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Mystagogical Preaching in the Episcopal Church: Connecting Sermon and Liturgy

Daniel John Justin

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MYSTAGOGICAL PREACHING IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH:
CONNECTING SERMON AND LITURGY

by

DANIEL JOHN JUSTIN

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

Mystagogical Preaching in the Episcopal Church: Connecting Sermon and Liturgy

by

Daniel John Justin

Seeks to determine the effectiveness of mystagogical preaching for communicating the theology of the Episcopal Church as it is presented in the liturgies of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Mystagogy is a liturgical theology leading worshipers deeper into the mysteries of the faith as they are experienced in the liturgy. This study uses an action/reflection research method seeking to determine participants understanding of the liturgical rites in question prior to the sermon and if that understanding changes after hearing a mystagogical sermon. Surveys including both quantitative and qualitative questions are used to measure effectiveness of this style of preaching.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

RCIA	Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of my thesis begins with a presentation of the rationale and relevance of this project. It will introduce the topic of mystagogical preaching, which simply stated, is explaining liturgical rites. It seeks to explore the mysteries of the faith as they are experienced in the liturgy. It will also explore why I believe it is important for the Episcopal Church today, offer a short description of the major features of this style of preaching, and briefly explore the history of mystagogy in the church. I will then turn my attention to four liturgical rites and Sacraments of the Episcopal Church: the general confession and absolution, the passing of the peace, holy baptism, and the Eucharist. The theology found in the *Book of Common Prayer* regarding these four topics will be explained. These four topics are important, as they will provide the content for the mystagogical sermon series I will use in my research.

Rationale and Relevance

Can mystagogical preaching help Episcopalians grow in their understanding of the theology presented in the liturgies of the church? Christine McSpadden, an Episcopal priest, argues that preachers in our post-modern world can no longer assume parishioners have familiarity with the text being preached. In fact, she suggests this is deeper than just a lack of knowledge about the biblical text. She contends there is also a lack of familiarity with the entire Christian story. As a result, McSpadden argues:

Preaching in the post-Christendom church, then does well to recover a sense of apologetic – articulating the fundamentals of the faith clearly, simply and hospitably to an audience no longer predisposed to assimilate the Christian story readily...

...Preaching benefits from the study of the text with an ear toward the basic confessional affirmations of the church, most explicitly stated in the creeds.¹

These words resonated with me. I found myself wondering, however, how this would work in the Episcopal Church. We are not and have never been a confessional church. Our theology is located in the *Book of Common Prayer*. What we pray is what we believe. For an Episcopalian, sermons would need to be preached with an ear toward our liturgy.

McSpadden is not the only Episcopal Priest who is concerned that our congregations do not fully understand our theology.² Louis Weil, one of the premier liturgical scholars within the Episcopal Church, in his book *Liturgical Sense*, has argued that congregations are also adding meaning to aspects of the liturgy they do not understand.³ Weil laments certain practices that have become commonplace in the Episcopal Church, particularly gestures and manual acts. These include reverencing, making the sign of the cross, elevating the elements during the Words of Institution, using consecrated host to make multiple signs of the cross, as well as other gestures, genuflects, and busyness. He argues the negative consequence of these gestures and acts is that parishioners attach meanings to them that are not true. Weil is concerned that the clergy of our tradition are subverting the theology presented in the prayer book and in the

¹ Christine McSpadden, “Preaching Scripture Faithfully in a Post-Christendom Church,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. and Richard B. Hayes Davis (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 129.

² “Our congregations” refers to Episcopal congregations only.

³ Louis Weil, *Liturgical Sense: The Logic of the Rite*, Weil Series in Liturgics (New York: Seabury Books, 2013).

rites of the church through sloppy manual acts. His solution is for priests to omit all manual acts outside touching the elements as required by the rubrics of the prayer book. While I certainly understand Weil's concern, I am not certain I agree with his conclusion that manual acts should be abandoned. Rather, I suggest mystagogical preaching as an alternative that will help parishioners understand the rites and actions of the liturgy.

Lex Orandi Lex Credendi. "The law of prayer is the law of belief. And generally Anglicans do assent to this proposition – what we pray *is* what we believe."⁴ This idea of common prayer as the location of our theology is one of the hallmarks of what it means to be Anglican. George Wayne Smith, the Bishop of Missouri, writes that Anglicans explain this idea in the following way:

The churches of the Anglican Communion are not (in technical terms) "confessional." There is neither an Augsburg Confession (as with the Lutherans), nor a Westminster Confession (as with the Presbyterians) to guide the workings of Anglican theology. Anglicans also lack a seminal theologian, a Martin Luther or a John Calvin or a John Wesley. There is no foundational book of beliefs or a single important theologian in this tradition. Precise classical arguments from doctrine have little success in holding the attention of most Anglicans. Nor does doctrine express a cause for Anglican unity, as it does in other churches of the reformation and even in the Roman Catholic Church. There is no confessional flag to wave, not even an overriding theological tenet like justification for Lutherans or predestination for the churches of Reformed Christianity. But for Anglicans the consensus achieved through common prayer does provide a center point not only for practice but for belief.⁵

It is through the liturgies of the church we experience the Paschal Mystery. In the liturgy we do more than just remember the mighty saving acts of God; we become active participants in those acts. Yet, I suspect that many in the pews do not fully understand the actions of the liturgy and the theology conveyed therein. In fact, many newer members of

⁴ George Wayne Smith, *Admirable Simplicity: Principles for Worship Planning in the Anglican Tradition* (New York: Church Hymnal Corp, 1996), 37.

⁵ Ibid., 38.

the Episcopal Church likely may not even know we use the *Book of Common Prayer*. Many parishes print the liturgy in service bulletins that include everything needed to participate in worship services. Even hymns are printed in those bulletins. The prayer books remain tucked away in the pews and are never opened. As a result, one of the key aspects of our unique Anglican identity is being lost.

There are excellent books available, such as Leonel Mitchell's *Praying Shapes Believing* and Ian Markham's *Liturgical Life Principles*, which explain the meaning of the liturgy in great detail. Mitchell's work is a staple of Episcopal seminaries while Markham's book is geared toward the laity. Both do an excellent job of presenting the theology of the prayer book liturgies. Both explain the meaning of the rites themselves and the actions of the priest. Both are excellent resources for small group discussions, catechesis class, or to be sold in the parish bookstore (if one is available). The problem is that the majority of parishioners will not attend those discussions, classes, or buy the book.

The liturgy provides the opportunity to experience the mysteries of the faith. This stands in contrast to catechetical instruction, which deals with doctrine, rather than experience. It is through liturgy that we become active participants in God's redemptive work. In the church we tell the story of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. The lectionary leads us through a three-year cycle of telling that story. We mark time with the Christian calendar by that story. The liturgical seasons of the year help us tell that story. Each and every Sunday we gather to tell that story again. Mystagogy is intended to lead people to a greater understanding of the mysteries they have experienced through their participation in the liturgy.

I believe it is the sermon that has the ability to carry the weight of mystagogy. The sermon provides the opportunity to reach the largest number of parishioners. It can provide opportunity to reflect on the experiences they have had in the liturgy and in the Sacraments. A mystagogical sermon by its very nature is a biblical sermon. The biblical readings offered in the lectionary⁶ tell the story that we enact in the liturgy. In order to fully understand the story (Bible), and how we participate in that story (liturgy), we must carefully examine both. “Bible and liturgy are the two great starting points for classic Christian mystagogy.”⁷

Yet it is also important to note that the text of a mystagogical sermon is not the biblical passage but rather the liturgical rite itself.⁸ Mystagogy is a liturgical theology.⁹ The preacher leads the congregation to a deeper understanding of the rites its members experience turning to the scriptures as a way of connecting the meaning of the rite to the biblical text, and in so doing, discover how the liturgical rite they have experienced is a “type” of what was read in the scripture.

This focus on the liturgical rite as the text of the sermon brings the unique Anglican ethos to the forefront and is wonderfully compatible with an Anglican way of being Christian. Mystagogical sermons, therefore, can help members of the church gain a

⁶ The Episcopal Church uses the Revised Common Lectionary. Ample opportunity for mystagogical preaching on a variety of topics is easily found without deviating from the lectionary. For the purpose of this project, all mystagogical sermons offered were based on the Revised Common Lectionary lessons appointed for that particular Sunday.

⁷ David Regan, *Experience the Mystery: Pastoral Possibilities for Christian Mystagogy* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 58.

⁸ Craig Alan Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 145.

⁹ Regan, *Experience the Mystery: Pastoral Possibilities for Christian Mystagogy*, 17.

greater understanding of *Lex Orandi Lex Credendi*. The mystagogical sermon must always still be anchored in one or more of the scripture lessons read in worship. The mystagogue¹⁰ works to illuminate the liturgical rite, leading listeners to experience the mysteries in the light of the biblical text.

Mystagogical preaching, while being anchored in one of the texts of the day, will use a variety of biblical stories and images as the preacher explores the liturgical rite. In this way mystagogical preaching is different from other styles of preaching. Narrative preaching and expository preaching all may remain focused on one pericope. The preacher explores that text in hopes of uncovering the truth found in that text. The preacher seeks to apply the text to the every day lives of parishioners. Mystagogical preaching takes the liturgical rite as the text of sermon, anchoring it in the biblical text. At the same time, the preacher also explores many other biblical texts, utilizing typological and allegorical interpretations in order to bring the listener to a deeper understanding of the liturgical or sacramental rites they experience.

Brief History of Mystagogy

The practice of mystagogy has its earliest roots in the writing of St. Paul. Some argue that Paul's epistle to the Galatians reveals a form of primitive mystagogy.¹¹ But it was not until the fourth century that a period of mystagogy was identified in connection to the rites of initiation in the church. The catechetical process was a lengthy period of time in which new converts prepared to receive the Sacrament of Baptism. The neophytes

¹⁰ The preacher of a mystagogical sermon is known as the mystagogue.

¹¹ Thomas Alden Rand, "The Rhetoric of Ritual: Galatians as Mystagogy" (PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University, 2000).

were baptized at the Easter Vigil. Until that time they were not allowed access to even witness the administration of the Sacraments. The Sacraments were literally a mystery to them. The process of catechesis prepared the neophyte to receive the Sacraments but did not cover the meaning of those Sacraments. It was believed that new converts must first experience the Sacraments and then and only then would they have the opportunity to reflect on their experience. This period of reflection was known as the period of mystagogy.

The period of mystagogy in the fourth century was always in the week following Easter. The newly baptized would attend church every day of that week where they would listen to sermons – mystagogical sermons. During the Patristic Age all mystagogy was accomplished through preaching. Ambrose of Milan, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem are fourth century bishops and the exemplars of this style of preaching. It is through studying their mystagogical sermons that we learn of this practice.

When reviewing the sermons of the Patristic Fathers mentioned above one uncovers two distinct ways or methods of interpreting scripture for mystagogical sermons: typology and allegory.¹² A full exploration of these two hermeneutical methods can be found in Chapter 2 of this thesis. It was abuses of allegory over the years that ultimately led to the demise of mystagogy. Allegorical interpretations of the scriptures were only limited by the preacher's imagination. During the Reformation there was great

¹² Regan, *Experience the Mystery: Pastoral Possibilities for Christian Mystagogy*, 60.

resistance to the use of allegory in favor of a literal interpretation of the text.¹³ With this change the practice of mystagogy with its emphasis on experience came to an end.

It was not until 1972 that the practice of mystagogy was recovered. The Roman Catholic Church developed what is known as the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). This program identified a new catechetical process that is divided into four sections: Evangelization, Catechumenate, Sacramental Celebration, and Mystagogy. With the establishment of the RCIA we once again find the practice of mystagogy directly tied to the rites of initiation and the Sacrament of baptism.

In the Patristic Age the period mystagogy lasted only one week and began after Easter. The RCIA does not specify any particular time limit on the period of mystagogy. In some cases it is known to last over a period of two years. Another major difference of the RCIA from earlier methods of mystagogy modeled by the early Fathers is that mystagogy is no longer primarily done through sermons reflecting on the rites experienced. It is rather taught as a class. The focus is more on doctrine than experience.

The practice of mystagogy is not currently a focus for the Episcopal Church. While I appreciate that the Roman Catholic Church has rediscovered mystagogy, I argue that we Episcopalians should reclaim its original fourth century roots. These roots are found in preaching rather than catechetical instruction. As stated above, I contend that this style of preaching is uniquely relevant to an Episcopal/Anglican understanding of theology. It provides listeners the opportunity to go more deeply into the experiences they have had in the liturgy.

¹³ Ibid.

A Mystagogical Sermon Series

This thesis seeks to discover if mystagogical sermons can be effective in communicating the theology of the liturgies of the *Book of Common Prayer*. A full description of the research methodology can be found in chapter four of this thesis. I turn my attention here to the theology the prayer book is communicating. I have chosen to present this information in this introductory chapter rather than in the biblical/theological overview of chapter two. This is because it is part of the argument I am making. Chapter two will deal with the biblical and theological foundations of this style of preaching.

The four topics of the sermon series are the general confession and absolution, the passing of the peace, baptism, and the Holy Eucharist. Each of these rites is an important element of the Holy Eucharist, which is the principal service of worship in the Episcopal Church as established in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. In order to maintain a narrow and manageable scope of research I will not attempt to address any of the other liturgies found in the prayer book. I selected the first two topics because I doubt people have ever heard a full sermon dedicated to these rites. As a result, I suspect people have attached their own meanings to them. At the very least, they do not fully understand the theological reasons we participate in them each week. The second two topics are the two primary Sacraments recognized by the Episcopal Church. The theology of these two Sacraments is foundational for the church. Mystagogy, in its original form, always dealt with the rites of initiation. Baptism, which then led to the Eucharist, was always the topic of mystagogical sermons.

There is also a linear logic to my selection of these four topics. In the context of the Holy Eucharist each of these rites is intimately connected and each flows into and

directly relates to the others. Through this mystagogical sermon series I hope the congregation will begin to discover how the liturgy works as a whole. These rites are never left to stand alone. They are not isolated things we do before moving on to the next thing. There is significant meaning in how they are connected.

I begin with a sermon on the general confession and absolution. In the prayer book liturgy of the Holy Eucharist there are two options for the placement of the confession. It may be placed at the beginning of the liturgy, thus representing the Penitential Order, or it may be placed immediately following the prayers of the people towards the end of the liturgy of the word. The Penitential Order is more likely to be used during the season of Lent. The confession and absolution is most commonly placed following the prayers of the people the remainder of the year¹⁴. Either location communicates the same theology. This theology is best seen in the Exhortation found on pages 316-317 of the prayer book, a portion of which reads:

Examine your lives and conduct by the rule of God's commandments, that you may perceive wherein you have offended in what you have done or left undone, whether in thought, word, or deed. And acknowledge your sins before Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life, being ready to make restitution for all injuries and wrongs done by you to others; and also being ready to forgive those who have offended you, in order that you yourselves may be forgiven. And then, being reconciled with one another, come to the banquet of that most heavenly food.¹⁵

Here we discover that the prayer book itself, in a little known section, presents the pertinent theology of the rite. General confession is done, in light of God's word and

¹⁴ It is the practice of many Episcopal parishes to omit the confession and absolution completely during the season of Easter.

¹⁵ Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation and The Seabury Press, 1979), 317.

commandments, as a preparation to receive the Eucharist. St. Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, exhorts believers to examine their lives and conduct before receiving the Sacrament (1 Cor 11:27-34). To receive the Eucharist without this kind of preparation would be to their detriment.

This examination is to take place in the light of God's word and commandments. The scriptures read in church, or the Decalogue recited by the congregation when using the Penitential Order, provide the standards by which we examine our lives. The confession is only said after we have heard the scriptures read, and in most cases, after the sermon has explored the meaning of those texts and how we relate to them today. In the confession we ask ourselves, "Does my life reflect these words?" The scriptures read in church reveal what we may need to confess *this week*. As Mitchell says, the confession "Forms a part of our response to the word."¹⁶

The confession never stands alone. It is always followed by the absolution. This is the assurance of pardon proclaimed by the priest. This is our reminder that we are always met with grace and forgiveness when we confess our failings to God. It is important for the congregation to have a full understanding of who is doing the forgiving. It is not the priest who forgives; it is God who forgives. The priest serves as a witness to the grace and love of God. The priest is simply declaring what God has already done in Christ.

The absolution also then invites the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As we confess our sins we note where we have failed, and we welcome the Spirit to work on those areas in our lives.

¹⁶ Leonel L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing: A Theological Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer* (Minneapolis: Winston Seabury Pr, 1985), 138.

Finally, the confession is never an individual act. The liturgy does not read, “I confess.” It is “We confess.” The corporate nature of the general confession reminds us that we are all complicit in the corporate sinfulness of society. We all participate in systems of injustice. We live in a culture that fails to respect the dignity of every human being. We confess together, so that we might together begin welcoming God’s work of sanctification into our corporate lives. We confess together so that we can become a community of love and welcome, living in the world as God intends.

The second topic of the sermon series is directly related to the first. The passing of the peace immediately follows the general confession and absolution. The passing of the peace is a newer addition to the liturgy of the Episcopal Church. It was not included until the 1979 revision of the *Book of Common Prayer*. The theology of the peace is also found, at least in part, in the Exhortation of the prayer book. There we read, “And then, being reconciled with one another, come to the banquet of that most heavenly Food.”¹⁷

According to Leonel Mitchell, the “Peace serves as a bridge between the liturgy of the word of God and that of Holy Communion.”¹⁸ The passing of the peace is so much more than just the opportunity to greet friends and family members in the church. It is the embodiment of the acceptance we have just experienced in the confession and absolution. God has forgiven and accepted us. We now forgive and accept others. The passing of the peace is the opportunity to seek out those in the congregation with whom you are at odds and offer them peace. In this way, the peace also prepares us to receive the Eucharist. It

¹⁷ Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the the Episcopal Church*, 317.

¹⁸ Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing: A Theological Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer*, 142.

reflects the idea of the offertory sentence based on Matthew 5:23-24, “If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come offer your gift.”¹⁹

While it is true that the passing of the peace is more than just greeting friends, it is also still a greeting. It is a tangible act of welcome and hospitality. The passing of the peace includes both words and touch. Numerous places in the New Testament encourage believers to greet one another with a kiss of peace. Our churches today are far more likely to offer a handshake than a kiss. Regardless of the form it takes, the touch of peace embodies the welcome Christ offers to all people.

Finally, the passing of the peace is a proclamation to the world. One need only turn on the news to see the violence, hatred, and fear which surrounds us. The church, in our baptismal covenant, declares that it “renounces the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God.”²⁰ Through the passing of Christ’s peace we declare and embody that the church is a place of peace in a world so desperately in need of peace.

The third topic of the sermon series focuses on baptism. This topic is considerably larger and broader than the first two. Baptism is recognized as one of the two Sacraments of the church. In the Catechism found in the *Book of Common Prayer*, a Sacrament is defined as an “outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as

¹⁹ Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the the Episcopal Church*, 376.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 302.

sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.”²¹ That same Catechism defines baptism as union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God’s family known as the Church, and new life in the Holy Spirit. It would literally be possible to preach a mystagogical sermon on different aspects of the liturgy of baptism each Sunday of the year.

Our liturgy of baptism follows the same format as our liturgy of the Eucharist. Laurence Stookey suggests the story told in baptism is that of creation, the covenant, Christ, the Church, and the coming kingdom.²² The story is primarily told in the Thanksgiving over the Water. This portion of the baptismal liturgy is filled with typology, symbolism, and meaning. As a result, it is the Thanksgiving over the Water that became the primary text of my sermon.

The sermon seeks to communicate the theology of baptism as forgiveness of sins, new birth, participation in Christ’s resurrection, and adoption as Christ’s children. In addition, the sermon explores the meaning of the chrismation where the priest makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the newly baptized. I wanted the congregation to understand what it means to be “sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, and marked as Christ’s own forever.”²³

The fourth topic of the series is also an enormous one: the Holy Eucharist. There is a wide variety of beliefs surrounding the Eucharist. Some argue the Eucharist is nothing more than an opportunity to remember the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

²¹ Ibid., 857.

²² Laurence Hull Stookey, *Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982).

²³ Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the the Episcopal Church*, 308.

Others might suggest it is a continuation or a completion of the sacrifice of Christ's life. Some believe the elements of bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus. Others argue the elements do not actually change, rather it is their significance that changes. Some say the Eucharist is primarily an individual act while others say it is a corporate act. On top of all that, there is confusion regarding the role of the priest in the Eucharist. Does the priest stand in the place of Christ or does the priest stand in the place of the congregation? I sought to address these areas of debate with my mystagogical sermon. The Eucharistic prayer and the theology of the Eucharist were my primary topic.

My sermon sought to bring to light the theology of Real Presence. In the Episcopal Church we believe that Christ is uniquely present in the Eucharist. I sought to eradicate the erroneous idea that the Eucharist is a continuation of the sacrifice of Christ. Rather, the sacrifice of the Eucharist is the worshiper's own "sacrifice" or offering of praise and thanksgiving made by the congregation now coming to the Lord's Table. We offer ourselves back to God at the altar in gratitude for God's love and redemption received in Christ.

My sermon was anchored in the High Priestly Prayer of John 17:6-19. In the fourth gospel, Jesus prays that his followers would be one, that they would be protected, and that their joy may be complete. I argued in my sermon that each of those prayers was answered in and through the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist we are made one body. The miracle of the Sacrament is not necessarily that the bread and wine are transformed into the body of Christ,²⁴ but that we

²⁴ There is a full spectrum of belief within the Episcopal Church regarding Eucharistic theology. I did not attempt to address these beliefs arguing for one over the other. To do so would be somewhat un-Anglican. A more faithful approach for our tradition is to leave room for a wide variety of opinion placing greater value on common prayer and community.

who are many are transformed into the body of Christ. We never come to the table alone; we come to the table in community. Just as God has accepted us, we accept one another. We kneel at the altar rail shoulder to shoulder coming to a family meal.

In the Eucharist we are protected. We are united with Christ and given strength for our journey. The bread of the Eucharist is the new manna from heaven, which sustains us, nourishes us, and gives us strength. At the Eucharistic table we are reminded on weekly basis that we are not alone. Christ is alive and fully present with us. This gives us courage to face the dangers of the world.

In the Eucharist we receive joy. We come to the table with gratitude in our hearts. We offer our thanksgiving and praise to the God who has rescued and redeemed us through Jesus. We also look to the future with expectation. The Eucharist allows us to see the past, present, and future in new ways. We proclaim, “Christ has died, Christ has risen, and that Christ will come again.”²⁵ The Eucharist is the foretaste of that heavenly banquet prepared for all God’s people.

It is through the mystagogical sermons on these four topics that I seek to communicate the theology found in our liturgy. I want members of the parish to discover the deep meaning of these liturgical rites. I want them to go deeper into the mysteries of the faith as they are experiencing it in the liturgy. I want them to realize that they are active participants in the ongoing saving actions of Jesus in the world. I want them to understand how these different aspects of the liturgy connect and tell the story of those saving actions. My hope is that they will come both to a place of understanding, but also

²⁵ Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the the Episcopal Church*, 363.

a place of appreciation and growth in their faith. My goal is that the liturgy will come to life in new ways for them.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the rationale and relevance of mystagogical preaching for the Episcopal Church today. I outlined a brief history of mystagogy, its fourth century origins, how it was practiced by the early church fathers, how and why it fell from practice within the church, and how the Roman Catholic Church through the RCIA reclaimed it. I have presented the topics of my mystagogical sermon series and the prayer book theology of the Episcopal Church I hope to convey through those sermons.

Chapter two will present a biblical and theological overview of the foundations of mystagogical preaching. This will include an examination of how the New Testament authors utilized early Christian liturgy including liturgical fragments, early Christian hymns, baptismal formulas, and creedal statements to communicate theology. I will explore important hermeneutical methods for interpreting the scriptures that are significant for mystagogy. I will present the difference between typology and allegory, consider examples of typology found in the New Testament, and explore how scripture and liturgy can have a typological relationship. I will conclude the chapter with an examination of early Anglican sermons found in the *Book of Homilies* in hopes of identifying elements of mystagogy from the early days of Anglicanism. In addition, I will explore how mystagogy was an important element of the liturgical renewal brought to the church by the Oxford Movement.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

In the previous chapter I stated the rationale and relevance of mystagogical preaching for the Episcopal Church. I provided a brief history of mystagogy, including how it first began in the fourth century in the preaching ministry of St. Ambrose, Cyril of Jerusalem, St. John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. I explored how the practice of mystagogy fell from favor after the Reformation and how the Roman Catholic Church rediscovered it in 1972. I then outlined the theology found in the prayer book of the Episcopal Church, particularly focusing on the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist.

This chapter turns its attention to the biblical and theological foundations of mystagogy. I will first seek to understand the word “mystery” as it is used in the New Testament. The chapter will then examine how the New Testament authors communicated theology through the use of early Christian liturgy, hymns, creedal statements, and baptismal formulas. Next, it will explore the hermeneutical methods employed in crafting of mystagogical sermons. Particular attention will be paid to typology and allegory. I will search for evidence of mystagogy in the earliest Anglican sermons preserved in the *Book of Homilies*. Finally, I will consider ways mystagogy and mystagogical preaching were used by the Tractarians of the Oxford Movement to bring liturgical renewal to the worship practices of the Church of England and later to the Anglican Communion.

Mystery in the New Testament

As I stated in my introduction, mystagogy seeks to explore the mysteries of the faith, as they are experienced in the liturgy. It is important to remember that “mystery,” in the Christian usage of the word, seeks to describe what has been revealed. The New Testament uses the word *mysterion* eighteen times, with its most frequent usage appearing in Ephesians. The word is primarily used to refer to the revelation of God’s plan of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The author of Ephesians writes, “He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ.”¹ (Eph 1:9). The author wants the reader to know that God has revealed God’s will and plan of salvation. It is not a secret or something known by only a few. It is fully revealed in Jesus. The word mystery appears in Ephesians 3:3, 4, 5, 9, 5:32, and 6:19. In each instance *mysterion* speaks of “Truths only apprehended through revelation especially referring to God’s plan.”²

Mysterion also appears in Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, and Revelation. It is no surprise that its usage in Colossians is the same as in Ephesians. Scholars have suggested that Ephesians may have served as a commentary on Colossians. Its use in 1 Timothy is consistent with this same reference to Christian revelation arguing that deacons are to “hold fast to the mysteries of the faith.” (1 Tim 3:9).

Even when the word is not used in reference to God’s plan of redemption it still refers to revelation or something being explained or exposed. The use of the word in 2

¹ All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

² Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament, Unabridged*, 4th ed. (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993), 578.

Thessalonians is slightly different than Ephesians. Paul writes, “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work...” (2 Thess 2:7). Clearly the *mysterion* has to do with lawlessness in this text. But even here Paul is indicating that the lawless one has been revealed and exposed. This is established in 2:3 before the word *mysterion* is employed. A similar usage is found in Revelation 17:5 where the author writes of the mystery of the name found on the head of woman. “...and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth’s abominations.” (Rev 17:5). The name is a *mysterion*. But just two verses later the angel asks, “Why are you so amazed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman.” (Rev 17:7). The *mysterion* is revealed, exposed, and made clear to all.

In all eighteen occurrences of *mysterion* in the New Testament the word speaks to some kind of mystery being revealed. Most commonly, as seen in Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Timothy, it speaks of God’s plan of salvation and redemption in Jesus Christ. Since mystagogy seeks to explore the mysteries of the faith, as they are experienced in the liturgy, mystagogy and *mysterion* walk hand in hand. Through the liturgy we become active participants in God’s saving actions and plan of redemption, which have been revealed in Jesus Christ.

Usage of Early Christian Liturgy in the New Testament

Using liturgical elements and doxology to communicate theology is not new; the New Testament is filled with examples of this practice. The authors of the New Testament utilized familiar hymns, baptismal liturgies, creedal statements, and doxology throughout their writings. According to James Bailey, “It is no surprise that liturgical language and forms are found scattered throughout the letters in the Pauline tradition.

Paul himself most certainly led worship in the churches he founded and would have been influenced in his correspondence by the traditional elements of worship.”³ The familiarity with these liturgical elements would catch a listener’s attention when the epistle was read in worship. This is particularly true when slight variation or changes appeared in the liturgical elements used. The use of devotional texts and hymnody is not restricted to Christianity. It can also be found in Greek, Roman, and Jewish writings in antiquity.

I am particularly interested in liturgical elements as they are used in the New Testament to communicate theology and enhance unity. This is in contrast with those New Testament passages that are used as liturgy today. *The Magnificat, the Benedictus, Gloria, Nunc Dimittis* and others canticles used in the *Book of Common Prayer* are drawn from the scriptures. These are used in the liturgies of Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and are optional for use in the Holy Eucharist. These texts, along with other great songs of Old and New Testaments, are examples of joyful response to the wonderful actions of God on behalf of God’s people. They also connect the life of Jesus to the events of Israel’s history. They do not function, however, in the same way as the early Christian liturgical elements included in the epistles of the New Testament. This is because these texts were original compositions in their settings. Even the *Magnificat*, which has its source in the Song of Hannah of 1 Samuel, is original to Luke. The early Christian liturgical elements I am in interested were not original works by the biblical author. They were known by the community and employed by the author to communicate theology.

In his book *The Colossian Hymn in Context*, Matthew Gordley suggests a number of important reasons for the use of liturgical elements in New Testament epistles. The

³ James L. and Lyle D. Vander Broek Bailey, *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 72.

author is able to “enhance his ethos”⁴ through the use of familiar language and liturgy. In addition, “The citation of hymns functions as a reminder of values and traditions already shared by Paul and his readers.”⁵ Used in this way the familiarity of the liturgical elements and hymnody enhances the author’s ability to communicate and/or reinforces the theology he wanted to address. By appealing to shared beliefs in this way, the biblical author is also able to combat false teachers and other ideologies threatening the stability of the community.⁶

Gordley offers another benefit of using familiar liturgical elements: the establishment of unity in the community. The communal nature of the church is enhanced as readers encounter familiar liturgical elements in these letters. The community holds these shared beliefs and therefore experiences a greater sense of unity.⁷ This benefit is of particular interest for this thesis. The sense of unity through common liturgy is an essential element of the Anglican/Episcopal tradition. According the website of the Episcopal Church, “The Book of Common Prayer is a treasure chest full of devotional and teaching resources for individuals and congregations, but it is also the primary symbol of our unity. We, who are many and diverse, come together in Christ through our worship, our common prayer.”⁸

⁴ Matthew E. Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn in Context: An Exegesis in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Hymnic and Epistolary Conventions*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament. 2. Reihe; 228; Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament. 228. 2. Reihe; (Tübingen:: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 259.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 269.

⁷ Matthew E. Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity: Didactic Hymnody among Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 2.

⁸ The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society The Episcopal Church, “Www.Episcopalchurch.Org,” The Episcopal Church (accessed September 1, 2015).

Finally, Gordley has suggested that Paul used hymns as a teaching tool, calling them “Didactic Hymns.”⁹ Gordley’s work is primarily on Colossians 1:15-20, a passage long thought to be an early baptismal liturgy. The words of this liturgy provide readers a glimpse into what early Christians believed about baptism. He argues, “The primary purpose of ancient hymns was offering praise, thanks, requests, or some combination of these, to the divine. But we discover in the New Testament that some early Christian hymns were used for another reason: instruction.”¹⁰ The author repurposed this liturgy to counter false teachers who were threatening the church in Colossae.¹¹ David M. Hay, in his commentary on Colossians, writes, “Much of the argument in the rest of Colossians seems to build on this hymnic passage.”¹²

One of the best-known examples of Paul’s usage of early Christian liturgy is the Christ Hymn of Philippians 2:6-11. This is an example of Paul’s early use of creeds as a Christological statement. Here we also find an example of Paul changing the hymn to suit his particular needs. It is widely accepted by scholars that Paul added the phrase, “Even death on a cross” to Phil 2:8. Paul’s use of this familiar creed assists him as he pleads for unity within the Philippian Church. Paul presents the well-known hymn as a means of lifting up the life of Christ as the exemplar of humility and self-giving love. Paul wants the Philippians to embrace this way of life by imitating Christ. The hymn speaks to the

⁹ Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity: Didactic Hymnody among Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians*.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1.

¹¹ Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1991), 104.

¹² David M. Hay, *Colossians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 53.

nature of Christ but also to how the reader should therefore live as a follower of Christ. It communicates theology, offers instruction, and enhances unity within the community.

Those writing in the Pauline tradition took their cue from Paul. Early Christian liturgy and creedal statements continued to be used in the Pastoral Epistles. The author of 1 Timothy utilizes early Christian liturgy to communicate theology in chapter 3, verse 16. This passage is used to delve more deeply into the mystery of the Christian faith. Mystagogy seeks to do the exact same thing.

The author of 1 Peter also uses early Christian liturgy to communicate theology. 1 Peter 3:18-22 provides an example of how the author cobbled together a series of creedal statements in order to make his point.¹³ The life of Christ, including his suffering, provides the example for the life the believer is to live. Peter offers what could be considered a hymn as a response to suffering experienced by his readers. This familiar language therefore becomes a source of hope and unity for the persecuted Christians Peter addresses.

Liturgy being used to communicate theology is not restricted to the epistles of the New Testament; it is found in the Gospels as well. This is most evident in the poetic prologue of John's Gospel which is a hymn placed at the beginning of the fourth Gospel and used to establish the identity of Jesus. The prologue of John easily fits into the criteria for identifying didactic hymns offered by Gordley. It "directly addresses the human audience with the goal of conveying ideas, information, or values, makes direct

¹³ Pheme Perkins, *First and Second Peter, James, and Jude*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1995), 64.

claims about the nature of the one being praised, and recounts events of mythic past or recent past.”¹⁴

These passages of scripture mentioned above are only a few of many examples of early Christian liturgy being pressed into service by biblical writers. Other examples for Christological hymns can be found in Ephesians and Hebrews as well - be they sacramental, meditative, confessional, or Christological¹⁵ evidence - of well-known hymns, creeds, and liturgical formulas are regularly used in the New Testament to lead believers deeper into the mysteries of the faith.

Hermeneutical Methods

I now turn my attention to hermeneutical methods. Mystagogical preaching requires interpreting biblical texts with an eye towards the four theological senses: the literal, allegorical, moral, and prophetic.¹⁶ In mystagogical preaching, it is the allegorical sense that plays the most important role. “A simple definition of allegory is to say or interpret something in the light of something else.”¹⁷ In particular, mystagogical preaching employs one aspect of the allegorical sense: typology.

According to Leonhard Goppelt, “Typology is the method of biblical interpretation that is characteristic of the New Testament.”¹⁸ Typology seeks to make a

¹⁴ Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity: Didactic Hymnody among Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians*, 10.

¹⁵ Bailey, *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook*.

¹⁶ Paul Scott Wilson, *God Sense: Reading the Bible for Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁸ Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1982), 4.

single point of comparison between people, places, things, or events. One person, place or thing is a “type” of the other. Typology is different from allegory in that there is only a single point of comparison while the historical integrity of the original is maintained. The use of typology allows one to read the Old Testament from the perspective of the New. This reflects the third of nine theses on the interpretation of scripture offered in *The Art of Reading Scripture* edited by Ellen Davis and Richard Hayes. The third theses states, “faithful interpretation of Scripture requires and engagement with the entire narrative: the New Testament cannot be rightly understood apart from the Old, nor can the Old be rightly understood apart from the New.”¹⁹

For example, the Apostle Paul uses typology in Romans 5:12-21 when he compares Adam and Christ. Here Adam is a type for Christ. In typology, the later fulfillment is always greater than the former.²⁰ When utilizing the allegorical sense one is able to identify an abundance of types in the scriptures. The Akedah of Genesis 22 is a type for the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The exodus of God’s people from slavery in Egypt is a type for the new exodus in Christ where God’s people are liberated from slavery to sin and death. The suffering servant texts of Isaiah can be interpreted as a type for Christ as well. The Bronze Serpent of Numbers 21 is a type for the crucifixion of Jesus.

In his book *Typos*, Leonhard Goppelt writes:

Paul’s basic view of the Old Testament is that its content corresponds to the gospel, and that its task is to present the gospel to the church. Christ is the affirmation of all God’s promises (2 Cor 1:20). The story and the meaning of

¹⁹ Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 2.

²⁰ Wilson, *God Sense: Reading the Bible for Preaching*, 125.

Christ's life are in harmony with scripture (1 Cor 15:3f.), and the gospel of justification was announced beforehand in scripture (Rom 1:2, 3:21; cf. 10:5ff.). Therefore, Scripture can and will help the church understand the salvation it has received... This is especially true of biblical history, which must be interpreted typologically.²¹

This use of typology is relevant to mystagogical preaching because the liturgy and the Sacraments can be explained as types. The manna from heaven of Exodus is a type for the Eucharist. The crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus is a type for baptism, as is the washing of Naaman in the Jordan River in 2 Kings. The passing of the peace after the confession can have a typological relationship to the forgiveness and acceptance we have received through Christ. The mystagogue will use an abundance of biblical images and types as he or she leads the congregation deeper into the mysteries of the faith they experience in the liturgy.

The Episcopal Church already embraces this usage of typology as means of understanding the liturgy of the church. Examples can be found within the liturgy itself. The best example is found in the thanksgiving over the water in the baptismal liturgy.

There we read:

We thank you Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.

We thank you, Father, for the water of baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who have come to him in faith, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Now sanctify this water, we pray you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that those

²¹ Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, 127.

who are cleansed from sin and born again may continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior.²²

Here we find a variety of images from both Old and New Testaments that help the gathered congregation connect what they experience in baptism to God's ongoing work of salvation. Those images include the story of creation found in Genesis, the Exodus out of Egypt, the baptism of Jesus as presented in the Gospels, Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, the images of death and burial used by Paul in Romans, as well as images of cleansing and bath. All of these images can be explored in a mystagogical sermon establishing the typological relationship between the scripture and the liturgical rite.

While the allegorical sense is critical for mystagogical preaching, it does not come without dangers. Bad allegorical interpretations of texts must always be avoided. It was the abuses of allegory that led Luther to reject the fourfold meaning of scripture.²³ According to Paul Scott Wilson, "Bad allegorical interpretation inverts what the text is plainly saying and claims for it a meaning that denies its historical footing."²⁴ In other words, bad allegory allows the interpreter to make any claim about the meaning of an Old Testament text without care or concern about the actual historical situation in which it was written. Therefore the text loses all meaning for its original context. Typology is different in that it only makes one point of comparison and the original meaning of the text is not lost.

²² Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the the Episcopal Church*, 306-307.

²³ Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, 6.

²⁴ Wilson, *God Sense: Reading the Bible for Preaching*, 114.

Mystagogy in Anglican History

The Book of Homilies

The *Book of Homilies* is the abbreviated title for the collection of sermons produced by the Church of England shortly after the death of Henry VIII. The original and complete title of the work was *Certain Sermons, or Homilies, Appointed by the Kings Majesty, to be Declared and Read, by all Parsons, Vicars, or Curates Every Sunday in their Churches, Where They Have Cure*.²⁵ Archbishop Cranmer was interested in teaching reformed doctrines in the Church of England. So important was this teaching that Cranmer completed the first volume of the *Book of Homilies* prior to completing the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*. He believed his goal was not possible without a standard set of homilies that would teach these doctrines to all the people of the Church of England. Writing about the *Book of Homilies*, O. C. Edwards explains:

When the power of the Crown was placed behind the Reformation by the regents of Edward VI, two truths were recognized: (1) that the new doctrines needed to be taught in a wholesale way, and (2) that many of the clergy were not well enough trained to teach them. To meet the need, a collection of sermons was published to inculcate the new doctrines.²⁶

The sermons were topical in nature and covered a wide array of topics.

Examination of the Homilies reveals that the early preaching of the Church of England presented a form of Christian Humanism reminiscent of Erasmus. Edwards continues:

English humanists shared with Erasmus three convictions: that obedience to God is aimed not so much toward holy dying as toward obedience to God in the world as a way that improves social living, that such obedience is to the will of God as

²⁵ For ease of reading I have changed the spelling of the original title of the Book of Homilies to reflect the current spelling of the words. The actual spelling of the original title is *Certain sermons, or Homilies, appointed by the Kynges Maiestie, to be declared and redde, by all Persones, Uicars, or Curates euery Sondag in the Churches where they haue Cure*.

²⁶ O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 357.

revealed in the Bible, and that this reform is communicated through human speech.²⁷

The *Book of Homilies* was not well received. It was greatly resisted by clergy and laity alike. Historians indicate that parishioners refused to listen to the Homilies as they were read in church. They would loudly talk over the preacher who was doing his best to recite the Homily for that day. The illiteracy of some parish clergy also made it impossible for the Homilies to be read effectively²⁸.

For this thesis I was curious to see if there were any elements of mystagogy in these early Anglican Sermons. Reviewing the list of topics covered in the *Book of Homilies* I discovered that there was surprisingly only one sermon on the Sacraments. This Homily is called *An Homily of the Worthy Receiving and Reverent Esteeming of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, in two Parts*. The sermon is primarily concerned with the process of self-examination required of a person intending to receive the Sacrament. The sermon covers some of the same theological themes I address in both my sermon on the general confession and absolution, as well as my sermon on the Holy Eucharist preached for this thesis. I also found it interesting that some of the early Fathers best known for mystagogy were quoted in this sermon. This includes St. John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, and Cyril of Jerusalem.

The author of the sermon - believed to be John Jewel, then Bishop of Salisbury - wanted listeners to understand the importance of self-examination prior to coming to the Eucharist. He sought to dispel erroneous ideas that the Eucharist is a completion of

²⁷ Ibid., 358.

²⁸ *The Book of Homilies*, edited by John Griffiths (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2008), x.

Christ's sacrifice. Rather, the Eucharist is an offering of praise and thanksgiving to God. Worshipers are offering themselves to God. Jewel argues that the Eucharist is spiritual nourishment feeding the soul. Those who come to the table of God are able to live Godly lives as a result of their communion with the Lord. Jewel also writes that the gathered congregation is made one body through their participation in the Eucharist.

As stated above, the text of a mystagogical sermon is the liturgical rite itself. This is evident in this early Anglican homily. The author never directly quotes the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist used in the Church of England at the time. It is still clear that the Sacrament is the topic of the sermon despite the preacher never directly quoting the liturgy.

Mystagogical sermons utilize a variety of biblical images, using typology and allegory to provide the listener deeper insight into the meaning of what they have experienced in the liturgy. This sermon does indeed utilize numerous biblical texts and images to communicate the meaning of the Sacrament. The homily uses 1 Corinthians 11:27-34 as its primary text. The preacher uses additional images drawn from Exodus, Deuteronomy, Proverbs, Matthew, Luke, and John. The preacher uses typology connecting the Eucharist with the manna from heaven given during the Exodus. This use of typology is also seen in a reference to Proverbs 23:1,

“To avoid then these harms, use the advice of the Wise Man, who willeth thee, when thou sittest at an earthly king's table, to take diligent heed what things are set before thee. So now much more, at the King of Kings' table, thou must carefully search and know what dainties are provided for thy soul.”²⁹

Similar typological connections are made between Passover, the Rock of Deuteronomy 32, and the True Vine of John 15. Additional images are drawn from

²⁹ Ibid., 441.

parables such as the Ten Lepers from Luke's Gospel, and the Parable of the Wedding Banquet found in Matthew's Gospel.

This early Anglican sermon bears several hallmarks of mystagogical preaching, including the fact that the sermon was to be read within the context of worship and intended to lead congregants to a deeper understanding of the Sacrament. The sermon's topic was not one particular biblical text but a liturgical rite. The sermon was anchored in one biblical text but also used a variety of biblical images and stories to convey meaning. The sermon utilized typology and allegory connecting the liturgical rite to biblical images. The sermon regularly referred to and quoted the words of some of the early mystagogues, particularly Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Cyril.

I do not believe one could argue that *An Homily of the Worthy Receiving and Reverent Esteeming of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ* is truly a mystagogical sermon. It does, however, reveal many elements of mystagogical sermons. I therefore believe one can argue that this style of preaching does have some basis in early Anglican usage.

The Oxford Movement

The second place I find evidence of mystagogical preaching in Anglican history is the Oxford Movement of the nineteenth century. This movement, begun by John Henry Newman, John Keble, Richard Hurrell Froude, and Edward Bouverie Pusey, sought to correct what they viewed as the wayward direction of the Church of England. They believed that the State had failed in its responsibility to uphold the true nature of the church. They saw the Erastian leaning of the Church of England as a serious problem. They also set their sights on combating evangelical directions the church was

entertaining. Their primary weapon in their fight was the publication of a large number of tracts presenting their arguments for liturgical renewal and reform. Their reliance on tracts gave the movement its other name: the Tractarians. The Oxford Movement ultimately led to significant liturgical renewal in the Church of England.

Of the four Oxford men, it was Newman, their primary theologian, who turned to the Patristic Age and the writings of the Early Fathers to find the theological core of what he believed about the Church. This reliance on the Early Fathers provided direction for the Oxford Movement. Newman believed that the liturgies of the *Book of Common Prayer* presented the Church's true nature as the Fathers had handed it down.³⁰ Not only did Newman write tracts on this topic, he also preached and published a series of ten sermons on the liturgies. These sermons were offered in order to deepen his congregation's understanding the theology of the liturgy. "Methodically, Newman went through the uses of the liturgy, its teaching of Christian doctrine, and its forming of Christian character, and he appealed for its full acceptance in the life of every Christian believer."³¹

In his book *The Oxford Movement: A Thematic History of the Tractarians and Their Times*, C. Brad Faught offers a detailed analysis of the politics, theology, methods, and mission of this influential movement within the Church of England. Faught's description of Newman's reliance on the Patristic Fathers for theology, his insistence on the liturgy of the prayer book as the most faithful source of communicating that theology, and the report that Newman preached sermons on the liturgy, provides evidence of

³⁰ C. Brad Faught, *The Oxford Movement: A Thematic History of the Tractarians and Their Themes* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 61.

³¹ Ibid., 60.

mystagogical preaching in Anglican history. As mentioned earlier, the Oxford Movement was one of the most influential and important times in Anglican history. The liturgical renewal brought to the church by this movement still guides many of the churches of the Anglican Communion today.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to explore the biblical and theological foundations of mystagogical preaching. I explored how the New Testament authors used the word *mysterion* and its relation to mystagogy. The chapter looked at how biblical authors used liturgical elements such as early Christian hymns, creedal statements, and baptismal formulas in their epistles to communicate theology, enhance ethos, instruct, and encourage unity within the community. I examined texts found in several New Testament books. I considered the hermeneutical methods important for mystagogical preaching including the four senses of scripture and allegorical interpretation in particular. I opened the Book of Homilies in hopes of discovering evidence and elements of mystagogy in these early Anglican sermons. Finally, I considered the Oxford Movement and how mystagogical preaching and the theology of the Patristic Fathers guided the liturgical renewal brought to the Church of England.

Chapter three will present a review of important literature on the topic. This will include a review of the foundational books that define mystagogy and how the Early Church Fathers practiced it. I will then turn my attention to literature that examines the mystagogical sermons of the Early Fathers in hopes of identifying a method of mystagogical preaching that can be used today, followed by an exploration of the

foundational books regarding the theology of the Episcopal Liturgy. Finally, I will consider and critique similar doctoral theses, looking for strengths and deficiencies. These theses provide an excellent starting point for my own research project.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

In chapter two I reviewed the biblical and theological foundations of mystagogical preaching. I examined the practice of New Testament authors who utilized familiar liturgical elements, hymns, creeds, and baptismal formulas in their letters hoping to enhance ethos, communicate theology, instruct, and build unity within the community. I reviewed the hermeneutical methods used in mystagogical preaching and connected those to the biblical practice of using typology. I argued that typology may also be used to make valid connections between the scripture and the liturgy. Finally, I reviewed a sermon from the *Book of Homilies* and the Oxford Movement in the hope of discovering elements of mystagogical preaching in early Anglican history.

In this chapter I turn my attention to relevant literature on the topic of mystagogy and the liturgy of the Episcopal Church. I will begin with a review of what I consider the most foundational books defining mystagogy. These books explore its history beginning with how mystagogy was practiced by the Early Church Fathers, how it fell from favor in the church, and how it was recovered by the Roman Catholic Church. I then turn my attention to books that seek to use work of the early mystagogues to uncover a method of mystagogical preaching for today. Thereafter, I review the key texts presenting the theology of the liturgy of the Episcopal Church as it is presented in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Lastly I turn my attention to academic work and other doctoral theses written on the topic.

For the sake of space and continuity, I have chosen not to cover the extensive amount of literature reviewed regarding typology, early Christian liturgical elements, how they were used in the New Testament, and the four senses for interpreting scripture in this chapter. I read and relied heavily on many works on these topics. While my reading on these topics was certainly not exhaustive, chapter two offered a sufficient review of the most relevant literature. A complete list of the work reviewed on this element of my research can be found in the bibliography.

Mystagogy

On the topic of mystagogy itself one is able to find a small but helpful chunk of literature. Specifically, there are two primary books that define mystagogy: Enrico Mazza's *Mystagogy* and David Regan's *Experience the Mystery*. Both works are incredibly helpful in understanding what mystagogy is and how it has developed over time.

Mazza's *Mystagogy* provides the foundational definition of mystagogy. He writes, "Mystagogy seeks to give a theological explanation not only of the sacramental fact, but of each rite making up the liturgical celebration."¹ Mazza introduces us to four exemplars of mystagogical preaching: Ambrose of Milan, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, and Cyril of Jerusalem. These four mystagogues and their writing (sermons) provide us with the only window available through which we may peek at the earliest practice of mystagogy. Based on these early mystagogues, Mazza makes the convincing argument that true mystagogy should remain within the sphere of preaching rather than in

¹ Enrico Mazza, *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1989), ix.

catechetical instruction. The only information we have on the early practice of mystagogy is found in the homilies of these four Early Fathers. This is important for my thesis. As we will soon see, the Roman Catholic Church rediscovered the practice of mystagogy in 1972 making it the fourth stage of the RCIA. But in that form mystagogy is offered in a class/discussion format. I argue that mystagogy is best when its original form is maintained as a homiletic activity rather than a catechetical one.

Mazza also makes the clear case that mystagogy is a liturgical theology. Its primary purpose is to lead Christians to a deeper understanding of the mysteries of the faith they have experienced in the liturgy and in the sacraments. Again, this point supports my argument. In order to fully understand the theology of the Episcopal Church one must understand the liturgy of the church. As a result, I have come to believe that the clergy of our tradition would be wise to find ways to make the liturgical rites Episcopalians practice each Sunday the focus of at least some of their sermons.

Mazza also briefly touches on the two primary hermeneutical methods used in mystagogy: typology and allegory. Chapter two of this thesis defines the difference between these two methods. Of interest to Mazza is not just defining these two hermeneutical methods, but more importantly, identifying the two primary schools of thought regarding the use of typology and allegory. These include the Antiochenes and the Alexandrians. The difference between these two schools is their primary reliance on one method over the other. The Alexandrians utilized allegory as their primary method of practicing theology; the Antiochens relied more heavily on typology.

The remainder of *Mystagogy* is a close examination of the mystagogical sermons of Ambrose of Milan, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, and Cyril of Jerusalem.

Mazza takes time to identify the primary features of their mystogy, the approach they use to interpret scripture— either allegorical or typological – and therefore to which school they belonged, as well as what aspects of the liturgy they found most meaningful for new converts to the faith.

Experience the Mystery by David Regan also explores the early history of mystagogy. He defines mystagogy as “That which leads newcomers into an experience of mystery.”² As the title of the book implies, Regan is quick to point out that mystagogy is more interested in what people experience than with what they know. He calls mystagogy the “hub of Christian initiation.”³ Regan is quick to point out that mystagogy is not exclusively a Christian practice. In fact, the word mystagogy comes to the church from the mystery religions of the Greek and Roman culture.⁴ Those being initiated into those secret cults were exposed to the mysteries and practices of those religions. Their practices of initiation were experiential. Christians then built upon this sense of experience as they sought to welcome new members to the faith. The sacraments were to be experienced first. Only then could they be explained.

Regan points out that the experiential nature of mystagogy reminds us of something that is particularly important for mystagogical preaching today. Mystagogy is not meant to be a commentary on the liturgy. The experience of the liturgy is meant to teach the Christian how to live the faith. If mystagogy is to be effective it should communicate more than just information about the liturgical rite. It should also reveal

² Regan, *Experience the Mystery: Pastoral Possibilities for Christian Mystagogy*, 1.

³ Ibid., 2.

⁴ Ibid., 13.

how participation in that rite helps one live more fully into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Through the liturgy we become active participants in the saving actions of God in the world. Christian worship becomes the opportunity to practice what it means to live the Christian life.

It is Regan who presents the reasons why the practice of mystagogy fell from favor in the church, particularly after the Reformation. He attributes this to the abuses of allegorical interpretation of scripture that was rampant in medieval times. He argues, “Extravagant use of allegory was often due to ignorance of the historical origins of the rites.”⁵ This led the reformers to insist that the literal sense of the scriptures was the only legitimate way to interpret a text. Regan also notes that the reformers were also not as interested in the writings of the Early Fathers as were the Roman Catholics.

In his review of how mystagogy vanished from use in the church, Regan expresses some surprise that Protestant traditions have not sought to recover its practice. Of particular interest for this thesis are his comments regarding the Anglican Tradition:

The Anglican Communion, most likely of the Protestant Churches to recover venerable patristic notions, because of its strong sacramental theology, has carried out research on the history of Christian initiation as a whole and on the specific pastoral theme of adult initiation. Return to some of the abandoned patristic methods of interpretation, and a new appreciation of the *sensus plenior*⁶, may yet allow of the rediscovery of mystagogy in the Churches issued from the Reformation. It has recently been argued that in recognizing their own early tradition – dating notably to Lancelot Andrews – Anglicans could recapture a mystagogic strain.⁷

⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁶ A fuller sense.

⁷ Regan, *Experience the Mystery: Pastoral Possibilities for Christian Mystagogy*. 23.

Regan's comments here lend credibility to my thesis. I have argued that mystagogy is particularly relevant to an Episcopal/Anglican ethos. And yet I have discovered no work published within the Episcopal tradition regarding reclaiming the practice of mystagogical preaching.

After outlining the demise of mystagogy in the church, Regan next turns to how it has been reclaimed after Vatican II in the RCIA. The period of mystagogy now forms the final stage of the RCIA. Unlike previous stages, the period of mystagogy has no set time limit. In fact, Regan argues that it is an ongoing part of the life of the believer. Regan argues that this emphasis on experience is much more compatible with the culture of the day. He specifically explores how mystagogy connects to scriptures, liturgy, experience, community, and mystery.

Because Regan writes from Brazil, he also includes elements of liberation theology in his discussion of mystagogy. He argues that mystagogy leads people into the Paschal Mystery. Through the liturgy men and women are participating in the new Exodus. He reminds his readers of the centrality of the Exodus in the Old Testament as the central act of liberation. Regan argues that Christians come to experience this liberation themselves and begin to see how the church can be relevant today. He lifts up an emphasis on care for the poor, social justice, human rights, and human sympathy as the experience of the Gospel in action.⁸ This makes for a fascinating discussion on how mystagogical preaching can be an integral part of the peace and justice efforts of the church.

⁸ Ibid., 107.

One must also consider the work of Edward Yarnold and his book *The Awe Inspiring Rites of Initiation*. This book further compares the RCIA and the fourth century baptism practices. Yarnold goes into great depth describing the practice of baptism experienced in the fourth century. Each element of the rite is dissected and the symbolism explained. After explaining these rites, Yarnold turns his attention to the baptismal homilies of Ambrose of Milan, Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and John Chrysostom. Yarnold seeks to reveal their particular way of approaching the task of mystagogy.

Discovering a Method for Mystagogical Preaching Today

Moving from these three foundational books about mystagogy itself, I now turn my attention to works that specifically examine the mystagogical preaching of the Patristic Fathers and extrapolate therefrom methods of mystagogical preaching that can be used today. The work of Craig Satterlee in his *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching* is the most helpful. This work is Satterlee's PhD dissertation in book format. It is meant to be a companion to William Harmless' *Augustine and the Catechumenate*.

Satterlee presents a picture of who Ambrose was and what made him such an important figure in the history of the church. The book covers in great detail the original writings of Ambrose himself, specifically in *De sacramentis*. The rites of baptism in the fourth century and in Milan specifically are outlined and explained in great detail. This level of explanation is important to understand. Without the understanding of what the neophytes experienced we cannot understand Ambrose's sermons that explain them. Dr. Satterlee takes the sermons of Ambrose preserved in *De sacramentis* and from them

identifies the key factors of early mystagogical preaching. He then uses that historical evidence to recommend a method for mystagogical preaching today. Satterlee believes that, “mystagogical preaching offers great promise for enlivening and enlarging the faith community’s liturgical and sacramental life and the identity and mission that flow from it.”⁹ Satterlee takes the strong stance that the church today has neglected its responsibilities by ignoring mystagogy.

As mentioned above, based on his extensive review of the mystagogical sermons of Ambrose of Milan, Satterlee is able to identify a method for mystagogical preaching today. He outlines that method in a four-step process suggesting that the mystagogue:

- 1) Establishes the “text”.
- 2) Evaluates the rites.
- 3) Interprets the meaning of the rites.
- 4) Spells out the implications of participation for daily life.¹⁰

Satterlee is once again quick to remind that the text of the mystagogical sermon is the liturgical rite itself. He argues:

This process takes seriously that the liturgy is the “text” on which mystagogy is based, that scripture provides the means for interpreting this “text”, and that the experience of both the preacher and the listeners are the best source for determining how the sacraments are applicable to the faith community’s everyday life in the world.¹¹

The end of his book also includes helpful tips and guidelines for crafting mystagogical sermons. Satterlee reminds that some topics, such as baptism and the Eucharist, are simply too large to cover in one sermon. It is far better to take small portions of those liturgical rites and base the sermon on those. I attempted to put this into

⁹ Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching*, 317.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 327.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

practice in my own mystagogical sermons on baptism and the Eucharist used for the research portion of this thesis.

Satterlee's method is expanded on in a more accessible and shorter book called *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments*, which was co-authored by Lester Ruth. This work identifies the traits of mystagogical sermons and the assumptions with which a mystagogue must approach the scriptures. This is particularly relevant because it moves mystagogy beyond being only related to the rites of initiation. It presents a form of mystagogy that can be used to explore the meaning of many different parts of the liturgy.

The book presents three distinct traits of mystagogical preaching. These traits are outlined in the following way:

- 1) This style of sermon is best heard within the context of worship rather than being read.
- 2) This style of sermon approaches the preaching task with a certain logic that goes beyond critical or scholarly approaches to the text or explanations of the liturgical rites.
- 3) This style of sermon requires living with an abundance of meanings.¹²

In addition to these traits, Satterlee and Ruth also outline three assumptions regarding the use of scripture in mystagogical preaching. They argue the following:

- 1) Creative preaching on the sacraments assumes that scripture and worship are connected by God's saving activity.
- 2) Such preaching understands that the biblical story continues to our day in the church's worship and sacraments.
- 3) Turning to the scripture in order to explore the meaning of worship and sacrament and to find images that illustrate that meaning is not new.¹³

¹² Craig Alan Satterlee and Lester Ruth, *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2001), 17.

¹³ Ibid., 17-18.

Satterlee and Ruth then draw from these ideas a method for mystagogical preaching today. They first reinforce the idea that mystagogical preaching, by its very nature, is biblical preaching. The scriptures provide the means for interpreting the liturgical rites experienced in worship. The preacher draws on the biblical stories finding connections to the liturgy and revealing how through our liturgy we are participants in God's ongoing work of redemption and salvation.

The preacher must be willing to draw on a wide variety of biblical stories and images found in both the Old and New Testaments. Just one story will not do. This idea is revealed in the preaching of the Patristic Fathers. They employ multiple images and stories from the scripture that help find meaning in the rites experienced. Satterlee and Ruth are quick to remind that the preacher is not seeking something new or original. The connections made should be able to be seen in the traditions of the church and in the scriptures themselves. This guards against the abuses of allegory mentioned in earlier chapters.

Satterlee and Ruth continue by pointing out that ultimately mystagogical preaching is about God's saving activity in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is the Paschal Mystery that is the very center of our worship life. It is this experience to which mystagogical preaching seeks to lead people. The second half of this instructive book consists of examples of contemporary mystagogical sermons provided by a variety of different preachers.

Satterlee and Ruth's method for mystagogical preaching provides a blueprint for crafting mystagogical sermons today. The method they outline, combined with the method provided in *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching* will be used

in the crafting of my own mystagogical sermons produced for the research portion of this thesis.

Theology of the Episcopal Church

Because this project seeks to discover the usefulness of mystagogical preaching, particularly in the Episcopal Church, there must also be consideration of the literature that directly relates the Episcopal liturgy. A review of the literature on mystagogy and mystagogical preaching reveals that no work has been done on this topic with specific focus on how it can be used particularly in the Episcopal Church.

The closest book on the topic I have found is a book by Episcopal priest Charles L. Rice entitled *The Embodied Word: Preaching as Art and Liturgy*. Rice's book is excellent and important for preachers within the Episcopal Church. He does make some allusion to the importance of mystagogical preaching when he argues, "Wherever the preacher can echo the liturgy, the sermon will be strengthened by its connection to the people's work."¹⁴ This comment, which is similar to the argument made by Christine McSpadden, is as close to the current topic that Rice comes. Rather, his book is almost more an example of mystagogy itself. Rice seeks to explain the meaning of the location of the sermon within the liturgy. He argues that the location of the sermon in the Episcopal liturgy between the reading of the scriptures and the celebration of the Eucharist has significance. His primary point is to say that the sermon ends at the altar. The sermon should lead people to the act of thanksgiving (Eucharist).¹⁵

¹⁴ Charles Lynvel Rice, *The Embodied Word: Preaching as Art and Liturgy*, Fortress Resources for Preaching (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 67.

¹⁵ Ibid., 19.

Rice also takes up the issue of where the sermon is best preached in the church. He discusses the merits of preaching from the pulpit and those of preaching from amongst the congregation. In the end, he seems to suggest that the sermon should move from one of these places and end at the altar. This embodiment of the word communicates meaning to the congregation.

Dr. Rice does make some excellent points that are important for the Episcopal Church. His work is relevant to my project because it illustrates that there is meaning, symbolism, and significance to be found even in things like the location of the sermon in the liturgy and from where the preacher speaks.

The primary book to examine from within the Episcopal tradition is *Praying Shapes Believing* by Leonell Mitchell. This work examines each and every part of the prayer book and serves as a theological commentary on the liturgies. Mitchell's book is invaluable for this thesis. It examines the theology presented in each portion of the prayer book by quoting the relevant sections of the liturgy and shining light on the theology being communicated. Mitchell is especially helpful in the way he connects, compares, and contrasts the various options within the prayer book. As mentioned earlier, there is a full spectrum of belief on most topics within the Episcopal Church. This is reflected in the *Book of Common Prayer*. For example, the theology found in the Rite 1 liturgy of the Great Thanksgiving is considerably different than the theology presented in the Rite II liturgy. Not only are there differences found between Rite I and Rite II, there are differences between the different options within those Rites. The Rite II liturgy of the Holy Eucharist offers four options for the Eucharistic Prayer known as Prayer A, B, C, and D. Each option has been drawn from different liturgical traditions and sources, and

each highlights different aspects of theology. Mitchell's work places these options side by side and offers commentary on what these prayers say to those who participate in them. One option is not better than the other. All are equally valid and valuable.

Mitchell's book provides a map through all the various prayers and liturgies of the church and lifts up the theology being communicated by them.

A second foundational book is *Commentary of the American Prayer Book* by Marion Hatchett. While Mitchell's book presents the theology of the prayer book, Hatchett's book explores the development of the liturgies and history of liturgy, and the original intentions of the authors. Understanding this background and how the rites came to be in their final forms provides insight on the meaning of the rites themselves. Hatchett provides commentary not only on the words of the liturgy but also on the rubrics that guide the liturgical celebration. In the Episcopal Church the rubrics of the *Book of Common Prayer* hold constitutional authority in the church. They are not options or suggestions. Understanding the rubrics is often key to understanding how worshipers will experience these liturgies.

These two books, along with Ian Markham's *Liturgical Life Principles*, serve as the primary guides regarding the theology of the prayer book I will seek to communicate in the mystagogical sermons used for this research project. Ian Markham's book is different than either Mitchell and Hatchett's work in that Markham writes for the laity rather than for the priest. Markham examines the Episcopal liturgy and reveals how every aspect of the liturgy can lead to healthy and authentic living.¹⁶ His work is illustrative of some of the things that David Lose teaches. In particular, how the church and our life of

¹⁶ Ian S. Markham, *Liturgical Life Principles: How Episcopal Worship Can Lead to Healthy and Authentic Living* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2009).

worship become the practice field for the Christian faith. Markham makes the same point but directly ties that idea to the experience of the Episcopal liturgy. This idea reflects what was presented about mystagogy in both Mazza and Regan's books reviewed above.

I have had the opportunity to both read Dr. Markham's book and listen to him present the material in lecture format. Dr. Markham was the guest speaker at a clergy conference I attended in the Diocese of Chicago. His lectures were basically a form of mystagogy, although he never used that term. He connected our life experience to the experience of the liturgy and revealed how the liturgy teaches us to live as Christians in the world today.

Finally, George Wayne Smith, the current Bishop of Missouri, wrote *Admirable Simplicity*. This book was written as a handbook of sorts to assist those within the Episcopal Church responsible for planning worship. Smith provides the meaning and rationale for the liturgies of the church and also explores how many of these rites have changed and developed over time and through the various versions of the prayer book. Smith explains both the earliest form of the rites as Thomas Cranmer developed them for the Church of England and their current form as they appear in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*.

Doctoral Theses and Dissertations

In addition to the books mentioned above I also reviewed a number of doctoral theses and dissertations on the topic of mystagogy. These ranged from a mystagogical focus on the sacrament of marriage to the maintenance of an online blog. I reviewed an interesting dissertation suggesting that Paul's epistle to the Galatians is a form of early or primitive mystagogy.

I found two theses particularly relevant and helpful for my project. Eric Walters wrote the first of these in 2008 for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Luther Seminary. His thesis is called *Recovering Typology for Preaching the Old Testament: A Case Study of King David*. Walters argues that the Old Testament has been neglected in Lutheran preaching for a variety of different reasons. He sees this as a negative that must be changed. Walters finds hope for reclaiming sermons on the Old Testament through the use of typology and the four senses of scripture presented in Paul Scott Wilson's book *God Sense*. Walters presents the differences between typology and allegory, warning preachers against the abuses of allegory. He also outlines the demise of the allegorical, prophetic, and moral senses for interpreting scripture after the Reformation. The literal meaning of the text is valued above all. He argues that emphases on other senses for interpreting scripture are experiencing a revival in the postmodern age.¹⁷

Walters' thesis was helpful as I crafted and considered the biblical and theological overview for my thesis. I found his discussion of typology and his arguments for a fresh approach to interpreting scriptures helpful. I agree that the church must move beyond an exclusive use of historical-critical method and once again embrace approaches that allow us to reclaim the full canon of scripture. Beyond agreeing with his thesis, however, I did not find anything particularly new about his work. He did an admirable job presenting the work of Paul Scott Wilson and others on the topic. But he failed to offer a new way forward. My thesis is different in that I am utilizing the hermeneutical methods Walters embraces, combined with the methods for mystagogical preaching suggested by Satterlee, in order to offer an option for a different style of preaching within my tradition. My hope

¹⁷ Eric Walters, "Recovering Typology for Preaching the Old Testament: A Case Study of King David" (D. Min Thesis, Luther Seminary, 2008), 40.

is that mystagogical preaching will be found to be one more effective tool for helping Episcopalians live their faith.

Of all the academic works I have reviewed, only one comes close to my specific topic. As a result, it serves as an extremely important and relevant resource. In 2010 Jose Jacob, a Roman Catholic priest, presented a thesis for the Doctor of Ministry degree at the Aquinas Institute of Theology. His thesis is called *Renewal Oriented Parish Mission Preaching: A Mystagogical Method*. In his thesis Fr. Jacob seeks to determine the effectiveness of mystagogical preaching in the context of Parish Mission Events. His research methodology is the same as mine. The difference between Fr. Jacob's work and my project are clear. Fr. Jacob studied mystagogical preaching in the context of Parish Mission Events within the Roman Catholic tradition. The closest thing to these events within the Protestant tradition would be the old-fashioned tent revival. Fr. Jacob planned a week long Parish Mission Event and invited new members of the church to attend. These events took place every week night during the week following Easter. The event consisted of celebratory music and extended mystagogical sermons. These sermons were based on the lectionary texts found in the season of Easter. He based his events on the historical example of St. Louis De Montfort. Fr. Jacob's study was not only designed to determine the effectiveness of the mystagogical sermon, but also the effectiveness of the Parish Mission Event itself.

Fr. Jacob developed a questionnaire and had participants complete it prior to attending the events. At the conclusion of the event he presented the exact same questionnaire in order to measure effectiveness. After analysis of the research Fr. Jacob

concluded that both mystagogical preaching and the Parish Mission Events were successful and promoted spiritual growth.

In reviewing his research, however, I find deficiencies. Fr. Jacob primarily asked questions about people's opinions – did they like the event or did they like the sermon? There was no research that determined if the objectives of the sermon were achieved. There was no way to measure understanding of the liturgy or the scriptures prior to the events and the level of understanding following the events. Fr. Jacob determined the effectiveness by asking whether or not people who attend one of these events again in the future. Not only that, he also added significance to the fact that attendance at the event itself grew over the course of the week. There was no attempt to determine why more people attended the gathering later in the week as opposed to earlier in the week. He makes the assumption that people were sharing their experience and inviting friends and family members to attend. That conclusion may or may not be true. It could also be true that earlier in the week a person's schedule prohibited attendance and they had more time later in the week.

Fr. Jacob's work is also rather narrow in scope. He planned and executed only one Parish Mission Event at the parish in which he serves. His conclusions are drawn from only those who attended that particular event. The number of questionnaires returned was only around forty.

My project will be different from Fr. Jacob's in that I will be seeking to discover the effectiveness of mystagogical preaching in the Episcopal Church. I will use a similar research method but mine will seek to measure levels of understanding prior to the sermon and how that understanding changed after the sermon. My research is also wider

in scope. I will complete the research in two different parishes. I will collect nearly four hundred surveys as opposed to Fr. Jacob's forty.

The sermons researched by Fr. Jacob each lasted approximately one hour. I plan to study sermons preached in the context of the regular Sunday morning liturgy. Therefore the sermons preached in my study will be significantly shorter in length. I will also be using the lectionary texts for the season of Easter for the basis of my sermons.

While I did find Fr. Jacob's research a bit weak, I greatly appreciated his scholarship on the topic of mystagogy, the historical views of St. Louis De Montfort, and his practice of Parish Mission Events. I was unaware that the Roman Catholic Church had their own version of the tent revival.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed the pertinent literature on the topic of mystagogical preaching within the Episcopal Church. I began with an exploration of the foundational books defining mystagogy, its history, its decline, and rediscovery. I explored literature that draws upon the fourth century practitioners of mystagogy in order to identify a method for mystagogical preaching applicable to the church today. I reviewed the most important works on the theology communicated through the liturgies of the Book of Common Prayer. Finally, I reviewed and critiqued relevant doctoral theses and dissertations upon which my thesis will build.

In the next chapter, I will turn my attention to the research I propose to answer my question: Can mystagogical sermons help Episcopalians understand the theology found in the liturgy of the church? I will explain the methodologies I chose to use and the rationale for using them, as well as describe the surveys and research tools selected. I will provide

a description of the context in which the study will take place. Finally, I will present the outcomes and results I hope and expect to achieve.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In chapter three I presented the most relevant literature for my thesis. This included foundational works on mystagogy, its history, and how the Roman Catholic Church revived it in the RCIA. I explored methods for mystagogical preaching today, identified key literature about the prayer book theology of the Episcopal Church, and evaluated and critiqued a similar doctoral thesis. In this chapter I now turn my attention to the research project itself. I will explain the methodologies used in hopes of answering my question and the rationale for using them, describe the surveys and the research tools I will use, illustrate the context in which the study will take place, and probe potential outcomes and results.

Methodology

My goal is to assess the effectiveness of mystagogical sermons in helping Episcopalians understand the theology found in the liturgies of the church. For the purpose of this study I will only utilize the liturgies found in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Additional authorized liturgies for the Episcopal Church are also found in *The Book of Occasional Services* and in the series known as *Enriching Our Worship*. Those works, while important, are not as foundational to our theology as is the prayer book.

I will utilize an action/reflection model for my study. In its simplest form, this model of research allows one to construct what the issues or questions are, plan an action

in response to those issues and questions, take a particular action, and finally evaluate the results of that action.¹ Action/reflection research is participatory and collaborative. It allows the congregation to contribute to the study. As stated above, I am interested in discovering if mystagogical sermons are effective in helping Episcopalians understand the theology found in the liturgies of the church. This forms the question. In order to measure this I need to establish some way of determining participants' current level of understanding of that theology. Participants are defined as anyone who attends church on that particular Sunday² and who completed the survey.³ The participants will collaborate with me on measuring current understanding by answering both scaled response questions where they rate their own current perceived level of understanding, and by answering an open-ended question inviting them to write a few sentences about what they believe about the given topic. The scaled response questions ask participants to rate their current level of understanding in five areas: why we participate in this particular rite each week, how the rite connects to other portions of the liturgy, what the biblical foundations of this rite are, what the church teaches about this rite, and what theology is communicated by this rite.

¹ David and Teresa Brannick Coghlan, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, Fourth ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 11.

² Participants at St. Michael and All Angels included anyone attending church on a Sunday the survey was being administered. Participants at St. Augustine's by the Sea included only those parishioners who volunteered to participate in the research. As a result, the number of participants at St. Augustine's will be considerably lower than the number from St. Michael and All Angels. The rector of St. Augustine's was concerned that introduction of a survey within the context of Sunday worship would be too distracting. He was particularly concerned about how the survey would impact potential first-time visitors to the church. Prior to the beginning of the research I attended and preached at St. Augustine's. This allowed the congregation to put a face with a name as well as providing me an opportunity to invite those who were interested and willing to volunteer to participate.

³ Surveys may be viewed in Appendix A.

Planning the action consists of selecting four different topics to explore and writing sermons about them. The first two topics, the general confession and the passing of the peace, are those that I believe may either be commonly misunderstood or infrequently considered. The second two, baptism and the Holy Eucharist, are Sacraments so foundational to our theology that they cannot be ignored. In addition, the second two topics, and in particular baptism, have always been traditional topics of mystagogy.

The action taken will be the preaching of four different mystagogical sermons in the context of regular Sunday morning worship over a period of four consecutive weeks. This series will take place during the season of Easter, which has always been the traditional season of mystagogy. Each sermon will be anchored in the lectionary readings assigned for the day and also identify a liturgical rite as the primary text of the sermon. These will include sermons on baptism, the general confession and absolution, the passing of the peace, and the Holy Eucharist. The sermons will be written following the method presented in Satterlee's *Creative Preaching of the Sacraments*. That method is defined and explained in the Literature Review chapter of this thesis. The theology of the liturgy presented in the sermons will use Mitchell's *Praying Shapes Believing* as its primary source with Markham's *Liturgical Life Principles* serving as a secondary source. As stated earlier, *Praying Shapes Believing* is a staple of Episcopal seminaries and therefore likely serves as the closest thing to a consensus opinion on theology of the Episcopal Church.

Evaluating the action will once again be a collaborative effort accomplished with the congregation's participation. Immediately following each sermon, participants will complete the second half of the original survey. This second portion of the survey

presents the exact same scaled response questions, once again asking participants to rate their level of understanding of the topic in question. Ideally, by asking the same questions in the same way, I will be provided the opportunity to determine if understanding of the topic has changed as a result of hearing the mystagogical sermon. Furthermore, these questions will also help identify which areas the sermon best addressed why we do what we do, its connection to other portions of the liturgy, biblical foundations, teachings of the church, and the theology communicated by the rite.

In addition to the scaled response question, participants will now answer an additional simple yes/no question. The survey will ask if their understanding of the topic has changed after hearing the sermon. If yes, they are also asked to write a few sentences about what changed for them. The works of Mitchell and Markham mentioned above will provide the basis for measuring understanding during the analysis of this qualitative aspect of the research.

Mystagogy has traditionally been associated with the rites of initiation. As a result, I am also interested in how effective mystagogical preaching is for newer Episcopalians as compared to long-time and cradle Episcopalians. The surveys will include demographic questions including age, gender, religious affiliation, and length of time the participant has attended an Episcopal parish.

In addition, I will welcome a focus group to attend the sermon series at St. Michael and All Angels. This will be a small group of people who are not members of the church and have little or no familiarity with the Episcopal Church and our worship. The focus group provides the opportunity to simulate a group of new converts to the faith. This group will not only complete the surveys but also participate in two group

discussions with me. These discussions will take place both before and after the sermon series. These meetings will be recorded and notes will be taken.

Analysis of Data

By the conclusion of the research, I anticipate collecting approximately four hundred surveys. My next step will be analyzing the data and drawing conclusions. In order to accomplish this, I will be examining both the quantitative data provided by the scaled questions and the yes/no question, along with the qualitative data provided by the written responses provided by participants. I will also seek to identify correlations between this data and the demographic information provided by participants. The primary correlation of interest in this area will be regarding change in understanding and the length of time attending an Episcopal Church.

Data will be compiled based on results for each individual sermon. This will provide insight on the effectiveness of that one mystagogical sermon on the topic addressed. Data collected at each location will be considered independently. The results from the focus group will also be considered separately for each sermon.

I will first begin with an analysis of the quantitative data. Results of each scaled question will be entered into Excel using the labels Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, and Q5. Results from before the sermon will be entered first, followed by the results from after the sermon. I will then determine the average response for each question. The average response from before the sermon will be compared with those after the sermon to determine positive or negative change. Simple bar graphs will be created to easily visualize the change or lack of change in understanding for each question.

Answers to the question: Did your understanding change – Y/N – will also be tabulated. I will determine the percentage of those answering yes and the percentage of those answering no.

Responses will then be considered based on age. I will report the number of respondents in each age category and the number and percentage of those respondents who answered yes to the question if their understanding changed. I will follow the same process regarding length of time attending an Episcopal Church. For the purposes of this study I will consider the following categories: less than a year, one to three years, four to six years, seven to ten years, eleven to fifteen years, and sixteen to twenty years. I have also named one additional category: cradle Episcopalians. Cradle Episcopalians are defined as those who reported attending an Episcopal Church for their entire life or since childhood. The entire process will be repeated regarding age and length of time attending an Episcopal Church, but this time it will be divided by gender.

While the quantitative data will be interesting, it will be the qualitative data that will truly be the most helpful for determining the effectiveness of this style of preaching. The opportunity for participants to write about their current level of understanding gives insight to where they really are regarding their understanding of the liturgy. It allows me to actually see if they are indeed attaching meanings to the liturgy that are untrue. They then will write a few sentences regarding how their understanding has changed as a result of the sermon. Not only will these responses provide the preacher a rare window into what people actually heard during the sermon, but it will help determine the effectiveness of mystagogical preaching.

I will analyze the written portions of the survey using coding and clustering methods as outlined in *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* by Kathy Charmaz. I will first read through all the written responses and code each one. “Coding means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data.”⁴ Through this coding process I will be naming and defining what I see in the data. I will then begin the process of clustering the data into these defined categories. This will allow me to see how many participants answered the question in similar ways. This process will be followed for both those responses written prior to hearing the sermon and again for those written after hearing the sermon. I will then compare these responses, seeking to identify how understanding changed.

The final aspect of the research will be the follow-up meetings with the participating clergy and the focus group participants. The meeting with the clergy will seek to unpack the experience of participating in this research project. We will discuss our feelings and perceptions about mystagogical preaching after completing our four-week series where we exclusively used this method. I will be interested to learn if the other clergy enjoyed writing and delivering this style of sermon. We will also discuss the challenges this style presented. We will explore how it was different than our normal styles of preaching. There will also be some reporting of how our parishioners responded to the sermons in comments and conversations following the church services. We will discuss the benefits of mystagogical preaching and plans for how we would or would not incorporate this style of preaching in future sermons.

⁴ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 43.

The follow-up meeting with participants of the focus group will ask for impressions on their experience. Participants will be provided an opportunity to ask questions and reflect on what they heard and felt. I hope to hear from them their thoughts about the sermon series and if it was helpful to them despite having no previous understanding of the liturgies or theology of the Episcopal Church.

Context

In order to widen its scope, this study will be completed in two different Episcopal Churches: St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church in Studio City, California and St. Augustine's by the Sea Episcopal Church in Santa Monica, California. In each church the topics of the sermons will be identical. The rectors of each respective church will preach the sermon series on the topics listed above. The associate rector at St. Augustine's, the Rev. Katie Cadigan, will preach one of the sermons of the series in that parish.

Prior to the sermon series the preachers will meet to discuss the biblical passages, topics, and our ideas for our sermons. These meetings will be recorded and notes on the meeting will be kept. Sermons will be preached on the same dates using the same lectionary texts. Manuscripts of each sermon will be collected.⁵ Additionally, each church will utilize the same liturgy for these Sundays. Hymn selection and service music will be an exception and will reflect the tradition of each individual parish.

I plan to provide the clergy of the participating parish with two books serving as a foundation as they craft their mystagogical sermons. These two books will be Markham's

⁵ Manuscripts of each sermon are found in Appendix B. These include the four sermons preached at St. Michael and All Angels and the four sermons preached at St. Augustine's by the Sea.

Liturgical Life Principles and Satterlee and Ruth's *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments*. Both priests already own and are familiar with Mitchell's *Praying Shapes Believing*. I will once again meet with my colleagues at the conclusion of the series to discuss their experience and hear their reflections on this style of preaching. This meeting will also be recorded and notes will be taken.

St. Michael and All Angels and St. Augustine's are similar in many ways. Both have relatively new rectors who have been serving in the parish for approximately four years. Both parishes have an average Sunday attendance of about one hundred and thirty communicants. Each parish offers two Sunday morning services. St. Augustine's first service is a Rite I service while St. Michael's uses Rite II at both services. There is a greater ethnic and economic diversity at St. Augustine's. The parishes also share a similar architectural style.

Both parishes share a history of being very low church in their worship styles. Low church is defined as a style that puts little emphasis on liturgy, vestments, and the Sacraments. Low church worship generally views the sermon as the most important part of the service. In the recent past, St. Michael and All Angels has embraced more of a broad church worship style. Broad church reflects the style of the vast majority of Episcopal Churches today. This style includes a much greater emphasis on how the liturgy is executed, includes a greater variety of vestments, and often includes incense and bells during worship services. Broad church expressions of worship seek to place an equal emphasis on sermon and Sacraments. Style of worship is relevant to this study as it impacts the way the liturgy is celebrated and how much emphasis is placed on liturgical elements and the theology they communicate.

The Rev. Nate Rugh, the rector of St. Augustine's, did not believe that his parish had ever heard anything close to a mystagogical sermon. He did not believe the congregation had ever thought about the meaning behind some of the liturgical rites that would now be placed in the spotlight and examined. However, the same thing cannot be said of St. Michael and All Angels, where I serve as rector. I began working on the topic of mystagogical sermons three years ago when I enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Luther Seminary. As a result, my congregation has already become more familiar with this style of preaching. I have frequently found opportunities to include elements of mystagogical preaching in my sermons on a fairly regular basis over the past three years. I have also taught adult formation classes on important features of mystagogy, such as typology and the four senses of scripture. This may result in some data collected at St. Michael and All Angels being slightly skewed. Parishioners at St. Michael's may report an accurate understanding of certain topics or report no change in understanding simply because they have already heard previous sermons on the topics. The primary goal of including both St. Augustine's and the focus group was to widen the scope of the study. Their inclusion also has the side benefit of avoiding tainted research. Respondents from St. Augustine's and the focus group are unlikely to have heard mystagogical sermons in the past.

Expected Outcomes

I believe there will be a clear answer to my research question. I believe that the research will show that mystagogical sermons do indeed help people understand the theology communicated by the liturgy. I will consider my research as successful if this can be shown in both the quantitative data and the qualitative data. I will be interested to

discover the relationship between how people rate their own understanding of the topic and what they write about the topic.

I suspect that the research will show greater changes in understanding in the first two topics and less in the second two. I have serious doubts that parishioners in either parish have ever heard sermons on the meaning of the general confession or on the passing of the peace. The second two topics will be much more familiar to people. This will be especially true for anyone who has been attending an Episcopal Church for longer than one year. Baptism and the Eucharist are frequently topics of sermons. If they are not the topic of a sermon, they are often used as examples within sermons. As a result, the mystagogical sermons on baptism and Eucharist will not necessarily be covering new material. It will be interesting to note if participants report an understanding of how these rites relate other portions of the liturgy, what their biblical foundations are, and the theology communicated by the liturgy itself. I suspect there will be higher numbers regarding what the rite means and what the church teaches about them.

I do not believe there will be a significant difference in understanding shown between those who are newer to the church and those who have attended an Episcopal Church for many years. My guess is that even those who are cradle Episcopalians do not really have a very strong grasp on the theology of the liturgy. One contributing factor to explain this could be the introduction of the revised prayer book in 1979. Cradle Episcopalians would have had their more formative years and catechetical training during a time when the Holy Eucharist was not the primary service on Sunday morning. Prior to 1979, Morning Prayer was the principle service of the church. The location of the general confession changed from being at the beginning of Morning Prayer in the 1928 Prayer

Book to its current location immediately following the prayers of the people today. Prior to its introduction in 1979, the passing of the peace was not a part of the Episcopal worship service at all. As a result, this research may well discover that newer members of the church have a greater understanding of the theology communicated in the liturgy than long-time members. In my opinion, this would actually strengthen my case for the importance of mystagogical sermons. Newer members of the church are much more likely than long-time members to attend classes. Without mystagogical sermons, therefore, long-time members of the parish will never have the opportunity to be exposed to this theology.

I fully expect to discover that the members of the focus group had almost no understanding of the theology of the liturgy prior to the sermon. This reflects the concerns mentioned by Christine McSpadden in chapter one of this thesis.

I feel fairly certain that this research will show that mystagogical preaching will greatly benefit all those who hear the sermon. I believe the same results will be found in all three subject groups. These include the parishioners of St. Michael and All Angels, the volunteers who participate at St. Augustine's by the Sea, and those who will make up the focus group.

Conclusion

This chapter has described my project by presenting the methodology I will use for my research, how the data will be analyzed, and the context in which it will be conducted. It has named the criteria for success and what some the expected outcomes of the research will be.

In chapter five I will provide the analysis of the results of the research by reporting the data obtained, interpreting the results, and identifying correlations found. I will interpret the data in light of the stated goals and projected outcomes for the research. In doing so, I hope to find an answer to my initial question.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

In the previous chapter I outlined my research methodologies. I introduced the surveys used, explained the goals of the study, and speculated on some expected outcomes. This chapter will provide an analysis of the results of the research completed. Results for each sermon will be presented individually and identified by the topic covered in the sermon. These topics include the general confession and absolution, the passing of the peace, holy baptism, and the Holy Eucharist. Each topic will include three sections: results for the sermon preached at St. Michael and All Angels, Studio City, results for the sermon preached at St. Augustine's by the Sea, Santa Monica, and the results for the focus group.

Confession and Absolution

St. Michael and All Angels, Studio City

I preached all four sermons at St. Michael and All Angels. The surveys were distributed to all those who attended a service that morning. A total of 65 surveys were completed, including 23 men, 38 women, and 4 participants who did not report their gender. The majority of participants, 34 of the 65, indicated that they were cradle Episcopalians. There were four people who had been attending less than one year, ten attending 1-3 years, four attending 4-6 years, three attending 7-10 years, four attending

11-15 years, five attending 16-20 years, and one who did not indicate length of time attending an Episcopal Church.

The first portion of the survey asked the respondents to rate their own level of understanding on the topic. This consisted of five questions (labeled Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5) regarding why we participate in this rite each week, how it connects to the liturgy, the biblical foundations of the liturgical rite, the church teachings on this rite, and the theology communicated by the rite. The responses to this portion of the survey indicated that participants felt they had an average understanding of the topic. None of the five questions had an average score above 3.8. Question 1, regarding why we say the general confession each week, scored the highest with an average response of 3.8. Question 5, regarding the theology communicated through the liturgical act, scored the lowest with an average response of only 3.1.

After listening to the sermon, participants were asked to once again rate their own level of understanding on the same five questions. There was a positive change in their response after the mystagogical sermon was preached. After hearing the sermon on the topic the average score increased for all five questions. This change can be seen in Figure 1 below.

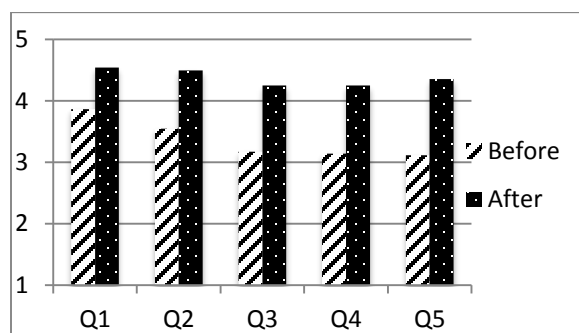


Figure 1. Average response before and after sermon 1 - St. Michael's

Each participant was also asked to indicate if his or her understanding of the topic had changed by answering a simple yes/no question. 59 of the 65 surveys completed (91%) at St. Michael's answered yes to this question.

There does not seem to be a correlation between length of time attending an Episcopal Church and the response to change in understanding on this topic. Even a majority of cradle Episcopalians (88%) indicated that their understanding changed. As stated in Chapter 4, I suspect that most participants had never before heard a sermon on this particular topic.

Participants were also invited to write a few sentences about what they believed about the general confession and absolution, what we are doing when we participate in this rite, and why we do it. This question was to be completed prior to the sermon. Following the sermon the participants were invited to write a few sentences about what changed, if anything, in their understanding of the rite after hearing the mystagogical sermon. I reviewed these responses, coding them according to the format explained in Chapter 4, and then made a determination as to whether or not what they wrote before and after revealed positive change in their understanding. Of the 59 surveys indicating a change in understanding, I argue that 47 (80%) show evidence of positive change in their understanding based on what they wrote. There were eight participants who provided scaled responses but did not complete the written portion of the survey.

There were common themes that appeared in the responses written prior to hearing the sermon. The most frequent responses included that we say the general confession to get a clean slate, to cleanse ourselves, or to remind ourselves that we need to be better. I was surprised to see how many respondents considered the general

confession to be something we must do to make ourselves better. There was very little evidence of an understanding of grace. Below is a representative sample of a few responses to this question:

“We do it to admit our imperfections, to cleanse ourselves so we can start fresh again.”

“The general confession and absolution provides us with hope. It gives us a chance to begin again, a fresh start, a way to strive to be better.”

“I believe the general confession is a time to reflect on things that maybe I could have changed or reacted better to during my previous week and enter my new week with a different awareness. How can I be more kind? How can I react better to an unlikable situation? How can I be the best me?”

“To remind us what is expected of our belief. It keeps us in knowledge of how to live our lives.”

Only a very few indicated that the general confession was related to the Eucharist in any way. There were numerous responses that revealed only a surface level understanding of the rite being about receiving forgiveness of sins. I was pleased to discover only one respondent believed that it was the priest who was offering forgiveness of sins.

There was significant change in understanding following the mystagogical sermon. Some of the most common themes included a greater understanding of grace, an understanding of how the rite connects to the other portions of the liturgy, the confession/absolution preparing us to receive the Eucharist, and the corporate nature of the rite. Examples of this change are seen below.

“I understand now the confession as a necessary aspect of the liturgy and its placement after scripture readings and before the Eucharist. I gained an understanding of the rule of grace in confession.”

“I now understand that we confess as an examination of our lives in preparation to meet God at the table. To confess is to invite the Holy Spirit to make us new.”

“I now understand that this is not just my confession, but a group confession and that it’s through God’s grace. I have learned that the week’s scripture is a guide to help me reflect on my past week and my behavior in relation to what the scripture states. Lastly, it is a taste of what is come in heaven.”

St. Augustine’s by the Sea, Santa Monica

The Rev. Nate Rugh, the rector of St. Augustine’s, preached the sermon on the confession and absolution. Participants were members of the parish who volunteered to participate in the research and complete the survey. As a result, the number of surveys completed at St. Augustine’s was considerably lower than those completed at St. Michael and all Angels.

A total of 24 surveys were completed, including 13 men, 10 women, and 1 participant who did not report his or her gender. The participants varied in the length of time they had been attending an Episcopal Church. Ten of the participants reported that they were cradle Episcopalians. Only one participant was new to the church having attended less than one year.

The responses to the scaled questions of the survey indicated that participants felt they had an average to far below average understanding of the topic. None of the five questions had an average score above 3.4. Question 3, regarding biblical foundations scored the lowest with the average response of only 2.8.

There was a positive change in their responses after the mystagogical sermon was preached. After hearing the sermon on the topic, the average score increased for all five questions. This change can be seen in Figure 2 below.

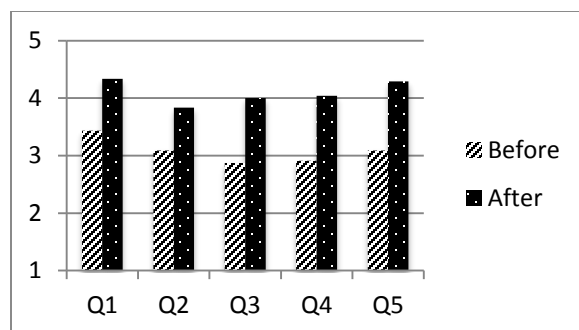


Figure 2. Average response before and after sermon 1 - St. Augustine's

Answering the yes/no question, 18 of the 24 surveys completed (75%) indicated that understanding of the topic had changed after hearing the sermon. In this group there does seem to be a correlation between length of time attending an Episcopal Church and the response to this question. Those who were either longtime attenders or cradle Episcopalians were more likely to indicate that their understanding of the topic had not changed after hearing the sermon. Four of the six people with unchanged responses had not changed were cradle Episcopalians. It is difficult to determine how strong of a correlation exists here due to the relatively small number of surveys completed.

After reviewing the written responses both before and after the sermon, I argue that 17 of the 24 (71%) have positive changes in their understanding. Much like the participants at St. Michael's, prior to the sermon the most common theme was making ourselves better. There was a lack of understanding of grace. Only a few respondents wrote about preparing for the Eucharist. Below are a few examples of responses from this group.

“Confession of our wrongs to God helps us to do better in our lives. We are recognizing areas where we can improve. We do it to more closely follow Jesus’ commandments to love him and love each other. First step is to identify when we are not doing this so we can fix it.”

“We all have sins of omission and commission, which we must address, for which

we ought to seek forgiveness, and for which we should strive to be better people and reconcile ourselves to God. It is a reminder to love God with our whole hearts/minds/body/soul, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.”

“We participate in the ritual of spiritual cleansing to become closer to the purity of Jesus prior to receiving the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.”

“To allow parishioners to explore/review their actions during the past week.”

There was positive change following the mystagogical sermon. The most common themes appearing after the sermon was preached included a greater understanding of grace, preparation for the Eucharist, and a greater understanding of how the rite connects to the liturgy. Examples of responses after the sermon are below.

“More emphasis on the forgiveness portion of the process. That it is in the bringing to our awareness the amazing power of God to forgive that we find God’s love.”

“I didn’t know the connection between the liturgy and the Gospel and where it came from. I also liked that it is all encompassing and meant to be uplifting, not shaming.”

“That the general confession is a self-examination of one’s life and as such is deepened in the communal confession. One is transformed by God’s love and grace.”

Focus Group

A focus group was invited to participate in the research. This group attended St. Michael and All Angels each week. The group was made up of people who have no experience with the liturgy of the Episcopal Church and do not attend an Episcopal Church. There were a total of six surveys completed, including five men and one woman.

The scaled response questions prior to the sermon revealed a very low understanding of the topic. Question 3 regarding the biblical foundations of the rite had the lowest average score, 1.2. Question 1 regarding why the rite is done each week had the highest score, 2.2.

There was significant change in understanding for all questions after hearing the sermon. This change can be seen in figure 3 below.

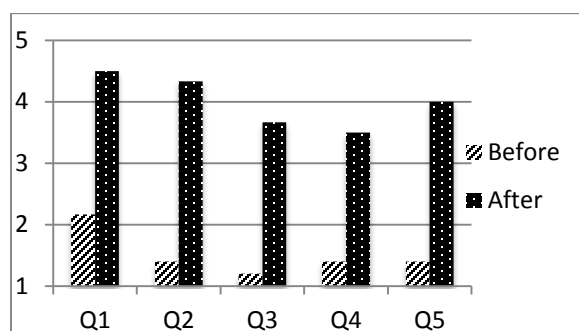


Figure 3. Average response before and after sermon 1 - Focus Group

Answering the yes/no question, all six of the surveys completed (100%) after the sermon indicated that their understanding had changed after the sermon.

Regarding the written portions of the survey before the sermon, the majority of the focus group wrote that they had no understanding or concept of the meaning of the general confession and absolution. Those few who wrote more than “I don’t know” explained that they assumed it must have something to do with asking for forgiveness of sins. After hearing the sermon, all members of the focus group were able to clearly articulate the meaning of the rite. They understood that the confession served as the opportunity to examine oneself before coming to the Eucharist. They also showed an understanding of grace.

The Passing of the Peace

St. Michael and All Angels, Studio City

A total of 76 surveys were completed, including 26 men, 49 women, and 1 participant who did not report his or her gender. The majority of participants, 41 of the 76, indicated that they were cradle Episcopalians. There were four people who had been

attending less than one year, nine attending 1-3 years, eight attending 4-6 years, five attending 7-10 years, three attending 11-15 years, five attending 16-20 years, and one who did not indicate length of time attending an Episcopal Church.

The responses to the scaled questions on the survey indicated that participants felt they had an average to below average understanding of the topic. None of the five questions had an average score above a 3.7. Question 1, regarding why we pass the peace each week, scored the highest with an average response of 3.7. Question 4, regarding what the church teaches about the liturgical act, scored the lowest with an average response of only 2.8.

There was a positive change in their responses after the mystagogical sermon was preached. After hearing the sermon on the topic, the average score increased for all five questions. This change can be seen in Figure 4 below.

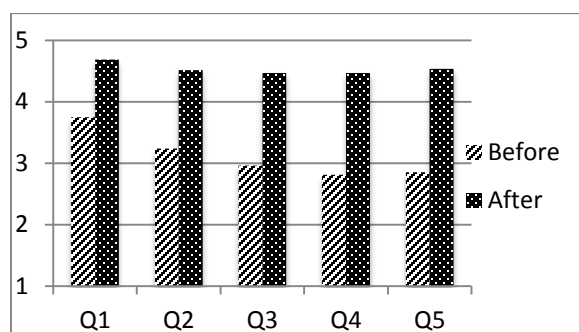


Figure 4. Average response before and after sermon 2 - St. Michael's

Regarding the yes/no question, 68 of the 76 surveys completed (89%) indicated that after hearing the sermon their understanding of the topic had changed.

There does not seem to be a correlation between length of time attending an Episcopal Church and the response to change in understanding on this topic. Even the

majority of cradle Episcopalians (93%) indicated that their understanding changed after hearing the sermon.

After reviewing the written responses, I believe that 58 of the 76 surveys (76%) reveal a positive change in understanding after the sermon. Eleven participants completed the scaled response questions but did not complete the written portions. In this group of surveys there were seven respondents who indicated their understanding changed but their written response after the sermon indicates that they still lacked understanding of the topic.

Prior to the sermon being preached the most consistent themes people reported indicate that participants believed that the passing of peace was primarily an opportunity to say hello and greet fellow parishioners. Many wrote they believed the primary role of the passing of the peace was to build community. An additional theme that appeared was that the peace was a chance to welcome new comers to the church. There were some who suggested that the peace was an opportunity to embody the love of Christ. Finally, a common theme was to build unity in the church. Some examples of responses showing these themes are below.

“It is our outward expression of community. A loving way to extend our relationship beyond familial and close network friends.”

“When we give the peace to one another, we are connecting with one another and reinforcing that we are community in Christ.”

“We imitate the resurrected Christ’s greeting to the apostles. We are also preparing for communion, putting aside any grievances we might have with each other.”

“To build community, offer greetings and share God’s love with one another.”

It is of interest that some people took the opportunity to reflect on the change in the liturgy brought about by the *1979 Book of Common Prayer*. Some participants

remembered that the passing of the peace was not done prior to this prayer book revision. Those who made this comment also indicated that they did not enjoy the passing of the peace and wished that it would be removed from the liturgy.

The written responses after hearing the sermon reveal positive change in understanding of the rite. The most common themes reported after the sermon were about the direct connection of the confession and the passing of the peace. They understood that the peace was an opportunity to forgive and accept others as God has forgiven and accepted them. Those who commented on this connection reflected on the flow of the liturgy and how that illuminated the rite in new ways for them. Additional themes appearing were the biblical basis for the rite, and how we are embodying Christ. Below are a few examples of what was reported after the sermon.

“We forgive one another, love one another. Because we have been forgiven and loved by God. Never thought about touch being associated with the exchange of peace. Acceptance into the community by others of the same faith and mind. We love because we are loved.”

“It is more intentional than I previously thought and I like that it is an opportunity to practice how we are to treat others outside the physical building of the church.”

“We receive forgiveness and acceptance and pass it on to others. We represent Chris to each other.”

“We pass the peace to show God’s love and grace. As a way to show his redemption, love, forgiveness, and understanding. We love as Christ loved. We forgive and accept others as he forgives and accepts us, through this act we recreate peace and share the peace for others to feel and accept.”

St. Augustine’s by the Sea, Santa Monica

The Rev. Nate Rugh, the rector of St. Augustine’s, preached the sermon on the passing of the peace. A total of 17 surveys were completed, including 6 men and 11 women. There was fairly even distribution regarding length of time attending an Episcopal Church. This included four who have been attending 1-3 years, two attending

4-6 years, three attending 11-15 years, three attending 16-20 years, four indicated they were cradle Episcopalian, and one participant who did not indicate length of time attending an Episcopal Church.

The responses to the scaled questions of the survey indicated that participants felt they had a low understanding of the topic. None of the five questions had an average score above a 3.1. Question 4, regarding the teachings of the church on this topic scored the lowest with an average response of only 2.5.

There was a positive change in their responses after the mystagogical sermon was preached. After hearing the sermon on the topic, the average score increased for all five questions. This change can be seen in Figure 5 below.

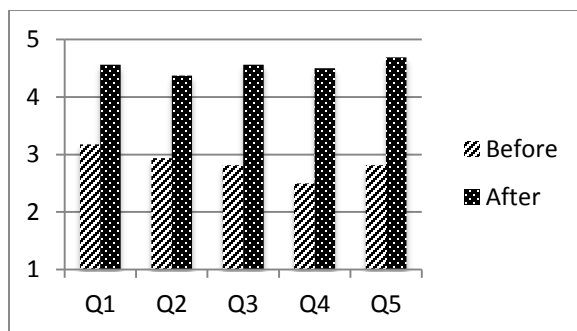


Figure 5. Average response before and after sermon 2 - St. Augustine's

All of the respondents indicated that their understanding of the rite had changed after hearing the mystagogical sermon. Because all participants indicated their understanding changed, there is no correlation between lengths of time attending an Episcopal Church and change in understanding.

After reviewing the written responses, 10 of the 17 (59%) surveys reveal a positive change in understanding after the sermon. Four participants completed the scaled response questions but did not complete the written portions. Two of these completed

written responses prior to the sermon, indicated their understanding had changed, but did not complete the written portion after the sermon.

Prior to the sermon the most consistent themes that appeared in the responses were that the peace was primarily about building community and providing an opportunity for members to connect with other parishioners. A few respondents reflected on the fact that the peace was not a part of the service prior to the 1979 Prayer Book. These are a few examples of responses prior to the sermon:

“Blessing each other and strengthening the community we are a part of.”

“To help parishioners connect with one another.”

“Jesus said I leave you my peace. He also said to share and love each other. This is probably the basis of the peace.”

“It is a meet and greet function.”

Following the mystagogical sermon the themes of the responses changed considerably. After hearing the sermon those participants who completed the written portions of the survey were able to articulate a much fuller understanding of the theology of the liturgical rite. The themes lifted up after the sermon included embodying Christ to one another and forgiving others as we have been forgiven. In addition, there was a deeper understanding of why the peace was located where it is in the liturgy. I would have liked to see some of the respondents understand the connection between the confession and the passing of the peace. Unfortunately that element of this rite was not highlighted in the sermon preached by the rector. Examples of the responses showing these themes are as follows:

“I didn’t know it wasn’t done before 1979. I was reminded that it is an important part of reconciling ourselves with our neighbors before communion. And I was reminded that we cannot love God without loving our neighbors.”

“I was reminded that we cannot love God without loving one another.”

“We can’t see God but when we offer love to each other, we can see God’s love in the world. Especially those with whom we don’t get along. Mark of Christian community is the love we express to each other.”

Focus Group

The focus group had one less participant for this sermon than were present for the other three sermons. There were a total of five surveys completed, including four men and one woman.

The scaled response questions prior to the sermon revealed that this group had almost no understanding of the topic. Question 4, regarding what the church teaches about the passing of the peace, and Question 5, regarding the theology communicated by the rite, each had the lowest average scores. Both scored an average of 1. Question 1 regarding why the rite is done each week had the highest score, 2.

There was significant change in understanding for all questions after hearing the sermon. This change can be seen in figure 6 below.

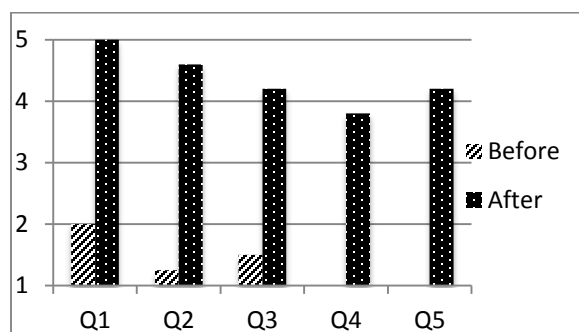


Figure 6. Average response before and after sermon 2 - Focus Group

Answering the yes/no question, five of the 5 surveys completed (100%) after the sermon indicated that their understanding had changed.

Prior to the sermon, each member of the focus group wrote that they supposed the passing of the peace was a way to say hello to other members of the congregation. After

hearing the sermon all members of the focus group were able to articulate its connection to the confession and absolution. They understood that the action involved embodying the love and forgiveness of Christ, forgiving others as we have been forgiven, and serving as a witness that the church was a place of peace in the world.

Holy Baptism

St. Michael and All Angels, Studio City

A total of 78 surveys were completed, including 30 men and 48 women. The majority of participants, 42 of the 78, indicated that they were cradle Episcopalians. There were two people who had been attending less than one year, nine attending 1-3 years, eight attending 4-6 years, four attending 7-10 years, four attending 11-15 years, five attending 16-20 years, and four who did not indicate length of time attending an Episcopal Church.

Unlike the previous two topics, the responses to the scaled questions portion of the survey indicated participants felt they had an above average understanding of the topic. None of the five questions had an average score below 3.5. Question 1, regarding why we baptize people, scored the highest with an average response of 4.2. Question 5, regarding the theology communicated by the liturgy of baptism, scored the lowest with an average response of 3.5.

There was some positive change in responses after the mystagogical sermon was preached. After hearing the sermon on the topic the average score increased slightly for all five questions. This change can be seen in Figure 7 below.

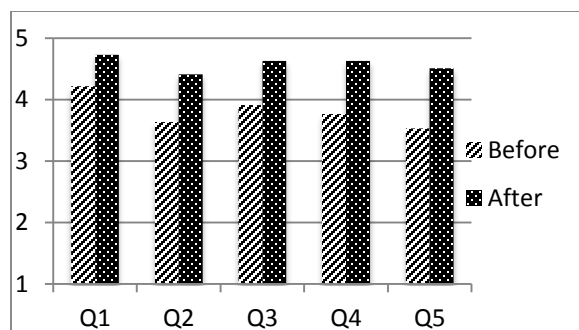


Figure 7. Average response before and after sermon 3 - St. Michael's

It is easy to see from this figure that participants felt they had a much fuller understanding of the topic of baptism prior to hearing a sermon on the topic. As I mentioned in the expected outcomes section of Chapter 4, I suspected this would be the case. Baptism is a topic frequently preached on at St. Michael and All Angels. In the past four years of ministry, I have conducted 55 baptisms. Therefore, the liturgy of baptism is familiar to this congregation. The theology of baptism would naturally be an element in any sermon on a Sunday we were baptizing someone. While the theology of baptism would be included in a sermon on such a day, the sermons preached on those days would not have been considered mystagogical sermons. The theology of the rite would have been included, but the primary text of the sermon would not have been the liturgy itself. The sermon on baptism for this survey was a mystagogical sermon focusing on the liturgical text of the thanksgiving over the water. It sought to explore the meaning of the liturgical act and how that action communicated theology. As a result, despite a high level of understanding prior to the sermon, a high percentage of participants indicated their understanding still changed. Answering the yes/no question regarding change in understanding, 63 of the 78 (81%) answered in the affirmative.

On this topic there is a correlation between length of time attending an Episcopal Church and the response regarding change in understanding. 81% of those considered cradle Episcopalians reported a change in understanding. This is still a majority, but it is a smaller percentage than the previous two topics. Also of note, in the range of those attending only 1-3 years, there was a low percentage of people reporting change. Four of the nine (44%) indicated that their understanding of the topic did not change. It is impossible to know exactly which members of the congregation reported this. One possible explanation for this result is that newer members of the parish have either recently attended newcomer classes or attended classes preparing for baptism. In either instance they would have recently participated in detailed conversations regarding the meaning of baptism. Because these classes took place during the same timeframe I began working on this thesis, the classes would have highlighted elements of mystagogy I was already studying, working with, and writing on.

After reviewing the written responses, I believe that 58 of the 78 (74%) surveys reveal a positive change in understanding after the sermon. Eleven participants completed the scaled response questions but did not complete the written portions. In this group of surveys, there were four respondents who indicated their understanding changed but their written response after the sermon indicates that they still did not understand the topic. Most of the 15 respondents indicating their understanding had not changed after hearing the sermon provided evidence by their written comments that they did indeed have an understanding of the topic prior to the sermon. This is something to be celebrated. For the purpose of this research, it does indicate that the mystagogical sermon did not offer those few members something they did not already understand.

There is some disconnect between the results of the scaled response questions and the results of the written responses. As mentioned above, the respondents reported a high level of understanding on the topic. Nevertheless, 81% indicated that their understanding changed after hearing the sermon. Reviewing the written responses provided prior to the sermon reveals that the participants did not have as high of an understanding of the topic as they initially reported via the scaled questions.

The most common themes appearing in the written responses prior to the sermon indicated baptism as the way to become a member of the church, receive forgiveness of sins, and as an initiation into the Christian life. I was surprised to see a number of people writing that baptism was the removal of “original sin,” a belief rejected by most in the Episcopal Church. Some respondents simply wrote out the definition of a Sacrament as it is provided in the Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism, from the *Book of Common Prayer*. It is also interesting to note an almost equal division in the way the respondents approached the topic. Approximately half answered the question in a way that indicates they were writing about what their own baptism meant. The second half answered the question in ways that indicated they were writing about the baptism of others. Some of those answering the question from this second viewpoint even quoted the liturgy where the gathered congregation vows to support the newly baptized in their life of faith. Some examples of the comments written prior to the sermon are below.

“Parents and godparents presenting their child to be a part of the Christian community and being there to help in the upbringing of a Christian.”

“Baptism is the way we are ordained as Christians. It allows for forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.”

“The beginning of a spiritual journey. The baptized become members of the Christian society.”

“We baptize to remove the sin of Adam.”

“It is a welcoming of an individual into the communion of Christ and an opportunity to profess to live out that communion. It is an outward sign of this grace as we are all already part of the community of Christ.”

After hearing the mystagogical sermon the most common themes changed considerably. The idea of removing original sin was almost completely gone (one response written after the sermon unfortunately still included this idea). As in previous topics, a greater understanding of grace appears in the comments after the sermon was preached. Participants were able to articulate that God is doing something in baptism, rather than it just being something we do. In addition to membership and initiation, participants were able to articulate the idea of adoption into God’s family. They wrote about baptism as a cleansing bath, a new birth, a symbolic death and resurrection, and our belonging to Jesus. Many focused on the biblical foundations of the liturgy and identified the different aspects of typology from the scripture and the liturgy. Participants appreciated the connection to the Old Testament stories that are reflected in the liturgy of baptism. Examples of some of the comments written after the sermon are below.

“Baptism makes us a member of the family of God. It washes us clean. We are cleansed of all sin. Baptism is Christ’s work in the church. It takes our entire life to complete this act. It is a miracle.”

“I have a better understanding of the biblical foundations of baptism and see how water has played a pivotal role in many biblical events.”

“Baptism is a miracle from God. The Holy Spirit comes to us and we are forever part of the church.”

I now understand that baptism allows us to be members of the church, washes us clean of sin allowing us to be born again through Christ. We receive forgiveness for our past and the joy of a new life in the risen Christ.”

“Baptism is a rebirth. Water represents the Holy Spirit...God’s love and acceptance. We are sealed with Jesus Christ. Our old lives are buried and we are

reborn. This is God's doing.”

“The emphasis on the majesty of the water symbolizing from creation with God's Spirit, to the exodus of the Israelites, to the water of the baptizing of Christ with the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. This I will remember with each baptism I will see from this day forward. Thank you.”

“The importance of water – being a bath to cleanse away sin. The inclusion in the church community – of any church. The majesty. It is a one in a lifetime event but we process through it over our whole lives to live in grace and follow Jesus' teachings.”

St. Augustine's by the Sea, Santa Monica

The Rev. Katie Cadigan, the assistant rector of St. Augustine's, preached the sermon on baptism. A total of 18 surveys were completed, including five men and 13 women. There was a fairly even distribution regarding length of time attending an Episcopal Church for this survey. This included two who have been attending 1-3 years, four attending 4-6 years, two attending 11-15 years, three attending 16-20 years, and seven indicated they were cradle Episcopalian.

The responses to the scaled questions of the survey indicated that participants felt they had an average understanding of the topic. Question 5, regarding the theology communicated by the liturgy of baptism, scored the lowest with the average response of only 2.8. Question 1, regarding why we baptize people, had the highest average response with a score of 3.9.

There was positive change in responses after the mystagogical sermon was preached. After hearing the sermon on the topic the average score increased for all five questions. This change can be seen in Figure 8 below.

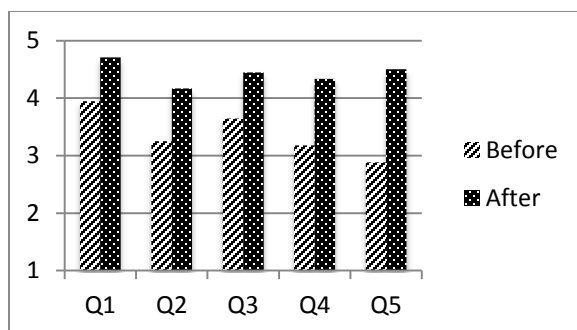


Figure 8. Average response before and after sermon 3 - St. Augustine's

All of the respondents indicated that their understanding had changed after hearing the mystagogical sermon. As a result, there can be no correlation found regarding length of time attending an Episcopal Church and change in understanding. The mystagogical sermon benefited all who heard it.

After reviewing the written responses, 12 of the 18 (67%) surveys reveal a positive change in understanding after the sermon. Three participants completed the scaled response questions but did not complete the written portions. Three of the participants indicated that their understanding had changed, but after reading what they wrote it is obvious that they did not have a clear understanding of the topic to begin with.

Many of the participants wrote about the process of renewing their own baptismal covenant and the promise they make to support new members of the church. Those completing the survey at St. Augustine's did not approach the topic as if it were asking about the meaning of their own baptism. The most common themes appearing prior to the sermon included welcoming new members into the church, that baptism was the sacrament of initiation, and that through it our sins are forgiven. Absent from most responses prior to the sermon was an understanding of grace. Almost all of those completing the written portion of the survey mentioned welcoming new members into the

church in some way. This likely reveals an emphasis on this point in preaching and instruction at St. Augustine's. Examples of written responses prior to the sermon are as follows:

"Creating a ritual around the process of initiation into the church. This helps codify in the mind of the baptized the importance of committing oneself to the church."

"I believe baptism is the first step in one's journey with Christ. It washes us clean and prepares us for this journey with a clean slate, so to speak. I believe it is our way of showing our intent to be Christians."

"Holy baptism is us confirming us as members of Jesus Christ and beginning of new life."

"Forgiveness of sins. Welcome into the church by the community. Closeness and commitment to God."

"An outward act of connection to God, following Jesus example. To extend the love of God to all those who choose to join the community."

After the mystagogical sermon was preached, the responses revealed a positive change in understanding. The most significant theme was grace. There was also a greater understanding of how water is used in the Bible and its importance as the outward sign in baptism. Water was the primary image of Rev. Cadigan's sermon so it is not surprising this was reflected in the responses written after hearing the sermon. Examples of responses after hearing the sermon are below.

"Baptism is not a magical ticket – it just welcomes us into the very human and flawed family of God's Christians struggling to discern God's will and do our best as we fail and succeed. Grace of baptism is not earned, rather it a free gift of God, who loves us all equally – no prerequisites - in the Episcopal view."

"I better understand the origin and reason for baptism. How the church uses baptism as initiation into a life with Christ. It is also used as a way of binding us with other Christians, our church, and Christ."

"Water/baptism is the bringing of new life into the body of Christ/church. It is freely given and includes everyone. It saves us and frees us (salvation – freedom

and wholeness in God). By being reborn by the Holy Spirit we are trusting and following Jesus and also pledging to support others.”

Focus Group

The focus group returned to its original size for this sermon. There were a total of six surveys completed, including five men and one woman.

The scaled response questions prior to the sermon revealed that this group had more understanding of this topic than of previous topics. Even so, the average responses prior to the sermon were fairly low. Question 2, regarding how baptism connects to other portions of the liturgy, and Question 5, regarding the theology communicated by the rite had the lowest average scores with both scoring an average of 2. Question 1 regarding why people are baptized had the highest score, 3.6.

Like the previous two topics, the focus group did show significant change in how they rated their own levels of understanding after the sermon. The change, however, was not as pronounced as in the previous two weeks (especially for Question 1, regarding why we baptize, and Question 3, regarding the biblical foundations of baptism). This can be seen in figure 9 below.

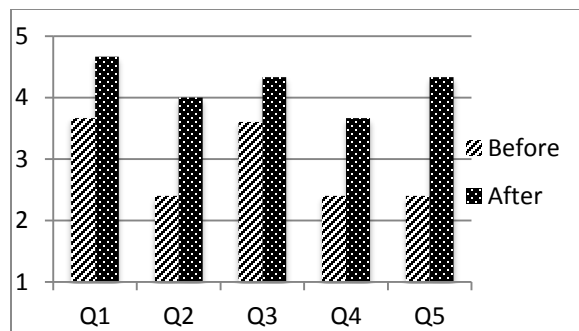


Figure 9. Average response before and after sermon 3 - Focus Group

Answering the yes/no question, five of the six members of the focus group indicated that their understanding of the topic changed after hearing the mystagogical

sermon. I was surprised to see that one member of this group indicated his or her understanding had not changed. After reading the comments this participant wrote, it appears he or she may have been indicating that they were not persuaded to change their belief on the topic. This, of course, was neither the goal of the sermon nor the goal of the project. On the first half of their survey, this person wrote about being raised as a Southern Baptist and explained what that denomination believes about baptism. They indicated that baptism was a public confession of faith and an acceptance of Jesus as one's personal Lord and Savior.

This theme of baptism as a public confession of faith appeared on three of the six surveys completed. Interestingly, all three indicated having been raised in the Baptist tradition. Two of the six indicated being raised attending a Roman Catholic church. Both of these participants wrote about the removal of original sin.

After the sermon, the five who indicated their understanding had changed wrote about themes that accurately reflect the theology of the Episcopal Church. They wrote about things like initiation into the church, becoming members of the universal church, forgiveness, and adoption. I was personally pleased that a greater understanding of grace appeared in their writing after hearing the mystagogical sermon.

The Holy Eucharist

St. Michael and All Angels, Studio City

A total of 65 surveys were completed, including 25 men and 40 women. The majority of participants, 35 of the 65, indicated that they were cradle Episcopalians. There were two people who had been attending less than one year, ten attending 1-3 years, six attending 4-6 years, three attending 7-10 years, two attending 11-15 years, five

attending 16-20 years, and one who did not indicate length of time attending an Episcopal Church.

The responses to scaled questions portion of the survey indicated participants felt they had a high level of understanding of this topic. None of the five questions had an average score below 3.7. Somewhat surprisingly, Question 3 regarding the biblical foundations of the Holy Eucharist scored the highest with an average response of 4.3. Question 5, regarding the theology communicated by the liturgy of the Eucharist, scored the lowest with an average response of 3.7.

As with the results regarding baptism, there was positive but very minor change regarding all five questions. The results of this can be seen in figure 10 below.

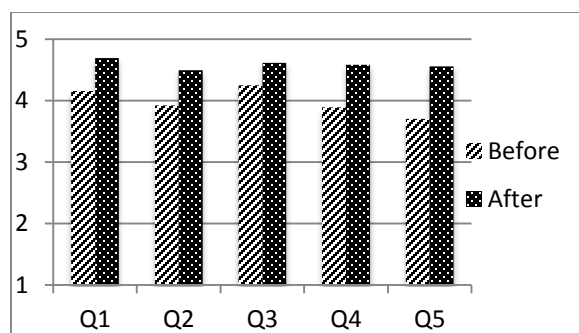


Figure 10. Average response before and after sermon 4 - St. Michael's

The fact that this congregation reports a very high level of understanding on this topic is not surprising. The Holy Eucharist is the central act of Christian worship in the Episcopal Church. The theology of the Eucharist is frequently taught in sermons. Our annual observance of Maundy Thursday, a particular favorite of this congregation, clearly establishes the biblical foundation for the Eucharist. Nevertheless, even with reporting this high level of understanding prior to the sermon, 55 of the 65 respondents (85%) indicated their understanding had changed after hearing the mystagogical sermon.

There is not a correlation between length of time attending an Episcopal Church and whether or not the respondent indicated change. Of the 10 indicating their understanding had not changed, seven were cradle Episcopalians. Still, that leaves 81% of those who are cradle Episcopalian indicating that their understanding had indeed changed after hearing the sermon.

After reading the responses I agreed with 49 of the 65 (75%) respondents who indicated that their understanding had changed. Ten of the 65 completed the scaled questions portion of the survey but did not complete any of the written portions of the surveys. Six of the 65 either only completed half of the written portion making it impossible to determine if their understanding changed, or what they wrote indicated that they still did not understand the topic even after hearing the sermon.

The written responses given prior to the sermon being preached revealed a very interesting and unanticipated theme. Twenty of the 65 (31%) respondents wrote that our weekly celebration of the Eucharist was primarily a re-enactment of the Last Supper. I was surprised to see this many people focus on this aspect of the story. Some articulated the primary reason for the Eucharist was a connection to the original disciples at the Last Supper. Other themes commonly appearing included remembering the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf, being strengthened for our journey of faith, being in union with Christ, unity in the church, and an act of worship. A few respondents wrote about transubstantiation. Some wrote that they believed the Eucharist was a way to receive the forgiveness of sins. Some examples of response are below.

“The Holy Eucharist is the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We are commemorating the Last Supper in his memory and partaking in his body and blood.”

“We are participating in the Last Supper and it is a living sacrifice. We join with the original disciples.”

“Jesus broke bread with the disciples, sharing bread and wine. He said ‘this is my body, this my blood. Whenever you eat/drink, do it for me, to remember the sacrifice I am making for you.’ So each week we remind ourselves of the great sacrifice Jesus made, to cleanse us of our sins forever.”

“We are observing the receiving of Christ’s body and blood as a sign of being a part of the body of Christ.”

“Reinforcing our community by sharing one bread and one cup. Remembering the Last Supper, and symbolically taking in the body and blood of Christ.”

“I believe the Holy Eucharist is our time to truly connect with the Lord through communion with one another and with him. It reminds us to come to the Lord’s table together as one body.”

“We are remembering Christ’s sacrifice for us.”

After hearing the sermon there was positive change in understanding revealed in the written comments. Some of the key themes that showed up included an understanding of the difference between remembering and remembrance, an understanding of our own self-offering, sacrifice of praise, the Eucharist as an act of thanksgiving, real presence, and how we become the body of Christ in the Eucharistic meal. There was also a new emphasis on looking forward to the future and the Eucharist as the foretaste of the heavenly banquet. People seemed to really like the idea of accepting others and coming to the table together. I also found it interesting that there was no mention of the Last Supper in the comments written after the sermon was preached. Below are examples of what people wrote after hearing the mystagogical sermon.

“We meet the risen Christ in the Eucharist. We receive the body of Christ, sanctified by the Holy Spirit and remember what Christ did for us. We become the body of Christ. We look to the past, present, and future in communion and give the sacrifice of ourselves.”

“A greater understanding of why we celebrate the Eucharist in community. Also that we are not only receiving the body of Christ but that we are the body of

Christ. This is an invitation to be one in Christ. And the role of the priest as speaking for the people.”

“We are coming together in one body with Jesus in remembrance of his life and sacrifice.”

“Eucharist is a gift. We are all made one with Him. Through the liturgy we become active participants.”

“We are in union with Christ and each other. It is a gift. We share a common bond, one body. The sacrifice of praise, our joy, and thanksgiving. Remembrance – active participants so we can continue the works and words of Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity.”

St. Augustine’s by the Sea, Santa Monica

The Rev. Nate Rugh, rector of St. Augustine’s, preached the sermon on the Holy Eucharist. Only seven surveys were completed, including five men and two women. There was an interesting distribution regarding length of time attending an Episcopal Church for this survey. This included one person who had been attending 1-3 years, three attending 4-6 years, one attending 11-15 years, one attending 16-20 years, and only one indicated they were cradle Episcopalian.

The responses to the scaled questions of the survey indicated that participants felt they had a high level of understanding of the topic. Question 2, regarding how the Holy Eucharist connects to other portions of the liturgy, the theology, scored the lowest with the average response of 3.5. Question 3, regarding the biblical foundations of the Holy Eucharist had the highest average response with a score of 4.2.

There was positive change in responses after the mystagogical sermon was preached. After hearing the sermon on the topic, the average score increased for all five questions. This change can be seen in Figure 11 below.

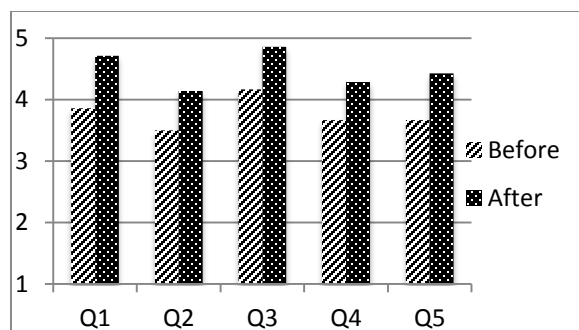


Figure 11. Average response before and after sermon 4 - St. Augustine's

When answering the yes/no question regarding change in understanding, six of the seven (86%) respondents indicated yes. The one participant indicating no change in understanding had been attending an Episcopal Church between 11-16 years. With this small number of surveys completed, it is impossible to draw conclusions regarding length of time attending an Episcopal Church and likelihood to report change in understanding.

After reviewing the seven completed surveys, I agreed with five of the six that reported a change in understanding. One reported change but what they wrote revealed that they still did not understand the topic. The common themes appearing prior to the sermon included re-enacting the last supper, remembering the sacrifice Jesus made, unity with Christ, and community. Below are a few examples of what was written prior to the sermon.

“It is a physical embodiment of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus. I love that it is a tangible reminder of his instruction at the Last Supper and reminds us of that and his sacrifice every week.”

“We commemorate Jesus’ sacrifice, and in partaking of the Eucharist we become one with Jesus.”

“We are becoming one with Christ by sharing a meal with him as the disciples did at the Last Supper. Meals symbolize family. We are renewing our family bonds of love and respect.”

“We are mimicking the disciples receiving the body and blood of Christ at the last

supper. It is done that we too can be disciples of Christ and spread the good news as they did.”

After hearing the sermon there was positive change in understanding. Some of the common themes appearing after the sermon included community, remembrance, unity with Christ and with one another, celebration, thanksgiving, and the Eucharist as the central act of Christian worship. With this small number of surveys it is more difficult to identify common themes. Below are a few examples of responses following the sermon.

“In addition to union, the idea of remembering and celebrating and promise and thanksgiving.”

“We are commanded to share our love through the act of the shared meal with Christ. Jesus loved sharing his love through meals and sharing food.”

I did not know “Eucharist” meant thanksgiving and at the heart of Christianity is giving thanks for all we have received from God.”

Focus Group

There were a total of six surveys completed, including five men and one woman. The scaled response questions prior to the sermon revealed that this group had a much lower understanding of this topic than they did of baptism. It was seen in the previous survey that three members of the focus group had Southern Baptist faith backgrounds. This may explain why the group had a lower understanding of the Eucharist and its role as a Sacrament. Question 2, regarding how the Holy Eucharist connects to other portions of the liturgy, and Question 5, regarding the theology communicated by the rite had the lowest average scores with both scoring an average of 2.2. Question 3, regarding the biblical foundations of the Holy Eucharist, had the highest score, 3.6.

The focus group did show significant change in how they rated their own levels of understanding after the sermon. This can be seen in figure 12 below.

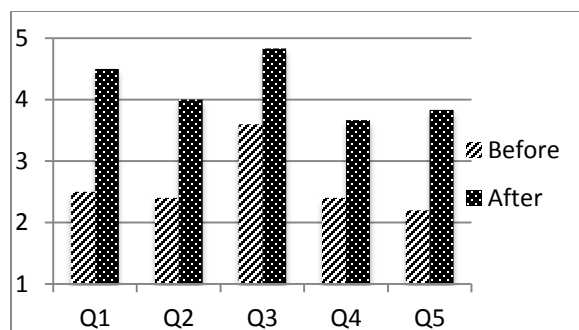


Figure 12. Average response before and after sermon 4 - Focus Group

All six of the participants in the focus group indicated their understanding had changed after hearing the sermon. The group did not write very much prior to the sermon. There is an interesting division based on the faith background of the participants. The two who were raised Roman Catholic both wrote about union with Christ as the meaning of the Eucharist. The three with a Baptist background each wrote that the Eucharist was a means of commemoration. They believed it was about remembering the sacrifice Jesus made. The final member of the group wrote that he or she had no understanding at all.

Unfortunately, after reading the response written after the sermon was preached, I come to the conclusion that this sermon was not particularly effective in communicating the theology of the Episcopal Church to this group. Only the two participants with a Roman Catholic background were able to articulate themes I hoped to communicate. These included the difference between remembering and remembrance, union with Christ, unity of the body, thanksgiving, and the Eucharist as an outward, visible sign of an inward, spiritual grace. The remaining four indicated that they did not agree with the theology presented in the sermon. Once again, I point out that persuasion was neither the purpose of the sermon nor the project.

Follow-Up Meetings

Clergy Follow-up

At the conclusion of the four-week sermon series I gathered with the Rev. Nate Rugh and the Rev. Katie Cadigan to discuss the experience of writing and preaching mystagogical sermons, and to discuss the results observed in our congregations. This meeting took place at St. Augustine's by the Sea in Santa Monica.

All three of us agreed that we found great value in preaching these sermons. Nate and Katie indicated that this was the first time that they had ever preached this style of sermon. It was also the first time they had ever done a sermon series at St. Augustine's. Nate felt that the mystagogical sermons were helpful and that his congregation benefitted from hearing them. I felt the same way about the experience at St. Michael and All Angels. All three of us agreed that the sermons were more challenging to craft than we first expected. Nate commented that using this style also forced him to preach on a wider variety of biblical texts. He indicated that his regular practice was to preach on the gospel lessons exclusively.

All three of us agreed with the comment Craig Satterlee makes in *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments* where he warns that this style of preaching can be overdone. We felt that mystagogical preaching would be best when used carefully and sparingly. It is certainly not something we would want to do every week. I suggested that it might be interesting to try just adding elements of mystagogy into sermons rather than preaching a full mystagogical sermon. Both Nate and Katie did not like that idea. They both felt that there was something unique about this style of sermon that should be preserved rather than just adding elements of it into other sermons.

The group also discussed how we found writing sermons one and two easier than writing sermons three and four. We all agreed that the topics of baptism and Eucharist were too large and should have been broken down into smaller topics. I had done this with my sermon on baptism by taking the thanksgiving over the water as my primary text of the sermon. I had not done something similar in my sermon on Eucharist. I wondered if my sermon on the Eucharist could even technically be called a mystagogical sermon. It had not closely followed the method outlined in Satterlee's book.

In the end, we all were glad to have participated in this research project. We all agreed that mystagogical sermons were indeed beneficial to the congregation. We all agreed that we would look for opportunities to preach mystagogical sermons in the future.

Follow-up Conversation with Focus Group

I gathered with the members of the focus group at St. Michael and All Angels in the week following the fourth sermon. All six members of the group participated in the meeting. I began the meeting by thanking the members for their willingness to attend St. Michael's four weeks in a row and to participate in my thesis research. The members of the group thanked me for the opportunity to participate. They indicated that they enjoyed the experience very much and found it both interesting and rewarding.

They mentioned they felt inadequate at times when attempting to complete the first half of the surveys. They talked about not knowing what these topics were about and thus they were unsure as to how to complete the surveys. As a whole, they felt the sermons were very effective in helping them understand the topics and the theology of the Episcopal Church. Some reflected on their own traditions and beliefs from their

experience attending other church services. They talked about how they found themselves comparing what they were hearing in the sermons with what they had previously been taught on the subjects. I asked them if they felt like I was trying to convince them or persuade them and no one indicated that was the case. They appreciated that very much.

The members of the group indicated that they liked the style of the sermons. This was especially true of those members of the group who had no significant faith background. One of the best outcomes of the follow-up meeting was that the group expressed that they felt they were able to more fully participate in the liturgy after hearing the mystagogical sermons. What was at first a complete mystery to them made sense after hearing the sermon. They also noted how much the words of the liturgy came alive to them after hearing the sermons. They talked about the feeling of having things in the liturgy “jump out at them” after having heard a sermon on it. One participant said, “After hearing the sermons, I was able to connect all the dots. What once felt rather rote and routine had new meaning to me.” They talked about how the sermons encouraged them to begin looking for other connections they could find within the liturgy, even beyond the topics covered in the four sermons. One participant indicated that he had never before considered how different elements of the liturgy connected. He always assumed they were disconnected and you just had to go through the list of tasks. He said, “Now it seems that the liturgy is telling a story. Each part flows into and connects with the next.” I must say, that last comment made me smile.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an analysis of the results of the research completed. It presented the survey results for each topic in the sermon series. The primary purpose of

this chapter was the reporting of the data along with some interpretation of that data. In addition to the results for each topic, the chapter also presented the results of the two follow-up meetings completed after the sermon series was preached.

Chapter 6 will evaluate the results of the research. I will provide a full interpretation of the data, explore the strengths and weaknesses of the project, and determine if my stated goals were met by presenting the outcomes of my research. My goal will be to discover the answer to my initial question stated in Chapter 1 of this thesis: can mystagogical preaching help Episcopalians grow in their understanding of the theology presented in the liturgies of the church?

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION

The previous chapter presented the results of the research project exploring both the quantitative and qualitative data collected. Each of the four topics of the sermon series was reviewed separately. Each topic was divided between the results at St. Michael and All Angels, Studio City, St. Augustine's by the Sea, Santa Monica, and the focus group. The chapter concluded with reports of the follow-up meetings with both the clergy group and the focus group.

This chapter will present an evaluation of the results received, interpreting the data and determining if the project's goals were met. It will answer the questions: can mystagogical preaching help Episcopalians grow in their understanding of the theology presented in the liturgies of the church? What research weaknesses were determined? How could the research have been done better? It will also identify unanswered questions and suggest ideas for improvement.

Outcomes

Can mystagogical preaching help Episcopalians grow in their understanding of the theology presented in the liturgies of the church? The research completed clearly answers this question in the affirmative. Indeed, mystagogical preaching has proven to be a highly effective tool in accomplishing this goal. The research completed reveals that a large majority of participants (87%) found that their understanding of the liturgical rites

covered changed after hearing the mystagogical sermon. Of the 373 surveys completed, many respondents who reported a high level of understanding of the topic prior to the sermon via the scaled response questions still reported changes in their understanding after hearing the sermon.

Upon initial reviews of the surveys, I feared this revealed a weakness in the survey. Some participants who scored their levels of understanding as a 4 or 5 prior to the sermon, scored themselves at the same levels after hearing the sermon. This result may have caused some of the averages to be a bit off when evaluating the scaled response questions. Even those who gave the same scores before and after the sermons, however, indicated that their understanding had changed. Their written response revealed that change to be positive. This reveals that people thought they had a complete understanding of the liturgical rite, but upon hearing the mystagogical sermon they realized they were either incorrect in their understanding, or they did not have a full understanding to begin with.

As stated earlier in this thesis, in its earliest form, mystagogy was intended for new converts to the faith. The neophytes returned to the cathedral each day during the week following their baptism at the Easter vigil. These new converts to the faith now learned the meaning of the rite they experienced. I welcomed a focus group consisting of people who had no previous background in the Episcopal Church in hopes of simulating the experience of preaching to new converts. The mystagogical sermons were most effective for this group. Both the scaled responses and the written responses offered by this group indicate that they had almost no understanding of the rites prior to the sermon. The results after the sermon were dramatic. After hearing the sermons they reported

significant change in understanding and were able to clearly articulate that understanding in their written responses. This was particularly true for the first two topics of general confession/absolution and the passing of the peace. This group did report more understanding of baptism and Holy Eucharist prior to the sermon, but this understanding reflected the teaching of other faith traditions. The purpose of the research was to determine if the mystagogical sermons effectively communicated the theology of the Episcopal Church. The responses after the sermon indicated that they did indeed understand the theology presented in the liturgy. They may not have been persuaded by that theology, but they did understand. As the goal of the project was not to persuade, these results still support my thesis.

While mystagogy may have been designed and intended for new converts, this research shows that it is nevertheless beneficial for all those attending an Episcopal Church, regardless of the length of their tenure. There was little to no correlation between the length of time a participant had been attending an Episcopal Church and his or her change in understanding. Even those who are cradle Episcopalians benefited from these sermons. One would hope that a person attending an Episcopal Church for his or her entire life would have a full understanding of the liturgy and the theology presented therein. The liturgy as the location of our theology is not a recent occurrence. This has been the hallmark of the Anglican Church since Thomas Cranmer penned the first *Book of Common Prayer*. It is part of our identity as Episcopalians and Anglicans. Yet, the majority of those who have attended an Episcopal Church either their entire life or for 15 or more years still indicated that their understanding of the topic had changed. Not only was this seen in the scaled response questions and in the yes/no question, it was

confirmed in the written responses. Members of both St. Michael and All Angels and members of St. Augustine's thanked the preachers for offering this sermon series.

The research also shows that the mystagogical sermons were more effective for the first two topics than they were for the second two, albeit only slightly. In this regard the quantitative data and the qualitative data do not agree when it comes to the second two topics.

It is my suspicion that the passing of the peace and the general confession are infrequent topics for sermons. It is impossible to say whether participants have never heard a sermon these topics. It is possible to say that the three preachers participating in this project have never preached full sermons on these two topics. The participants of the surveys had not heard a sermon on these topics during the four-year tenure of each rector. In all three groups – St. Michael's, St. Augustine's, and the focus group – these two topics had the lowest scores when participants were asked to rate their own level of understanding. These scores jumped dramatically after the mystagogical sermons were preached.

The topics of baptism and the Holy Eucharist are standard fare for sermons in most Episcopal congregations. It was not surprising to see participants who regularly attend an Episcopal Church rate their levels of understanding of these topics very high. The quantitative data shows only small increases in how participants rated their own understanding after the sermon. Yet, the vast majority of them did indicate that there had been change. More importantly, the written responses offered before and after the sermons revealed significant change. This was revealed most prominently in the responses regarding the Holy Eucharist. Prior to the sermon many participants wrote that

the Holy Eucharist was a reenactment of the Last Supper. After the sermon they reported a much fuller understanding of the theology of real presence, union with Christ, strength for the journey, unity of the church, and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. There were no comments about the Last Supper after the sermons were preached. So despite the self-reported high levels of understanding prior to the sermon, the mystagogical sermon was indeed effective in communicating the theology of the rite. It could even be said that the mystagogical sermon served to correct misunderstanding of the rite.

The preachers who offered these sermons believed mystagogical preaching is both effective and beneficial. The follow-up meetings with this group provided an opportunity for the three to discuss their experience. All three, myself included, were new to writing mystagogical sermons. All three of us enjoyed the process and believed our congregations needed to hear this style of sermon. Each of the preachers also agreed that this style of preaching, while effective, should be used sparingly. I will explore ways this style of preaching can be used throughout the year in Chapter 7.

Areas of Weakness in Research

There are more than a few things I would do differently if I had the opportunity to repeat the research. First, I would not have preached the sermons on four consecutive Sunday mornings. This led to a fair amount of survey fatigue by the fourth Sunday in the series. This fatigue was evidenced in the written portions of a few of the surveys. A few participants in the last two weeks of the project began writing negative comments on the surveys. These comments were not about the sermons but about the frequency of having to complete the surveys. A better alternative would have been to preach a mystagogical sermon on the first Sunday of the month over a period of four months. I can see no

negative impact this would have had on the research. The benefits would likely have included larger participation in the fourth survey, particularly at St. Augustine's. I also think it may have led to better mystagogical sermons. Preaching the sermons over a period of four months as opposed to four weeks would have allowed for more time to be dedicated to the preparation of each sermon.

As mentioned above in the Outcomes section, there was weakness in the surveys regarding the scaled responses. Some participants answered the scaled questions with the same numbers selected both before and after the sermon was preached. Yet, despite no change in how they ranked their understanding, they answered the yes/no question positively. This indicated that they did indeed have a change in understanding after hearing the sermon. Therefore, the scaled response questions did not always accurately reflect change. Fortunately, in these instances the written portions of the survey adequately revealed the change they experienced.

A more serious weakness of the survey was the question calling for written responses after the sermon. The question reads, "If yes, in the space below, please write a few sentences explaining ways your understanding has changed after hearing the sermon." As a result of the wording of this question, those participants who answered "no" to the yes/no question regarding change did not write anything after the sermon was preached. The survey should have provided a way for those who reported no change in understanding to reflect on the sermon. Only one or two participants who answered no wrote anything after the sermon was preached.

Interestingly, those who answered no to the yes/no question were also the most likely to not write anything at all either prior to or after the sermon. As a result, it is very

difficult to determine why these participants did not have any change in their understanding. It is also interesting that the majority of those who answered “no change” did not answer the scaled response questions identically on both sides of the survey. In almost all cases the scaled response answers were higher after the sermon than before the sermon. And yet, despite selecting those higher scores, the participant indicated no change in understanding. There was only one participant who scored their level of understanding lower after hearing the sermon than they had prior to the sermon.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, I had previously taught classes at St. Michael and All Angels, Studio City on different aspects of mystagogical preaching, particularly a class on using typology to interpret the stories of the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. These were offered over the course of the three years I have been working on this thesis. In addition, since beginning work on this topic in 2013, I have added elements of mystagogical preaching to my sermons. As a result, some members of my congregation had already heard some of the main points I sought to make in several of my sermons. This is particularly true for the passing of the peace and baptism. This may have skewed some of the results for these two topics in the surveys completed at St. Michael and All Angels. In fact, a few surveys indicated that they remembered my prior preaching on this topic.

Finally, the topic of the Holy Eucharist was too broad for a truly effective mystagogical sermon. As a result, the sermons preached on this topic may not have accurately reflected the method of mystagogical preaching outlined in Chapter 3. The early mystagogues preached daily sermons during the week of Easter in which the meaning of the actions of the liturgy was explored. For example, when preaching on the

rites of initiation, St. Ambrose preached sermons on topics such as the descent into the water, the chrismation, or the renunciations. He even delved into things like the significance of the direction the neophytes faced during the renunciations. Early mystagogical sermons were on much smaller topics within the larger topic. This narrow focus, when combined over time, would bring the neophytes to a complete understanding of the mysteries they experienced. I attempted to accomplish this in my sermon on baptism by focusing exclusively on the thanksgiving over the water. My sermon on the Holy Eucharist, however, did not focus on a single element or section of the liturgy itself. Rev. Rugh's sermon at St. Augustine's had the same problem; the topic was too large. To be more effective, we should have identified one element of the Eucharistic prayer to be the text of the sermon. There are so many one could choose from. By focusing on smaller aspects of the liturgy, I suspect a mystagogue could spend an entire calendar year on the topic of the Eucharist and still not exhaust all the possibilities.

Despite these weaknesses, the results of the research are convincing. Mystagogical sermons are indeed effective for communicating the theology of the Episcopal Church as it is experienced in the liturgy. An overwhelming majority of participants reported positive change in their levels of understanding. The priests who participated in this research believed this style of preaching was beneficial to their congregations. Mystagogical preaching was effective for all ages and for all members regardless of the length of time they have been attending an Episcopal Church. It is particularly beneficial for new converts to the faith or new members of an Episcopal Church who have little to no background with the theology presented in the *Book of*

Common Prayer. The research completed, while not perfect, certainly met the goals outlined in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an evaluation of the data obtained in this research project. It identified both strengths and weaknesses of the research. The data has shown that mystagogical preaching is indeed effective in helping Episcopalians grow in their understanding of the theology presented in the liturgies of the church. It has shown that this style of preaching is effective for both old and new members. It is particularly effective for those who are brand new to the Episcopal Church and those who are new converts to the faith.

The final chapter of this thesis will reflect on the project as a whole. I will explore ways mystagogical preaching can be used by preachers in the future. The chapter will present ideas for further work and study. I will ruminate on how this project and degree program has made me a better preacher and how I have grown as a result of this study.

CHAPTER 7

REFLECTIONS

There is an old story told about a new rector being called to serve a church. It did not take long before this new rector began having trouble. The parishioners were disgruntled. They were unhappy and they made sure their new priest knew they were unhappy. The priest could not figure out what he was doing wrong. He had been careful not to make significant changes in his first year. He was leading collaboratively. He was working with a committee to select hymns. Yet, the people were unhappy.

He finally approached a long-time member and lay leader of the parish asking her if she would be willing to speak frankly. He asked her what he was doing wrong. The woman finally decided to tell him. She said, “It is the way you preside at the Eucharist. You have omitted the prayer at the beginning and without it we feel something is missing.”

The priest thanked her for her candor and began to mentally review what he did and said when he came to the altar. He reviewed his prayer book, checking both the Rite I and Rite II liturgies, but he could not identify an element of the liturgy he was forgetting. He eventually went back to the woman he had previously spoken to asking her for a description of the prayer he was omitting. She told him it was the silent prayer near the credence table. She explained that the previous rector, who had served the parish for many years, always began the Eucharist with this silent prayer where he extended his hands over the elements. This new priest had no idea of what this prayer could be. So he

did the only thing he could possibly think of. He called the now retired former rector and asked him what that prayer was. The retired priest said, “I never said any additional prayers before presiding at the Eucharist. I don’t know what they are talking about.” The young priest reported the woman’s description of how he apparently used to extend his hands over the elements before they were brought to the altar. The retired rector started laughing when he heard this. He said, “I was not praying! There is a radiator back there and I would always go warm my hands before coming to the altar.”

While the story may or may not be true, the situation it describes is most certainly in the realm of possibility. The story reflects the truth of what Louis Weil was worried about when he suggested that congregations are attaching meaning to liturgical actions, gestures, and manual acts that may not be true. His solution was for priests to omit all such confusing actions. I disagreed with Weil. My workable alternative was mystagogical preaching in which the liturgical rite becomes the text of the sermon – a sermon which leads listeners deeper into the mysteries of the faith they experience in the liturgy.

As I come to the conclusion of this thesis, I am now even more confident that mystagogical preaching is a solution that will benefit all preachers in the Episcopal tradition. Through this research I have discovered that even lifelong members of the Episcopal Church are confused on even the most familiar elements of our liturgy. They have indeed attached their own meaning. Unfortunately, omitting gestures and manual acts will not solve the real problem. Only through education, classes, book discussion groups, or instructed Eucharist could the problem be solved. It is also unfortunate that so few members of the church are willing to give the extra time commitment to attend these kinds of things. The sermon is the perfect opportunity, on occasion, to address these vital

aspects of our common prayer. Mystagogical preaching is the best method to be used on these occasions. This research will benefit any Episcopal priest willing to explore mystagogical preaching. It is not only beneficial to Episcopalians, however. Any tradition in which liturgy and Sacrament are important would be well served by mystagogical preaching.

This thesis is merely the beginning of the potential for study on mystagogical preaching. Building on the foundation provided here, there are many options for further study. A next helpful step could be a study of the Revised Common Lectionary and the development of a preaching plan for mystagogical sermons based thereon. One could identify which lectionary texts provide opportunities for mystagogical sermons and what those potential topics could be. A study like this could identify texts that can be interpreted using the allegorical sense looking for types and connections to the liturgy.

One question that arose among the preachers participating in this research was about the effectiveness of adding elements of mystagogy to sermons as opposed to preaching full mystagogical sermons. Continued experimentation and study could determine if adding elements of mystagogy is as effective as full mystagogical sermons.

The Early Fathers who were best known for mystagogy preached their sermons during the week of Easter. Neophytes returned to the cathedral each day for one week to hear these types of sermons. Fr. Jose Jacob attempted to recreate this with his Parish Mission Events. His work was equally interested in the events as it was in the mystagogical preaching. It would be of interest to recreate the experience without the Parish Mission Event. It would be very interesting to see how effective mystagogical preaching would be if done daily in the week immediately following one's baptism. In

this day and age it is hard to imagine people being willing to participate in this. Yet the idea is worth considering and could provide interesting opportunity for further study.

While my thesis is about mystagogical preaching in the Episcopal Church, it brought to light several fascinating topics that could easily become the focus of an entirely new thesis. Chapter 2 of this thesis explored how New Testament authors utilized early Christian liturgy and hymnody to communicate theology. I was fascinated reading the research done on didactic hymns used by Paul. I discovered that there were many more benefits to this than just communicating theology. A thesis could build on this element of my research by exploring ways familiar music and hymnody can be incorporated into sermons in order to enhance ethos, encourage unity, and communicate theology.¹

I also see more opportunities for additional theses on the four senses of scripture outlined by Paul Scott Wilson in his book *God Sense*. Eric Walters touched on this topic in his 2008 thesis for Luther Seminary. His thesis focused on the Old Testament and the use of typology. A thesis could easily be built on any of the remaining three senses mentioned by Wilson. Any of these could build on the work begun in this thesis.

Finally, this thesis relied heavily on the work of Craig Satterlee and his book *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching*. Satterlee has indicated that his book is a companion to William Harmless' book *Augustine and the Catechumenate*. A thesis could be written on the effectiveness of catechetical preaching building on what Harmless has written in his book.

¹ Enhancing ethos, encouraging unity, and communicating theology are the three reasons outlined by Matthew Gordley for the inclusion didactic hymns in the New Testament. An exploration of Gordley's work can be found in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

These are just a few ideas of how the work completed here could easily lead to other thesis and follow-up studies. There are so many ways to move forward that I cannot possibly explore them all in this chapter.

Working on this thesis has challenged me in new ways and I have grown so much over these past three years. I have challenged myself to learn a new style of preaching. Prior to the beginning the program at Luther Seminary I had never even heard the word mystagogy before. I know that I have only just begun my journey of exploration with mystagogical preaching. As I sit in my rector's study each week preparing for my Sunday sermon I now frequently notice opportunities in the lectionary for a mystagogical sermon. I have found this style of preaching to be both rewarding and challenging. I know I have so much more learning and experimenting to do with this topic. I would love to eventually be known as an effective mystagogue.

I also grew in my understanding of hermeneutics by working on this project. Like so many others, I was trained to seek the literal sense of the scriptures. Thanks to working on this topic, and to the work of Paul Scott Wilson in *God Sense*, I have a whole new appreciation for alternative ways of interpreting texts. I believe that preachers need to return to embracing these four senses of the scripture.

I became an Episcopalian because I fell in love with the *Book of Common Prayer*. This thesis has renewed my love for this foundational aspect of our Episcopal identity. I continue to be amazed by the beauty and depth of our liturgy. The process of writing this thesis and crafting mystagogical sermons has once again given life to the phrase "praying shapes believing."

I also think this project has made me a better presider in the liturgy. Gordon Lathrop writes, “The pastor cares for symbols, sets out symbols for other people, hopes these symbols may hold people’s lives into meaning.”² In his book *The Pastor: A Spirituality*, Lathrop reminds us who do this work that we must be careful presiders of the liturgy and careful with the symbols we work with. I had read Lathrop’s book several years before beginning work on this degree and on this thesis. I always appreciated what he had said. After working on this thesis, however, his words came alive for me in new ways. While I suggest an alternative to his argument, Louis Weil’s concern about sloppy liturgy is incredibly important. Those of us who do this work must be mindful of these concerns. Working on mystagogical sermons and the experience of the liturgy breathes life into what sometimes feels routine. This sentiment was reflected in several of the responses written on the surveys. Participants indicated that the liturgy came alive for them in new ways after hearing the mystagogical sermon. It has come alive for me in new ways as result of working on this project.

This study has challenged me so many positive ways. I have grown as a preacher, presider, and priest. I have grown in my understanding of the scriptures. It has convinced me that mystagogical preaching must be a regular staple of preaching in the Episcopal Church. It will certainly be a regular part of my preaching wherever I serve.

Christine McSpadden wrote, “Preaching benefits from the study of the text with an ear toward the basic confessional affirmations of the church, most explicitly stated in the creeds.”³ Her words resonated with me. They made me wonder if sermons in the

² Gordon W. Lathrop, *The Pastor: A Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 1.

³ McSpadden, “Preaching Scripture Faithfully in a Post-Christendom Church,” 129.

Episcopal Church would need to be preached with an ear toward our liturgy. I no longer wonder about that, but am thoroughly convinced of its truth. If we are to connect sermon and liturgy, leading our parishioners deeper into the mysteries of the faith they experience in that liturgy, and communicate the theology of our tradition found in the prayer book, we will need to preach mystagogical sermons in the Episcopal Church.

APPENDIX A

SURVEYS

Survey One

Topic: The General Confession and Absolution

What is your religious affiliation? _____

How long have you been attending an Episcopal Church _____

Your Age _____ Your Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Please complete this portion of the survey prior to the sermon.

Using a 5 point scale where 5 indicates the greatest level of understanding and 1 indicates least level of understanding, how would rate your understanding of the following?

Why we say the general confession each week?

1 2 3 4 5

How the general confession connects to other portions of the liturgy?

1 2 3 4 5

What the biblical foundations of the general confession are?

1 2 3 4 5

What the church teaches about the general confession?

1 2 3 4 5

What is the theology communicated through this liturgical act?

1 2 3 4 5

In a few sentences, please write what you believe about the general confession/absolution. What are we doing? Why do we do it?

Second portion of the survey is found on the back of this sheet

Please complete this portion of the survey immediately following the sermon.

Using a 5 point scale where 5 indicates the greatest level of understanding and 1 indicates least level of understanding, how would rate your understanding of the following?

Why we say the general confession each week?

1 2 3 4 5

How the general confession connects to other portions of the liturgy?

1 2 3 4 5

What the biblical foundations of the general confession are?

1 2 3 4 5

What the church teaches about the general confession?

1 2 3 4 5

What is the theology communicated through this liturgical act?

1 2 3 4 5

Do you feel your understanding of the general confession changed after hearing this sermon?

Yes

No

If yes, in the space below, please write a few sentences explaining ways your understanding has changed after hearing the sermon.

Thank you for your participation. Ushers will collect the completed survey.

Survey Two

Topic: Passing of the Peace

What is your religious affiliation? _____

How long have you been attending an Episcopal Church _____

Your Age _____

Your Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Please complete this portion of the survey prior to the sermon.

Using a 5 point scale where 5 indicates the greatest level of understanding and 1 indicates least level of understanding, how would rate your understanding of the following?

Why we pass the peace each week?

1 2 3 4 5

How the passing of the peace connects to other portions of the liturgy?

1 2 3 4 5

What the biblical foundations of the passing of the peace are?

1 2 3 4 5

What the church teaches about the passing of the peace?

1 2 3 4 5

What is the theology communicated through this liturgical act?

1 2 3 4 5

In a few sentences, please write what you believe about the passing of the peace. What are we doing? Why do we do it?

Second portion of the survey is found on the back of this sheet

Please complete this portion of the survey immediately following the sermon.

Using a 5 point scale where 5 indicates the greatest level of understanding and 1 indicates least level of understanding, how would rate your understanding of the following?

Why we pass the peace each week?

1 2 3 4 5

How the passing of the peace connects to other portions of the liturgy?

1 2 3 4 5

What the biblical foundations of the passing of the peace are?

1 2 3 4 5

What the church teaches about the passing of the peace?

1 2 3 4 5

What is the theology communicated through this liturgical act?

1 2 3 4 5

Do you feel your understanding of the passing of the peace changed after hearing this sermon?

Yes

No

If yes, in the space below, please write a few sentences explaining ways your understanding has changed after hearing the sermon.

Thank you for your participation. Ushers will collect the completed survey.

Survey Three

Topic: Holy Baptism

What is your religious affiliation? _____

How long have you been attending an Episcopal Church _____

Your Age _____

Your Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Please complete this portion of the survey prior to the sermon.

Using a 5 point scale where 5 indicates the greatest level of understanding and 1 indicates least level of understanding, how would rate your understanding of the following?

Why we baptize people?

1 2 3 4 5

How baptism connects to other portions of the liturgy?

1 2 3 4 5

What the biblical foundations of baptism are?

1 2 3 4 5

What the church teaches about baptism?

1 2 3 4 5

What is the theology communicated through this liturgical act?

1 2 3 4 5

In a few sentences, please write what you believe about baptism. What are we doing?
Why do we do it?

Second portion of the survey is found on the back of this sheet

Please complete this portion of the survey immediately following the sermon.

Using a 5 point scale where 5 indicates the greatest level of understanding and 1 indicates least level of understanding, how would rate your understanding of the following?

Why we baptize people?

1 2 3 4 5

How baptism connects to other portions of the liturgy?

1 2 3 4 5

What the biblical foundations of baptism are?

1 2 3 4 5

What the church teaches about the baptism?

1 2 3 4 5

What is the theology communicated through this liturgical act?

1 2 3 4 5

Do you feel your understanding of baptism changed after hearing this sermon?

Yes

No

If yes, in the space below, please write a few sentences explaining ways your understanding has changed after hearing the sermon.

Thank you for your participation. Ushers will collect the completed survey.

Survey Four

Topic: The Holy Eucharist

What is your religious affiliation? _____

How long have you been attending an Episcopal Church _____

Your Age _____

Your Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Please complete this portion of the survey prior to the sermon.

Using a 5 point scale where 5 indicates the greatest level of understanding and 1 indicates least level of understanding, how would rate your understanding of the following?

Why we celebrate the Holy Eucharist each week?

1 2 3 4 5

How the Eucharist connects to other portions of the liturgy?

1 2 3 4 5

What the biblical foundations of the Eucharist are?

1 2 3 4 5

What the church teaches about the Eucharist?

1 2 3 4 5

What is the theology communicated through this liturgical act?

1 2 3 4 5

In a few sentences, please write what you believe about the Eucharist. What are we doing? Why do we do it?

Second portion of the survey is found on the back of this sheet

Please complete this portion of the survey immediately following the sermon.

Using a 5 point scale where 5 indicates the greatest level of understanding and 1 indicates least level of understanding, how would rate your understanding of the following?

Why we celebrate the Holy Eucharist each week?

1 2 3 4 5

How the Eucharist connects to other portions of the liturgy?

1 2 3 4 5

What the biblical foundations of the Eucharist are?

1 2 3 4 5

What the church teaches about the Eucharist?

1 2 3 4 5

What is the theology communicated through this liturgical act?

1 2 3 4 5

Do you feel your understanding of the Eucharist changed after hearing this sermon?

Yes

No

If yes, in the space below, please write a few sentences explaining ways your understanding has changed after hearing the sermon.

Thank you for your participation. Ushers will collect the completed survey

APPENDIX B

SERMONS

Mystagogical Sermon by The Rev. Daniel Justin
Preached at St. Michael and All Angels, Studio City, CA
Topic: General Confession and Absolution

Say Your Prayers!

1 John 3:16-24

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor. I probably should not say it, I can't believe I am going to say it, but that phrase has always made me think of Yosemite Sam.

When I was a kid I was fan of Bugs Bunny cartoons. My Saturday mornings were spent in front of television, bowl of cereal in hand, watching Bugs, Daffy, and Foghorn Leghorn. But my all time favorite was the roughest, toughest, rootin, tootinist, fastest gunslinger west of Pecos – Yosemite Sam. He was the archenemy of Bugs Bunny and I loved him. I think it might have been because he was so short and had red hair. That was a cross whose weight I was all too familiar with.

Each week Yosemite Sam would try to do away with Bugs Bunny and somewhere, at some point, he would say, "Say your prayers, varmint." In other words – prepare yourself. Get ready to meet your maker. Repent. Confess. However you say it, it all means the same thing. You are about to stand before God and face judgment. So get ready, because in your current state you probably will be found wanting.

Say your prayers. Prepare to meet your maker. I guess I thought of all this because in a sense, when it comes down to it, we hear the same message in church each week. The wording is different but it means the same thing. Instead of "Say your prayers, varmint" we say, "Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor." It might as well just say "Prepare to meet your maker."

Of course, there is a big difference when it is said within the context of the Episcopal liturgy. In this place, those words are not a threat of judgment. Rather, they are a promise of grace.

For what is it that we believe we are doing when we come to the altar to receive bread and wine? We are meeting God. We are encountering the Risen Christ who is uniquely present in the Sacrament. We meet our maker who is giving us a foretaste of that

heavenly banquet that we have all been invited to. Here, at the table, we meet God, and God feeds us. We are strengthened and empowered by God.

And because we come to meet the Risen Christ here, we need to take time to prepare ourselves. We take time to examine our lives and our conduct. St. Paul, in his letter to the church in Corinth, admonished Christians not to come to the table unprepared. He argued that to do so would actually be to our detriment. He reminds us not to take these mysteries lightly. We come to the table and we are met by God there.

So take a breath, take a moment to reflect. We need to examine our hearts and our lives before we go. And we examine them in the light of God's word and commandments. In our liturgy we call this the General Confession. It is both preparation and response.

Have you ever taken note of the place the confession holds in the liturgy? I mean, have you ever noticed when it is that we say it during the service? We say the confession after we have heard the scriptures read and after we have reflected on their meaning in the sermon.

After all, if we are to examine our lives, preparing to meet God in the Eucharist, we need to start somewhere. It would be a bleak life indeed if we were expected to make note of all the little infractions and failures of our lives. It would bring us back to a religion of rules based in fear if we had to keep note and recall every sin – those things done and those things undone, that combined with every wayward thought and every unloving feeling or attitude. For heavens sake, I could fill an entire journal or notebook each time I got stuck in traffic. No. That is not what we are expected to do as we come to the confession.

The scriptures read in church provide enough light to search out what it is we need to confess *this week*. Today we heard from 1 John chapter three. You know, First John serves as a commentary on the Gospel of John. It collects and communicates the major themes of the fourth Gospel – distilling them down to their most basic form.

So, this morning, we heard John's key message: love God and love one another. John reminds us again that love, in the Christian usage of the word, is not an emotion. It is an action. Love is a verb. It is something we do, not something we feel. John writes, "Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."

He then builds on one of Jesus' more famous teachings. He revisits the theme of Jesus as the true vine and how we are the branches. And how we are to abide in Jesus. He reminds us that the only way to do that is to love others, like Jesus loved us. Self-giving love. That is how we abide in him. John summarizes the key message for us: love God, believe in Jesus, and love one another in real and tangible ways. Those are the commands presented to us in our New Testament lesson this morning.

We hear them, we read them, and now we must respond to them. The liturgy presents us with the opportunity to ask ourselves – do I live these words? Have I followed these

commands? You see, the scriptures read in church each Sunday are like a search light shining into our hearts and into our lives. They become the guideposts, the measuring sticks, by which we examine our lives as we come to confession.

And chances are we will discover that we are kind of like Isaiah in the temple of the Lord. In light of God's commandments and word we cry out, "Woe is me, for I am a person of unclean lips." And the scriptures we have heard are like the burning coal brought by the Angel. They purify. They bring to our attention the ways we have failed. John writes, "Our hearts condemn us." The confession allows us to examine our lives in preparation to meet God at the table. Say your prayers! Get ready.

And yet, how often we take this moment for granted. Like many aspects of our familiar liturgy, it can become rote and routine. It can become like we are just going through the motions. We can say the words, make the sign of the cross, and have it not mean anything at all. Time to make the donuts. Time to say the confession. Without reflecting on the word read and what it brings to light the action does not mean all that much.

Of course, on the other hand, we should acknowledge that we live in a "Not guilty" culture. The idea of confessing wrong doing is foreign to us. Hide wrong doing, don't confess it. That makes much more sense. Don't do or say anything that admits mistakes or guilt. But here is the thing, God knows. God already knows.

That is another thing 1 John tells us in our text this morning. "God is greater than our hearts, and God knows everything." You know, trying to hide from God is nothing new. Adam and Eve hid in the garden, but God knew. Cain hid his brother's body after he murdered him and then played dumb when God asked, "Where's Abel?" but God knew. The priest Aaron concocted a fantastic story about the golden calf magically appearing, but God knew. Jonah jumped on the first ship out of town when God commanded him to go prophesy to Ninevah, but God was not fooled. God knew.

God already knows. In the confession we prepare to meet our maker who already knows what we have to confess. But, as I said earlier, that is not a threat. It is a promise of grace. For the confession is not left to stand alone. It is immediately followed by the absolution. This is the assurance of pardon and forgiveness. "Almighty God, have mercy on you, forgive you your all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life."

The priest may be the one saying the words but it is God who is doing the forgiving. And that forgiveness comes through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. When we stand before God facing judgment every verdict is always rendered "Not guilty" because Jesus already covered the bill. It was paid in full when he said from the cross, "It is finished."

1 John reminds us, "When we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." There is no fear and no condemnation associated with the confession. There is only assurance of pardon. It is the task of the priest to declare that forgiveness. The priest serves as a witness declaring what God has done through Christ. We are forgiven.

And then, it is the Holy Spirit who begins a new work in our lives. When, in the light of the scriptures, we see those things in our lives that don't reflect the love and example of Jesus, when we see how we have failed to love God and failed to love our neighbors, when we take note of things both done and undone, confessing them to God, we are inviting God's Spirit to work on those parts of our lives.

Through examination and confession we prepare to meet our creator, not hiding, but rather throwing wide the doors of our hearts. We invite God to do something new in us. So that our lives will begin to reflect the life of Jesus – the only one who truly was able to love God and love others without fault.

And lest we think that confession is only an individual, personal act, let us note the language we use. We do not say, "Most merciful God, I confess..." We say, "We confess." Corporately, as a community, we acknowledge that not only do our own individual lives fail to reflect the love of God. But so does our community. So does our culture. Together, collectively, we live in ways that exploit the poor. Together we live in systems of injustice and together we have failed to respect the dignity of every human being.

We confess together, as a body, knowing that Jesus is alive and is still working to bring justice. We say the confession together because we acknowledge that we are the body of Christ in the world. We are invited by God to be love spreading difference makers. The Spirit works in all of us to make us full participants in building the kingdom of heaven right here and right now.

So get ready. Prepare yourself. Say your prayers. We are about to meet our maker. Jesus come to us in bread broken for us and wine poured out for us. We are not met with judgment but with open arms of love. We confess those things that the light of scripture has revealed to us today. And we will be back next week too. We receive the assurance of pardon and grace; forgiveness and strength. And the hope that through these actions God's Spirit is making us new.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Mystagogical Sermon by The Rev. Daniel Justin
Preached at St. Michael and All Angels, Studio City, CA
Topic: Passing of the Peace

Peace Be With You
1 John 4:7-21

The peace of the Lord be always with you. For some the passing of the peace is their favorite part of the service. Others seem to dread it. I have a dear friend who is one of those who seems to dread it. He refers to as "hug time" and usually finds a way to escape for that portion of the service.

What are we doing when we greet one another saying, “Peace be with you?” Is this just the opportunity to say hello to people we have not seen in a week? Is it the churches version of intermission? Is it the seventh inning stretch giving you an opportunity to get the blood flowing again? Perhaps it is there to be perfect time to wake up those who have dozed off during the sermon.

The passing of the peace – some love it, some tolerate it, some hate it. But I can’t help but wonder – do we understand it? Why do we do this each week? Some of you may even remember that we Episcopalians never used to do it. Did you all know that the passing of the peace during the service is a relatively recent addition to the liturgy of the Episcopal Church? The passing of the peace was not a part of the liturgy until 1979 when the Book of Common Prayer was revised. That is also when the Holy Eucharist replaced Morning Prayer as the principal service of Sunday morning.

In all previous iterations of the prayer book the confession of sin, which we explored last week, was immediately followed by the Holy Eucharist. Only recently, since 1979, was the passing of the peace added. It was placed in between the confession and the Eucharist.

But why? What does it mean? What are we saying? What are we doing? Well, let me assure you – it is more than just a chance to say hello. It is more than just hug time. After all, in the Episcopal Church, our liturgy is the location of our theology. In other words, what we do and say in the liturgy tells us something about what we believe. That is why it is so important to explore these topics.

Not only that, but through our participation in the liturgy we become active participants in God’s saving actions in the world. We read in the scriptures how God rescued and liberated and redeemed the people of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Our liturgy then allows us to act out those things. We embody them. We participate in them. We don’t come to church just to learn the history of these things. We participate in the liturgy because this history comes alive in us.

The passing of the peace is more than “hello.” It is a liturgical, sacramental act that embodies the message of God’s salvation, which come through Jesus. The peace is pregnant with meaning. It is filled with significance. It allows us to act out and participate in what we have read in scripture.

So, just like last week, our New Testament lesson from First John provides the perfect starting point. John is continuing his exposition of the teachings of Jesus conveyed to us in the fourth Gospel. There, if you remember, Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment: that they love one another. We heard in our Gospel reading this morning the call to abide in Jesus. According to First John, this is done when we love one another as Jesus loved us.

In this famous passage we have read, John is establishing the correct order to things. He tells us, “God is love.” God loved us. That love is revealed in the sending of Jesus who gave everything so that we could be in right relationship with our creator.

We do not need to convince God to love us. We do not, and need not, try to earn God’s love. Our actions, be they good or bad, are not what is taken into account. God loves us because God is love. God loved us first – even when we were unlovely and unloving. God’s love is unconditional. And that unconditional love and acceptance evokes a response of love from us. Fear is cast down. There is no reason to be afraid of God focusing on things like wrath or judgment. God’s unconditional love is shown for us through the gift of Jesus. God’s perfect love casts out fear.

And because God first loved us, we are now able to love God. God makes it possible for us to love God. And our love for God, according to John, is seen by our love for one another.

First John gives us the sequence - God loves, forgives, and accepts us. Therefore, we love, forgive, and accept others. Through Jesus we have peace with God. As a result we may have peace with one another.

The peace of the Lord be always with you. Our liturgy models exactly what we have read here. In the confession we examine our lives in the light of God’s word, confess our failures, and receive grace and forgiveness. We receive the assurance of pardon and the joy of knowing that God’s Spirit is now working in our lives to make us into the people God longs for us to be. In the confession we are accepted by God. And the peace follows the confession and absolution. We have received the gift of peace. And so we now turn to one another and embody this forgiveness, grace, and acceptance to our neighbor. We forgive and accept one another.

The peace is so much more than intermission; it is more than saying hello. In the passing of the peace we follow the word and life of Jesus who gave us that new commandment – love one another. The order we do these things is important. For we know that we are only able to love because we have received love. “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God.”

We are forgiven and accepted, so we now forgive and accept. The peace is that moment in the service to seek out those who have wronged you or those you have wronged and offer them peace. We all know that we have a tendency to harbor resentments, hold grudges, and keep score. But there is no room for that in the Christian life. We were forgiven so we too must forgive. Peace be with you.

That also applies to those who are not physically present. Perhaps there is some person in our past that we need to forgive. Peace. We love and accept as we have been loved and accepted.

The peace is more than hello – but it is still hello as well. Remember, the peace is filled with meaning. Where else but the church do we have the opportunity to gather with some many different people. In the church we are surrounded by people that we would likely never interact with in other place in our lives. We are all different in so many ways. But God’s love and welcome reaches to all people. We saw that in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles today. So the passing of the peace also allows us to embody the hospitality of God welcoming all people.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection he greeted them saying, “Peace be with you.” He reached out his hands to them, inviting them to touch him so they could see that he was real. We embody the risen Christ today in this same way each time we turn to one another saying, “Peace be with you.” The action is more than just words. It includes touch as well. The New Testament again and again invites Christians to greet one another with a holy kiss. Today that kiss is more likely to take the form of a handshake – but the message is the same. We represent Christ to one another. God showed God’s love for us through the incarnation – Jesus, who is God, became flesh and blood. God became a human being so we could see and experience God’s love. So we reach out our hands offering peace to another – both in word and touch. We meet the risen Christ embodied in one another.

Jesus taught that he gave a peace that the world could not give. A peace that passes all understanding. As we greet one another with the peace of Christ we embody this gift as well. We live in a world where there is no peace. The riots in Baltimore, the disaster in Nepal, the conflict and terror in the Middle East are all reminders that we are in desperate need of peace. The church is that place of peace. It stands against intolerance, racism, fear, war, and terror saying, “Peace be with you.” Here one is greeted with open arms and open hands of love and acceptance. An acceptance that comes first from God and is embodied in us. We practice this each week in the liturgy.

You know, it is said that practice makes perfect. One does not become a stellar musician or singer with out hours of practice. One does not become a star athlete without practice and regular training. The church then is the practice field for our faith. We learn here what it means and what it looks like to be followers of Jesus. We practice acts of love and acceptance and forgiveness here each week. We come again and again, going through the same motions, in hopes that God will make them second nature to us. Through the regular passing of the peace we learn to love and accept others as God has loved and accepted us. We do it here so we can begin to do this with all whom we meet. Not just on Sundays, but every day of our lives. Not just with those who are like us, but with each person we encounter. For only then will our lives truly become the witnesses Jesus invites us and empowers us to be. Witnesses of God’s amazing love for the world. Witness of the hope we have in Christ. Witnesses of a peace that is available to all people.

The peace of the Lord be always with you. It is so much more than just hello. Through this action we embody the truth of gospel: we love because God first loved us. We accept others because God has accepted us. Our lives reflect the life, love, power, and presence

of the resurrected Christ by welcoming all to experience what only Jesus can give – true peace. Amen.

Mystagogical Sermon by The Rev. Daniel Justin
Preached at St. Michael and All Angels, Studio City, CA
Topic: Holy Baptism

Miracle, Majesty, and Membership
Acts 10:44-48

Now, obviously it is not there now, but I wonder – what is your first thought on those Sundays when you come into church and notice the baptismal font set-up here in the front of the church. Perhaps you simply think, “Oh, there must be a baptism today.” Or maybe your first thought is, “Oh, there must be a baptism today. Church is going to last a lot longer than normal.” Of course different people may have different reactions. If you sing in the choir or if you are an acolyte you may think, “Oh, how am I going to get around that thing during the procession without tripping.” If you regularly sit in these first few pews you may think, “Oh, there is probably going to be a crying child near me. Maybe I should move.” What do you think when you discover there is going to be a baptism?

In our reading from the book of Acts this morning the people who were with Peter when he visited the home of Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, were not too sure what to think when they found that there was going to be a baptism that day. In fact, they were astounded that there was going to be a baptism. But maybe astonishment is indeed the best response - because what happens in baptism is truly astonishing.

Of course, like so many things we read about in the scripture or regularly experience in our liturgy, familiarity desensitizes us to the magnificence of what is we are participating in. The first thought we should probably have when we walk into church and see the font is “Oh, we are going to witness a miracle today.” When we see and participate in baptisms we are seeing something astounding. Martin Luther, the great reformer, described baptism as, “A once in a life time experience that takes our whole life to complete.”

There is something profound and powerful happening in baptism. It is a Sacrament – an outward and visible sign of and inward, spiritual grace. That is a definition that reflects exactly what we witness in the book of Acts today.

Peter and his companions have gone to the home of Cornelius, the Roman Centurion. This is significant because Cornelius was the enemy. He was a Gentile. He was not a member of God’s chosen people. Jews did not associate with or speak to Gentiles. But suddenly God seemed to have other plans. While at prayer Peter has some disturbing and strange visions. In the end, God sends Peter to meet with this Roman, who had also had some strange visions of his own. Peter ends up preaching a sermon to everyone gathered there. While Peter was preaching the Holy Spirit suddenly fell on these Gentiles. And just like that, they are filled with the Spirit and begin to speak in other languages. The scene

is oddly familiar to what happened to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost. They too were filled with the Spirit and began to speak in languages they had never learned. The members of Cornelius' household had received the Spirit in the exact same way the Apostles themselves had.

God was doing something new. God was sending a message. The gospel was not for a select few, or a chosen group. The gospel was for all people everywhere – no matter who they were or were not. Jesus has redeemed the whole world and now all people are God's beloved people. This was an astonishing revelation.

Those who witnessed this were astounded. Peter sees what is happening and he asks, "Who can withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

Baptism, particularly the water of baptism, is the outward sign of God's love, acceptance, and inclusion. God had poured out God's Spirit. These people who were once enemies are now shown to be members of the family. They are God's beloved. And so they are brought to the waters of baptism. For baptism is the Sacrament of initiation. Through it we become full members of the church. It is the outward sign saying, "You belong here." You are a member of the family – the family of God – and nothing can change that. That is the message of baptism.

You belong. And not only just to this church, but every church. You belong. Have you ever thought about that? The next time you are driving somewhere and pass a church you may want to say to yourself, "I belong there. I am a member." In baptism we are made members of the universal church, we belong here.

I once had a priest say to me, "There is no magic in the water of baptism, but there is majesty." When we begin to look at the images presented to us through baptism we can see that majesty.

In the water of baptism we are brought back to the image of creation itself. In the liturgy of baptism the priest thanks God for the water, reminding us that God's Spirit hovered over the water in creation. God brought order to chaos in creation. Through the water of baptism we are made into new creations in Christ. Jesus entered the chaos of this world and revealed what it looked like to be truly human. Jesus revealed what it looks like to live as God always intended for creation to live. God's Spirit hovered over the water in creation and God makes us a new creation through the waters of baptism.

And of course, in baptism we also relive the Exodus. The Israelites passed through water, the water of the Red Sea, as God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. They passed through the water on dry ground. God led them to the land of promise. God made a covenant with them naming them as God's chosen and beloved people. Likewise, we pass through the water of baptism just as they once did. We were once slaves as well – slaves to sin and death. Jesus rescued us; liberated us. His life, death and resurrection are

the new Exodus. He makes a way for us to once again follow God to the land of promise. That way is through the water of baptism.

Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River. And as Jesus came up from the water the Spirit descended on him and the voice from heaven declared, “This is my son, my beloved.” We hear the same message when we are baptized. As we come through the water of baptism the same Spirit fills us. We are named as God’s beloved daughters and sons. We are adopted into the family of God.

The images presented to us in the prayer of thanksgiving over the water start to pile up after a while. We discover that baptism is a bath, a womb, and a tomb. In baptism we are cleansed. We are washed clean. It is a bath. We are like Naaman from the book of 2 Kings, whom the prophet Elisha sends to dip himself in the Jordan River three times. And when he does he is healed of his leprosy. He is cleansed. We are cleansed of all sin in the water of baptism. Yes, we will fall; yes, we will fail many times, we continue to do those things we know we should not do. But Jesus will always and only see us as clean. Baptism is a bath. We are cleansed forever.

And it is a womb. Through baptism we are reborn – just as Jesus promised to Nicodemus in John’s Gospel. We are made into new people, born again by water and the Spirit. Baptism is a womb.

And it is a tomb as well. Through baptism our old life of sin and death are buried with Christ. That part of us that rebels against God dies in baptism. That is what St. Paul teaches. Our old lives, our old ways die with Christ. They are buried under the water of baptism. And as we pass through that water we are raised to life again. So then, in baptism we also participate in Christ’s resurrection. We receive the promise of new and eternal life; we continue in the risen life of Christ.

You see, there is majesty in the water of baptism. There we are cleansed, reborn, and resurrected. There we proclaim the promise we have received. We belong to Jesus. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever. That cross that is traced on our foreheads is like a permanent tattoo. We can’t see it with our eyes but it never washes off. We belong to Jesus. We are his people.

When Peter and his companions witnessed those Gentiles filled with the Holy Spirit just as they had been, he asked, “Who can withhold the water for baptizing these people?” I have always thought that question meant, “How can we deny them even though they are not like us?” And that is probably a fine interpretation. But I also wonder if Peter may have recognized something else. “Who can withhold the water?” Could he be asking, “Who is powerful enough to stop God from doing what God is doing here?”

For if there is one final thing we should always remember about baptism – it is that baptism is Christ’s act in the church. It is God’s doing. God is making us members of God’s family. God is rescuing us from slavery, delivering us from death, giving us new birth and new life. God is cleansing us from sin, and marking us as Christ’s own forever.

Baptism is a once in a life time experience that takes our whole life to complete. It is Christ's act in the church. We just get to pour the water. Jesus does the rest.

So, what do you think when you see the font when you come into church? I say it is nothing less than a miracle – the miracle and majesty of membership.

Amen.

Mystagogical Sermon by The Rev. Daniel Justin
Preached at St. Michael and All Angels, Studio City, CA
Topic: Holy Eucharist

What is the Gift?

John 17:6-19

In a 2012 article called *What is the Gift*, preacher and author Tom Long wrote the following: “I don't know if you've ever had the slightly embarrassing experience of having someone give you a gift, only to find out when you opened it, you did not have the foggiest idea what it was or what it was for. I mean, there you are: you're at the company Christmas party, or at a wedding shower, or at your birthday party, and someone hands you a wrapped package. As you pull off the ribbon and the wrapping paper, all the eyes in the circle are on you. You open the box and there it is...

But is it a pencil sharpener or a coffee grinder? A scarf or a bread napkin? Earrings or fishing lures?

Of course the person who gave the gift is looking at you with eager anticipation, as if to say, “Well, do you like it?” And finally, out of courtesy, you know you have to say something, so you say, “Oh, how could you have known? Thank you so much. I can really use a tire pressure gauge.” Only to have a wounded voice say, “Tire gauge?! That's a meat thermometer!”

What is the gift? There is something of the same uncertainty and perplexity when it comes to considering the Holy Eucharist. What is the gift? In the Episcopal Church we say that the celebration of the Eucharist – the Lord's Supper; communion – is the central act of Christian worship. But there is a wide range of ideas and beliefs about what exactly it is we are doing and what is happening as we do it.

Some would say the Eucharist is just the opportunity to remember. It is the remembrance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Others would argue it is a sacrifice of sorts. In fact, some believe that it is a completion of what Jesus did on the cross and through our participation in it our sins are forgiven. Some believe the bread and wine actually and literally become the body and blood of Jesus. Others say no, that is not what happens, the elements themselves do not change. They are still bread and wine but their significance changes.

Some would say that the Eucharist is all about looking back, while others say it is about look forward – in the meal we glimpse what is to come at the end of time. Some would say it is an act that is primarily between an individual and God, while others would say no, it is about us all coming together to join in a common meal. Some would say it is about God coming down and meeting us here, while others would say it is about us being lifted up to God. Some would say it is an act of gratitude, while others say it is an act of offering. Some say we are receiving something, while others say we are giving something.

What is the gift? What are we doing? Who is doing it? And why is it done? Well, I believe our text from the Gospel of John this morning may just be the best place to begin as we seek answers. Our reading from John presents a portion of what is known as the Farewell Discourse. Jesus is saying goodbye to his friends. He has just celebrated the Passover meal with them. *We* call this event the Last Supper. Jesus knows that this is the last night of his life. He knows he is soon to be betrayed, arrested, and crucified. He knows his disciples, his beloved friends and followers, are going to be devastated. They are going to be shaken to the core. For they do not yet fully understand who he is and what he came to do.

Jesus came to offer his life as the perfect sacrifice, the Passover lamb, that takes away the sins of the world.

A major portion of this final speech is actually a prayer. We call it the High Priestly prayer. There Jesus prays for his followers. In a very real sense, he prays for us. He is praying for the church, because the church will now be the one carrying on the mission and ministry of Jesus in the world. The church will soon become Christ's hands and feet in the world. So Jesus prays for the church. He prays for its protection, its unity, its joy, and its holiness.

Jesus prays for our protection because he knows the church is going to remain in a hostile world. We are not going to be taken out of this world. Rather, we are to live in it, loving and caring for it. We are to bear witness to God's reconciling love. He prays for the unity of the church, because we are meant to be one community, one family of God. He prays for joy because we find our truest meaning and satisfaction in life when we are in relationship with God and our neighbor. He prays for holiness because we are to be set apart, not living as the world lives, but rather reflecting the life and love of Jesus.

There are the four things Jesus prays for. These are not easy things. Each one of them is a tall order. And the Eucharist is Christ's gift to the church providing the answer to each of these prayers.

Because of course, we still live in that in-between time. Jesus rose from the grave, appeared to his disciples promising them the Holy Spirit, then he ascended to heaven where he lives and reigns, seated at God's right hand. We believe he will come again. But that has not yet happened.

This past Thursday we celebrated the Feast of the Ascension. This Sunday then, more than any other Sunday, highlights that sense of expectant waiting. We are between the Ascension and Pentecost when the gift of the Spirit is realized. This Sunday reminds us we live in the meantime. Jesus is alive and has ascended but has not yet come again. The church, his followers, now wait and work. We live in the world, carrying on this mission and ministry of Jesus. And we need his protection, unity, joy, and holiness. And I say we find it in the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist we meet the risen Christ. In the Eucharist we are reminded, above all else, that we have not been left alone as orphans. Jesus is uniquely present with us in the bread and wine. In theological terms we call this “The real presence.” We meet Christ here and are united with him. What begins in our baptism is continued each week in the Eucharist.

In the high priestly prayer, Jesus prays that his followers be protected in this world. Like the manna from heaven given to the Israelites as they journeyed from slavery to the promise land, the bread from heaven given here sustains us. It strengthens us each week. We are able to come here and receive food for the journey. We come here to receive the promise that we are not alone. Jesus is with us, he is present. He is alive. Jesus’ disciples always recognized the risen Christ in the breaking of bread.

Jesus prays that his followers would be one. He prays for unity. This unity is also demonstrated and realized in the Eucharistic feast. For not only are we in union with Christ, we are in union with one another. We do not come to the table alone. God has loved and accepted us, so we now love and accept one another. This is demonstrated in the passing of peace, but also in the shared meal. We come together from different families, and places, and here we are made one body.

As I mentioned earlier, some believe that the most important part of the Eucharist is that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus. But the amazing thing is not really that the bread become the body of Christ, but that in coming to the table, we are made into the body of Christ.

The Eucharist is indeed a sacrifice – but it is never a continuation of Christ’s sacrifice. That sacrifice was done once for all. It was the perfect sacrifice for the whole world. The sacrifice of the Eucharist is one of praise and thanksgiving. We offer our worship, but more than that, we offer ourselves - our souls and bodies so that we may all be one body with him, that he may dwell in us, and we in him.

Our sacrifice, our self-offering, only means something because of Jesus’ self-offering. But because of it, Jesus makes us one, just as he prayed.

And he prays that our joy may be complete. The Eucharist is the expression of our joy and thanksgiving. Through it we remember God’s saving actions in the world. But remembrance is more than just remembering. Remembering is a psychological act that recalls an event. The remembrance done here is more than that. It is remembrance in a

biblical sense. It means participation. Through the liturgy we become active participants. We are not just bystanders. Those things we remember are happening in us. Therefore we rejoice and celebrate what God has done, is doing, and will do. Eucharist looks to the past, sees the present, and anticipates the future.

Jesus prays that his followers would be made holy. Set-apart. Sanctified. We are changed, we are transformed by the Spirit of God as we come to this meal. We encounter the risen Christ who is fully and uniquely present in the bread and wine made holy. We invite the Holy Spirit to bless and sanctify both our gifts and ourselves. In the Eucharist we are brought up to heaven. Focusing our hearts and minds on things above. Lift up your hearts.

The Eucharist is a gift. At the altar we meet the risen Christ who is fully and uniquely present with us. We offer ourselves and our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. We remember what Christ did for us. We are transformed to be the body of Christ in the world, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. We receive strength for the journey as we are fed with the bread of life. We are made one with Christ and with one another.

The priest stands in the place of the whole congregation, offering all our prayers, praises, gifts, and thanksgiving to God. It the foretaste of the heavenly banquet and the hope of the promise we have received. What is the gift? One cannot possibly distill it down to just one image or one meaning. It is far too great a gift for that.

Thank God we get to come to the table each week where we receive the richness and the fullness of all that Jesus prayed for us.

Amen.

“What is the Gift” by The Rev. Dr. Thomas G. Long, May 27, 2012, Day 1 (http://day1.org/3822-whats_the_gift)

**SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND NATHAN A. RUGH, RECTOR
ST. AUGUSTINE BY-THE-SEA EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SANTA MONICA,
CALIFORNIA
ON THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
April 26, 2015**

This morning and for the three weeks following, we will be having a sermon series on aspects of the liturgy. The goal of the series will be to explore the meaning of the different elements of our shared worship to see how God uses the liturgy to reveal God's grace to us and to draw us into participating with that grace.

Today, we will be looking at the general confession and the absolution. Usually, for us, the general confession comes after the prayers of people and before the exchanging of the peace. In the confession, we acknowledge our sin before God and proclaim God's forgiveness.

And I want to begin today by turning our attention to the passage from the First Letter of John that we heard this morning. John begins by reminding us of what we know of love by holding up to us the example Jesus Christ. John says, “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us.” Here he calls to mind Christ’s crucifixion and death, but also the whole pattern of self-giving love that Jesus embodied in his ministry. What John doesn’t specifically say here, but what he has in mind, is also the eternal relationship of love between God the Father and the Son, and how we are drawn into that eternal relationship of love through Christ’s life and death and resurrection.

And because we are recipients of Christ’s love, John wants us to follow in kind, by laying down our own lives for one another. It is probably be easy to be a bit lofty and dramatic here, but John isn’t necessarily speaking in grand terms or suggesting that we will all be called to some heroic act of self-sacrifice. Instead, he’s talking about our day in day out lives of living with other people. John is saying, if you see someone in need, help them, this how God’s love abides in you. Love not in word and speech, which we all know is next to useless, but in truth and action. And ultimately, he sums up the Christian life of discipleship by saying, “This is [God’s] commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another.” Trust and love, that’s how we come to we abide in God and God abides in us.

Which is absolute simplicity and an absolutely wonderful vision, and also pretty much impossible for us to live into most of the time. If you are here, I’m just going to make the assumption that you want to be believe and follow in Christ’s example. You want to care for the needs of others and respect the dignity of every human being and work for justice and peace in the world. And yet, inevitably, you fail to live into these aspirations. You and I, we don’t trust in God to the extent we ought to and nor do we love others as we ought to love. This is our problem and it is true of us both as individuals and communally.

And because we fall short of the simple and wonderful vision that John puts forward for us estrangement, discord, suspicion and guilt enter into our lives. We live at odds with one another and we live at odds with God. And as such, we need a way to both acknowledge our estrangement and to remedy it. We need a place to be honest with ourselves about how we have failed to live into God’s best hope for our lives, and to then be reconciled to God. We need a moment to acknowledgement and reconciliation, of confession and absolution.

Therefore, our experience in the General Confession will be deepened, if self-examination is a component of our spiritual life. If we are daily bringing to mind how we have fallen short of God’s grace, then this awareness will manifest itself in our confession, as indeed God’s word of pardon will be heard more deeply.

And yet, there is a danger in this dynamic of confession and absolution, One that will arise if we do not take it far enough, and we hear the critique, but we fail to hear the forgiveness. Often, our inability to live as we ought to live often makes us feel guilty and

ashamed, unable to hear God's forgiveness. And the church has reinforced this at times. The church is often a place where instead of relieving and banishing shame, the church reinforces it and fosters it. The church has often cultivated shame in order to become more important and relevant and confession has often been the center of that circle.

My wife tells a story of growing up Roman Catholic that I also think is a common enough experience for me to share with you. She grew up Catholic and had to go to confession. But since she was a child, she couldn't always come up with something to confess. And so, rather than face a grumpy priest in the confessional who would be critical of her lack of an offering, she would just make something up. This is a comical example, but it speaks to a dynamic of shame and guilt that can exist in the institution of the church.

But confession is not meant to be a moment where we wallow in our faults in misery, rather it is meant to be a moment where liberation is to be experienced. The liturgy is looking to draw us into a space where we are able to face our failings and faults, both specific and general. From this we are to resolve to strive to live more faithfully through that awareness. And thus to receive God's forgiveness. In making the confession, we are to be able to be truthful with ourselves and God and be honest about all of the ways that we have hurt others and hurt ourselves. In making confession, we are to be able to make new choices from the awareness we have received. In making confession and in being absolved, God tells us God loves us and nothing can come between us and that love, not even our own failings. When we make our confession in the service, we announce that we are free, both as individuals and as a community, because God has made us free.

Which isn't to say that we have somehow stepped out of the state of being human. We will still fail to live as we ought. I had a friend and classmate in seminary who claimed that after saying the confession in the service, he inevitably sinned again before he made it to the communion rail. Knowing him he was probably right.

As such, we will continue to lead lives where our brokenness makes its mark. And sometimes, I think that we fail more spectacularly after we have been able to be truthful with ourselves and God, then we did before. And at the very least, we are more aware of all of the ways, small and large, that our lives are marred by sin. And yet that is not the end of our story. God continues to mold and shape our lives. God pulls up and shakes us off and by God's grace puts on the path toward growing in faith, hope, and love.

In the General confession and absolution, we take our place within the story of God's interaction with humanity. We stand alongside the prophet Isaiah, who in standing before God, realized his sinfulness and despaired, only to have God send an angel to set a burning coal to his lips and forgive and empower Isaiah for ministry. Or we take our place with Paul, who persecuted the church, only to be forgiven and empowered as an apostle.

It is said, God does not call the worthy, but instead makes worthy the called. And God's love and grace can triumph over everything that would pull us from God's love. Finally,

know that by God's grace the call to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another exists as a horizon to be ventured toward everyday, trusting that as we do we will be transformed by God. When we say our confession and I proclaim God's forgiveness, celebrate it as a triumph of love and grace.

**SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND NATHAN A. RUGH, RECTOR
ST. AUGUSTINE BY-THE-SEA EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SANTA MONICA,
CALIFORNIA
ON THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
May 3, 2015**

This morning we are continuing our sermon series on aspects of the liturgy that we began last week. The goal of the series is to help us to explore different parts of the liturgy to discover how God uses our worship to reveal God's love and grace. Last week, we looked at the general confession and absolution to be reminded of how God's forgiveness is a liberating force in our lives. This morning, we turn our attention to the passing of the peace.

The passing of the peace is a sharing of a message of peace with each other after the confession and before we turn to the eucharistic prayer. The peace is the final act of the Liturgy of the Word. It represents our response to hearing the word, praying for the church and the world, saying the confession and receiving absolution, and before we gather around the Christ's table as a celebrating Eucharistic community.

But, I think it is fair to say that if you have spent any time in this parish and worshipped with us at all, then you know what the passing of the peace is. For us it is a pretty big deal. During our peace the room erupts into a flurry of hugs and the shaking of hands. When I was reading a commentary on the liturgy as a way of preparing for this sermon I had to chuckle. The commentator said the passing of the peace should be a "solemn liturgical rite" and not a "folksy greeting of one's friends and neighbors". But I couldn't help but think, why can't it be both? Clearly my man has not visited St. Augustine by-the-Sea in Santa Monica or he would know better, because I think we can all agree that we do the peace in the right way here.

But because the passing of the peace just seems to be so natural for us, one might think that Episcopal and Anglican churches have been passing the peace since before the Protestant Reformation. But in point of fact, this Book of Common Prayer of ours, which was published in 1979, is the first Episcopal Church prayer book with the passing of the peace as a component of the liturgy. Before that it was absent from the Episcopal church's worship and all other Anglican worship until the middle of the twentieth century. And when it was reintroduced it was controversial. Many feared it would distract from the worship of God.

But while the peace is in one sense an innovation, it is also a reclaiming of a tradition present in the life of church from the very beginning. Somewhere along the way it was lost as an expression of worship, but some scholars think that there are no less than 13

references in the New Testament to the exchanging of the kiss of peace. And more than this, the exchange of the peace is in our earliest Baptismal liturgies.

And I think that it is a powerful component in our worship when we gather together. For, we not only say something to one another when we greet each other as we do, we also say something to the world. The second/third century theologian Tertullian imagined the pagans looking at the church and saying to one another, "See how these Christians love one another." And in the First Letter of John that we heard from this morning, we see that this love for one another is truly an essential mark of Christian community. John tells us, God is love and so we are to love one another.

He writes, "Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us" And then later, he writes, "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also." Christians, always a diverse lot, are called on to love one another as a way of both revealing God's love and as a way of loving God.

As such, in our journey with God, we need one another as both a means for loving God and as a way of revealing God's love to us. John tells us that we can't love God without loving one another, but I think it is also fair to say that it becomes a heck of a lot easier to believe God loves us when we see that love at work in community. And the passing of the peace is intended to be a concrete liturgical expression of this love at work.

But it is possible to be too romantic about all of this. The real test of the peace is not the passing of the peace with those we like and enjoy, rather it is living in peace with those we do not. And this dynamic of sharing peace with those we are at odds with is the challenge inherent to us in the act of passing the peace. Jesus tells his disciples that if you love those who love you, then it is no big deal. That sort of mutual love is only a way of repaying good with good, everyone does that. But if and when we can love our enemies, then we have a love that truly models God's love. The love of enemies is a love that is a creative and grace filled love. When we can repay evil with good, then we are truly free.

And we can't underestimate how powerful this love can be in a world that is so torn apart by enmity. We live in a world wracked by violence and oppression, anger and hatred. It is easy to get caught up in the stream of loathing at work in our world. And yet, God calls on us to reveal a different way. Our love is intended to be grounded in the self-giving love of God, most clearly manifested in the cross of Christ.

And the cross is both the place where we see the depths of God's love most clearly revealed and the place where God makes peace with humanity. And more than this, it is therefore the space where all human enmity can and should be laid aside.

Seen in this way when we pass the peace, we point to something ultimate that is both present and yet coming. When we pass the peace, we reveal a love that is always with us, but also a peace that is looking to be fulfilled. We pass the peace as an anticipation of what is to come because peace exists at the center of all things. Because God is love, God is therefore peace. When we pass the peace, we make our small protest against all the hatred and mistrust and greed that dehumanizes, and instead embrace the love God has for us all.

I love the way that we pass the peace here. Sometimes I think that it saves the service, especially after a bad sermon. The strength of the bond that we have as a community is palatable. But never lose sight that this bond is intended to abide through all forms of strife and discord. When we give each other hugs and shake each others hands, we point beyond ourselves, to the God who is peace and longs for us to live in peace, both as a community and as a world.

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REV. KATIE CADIGAN
At St. Augustine's by the Sea, Santa Monica, CA
Topic: Holy Baptism

I just spent several weeks in Africa, mostly in Botswana, a land-locked country that sits right above South Africa. We were visiting one of the Seven Natural Wonders of Africa - the Okavango Delta. It's like the Mississippi Delta in Louisiana where the Mississippi River fans out and empties into the Gulf of Mexico. But, the Okavongo River, instead of emptying into an ocean, empties inland -- fanning out into the brush and sands of the Kalahari Desert.

The floodwaters arrive once a year, months after the rainy season hits upriver, over 800 miles away. And when the waters slowly arrive, it's a bonanza of new growth -- trees, shrubs, grasses -- And along with the growth come fish, insects, birds and, of course, a huge influx of animals, water buffalo, hippo, elephants, lions, leopards, all sorts of antelope and more.

We were there for the 1st weeks Water - pouring into a pretty barren landscape. Imagine Death Valley suddenly fed, - filled - with life-giving water.

Awe-inspiring.

Humbling.

Just water. Precious, holy water.

Today, we continue our sermon series about worship, and we get to look at the most ancient of all Christian rituals - our initiation ritual -- the one we do with water -- Baptism.

It's the time when our parched selves come to Christ for the first time and receive the spiritual water that produces life, our spiritual life. We come to baptism like the sands of the Kalahari. Rich in nutrients, seeds, potential, but needing water, needing union with the divine, union with Christ. And in that holy mix - sand/water - soul/Christ - we become part of a spiritual community. Part of God's plan for creation, that we - and the world - be made whole.

In today's reading from the book of Acts, Peter discovers that a new spiritual life in Christ, is not just for Jews, but for all. Peter has been speaking with a group of Gentiles and they are suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit.

He's astounded. He realizes Christ welcomes everyone, not just Jews. Salvation, wholeness, oneness with God is available to all. And indeed, Christians throughout the centuries have been baptizing, welcoming people from all walks of life.

Now some Christian traditions have different views of what needs to happen before Baptism. In the Episcopal/Anglican church we believe in baptizing everyone regardless of stage of life or belief. Adults and infants, all are welcome. Because this is initiation into the Body of Christ, into the church, initiation into a spiritual life.

We understand God's grace and love are freely given. So baptism is not something we earn or achieve. Baptism is not contingent on full repentance. Not contingent on intellectual understanding. Not contingent on an adult profession of faith. We do teach adult candidates and the parents and godparents of infants the meaning of baptism, but there's no test. Baptism is inclusion. Baptism upholds that all of God's creation is good, WE are fundamentally good, created in the image of God and as such we all can be baptized - adults, infants, seekers, believers.

The first instruction in our prayer book about the service of Holy Baptism is that it is *full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body, the Church*. There is sometimes a tendency to think of baptism instead, as a magical light-switch. Going from a place of darkness, sin and separation from God, into a life in Christ where everything is hunky dory and our baptismal halo prevents us from doing bad things or having bad things happen to us.

No, in being baptized into a life in Christ, we are baptized into the earthy manifestation of life in Christ, our Christian community a very human community and with ever-so human members.

The rite of Baptism happens once in our life. Through the waters of baptism and with the Holy Spirit the dust that we are, the sand that we are becomes spiritually empowered to bear fruit.

So guess what prayer is right at the center of the baptism service?

It's the prayer of Thanksgiving over the Water. It's the hinge between the baptismal vows and the actual act of baptizing the Thanksgiving over Water is the core expression of the theology of baptism, and the role of water.

The promise is that salvation, the arc of Christ's death, resurrection and new life is an arc for us. A new and eternal spiritual life is for us - a life of love, grace, forgiveness, wholeness - for US!

We start by remembering what scripture tells us about water's central role in God saving us: OVER the water the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. THROUGH water God led the children of Israel out of bondage, into freedom. And BY water Jesus himself was baptized. And the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus as Messiah to lead us into everlasting life.

Just know, that built into the simple act of being baptized with water, is the very core of our faith, that there is salvation, freedom, wholeness in God, in Christ. The Thanksgiving over Water proclaims that IN the water *we are buried with Christ in his death*. BY the water *we share in his resurrection*. THROUGH it *we are reborn by the Holy Spirit*.

This prayer of thanksgiving is when the priest - Nate or I - reinforce the connection between water and salvation by pouring the big jug of water into the baptismal font -- our giant shell.

When the water flows into the Kalahari, and plants emerge, the plants attract new life, give of themselves to the greater whole of creation. And in baptism we are called to bring others into fellowship with the fullness of the divine, with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Or, shall we say in honor of Mother's Day -- God the Mother, Child and Holy Spirit!

We are called to fill out the ecosystem of life, God's ecosystem. At the end of the prayer of thanksgiving over water the priest sanctifies the water, blesses it, to be the water of baptism. To be the water that brings the people being baptized into the risen life of Christ. And right after this prayer the candidates are baptized. And we rejoice.

So while baptism only happens once, our lives as baptized Christians needs regular renewal. Like the sands of the Kalahari we cycle through times when our spiritual lives thrive; when they are vibrant and life giving. But we also cycle through times when our connection with Jesus dries up.

A wonderful way we are regularly renewed is in the Eucharist, taking communion, which Nate will talk about next Sunday.

Another way some of us connect with that renewal, is with the Holy Water at the entrance to the church. It's mounted inside the big glass doors at the front, It's in brass dishes on either side as you come in.

Some of us use it to cross ourselves as a regular reminder of our baptism and membership in Christ's body. Renewal is also embedded in the baptismal liturgy. The service includes reaffirming our baptismal covenant.

This happens before the Thanksgiving over the Water. First, we participate in the promises being made by the adults being baptized, and the parents and godparents of the little ones.

The first promises are to stand against internal and external spiritual adversaries - those things that keep us away from God - those things that pollute our sand.

The second set of promises are about turning to Jesus, about opening up, trusting and following Jesus. Some churches in ancient times would have their candidates physically turn east when they affirm they will turn to Jesus.

The next question is for whole congregation, We are all asked to do all we can to support these people in their life in Christ. And then together, with the candidates, we all renew our baptismal covenant.

Through these words we immerse ourselves anew with the fundamentals of our faith. Salvation in Christ - freedom, wholeness – is there for us water is there for us for our parched dust. And Jesus is welcoming everyone, with open arms.

So what if, this week, when we are watering plants or when we are washing our faces - water over our foreheads - what if we were to think about our baptism? Think about the water uniting us with Christ, filling us with the Holy Spirit, and feeding our spiritual lives.

Water. Holy Water. Bringing us to life. Calling us to bring life to the world.

**SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND NATHAN A. RUGH, RECTOR
ST. AUGUSTINE BY-THE-SEA EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SANTA MONICA,
CALIFORNIA
ON THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
May 17, 2015**

This morning we are completing our sermon series on aspects of the liturgy. Over the last few weeks we have looked at the general confession, the passing of the peace, and baptism. This week we turn our attention to the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, or Communion. Like last week with baptism, the Eucharist is both a deeply complex ritual practice, with a whole host of different theological interpretations, and a profoundly simple act. We will just scratch the surface here this morning.

But I want to begin by just remarking that it has always struck me as amazing that for nearly two thousand years, almost everyday, Christians have gathered together and celebrated the Eucharist because Jesus commanded us to do so. And they have celebrated

this meal from the very beginning. To the Church in Corinth, Paul wrote, “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” You could look to very similar passages in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We say basically the same thing every Sunday and Wednesday here at St. A’s.

And so, we celebrate Holy Communion because Jesus told us to. We remember that on the night where Jesus is reaching the culmination of his ministry and is staring his own death in the face, he gives his disciples a new practice to remember this self-gift of himself. In this meal that Jesus gives them, they were to remember all he was doing for them. They were to recall the rejection, the suffering, the cross and his death. But more than just this, they were to remember his whole ministry: the preaching, teaching, healing. And they were to remember the food, because Jesus loved food and loved to eat with people.

The Gospel stories are filled with stories where food plays some part. There are of course the mass feedings, like the feeding of the 5,000. But there are also parties and small gatherings and even a wedding feast where Jesus makes more wine because he does not want the party to stop.

And Jesus eats with everybody. In that time meals were a big deal culturally and you didn’t just eat with just anybody, but Jesus did. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners and prostitutes and all variety of marginalized people, but he also ate with the pharisees, even though he argued with them all the time. And so like Jesus, we will eat with anyone. We welcome all to this table, because God welcomes all in and through Christ.

But then after his resurrection, food plays a role in many of the resurrection appearances. One time, Jesus eats broiled fish in a closed room in Jerusalem. Another time he is barbecuing fish on the beach. And another, two disciples finally recognize Jesus in the breaking of bread at the table, after walking for hours with him on the road to Emmaus.

Food plays a central role in Jesus’ ministry and it just occurs again and again in the Gospels. And as such, it is no wonder he told us to eat together in remembrance of him. In theological parlance, this is called memorial. When we gather at the table we look back in remembrance and gratitude.

But Jesus’ meals are also about looking forward. When Jesus eats with people he does so as a way of declaring and enacting the nearness of the Kingdom of God. In the Gospels, to eat with Jesus was to experience the in-breaking of God’s Kingdom. At table with Jesus, one experienced reconciliation and forgiveness. The barriers and boundaries that existed between peoples fell away and true fellowship existed, if only for a moment.

What's more these meals with Jesus pointed forward to the banquet that God promised for the end of the age.

For instance, Isaiah writes, "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken."

To eat with Jesus at these meals was to catch a glimpse of this meal to come. And so when Christians have gathered, they have not just looked backward to what was done and finished in Christ, but they have also looked forward as well. They have embraced the reality that God's Kingdom as already come in Christ, and already arrived in Christ's life, death and resurrection, but that the kingdom also awaits completion and that it has not yet come. When we gather at this table, we do so longing for the future God has promised, where perfect peace and justice have been achieved, where death is swallowed up forever and every tear is wiped from our faces. This is our foretaste of that heavenly kingdom.

And yet there is more. More than just this remembering what was, and looking forward to what is to come, many Christians have also claimed that Jesus is particularly **present** in this meal. This is my body, Jesus says to his disciples as he hands them the bread. This is my blood, as he hands them the cup. And elsewhere, in John's Gospel, Jesus goes so far as to describe himself as the bread of life. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them," Jesus says.

Much theological controversy has been made of just how and where Jesus is present in the bread and the wine and in the meal itself. I don't want to go down that rabbit hole, because I might never get out. But the Episcopal Church has always contended that Jesus is really present here as we gather around his table. Moreover, the bread and the wine are to be revered and respected because Jesus identifies his own flesh and blood with the bread and the wine of this meal. Jesus makes his very self a sign in these elements.

And so, in this way, Jesus is here with us. We gather around his table. This is his meal and he is with us, hosting us. And yet, he is also asking us to host him. He asks us, as we receive his body and blood, to welcome him into our hearts with faith and thanksgiving. And as such, just like the first disciples, we are an Easter people. Just like them, we are people who eat and drink with Jesus after he has been raised from the dead.

Eucharist means thanksgiving and at the heart of the Christian life is giving thanks. We are to give thanks for what was and what will be and what is. We give thanks that we are forgiven and embraced by God in Christ. We give thanks that we have been empowered by God for God's mission and ministry. We give thanks for the new life that Jesus promises to us. As we gather at this table, we are sanctified, just as Jesus prayed we

would be in today's Gospel reading. We are sanctified, which is to say we are made holy, which is to say we are set apart to share God's love with the world.

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