounded far less poignant and persuasive to me than it does in 2022, having since been forced to become a public health policy expert as part of my pastoral vocation during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I still believe the theological concerns I had in 2018 have merit today. The Sacrament of Communion, by definition, is a messy, incarnational act. It inevitably involves close personal contact and the microbial cross-contamination of shared surfaces, air, and elements. Indeed, the decision to follow Jesus involves a degree of risk; any "health and wealth"

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gospel is antithetical to the cross of Christ. There is a theological balance to hold as we consider how our practices reflect what we believe and the Jesus we seek to follow.

In 2018, the session of my north Texas congregation, after months of conversation, study, and experimentation, finally did adopt a new method of serving communion: by intinction, with a single, common loaf of vegan, gluten-free bread and common cups containing either grape juice or wine. They decided to offer the option of single-serve miniature cups and bread cubes for those with concerns about shared elements. While I'm not sure John Calvin—much less our liturgics professors or immunologists—would have given full-throated approval, we were certainly doing the best we could.

Of course, by the end of March of 2020, doing the best we could took on an entirely new meaning. Looking back more than two and a half years later, I'm struck by the way that, when the pandemic began, we mostly acted as though it would be a ninety-day interruption with a definite end. For a couple of months, everyone would hunker down, shelter in place, and fast from our everyday routines. Then, one day soon, we would collectively reemerge to our former routines at the moment the Powers That Be declared the "all clear." It certainly didn't dawn on me that our improvised, trial-and-error adaptations to fulfill our professional, educational, social, and spiritual commitments in a virtual and socially-distanced world would create the new normal we would eventually live in. It is a *new normal* we devised one day at a time with limited knowledge in response to evolving rules and guidance. We "built the airplane while flying it," as the saying goes, constructing new customs and paradigms at lightning speed.

Before we pat ourselves on the back for our quick thinking, we also have to remember that we were not, for the most part, inventing a new world *ex nihilo*. As my experience in north Texas demonstrates, there was precedent for how to handle health concerns in the practice of communion. Many navigated similar concerns during the outbreak of the novel H1N1 flu virus of 2009. Many communities were taking many of the same measures prior to 2020 for a variety of reasons, and many had a set of best practices to modify in a new pandemic. In 2021, when COVID case numbers were still front-page news but it was safe to return to in-person worship, the chair of the worship committee of the congregation I was serving at the time came to me in a state of alarm about how to administer communion now that we were going "back in-person." Luckily, I already had a model to work with thanks to the congregation I served pre-pandemic in north Texas. Though it seemed sterile, impersonal, and theologically impoverished from one perspective, the conversations about communion customs I had there were perfectly applicable for our new reality.

The same principle may be applied to the question of what has come to be called "virtual communion." First, it's important to note that congregations have gathered exclusively online long before 2020. Second, we do well to remember that the PC(USA) *Book of Common Worship* (BCW) has for decades provided guidance for including members of the congregation unable to attend worship in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. We have long been serving communion to our home-bound members and to those who are hospitalized, for example. I believe this framework for offering home communion serves as the best available starting point for developing guidance for offering virtual communion in the pandemic.

The BCW is clear that the act of home communion should be conceived as a ***continuation*** of the larger congregation's worship service, an "extension of the table."

The BCW is clear that the act of home communion should be conceived as a *continuation* of the larger congregation's worship service, an "extension of the table." Thus the offering of home communion should happen on the same day as the larger congregation's worship service, or as soon as possible afterward. The elements should be taken from the same bread and wine/juice used earlier by the larger congregation. They should be offered by no fewer than two ruling and/or teaching elders, accompanied by the reading of Scripture, the Words of Institution, and a prayer of thanksgiving.

In the same way, virtual communion, when possible, should be an extension of an in-person communion service. The same Spirit that we call upon to overcome space and time to unite the

gathered congregation with the body of believers in heaven, throughout the ages, and across distance and culture can surely unite us with believers across the World Wide Web. The celebration of communion online should be simultaneous with the in-person service in the physical gathering space of the congregation, live, not prerecorded.

When possible, those participating in virtual communion should do so in the physical presence of other communicants. This may be achieved simply by having a family observe communion together in front of a television or computer screen "with" their congregation while they are away on vacation and unable to attend in-person worship. This may mean including a home healthcare worker who is not a member of the congregation but who wants to participate in communion with a homebound member. It may mean that a couple of members or elders worship at the home of a communicant who is unable to attend worship while practicing safety precautions.

When possible, those who participate in virtual communion should receive communion elements prepared by a team from the congregation rather than being instructed to furnish their own elements or just "use whatever is at hand."

When possible, those who participate in virtual communion should receive communion elements prepared by a team from the congregation rather than being instructed to furnish their own elements or just "use whatever is at hand." Preparing home/virtual communion "kits" is a wonderful opportunity for ministry and service for all ages. The work of preparing bread and wine or juice for communion and delivering these elements (perhaps enclosed with a personal note, written prayer, or some other gift or symbol of the congregation's mission and ministry) represents a beautiful example of liturgy: the work of the people.

What is clear both in the guidance for home communion offered in the BCW (as well as to anyone who has personally participated in a service of home communion) is that one of the primary purposes of this ritual act is pastoral care. It is described within the context of "Ministry to the Sick." Accordingly, depending on the pastoral needs and circumstances of the context, parts of the guidance for the service may be changed or omitted. I would guess that most services of home communion do not utilize the same physical elements used in the greater congregation's worship service and do not occur on the same day or even in the same week. I admit that I have used cranberry-apple juice for home communion when grape juice was not available and said the Words of Institution over a sesame seed bagel when that was what the accompanying elder provided. And for those of us who have attempted to celebrate the Lord's Supper virtually during the pandemic, these scenarios likely sound familiar.

Again, we all are doing the best we can. We do the best we can with bagels and apple juice, with proper prefaces omitted, with the Words of Institution garbled, with lines of the Lord's Prayer forgotten, with latent prayer petitions hastily offered following the "Amen," while home healthcare workers take phone calls and the dining hall television blares in the background—and all other manner of indecency and disorder. Thank goodness that, not by our effort but by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ is present and encountered, the Word is proclaimed and sealed, faith is strengthened, grace is mediated, and God is glorified.

The Work of Our Hands: “Draw Us in the Spirit’s Tether”

S. Beth Taylor

Born and baptized into the First Presbyterian Church (USA) of Smithfield, North Carolina, S. Beth Taylor has served as an artist and musician in churches in Georgia, Illinois, North Carolina, and New York.

While What draws someone, in the words of a hymn, into "the Spirit's tether"? Is it a prayer, a service of worship, or communion? Are we drawn in by a word of encouragement, a look of acceptance and understanding, a glimpse of something beautiful, or a kindness quietly delivered at the perfect moment of need? Does what we hear, who we remember, what we see, or what we do together draw us in?

Visual art—created, shared, or appreciated—can draw us unexpectedly into the Spirit's tether. As God's loving and creating Spirit shows God's goodness to all through creation, so elements of that creation can become a starting point for artistic endeavors that God can use to draw in people of all ages and abilities.

> For when humbly in your name two or three are met together,
> you are in the midst of them. Alleluia! Alleluia![1]

Without words, musicians know well that singing or playing music together includes an unspoken dimension of connection and understanding. Similarly, the simplest art projects appreciated or created, alone or together, can open a window through which the God of creation works with us and among us while connecting us to each other and to God's creating Spirit and presence. In a time when many

struggle with isolation, art and music open a space for connection to God and others within the faith community.

Through God's grace, we encounter what we could not have planned. Small gifts of welcome and encouragement come from those around us, whether they know the encouragement they share or not.

Some years ago, I received the gift of an introduction to Taizé worship and Brother Roger's writings. Founded in Taizé, France, in 1940 by Brother Roger Schultz amid a period of conflict and war, the ecumenical Taizé community for eighty-two years has set about the work of peace, justice, and reconciliation through music, worship, reflection, and prayer. While the Taizé worship and community are meaningful to people of all ages, the community is purposely focused on young people. The community welcomes pilgrims from around the world, while Taizé worship services with simple, repetitive, chant-like songs and prayers have spread far beyond France. I remain enormously grateful for the experience of singing and participating in these services.

Prayers and writings from the Taizé community caught my heart and mind.

> Whether you wake or sleep, night and day, the seed springs up, you know not how.[2]

> And so we would like to say to God: "God, you love us: turn us into people who are humble; give us great simplicity in our prayer, in human relationships, in welcoming others . . ."[3]

In the same month that I was introduced to Taizé songs and became interested in Taizé prayers, a few moments of encouragement from others brought me to free form quilting and fabric art. I have always loved fabric and wanted to quilt and sew, but working with patterns seemed impossible. With one understanding comment, an experienced quilter offered a new perspective when she asked me, "Have you ever thought about sewing your own ideas without a pattern?" I began using both fabric and printed or handwritten prayers in my quilts without using patterns. I showed my first Taizé free form quilting prayer quilt to the person who had introduced me to Taizé, whose response was, "Make more of these," and "Can you make them bigger?" I did, and have been sewing ever since.

After a lifetime of singing, a thirty-year career in higher education and human services, and a long-time interest in language and fabric, I fell in love with combining Scripture and prayers with free form quilting. As a person of faith who has long been affected by the visual, I found creating fabric pieces for worship spaces was a way of deepening and sharing my faith.

Like God's grace and faith's surprises, I approach projects with an openness to the Spirit and a prayerful hope that my work might in a small way reflect God's creativity in the world around me. The beauty of the natural world as a gift from God was often mentioned to me as a child by forebearers who hailed from the Blue Ridge Mountains. When I grew up, my father would call me many mornings and say, "Beth, God has given us a beautiful day today." I have never grown tired of looking closely at the sky and the mountains and noticing that these unfathomably beautiful gifts from God look different each day, connect us to each other, near and far, and offer a new view of the reality of God's care in creation. I quilt what I see in

The quilt's colors and design support and lift up words that encourage, comfort, and teach. Words catch the viewer's attention and slow them down as they read. I hope my work reminds us of our connections to God and each other and to all that is good in a complicated world. By using written lyrics and Scripture as part of my quilts, I place music, visual art, and quilting into conversation. Making free form quilts and making music have much in common in that both require working within inherent limits. The notes on a page of music, the sounds of the instruments, the qualities of the fabric and the thread are realities that one works within to make a work of art the best quality artistic expression it can be.

nature, especially landscapes, sometimes as a background for hymns, Scripture, and prayers and other times simply as a wordless expression of God's creation.

> This is my Father's world,
> and to my listening ears
> all nature sings, and round me rings
> the music of the spheres.
> This is my Father's world;
> I rest me in the thought
> of rocks and trees, of skies and seas,
> his hand the wonders wrought.[4]

My paraments/quilts are often complex in composition to reflect my sense that as a person enters a church, they bring their own history, joy and grief, memories, and unique, complex, and messy life story.

Each of my pieces begins with a collection of cotton and silk fabric, including the smallest of scraps. My paraments/quilts are often complex in composition to reflect my sense that as a person enters a church, they bring their own history, joy and grief, memories, and unique, complex, and messy life story. Alongside the complex histories we carry into church, we come with different anticipations and ways of looking and connecting. People of faith find meaning in various details of the experience of attending worship: the gathering people, the quieting sanctuary, the language of liturgy, the singing, the stories, the architecture, and even the creaking of the pews and the texture of the hymnal pages. Whether my work is made of a few elements or hundreds, I hope that viewers will be affected by the visual whole or find meaning in a small detail that draws their attention.

In a recent project, First Presbyterian Church of Durham, North Carolina, invited me to create paraments for Ordinary Time and Easter. Ahead of time, I invited members to contribute fabric or small items that they considered tangible symbols of their own life, faith, and connection to the church community. This very participatory church staffed a table on several Sundays to receive these materials from church members. As they did, the members collecting these small personal tokens heard their accompanying stories. From a ring and a scrap of a minister's robe to a scarf and a rock—and everything in between—members shared the objects and fabric of their lives that would become part of the paraments in their sanctuary.

While I did not know each story, I did know that each token from church members meant something to the person who shared it. As each piece found its place in the paraments, I felt pulled into a rich history of tender, holy, and diverse connections to First Presbyterian Church of Durham from members who had been drawn into "the Spirit's tether" through this church for generations.

Drawn into God's creating and creative world, "we will all serve with faith anew."

Notes

1. Perry Dearmer, "Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether," *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 529.
2. Brother Roger, *The Rule of Taizè*, rev. ed. (London, UK: S.P.C.K. Publishing, 2012), 158.
3. Brother Roger, "A Future of Peace," letter to the young adult European meeting, Lisbon, Portugal, 2005.
4. Maltbie D. Babcock, "This Is My Father's World," *Glory to God*, 370.

Anamnesis, Prolepsis, and the Work of the Spirit

Brant Copeland

Participation precedes cognition.

Long before I encountered words like *anamnesis, epiclesis*, and *prolepsis*, I sat in the front pew of the Beacon Hill Presbyterian Church in San Antonio, Texas, my twelve-year-old self decked out in a white sport coat bought for the occasion, my hair well plastered with Brylcreem, and my eyes fixed on the pastor. It was Maundy Thursday, and I was being admitted to the Lord's Table.

Standing on the chancel steps in his Geneva gown, the pastor cast a benevolent gaze upon me and the other members of the communicants' class. With warm solemnity he put to us the questions set forth in the *Book of Church Order* of the Presbyterian Church in the United States:

> Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure, and without hope save in his sovereign mercy?
>
> Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and depend on him alone for salvation as he is offered in the Gospel?
>
> Do you resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?[1]

We all knew the *right answers*. We had gone over them in the communicants' class as we were memorizing the *right answers* to several other questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

> What is God?
> What is sin?
> And the question that preceded all the others: What is the chief end of man?
> After we had answered all the questions satisfactorily, the pastor announced,
>
> Inasmuch as you have made profession of your faith and obedience, have received Christian Baptism, and have by the Church Session been welcomed to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and admitted to the confirmed membership in this congregation, I declare you entitled to the privileges of confirmed membership in this particular church and to the full fellowship of the Church Universal.[2]

Moving down the line of young people, the pastor offered to each "the right hand of fellowship." When he came to me, he started to reach out his right hand, but instead opened wide both arms. I fell into his embrace, the sleeves of his gown brushing against my cheeks. When we released one other, we were both in tears.

The pastor was also my father.

Brant S. Copeland, now retired, served as pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Tallahasse, Florida, for thirty-five years.

I thought in that moment, "I am now a *communicant member* of the church." I had moved from the kids' table, which had no bread and wine, to the Lord's Table, where beneath a white linen cloth lay what my father had called "the elements." (Not so much bread as uniform rectangles of hardened flour and not so much wine as Welch's grape juice decanted into miniscule shot glasses, but even a twelve-year-old can make the symbolic transfer.)

I have the well-thumbed copy of the 1946 *Book of Common Worship* my father used that night. His notes and underlines clearly show that he followed the first "Order for the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion" with a few excisions. (He regarded the Sursum Corda and Sanctus as "too Catholic.") First Corinthians 11:23–26 served as the scriptural warrant for the Supper. The cadences of King James English, strange to my young ears and delivered with a Texas twang, nevertheless evoked a connection to ages past:

> The Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me.
>
> After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying,
> This cup is the New Covenant in My blood: this do ye, as often as ye drink it,
> in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup,
> ye do show the Lord's death until He come.[3]

What followed was not a "joyful feast of the people of God" but a solemn memorial for the crucified Jesus. The "liturgy" (a word that I would not encounter for many years) called to mind the Last Supper, not the post-resurrection meals at Emmaus (Luke 24) and on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (John 21), or indeed, the many other occasions of table fellowship mentioned in the Gospels.

As the elders passed the elements to worshipers seated in their pews, the organist played "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" and "Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees." The cross on Calvary's hill cast its shadow over words, actions, music—*everything*.

That communion service had a profound impact on me, even though when I preside at the Table today, my intention is to enact a liturgy that is a fuller expression of the Reformed and ecumenical understanding of the Eucharist. While I am deeply grateful for the way the church of my childhood *used to do it*, I am convinced that the Holy Spirit is nudging Presbyterians toward "a still more excellent way." Despite the progress we have made, as evidenced by more frequent celebration and the use of the 1993 and 2018 editions of the *Book of Common Worship*, I fear that in many congregations, "best practices" of eucharistic celebration are wanting.

After college and a year of teaching in a high school, I enrolled as a divinity student at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. Through worship in the university chapel every Lord's Day and participation in other eucharistic meals led by chaplains of the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church, I encountered an approach to the Lord's Supper that was also deeply moving, but very different from the solemn commemorations of my childhood.

In those celebrations the familiar Words of Institution appeared not as a warrant, but *anamnesis*—of active remembrance—and of *prolepsis*—future longing. Instead of sitting passively in a pew, I joined my neighbors in the chancel, where we formed a semicircle in front of the Holy Table. The bread the minister broke was recognizably *bread*, rich in texture and smelling fresh from the oven. The wine was tawny port, poured into a plain pottery chalice and passed from person to person. It warmed my throat as I drank. Gazing at the faces round the circle, I recognized a fellow divinity student from Kenya, an art student from Ireland, a professor whose latest book lay open on my desk back in the residence hall. I was "discerning the body" in a way that I had never experienced at the Table of the Lord.

This way of enacting the Lord's Supper was new to me, but in time I would learn that it is in fact much closer to the practice of the early church and even to John Calvin's theological affirmations than I had imagined. My father would have found this Lord's Supper in the university chapel, with John Knox's pulpit a few feet away, surprisingly *Catholic*. My surprise sprang from the thrill I felt while communing with the risen Christ as a member of his body. And Dad was right; this way of enacting the Lord's Supper was surprisingly *catholic*.

There is a reason behind this personal testimony. I want to bear witness to the formative power of

liturgy to be what Martha L. Moore-Keish terms "primary theology."[4] I experienced the *real presence* of Christ in the Eucharist before I knew that was "a thing" to be defined and debated by theologians ancient and modern. Through participation in the liturgy, not as a leader but as a member of the assembly, I was brought into "nearer presence" of the triune God. This was not because I understood what was happening. Rather, it was because the Spirit was at work.

Participation precedes cognition.

Although I trained for ministry on both sides of the Atlantic, I received almost no instruction in liturgics, hymnody, or liturgical theology. Newly minted pastors in my generation were well schooled in biblical exegesis and homiletics, but no one taught us how to enact the liturgy. For that I turned to the Office of Theology and Worship and to the yearly conferences of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians.

Ordained in 1979, I was serving my first church when the Office of Theology and Worship of the PCUSA began publishing its Supplemental Liturgical Resources, large portions of which would eventually comprise the 1993 edition of the *Book of Common Worship*.[5] I eagerly awaited the arrival of each of those paperbacks. I devoured them with gusto. I tore them apart, punched holes in the severed pages, and assembled working service books. Standing at the bathroom mirror, I practiced saying the words I found in those liturgies. Standing at the Communion Table in the empty sanctuary, I practiced coordinating the movements of my hands and body with the words I was attempting to embody.

I was learning that it is not enough to *say the words*. The minister should strive to *enact the liturgy* without calling attention to oneself.[6]

I learned, too, that worship is not a theatrical performance starring the minister, but rather the response of the entire assembly to the grace proclaimed in the gospel. The minister is not the star, but the prompter, and the movements within the drama of the Service for the Lord's Day follow an ancient *ordo* whose roots reach deep.

What the presider says at the Table is vitally important, but the liturgy is more than words. The liturgy is *everything that happens*, including words said and sung, bodily movement, facial expressions, the arrangement of furniture, visual art—even the vessels used for bread and wine.

Martha L. Moore-Keish offers an example of how one congregation came to experience the "joyful feast of the people of God" when the setting of its observance changed.

> For three years in the 1990s I worshiped with a Presbyterian congregation that celebrated communion once a month. For the first year the tone of each communion service was about the same: the words emphasized joy and inclusiveness, but the performance was fairly somber and quiet. . . . Then, during the second year, the congregation worshiped in a neighboring Catholic church while our building was undergoing renovation. The shift in place necessitated a shift in the way we celebrated communion; rather than passing the trays of bread and tiny glasses of grape juice down the rows, we began processing down the aisles to receive the elements from the servers in the front of the sanctuary. Suddenly the mood was different. People looked at one another. They smiled. The servers and the partakers exchanged words over the bread and cup—something that happened rarely before. The gathering took on the tone of a joyful celebration rather than a somber time of individual reflection. *This was not due to the words, which had hardly changed from one location to the other* . . . the assembly met God in a new way in that celebration, which changed their relationship to the Eucharist ever after.[7]

The setting matters, but so do the words. Especially when presiding at the Table, the minister is the servant of the liturgy. The prayer offered at the Table is not the minister's prayer, but the church's prayer. Although there is always room for creativity and variation due to local custom, care must be taken to preserve the integrity of the overall form of the eucharistic prayer, the Great Thanksgiving. When the Great Prayer is carelessly emended or contracted to the point that it no longer retains its Trinitarian form, doxological character, or eschatological longing, the Supper becomes a pale reflection of what it should be: the sign and seal of the promises of the gospel.

Following the principle of *Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*, the danger of such truncated prayer is that it produces truncated Christians.

In his exhaustive and enlightening study of Reformed eucharistic prayers, Ronald P. Byars shows how the model eucharistic prayers provided in the *Book of Common Worship* reflect both Reformed and ecumenical perspectives—what he calls "A Crescendo of Consensus." Byars is especially concerned that John Calvin's emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament be reflected in the Great Prayer.

In the sixteenth-century debate over the presence of Christ in the sacrament, Calvin affirmed the *real presence*, but did not locate the risen Christ "in" or even "by, with and under" the bread and wine. Christ is spiritually present in the Supper because in the Supper we are drawn into the communion he shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Calvin emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit who "lifts our hearts on high" to sit at table with the risen, ascended Christ. In this regard Calvin's thinking shows a kinship with the liturgies of the Eastern churches. It follows that

> the Epiclesis would seem to be, for Reformed people, the sine qua non of a liturgy informed by Calvin's thought. Insofar as the Reformed tradition has anything to say to the whole church about Eucharist, it would seem that we need to say Amen to Calvin's affirmation of a theology informed by sources Eastern as well as Western, that is, to his eucharistic theology rooted in the action of the Holy Spirit.[8]

Byars observes that, useful as the models of eucharistic prayer in the *Book of Common Worship* can be, there appears to be an erosion of the Great Prayer in the liturgies of at least some Presbyterian churches. At some services,

> one may hear the equivalent of a brief table grace, with no Trinitarian form, no rehearsal of God's mighty acts in creation or in Christ, and, most astonishingly in a Reformed setting, no prayer for the Holy Spirit to bless us and the gifts of bread and wine. Sometimes one may hear what begins as a classical eucharistic prayer but concludes prematurely, with no Anamnesis, no Epiclesis, and no Trinitarian doxology.[9]

The point is not to adhere unwaveringly to printed prayers in the BCW. The point is, rather, to honor the deep wisdom of the church through the ages and the power of liturgy to form the faith. Because participation precedes cognition, it is vitally important that what is said and done at the Table embody the faith of the church, not merely the cleverness or creativity of the presider.

In my opinion, presiders should be particularly wary of liturgies that reflect neither ecumenical nor Reformed consensus, but rather the idiosyncrasies of their writer alone.

Based on materials from the watershed document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* and Ronald P. Byars's summary, the Great Prayer takes more or less this form[11]:

Opening Dialogue

(said or sung in response)

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

The Preface

Thanksgiving to the Father for the marvels of creation, redemption, and sanctification, concluding with the singing (or saying) of the Sanctus and Benedictus.

Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might, (*Sanctus*)
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the
name of the Lord. (*Benedictus*)
Hosanna in the highest.

The Post-Sanctus (or Anamnesis)

A memorial of the great acts of redemption, the witness of the prophets, the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and God's steadfastness in spite of human sin.

The Words of Christ's Institution of the sacrament according to the New Testament tradition. (In keeping with earlier Reformed practice, the Words of Institution may be used as a warrant for the Supper or in relation to the breaking of the bread. In my own practice, I tended to include the Words in the body of the Great Prayer.)

A Memorial Acclamation, such as:

Christ had died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

The Invocation of the Holy Spirit

(*Epiclesis*)

The presider calls for the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon the assembly and the gifts of bread and wine, lifting all who share in the feast into Christ's presence, and uniting us with the risen Christ and all the faithful in heaven and earth, keeping us faithful as Christ's body in anticipation of the fulfillment of God's kingdom (*Prolepsis*).

Trinitarian Doxology

The Amen of the Whole Assembly

(*Great Amen*)

The Lord's Prayer

The 2018 edition of the BCW contains sixteen generic eucharistic prayers (Great Thanksgivings) as well as eucharistic prayers for the Season of Advent, the Season of Christmas, Epiphany of the Lord, Baptism of the Lord, Transfiguration of the Lord, the Season of Lent, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, The Great Vigil of Easter, the Season of Easter, Ascension of the Lord, the Day of Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, All Saints' Day, and Christ the King/Reign of Christ. While some of these Great Thanksgivings are shorter than others, none is excessively long.

Regarding the time it takes to enact a liturgy that includes a complete Great Thanksgiving, worship planners should consider whether the pressure to shorten the service springs from legitimate pastoral concern or is simply an accommodation to "itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3). If the presider feels that he or she must offer a brief version of the Great Prayer, it is far better to choose one of the less wordy models offered in the BCW than to lop off portions of longer versions. Even the briefest of the Great Thanksgivings in the BCW preserves the classical *ordo*.

Great Thanksgiving 8 in the 2018 BCW, a contribution from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is an example of a brief but complete Great Thanksgiving. Following the introductory dialogue ("The Lord be with you") the presider prays:

Holy God, *Preface (and Praise)*
you alone are holy,
you alone are God.
The universe declares your praise:
beyond the stars;
beneath the sea;
within each cell;
with every breath,
We praise you, O God.
Generations bless your faithfulness:
through the water;
by night and day;
across the wilderness;
out of exile;
into the future.
We bless you, O God.
We give you thanks for your
dear Son: (*Anamnesis*)
at the heart of human life;
near to those who suffer;
beside the sinner;
among the poor;
with us now.
We thank you, O God.
(*The words of institution are included here, if not elsewhere.*)
Remembering his love for us
on the way,
at the table,
and to the end,
we proclaim the mystery of faith.
(*The memorial affirmation may be sung or spoken.*)

We pray for the gift of your Spirit: (*Epiclesis*)
in our gathering;
within the meal;
among your people;
throughout the world. (*Prolepsis*)
Blessing, praise, and thanks to you,
holy God, (*Trinitarian Doxology*)
through Jesus Christ,
by your Spirit,
in your church,
without end.
Amen.[12] (*Great Amen*)

To offer the Great Thanksgiving extemporaneously is, of course, an option. However, it takes skill and practice to do this well. The rubrics in the BCW are extremely helpful for those who undertake this

approach.[13] However, care must be taken to avoid unintentional bowdlerization. In my experience, presiders do well to remember that the Great Prayer is not the presider's prayer. It is the church's prayer.

Hymns can be adapted into Great Thanksgivings. Here is an example of a hymn from the *Church Hymnary* (fourth edition) of the Church of Scotland that formed the structure for a Eucharistic Prayer offered at First Presbyterian Church of Tallahassee, Florida. The italicized words are from the hymn by Colin Peter Thompson. I composed the rest of the prayer, following Thompson's meter (but not always his rhyming scheme). The sung responses are those set to Land of Rest (*Glory to God*, 552, 553, 554). On this occasion, the Words of Institution were included in the Invitation to the Table.

Words of Institution

The Lord be with you. (*Opening Dialogue*)
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Word of the Father, the life
of creation, (*Preface*)
emptied of glory, among us you came;
born as a servant, assuming our weakness,
drank from the cup of our joy and our shame.
Each human child bears your image
and likeness,
yet all are heirs to the sins of our earth;
once from death's flood you arose to
redeem us,
water and Spirit now seal our rebirth.[14]
Therefore, we praise you, O God of one story
joining one chorus as angels reply,
with all the faithful of past and of present
we sing to your glory and praise you on high:

Sanctus (*sung*)

Yours is the manna sent down
from heaven. (*Anamnesis*)
Yours is the bread broken for us.
Yours is the cup sealed for salvation.
Yours is the mystery we handle and touch:

Memorial Acclamation (*sung*)

Taking this cup, the blood of salvation,
taking this bread from the gifts of the earth,
proclaiming Christ's death and his resurrection,
we await his return and
creation's rebirth. (*Prolepsis*)
Pour out your Spirit, and make
this communion (*Epiclesis*)
one with your Christ and all who believe.
Unite us in hope, inspire us to serve you,
until all are one in your love and your peace.
Through Christ who came in self-emptying service, (*Trinitarian Doxology*)
with Christ who saves as the servant of all,
one in the Spirit who moves where your breath blows,
all glory and honor are yours, Sovereign One.
Amen. (*sung*) (*Amen*)

In retirement my place in corporate worship is most often in the "body of the kirk," not in the presider's chair. From the pew I encounter liturgies informed by editions of the *Book of Common Worship* that did not exist when I graduated from seminary. These liturgies reflect a Reformed and ecumenical consensus that is the product of decades of careful study and prayerful discussion. I have also noticed a tendency to use ready-made liturgies copied and dropped into the Sunday bulletin. Copy, paste, and you're done. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this practice, ease of use does not guarantee theological integrity or contextual relevancy. From my perspective, these copy-and-paste concoctions tend to yield thin gruel.

Even when the classical *ordo* is followed, the Great Thanksgiving can fall victim to ham-fisted emendation. One gets the feeling that, because the service is running long, the presider is editing the Great Thanksgiving "on the fly." This results in what one astute worshiper I know calls "communion lite."

It is up to the presider to maintain the integrity of what is spoken and enacted at the Holy Table. While there is always a place for creativity and variation, the Great Thanksgiving is not the place for time-saving tinkering or off-the-cuff redaction. When offering the church's prayer, the presider should be mindful of a structure whose roots run deep and whose wisdom endures from age to age.[15]

Sixty-eight years have passed since that twelve-year-old first communed at the Table of the Lord.

In the course of those years many churches in the Reformed tradition have, true to the motto *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*, reformed the way they enact the eucharistic liturgy. I rejoice in the progress Reformed churches have made toward "a still more excellent way." What we say and how we act at the Table shapes the faith of future generations.

Notes

1. *The Book of Church Order* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 104.
2. *Book of Church Order*, 105.
3. *The Book of Common Worship* (John Knox Press, 1946), 160.
4. Martha L. Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me: A Ritual Approach to Reformed Eucharistic Theology* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2008).
5. For an account of the sources and development of the *Book of Common Worship*, see Harold M. Daniels, *To God Alone Be Glory: The Story and Sources of the Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2003).
6. "The minister at the liturgy, like a Zen master, should be as 'uninteresting' as a glass of cold, clear, nourishing water." Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1966), 53.
7. Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 72 (italics mine).
8. Ronald P. Byars, *Lift Your Hearts on High: Eucharistic Prayer in the Reformed Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 72.
9. Byars, *Lift Your Hearts*, 71.
10. World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 16.
11. Byars, *Lift Your Hearts*, xvii.
12. *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 128–9.
13. *Book of Common Worship*, 122–3.
14. The italicized words are verses 1 and 2 of a hymn by Colin Peter Thomson (born 1945), as they appear in *Church Hymnary*, 4th ed. (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press), no. 634.
15. "Ritual forms worshippers more deeply than does formal instruction, and when shaped by an ecumenical tradition that is older and deeper than the commonplace generic, it protects worshippers from the idiosyncrasies of services cobbled together as though faith and form have nothing to do with each other." Ronald P. Byars, *Finding Our Balance: Repositioning Mainstream Protestantism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 12.

Do We? Or Don't We?

Ronald Byars

Ordained by another denomination, I have been a Presbyterian minister for nearly my whole ministry. Like many others, I was drawn to Presbyterianism impressed by the way the denomination explains itself on paper. The first Presbyterian congregation on whose staff I was called to serve was led by a pastor whose own views and practice corresponded relatively closely to the official documents by which the PC(USA) describes itself in terms of polity, theology, and liturgy. I felt assured that my decision to ally with this community of God's people had been the right one. What I love most about my church is that so much of what I value overlaps with ecumenical norms that are shared with other ecclesiastical communities. Presbyterianism expresses those norms in a way that seems to me to be exquisitely balanced—on paper. For example,

Polity: Our church is a church committed to the practice of *episcope*—oversight. No prelates, of course, but a graded system of church "courts," corporate "bishops" whose duties include attending to issues at all levels having to do with integrity in faith as well as in practice. It becomes increasingly obvious in this era of independent congregations that ecclesiastical oversight is essential.

Theology: Ours is a teaching church, and the content of that teaching is exemplified by the *Book of Confessions*, anchored by the ecumenical creeds. Our church professes, on paper, to believe that theology matters. While membership in the church calls for a profession of faith (no small thing), it does not demand that members conform to a particular theological system. However, its commitment to being a teaching church does require that officers in the church—ministers, elders, and deacons—must answer ordination questions in the affirmative, including those having to do with doctrine. For example, "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church . . . and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?"[1]

Liturgy: The PC(USA) is a church that is officially attentive to the integrity of Christian worship—in both Word and Sacrament. Certainly, for a teaching church concerned for the soundness of its doctrine, it is important to recognize that any and every service of worship, of whatever kind, embodies, projects, and eventually imprints a theology on those who are exposed to it over time. Our Directory for Worship is a marvelous guide to the ways that our faith might be best expressed in what is done and said as we assemble around Word and Sacrament. And our *Book of Common Worship* provides models to guide practice.

On paper, our church is impressive in the care with which it tries to follow biblical and ecumenical norms in a Reformed way. So, one might imagine, for example, that each section of the *Book of Order* would be equally honored in practice. And yet, while presbyteries rightly provide oversight appropriate to the Form of Government—for example, examining session minutes and noting errors in procedure—and also turns to the Book of Discipline in cases that require intervention, the Directory for Worship seems to be entirely advisory, and easily set aside as soon as candidates for the ministry have passed their ordination exams. (This is not surprising. since the majority of models, mentors, and those preparing candidates for ordination are more likely to think of liturgy as a set of techniques rather than as the liturgical representation of "essential tenets.") The result is that, in practice, the worship in a PC(USA)

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congregation may communicate a different theology from that which is intended in various constitutional documents.

For example, it is possible that one may find oneself in a PC(USA) congregation in which the service ends without any actual intercessory prayers. When a congregation either omits intercessions, whether always or only now and then, the service misrepresents both denominational and ecumenical theology. The church is called, after all, to be "a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:9). What might such "spiritual practices" look like? In worship, ecclesial priesthood certainly includes both advocacy and intercession for the world.

It may be that a service does include intercessory prayers, but they are framed so abstractly that one is unable to discern a connection with the real-time world whose trials weigh on us when we come to worship, trials that may involve natural disasters or human injustices.

It may be that a service does include intercessory prayers, but they are framed so abstractly that one is unable to discern a connection with the real-time world whose trials weigh on us when we come to worship, trials that may involve natural disasters or human injustices. Perhaps there is a "pastoral prayer," or "prayers of the people," but they include no prayers specific to those near or far whose land is burning today, or flooded; or to school shootings or starving Afghans. In such cases, the church minimizes its priestly role as intercessor. If the church prays only for its own members, its very identity is narrowed and distorted, as though it has no vocation and no responsibility beyond its walls.

It would be unusual, but not unheard of, for a Presbyterian service to omit a prayer of confession. One pastor was approached by a member of the congregation who complained about this prayer, a practice to which she had not been accustomed in her former denomination. She claimed not to be guilty of the corporately confessed sins—or, not usually. The pastor's remedy for her grievance was a simple one: to remove the prayer from the liturgy! When confession seems to be framed in such a way that it has to do only with acknowledged sins of individuals present, it ignores the shared obligation to confess sins not only for those participating, but also on behalf of persons and entities who cannot or will not themselves confess. We are all complicit, for example, in sins of the church local and universal, sins of the city and nation, sins of principalities and powers that may privilege some at the expense of others.

Of course, there may be a time of silence during the corporate prayer in which one may acknowledge personal sin in one's own way, but the prayer as such is not about me and is about me, whether recognized or not. The prayer of confession is intimately linked to our identity as baptized people, whom God loves not in proportion to whatever virtues we may exhibit, but out of God's pure grace. Prayerful confession is a testimony to that grace exhibited in the sacrament. Omit it, or sweeten it up with excuses, and its absence or lack of seriousness obscures the baptismal commission that sends out sinners washed in grace to participate in God's healing of the world.

In a recent Presbyterian Worship and Music Conference, a leader of one of the seminars had been entertaining questions and comments from the group. One person commented that his congregation had studied the history of the Nicene Creed and discovered that debates over its adoption in 325 C.E. had been marked not only by careful discussion, but also by unseemly conflicts. People back home didn't entirely approve of it, or the Apostles' Creed, either. Why should they say or sing them? The leader of the seminar, a musician, responded to the effect that it was rare that anyone experienced faith without doubts. It is possible, even likely, to experience both at the same time. "I believe, help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

When a member of the congregation comes to the pastor to complain about a creed (either Apostles' or Nicene), the pastor may decide that the way to solve the problem is to do away with both, or to substitute something up to date and culturally acceptable in their place. Both of these creeds are, for the most part, direct summaries of core affirmations of the Bible. They represent nothing less than doxological versions of the faith of the church. The heart and soul of that faith is very often countercultural, not part of the approved repertoire of the twenty-first-century consensus. When doubts

shape worship more than does faith, the church is left with nothing to say at all. A creed removed, or never used, is noticeable by its absence, just as a prose substitution seen for the first time reveals discomfort with the classic faith of the church embedded in the constitutional documents of the PC(USA) as well as the teaching of the church catholic.

Basic Christian theology becomes distorted when the service lacks a strong element of thanksgiving, turning away from our vocation to be a eucharistic people. (***Eucharist*** means "thanksgiving.")

Basic Christian theology becomes distorted when the service lacks a strong element of thanksgiving, turning away from our vocation to be a eucharistic people. (*Eucharist* means "thanksgiving.") As a community of Christ who claim to live by grace, the giving of thanks would seem to come naturally; at least, grace and gratitude belong together. Historically, ecumenically, and in the agenda of our Reformer, John Calvin, the giving of thanks is the norm for every service for the Lord's Day. since it is foundational to the character of the Sacrament. But the authorities in Calvin's Geneva refused to give permission for weekly Eucharist, probably worried that most parishioners would find it too hard to adjust, since before the Reformation they had communed only once a year, at Easter. So, their practice became quarterly communion. Calvin hoped that in time the norm of weekly Eucharist would be restored; meanwhile, he considered the interim arrangement to be a "defect." However, as the centuries rolled on, the "defect" acquired a kind of historical sanctity, as though occasional celebration of the Sacrament was meant to distinguish the Reformed from their Roman Catholic rivals, and therefore must be claimed and cherished as though it were a practice intended to be defended and perpetuated.

The Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, rightly celebrated, is a multilayered representation of thanksgiving, and can impress upon us the importance of our calling to be a people whose work it is to learn how to live eucharistically; that is, gratefully. Gratitude points to grace received as a gift, unearned, beginning with life itself. When thanksgiving is represented not only in words but in the actions at the table and the giving of bread and cup, it speaks more eloquently and more ardently than when thanks is expressed only in a passing sentence or two, if that, in one of the prayers of the day. When expression of gratitude is absent, or when it is reduced and/or muted, the gospel of grace is not likely to be as evident as it is when grace is our food and drink.

Of course, the *Book of Common Worship* provides a fallback for those who, for whatever reason, are not able to celebrate the sacramental meal. A rubric (note of instruction) in the BCW reads, "The norm of Christian worship is to celebrate the Lord's Supper on each Lord's Day. If the Lord's Supper is omitted, the service may include a prayer of thanksgiving," and directs the reader to pages 149–151, where examples of non-eucharistic thanksgivings may be found.[2] These prayers resemble the Great Thanksgiving insofar as possible when there will be no communion. This sometimes necessary substitute (see pandemic!), is less than optimal, but it does honor the need for some substantial expression of gratitude every Lord's Day. When even that is missing, the service is likely to embody and bless an unintended theology, one that does not conform to an essential component of the church's faith as expressed in its teaching tradition.

The absence of the Eucharist has another unintended effect. When the Sacrament of the Table is only occasional, it leaves the Word isolated, without its natural and intended accompaniment.

The absence of the Eucharist has another unintended effect. When the Sacrament of the Table is only occasional, it leaves the Word isolated, without its natural and intended accompaniment. The Reformers pointed out that without a sermon, or only an occasional sermon, the Sacrament is likely to be distorted by its separation from the Word. After centuries in which the Protestant norm came to be Word only, it is time to take note that when there is Word but no Eucharist, it becomes the Word that is at risk of being distorted. The Sacrament alongside the Word can awaken us to the sacramentality of preaching. In other words, as Scripture is not a textbook, neither is preaching a lecture, or a motivational speech. Scripture read and

the Word preached serve as a kind of meeting place where God reaches out to nourish us, just as in the holy meal. Sacramental.

In today's *Zeitgeist, sacramental* is always countercultural, because contemporary culture understands God not as One who engages with us, but rather as a concept about which we need to form an opinion. Many presume God to be impersonal, secularly addressed as "the universe," rather than One actively in search of us. In a barren spiritual context, it is easy to suppose that rather than an occasion in which God and God's people interact, worship is a kind of school, a place for learning something or rallying around a social issue, or perhaps exploring various modes of "spirituality," accompanied by a little music to make it more palatable. In other words, a program of de-theologizing to satisfy contemporary reservations.

Miroslav Volf of Yale Divinity School decided he had to leave churches where Eucharist was only occasional. Volf was "disturbed by the failure of many preachers to make the center of the Christian faith the center of their proclamation." He notes that "where the Sacraments are left intact, they point straight back to Christ's self-giving on the cross . . ."[3] In other words, where they are left intact, the sacraments direct us to the heart and soul of the Christian faith, cross and resurrection, the foundational testimony from which all Christian preaching draws its vigor and authority.

Equally important is that the Lord's Supper directs us forward, toward a cosmic redemption, a transfigured creation, where "people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29).

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.[4]

The sacramental meal is an anticipation of the messianic banquet that represents what Jesus called "the renewal of all things" (Matt. 19:28), and the apostle Peter described as a "universal restoration" (Acts 3:21), the ultimate realization of God's promise, "See, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5). When it is present (*and left intact*), the Sacrament testifies to the "big picture," the ultimate hope, the indescribable outcome that by grace we have been enabled to glimpse in the ministry, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This picture clears the sight, shows a way, and chases away the ever present temptation to despair. Will we? Or won't we?

Notes

1. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, *Book of Order* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2017–2019), W-4.04c, 104.
2. *Book of Common Worship*, prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2018), 149–151.
3. Miroslav Volf, "Proclaiming the Lord's Death," *The Christian Century* (March 3, 1999): 253.
4. *Book of Common Worship*, 27, and others.

Sermons

That Night and the Twelve

Cecelia Armstrong

Preached at St. James Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on Maundy Thursday 2021 (a virtual service).

For a film of the worship experience, visit youtube.com/watch?v=vlt9EXNLIFM.

Read John 13:1–11.

Jesus knew exactly who was going to betray him. Yet he acted out of love to provide a foot washing for each of the disciples. In a sense, Jesus knows that we are going to be tempted to betray God in our words, actions, and deeds, and yet God acts out of love to provide for us a cleansing, called baptism. Remember your baptism.

Read John 13:21–28.

Have you ever considered those who sat at table with Jesus on that night before his arrest? There he sat with his dearest friends to share with them what was to come. They had been with him for some time and should have been well aware of what was to come, but all along they did not fully grasp what was about to take place. They were all close to Jesus, yet they struggled with something that separated them from him. We come to this table on a regular basis because this draws us closer to Jesus, and there are things in our lives that separate us from Christ.

Joel 2:12–13 tells us that the Lord wants us to return with all of our heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. The Lord specifically tells us to rend our hearts and not our clothing. What is it that we may be experiencing that is separating us from God? Whatever it is, we should know that we aren't the first to have this separation and we will not be the last. We need to recognize what separates us and then spend time designing intentional plans that will help reconcile us with our Creator.

Are you Peter? One minute walking on water by faith and the next sinking in doubts? Are we like Peter, best known for denying Jesus when pressured? Jesus spoke of his death, and Peter was quick to rebuke him, saying that it couldn't happen that way. Jesus was concerned about who touched his garment, and Peter said, "It is just the crowds." Jesus wanted to wash the feet of his friends, and Peter said, "No, thank you." After he understood the significance, he changed his mind to say, "Wash my hands and head too." Most of us can relate to Peter because what separates us from God is our desire to be faithful and logical at the same time, eliminating the need for faith and the acknowledgment of grace.

Are you Andrew? Bringing folks to Christ and then slipping into the background? Are we like Andrew, who lived in the shadow of his more famous sibling, Simon Peter? Andrew led Peter to Christ, then stepped back as his brother became a leader among the apostles. Andrew was the one who brought the boy with the fish and loaves of bread. Most of us can relate to Andrew because what separates us from God is our desire to push folks ahead of us, forgetting that we are leaders too.

Are you James or John? Making assumptions usually without thinking? Are we like James or John, known for being in the innermost circle with Christ? These guys had the nickname "Sons of Thunder." They were proud of being who they were with Christ and would be willing to shut others down who were not in line with the teachings of Christ. They were also the ones whose mother wanted to know how far they would go in rank with Jesus. Most of us can relate with either James or John because what separates us from God is our willingness to be bullies in hopes that it grants us high rank in heaven.

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Are you Philip? Introducing the individuals who will bring with them doubt? Are we like Philip, who asks questions that will invoke probable cause for doubt? Philip introduced the known skeptic Bartholomew to Christ. Philip asked at the feeding of the five thousand about the amount of wages necessary to feed the crowd. Most of us can relate to Philip because what separates us from God is our desire to make sense out of what God is able to do, as if we could have that much understanding. Later Philip had an experience with the Ethiopian eunuch who wanted to know how we can understand anything without someone teaching us.

Are you Nathanael, also named Bartholomew? Skeptical until there is a personal encounter? Are we like Nathanael, who is not certain that Jesus is who he says he is? Nathanael was not going to easily follow Jesus. But when Christ was able to prove to him that he knew him and his location prior to Philip's approach, Nathanael was fully aware of Jesus' claim.

Are you Nathanael, also named Bartholomew? Skeptical until there is a personal encounter? Are we like Nathanael, who is not certain that Jesus is who he says he is? Nathanael was not going to easily follow Jesus. But when Christ was able to prove to him that he knew him and his location prior to Philip's approach, Nathanael was fully aware of Jesus' claim. Most of us can relate to Nathanael because what separates us from God is our desire to have some sort of proof that God is God all by Godself.

Are you Thomas? Doubting because something tangible must precede belief? Are we like Thomas, called Didymus—meaning "the Twin"—although a twin brother or sister is never mentioned in the Bible? Thomas was an outspoken skeptic to the point of being known as a pessimist, yet his courage and loyalty to Christ really points to him not wanting to be left out. When the disciples feared that returning to Bethany at Lazarus's death would cause them to die, Thomas spoke up and said, "Let's go and die with him." When Jesus spoke of his ascension to be with God and told the disciples that they knew where he was going, Thomas spoke up and said, "How do we know the way?" Most of us can relate to Thomas because what separates us from God is our desire to have enough faith sprinkled with a little bit of physical assurance.

Are you Matthew? Like a tax collector in Roman times, the most despised type of person? Are we like Matthew, who tended to only know traitors and social outsiders because that's exactly who he was? Matthew only knew folks who were religious outcasts. A tax collector in those days would take extra money from the people to pay off the Romans and pad their own pockets. Yet, when Jesus said follow me, he left his cursed profession forever because he had new life in Christ. Most of us can relate to Matthew because what separates us from God is that we boldly want to leave our old lives behind and yet we want to hold on to whatever value we think it gives us.

Are you the other James? Not quite as noticeable and outspoken as the rest, but still present? Even called James the Less, probably because there is nothing mentioned about him except his mother and brother's names. Are we like James, who usually hangs out in the background? James may have been in the background, and yet he was chosen by Jesus to be one of the twelve to further the kingdom of God. He was trained and used by Christ in a powerful way. Most of us can relate to James because what separates us from God is that we are not confident that we are valuable team members in the ministry that God has called us to do.

Are you Simon the Zealot? Named in such a way that says he was an enthusiast and was ready to fight the power? Are we like Simon, who was probably a political activist? Simon was a man of fierce loyalties, amazing passion, courage and zeal. He used his fiery enthusiasm as devotion to Christ, even though it was once used to promote the political sector. Most of us can relate to Simon because what separates us from God is that we are adamant about something in our lives that has nothing to do with our Christian walk and yet lack that same zeal when it comes to actual service for the Lord.

Are you Judas (not Iscariot), known by three names, including Labbaeus Thaddeus? Named in such a way that meant he was a child at heart? Are we like Judas Labbaeus Thaddeus who was tenderhearted and compassionate? He innocently questioned Jesus as to why Christ wasn't going to

make himself known to everyone. Most of us can relate to Judas Labbaeus Thaddeus because what separates us from God is that we do not want to reveal our humility and rather be brash or bold or overconfident about our convictions.

Are you Judas Iscariot? A traitor? Are we like Judas Iscariot, who gave Christ moments of his life but certainly did not give Jesus his heart? He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. He drew as close to the Savior as was humanly possible to be. He enjoyed every privilege Christ affords. He was intimately familiar with everything Jesus taught while he remained in unbelief and went into a hopeless eternity. Most of us can relate to Judas Iscariot because what separates us from God is that we do not want to admit that our faith is too weak to believe God all the time. Nelson Mandela reminds us that "one cannot be prepared for something while secretly believing it will not happen."

Read John 13:31b–35.

Jesus leaves us all to deal with those things that separate us from God. We suffer from spiritual carelessness, squandered opportunity, sinful lusts, and hardness of heart. Yet, Jesus also reminds us of the new commandment that will allow us to be encouraged. We may feel separated from God, but the twelve should give us hope because they exemplify how common people with typical failings can be used by God in uncommon, remarkable ways. This is why we give. This is why we pray.

Our encounter with Jesus tonight allows us to hear the invitation to the Table.

Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. The gift of God for the people of God.

We have come face to face with our forgetful and flawed nature. We can easily be turned from the promise of baptism and the beauty of communion to betrayal. The threat of death hovers near and darkness is coming. We realize in these moments of comfort and light of the sacraments that there is anxiety and pain in the garden, and the cross is on its way.

Sit with that . . .

Total Re-call

Christopher Vogado

Preached at New Hope Presbyterian Church
in Gastonia, North Carolina, on May 22, 2022.

Read John 21.

It doesn't seem that Peter is handling the aftershocks of Easter particularly well. It is never a good sign to be found naked in a boat. Your reaction may be like mine—this is risky content for the Bible, and this is not even the first story in the Good Friday/Easter narrative to mention someone without clothes! In Mark's Good Friday account there is a "certain young man wearing nothing but a linen cloth" who, while fleeing the Gethsemane garden, "left the linen cloth and ran off naked." Now we read that Peter is fishing naked while the other disciples in the boat with Peter are presumably fully clothed. I can just imagine Thomas leaning over to Nathanael with concern, "I think Peter is really struggling in this post-resurrection world."

Certainly, a lot has happened to all the disciples since Mary found the tomb empty—this is the fourth time Jesus has appeared outside of the tomb in John's Gospel. Peter, in his own way, has been involved in all Easter encounters. He was present investigating the empty tomb on Easter morning only to go back home after the sunrise. He was part of the eleven who met Jesus twice in a locked room and among those who received the Holy Spirit from Jesus, the very breath of God.

The disciples process their post-resurrection encounters with Jesus in different ways. Mary at the tomb says, "Rabboni," and preaches the first Easter sermon: "I have seen the Lord!" A persuaded and practical Thomas proclaims, "My Lord and my God!" after his very fleshy experience of Easter. What then is Peter's response to all these appearances of the resurrected Jesus? Is it a grand articulation of faith: "I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth"? No, it is simply, "I am going fishing," a response that does not seem to have the same spiritual profundity as Thomas's or Mary's after meeting the risen Lord. But let's not give Peter such a hard time. I'm sure many can attest that fishing is a healthy way to process strange or difficult events. Henry David Thoreau once remarked, "Many go fishing all their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after."

Maybe Peter is after closure, the kind that comes after resignation from some great struggle. It may be an uneasy closure, but he needs closure nonetheless. Peter has given all his hopes and hard work to the cause, but the project has not worked out how he dreamed it would. Jesus appeared and indeed, as John said earlier, the disciples "rejoiced" when they met the risen Lord. But what Jesus' appearance means to the disciples is not yet known. "Jesus may well be alive," could be Peter's inner dialogue, "but the Jesus movement seems as dead as ever." Was all that time following Jesus, traveling from town to town, ministering and healing, worth anything? Disciples are now going home walking their Emmaus roads or, like these seven disciples, taking a boat ride back to the home they knew on the sea. Could Peter's lack of clothes indicate that he just simply needs to be free from it all? To get back to his fishing business, to his life before Jesus?

Business, however, is not going well in the post-Easter world. What used to make sense for the disciples does not make as much sense now. They are all a little rusty at fishing, and the disciples' track record in boats hasn't been the best. Although John does not record it, in Luke's Gospel, the first meeting between Jesus and Peter shares much in common with this story. At this point Jesus is still a stranger approaching them to offer random fishing advice, which results in so many fish that they nearly swamp

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the boat. As it was in Luke's account of the first meeting years before, here the disciples pull a net so full they are hardly able to haul it to shore.

They catch a large amount of fish, no question. Not unlike the large amount of top-shelf wine Jesus made for a wedding reception as dry as the Sierra. Not unlike the large amount of leftovers after feeding a "great multitude." It is this pattern of abundance that leads the "disciple whom Jesus loved" to say to Peter and the others, "It is the Lord." Jesus is recognized by what he does and what he creates—always more than enough.

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Peter responds to this news as he usually does—he is quick to act and slow to follow through. At word of Jesus' appearance, Peter gets (un) dressed for the occasion and jumps into the sea. Once on land he turns back around and boards the boat he just exited to haul in a net full of fish. It is nervous energy which Jesus thankfully has come to address, but it may not be good news for Peter right away. Though Peter has seen Jesus resurrected, the last time they spoke was on the night Jesus was betrayed. Warming himself by a charcoal fire that night, Peter said, "I do not know him."

By that courtyard fire they asked Peter three times, "Are you not also one of his disciples?" He denied it, "I am not." Now, as Peter drags that full net out of the boat, he is met with another charcoal fire. Beside this second charcoal fire is the risen Jesus. For the others present this fire is just a means for cooking fish and bread, which Jesus is already doing. But Peter knows exactly what this fire means. This fire brings memories of the previous one. This new fire becomes the very light Peter needs to burn away his shame into who he will become, like sunlight burns through a mountain fog opening to vast and clear views.

Just as he did when standing around that other charcoal fire, Peter now again receives three questions, as if Jesus is seeking Peter out and re-calling him. Peter denied Jesus three times, and Jesus calls Peter three times. He calls him to love him and then commissions him. This commission is different from earlier ones. It's not a commission to go and fish for people. It's not a calling to "come and see" or to leave the nets on the shoreline. It's a very specific calling to feed Jesus' beloved sheep.

Could it be that the good news in this post-resurrection world reassures us, too, that just because we love Jesus does not mean we are able to avoid suffering or failure? Just because we love Jesus does not mean that we will not ever disappoint ourselves or deny that which we hold most dear? Peter cried around that first charcoal fire because he cared, which should be an example for us all. Around the second, Jesus gives him a second chance. God knows that a commissioning to serve Jesus also grants us opportunities to fail, however seriously we take our commitments to discipleship. Still, we are called and re-called to love what matters most to God, to take responsibility for our neighbors' well-being.

We are not so different from the disciples who were back in the boat many weeks after Easter. We have heard the same news: "Christ is risen, he is risen indeed." But by now the flowered cross has been taken down. There are no more lilies in the sanctuary, and even the triumphant "He Is Risen" banner has been rolled up and put away to use again next year. Like Peter, we may want to return to "usual." But like Peter, maybe we need to examine how God turns our own depths of denial into soaring affirmations of faith. So what can we decipher from this concluding story in John's Gospel and the last post-Easter encounter with Jesus? What do we do as God's re-called disciples?

We have no charcoal fires burning on this Sunday morning. If we did, we would probably assume somebody was cooking hamburgers for a potluck after the service. Peter's symbol of his discipleship was fire, but ours may not be. We do, however, have a shared meal at a table where any Sunday we can meet the risen Christ. We find in this

meal the one who says, "Come to me, all you who are carrying heavy burdens."

Are you carrying shame that makes you feel as empty inside as the disciples' nets prior to Jesus' appearance? Let this table be for you a fire not of fear but of God's immense grace that says you are wonderfully made in your own skin exactly how you are.

Are you carrying shame that makes you feel as empty inside as the disciples' nets prior to Jesus' appearance? Let this table be for you a fire not of fear but of God's immense grace that says you are wonderfully made in your own skin exactly how you are. Are you carrying a past failure that continues to haunt you and that you relive like Peter? May this table be a charcoal fire for you of God's forgiveness. Or, perhaps you arrive at this table with more fish in your net than you know what to do with. May this table be a fire that calls you to discipleship and kindles in you a desire to share God's abundance and feed others.

Our communion tables should be more like a beach bonfire, everyday a new location but the same question—how can we contribute our catch to the meal God is already cooking up? Far from the folding tables of a nimble beach bonfire, the tables we gather around in many of our churches may look weightier and more inflexible. Often the communion table can function as a barrier, a piece of furniture to protect rather than a piece of furniture we gather all the way around to share a meal in the presence of God. Here, we go to great lengths to keep our communion table shielded from all stains, wear, and signs of human contact. It's covered in strong glass or a leather cover as though we are covering a backyard grill, not uncovering it for use. Instead, what if we saw the table as the charcoal fire that reminds us we are forgiven through the grace of God?

This way of thinking changed for me the night before Palm Sunday. As many of you know, there was a wedding in the sanctuary on Palm Sunday eve, something I now do not recommend! After the wedding reception concluded in the fellowship hall, I received a call from one of our dedicated elders saying the cleaning of the church was going "fairly well." There was a strange tone in her voice that suggested I might want to come and see the cleaning efforts for myself. Upon walking into the sanctuary, I could hear the sounds of glass shards being picked up from the narthex. Somehow, during the course of moving sanctuary items back into place post wedding, the custom glass which had rested atop our communion table for decades had broken. While being carried, the cumbersome table tipped and like a glacier the heavy glass slid slowly but mightily off the lip of the table and shattered upon the floor.

Following the cleanup effort that night, we wasted no time placing another order for a custom sheet of glass. Still, there was a delay in production while our communion table sat like a hermit crab without its protected shell. It taught our church and me a few lessons about what it means to be a disciple while we were waiting for the new glass to arrive, lessons Peter had learned many years ago.

Serving communion now felt different. The bare wood was exposed to all the dangers a communion table encounters in our active sanctuary. Smudges of fingerprints made by roaming children appeared during the time with young disciples. Someone wearing a belt buckle haphazardly bumped into a corner and left a dent. There were old and faithful ecclesiastical scars like a drip from pouring communion juice and oil on the base of refilled candles. Something changed over this last month; the table took on a new character.

The table, upon closer inspection, was beautiful even with its flaws, and one could see the wood pattern and the skill of the hands who made such a fine table even in its imperfections. It made the table come alive when the barrier of glass was removed. It told a different story of what is supported. It was not a story of a fabricated cold and smooth glassy reflection but one of divots, knots, textures, patterns, and inconsistencies. Seeing those less than pristine parts actually told a greater story about the lives of the people who shared a meal around it. All the less-than-perfect people taking communion showing the vulnerability of being a disciple and knowing the forgiveness of our risen Lord.

Would seeing the raw wood grain of the place we continue to meet the risen Christ force us to ingrain an entirely different message of the vulnerability of being a disciple? It just might. How often does it feel

like the best the greater church can do is interact with the world through reinforced glass like a bank teller, rather than like a friend across a well-marked table, the result of numerous meals shared? How often do we hold God at a distance? Could seeing a plain table remind us that the church also comes with dents and dings, failures and inconsistencies? Like Peter, through God's grace, our lives tell a far greater story than a singular night of failure in a courtyard.

Jesus called Peter three times because that is how many times it took for him to receive a response that broke through whatever block of tempered emotions Peter was carrying. The line of Jesus' questions was not to shame Peter but to have the opposite effect. It was to get the one Jesus called "the Rock" to soften just enough to feel the love of God that called him to a greater story. It took a little pressure of repeated questions to turn an average, rocky disciple into a gem that reflected Christ's light.

No matter where we are, a beach sunrise breakfast or a meal where we celebrate the joyful feast of God for the people of God, we have an opportunity to be re-called and sustained by this meal. Around this table, we who are marked, chipped, and mended become disciples gathered together. Like any family table, our table in the family of faith tells a dynamic story, too. It speaks of the meeting place where all saints and sinners gather. It is the place for imperfect disciples to be in the company of their perfect Lord with no barrier in between. Here around the fire we again hear Jesus' words, "Follow me."

Purify My Heart
acrylic and ink on wood
Jennifer Bunge

Columns

On Liturgy: Improvisatory Hope

Alexandra Jacob

This past July, I accompanied a group of twenty high school youth and seven other adult leaders on a service trip to Breathitt County, Kentucky, where we spent a week of learning and service alongside the good folks at Appalachia Service Project. We worked together all week to contribute to ASP's home repair projects, and we learned about the culture and history of a region vastly different from our own urban midwestern context. Just as we had hoped, the week was a transformative opportunity to learn, serve, grow, and play together. By the time the week ended and we were on the road back to Minneapolis, we were bone-tired, but full of joy.

Our drive was long enough to break the journey into two days of driving, and our final night was spent at a host church in Stockton, Illinois. In keeping with youth group tradition, the final night would be an all-nighter, at least for the youth. We would stay up late writing "care cards" for one another (due before breakfast the next morning!), playing sardines in a can, and enjoying one another's company for one last night. I planned for us to begin the evening with a time of worship, including communion.

I soon realized that this plan wouldn't work out as I had imagined when I was planning the trip. First, we had forgotten to pack the little communion wafer-and-juice kits—affectionately named by our youth group "Rip-N-Sips"—that we would use for worship. The Rip-N-Sips were back at home, and I had not remembered to purchase enough bread at our last gas station stop to use for communion bread. Aside from the elements themselves, we were *exhausted*. The days of work in the hot Kentucky sun had worn our bodies out, and my spirit was worn from keeping track of youth and their needs all week. It just didn't feel like we had what we needed to celebrate the Lord's Supper together that night.

When we arrived in Stockton, the pastor—a new acquaintance of mine through an online network of young clergywomen—greeted us with a smile *and* with the company of her adorable pet dog, Milo. Milo's tail-wagging excitement woke up even the sleepiest high schooler from their road trip naps, and I felt my spirit rise as we entered the church building. Our host pastor assured us that we would have all the space we needed for our late-night activities, and once the students were settled in and eating their pizza dinner, she turned to me. "Would you be willing to let me serve you all communion in the morning before you hit the road?" My eyes filled with tears. Would I be *willing?* I nodded, grateful to be receiving hospitality both material and sacramental.

The next morning, all twenty-eight of us encircled the church's communion table. Our host pastor prayed and shared the words of institution, gently inviting us into the feast prepared for us. She shared the bread and wine with each of us individually, calling us by name: "Izzie, this is the body of Christ, given for you; the cup of Christ, shed for you." She closed with a reminder that God loves each of us deeply and fully, no matter where we go or what we do.

This moment shared around a relative stranger's table in an unfamiliar community was one of the holiest that we experienced throughout our service trip. It was a deep gift to have been welcomed at the table, and called by name, at the end of our weeklong journey. As we loaded our vans for the final leg of the trip home, I knew I was not the only one fighting back tears of gratitude. To share the sacrament in such an unexpected way felt like pure grace.

Rev. Alexandra Jacob serves as associate pastor for families, youth, and children in downtown Minneapolis, where she enjoys learning and worshiping alongside a vibrant group of young people and their families.

At a session I recently attended at the St. Olaf College Conference on Theology, Worship, & the Arts, theologian Willie Jennings shared a striking idea: Christian hope as improvisation. The skilled jazz musician, Jennings explained, does something new at the site of the old. She takes preexisting melodic and harmonic material, infuses it with her own set of skills, knowledge, and imagination, and creates something new. So it is with Christian hope. We participate in the work of hope when we recognize that we live our lives *within* the life of the resurrected Christ—the preexisting material. Hope is the improvisatory work: what will we do in our own age to improvise upon the completed work of Christ's death and resurrection?

When I heard Jennings share this image of improvisatory hope, my mind returned to the image of our road-weary youth group gathered around the table of a stranger-turned-friend. We arrived unprepared, without the necessary elements to share in communion. We also arrived tired, one more day of driving alongside the midwestern cornfields standing between us and home. Our generous host helped us to participate in the work of hope, improvising with the materials at her disposal to spread before us a table of hospitality and belonging. The raw material of her improvisation included twenty-eight strangers, a desire to extend hospitality, and the ancient practice of Holy Communion. This improvisatory work brought forth greater hope than our host could have imagined. She sent us on our way with a new melody in our hearts, ready to share it with the world.

The contours of our worshiping communities have shifted as a result of the pandemic—we are asking new questions, imagining new patterns, and engaging new forms of belonging. How will our table practices respond to these new realities? How will that sacred and timeless practice take up new turns of phrase, new rhythms and harmonies? This is the task to which we are continually called, in the words of Jennings, "to do something new at the site of the old." May we improvise with joy!

On Music: Singing Our Way to the Table

Mary Margaret Flannagan

In my household, everyone has a different opinion about how best to set the table for a meal with special guests. Should we use our everyday plates, showing an authentic (and perhaps more intimate) side of ourselves? Or should we use our special occasion plates to honor our guests? Should we use our clean, formal tablecloth or the much-loved and much-stained tablecloth? Should we decorate with store-bought flower arrangements or collect wildflowers from our yard and make hand-crafted art for the table? Sharing a meal is a *big* deal, especially in the wake of COVID's long-reaching isolation. How can we best honor those who dare to join our rambunctious bunch, sharing with others the best of who we are and what we have?

"It is fully evident that unless voice and song, if interposed in prayer, spring from deep feeling of heart, neither has any value or profit in the least with God. But they arouse [God's] wrath against us if they come only from the tip of the lips and from the throat."[1] With these words, John Calvin reaffirmed the importance of congregational song in public worship. Calvin called Christians to sing with their whole heart and mind, soul and strength, not *just* absentmindedly or because it is the next item of business in the liturgy. He believed that investing one's whole self in the act of song brought God greater glory.

Calvin, Martin Luther, and other reformers sought the full participation of the worshiping body in the worship service. This was often (though not always, *ahem* . . . Zwingli[2]) accomplished through congregational song. Sung biblical texts, as well as harmonized hymns, in people's vernacular language became a key method of both theological education and evangelism; worshipers not only heard the Word of God read and proclaimed, but they also participated in the reading and proclamation themselves through song. Worshipers more easily memorized Scripture through singable tunes accompanying psalms. They sang the hymns out the church doors, down the street, and into their daily lives, until they became earworms that stayed with them through the week. Congregants were able to ruminate and reflect on the particular theology of this hymnody in ways that weren't possible with Catholic liturgies recited and sung in Latin, a language most worshipers could not read, write, or understand. Singing "A Mighty Fortress" and "Now Thank We All Our God" invited worshipers to personally claim their congregation's profession of faith. Passing travelers knew a town's theological preferences by listening to the sounds of evening prayer from household windows; Protestant areas echoed with catchy tunes and discernable lyrics. Travelers took these songs to heart, singing them down the road to the next village, unknowingly spreading musical seeds of the Reformation as they went. Hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs carried newborn Protestant theology and praxes from village to village in words that ordinary people understood.

People also joined the song around the table in the sacrament of communion. Their voices joined the priest's, arising like incense in prayer and praise before God. No more "hocus-pocus" by a priest mysteriously waving his hands over the feast. Whereas people misunderstood the phrase *hoc est corpus meum* in the Roman Catholic mass (the magical phrase's rumored beginnings), they now heard "This is my body" and knew what was being proclaimed. Thus began a theological revival as ordinary pew sitters became invested in the meal they shared. They reclaimed the story of

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faith as their own, seeking more frequent and more personal experiences with the sacrament.

The experience of learning and understanding table rituals comes alive with every shared meal in my family. Preschoolers in our house know that we do not eat until we have each said "Thank you, God, for . . . ," during which time God usually receives gratitude for sharks and fire trucks and cupcakes and other simple, yet heartfelt experiences of our day. We conclude our prayers of thanksgiving with a communal blessing, which used to be led by the adults. Recently, though, our children staged a coup, demanding we all take turns choosing the shared blessing. When it's their turn, they *always* choose to sing. With twinkles in their eyes and commitment in their voice, they choose blessings from a "deep feeling of heart" that Calvin must have sought in congregational music.

One table blessing that our children frequently choose to sing is an adaptation of "Lord, We Thank You for This Food"[3] (*Glory to God*, #660). The melody is from the Bunun people in Taiwan, though in our family we call this song the "Tom, Tom Blessing." While one person cants a melodic blessing, the others hit their fists into their own palms as if they were mashing up food, singing "tom" each time their fists hit their palms. As *Glory to God* notes, the sung "tom" is an onomatopoeia that simulates the sound of pounding rice. Because this part of the blessing doesn't require any words from the group, it is a perfect song to teach children while they learn to talk. It teaches so much more than a fun blessing: they have learned another culture's music, another culture's food tradition, the song style with a cantor and congregation, and the global church's praise of God.

Camp blessings are another example of the congregation claiming its place at the table. A few days romping and playing in the woods is special, but the blessing (which probably got minimal attention at camp) is often what people remember and sing proudly into adulthood. Whether it is the "Johnny Appleseed" blessing made famous by the Walt Disney cartoon[4] or the "Superman" blessing sung at many summer camps, people gladly—with full heart and body—sing their praise of God before a shared meal. Neither the meals nor the blessings are formal or fancy, though one can be certain of the authentic place from which these songs are born and the deep feeling of heart they evoke.

In watching our children choose to participate in and occasionally lead our table blessings, I am reminded of how powerful it can be when everyone at the table brings understanding and responsibility. We each have a place at the table and we each have a part in the song we sing. Oldest and youngest, clergy and lay folk. God must be well pleased when we all sing with our whole heart and mind, soul and strength, not just the tip of our tongue or the reflex of our spirit.

Colossians 3:16 reads, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God." Sing not just old hymns, not just favorite songs, not just formal liturgies, but psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. Around the table, into the woods, with everyone you know, sing praise to God, the giver of all life and host of our daily feast!

Notes

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.20.31.
2. Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelica* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 368.
3. I-To Loh, admin. GIA Publications, © 1990.
4. *Melody Time*, Walt Disney, 1948.

On Preaching

Colleen Cook

I preach every Sunday, but somehow on the first Sunday of the month, preaching takes a back seat to the proclamation that is the Eucharist. Yes, the Eucharist is a response to the Word, but the Eucharist reshapes the service, pulling itself to the center, even though it takes place nearly at the end. I have always had a sense that the saints who have gone before us come to partake with us at the table. Those who dwell in the presence of God and commune with Jesus face-to-face know so much more about God than we do, so our proclamation of the Word is at best provisional. I'm pretty sure the saints wait until after the sermon before they arrive.

I have a vision of them tiptoeing in during the Invitation to the Table, those saints who come from east and west and north and south. They are amused by our solemnity. They leap and dance among us as we woodenly pass the peace. They jostle in the line to the elements. They know they are at a party, a big, joyous feast. What do they make of our small numbers? Of our invitation to those livestreaming to gather elements from the kitchen at home?

I imagine that as Christ is present in the elements, so these saints are present wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, popping in at a homebound member's house, pressing the bite of cinnamon roll into the palm of their hand, "Christ's body for you," holding the cup of tea—or juice—or lemonade—to their lips for that one taste of God's goodness, "the cup of salvation."

Jesus got harder to put into a box and surround with restrictions once we learned about Zoom and YouTube and Google Meets, once we were prevented from assembling in person. We found that we still craved the bread and juice. We came to understand a different sense of the gathered body. And here we are now, with access to vaccines, some timidly coming back to church and some perfectly satisfied to join online. Some of us feel fractured and some of us feel free. For all of us, church will never be as we once knew it.

We focus on what we think we can control: Do we serve by intinction or do we provide the holy Lunchables?[1] Do we reach for the bread ourselves or is it placed in our hands by the elders? Do we pass a plate with the wafers and tiny cups? Does the grape juice represent Jesus' blood if it's not Welch's? Have the details washed away the meaning behind it all?

I imagine that those saints who never bothered to take a seat but who are communing with us "in person" chuckle at us, because they know that corporeal presence is not what makes the elements holy, that the Holy Spirit wasn't really waiting for us to utter the epiclesis before she joined us, and that the table is God's and not our own. The saints know from experience that the table does not belong to our small church family, our denomination, or to America. It doesn't belong to our racial ethnic group or to our brand of Christianity. It is God's table. If we could see these saints, what would we learn? No doubt there are some among them who were denied the table in their lifetimes, ones who were deemed unworthy. I think they are the first to arrive. They urge us to widen the table, God's table, for all.

How do we dare to preach with the table set before us and the saints waiting impatiently for the sacrament? With the smell of bread and juice in the air? In my context, I use the Revised Common Lectionary texts as a launching pad, searching and sifting among four texts for God's good word for the people in this time and place. I pray and read with one or more of those I call "lectionary partners." I ask unprepared friends to tell me what they see in the text. I live in the text as I write both the sermon

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and the eucharistic prayers, that they might proclaim the text in these times and this place.

If the Eucharist is to be a feast of Thanksgiving, my sermons on communion Sundays had better start and end by claiming the belovedness of each soul gathered, no matter how they gathered, the necessity of each to the body of Christ, and the wholeness we only feel when all are truly welcome. Our hymns make the same claims: "This is God's table, it's not yours or mine[2] . . . for everyone born, a place at the table[3] . . . Gather us in . . ."[4]

In a day and age when the Eucharist is often withheld as a political statement, let's emphasize each soul's intrinsic worthiness, because this is the good news we learn at the table that is God's alone. Each soul is worthy because of Christ's love and sacrifice for them, worthy because of the holiness of God's breath breathed into human flesh, worthy as bearers of God's beautiful image.

I often claim in my invitation to the table, "There is nothing you must do or say or believe to be welcome at this table, for many have met Christ at the table."

If we can grasp our welcome and believe it, then maybe we'll allow those hovering saints who have met Christ to coerce us to the table and, like a reluctant lover being dragged to the dance floor, we find our self-consciousness dissolved in the delight of being wanted, being needed to make the body whole.

Notes

1. My congregation and I have irreverently adopted this name for the prepackaged wafer and cups we began using during the pandemic.
2. Barbara Hamm, "Come to the Table of Grace," *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 507.
3. Shirley Erena Murray, "For Everyone Born," *Glory to God*, 769.
4. Marty Haugen, "Here in This Place," *Glory to God*, 401.

On the Arts: Community

David A. VanderMeer

To begin to explore the visual arts in relationship to the Eucharist for this column I again turned to *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, the summary report of the World Council of Churches in its effort to work toward church unity, published in 1982. This was also the year I began my own full-time service in the church. I marvel at the many ways the world and the church have changed in that forty-year period. Some of these changes have become challenges—we are constantly reminded of declining church membership, and many of us are too familiar with the "worship wars" of the past decades over what sort of music is right for worship. However, there have been many positive changes over the years, including the focus on liturgical renewal in most mainline Protestant denominations and an emphasis on sacramental practices, particularly in the PC(USA), that includes encouragement to celebrate communion much more often than a typical "first Sunday" schedule. As I look out at our congregations, I also see much more diversity and inclusivity among our worshipers and our worship leaders.

For me, one of the most exciting changes in the last four decades among Western Protestant churches has been a movement toward incorporation of visual art into the worship and mission of the church. Of course, it has been a process of re-incorporation, since art and the church have been in conversation in many places and eras in history. The visual arts are thriving in many churches, and my own experience suggests that many congregations have great interest in finding more ways for worshipers to experience visual art and express themselves using material. We know that listening and reading are not the only ways that people encounter and begin to comprehend their world. Words are wonderful, of course, but many people respond more intensely to visual stimuli. For me, the heavenly feast of the people of God calls not just for spoken liturgy, but also for musical, visual, tactile, and even olfactory liturgy! A few well-placed bread machines properly timed can create an aroma in your sanctuary that will welcome your worshipers and direct their attention to the sacrament they are about to experience.

In its discussion of the Eucharist, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* states that "the sharing of one bread and the common cup in a given place demonstrates and effects the oneness of the sharers with Christ and with their fellow sharers in all times and places." All times and all places—the communion of all the saints—includes believers of all ages and sizes and shapes and genders and nationalities and from all the areas and eras in which they live(d). When we eat the bread and drink the cup, we are communing with the person sitting next to us in the pew, but also our great-grandmothers, Sojourner Truth, Queen Elizabeth I, J. S. Bach, Michelangelo, and Jesus himself. We come to our Lord's supper.

One of the ways we can help our congregations get a sense of this experience is to use visual art. In the works that I reference in this article you will see images as diverse as the saints who gather at the table. The oldest piece is a fresco from the Church of St. Martin in France that dates from the twelth century. In contrast, *The Feeding of Judas*, a woodcut print by Indian artist Solomon Raj, was done in the twenty-first century—Raj died in 2019 at the age of ninety-eight and made art up until the time of his death. The print shows disciples gathered around the table behind Jesus, who is giving bread to a kneeling Judas.

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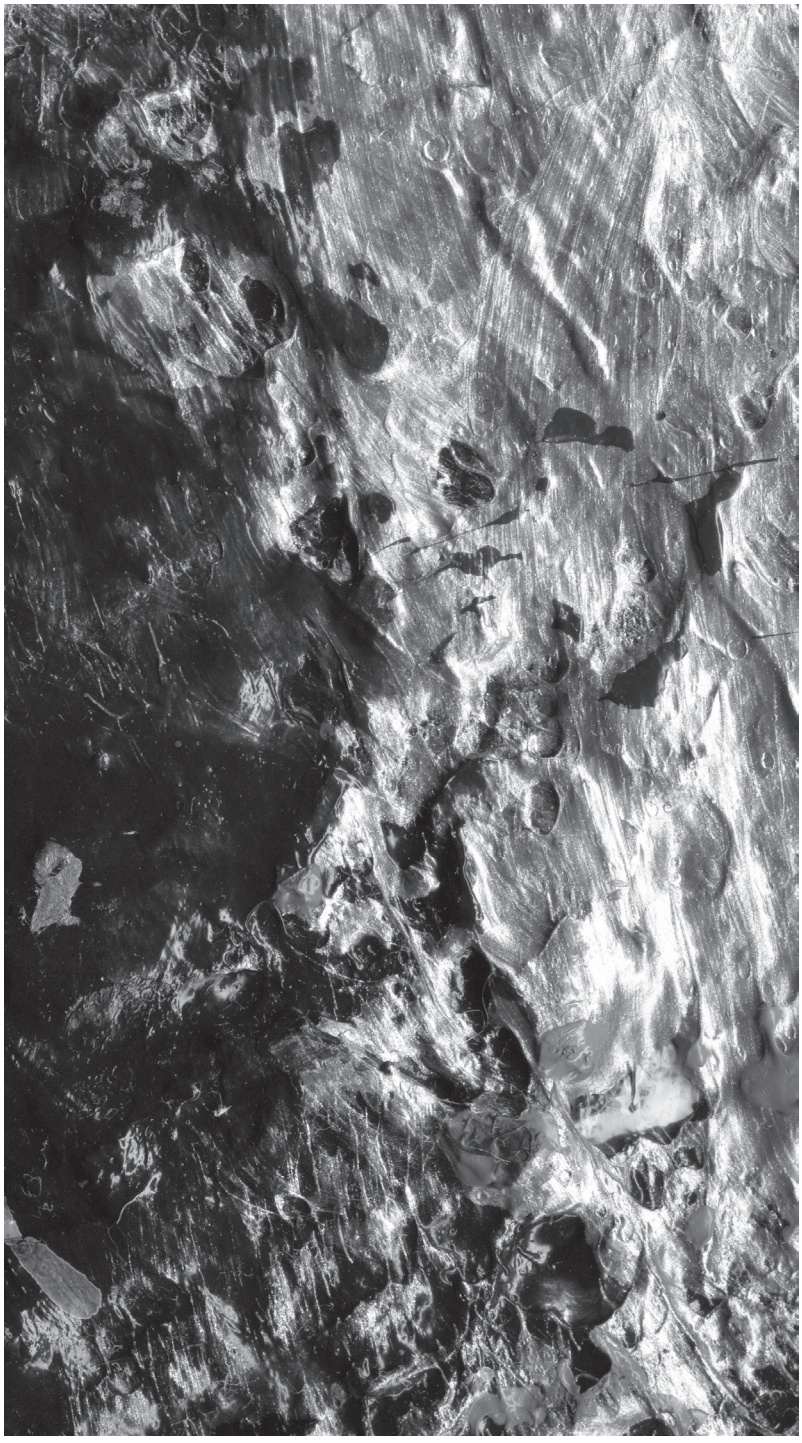
Fresco from the Church of St. Martin, Vic-sur-St-Chartier, France, twelfth century

Engaging with visual art is a great way to consider diversity across thousands of years and thousands of miles and to remember the diversity in our own specific time and place.

The Lord's Supper, JESUS MAFA, 1973

People of the faith have been sharing the bread of life for two millennia. As our common meal foreshadows the heavenly banquet, the words from Luke 13:29, "Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God," echo in art from east and west and north and south. *The Lord's Supper* from the project JESUS MAFA in Cameroon shows disciples gathered around the table. JESUS MAFA refers to a collection of paintings of the life of Jesus created in Cameroon in the 1970s based upon community enactments of biblical scenes.

Moving from the south to the east, *The Last Supper* by Sadao Watanabe shows a last supper scene from a Japanese perspective using a stencil printing technique on handmade paper. Images of



In the Cup of the New Covenant, Jan Richardson

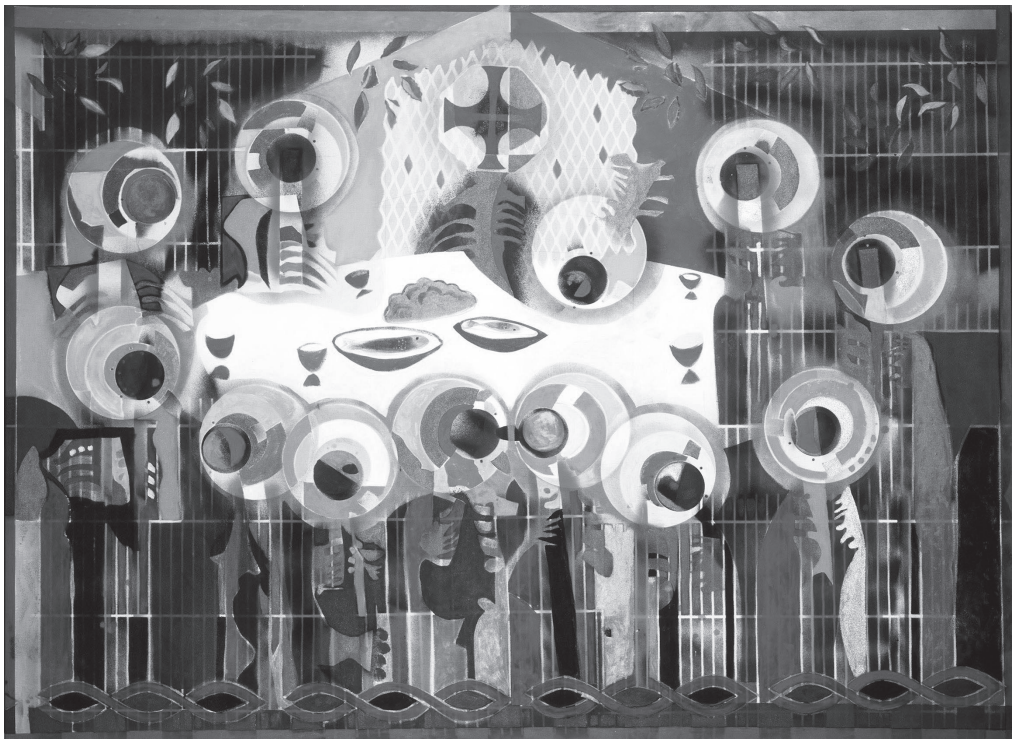
communion from all over the world remind us that we are communing with people all over the world.

Engaging with visual art is a great way to consider diversity across thousands of years and thousands of miles and to remember the diversity in our own specific time and place. Artists Paul Stoub and Jan Richardson make images of tables where all are welcome. In Paul Stoub's painting *Unity*, we see a full, round table from above with diverse ages, ethnicities, and abilities represented around it. Similarly, Jan Richardson's collage *The Best Supper* shows a round table from above with many partaking in a meal and table friendship, including animals. Both of these works preach a sermon without any words attached.

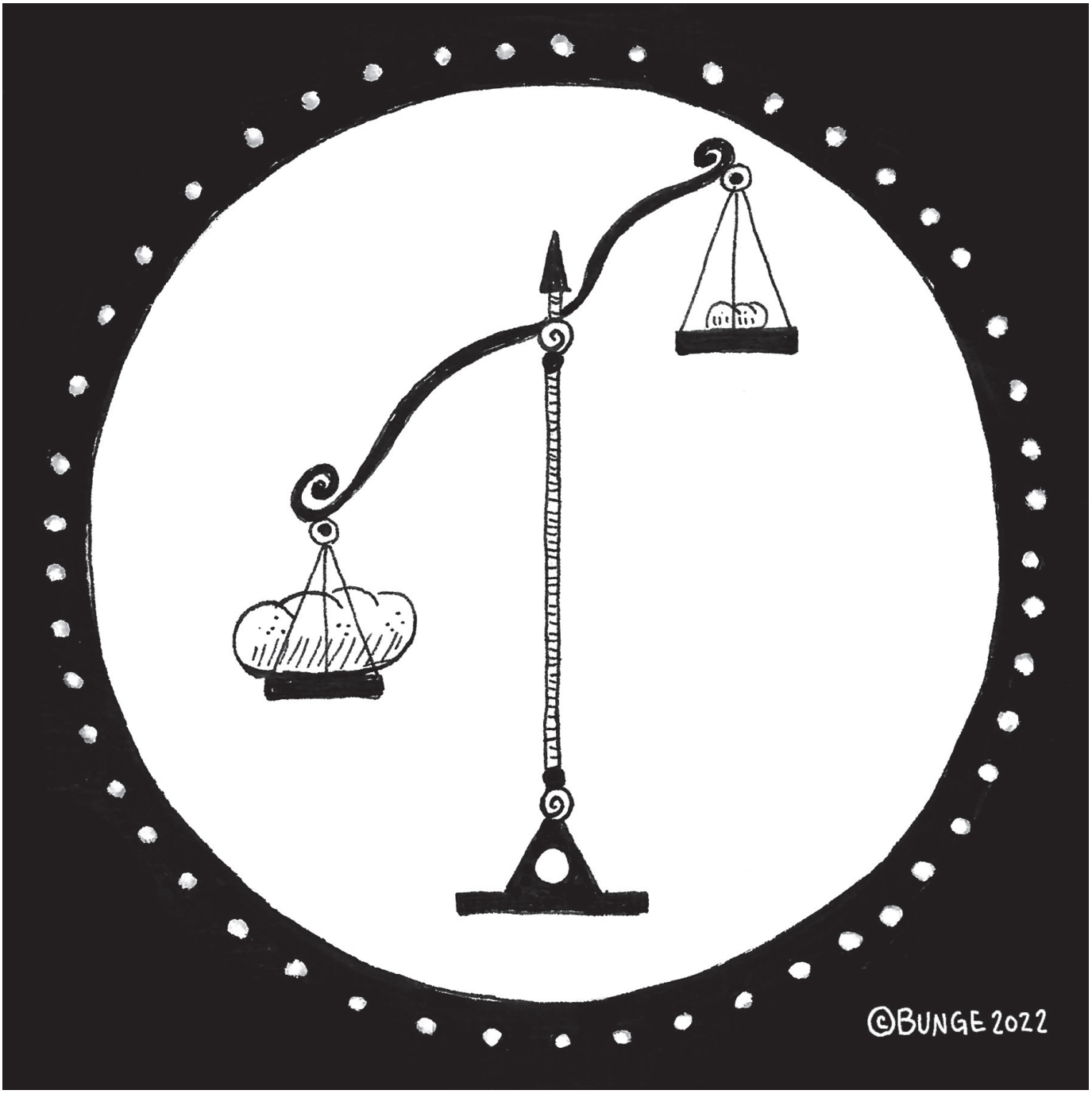
Representational art may increase our understanding of what is being represented. But art can evoke many levels of response and many meanings. The abstract painting by Jan Richardson called *The Cup of the Covenant* speaks to me of mystery, majesty, and love. I cannot fully know how it speaks to you, but I can imagine that if I print this art on the cover of Sunday's bulletin, at least some in the congregation will respond in deeply meaningful ways. For some, at least, the mystery of sacrament may be experienced most meaningfully through the mystery inherent in abstract art.

Communion has many faces—some somber and intense, some joyful and spirited. We can portray these many faces in our music, in the tone of our prayers, in the manner that we serve and receive the elements, and in the chalices and patens that we use. Sacrament is about material, so all the materials we use are important, including fabrics that drape the table and the bread we serve. Fabrics from around the world emphasize that the sacrament is for all of us, the smell of bread baking stirs our senses of taste and smell (as noted above, bread machines are a way to accomplish this), and a variety of different kind of breads adorning the table illustrate the abundance (and diversity) of our blessings.

As I gathered the images for this article, I turned to a serigraph by John August Swanson. I am always drawn to this image because I love the colors and the complexity in the details. The disciples' robes are rainbows of color, and the border of the work is made of tiny illustrations, forming layers of images. In the end, this image feeds me, just as Holy Communion feeds me. Just as I finished this article I found a new image, *The Last Supper* by contemporary artist Christina Saj showing abstracted figures around a table with many layers of color and imagery. It was a completely unexpected gift of beauty from the artist and a gift of the Holy Spirit. Soli Deo Gloria.



Christina Saj, *Last Supper*, oil on canvas, 54" x 72", 2000



Weigh In
ink on paper
Jennifer Bunge

Ideas

An Invitation to the Table

Sudie Niesen Thompson

Spoken from the table in Anderson Auditorium at Wednesday's worship service, Presbyterian Association of Musicians Worship & Music Conference, 2022

The One who leads us beside still waters
and shepherds us through shadowed valleys
has brought us to the table of grace.
Look—in the eating place, there is manna from heaven;
in the drinking place—an overflowing cup!
Look—the table is set, your place is prepared;
our host welcomes us into the house of the Lord.

So—whether you feel at home in God's house,
or you are a stranger passing by—
come; there is a place prepared for you.

Whether you gather among friends,
or find yourself surrounded by faces unknown—
come, there is a place prepared for you.

If you—like the wilderness wanderers—know hunger and thirst;
if you—like travelers on the Emmaus road—know heartache and longing;
if you—like the pilgrims of ages past—seek the presence of our Lord—
come. Take your place. Breathe in the peace of this moment.
Taste and see the grace eternal; taste and see that God is good.

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Inviting God to Dinner: Tips for Families

Karen Ware Jackson

Connecting your family meals more intentionally to your faith can be as simple as lighting a candle or as involved as a mini-Bible study. Check out these tips for making sure God stays at your table beyond the Amen.

1) *Light a Candle*. Consider using the same candle at every meal so that it develops significance. The candle will burn down in proportion to your time at the table together, which can be a powerful physical reminder of the value of your family mealtime. Take turns lighting the candle so that everyone has a turn. You might use a phrase like "Christ, be our guest," or "Holy Spirit, we welcome you to our table," or "God, be with us."
2) *Set a place for God*. An empty place setting can be a visual cue that God joins you at the table. Your empty place might be there for Jesus or any stranger or friend whom God calls you to invite, calling you to extend hospitality as an act of Christian discipleship.
3) *Invest in a set of cards to enrich your conversation*. Consider some of these options or create your own!
    a. Word Teasers: Faith Edition. Words and questions that are fun for youth and adults.
    b. The Muddy Fork Pray and Play Cards. Simple prayers, questions, and Scriptures that work for younger children, but are appropriate for all ages.
    c. Create your own cards as a family activity. Talk about what questions you have about God. Then, after the meal, have each person try to write three questions, each on a separate note card. You can pick one card at each meal, adding questions as you go.
4) *Play the Family Faith Fun!*
    a. Objectives: Have fun. Share faith. Bonus: this game can be played in interfaith groups.
    b. Materials: 2 dice, list of questions numbered 1–12. (Create your own or use below. Note: the questions below would need to be adapted for those with sensory impairments.)
    c. Rules: Each person rolls the dice and answers the indicated question.
    Doubles—you get to pick your question *unless* you roll snake eyes (double ones); then the person to your right gets to pick your question.
    Say "Amen" anytime you recognize a prayer, like "I'm thankful for my mom." (AMEN.) "The best thing I ate this week was dessert because ice cream is amazing!" (AMEN.) Optional: you get a point for every Amen you say / prayer you recognize.
    Winning: Everyone wins, but if you enjoy a bit of competition, count the Amens or decide with votes, or really anyway you'd like. The winner gets to say a prayer at the end of the meal *and* is in charge of dismissing from the table.
    d. Questions

1) What is one beautiful or holy thing you saw today?
2) Who are you thankful for?
3) What made you laugh this week?
4) What made you feel sad today?
5) Who do you know that deserves a high five?
6) IMPOSSIBLE ROUND: Who would you like to invite to eat with us? (Someone who is dead, a fictional character, does not inhabit a physical body, etc.)
7) What is the most beautiful sound you heard today?
8) What is the best thing you smelled this week?
9) What is the most delicious meal you ate this week?
10) What meal or food would you like to try soon?
11) Who do you know who might need a hug or a kind word?
12) POSSIBLE ROUND: Who would you like to invite to eat with us? (Friend, neighbor, family member, someone you'd like to get to know better, someone who might need food, etc.)

Rev. Karen Ware Jackson is senior co-pastor, First Presbyterian Church Greenville, North Carolina, and co-editor of ***When Kids Ask Hard Questions: Faith Filled Responses for Tough Topics***, Chalice Press (2019).

Communion
acrylic and ink on wood
Jennifer Bunge

Music Review

Protest of Praise: 50 Hymn Texts

David Bjorlin
(Chicago: GIA Productions, 2020)
136 pages. ISBN 978-1-62277-466-1. $20.95

Reviewed by David Gambrell

At a time when there is much to lament and confess—the idolatry of wealth and status, the atrocities of warfare and mass shootings, the devastating effects of climate change, the exclusion of beloved children of God—the church's song is an act of resistance against evil, a sign of solidarity with the oppressed, an affirmation of faith in God's future. This idea inspires the title and infuses the contents of David Bjorlin's hymn collection, *Protest of Praise.*

Bjorlin's hymn texts are deeply rooted in the doctrinal, liturgical, and musical traditions of the church, drawing on familiar theological themes and biblical imagery. At the same time, they speak with a fresh voice and engage contemporary concerns, challenging worshipers to expand their vision and embody the faith they profess. Three hymns related to the Eucharist illustrate Bjorlin's expansive vision and embodied faith.

In a hymn titled "At the Table, All Are Equal," Bjorlin explores eucharistic ethics, describing Christ's table as a place where "all are equal . . . none are best," "none go hungry . . . all are fed," "all are cherished . . . none are lost," and "none are finished . . . all are sent" (p. 20). Benjamin Brody's tune WILCOX underscores the unfinished nature of eucharistic living and the urgency of our call to feed and welcome others as we have been welcomed and fed.

Bjorlin wrote "Build a Longer Table" in response to a call from the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada for new hymns of hospitality to refugees and immigrants. Set to the fifteenth-century French carol NOËL NOUVELET, this text confronts the twenty-first-century ills of xenophobia and mass incarceration. Christ is depicted as one who "breaks walls to pieces," "breach[es] the jail wall," and "tears down our fences," in order to become "our doorway to the reign of God" (p. 22).

"If We Eat Our Lavish Banquet" consists of three stanzas, each a powerful and pointed question to the church. "If we eat our lavish banquet while the hungry cry for bread . . . is the meal we share indecent, is our eucharist a lie?" "If our sermons soothe the mighty but bring humble people shame . . . is the word we preach insulting, is our gospel then a fraud?" "If the rituals in chapels are divorced from acts of care . . . is our liturgy offensive, is our worship just a sham?" (p. 60). The vigorous hymn tune EBENEZER fuels this hymn's sense of righteous outrage against injustice. (You may guess what four-letter word rhymes with "sham" in the final stanza.)

With this outstanding collection, Bjorlin makes many other vital contributions to the church's song. There are hymns that ponder the relationship between faith and doubt, such as "Ask the Complicated Questions" and "O Spirit, Send Doubt." There are hymns that introduce feminine characters in familiar songs of faith, as "Children of the Heavenly Father" becomes "As a Mother Loves Her Children" and "The God of Abraham Praise" becomes "The God of Sarah Praise" with a stanza for Hagar. Two hymns, "The Heavens Tell of Your Creative Glory" (*Los cielos cuentan la gloria de Dios*) and "When the World Is Controlled by Petty Tyrants" (*Cuando el mundo padece tiranías*) are translations of works by modern Spanish-language hymnwriters. There are hymns that reconsider metaphors of darkness and light, such as "Darkness Is a Gift of God" and "When God First Promised Abram." And there are

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seven new Advent hymns, including "Advent Begins in the Darkness of Night."

Worship planners will find this to be an imminently useful body of work. The thematic index enumerates hymns pertaining to the life of daily discipleship (anxiety, courage, imagination, memory, risk, wonder), matters of the church's mission (environment, greed, hunger, inclusion, justice, reconciliation), significant pastoral occasions (marriage, motherhood, ordination, pastoral transitions, vocation, weddings), as well as festivals and seasons of the Christian year (Christmas, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, All Saints).

In the anecdotes that accompany each hymn text, Bjorlin reveals that he often finds inspiration in the words of poets, theologians, and other thinkers such as Wendell Berry, Brené Brown, James Cone, Madeleine L'Engle, C. S. Lewis, and Barbara Brown Taylor. This literary influence is evident in Bjorlin's own graceful and thoughtful writing. Other texts arise from events in the author's life and relationships with family, friends, and mentors in ministry.

Bjorlin's musical collaborators in *Protest of Praise* include William Beckstrand, Benjamin Brody, Lim Swee Hong, Sally Ann Morris, Randall Sensmeier, Joel Sierra, and Horacio Vivares. New compositions by these composers are found alongside well-known hymn tunes such as AR HYD Y NOS, HYMN TO JOY, NETTLETON, RESIGNATION, and SLANE. This juxtaposition yields an engaging diversity of musical styles and cultural traditions.

As Bjorlin writes in the introduction to this work, "The act of true praise is always a protest against all that curses or denigrates the Creator's world and the people made in the Creator's image; and an act of true protest is always in praise of a world that the protestor has begun to envision and works to make real. Praise is protest; protest is praise" (p. 10). In this spirit, I commend this hymn collection to the church, praying that it will inspire our witness and incite our worship.

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