



creative
preaching
on the
sacraments

CRAIG A. SATTERLEE AND LESTER RUTH

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This book is gratefully dedicated to
John Allyn Melloh, S.M.,
our teacher, mentor, friend,
and a champion at cosmic child's play.

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Preface

This book is a thank offering written in gratitude for the profound ways worship has formed us in faith and shaped us as Christians. We offer it in thanksgiving for the ministries of preachers from Paul and the Gospel writers to fourth-century pastors to the Wesleys and Luther, who so powerfully articulated the connection between Jesus' saving activity in the Bible and Jesus' saving activity in the sacraments. We offer this book in thankfulness for the congregations we have served as pastor, who have afforded us the grace and privilege of leading their worship, and for our students and teachers, whose questions and prodding have deepened our reflection on that ministry. We are particularly grateful for the opportunity to write together and for the collaborative process that has nourished and enriched us.

This book is also an offering to the church. It is a resource for ministry and mission. We firmly believe that helping God's people expand and thicken their appreciation of God's gifts of the sacraments will renew and enliven the worship life of the church and its mission to the world. We therefore humbly offer this book to the church as a tool with which proclaimers of Jesus Christ can creatively and faithfully preach in ways that both broaden and deepen people's experience of the sacraments and help them name and claim Christ's saving activity in the church's worship.

We are blessed with so many partners on this journey, whom it pleases us to acknowledge. Our families, Carmen, Charissa, and Rebekah Ruth and Cathy and Chelsey Satterlee, continue to bless our ministries with their love and support. Students at Yale Divinity School, beyond those whose sermons appear in this book, generously offered their manuscripts for the project. Linda Whited, editor for the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship, saw value in our project and made certain that we wrote for parish pastors. Daniel Benedict, also from the General Board of Discipleship, offered encouragement at a crucial juncture. Finally, we are grateful for our colleagues in the doctoral program at the University of Notre Dame, where this conversation began long ago, and particularly to John Allyn Melloh, our teacher and friend, to whom this work is dedicated.

Part 1

The Method for Creative Preaching on the Sacraments



Introduction

Consider the story of the woman with the hemorrhages of blood that would not stop (Mark 5:25-34). For twelve years she suffered, spending all that she had in visiting doctors. And yet she only got worse. Finally, having heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and, mustering faith, courage, and hope, touched his clothing. Immediately she quit bleeding and was healed. Jesus knew that something had happened, that power had gone out from him. When the woman, trembling with fear, came forward, Jesus told her that her faith had made her well.

Remember this story, and let us ask you a question that might never have occurred to you before: Is this a story about the meaning of Holy Communion? The initial reply might be no. There is no food, no eating, and no reference to the Last Supper. At first glance this story does not appear to be about the sacrament.

But the founders of Methodism, John and Charles Wesley, thought it was. In their collection of sacramental hymns titled *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, they included a hymn based on this Bible passage. The hymn begins:

Sinner, with awe draw near,
And find thy Saviour here,
In His ordinances still,
Touch His sacramental clothes;
Present in His power to heal,
Virtue from His body flows.¹

What remarkable connections the Wesleys made! Just as the woman touched the clothing of Christ to receive healing, so can we have something tangible of Christ to grab in the sacrament. And the benefit is the same: a gracious pouring out of healing, saving power. Surely standing behind this sort of creative association is the Wesleys' own experience of the Lord's Supper. Having experienced the connection between God's saving activity in

the Bible and God's saving activity in the sacraments themselves and having seen it in others, the Wesleys affirmed a link between the Bible story and the present benefits of Communion.

This book is about making those sorts of creative connections with the sacraments in the church today. The goal is to take the sort of creativity used by the Wesleys in hymns and apply it to preaching. The goal is to look at the *how* and the *why* of creative preaching about sacraments.

This book flows out of convictions that grow out of our own pastoral experience. Time and again parishioners have approached us with deep gratitude and thanked us for using sermons to disclose a wider breadth of meaning for the sacraments. "I have been a lifelong Christian," they often said, "but I never knew exactly all that the sacraments mean." They are partly wrong. They knew intuitively that the sacraments had a much greater depth of meaning. Their encounter in the sacraments with the gracious God of Christ Jesus told them that it was so. What they lacked were the words to articulate this meaning and make it conscious. Creative preaching on the sacraments can provide those words, giving the church the opportunity to say the most deeply felt amen to the salvation that God gives.²

This book comes from our own pastoral conviction, too, that the sacraments should have a more vital place in Christian spirituality. However, we have not found that it is as simple as stating aloud that the sacraments ought to be more important. Rather, we have found that what is needed is a way to expand the range of meanings and the types of associations people bring to the sacraments. Do we not have too narrow a range of meanings and explanations for sacraments? Perhaps this is a major part of the reason some shy away from the sacraments: They have not been helped to see how the sacraments connect with the whole Bible story and how the sacraments can be a whole way of living before God in the world. If all one has is just one or two ways of thinking about the sacraments (for example, if we understand the Lord's Supper solely as private forgiveness of sins), it is easy to soon grow tired or bored with the sacraments. The problem is not that these meanings are wrong. It is just that such narrowness is incomplete, unable to bear the weight of having the sacraments at the center of the church's spirituality.

Creative sacramental preaching accomplishes moving sacraments to the center of spirituality by making the Bible, personal experience, and sacraments intersect in such a way that a wealth of meanings surface. Consider the vitality that can be rediscovered in the sacraments if we can do the kind of creative linking that the Wesleys showed in their hymns. Imagine the associations that can be made with so many scriptural stories if we just think of those that include water or food as important elements. The possibilities

allow us to break out of a narrow range of meaning and create a way for the sacraments to bear the weight of being central in our Christian lives. It is possible to replenish dry sacramental wells. The goal of this book is to explore ways to discover how Bible stories, experience, and sacraments can intersect in preaching.

This kind of preaching can be described as leading the listeners into the mysteries of the Christian faith. (The ancient word for this type of preaching, *mystagogy*, meant that literally.) The term *mysteries* does not refer to something that is not known or something that hides in the shadows because it is bad. In this preaching, the term *mysteries* has a meaning similar to the one used by Paul in the New Testament: The mysteries are the great truths of God in Christ Jesus, once somewhat hidden but now brought to new clarity in Christ (Colossians 1:26). The aim is preaching that proclaims that these great truths are made visible and tangible to us in the sacraments.

What makes this type of preaching different from other kinds of preaching? One major difference is the central object of exegesis (critical analysis). Creative sacramental preaching first of all is an exegesis of our sacramental and worship experience rather than Scripture itself. It presumes that Christians experience God deeply and truly in worship and sacraments. This experience is what is investigated and examined. The preacher names the dimensions of this experience using biblical associations, cultural resonances, and natural images in creative ways. This approach to preaching stands in contrast to more common kinds of preaching today, whether expository or exegetical preaching, that make scriptural texts the starting point. Then other points of reference are often used to highlight the meaning of the Bible for today. While Scripture is most certainly inseparable from the style of creative preaching we describe in this book, this preaching starts with the church's worship and assumes that things fundamental about Jesus Christ and the salvation he offers are revealed there. Other points of reference, including Scripture, are then used to bring to light the dimensions of our experience in worship.

A few examples from the classic period of sacramental preaching (the fourth and fifth centuries) might illustrate this principle. (Several modern sermons are included in the second part of this book.) One of the most brilliant preachers of this time was a minister in the Syrian city of Antioch, John Chrysostom. It was his regular practice to preach on the meaning of baptism just before people were baptized. On one such occasion, Chrysostom, surely relying on the presence of business people among those about to be baptized, used an easily understood cultural image, a contract, to disclose the seriousness of the commitments about to be made in the baptism. Chrysostom preached:

I turn now to the sacraments and the covenant between yourself and the Lord into which you are about to enter. In business, when a [person] wishes to entrust [his or her] affairs to another, it is necessary for a contract to be signed between the two parties. The same is true now, when the Lord of all things is about to entrust to you affairs that are not mortal and passing away and decaying, but spiritual and heavenly. The contract is also called a pledge of faith, since we are doing nothing that can be seen but everything can be discerned by the eyes of the spirit. Meanwhile it is necessary for the contract to be signed, not with ink on paper but with the spirit in God. The words that you pronounce are inscribed in heaven, the agreement spoken by your lips remains indelibly before God.³

In this way, Chrysostom uses an easily recognizable aspect of culture—the seriousness by which contracts should be made—and applies it to the spoken commitments about to be made in baptism. One can almost feel the gravity of the sacrament dawning upon those who are to be baptized.

In this style of preaching, the Bible is used in the same way. For example, Ambrose, the fourth-century bishop of Milan, once sensed an aspect of disappointment in the newly baptized in his church as he reflected on their experience of baptism. After the buildup of anticipation, some thought that the actual baptism was a little anticlimactic. Describing what they had outwardly seen in baptism, Ambrose spoke the question some had:

If anyone should perhaps be thinking of saying: “Is that all?” I say, indeed it is all. There truly is all, where there is all innocence, all devotion, all grace, all sanctification. You saw all you could see with the eyes of the body, all that is open to human sight. You saw what is seen, but not what is done.⁴

To reinforce this point, Ambrose drew on a biblical story that also contains the challenge to look beyond initial disappointment in outward appearances. For Ambrose, the story of Naaman, the Syrian army commander, offered a wonderful parallel (2 Kings 5:1-19). When Naaman was told by the prophet to wash in the Jordan River to cleanse his disease, Naaman grew disappointed—even angry—that the cure did not involve something more spectacular. After a servant intervened, Naaman obeyed and was healed. That which had no spectacular outward appearance, the Jordan River, became the source of healing. Ambrose used this story to lead his own parishioners past any sense of disappointment they might have had in their own baptism.

Ambrose’s statement “You saw what is seen, but not what is done” is a succinct call for why we need creative preaching on the sacraments. Too

often we approach sacraments and worship with a kind of one-dimensional perspective that saps worship of mystery (the great truths of God in Jesus Christ brought to new clarity in Christ). That is why we like to define creative sacramental preaching as doing cosmic child's play for real. Consider how audacious are even the most classic claims about the meanings of the sacraments. Typically, baptism has been associated with union with Christ, incorporation into the church, new birth, forgiveness of sin, and reception of the Holy Spirit. Classic meanings for the Lord's Supper include thanksgiving, fellowship, commemoration of Christ's activity, sacrifice, the presence of God, and foretaste of the coming age.⁵ These are not peripheral issues to Christians, for they are at the heart of our faith. And we dare to associate them with the simplest of elements: water, bread, and wine. This is audacity!

To lead people into an understanding of the sacraments' meanings and mysteries is doing cosmic child's play for real. It is the activity of the children of God because it requires simple trust, excitement, and wonder. It is cosmic because in Christian worship we are dealing with ultimate realities. It is play because it involves a childlike acting out of roles with basic objects. It is for real because, through faith in Christ, we believe the true gospel to be made present in worship. It may be playful, but it is no mere game. Thus, to preach in this way—to usher people into the deep mysteries of Christian worship—is to bring a truly enriching gift to the church's life. It involves not only a certain kind of preaching during specific times of worship but also a whole way of approaching worship realities.

Sacramental sermons, classic and modern, share several basic traits:

- *The first trait is that this preaching is intended to be heard.* While one could certainly read this kind of sermon, the primary intent of this sort of preaching is to use a rhetoric that illumines worship's meanings in a powerful way to actual worshipers. The goal is to use the Bible, culture, and nature in creative ways to disclose the depth of the encounter in worship with the God who saves. The desire is to assist those who worship and have participated in the sacraments to envision what their experience is.
- *The second trait is the type of logic used to reach its goals.* Creative, powerful preaching on the sacraments will be more than straightforward, scholarly explanations on the church's liturgical life and sacraments.⁶ The goal is not just to explain (or, even worse, explain away) worship and the sacraments but to break them open in all their rich meanings.
- *Thus, the third trait is a willingness to live with an abundance of meanings.* Powerful preaching on worship will not play one meaning off of another: If the sacrament means *X*, then it does not mean *Y*. Rather, creative preaching allows meanings to live next to each other. The sacrament is both *X* and

Y—and *Z*, and *A*, and *B*, and *C*. Thus, the baptismal font is the tomb for burial with Christ, the womb for rebirth, the holy of holies from which a new priest emerges, the arena in which the devil is defeated, and the passage from death to new life. In its waters we are washed clean, healed, forgiven, cleansed from all guilt, buried with Christ, born anew, and anointed to participate in Christ's ministry. The waters bear the echoes not only of the first waters of Creation (Genesis 1) but also of the Flood, the Red Sea through which Israel passed dry shod, the Jordan River in which Jesus was baptized, as well as the river of the water of life that flows from the throne of God at the end of time (Revelation 22:1).

It is necessary to take this approach because it is the honest way to deal with the richness of grace that God shares with us in worship. Just as God's grace can never be exhausted, so, too, we try in vain to exhaust the wealth of meanings in worship and sacraments. We can lead people into the mysteries of grace in worship—that is the goal of preaching on the sacraments—but we can never lead them beyond them.

A Theology for Creative Preaching on the Sacraments

Creative sacramental preaching rests on one essential foundation: the belief that the God of the Bible—the God of saving activity—continues to act to save, especially in the church and most especially in its worship and sacraments. While we cannot explain the precise *how* of God’s presence and activity in worship, we do affirm it. The failure to affirm this truth robs the church of much of the inspiration that stands behind good creative sacramental preaching. It robs the church, too, of a theological foundation for creative sacramental preaching: the belief that we do experience grace in worship.

That God is present in worship and sacraments is too easily overlooked. Once, just to see what would happen, I asked each member of an adult education class in my church to list everyone present at a baptism. After a minute or so, I gathered up the sheets and compared them. Without exception, everyone gave a fairly standard list: the minister, the recipient, the congregation, family, and friends. And, almost without exception, no one named the most important presence of all, the God of Jesus Christ.

To bring that awareness to the forefront will be one of the purposes of preaching on the sacraments. To be sensitive to that added dimension, the presence of the active God of salvation, is the necessary condition for this kind of preaching. To awaken that awareness in the congregation will be one of its goals. The technique of this kind of preaching, with its creative use of Scripture and images drawn from beyond Scripture and its playful handling of the text of the sacramental rites, will give us the vocabulary to name God’s activity in the church’s worship.

Let us be frank that at this point some will be tempted to set down this book because of its reliance on this basic theological foundation about sacraments. Please wait before doing so. Consider whether doing so will separate you from some of the riches of your own denomination’s doctrines and tradition. For example, if you happen to be Methodist but are tempted to set down this book, be careful lest you discard an important part of our early Wesleyan heritage. Remember the Wesleyan hymn that began this book. Surely the same basic theological foundation exists in its language, that in the Lord’s Supper Christ is “present in His power to heal.” Consider, too, John Wesley’s definition for the means of grace, which include the Lord’s Supper. According to him, these means are the ways in which God normally conveys grace to us.⁷ In this definition, God is no passive, distant observer standing on the sidelines during worship. This awareness was continued by the earliest American Methodists. As one exulted after a 1789 Communion service, “The Lord met with us in miraculous manner, [it was] a time of refreshment from his presence.”⁸

Some early Christian ways of explaining God's activity in Christian worship are helpful for opening up new ways of thinking about the issue. One especially useful way comes from a fifth-century sermon on Christ's ascension. If you think about it, Christ's ascension does create somewhat of a difficulty about experiencing saving grace tangibly. When Jesus walked among us, one could experience directly and concretely the love of God. If you wanted to know the saving touch of God, you had Jesus lay his hands on you. Had him rub mud on your eyes or spit on you. Had him pronounce the gracious word over you. Had him breathe on you. Received the bread and wine from his hands. Or, if you were quite bold, grabbed the hem of his garment.

But what about now? How can we, who seem to have no direct contact with the body of Christ since the Ascension, tangibly experience the grace of God? A fifth-century preacher had an answer. Preaching on the Feast of the Ascension, he proclaimed, "What was conspicuous in our Redeemer has passed over into the sacraments [of the church]." It is an amazing—and hopeful—proclamation. The concreteness of God's saving love has not been lost. We only seem to have no contact with Christ's body. In actuality, we do. In the church, which is the body of Christ, and especially in its worship (in the fifth-century, *sacraments* would still have been a broad term), we have opportunity to come toe to toe, skin to skin, face to face with the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ.

What was conspicuous in the gracious Redeemer still stays that way in his church's worship and sacraments. What was conspicuous—Christ's mercy, kindness, power, unmerited love, boldness for the oppressed, sympathy for the downtrodden, sacrificial service, wisdom, provision for the hungry, cleansing, saving death, life-giving resurrection—all remains on open, accessible display in the worship of the body of Christ. There, in its sacraments, we can feel hands laid on us. There we can sense the life-giving waters flow over us. There we can hear the word of grace. There we can feel the breath of a new coming of the Holy Spirit. There we receive the food of our eternal life. There, if we are quite bold, we can grab the hem of his garment by touching "His sacramental clothes."

The early preacher Ambrose had a helpful way of explaining this conspicuousness of grace in worship. For Ambrose, the important connection between worship and sacraments now and the saving activity of God was wrapped up in the terms *Old Testament* and *New Testament*. When we hear the terms, we automatically think of parts of the Bible. Ambrose used them in a different manner. For him, the terms were about great eras or times of God's saving activity. The Old Testament was that time of God's activity before the coming of Christ. The New Testament refers to the time of Jesus' ministry in the flesh or, since the Ascension, his ministry through the Holy Spirit in the church.

Ambrose insists that what makes the previous gracious activity of God—whether in the Old Testament era or during the era of Christ’s earthly ministry—conspicuous in the church now is that all salvation is from God. For Ambrose, there is but one God and therefore but one grand sweep of salvation. Because there is just one God, all of God’s saving activity reflects this grand sweep, even if there are different manifestations during different eras. Thus, the church’s worship and sacramental life makes conspicuous that which God has previously done to save us or will do at the return of Christ.

This sort of perspective allowed Ambrose to think imaginatively about echoes between worship, sacraments, and the biblical narrative. Acknowledging one grand sweep to salvation, he saw connections between the different eras. Ambrose, for instance, was struck by the basic affirmation that Christians experience the power of the cross in baptism. That sort of resonance awakens a whole series of biblical stories in the Old Testament (think era, not part of a book) where wood and water were combined in God’s saving activity. “Do you want to know what your baptism means?” Ambrose asked the newly baptized. “Then let me tell you about a bitter spring in the desert that turned sweet when Moses placed wood in the water (Exodus 15:22-25). And let me tell you about a baptismal fountain where, through the wood of the cross, you can drink the sweetness of eternal life.”¹⁰ And that was not the only echo Ambrose used. How many biblical stories can you remember where wood and water form a crucial combination? Ambrose used many of these to find the words to articulate how wonderful is God’s saving power in baptism.

Each of the different relationships between Old and New Testaments (think eras, not parts of the Bible) can stir up resonance between our worship and biblical stories. Allow your mind to think playfully right now. Think of aspects of the sacraments—either the physical things themselves or the actions involved—and allow yourself to think of scriptural echoes on these things. Just remember, for example, how much water there is in God’s past activity. From the beginning when the Spirit hovers over the waters (Genesis 1:2), to the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14), to the provision of water in the desert (Exodus 17:6), to the passage through the Jordan River to the Promised Land (Joshua 3), water seems to be everywhere. And there was no drought when Jesus came. From the Savior’s entrance into that same Jordan (Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1), to the changing of water into wine (John 2), to the spittle used to restore sight (Mark 8; John 9), to the flow of water and blood at the Crucifixion (John 19), water remains prominent. And what does the vision of the future look like when all things are fulfilled in God’s purposes? It is a vision of a “river of the

water of life, . . . flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb,” with the tree of life on both sides (Revelation 22:1-2). This sort of association works for the Lord’s Supper, too.

What this sort of associating does is draw us into the biblical narrative. It makes the Bible story our own story in the most tangible ways through the sacraments. Finding those creative echoes between sacraments and Scripture allows us to latch onto the biblical narrative. Scripture thus provides us the vocabulary for naming the mighty acts of salvation experienced by us in our worship. God’s great saving acts, whether past or future, become conspicuous in our midst. Who would not want a way to preach these saving acts in such an immediate, accessible way?

To associate our worship with the great Bible stories in this way is to reinforce the sacraments as symbols. It is true that sometimes the term *symbol* is used to mean to drive things apart. When we say that *A* is a symbol of *B*, we often want the nuance to fall on how *A* really is not *B*. But could we not just as well emphasize the connection between *A* and *B*? After all, there are lots of things that are not symbols of *B* at all. Preachers in the early church, as we have seen, had this understanding of symbols in worship that emphasized connections. Indeed, one root meaning of the term *symbol* is to throw things together. To use the echoes from Bible stories creatively is to see the sacraments as symbols, but not as mere symbols. They are symbols that throw together the Bible stories, the sacramental acts of worship, and our own lives in ways that help us see connections.¹¹

To use the language of symbol in this sense allows a playful, creative approach to sacramental symbols. The heart of this approach is to throw together things, emphasizing that one thing reveals another (in our case, sacraments making conspicuous the gracious acts of God) without having to explain the precise *how* of this relationship. An imaginative sacramental preacher revels in these playful associations. Such practices assume that the children of God will also, because they are eager for saving grace to be made conspicuous for them in the most profound moments of the church’s worship, its sacraments.

Using Biblical, Cultural, and Natural Images

It is time to consider more closely the specific method for creative sacramental preaching. The place to begin is by considering how to handle the Bible, which continues the discussion about theology.

Like all Christian preaching, creative preaching on the sacraments is inseparably bound to the Bible. This preaching is more akin to topical preaching than expository preaching because of the way the theme of the sermon is determined. Rather than being drawn from a passage of Scripture, the subject matter of this preaching is a sacrament or a part of worship as it is actually celebrated in the Christian community. As in topical preaching, the Bible provides both the theology and the images that the preacher uses to explore the theme and, in this instance, to proclaim the good news that Christ acts to bring life in the sacraments and in what we do in worship.

As we reflect on the essential role that Scripture plays, we will begin by outlining the assumptions that guide the use of Scripture in creative preaching on the sacraments.

Assumptions That Guide the Use of Scripture

1. *Creative preaching on the sacraments assumes that Scripture and worship are connected by God's saving activity.* Creative preaching on the sacraments understands the life and history of Israel, the saving work of Jesus, and the mission of the early church as these events are proclaimed in Scripture to be connected to one another and to the church's worship and sacraments as the single, continuing story of God's saving activity in Jesus Christ. This approach to Scripture may at first seem odd to us because we tend to read smaller units of Scripture: pericopes, chapters, and verses. However, when we recall the events recorded in the Bible, we see that they are all connected. Wherever we look in the Bible, we find God bringing light out of darkness, life out of death, freedom out of slavery, and hope out of despair. Or put another way, the Bible tells how, again and again, God establishes a covenant with God's people; God's people break that covenant; God remains faithful and forgives; and the covenant is renewed. Creative preaching on the sacraments sees Scripture as a whole, as the single story of God's saving activity in Christ, a story that will be brought to completion when Christ comes again.
2. Creative preaching on the sacraments goes one step further. More than understanding the Bible as the single story of God's saving activity, *such preaching understands that the Bible story continues to our day in the church's worship and sacraments.* In baptism and the Lord's Supper, God does the same thing that God does in the Bible: God moves God's people

from darkness to light, from death to life, from slavery to freedom, from despair to hope. In baptism God establishes a covenant with us and, though we break that covenant again and again, remains faithful and, in the Lord's Supper, forgives as the covenant is renewed. Since the church's worship and sacraments are the continuation of the story of God's saving activity recorded in Scripture, using the Bible to interpret the sacraments is the most appropriate approach. Based on this understanding of the relationship of Scripture and sacrament, creative sacramental preaching looks to Scripture rather than doctrine (or, more accurately, beyond doctrine to Scripture) in order both to discover the meaning of the sacraments and to find images that will convey this meaning to the church.

3. *Turning to Scripture in order to explore the meaning of worship and sacrament and to find images that illustrate that meaning is not new.* In fact, creative preaching on the sacraments assumes that approaching Scripture in this way is in keeping with a long-standing practice of the church. Sermons on the sacraments from the second to fifth centuries show that as preachers in the early church read Scripture, they saw God's saving activity at different moments of sacred history. These preachers concluded that in the Old Testament God promises that in the future God will perform saving deeds for the chosen people even greater than what past history recorded. They saw that in the New Testament this future hope is realized. The early church therefore looked on the Bible as the sweeping story of God's saving activity in Jesus Christ. God's plan of salvation in Christ was foreshadowed in the Old Testament; fulfilled in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; contained in the church's sacraments; and will be brought to completion in Christ's return.

Biblical Images

Preachers in the early church thought that the unity of Scripture freed them to draw on distant texts to create a single image. Their preaching on the sacraments therefore approached the stories in the Old Testament as figures of both Jesus' actions in the New Testament and the sacraments of the church. For example, the Spirit moving over the waters at Creation, God's presence with Noah and his family in the Flood, Israel's crossing of the Red Sea, and the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in the Jordan River all point to God's saving activity in baptism, where we die with Christ and are raised with him. So extensive is the early church's use of the Bible to interpret the sacraments that we can read sermons by a variety of ancient preachers and discover a common tradition that still holds true today.

The early church approached Scripture in this way because this means of interpretation is found in the Bible. In the Old Testament, during the

Babylonian captivity, the prophets proclaimed to the people of Israel that in the future God would perform for their benefit deeds even greater than those God had performed in the past. There would be a new flood in which the sinful world would be annihilated and a faithful remnant would be left to begin again, a new exodus in which God would act powerfully to set humanity free from bondage to idols, and a new paradise that would be inhabited by those whom God had redeemed.¹² The New Testament teaches that the future promised in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the person, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The New Testament—and in particular the Gospel of Matthew—declares and shows how the mighty works of God recorded in the Old Testament are accomplished in Christ. Jesus is the new Adam with whom the time of the paradise of the future has begun (Romans 5:16). In order to establish the truth of their message, the apostles used this method of interpretation to show that Christ continues and goes beyond the Old Testament (Acts 2:14-35; 3:17-26; 7:1-53). Thus, Paul writes: “These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

The New Testament also uses Old Testament stories, images, and verses of Scripture to show how God’s saving activity in Christ continues in the sacraments of the church. Confining our discussion to one relationship, that of Israel crossing the Red Sea and Christian baptism, we can see how the writers of the New Testament found in Israel’s deliverance from Egypt a figure of our redemption in Christ through baptism. In 1 Corinthians 10:2-6, Paul declares that the exodus from Egypt was already a baptism. The freedom won in Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea is brought to fulfillment in the crossing of the baptismal pool. The two realities have the same significance: They mark the end of slavery to sin and the entrance into a new existence. The New Testament also invokes Israel crossing the Red Sea to point to our future in Christ. In Revelation 15:2-3, we read that the demon is destroyed by the waters of judgment, while the servants of God, victorious, find themselves on the other shore, having crossed without harm the sea of death.

The New Testament’s use of Old Testament events to interpret Christian sacraments is not limited to Israel crossing the Red Sea. The New Testament also describes baptism using the Old Testament rite of circumcision and various rites of purification that involved washing or sprinkling with blood (Colossians 2:11-17; Revelation 1:5-6). The great flood in the days of Noah is also used to illuminate baptism in the New Testament (1 Peter 3:20-21). Similarly, the Lord’s Supper is interpreted in relation to Passover, the feeding with manna, the covenant feast on the mountain, and the wedding feast in the Song of Solomon (Matthew 26:17-29 and parallels; John 6; 1 Corinthians 11:25; John 2:1-11).

Based on this biblical approach to scriptural interpretation, the early church understood itself as living in the world of the Bible. The church expressed itself in biblical terms. It saw itself as a continuation of God's saving work recorded in the Bible, declaring that, when we participate in the sacraments, we participate in the continuation of God's saving activity recorded in the Bible. Like the New Testament, the church made this point by using stories and images from the Old Testament as well as the New Testament to explain the sacraments.

The hermeneutic key to this approach to the Bible is simple: Interpret Scripture according to its application to Christian life, and interpret the life of the Christian by its correspondence to Scripture. According to this manner of scriptural interpretation, the task of preachers is to lift up the connection, or the continuing relationship, between Scripture and the Christian life. This connection is first made by showing how the various events recorded in the Bible are all united in the saving activity of Jesus Christ and, second, by showing how this saving activity continues beyond Scripture in the Christian life. According to the Bible, the point of intersection where the world of the Bible and the world of the church are united is the church's experience of Christ's saving activity in baptism and the Lord's Supper, making the sacraments an essential topic for preaching.

In exploring the sacraments as the point of intersection between the world of the Bible and the life of the church, Scripture and sacrament shed light on each other. On the one hand, the Bible both teaches the church that baptism and the Lord's Supper change who Christians are and provides the church with language, description, and images that illuminate what this change looks like in the lives of believers. On the other hand, the life and experience of the church provides the setting for seeing what the Scriptures mean. The sacraments are at the heart of the church's life and experience; therefore, baptism and the Lord's Supper provide the context for interpreting Scripture. For example, baptism and the Lord's Supper make Israel's crossing the Red Sea and eating manna in the wilderness important events in Christian history. In this way, creative preaching on the sacraments invites us to recover the unity of Scripture and church, of God's saving activity in the Bible and God's saving activity in the sacraments, so that Scripture remains relevant as the church's world of meaning and as the structure of language that sets the Christian life apart from life in the world.

But is the early church's approach to Scripture appropriate for the church today? Objections to this method of interpreting the Bible arise because some think that allowing the life and experience of the church to determine what the Scriptures mean implies that a given passage of Scripture has many

different meanings and denies the original meaning of a text. For example, critics argue that when we interpret Israel crossing the Red Sea and eating manna in the wilderness as images of baptism and the Lord's Supper, we deny that these narratives have a history and meaning apart from the Christian sacraments. If the only appropriate way to interpret Scripture is in keeping with its original, historical meaning, then every Christmas when we read Isaiah 9 and assume that the child born to us is Jesus, we err by going beyond the original meaning of the text.

The matter is further complicated because the idea that a given passage of Scripture has more than one meaning is completely foreign to both those who read the Bible literally and the historical-critical method of biblical exegesis that until recently has dominated biblical interpretation. In either approach to Scripture, the tendency is to distill a passage of Scripture down to a droplet of truth rather than to allow it to overflow with waves of meaning. Furthermore, the idea that the Old Testament can be interpreted by means of the New, and that the New Testament can be interpreted by means of the Old, runs counter to the fact that, rather than a single volume, historical-critical exegesis views the Bible as an anthology that spans cultures and centuries. For these reasons, the historical-critical method of interpreting the Bible criticizes the approach to Scripture that we have just described as lacking scientific rigor, analytical precision, and a truly historical perspective.

Yet, even the historical-critical approach to Scripture is not without its critics. Today, both pastors and scholars are increasingly concluding that the historical-critical method has distanced the church from its Scriptures by making the Bible unintelligible to anyone who is not a trained expert in the history, language, culture, and beliefs of the centuries and peoples spanned by the Bible. Furthermore, by disassembling the text of Scripture in order to uncover its authenticity, authorial intent, philosophical and cultural influences, and the writer's own religious experience, the historical-critical approach leaves the church with bits and fragments of the text so scrutinized and analyzed that their original coherence is lost amid all the pieces of the puzzle. This is not to deny that we have benefited inestimably in our knowledge and insight from the critical work done in textual, historical, linguistic, and cultural studies of Scripture. Our understanding of the Bible and of the faith is richer and better for it. The problem is not that the historical-critical method is used; the problem is that too often it is used at the expense of all other methods of interpretation. When this happens, sermons become either exegetical lectures that fail to touch the lives of those to whom they are addressed or the preacher's own theological, political, or programmatic agenda. For this reason, the church today is increasingly recognizing that preaching

and teaching must go beyond historical criticism and return to the coherence and wholeness of the text in order to bring Scripture to bear on the lives of Christians. Recent literary theory encourages the church to think of the texts of Scripture from the viewpoint of their readers rather than their authors.

Creative preaching on the sacraments provides the church with a way of lifting up the relationship of Scripture and sacrament, not by abandoning historical criticism, but by assigning the historical-critical method its proper place as an intermediate step in the process from the first reading of Scripture to announcing the good news. In this way, our hearers can benefit from the valuable perspectives on the Bible that historical-critical research provides and at the same time discover and experience the unity of Scripture and church, of God's saving activity in the Bible and in the sacraments. The goal is not to deny that there is a historical interpretation of the Scriptures but to say, as Andrew Louth puts it, that "we have to enter into that history. What was done in Christ is not past, but present in the One who is risen."¹³ By lifting up this unity between God's saving activity in the Bible and God's saving activity here and now in the sacraments, Scripture will remain relevant to ordinary Christians. It is meaningful because it provides the principles by which Christians are formed in faith, the world of meaning that helps them understand their life, and the structure of language that sets the Christian life apart from life in a post-Christian world.

Guiding Principles for Using the Bible to Interpret the Sacraments

A reason that many resist an approach to Scripture that is not grounded in history is the legitimate fear that preachers will imaginatively connect various parts of the Bible and the sacraments in ways that are at best proof-texting and at worst contrary to the gospel. They argue that the best way to prevent this from happening is to allow no interpretation that is not defensible according to the historical-critical method. In assessing the approach used by the early church, it is important to remember that Scripture is not always intended to be taken literally and therefore requires interpretation. The problem exists even with statements directly from Christ's mouth. In John 3, for example, Jesus rebukes Nicodemus for taking him literally when he speaks of being born from above. Furthermore, many of our most basic Christian truths, including that God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, cannot be proven according to the standards of the historical-critical method but are matters of faith. At the same time, in order to guard against inappropriate or outlandish interpretation, it is essential to provide principles that will guide preachers as they use the Bible to interpret the sacraments.

First, creative preaching on the sacraments demands that biblical symbolism provide the principal means of interpreting worship and sacrament. Regardless of how preachers craft their sermons to incorporate the actual celebration of the sacrament and the specific community celebrating it, biblical symbolism is central to the interpretation of the sacraments. Creative preaching on the sacraments looks to the Scriptures for both the meaning of the sacraments and the images that we use to explain them. Taking the Bible this seriously means that preaching on the sacraments will not be about explaining doctrine but about telling Bible stories in ways that relate them to the hearers' experience of worship. Taking Scripture this seriously also means that the first place preachers will search for an image to explain what we do in worship is Scripture and not the video store.

Second, using the Bible as the means of interpreting worship and sacrament means drawing on all sorts of biblical stories and images, both Old and New Testaments, as the lenses through which Christians view their experience of worship and sacrament. Reading the sermons of the early church (see the resource list, pages 49–54) both helps the preacher become familiar with the biblical stories and images that the church has traditionally used to explain the sacraments and provides a check that prevents the preacher from wandering far afield when connecting worship experiences and biblical stories and images. Reviewing where these Bible stories and images are assigned in the *Revised Common Lectionary*, a three-year cycle of Scripture readings used by more and more congregations, will help the preacher discover appropriate Sundays for preaching on worship and sacrament.

Third, creative preaching on the sacraments is not original work in terms of discovering new links between the Old and New Testaments or the sacraments and the Bible. It is appropriate to lift up the connections identified in Scripture and celebrated by the church. Rather than making new connections, originality is found in the ways that these biblical connections are brought to bear on the unique celebration of the sacraments that the preacher is explaining. Originality is also found in the ways the preacher intentionally incorporates Scripture into the content of the sermon so that the Bible serves as the church's mode of expression. Preachers should look to their denomination's sacramental services, particularly the main prayers in them, to see the links between Scripture and sacraments that their church already celebrates. In this way, the church's worship can provide another check to interpretive methods that threaten to get too fanciful and far afield.

Fourth, the Bible is used to show how the life, death, and resurrection of Christ are contained in the sacraments and worship of the church. One way to do this is by relating Old Testament events to their New Testament

correlatives and highlighting the passing from one reality to another: darkness to light, slavery to freedom, death to life. These passages are then applied to the explanation of the sacrament. In this way, the unity between Christ's presence in the Scriptures and Christ's presence in the sacraments is lifted up in order to connect the Scriptures and the church's life. By seeing that Christ is doing the same thing in the sacraments that he did in his life, death, and resurrection, Christians come to understand that in worship we do more than remember the life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the way it was foretold in the Old Testament and will be fulfilled when Christ comes again. We encounter and participate in Christ's saving activity here and now.

Fifth, creative preaching on the sacraments uses the Bible to show that the sacraments contain different dimensions of the saving activity of Jesus Christ hoped for in the Old Testament, accomplished in Christ's death and resurrection, and awaiting complete fulfillment in Christ's return. The most obvious way to do this is by using several biblical stories and images to explain the same sacrament or part of worship. As we have seen, baptism is passing safely through the Red Sea. Baptism is also being anointed with the Holy Spirit in the Jordan and emerging healed from the pool of Bethesda. It is also soaking up the water of the river of life that flows from the throne of God in the new Jerusalem. A second way to lift up the many dimensions of God's saving activity in Christ is to trace the same image through biblical stories to the sacraments. For example, the dove sent forth from the ark not only points to the Holy Spirit, who descended on the person of Jesus at his baptism, but that dove is actually a beginning revelation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the members of the church. In the Bible God uses water to create and to sustain, to condemn and to save, to cleanse and to heal. By using several biblical stories and images to explain the same sacrament or part of worship, our hearers' understanding and experience of worship and sacrament expands and deepens.

Cultural and Natural Images

In addition to biblical images, and to a lesser degree, creative preaching on the sacraments uses both natural and cultural images to communicate the meaning of worship and sacrament. In the sermons of the early church, we find interesting examples of how cultural images are used to explain the sacraments.

Cyril of Jerusalem describes the devil's pomp, a phrase used by those being baptized to renounce evil, as "the mad world of the stage, horse-racing, hunting, and all such futility." The devil's worship is defined as "prayer in

pagan temples, honour paid to lifeless idols, kindling lamps and burning incense by fountains or rivers.” Cyril also contrasts the kiss of peace with the customary kiss exchanged by friends in public.¹⁴

Ambrose of Milan compares the anointing prior to baptism to an athlete getting rubbed down with oil prior to his contest in the arena. Ambrose says that the newly baptized are about to engage in a contest with the devil. Ambrose then compares the renunciation of the devil to the note a person signs to borrow money and asserts that, just as the moneylender takes you to court and you are convicted by the contract if you seek to default, so the newly baptized are liable before God for the promise they made.¹⁵

John Chrysostom compares baptismal sponsors to guarantors for money, cosigners on a loan, who accept a greater responsibility than the debtor who receives the money. He compares the baptismal covenant to a business contract in which one person entrusts his or her affairs to another.¹⁶

Theodore of Mopsuestia compares the anointing before baptism to the identification-mark of a soldier, the Roman equivalent of a dog tag, which marks a person out for service in the heavenly army as one chosen and approved.¹⁷

Turning to natural images, **Cyril of Jerusalem** uses the setting of the sun to explain that candidates for baptism face west, the quarter from which darkness appears, to renounce the leader of shadow and darkness.¹⁸

In order to explain how Christians should live in the world, **Ambrose of Milan** tells his hearers to imitate the fish, which swims on despite the storms raging and the violent winds blowing on the sea. So Christians are to be like the fish so that the various currents, huge waves, and fierce storms of the world do not drown them. Ambrose contrasts the grace of baptism, which lasts forever, to white snow, which quickly turns black with dirt and loses its color.¹⁹

Guidelines for Using Cultural and Natural Images

Out of consideration for space, we have simply lifted examples out of the sermons of the early church to show that cultural and natural images are used to explain sacramental experience creatively. Reading how these images are included in the context of these sermons suggests five important guidelines for using cultural and natural images in creative preaching on the sacraments.

First, cultural and natural images are used to support and clarify biblical images, not in place of them. As we have said, in creative preaching on the sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper are explained by drawing on biblical themes and images. Scripture is used abundantly. Creative preaching on

the sacraments should overflow with biblical stories and images. Cultural and natural images serve well to show how the sacraments relate to our lives. However, we must resist the temptation to replace biblical imagery with images from the culture or from nature in order to present something novel. In baptism we are joined to Christ's death and resurrection. We do not, as one preacher put it, win more than the person who wins a million dollars on a game show.

Second, the cultural and natural images used are readily accessible to the hearers. The images are not contrived, invented, or even out of the ordinary. The images used come from the hearers' personal experience in everyday life. The kiss of greeting among friends, the wrestler anointed for the contest, the cosigner on a loan, and snow were all familiar to early Christians. These are not images that need to be set up or explained. The point we are making is that creative preaching on the sacraments uses cultural and natural images familiar to the hearers. If it takes time and effort to describe the image or to remind the hearers of its significance, the image is most likely not appropriate. The best place to look for images, then, is in the everyday world of the hearers.

Third, more than using familiar images, the way that the images are used is made obvious. That is, the connection between the point being made about worship and sacrament and the image used to make the point is crystal clear. The snow's whiteness, not its coldness, is being lifted up. The western direction of the sunset, not the beauty of its colors, is being used. This approach recognizes that all images have more than one meaning and are ultimately limited in their ability to convey the meaning of the sacraments. Therefore, in creative preaching on the sacraments, the point of comparison or contrast between the images and the sacraments described is made obvious.

Fourth, these images are incomplete. They are not described in great detail. We hear about the stage, horseracing, and hunting. It is left to the hearers to provide the details from their own experience and, in so doing, to realize how these activities are the devil's pomp. We hear about a soldier and about a person signing for a loan. These are images and not detailed stories. They lift up every soldier and every contract and, in so doing, touch on every hearer's experience of soldiers and contracts. Leaving out details highlights the connection between the image and the point being made and invites the hearers to filter the image through their own experience.

Fifth, cultural and natural images, as well as words and actions, are used to describe settings and participants. The images provide one more means by which the preacher invites the congregation to enter into the whole experience of worship and sacrament. They call the preacher to look

beyond the black-and-white order of service to proclaim the color and texture of the celebration. Images drawn from our lives and connected to every aspect of our worship also help the community of faith bridge or cross or even do away with the threshold that separates what we do in church from what we are called to do in our everyday lives.

The Timing of Creative Preaching on the Sacraments

A preacher should take care about how often she or he preaches creatively on the sacraments, as it is possible to overdo this kind of preaching. One would not want this method of handling Scripture to become the mainstay of how Scripture is used week to week in preaching. In fact, this kind of preaching done over an extended period of time might become too inward looking, reflecting on how wonderful worship is rather than turning worshipers outward to consider living out the implications of the sacraments in the world.

Instead, a preacher would do well to see creative sacramental preaching as one tool in his or her homiletical toolbox. There are certain tasks that this kind of preaching does better than any other. But it would be foolish to make it do more than it should do—as foolish as using a screwdriver to till a new garden spot. One could probably get the job done, but it would be hard; for that is not the role of a screwdriver. The likely results of the misuse of creative sacramental preaching would erode its distinctive quality and not serve the congregation well with a full ministry of the word of God.

Another way to think of proper balance is to consider creative sacramental preaching as a special kind of meal. A family could eat turkey and dressing every meal of every day—not just on Thanksgiving and Christmas—but that menu would quickly become boring. Brought out on special occasions, however, such food is a big part of what makes festive occasions special. Consumed too often, on the other hand, even the most special foods lose that quality, not to mention that such a limited diet is not good nutrition. Similarly, creative sacramental preaching on the right occasions is an important part of administering the sacraments. Done too often, it is likely to malnourish a congregation, ironically, through its richness.

What does creative sacramental preaching do? Creative sacramental preaching rolls the curtain back between our story and the grand sweep of what God is doing to save. Creative sacramental preaching provides the clearest vision of how our experience of God in worship is part of God's great purposes revealed in Jesus Christ. Thus, it is best used when it is appropriate to reveal these connections and to show that we have gained a share through the sacraments in what God is doing on a large scale. Done too frequently, however, sacramental preaching's strength could turn into its weakness. Even the stories most fundamental to a people's identity can become mundane through overuse.

When Should Creative Sacramental Preaching Be Done?

The obvious answer is to say that preaching on the sacraments should be done to coordinate with administering the sacraments. There are several possible relationships:

One possibility is preaching on the sacraments in the weeks prior to administering them. This could be done as part of preparing for the sacraments weeks in advance. Suppose, for example, a preacher has listeners who will be baptized at Easter. It would be natural in that case, as the preacher works through the sermons for Lent, to include some sacramental preaching. Doing so would be particularly appropriate whenever the lectionary texts provide an echo of sacramental actions or objects. Examples are the readings for the third Sunday in Lent in Year A: Exodus 17:1-7 (Moses bringing water from the rock) and John 4:5-42 (Jesus offering a spring of water gushing up to eternal life). The readings for the next Sunday in Lent in that same yearly cycle likewise contain sacramental echoes with a reference to anointing with oil for royalty (1 Samuel 16:1-13) and the story about Jesus making mud with his spittle (a water image; John 9:1-41).²⁰ Preaching on the sacraments sometime in advance can heighten how much people look forward to them.

Another way to connect sacramental preaching to the sacraments is to preach on them immediately prior to administering them. Doing so can set the stage for their reception that immediately follows. If properly done, this timing for sacramental preaching can intimately link the Word with the sacrament. The oral Word delivered in the sermon will linger in the listeners' ears as they come to receive the visible Word, as some classic theologians have called the sacraments.²¹ Such preaching can make the worship experience especially vivid as the sermon, in effect, invites the listeners to come anticipating an encounter with God. Examples of sermons in the second part of this book that are intended for this timing are the ones by Stephen Castleberry, Kate Heichler, and Lester Ruth (pages 55–59, 61–68, and 73–78).

Perhaps the most classic timing of sacramental preaching, if one follows the ancient model, is to preach on the sacraments after their administration. In the ancient church, preaching extensively on the sacraments before administering them was not done much. With some noticeable exceptions, most preachers preferred to wait until the people had experienced the sacraments before opening up their meanings, in order to let people's experience have the first word. During the late fourth century, for example, the time after Easter was dedicated to exegeting the experience of God in the sacraments celebrated in the special services at Easter. While the whole period of fifty days might be appropriate for this kind of reflection, often the week immediately after Easter was set aside for daily preaching on the sacraments. This period of preaching gave those who had just been baptized—who came with the baptismal anointing's smell still lingering on their skin and who could still taste their first-ever Lord's Supper on Easter morning—the opportunity to understand the significance of what they had just experienced. Ideally, the

sacramental preaching oriented them toward a lifetime of faithful Christian living by rooting their personal experience in the deep stories and symbols of the church. This preaching after the sacraments was the time to draw out the implications of what they had experienced in worship.

Our creative sacramental preaching, done after administering the sacraments, should aim for the same goal. One benefit would be in helping people see that receiving a sacrament, particularly baptism, is not closing the book after the last chapter. Receiving the sacrament is the first chapter in knowing how to live and trust from a Christian viewpoint. Thus, as a simple, useful measure, it is helpful at times to follow the administration of the sacrament one Sunday with a sermon reflecting on its meanings on the following Sunday.

The Revised Common Lectionary and Sacramental Preaching at Easter

Perhaps the best way to plan for preaching on the sacraments after their administration is to follow the ancient example: richly administering the sacraments at Easter, the church's grandest time in the year, and then using the opportunities up to Pentecost to preach creatively on the sacraments. The fact that many of the texts in the *Revised Common Lectionary* for this period have vivid images associated with the sacraments lends itself to this kind of creative preaching. Consider the readings for the Sundays of the Easter season in Year A of this lectionary. Often, the prescribed passages have explicit reference to the sacraments or, at least, a strong echo of sacramental themes. Indeed, there are some signs that the passages were selected for this season partly to lend themselves to creative sacramental preaching. In Year A, for example, the New Testament epistle readings are from 1 Peter, which many scholars see as being written out of a baptismal context in the early church. Considering just the first several Sundays of Easter in Year A, here are some of the sacramental references and echoes found in a few of the Scripture passages:

Second Sunday of Easter

- 1 Peter 1:3–9: new birth, death, and resurrection
- John 20:19-31: the peace of Christ, the breath of Christ, and giving of the Holy Spirit

Third Sunday of Easter

- Acts 2:14a, 36-41: repentance, forgiveness, and giving of the Holy Spirit associated with baptism
- 1 Peter 1:17-23: new birth, the blood of Christ
- Luke 24:13-35: the risen Christ being recognized in the breaking of the bread

Fourth Sunday of Easter

- Acts 2:42-47: the breaking of bread being connected to joy and true fellowship among Christians

Fifth Sunday of Easter

- 1 Peter 2:2-10: tasting that the Lord is good, royal priesthood, moving from darkness to light

Even with this cursory look, one can see how the lectionary texts encourage creative sacramental preaching in the time of Easter. Craig Satterlee's sermon on the exchange of the peace (pages 69–72) is an example of a sermon that fits this sort of after-the-fact reflection.

Sacramental Preaching at Easter and the Catechumenate Model

Another reason to preach creatively on the sacraments in the Easter season is that many churches have adopted a way of evangelizing and discipling called the catechumenate. (The word *catechumenate* is related to an ancient Greek word meaning echoing sound. Thus, catechumens were hearers of the gospel.) The catechumenate was the way ancient churches integrated evangelism, formation, and worship. In it mentors and teachers led new Christians through a period of deepening commitment to Christ and belief in the gospel, all the while coordinating their progress with special public worship services and spiritual disciplines. Since churches that have recently adopted this model have done so based on the same historical examples, it is not surprising that they call for the Easter season to include creative reflection on the impact of the sacraments for faithful Christian living. As we have seen, the early church regularly did this. Calls for creative sacramental preaching during the Easter season come from the catechumenate literature of a variety of churches, including Mennonite, United Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, as well as the voices of individual theologians such as Robert Webber.²²

Creative sacramental preaching, when done as part of a catechumenate process, serves a critical role in the formation of new Christians. It can both tell new Christians that their hopes and aspirations are fulfilled and call them to live in a way consistent with what they have become in Christ. As one minister has nicely put it, the shift from Lent to Easter itself tells the story of the newly baptized: “Lent says, ‘Become,’ Easter says, ‘You are.’”²³ This shift from imperative to indicative can serve as the basis for compelling preaching on the sacraments as the apostle Paul himself showed. Answering a question about continuing in sin, Paul proclaimed that doing so contradicts what happened to us in baptism, since we were buried with Christ into his death and then raised with him into newness of life (Romans 6:1-14).

Drawing out the implications of what we have experienced in the sacraments should have three aspects:²⁴

First, it should encourage the worshipers to adopt a way of seeing life using sacraments as the lens. Paul had this perspective. Consider the different ways that he could answer the question about why Christians should not continue sinning. He chose one from a sacramental perspective: It contradicts our experience in baptism (Romans 6:1-4). Developing a sacramental viewpoint should also impact how we respond to all of life and creation.

Second, creative sacramental preaching can root its listeners in the fundamentals of faith by laying out sound doctrine. Of course, the goal of such preaching is not a heavily didactic, excessively rational catechesis. Rather, the goal is to lay out enough sound doctrine so as to help the listeners interpret their sacramental experience. Sacramental experience is not just experience for experience's sake, but it is opportunity to merge our personal story with the story of what God is doing in Christ. While not only doctrinal, this concern has doctrinal elements.

Finally, creative sacramental preaching can contain admonitions for a Christ-like life. Again, excessive exhortation should not squeeze out the basic playfulness that characterizes creative sacramental preaching. But, as we saw in Paul above, experiencing God's work in the sacraments should have implications for how we live out our lives.

Beyond these more regular occasions for creative preaching on the sacraments—before and after administering them—it is also useful occasionally to bring this perspective into a sermon that is not otherwise on the sacraments. An example is Cathy Felber's sermon in this book (pages 79–83) about the Syrophenician woman who begs Jesus to heal her daughter. After Jesus' initial hesitation, she points out that she is asking for only the crumbs that fall from the table. With this appeal, Jesus responds to her plea for help. To make that point accessible for her listeners, Felber concludes the sermon by quoting the words in her tradition's Communion service that refer to worshipers gathering up the crumbs under the Lord's table. Bringing in her own experience of how seeing the crumbs during a Communion service was a liberating experience for her, Felber opens her listeners to that same possibility. In this way, the sermon can offer the sacrament and the listeners can make Christ's mercy shown in the biblical story their own.

Contexts for Sacramental Preaching

We turn now to contexts for creative preaching on the sacraments. In this section, we will explore the reasons that creative preaching on the sacraments was essential not only to the life and mission of the ancient church but also to the life and mission for the church today and tomorrow.

Ancient: The Catechumenate

The approach to creative preaching on the sacraments described in this book is not new. In fact, it dates back to the early church. By the fourth century, the legalization of Christianity under Constantine (A.D. 313) transformed the process by which the church prepared people for baptism. Originally, the Christian community prepared people for baptism by guiding them on a personal spiritual journey toward a Christian life, not only in terms of what they believed but also how they behaved and to whom they belonged.²⁵ After Constantine made Christianity official, many people wanted to get ahead by officially becoming part of the church. They sometimes enrolled for baptism without ever experiencing an authentic conversion to Christ. These people had little intention of embracing the way of life expected of baptized Christians.

Responding to this situation of “official” Christians in an “official” religion, the church standardized its way of guiding people on a spiritual journey to baptism. By the fourth century, the great festivals and the more sharply differentiated seasons of the liturgical year had developed, and Easter was accepted as the normal time for administering baptism. The church also developed a five-stage process of making Christians, which, as was noted earlier, came to be known as the catechumenate.

- *Stage One:* The process began with a period of evangelization in which the inquirer had informal contact with Christians and the church. When candidates were determined to have attained a basic grounding in Christian teaching, the beginnings of faith, and a commitment to a changed way of life, they were accepted into the catechumenate itself.
- *Stage Two:* The catechumenate could last for several years, during which candidates participated in spiritual formation and were instructed on how Christians behave. When those responsible for the catechumens’ formation determined that their behavior had changed sufficiently, the catechumens could proceed to the third stage.
- *Stage Three:* The period of enlightenment usually coincided with Lent and was intended as a time of intense spiritual preparation for the fourth stage.
- *Stage Four:* Baptism at Easter.
- *Stage Five:* Instruction on the sacraments.

In creating this catechumenate process, the church chose not to give instruction on the meaning of the sacraments to any who merely called themselves Christian. Rather, the church reserved this teaching for Christians who took their faith so seriously that they made the commitment to be baptized. We know this from the sermons of Ambrose of Milan, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom of Antioch, and Theodore of Mopsuestia in Syria. In fact, both Ambrose and Cyril withheld instruction on baptism, Communion, and the Lord's Prayer until after new Christians had been baptized and received the Lord's Supper for the first time during their initiation at the Easter Vigil, a special service that started on Saturday night and continued until Easter Sunday morning. Theodore taught candidates for baptism the meaning of this sacrament in the days before they were baptized, but withheld instruction on the Lord's Supper until after the Easter Vigil. John Chrysostom explained baptism in advance of the Easter Vigil but did not include a systematic treatment of the Lord's Supper in his sermons to the newly baptized.

Thus, the church created as a final stage in the process of becoming Christian the period of postbaptismal preaching known as mystagogy. During this period, the church held worship services at which there was special preaching on the sacraments for people who had experienced baptism and the Lord's Supper for the first time at the Easter Vigil and now needed guidance in understanding their experience. Easter week became the occasion for these special sermons on the sacraments and was the most common time for creative preaching on the sacraments in the ancient church.

As part of this guidance and instruction, the church taught the newly baptized the Christian faith. The Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the day, disagreements that resulted in synods and councils such as Nicaea and Constantinople, also sparked debates over Christian doctrine among regular folk in their everyday lives. This was especially true of the Arian controversy, because people who were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit found themselves called on to defend the manner of their baptism in light of the Arian doctrine that denied the divinity of Jesus and represented the Son as subordinate to the Father in the Trinity. In this climate, preachers helped their hearers engage in these struggles by addressing doctrinal issues from the pulpit. Preachers were especially concerned that new Christians correctly understand the faith. Preaching on the sacraments therefore became a means of rooting people in sound doctrine.

Contemporary: Missional Implications Today

More important than the fact that creative preaching on the sacraments dates back to the early church are the missional implications for this kind of

preaching today. In the twenty-first century, the church in North America is once again confronted by a culture that, despite the fact that it may claim to be Christian, is similar to the culture of the early church. In the twenty-first century, as in the fourth, the Christian direction of culture is highly ambiguous at best. Although we live in a culture that, in the minds of a majority of its citizens, is Christian, it is in many respects polytheistic and pagan. The ambiguous direction of our culture is revealed in several ways.

First, the church no longer stands at the center of society. In more and more communities, weekly church attendance is no longer expected of the people who live there. There is no longer a weeknight set aside for church activities; even Sunday mornings are not immune from soccer games and other youth activities. Rather than a steady stream of new members brought by immigration and ethnic neighborhoods in which the church stood as center stage, religion and spirituality have become individual and private matters as the church has been relegated to the margins. If we ever really had a Christian society, it has been replaced in our day by a variety of moralities that include historical religions, new forms of religious life, and secular alternatives to religion. For many today, Christianity implies a nominal life of faith in which baptism is a passport to the life to come that has no real value for the here and now. Today, many people participate in the church's worship when it is socially appropriate and beyond that are seldom, if ever, in church. Even the church sometimes programs its ministry in response to a consumer mentality. As in the fourth century, the church needs to call for and explain what it means for Christians to be disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Second, as in the fourth century, the church once again finds itself caught up in doctrinal controversy as people are increasingly concluding that the church's traditional language and understanding of God, salvation, and revelation are not relevant to their lives. For example, for many people today, the question of their eternal salvation, whether they will go to heaven or to hell, is not what haunts them in the dead of night. They see suffering and violence, they worry about their kids and drugs, and they wonder if God is active in the world. When the church answers questions that people are not asking in language they no longer understand, the church seems irrelevant. When a Lutheran pastor, for example, proclaims that the world's problem is sin and that God solves this problem by sending Jesus, who justifies us by grace, that pastor is preaching good, solid Lutheran theology. But would people today identify their problem as sin? And would they receive the assurance that they are justified as life-changing, good news? Or would they go away asking, "What do you mean by *justified*?"

Third, and perhaps the most important similarity between the fourth century and our own, is that, faced with the need to reinterpret the faith for a

secularized, pluralistic world, the church must once again decide how it will lead people to faith and bring them into the church. In our day, some churches respond to this challenge by increasingly presenting the Christian faith as exclusively personal and private. Some current forms of evangelism present a form of Christianity that has no concern for justice and is comfortable with participation in profit, greed, instant gratification, and material success.

As in the early church, the church today must recognize that we do not live in a Christian culture and that we must therefore form people in what it means to be Christian and how Christians are called to live. Rather than settling for compliance with certain minimal regulations, the church can come to expect of its members the capacity to undergo radical and lasting transformation. This is what people are looking for. Creative preaching on the sacraments offers the church a way to help them find it. Perhaps this is a reason that an increasing number of congregations from across the denominational spectrum are embracing modern forms of the catechumenate as their process for making Christians and designating the Sundays after Easter as a time for creative preaching on the sacraments.

Postmodern: A Changing Climate

Beyond its rooting in the church's ancient practices and its appropriateness for the church's current status in general culture, creative sacramental preaching finds specific support in what some describe as the current postmodern situation. Postmodernity is exactly that, the recent cultural and philosophical shifts beyond a modern, scientific mindset. While the extent of these shifts is sometimes questioned, they indeed seem to be happening, affecting many areas, from popular aspects of culture to academic methods of inquiry.²⁶

Based on how some scholars describe it, postmodernity seems to cry out for creative preaching on the sacraments. It is as if the two are made for each other. In a postmodern context, according to Leonard Sweet for example, preachers should not merely "write sermons"; they should also "create experiences" that "bring together all the senses—sound, sight, touch, taste, and smell—into a radiant glowing of God's presence dwelling with God's people." Likewise, says Sweet, preachers in a postmodern context will recognize the need to be "image-driven" and be willing to live with the complexity and impreciseness created by the use of images and metaphors. All this is so because "postmoderns want interactive, immersive...participation in the mystery of God."²⁷

In a similar vein, sociologist Tex Sample advocates an approach to worship and preaching that finds "meaning in experience." By this, Sample

means worship and preaching that, in comparison with more rational and explanatory methods, is more emotive, embodied, nonrational, experiential, and finds meaning in “intimate immersion.”²⁸

In comparison, consider how William Harmless describes the characteristics of preaching on the sacraments. Harmless’ description is given in entirety because it is a good summary of creative sacramental preaching derived from the historical model:

Mystagogy [remember that this is the original word for the type of preaching advocated in this book] is an oral art and differs from a scholarly text on sacramental theology. Mystagogy moves by a logic more associative than discursive, more poetic than philosophical. This logic is not its only salient feature. There is another: a preference for surplus, whether a surplus of cultural images or scriptural echoes or both. The mystagogue [that is, a sacramental preacher] tends to let these images and echoes pile up so that the meanings cluster and set off vibrations among themselves; the scholar, by contrast, tends to sort them out into discrete bits of meaning. Sorting out creates conceptual clarity; piling up evokes experience—an experience that presses the hearer beyond the words themselves. The mystagogue uses this method of surplus to achieve a conscious pedagogical aim: namely, that while each image and each echo point to the mystery at hand, no one image or echo can subsume it. This method is thus a way of telling the truth about mystery: that a mystery can be pointed to, hinted at, even glimpsed, but it cannot be defined or exhausted.²⁹

Notice the key aspects that Harmless emphasizes for creative sacramental sermons: associative and poetic logic, a preference for a surplus of images in order to create experience, and a willingness to live with the mystery of inexhaustible meaning for the sacraments. These aspects fulfill what Sweet and Sample, among others, seek in postmodern preaching and worship.

A parallel between early Christian ways of sacramental preaching and the insights of contemporary scholars suggests a way of responding to the postmodern situation. It is easy to think that in a postmodern situation we must create worship forms from scratch. This is not necessarily true. There are models and practices from earlier, pre-Enlightenment and pre-modern, periods that can be useful now in a changing cultural climate. It is helpful to see how the kind of creative preaching on the sacraments seen in the early church and advocated in this book fulfills what some advocate in a post-modern situation.

Four Traits of Worship for the Postmodern Context

Four traits of worship for a postmodern context support creative preaching on the sacraments.

The first trait is that worship in a postmodern setting needs to be experiential. What we do in worship needs to be rooted in people's actual experience. In preaching there are several possible dimensions to this emphasis. For one thing, postmodern preaching must acknowledge and speak from the listeners' own experiences. For another, the postmodern preacher must use the sermon to help create experience. The goal is not just to share information but to awaken, evoke, and draw the listeners into a cooperative making of a message. This is partly what Leonard Sweet means when he says that postmodern preachers do not "write sermons" but that they "create experiences" that use all the senses.

This book's method for creative sacramental preaching fulfills both dimensions for experiential preaching: It acknowledges and uses the listeners' own experiences and at the same time helps create new experiences for the listeners. In fact, the primary text in creative sacramental preaching is the listeners' actual worship experience in the sacraments. What happens to them? What actions do they do? What actions are done to them? What do they feel with their bodies, taste with their tongues, smell with their noses, see with their eyes, and hear with their ears? Biblical, cultural, and natural images are then used to provide language to articulate and interpret that experience. A well-crafted sacramental sermon will create meaning for worship experiences in a way that is indeed a cooperative effort with the worshipers.³⁰

In fact, the well-crafted sacramental sermon will be so intimately linked to the worship experience as to be in some ways inseparable from it. That is why, for example, in some instances it is good to preach at the place of administering the sacraments themselves. How much more the impact of a sermon about baptism based on the image of the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God (Revelation 22:1) when that sermon is preached at the baptismal font itself. One could preach this same sermon across the room and point at the font, but standing at the waters themselves while preaching this vision of a life-giving river can powerfully evoke the association between baptism and that river. The preacher's standing at the font invites the congregation to participate fully in creating the association between the two. In like manner, consider a sermon whose climax offers the image of the Lord's Supper as the occasion when we can get a real taste that all our hopes in God will be fulfilled. For the preacher to ask if such an occasion exists and then to walk to the Communion table calls for the congregation to assist in the making of meaning in the sacramental experience. Such preaching not only exegetes the worship experience, it becomes part of it.

Another way to make sacramental preaching experiential is to craft it in such a way as to help the listeners relive specific instances of their worship experience. Use graphic, vivid language to reawaken what they have sensed in worship. Was there a little sense of “what in the world have I done?” as they heard the preacher say something about “mighty acts of God’s salvation” and then felt a cleansing stream of water come rushing off their heads and over their bodies? Was there a new sense of awe and thanks as they stood there with the broken bread in their hands and truly heard for the first time “...for you”? Was there a sense of discomfort as they felt the ashes being put on their forehead and heard words that echo their future funeral? Was there the comfort of finally having arrived home when they were greeted warmly and someone looked in their eyes while saying, “The peace of Christ”?

Creative sacramental preaching aims at creating this sort of vivid, sensory memory. Creative sacramental preaching in a postmodern context aims for what preaching scholar Thomas Troeger calls the “bodily weight” of truth.³¹ While Troeger is speaking about a quality for good preaching generally, sacramental preaching has an advantage in this regard because it relies on the bodily experiences of what people have touched, tasted, seen, smelled, and heard in worship as the starting text for a sermon. This emphasis on the body can put a little different spin on what we often mean when we say that people want to feel God in worship. In a postmodern context, feeling God does not merely mean whether or not the worshiper is moved emotionally. Rather, it is feeling in a broader sense, including emotion but also involving the whole body.³² Consequently, powerful postmodern preaching—including preaching on the sacraments—not only describes something but awakens an experience of it in every dimension in which we can feel, including both inward emotions and outward senses. Because of this approach, the suggestion of one scholar, commenting on worship generally, would seem to be especially true for postmodern people: “External rites have the power to order an inner experience.”³³

For sacramental preaching, understanding a postmodern holistic approach can remind us to remain focused on what our hearers actually experience. This focus will keep our sermons rooted in the *what* of God’s activity rather than allowing them to launch off too much into theoretical explanations of how God is working in worship.

According to many, *worshiping in a way that goes beyond merely rational approaches is the second trait of worship for a postmodern context*. Creative sacramental preaching moves the basic question of a sacramental sermon from *how* to *what*. It is not that postmodern worship should be anti-rational. Remember the holism desired between emotions, body, and the intellect. It is, however, a postmodern desire to go beyond rationality. That openness should

create a receptive atmosphere for sacramental preaching, which seeks to explore rather than to explain, which is more comfortable with liturgical play than liturgical proof. To use Harmless' terms quoted on page 37, the logic of creative sacramental preaching is "more associative than discursive, more poetic than philosophical."³⁴ In other words, to state systematically how sacraments work (or worse, how they do not work) is to undercut significantly a postmodern person's ability to experience them.

Sacramental preachers should check their sermons for how often they use words ending in the letters *ion*, a possible sign that the sermon has drifted into abstract conceptions. Instead of *ion* words, there should be a wealth of biblical, cultural, and natural images. Instead of *transition* into new life, let us speak of passing through the waters into the Promised Land. Instead of *determination* to remain faithful, let us speak of the assent to baptismal promises being like verbally signing your name on an agreement with God. Instead of *justification*, let us speak of being cleansed and forgiven in a life-giving stream. Instead of *regeneration*, let us speak of being born into the kingdom of God with a rush of water. Instead of human *satisfaction* of knowing God, let us speak of knowing what it means to rest after a Sunday dinner filled with heavenly manna.

One significant point in sacramental preaching that will go beyond linear rationality is affirming that in the sacraments our personal stories have been made part of the story of God's grand sweep of salvation throughout the Bible. This is the flip side of the reality discussed in the theology section above; namely, that what was conspicuous in the ministry of Jesus Christ has passed over into the sacraments. According to Leonard Sweet, post-moderns will respond to a faith that is not merely doctrine but is "merging one's personal story into the story of the Son of God and the Savior of the world."³⁵ Creative sacramental preaching can offer this merging of stories by pointing to the sacraments. There we do more than just tell others that this link exists; we invite them to sense anew the actions and objects that make the ministry of Christ still conspicuous in our worship. We tell people that they have seen, felt, tasted, smelled, and heard the connecting of their story into the story of God's work of salvation across history. (For examples, see the sermons in the second part of this book, particularly the one by Stephen Castleberry, on pages 55–59.)

The goal of creative sacramental preaching is to help people go beyond seeing only with the eyes in their head. To awaken people to a different dimension of vision in worship has been the goal of all great sacramental preachers. It is in the keener sight of the heart that we see the links created by sacraments between our story and the Bible's great story.

Creative sacramental preaching should also use a third trait in postmodern approaches to worship: comfort with symbols carrying a variety of meaning. According to worship scholar Robert Webber, the shift to symbolic ways of communicating is one of the basic aspects of postmodernism. Great opportunity now exists for creating interest in the sacraments as well as other ancient, classic features of worship, since there is a new “centrality of symbolic communication through an immersed participation in the event.”³⁶

It is not just the centrality of symbols in sacramental preaching that should appeal to postmodern people but also that at its best this kind of preaching respects having a variety of meanings for the things of worship. As Harmless has noted, preachers should allow sacramental images and echoes to “pile up” without trying to clarify.³⁷ Even worse than clarification would be arguing that one meaning should exclude additional meanings, since a postmodern perspective quite gladly allows multiple meanings to exist for the same thing.³⁸ And so, for example, speaking of baptism as both burial and birth and the font as both tomb and womb should not be a problem for postmodern people.

This postmodern willingness to allow multiple simultaneous meanings has several benefits for the method of creative sacramental preaching. One important one is a willingness to be playful in applying the Scriptures to the sacraments. This willingness should allow postmoderns not only to affirm the original, historical meaning of biblical passages but also to use biblical stories and images to articulate their experience of God in worship, part of the method advocated here. Another important benefit from a postmodern mindset concerning multiple meanings is the willingness to allow an accumulation of sacramental meaning over several sermons. Not only can there be a surplus of meanings in any one sermon, but the next sermon on the same sacrament can explore even more aspects of that same sacrament. The sacramental preacher in a postmodern context would not have to try to explain how the sacrament could have all these meanings. Postmoderns would likely glory in the mystery, allowing it to exist without demanding clarification.

The fact that their spirituality is image-driven rather than word-based also accounts for postmoderns’ willingness to live with multiple meanings.³⁹ Words can attempt to define precisely. Images, however, evoke and create experience; therefore, their meaning can be more indirect. Our method of creative sacramental preaching parallels the postmodern attraction to images. It does so on two levels. The first deals with the visual quality of the sacraments themselves. We do not just tell people about God’s grace and mighty works; we show them by symbols and vivid actions. In addition, the

language we use in sacramental preaching is also image-rich. The method plunges the depth of biblical, cultural, and natural images to find the language to speak about the meaning of the sacraments.

What is the meaning of the Lord's Supper? Let me draw you a picture of a risen Savior making breakfast on a beach for his disciples (John 21). What is the meaning of the baptismal waters? Picture the passage of God's people crossing through the Jordan River into a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus and Deuteronomy). What is the meaning of Communion? Think about the covenant meal where Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel eat in the splendor of God's glory (Exodus 24). What is the meaning of the baptismal commitments by sponsors, parents, and congregation? Imagine what it is like to cosign on a contract. What is the meaning of the Lord's Supper? Let me paint an image of a church that is like flour poured into a mixing bowl to which water and yeast are added so that it will become bread. The church is made up of countless grains of wheat that are moistened in baptism, leavened with the gospel, and baked by the fire of the Holy Spirit. Such use of biblical, cultural, and natural images to evoke meaning, which is the heart of sacramental preaching's method, should fit into a postmodern desire to appropriate meaning through images.

A fourth trait of postmodern thought supports creative sacramental preaching; namely, using a community-based understanding of truth. In a postmodern view, one's community is absolutely crucial for how one decides what is true. Individuals receive from their community the basic framework to understand what they are seeing and experiencing. Indeed, according to Grenz, this understanding reaches to the level of forming individual identity:

A sense of personal identity develops through the telling of a personal narrative, which is always embedded in the story of the communities in which we participate. The community mediates to its members a transcendent story that includes traditions of virtue, common good, and ultimate meaning.⁴⁰

The method of creative sacramental preaching relies on the same kind of communal logic. The basic goal of this kind of preaching is to show the meeting point of the individual worshiper's personal story and the big story of God's saving activity as symbolized in the sacraments. The sacraments make concrete and specific for each recipient her or his share in the grand sweep of salvation history.

To accomplish concreteness, the language used to explore this merging of stories should be in harmony with the thought of the larger church community. To be honest, there is some danger in the type of creative sacramental

preaching advocated here because of its methods of biblical interpretation. It can seem as if there could be no limits on these types of interpretation except the preacher's own imagination. And who knows where that might lead. But, when the preacher grounds her or his own interpretation in the thought of the larger church, the church provides a check against the wildest interpretations and guarantees that the preaching remains the sharing of the community's meanings for the sacraments. The ways that preachers and congregations can ground their interpretation within the larger church include the words of the service itself, important confessional or doctrinal statements within that tradition, and long-standing examples of interpreting sacraments. As an example of the latter, Methodists could look at the large collection of hymns on the Lord's Supper written by Charles Wesley, along with the theological treatise attached to them by John Wesley.⁴¹ Of course, the creative sacramental preaching of the early church can provide fruitful wells of thought for all sacramental preachers today. (See the resource list, pages 49–54, for information on finding these early sermons and other idea starters for sermons.) Although it uses creative biblical, cultural, and natural interpretations for the sacraments, good preaching on the sacraments should avoid being an individualistic free-for-all. Indeed, a postmodern context requires preaching that shows the interpretive framework of the larger church community.

Creative Sacramental Administration

These insights about sacramental preaching in a postmodern context also imply something about the administration of sacraments in that same context. While sacramental preaching is not strictly dependent on the way the sacraments are administered, there is some vital connection between the two. This connection would seem particularly essential in a postmodern context that emphasizes bodily experience within a holistic approach to things. In light of that emphasis, we should take care that the signs we use in sacraments are ample expressions of God's grace, that a wide range of senses are engaged, that the communal context for sacraments is celebrated, and that multiple layers of experience during administration are uplifted.

In order to produce the most positive meaning, administering sacraments ought to be a spectacle—to use the term of sociologist Tex Sample. According to Sample, commenting on the appropriate nature of worship in this new cultural context, part of the appeal of a “spectacle” is that it is “a total experience” with multiple dimensions.⁴² While Sample does not specifically apply his insights to the sacraments, his observations about current culture, if true, argue for closer attention to cultivating the various dimensions of a sacrament: the sign value, engagement of human senses, the surrounding community, and supplemental worship activity (such as music) during their administration. Of course, creative preaching on the sacraments itself is yet another way of adding a new level of experience to a sacramental spectacle. Remember what Leonard Sweet has said: “Postmodern preachers don't ‘write sermons’—they create experiences” that “bring together all the senses...into a radiant glowing of God's presence dwelling with God's people”?⁴³ What better way to do that than by carefully and playfully administering the sacraments?

Ample Signs to Support Creative Administration of the Sacraments

Beyond considering a postmodern context, we should give creative thought to each aspect of administering the sacraments that can undergird creative sacramental preaching. While not strictly necessary, rich administration of the sacraments with full signs helps stimulate good preaching on the sacraments.

One important aspect of the administration of the sacraments is the quality of the signs themselves. For too long many of us have been locked into thinking about what *must* be done to have a valid sacrament. This kind of question inevitably looks at how *little* can be done and how *small* the sign can be in a sacrament. Let us put that question aside and ask a new one: How much *should* be done and how *large* should sacramental signs be in

order to reveal the magnitude of God's love and the breadth of God's saving work? It can be hard to speak of a flood but have only a few drops of water. It can be hard to speak of a feast but serve only small crackers that have been stored in the refrigerator for years.

How ample are our sacramental signs for showing God's grace and God's saving activity? Generally, the rule of thumb in this regard is that more is more. Aim for a substantial amount of water. Even if sprinkling, let it be with a substantial dose from a fully cupped hand. How much more ample to use some kind of pouring or immersion! If your worship space is not equipped for this kind of baptism, it often does not take much to make big steps toward more ample signs. A small, inconspicuous children's pool in which the candidate stands or kneels can allow an ample pouring of water and yet protect the floor. Some churches have experimented with feeding troughs and other items—all appropriately decorated—in order to have immersions.⁴⁴ With respect to the Lord's Supper, consider the possibility of a substantial loaf of bread and a common cup. Let these be an ample, visible sign of our community during Holy Communion. In some churches there will be resistance to receiving from a common loaf and cup. In these situations, even though it is not ideal, consider having the loaf and cup visible along with the smaller, more common items.

Part of having ample signs in the sacraments is attending to the range of human senses engaged. People hear, see, taste, feel, and smell. In administering the sacraments, there is opportunity for engaging each sense. Sacraments are the original multisensory worship. Hearing has probably been the most important sense in Protestant worship. We will do nothing to diminish the sense of hearing here. Indeed, creative preaching on the sacraments is a way to make sure that the ear is engaged with regard to the sacraments. We should also be attentive to the quality of prayer in administering the sacraments. Many of our new services have outstanding prayers that serve as a kind of summary of God's greatest hits. Use these prayers. Our ears should be engaged by this kind of spoken remembrance of God's saving activity.

Administering sacraments can engage more than our ears. In the sacraments our eyes have something to see. A little bit of care can enhance this aspect. When you break the bread, do so with a grand gesture visible to the whole congregation. Does your church have a small baptismal font? While in front of the congregation, pour water into it immediately before administering baptism. When you hand someone the bread, hold it so the person can see it, look her or him straight in the eye, and say, "The body of Christ broken for you" as if you really mean it.

In similar manner, paying a little attention to other ways that sacraments can be sensed can be a rich reward. Using a substantial amount of scented oil, for example, as part of a baptismal anointing will create a tremendous experience that convinces the nose and the skin that God's grace is rich and abundant. One Texas church pours such oil onto the head of everyone baptized.⁴⁵ The oil runs down their faces, drips into their mouths, and fully anoints them. The smell will linger for a while. What will these people think as they hear the minister pray for the Holy Spirit to dwell richly in their lives? The outward experience in touch and smell gives them a physical clue as to what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to become the aroma of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14-15). Such practices are just waiting for creative preaching to expound their meaning.

In like manner, we should think of how other common baptismal practices, such as the giving of new clothes and of a new light, might become more spectacular. We should also think of the simple gestures of laying on of hands and the exchange of the peace as ways of making more tangible what it means to be blessed, encouraged, and included in the people of God. Perhaps we ought to look also at the quality of the taste in the Lord's Supper. If someone in your church had to describe what the saving work of God was like based on what they tasted in the Lord's Supper, what would they say?

The administration of sacraments should also be closely tied to the church's fellowship. Sacraments should be embedded in the life of the community. The fellowship should enfold the sacraments. It should be hard to see where the fellowship ends and the sacraments begin. In fact, they ought to be so close that it seems as if the sacraments flow naturally out of the community's love together and the fellowship is renewed by its experience in the sacraments.

Cultivating a community context for administering the sacraments will mean doing several things. First, recognize private baptisms or private Communion as oxymorons. Simply refuse to do any baptism (unless in a true emergency situation) without the fellowship present. Second, even if the church is present, do not do the baptism as a mere add-on at the beginning or end of a service. Third, consider scheduling baptisms by the rhythms of the community—such as major days in the church year—rather than by mere personal preference. Fourth, also avoid doing Communion where there is no community. Do not do come-and-go Communion where the food is blessed ahead of time and people arrive and leave separately. Think seriously, too, about whether it undermines Communion as a sign of community to relegate it to smaller chapels apart from the main worship service.

There are some easy, positive steps that can be taken to enhance the community context for administering the sacraments:

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1. Work hard on incorporating those about to be baptized into the fellowship of the church before the baptism.
 2. Use sponsors who can serve as a bridge to the community, mentoring those baptized and making sure that the church's care for the newly baptized is shown to them.
 3. Beyond the use of sponsors, think of baptism as the person's immersion into a whole way of following Christ and not merely as the application of water. Resources are available that can show you how to coordinate small-group ministry, one-on-one mentoring, and special worship services for this kind of discipleship.⁴⁶
 4. Show zeal in signs of welcome and love after the baptism. Take a look at the video of the Texas church mentioned on page 46.⁴⁷ It is hard to tell what got the newly baptized wetter, the triple immersion in water or being showered with love immediately after the baptism.
 5. Finally, make Communion the closing act of baptism itself. If baptism brings someone into the body of Christ (the church), then let his or her first experience of worship after baptism be the enjoyment of the body of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

In like manner, some easy things can enhance the communal context for the Lord's Supper. The first step is often to think of more than just receiving the food as the main action in this sacrament. There is also offering, praying, and breaking the bread. Why not include people in these other actions, especially the offering? Have some of the people bring the bread for Communion, perhaps even making the bread. This can be a wonderful gesture for those newly baptized or for other new members. Indeed, why have any kind of membership service (baptism, confirmation, or transfer) outside the context of a Communion service? What other things can we do to enhance the communal aspect of the Lord's Supper? Consider gathering the people, if the space allows, around the Communion table during the prayer over the bread and cup. Is there some way, given the requirements of your church's form of government, to have the people help serve the elements during Communion? Is there a way to allow a testimonial time about the goodness of God in our lives during Communion, as early Methodists often did?

Finally, paying attention to a postmodern context means developing multiple layers of experience while the sacrament is administered. Some ways to do this have been suggested above. Perhaps the keynote here is developing a willingness to have several things occur simultaneously during a sacrament. Most of us are familiar with one example: the practice of having singing while taking Communion. These things could be done sequentially—one thing at a

time, first receive and then sing—but done simultaneously they create a different experience. Consider doing the same thing during a baptism. What could be sung immediately before or after the water that would reinforce at a different level the meaning of the baptism? What song invoking the coming of the Holy Spirit could be sung while the newly baptized are anointed and have hands laid on them? Beyond music, at least two other ways for adding layers exist: (1) Cultivate the praying of all the people. What would it mean if those being baptized, for example, knew that everyone there was showering heaven with prayer during the baptism? (2) Pay attention to the gesture and placement of the people during the sacraments. Rather than sitting passively, is there something they can do with their bodies and someplace they can be other than in the pews that will reinforce the experience of the sacraments?

It is appropriate, especially in a postmodern context in which people want to be fully engaged in an encounter with our gracious God, to give new thought to these matters. Our preaching can be bold with the promise of grace, but if our manner of administering sacraments is pallid, which message are participants likely to hear? The sort of playfulness encouraged in administering sacraments makes creative sacramental preaching easier.

Let floods be floods and feasts be feasts. And let the sacraments be visible, multisensory words of God's saving goodness.

Suggested Resources for Further Reading

Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching, by Craig A. Satterlee (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002).

Augustine and the Catechumenate, by William Harmless (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995).

Experience the Mystery: Pastoral Possibilities for Christian Mystagogy, by David Regan (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994).

Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age, by Enrico Mazza (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1989).

Remember Who You Are: Baptism, a Model for Christian Life, by William H. Willimon (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1980).

Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacrament, by Kathleen Hughes (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999).

St. John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instructions, by Paul W. Harkins (New York: Newman Press, 1963).

Sunday Dinner: The Lord's Supper and the Christian Life, by William H. Willimon (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1981).

The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA, by Edward Yarnold (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994).

The Bible and the Liturgy, by Jean Daniélou (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956).

The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom, by Alan Kreider (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999).

The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley, by J. Ernest Rattenbury, edited by Timothy J. Crouch, OSL (Akron: OSL Publications, 1990).

Resources to Stimulate Creative Sacramental Thinking

A variety of good resources exist for helping pastors with sacramental preaching. Some model this kind of preaching directly with exemplary sermons. Others stimulate new insights into the meanings of sacraments in other ways. Both kinds of resources can serve as fertile ground for developing creative sacramental preaching.

Sunday Dinner: The Lord's Supper and the Christian Life and *Remember Who You Are: Baptism, a Model for Christian Life*, two books by William H. Willimon of Duke University, are good examples of resources that can develop a broadening of meaning for the sacraments. Willimon wrote both books in an easy-to-read style. Preachers will benefit from Willimon's ability to weave important theological insights with anecdotes, insightful questions, and other features of good oral style. In this way, Willimon explores several of the most important meanings for each sacrament.

Each of the sacraments receives its own short chapter. In *Sunday Dinner*, for instance, Willimon explores in one chapter the connection of the Lord's Supper to sacrifice by asking whether the piece of furniture on which it is served should be called an altar or a table. That chapter is between chapters considering hunger as a root metaphor for our desire for God and considering the significance of eating in Christ's resurrection appearances. For a preacher who wants to break new ground in the associations she or he brings to the sacraments, Willimon's two books are a good place to start.

Read J. Ernest Rattenbury's *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* to root this approach to preaching in Methodist history. Particularly helpful in the book are the 166 hymns on the Lord's Supper written by John and Charles Wesley and the theological treatise that John appended to the front of the eighteenth-century publication. Both the hymns and the treatise show how it is possible to combine a deep evangelical theology with a rich spirituality centered on the Lord's Supper. Both are also useful as a kind of kindling to start thinking creatively about associating this sacrament with biblical stories. Remember, for example, Charles Wesley's hymn at the beginning of this book (page 7), which connected the story of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment to our touching "His sacramental clothes" in the sacrament. Reflecting on this passage might lead one to other Bible passages that talk about the power of God revealed in the body of Christ.

At a basic level, the Wesleys' whole spirituality about the sacrament is rooted in a fusing together of two important New Testament images—Christ as the eternal high priest from the Book of Hebrews and Christ as the ever-sacrificed Lamb from the Book of Revelation—mingled with a good dose of typology of Old Testament passages. For example, to discuss the sacrificial aspect of the sacrament, Wesley sings, “Thou Lamb that sufferedst on the tree...still offer'st up Thyself to God.” Wesley then uses a type from the Old Testament to make us part of that story: “And on our *Aaron's* ephod placed/We now with Thee in heaven appear.”²⁴⁸ In other words, Christ appears as both priest and sacrifice in heaven where, as the priestly body of Christ, we are joined with him. This is what is experienced in the sacrament. The Wesleys' writings also follow the method explored in this book by making connections between the sacrament and other kinds of images. For example, Wesley uses an image from the production of the loaf: “In this expressive bread I see the wheat by man cut down for me.”²⁴⁹ In some respects, this type of sacramental exegesis goes back to the earliest days of Christianity. One might disagree with the Wesleys' theology. That is not the point. The Wesleys remain useful for stimulating the kind of exegesis and associations that support creative sacramental preaching generally. Even if one disagrees with the particulars of the Wesleys' theology, the writings of John and Charles Wesley remain useful for helping us break out of some ruts about the kind of biblical associations to make with the sacraments.

Edward Yarnold's *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA* (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) contains examples of sacramental preaching from the early church. After an opening section in which Yarnold details what a restored catechumenate should look like, he then includes sermons from several fourth-century preachers: Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom of Antioch, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. All preached in the second half of the fourth century. Yarnold does not include the entire collection of any of these preachers, but he includes enough to show the nature of this kind of preaching and each preacher's individual style. These sermons have influenced greatly the method we describe in this book. Anyone who wants to see early examples of this kind of preaching should look especially at the sermons of Cyril and Ambrose. These sermons are especially helpful for seeing how a creative, playful mindset with respect to the church's worship can at the same time remain deeply theological.

St. John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instructions, Paul W. Harkins' translation of the sermons by John Chrysostom, is for those desiring in-depth

exposure to an early church preacher. The book is a collection of twelve sermons Chrysostom preached in and around Easter in the late fourth century in Antioch, Syria. In them, one can see Chrysostom's carefully crafted handling of words as he at one time consoles his listeners with God's grace and at another calls them upward after the call of God. As compared with other preachers of his time, Chrysostom's use of Scripture and general logic make him accessible to people today. For the sacramental preacher today, Chrysostom is particularly helpful in showing the power of cultural images applied to the sacraments.

Craig A. Satterlee's *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching* is a comprehensive study of one of the most important sacramental preachers in the early church. Whereas Harkins provides mainly Chrysostom's sermons, Satterlee examines in detail the context, method, and manner of Ambrose's sacramental preaching. The book's goal is to understand Ambrose well enough to discuss his preaching in conjunction with the work of Fred Craddock, an influential recent preacher and scholar. In many respects, Satterlee's book on Ambrose might be the sequel to the book you are now reading, *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments*. Much of the discussion begun here is carried to a deeper level in the study of Ambrose.

William Harmless' *Augustine and the Catechumenate* is an excellent historical study that is helpful in three ways. First, it gives one of the best histories yet written of the context for sacramental preaching in the early church. The book shows how this sort of preaching was part of a whole structure that immersed people into the mystery of God's salvation as they were initiated into the church. In this structure—called the catechumenate—the church's worship life, its discipling ministries, and its evangelistic mission were all aspects of the same reality: the ongoing saving activity of Jesus Christ in the church. Second, Harmless details Augustine's sacramental preaching in the early fifth century. Augustine, a bishop in North Africa, was a talented preacher whose sermons remain instructive. Finally, reflecting on Augustine's ministry as evangelist and preacher, Harmless applies his insights to doing a catechumenate today. Every suggestion is helpful. Harmless' method is in harmony with the ideas you have found in this book on creative sacramental preaching.

Alan Kreider's *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* is an easy-to-read history of the changes that took place in evangelism over the first several centuries, particularly as it concerned transformation of human lives in Christ. As such, it provides an excellent backdrop that helps

sacramental preachers understand the contexts for early catechumenate methods, how shifts in these contexts resulted in changes in the catechumenate, and the evolving role of sacramental preaching in the midst of these changes. The book ends with insightful comments about methods of evangelism that could bring about true, deep conversions in a post-Christendom era. These insights have implications for the role of sacramental preaching.

Read Jean Daniélou's classic *The Bible and the Liturgy* to get a grasp of the symbolic nature of the church's worship as seen by early church preachers. Daniélou's work is a synthesis of how several important early preachers saw the significance of worship beyond surface level. The book demonstrates how these early preachers and teachers went beyond just what their visual eyes saw. It is a rich study that interprets the symbolism of Christian worship. Daniélou considers both baptism and the Lord's Supper as well as the symbolism of the weekly Lord's Day, Easter, and other important yearly days. The book can do much to cultivate the sort of symbolic, playful mindset needed to do creative sacramental preaching. Many of its interpretations of worship can serve as the leaven for imaginative sermons today. Accordingly, among the books discussed here, this classic is one of the most useful.

Start with Kathleen Hughes' *Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacrament* to see what exploring the worship experience might look like among other Christians. Although Protestants will have to translate some of the book's ideas and views because it is written from a Catholic perspective, it shares some of the perspective and method advocated here. Hughes' goal is the same: to help worshipers understand worship's inner dynamics. The book consistently moves beyond a more technical look at worship's history and theology in order to get at the meaning rooted in worshipers' actual experience. Readers can use the book to gain insights into how worshipers today talk about their experience of a gracious God through worship. Hughes' bibliography is also helpful for additional Catholic writings in this area.

David Regan's *Experience the Mystery: Pastoral Possibilities for Christian Mystagogy*, also written from a Catholic perspective, will prove useful to those who wish to dig deeper into a theological rationale for creative sacramental preaching. In his book, Regan covers many important theological points that support this kind of preaching. While a Protestant reader will want to be aware of Regan's context for writing his book—a recovery of ancient patterns of evangelism and discipling within the Catholic Church—he nonetheless offers some helpful insights into the why of sacramental preaching.

Enrico Mazza's *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age* is for those wanting even more theology. The book is not as much a theology supporting creative sacramental preaching today as it is a detailed examination of the worship theology of each of the four early preachers found in Edward Yarnold's book *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*. For preachers today, the book is best read to introduce one to the basic types and images that stock the homiletical repertoire of these ancient preachers. The book is also helpful for developing an early-church consciousness about the relationship between God's work before the birth of Christ, during the ministry of Christ, and after the Resurrection. At times Mazza loses the playful character of the early preaching as he pushes the ancient sermons for theological preciseness.

Part 2

Samples of Mystagogical Sermons



In Whom Do You Place Your Trust? Commentary

This sermon, intended for those about to be baptized, shows both a strong narrative structure and an interweaving of several levels of experience. At the level of basic homiletics, the preacher is skillful in the narrative structure. Not only is there a personal story that is easily accessible, drawing the listener in, but this story's plot bolsters the plot of the entire sermon, bringing the listeners to a moment of trust and decision. Notice also the oral quality to the sermon. The story sounds like a story told by a friend. Finally, note how concrete and specific this sermon is in its details. It draws a verbal picture, allowing the listener to visualize the incidents involved.

With respect to preaching on the sacraments, notice how the preacher masterfully weaves together three levels of experience. He begins with his own personal experience, but not in a way that alienates the listener or glorifies the preacher. Through the preacher's boyhood reminiscing, the listener is subtly invited into understanding the ambivalence of feelings when standing on the banks of a major commitment, and yet knowing at the edge of the water that trust is well founded. The preacher then weaves in biblical examples of the same kind of dynamic. Each of these types reinforces the notion of how God often called people to a new level of trusting commitment when they stood at the edge of the water. These examples provide a theological flavoring for the whole sermon. From then on we know that the crucial issue is not just about trusting loving grandparents but about trusting a God who encounters us at the edge of the baptismal waters.

In Whom Do You Place Your Trust?

Baptismal Sermon by Stephen Castleberry

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16-17)

The river was cold and crystalline where it began, running off some snow-capped mountain in the Colorado Rockies. Gurgling over rocks and stones, it was teeming with life—trout to tadpoles.

I remember how hot it was and how my forearm burned against the metal door of the pickup. The breeze coming in from the window, choked with dust, was just cool enough to keep us from succumbing to the July heat.

My grandpa was a man of few words—a wearer of khaki, with big, rough hands and a heart that was steady as a rock. He was a paragon of virtue, not in the sense that he glowed; besides, the halo would have clashed with the ring of sweat that encircled his billed cap. Always there to lend a hand, he avoided any attention or notice for his deeds.

His eyes mirrored the pale blue of a mountain stream and stood in stark contrast against the fire red of his hair. And I never, never saw him say a cross word to any man, woman, child, or dog. He worked from daylight to dark and—like most of those post-Depression, Dust Bowl surviving farmers—he kept a second job, just in case. He was the greatest man I have ever known, and nothing I can say about him could do justice to him and the life he led. He was the hero every boy deserves. As an adult, I know that what I saw wrought with those boulder-sized hands and the kindness that flowed forth from those blue diamond eyes was a fount of Christian goodness. He was a rock to me, and the gospel flowed forth from him to all who cared to draw close.

At five, I never passed up an opportunity to climb into that old International Harvester truck and tag along behind him. And when the combination of summer heat and walking a barbed wire fence line would take its toll and my short little legs would give out, he would scoop me up and carry me back to the truck. He would fill the lid from an old tin water can and pour the icy water over my head. The rivulets of water cut through the dust of the world that hung on my skin; and by the time the water hit the ground, I was refreshed, renewed, and ready to pick up the journey.

But this day, this day was special. I was going to learn to swim, and my grandpa had promised to teach me.

By the time the Red River wound and meandered its way to the farm, it carried the visible signs of the trip. Moving red silt along the Texas-Oklahoma border, the water seemed more mud than river in places. We sat on the bank of the river that day for what seemed like the longest time—that old man and me—both stripped to our skivvies, our modesty guaranteed by a country mile. He squeezed my hand, leveled those blue eyes at me, and asked, “Do you trust me?” My eyes must have been as big as dinner plates. I nodded.

In Genesis, we can read the ancient account of the mighty Nile River moving forward to give life to the fertile valley where the Israelites found both sanctuary and deliverance in the days of the patriarchs. The river sustained them in famine and gently cradled the prophet and deliverer Moses as he skimmed across the placid ribbon of water on his way to safety and his remarkable life. Their river was, in all, God’s strength, God’s redeeming deliverance; and the Israelites were challenged to answer the question plain in the utterance of the ineffable name: Who do you trust? The Israelites would later face that challenge once again as they stood, certainly dumbstruck, as the waters of the Red Sea fissured into a gaping chasm providing the means to traverse from a world of bondage to God’s promise. Who do you trust?

As Jacob tarried to cross the River Jabbok, he was set upon and wrestled the Divine. And at that river he came to be intimately involved with the presence of God and, in the darkness, declared his trust and measure in God when he held fast and exclaimed, “Bless me.”

So, now here you stand, prepared to take on the blessing of God and the holy church, to begin your own salvation history and, in that, to hold fast to Jesus Christ, honor and praise God, and wrestle with the Holy Spirit. Moreover, your journey begins immediately by rejecting spiritual forces of wickedness, accepting the freedom to resist injustice and oppression as evil; but, most importantly, you will be asked, “In whom do you place your trust?”

In that trust you will be making that leap of faith through the chasm of the water and into the arms of God as the rivulets run down your face. And before they touch the ground, you will be refreshed, restored, and ready to resume your journey. It is a matter of trust.

Throughout your life you will find that in whom and in what you place your trust defines you like nothing else. If you place your trust in material gain or money, you could find your heart as empty as your wallet. Likewise,

if you place your trust in the shallow well of your own self, what you draw forth could be stale or bitter.

When you were a child, you were bathed by your parent's loving hand. Your hair made sweet and your skin bright by the cleansing nature of the water's wet and soothing warmth.

Was it the water that divested you of your cares, of your fears, or was it the love that flowed forth from those hands that washed you?

In the Scriptures, we know the countless references to the waters, the rivers, and the seas and their salvific transformations. But as we know, there was nothing transformative in these waters. The waters of Cana that made the finest wine, the waters that washed away the King's disease, the waters that cleaved in two for the Israelites, the waters that bore Moses away from death, the waters that prepared Christ as the pure and precious sacrifice for all humankind—all these waters derived their saving power from the loving hand of God, and nothing else. And so it is with this water, plain and clear, so essentially necessary for life—both temporal and spiritual—which finds its mystery in the cupped palm of God by the invocation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Moreover, the true repository for your faith and trust lies in that hand, that strong hand that parted the sea, that wrestled with Jacob, and where Jesus Christ can always be found.

As Grandpa and I stood together on the bank of that river, I was working to summon up my courage and plan out the strategy to get from the safety of the bank to the heart of the flowing river. I was so immersed in my own speculation that I was shocked to feel the elastic of my shorts cinch up and my feet leave the ground. My world became a carousel and I a Kodak moment. I vaguely remember, in my surprise, invoking the name of the Deity or something as I launched skyward.

My terror was mercifully brief. As I yielded to gravity and the inevitable pull of the warm and waiting arms of the river, I was gently enveloped by the red, sandy water and, cleansed of all dignity, was quickly pushed back to the surface to bob up and down like a cork. In my sputtering and splashing, I made my way back to the riverbank where my grandpa's outstretched hand wrapped around mine and lifted me to the security of high ground. I knew my trust was well founded as at that moment he knew his was also.

We spent the rest of the afternoon splashing in the river and chasing turtles. We got home late after dark and after seeing if we could eat all the ice cream that the Dairy Queen could make. We were in some way more alive than at any other time since. I now know he felt five, and I know that I felt much older than that.

That one afternoon and that trust defined us for the rest of our lives together as this sacrament of baptism will set and form your relationship with our God, Lord, and Savior.

That water, which in your childhood innocence poured forth in love from your parent's hand, cleansed and soothed your body. This water, ultimately brought forth to you from the hand of God and in the Holy Spirit's love, will cleanse and release your soul. At that moment in your dependence and frailty, you will know exactly, as if by instinct, where to place your trust; but not until this moment have you ever been so assured that your trust can last a lifetime.

The Water of Life Commentary

This sermon is an excellent one for renewing baptismal vows. Its most striking quality is the abundance of rich imagery and associations of water. The images can be grouped in three ways:

- natural (conception and birth, amphibians, fish);
- cultural (cooling baths, refreshing swims, economic ability);
- biblical (Creation, Noah's ark, the Red Sea, the Sea of Galilee, Eden, and the Jordan River).

Note how these images play off one another, awakening things in the listener's imagination and experience that reinforce the central notions of the sermon: The baptismal water summarizes much of what it means to live in God; thus, the renewal of our vows is important and appropriate.

This sermon also exemplifies a lyrical quality and avoids heavy didactic pondering. Instead, the sermon dances lightly with each image and association, allowing the weightiness of the sermon to be created by the symphony of these voices, rather than by excessive explanation.

The Water of Life Baptismal Sermon by Kate Heichler

[John the Baptist] proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:7-11)

Let us pray:

“Come!” say the Spirit and the bride.

“Come!” let each hearer reply.

Let the thirsty come;

let whoever wishes accept the water of life as a gift. Amen. (Revelation 22:17)

Sometimes I think we belong in the water:

We begin life and we end it in an airless, sealed, watery place.

We go from womb to tomb, and in between we think we’re alive.

Sometimes I think we belong in the water:

We spend our first nine months of life floating around in
a sac of amniotic fluid.

At first we even have flippers for arms—sort of like fish.

Even our breathing is done for us. We are totally contingent,
totally dependent.

And then we’re born, which looks like freedom;

but it also means we’re fish out of water.

Some people spend their whole life trying to get back
to that warm, enclosed place—

To live in the water.

Do you like a nice, hot bath after a hard day—

Easing yourself into it slowly because it’s just a little too hot;

Letting the water close over your tired feet, your aching muscles;

Letting your back settle in, the water closing over your shoulders,
your neck;

Lying back, enfolded in warm water?

Or are you a shower person, standing for minutes on end in the flow,

Letting it wash over your face, your shoulders and neck?

Or let’s go bigger: Diving into a clear, cool lake on a hot day,

The water smooth and velvety as you extend your arms and legs
through it.

When I am swimming in the ocean, I feel the most freedom of all.

It’s bracing; it’s huge; you can dive down and float on the waves;
it’s vast and refreshing.

Sometimes I think we belong in the water.

You can't get very far from water in the Bible, either. It starts out with it:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.... And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." (Genesis 1:1-2, 6)

The whole universe was water to begin with!

We have the waters of the Flood,

which ended up being a tomb for most of the earth,

except for the remnant that floated on it, womb-like in the ark.

We have the Red Sea, tomb to the Egyptians who drowned in it,

road to rebirth in freedom for the Israelites who escaped right through it.

We have the Sea of Galilee, a lake on which Jesus walked

like it was pavement,

Whose waters Jesus stilled when they were angry,

Whose fish came swimming into nets at Jesus' invitation.

There is the pool at Siloam, where the blind man washed and

received his sight.

The water that Jesus turned to jugs and jugs and jugs of finest wine at Cana.

Then there are rivers, deep and wide, rivers of life,

Rivers watering the garden of Eden,

Rivers flowing out from the altar of the temple.

There are so many waters in the Bible that I don't know where to go.

I want to dip into all of them!

But there's one river calling to us today—and I think that's where

we're going to swim.

The River Jordan is calling our name.

The River Jordan, mighty and wide.

The River Jordan, opened up for Joshua, and Elijah, and Elisha;

and they crossed over.

The River Jordan, gateway into the Promised Land.

The River Jordan, chilly and cold.

The River Jordan, waters of healing for Naaman the leper.

The River Jordan, waters of baptism for our Lord Jesus.

The River Jordan is calling us today, my brothers and sisters.

These days, I hear, the River Jordan is a muddy trickle,
but that's not how I imagine it.

I think in Jesus' time it was a proper river.

John the Baptist was out there baptizing half the population
for the repentance of their sins.

But he himself said this wasn't all they needed.

John said, "I baptize you with water for repentance,
but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me;
I am not worthy to carry his sandals.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

But still, Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by his cousin.
And I wonder what it was like for him that day, to be there,
to be in the water, to be under the water, to come up.

I like to imagine Jesus—that he's hot and tired himself.

He's made his way out here where the crowds are listening to John
and being baptized.

When the time comes, he, too, climbs down the rocks to the river,
and he slides in.

The cool water rises over his tired feet, his aching calves.

He sinks down and gives himself to the cool water, and it feels so good.
And he goes all the way under, feeling his hair lifted up by the water,
floating free.

Then he starts to come up, and at the surface he can see
both under water and in the air.

Then he breaks the surface, and up he comes, clean and cool.

And then he looks up and the sky seems to be splitting, opening up,
and something is falling down on him.

It looks like a dove, but he knows it is the Spirit of God, his own Spirit.

And now he hears the voice from heaven:

"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

In this moment, Christ has prepared the water for us.

Christ has prepared the air for us.

Christ has called down the Spirit for us.

So when we go down into the water in baptism
And we come up, the Spirit is there, descending upon us.
And because Christ died and rose again to redeem us,
because we are united with Christ in baptism,
the Father's voice now rings out for us:
"This is my beloved child; with you I am well pleased."

Now, we don't have any baptisms today,
but we are all going to revisit our baptisms.
We're not going to be rebaptized, because we believe that
once for all does that job for all time.
Once with water and oil and the threefold name of the Trinity,
and it's accomplished.
It's done.

And whether you were sprinkled, toe-dipped, dunked, or half-drowned,
Whether you were a clueless infant or fully aware of what
was happening to you,
you got the whole thing in this sacrament.
You went down and were laid in the watery tomb with Christ.
You got up and were raised to life eternal with Christ.
You were given new life, and you were given an ability to live
in two realities at once:
This world, which is beautiful and painful and passing away,
And the kingdom of God, which is eternal life.

My friends, in baptism we become like amphibians,
able to breathe on land and in the water.
We are called to live in the world, which I think of as the air,
which sustains us for a time by these breaths we take, in and out.
And we are called to live in the kingdom of God, which is like the water,
A place where we are sustained by the very life of the Kingdom,
Breathe the breath of the Kingdom, the way fish breathe underwater.

One of the great saints of the church was Saint Ambrose, who was bishop of Milan in the fourth century. Ambrose gave a series of incredible sermons to the people who had just been baptized, explaining the significance of each part of the ritual and what it means to be baptized. In one of my favorite parts, he talks about how the newly baptized are to be like fish:

Imitate the fish... It is in the sea and above the waves. It is in the sea and swims on the waters. On the sea the tempest rages, violent winds blow; but the fish swims on. It does not drown because it is used to swimming. In the same way, this world is the sea for you. It has various currents, huge waves, fierce storms. You too must be a fish, so that the waves of this world do not drown you.⁵⁰

In baptism we become amphibians, too.

We are given dual citizenship: We are citizens of this world,
where we think we are alive,
And citizens of God's kingdom, where our new life has already begun.

And what is the proof of this citizenship?

It is the Holy Spirit, which is represented in baptism by the oil
with which we are anointed,
when our foreheads are signed and the minister says,
"You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as
Christ's own forever."⁵¹

Paul writes to the Ephesians that in Christ we have been "marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14).

The Spirit is a pledge of our inheritance as saints;
The sealing of the Spirit at baptism is a down payment,
marking us as Christ's own.
The gift of the Spirit is a bank card allowing us to access
our spiritual trust fund,
our share in "his glorious inheritance among the saints,"
our access to "the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe,"
our access to God himself through Jesus Christ.

Now, this new life of the Kingdom is already ours,
always renewed in us by the gift of the Spirit,
Not only at times like today, when we renew our baptismal vows,
but each time we gather together for the Lord's Supper to celebrate
our union with Christ.

But it doesn't stop there: Through us, the Holy Spirit renews
the whole world.

Do you remember the story in Ezekiel about the water flowing down
from the altar, out of the Temple?

And first it was up to the man's ankles, then his knees, then his waist;
and then it was so deep he could swim in it.

And this water from the altar flowed down into the desert, bringing life.

And it flowed into the Dead Sea and made fresh its toxic, stagnant waters.

And it says,

Wherever the river goes,...there will be very many fish, once these
waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live
where the water goes. (Ezekiel 47:9)

This water brings new life wherever it goes.

This water of baptism is still a gift to a dry and thirsty world;

It offers life and refreshment to all who would draw near.

The promise of baptism is this: We follow Christ into the water;

We rise with Christ out of the water;

We experience the Holy Spirit being poured upon us, filling us;

We hear the voice of the Father: "This is my beloved child;
with you I am well pleased."

We enter the new life of the Kingdom, that Kingdom that is already
around us,

and we are given eyes of faith to see it, even now, not in full;

but to see it and rejoice in it and hope for the day when it is come in
fullness, when

God himself will be with [us];
he will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.

(Revelation 21:3-4)

And what does that vision look like, that vision of the new heaven and
the new earth in Revelation, at the end of the story?

Guess what. A river runs through it! Listen:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

(Revelation 22:1-4)

We are going to renew our baptismal vows in a moment.

There's a strong emphasis in the form of baptism on the promises we make.

We call it a covenant, as though it were a transaction between equal parties.

But all of these promises are only possible—they only make sense—in the light of what God has promised us, of what God has already given to us:

His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Redeemer;

His Holy Spirit, to comfort, strengthen, guide, and empower us;

His everlasting Love, which for all eternity proclaims his delight in you, and you, in me, in us.

So, as we recommit ourselves this morning,

I want you to feel the water on your feet, on your head,

The Water that gave you life,

The River that will never run dry. Amen!

The Kiss of Peace Commentary

This sermon illustrates how one might preach on a part of the worship service—the passing of the peace—using the sermons of Cyril of Jerusalem as a guide. Notice that the order of worship is broken into units in order to set the exchange of peace in context and help explain it. Notice also that the way the congregation actually exchanges the peace is rehearsed. Like Cyril’s explanations, the explanation of the peace in this sermon moves from the outward to the inward, the physical to the spiritual, the visible to Christ’s unseen activity. Like Cyril’s preaching, this sermon uses scriptural language both to express ideas and to show how the exchange of peace is a continuation of Christ’s own saving activity for us.

The Kiss of Peace Exchange of Peace Sermon by Craig Satterlee

While [the disciples] were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”
(Luke 24:36-39)

“Peace be with you.” We say it every Sunday. Having prayed to and praised our God, having heard and reflected upon God’s Word, having confessed our faith in the creed and set the agenda for living out our faith in the prayers, I say to you, “The peace of the Lord be with you always.” And you respond, “And also with you.” Then, as I invite you to do each Sunday, we “share a sign of Christ’s peace among us.” For some it’s a kiss, for others an embrace, for still others a handshake. Some of us stay where we are and share the peace with those around us. Others of us get out of our pews and exchange the peace with everyone in church: “Peace be with you.” When I

say to you, “The peace of the Lord be with you always,” and you say to me, “And also with you,” we are asking that Christ’s presence, Christ’s power, Christ’s life, Christ’s love, Christ’s promise will be among us. And then we share Christ’s peace with one another.

This exchange of word and touch is more than a greeting, more than the handshake of hello: “Good morning. How are you?” It’s more than a sign of personal affection, more than a hug: “I love you. You’re my friend.” It’s more than a token of goodwill, the handshake of parting: “Have a good week.” Yes, on the human, outward, visible level, all these things may be going on. But at a deeper level—at the level of faith, the level of worship—what we’re doing when we exchange the peace is sharing the gift of the life, love, presence, power, and promise that is Christ’s resurrection, just as Jesus shared the gift of his peace with the disciples.

Imagine the disciples in our gospel lesson. They betrayed Jesus, denied Jesus, wouldn’t stand by Jesus. They ran away; they showed that they were cowards; and, even when they heard the women’s testimony of an empty tomb, they dismissed it as an idle tale (Luke 24:10-11). And now, Jesus himself stood among them. The last thing they expected to hear from him was a word of peace! No wonder they were startled and terrified. What was going on? Were they seeing a ghost? Or was it really Jesus? And if it was, how would he respond to their performance during his passion and their lack of faith?

How did Jesus respond to his disciples? Jesus said to them, “Peace be with you. Touch me; see that it is I myself.” In the word of peace and the touch that accompanied it, Jesus gave his frightened, flawed, failing followers the life, love, presence, power, and promise of his resurrection. And the disciples knew their Lord. And the disciples were at peace. No surprise when you think about it. After all, bringing the life, love, presence, power, and promise of God’s peace is what Christ is all about.

Yes, bringing peace is what Jesus is all about. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, we find a foretelling of Christ’s coming and a promise of peace. Isaiah writes: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; . . . and his name will be called Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). When the angel announced Jesus’ birth to the shepherds, the angel declared, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God’s people on earth!” (Luke 2:14). In his ministry, when Jesus healed people or forgave their sins, he told them to “go in peace” (Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50). Speaking of Jesus’ cross and resurrection, the apostle Paul tells us that “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). And after the Resurrection, Jesus says to his frightened disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14:27). Like those disciples, we, too, receive the resurrected Christ and are at peace.

And so the epistles of the New Testament tell us to greet one another with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26). For many of us, that kiss has turned into a handshake, but it is nevertheless holy. When we exchange the peace, whether it's a handshake, an embrace, or a kiss, we identify with Christ. We touch and are touched by the resurrected Jesus. We celebrate the victory of his resurrection in our very own flesh. When we receive the peace, we who know ourselves to be frightened, flawed, failing followers are touched by Christ in the flesh of another; and in the words "Peace be with you," we are assured of Christ's life, love, presence, power, and promise. And when we share the peace, when we say, "Peace be with you" and offer our hand or hug or kiss, Christ is in our flesh as we bestow and proclaim the Resurrection to another.

The peace that we receive from Christ, the peace that Christ shares through us, is not a peace that we can always see or understand. For Jesus does not "give [us peace] as the world gives" (John 14:27). Jesus gives us "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Unlike the world's peace, unlike peace that we can see and understand, the peace of Christ does not depend upon our getting along. It exists even among Christians who don't necessarily like one another or agree. It is not destroyed when our lives and our world are not peaceful. In fact, rather than being diminished, it is at these times that the peace of Christ empowers and challenges us to carry Christ in our words and in our touch. The place of the peace in worship makes this point clear.

We exchange the peace after the prayers and before we make our offering and celebrate and receive the Lord's Supper. Following the prayers as it does, the exchange of peace is like the handshake that closes the deal. Remember that the prayers of the people are the agenda for our life of faith. The peace, then, is our seal of approval on the prayers. It is our pledge that in our daily lives we will live out what we have heard in God's Word. It is our guarantee that we will make known, work for, and act upon what we have proclaimed and asked for in the prayers.

And sometimes the first step in working for and acting upon the Resurrection, sometimes the first step to carrying Christ in our words and in our touch, is reconciliation, personally extending the peace of Christ that we have received to those from whom we are estranged or with whom we disagree. Jesus says, "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). When words have been harsh, when feelings have been hurt, when actions have been hostile, when attitudes

have been hateful, the exchange of peace gives us the opportunity to allow the power of Christ's resurrection to lead us to heal and forgive before we receive our Lord in his Supper.

And so the exchange of peace is a sign that we are united in Christ's presence, one in Christ's love, and that together we are committed to living in the promise of his resurrection and bringing that power to the world. More than a greeting, more than a display of affection, more than a token of goodwill, this word and touch are holy. Peace be with you! Amen!

The Ultimate Business Luncheon Commentary

This sermon about the Lord's Supper has been preached several times to a warm reception. It was originally written for a congregation with many business managers in it. It is built upon a central story about Moses and, at first glance, appears to be an exposition of this Scripture. But the sermon does more than that. By using a common cultural image, a business luncheon, the biblical stories are recast as types and the crucial moment of covenant making is highlighted as now. The point becomes not that God's people in the past have had opportunity to commune with God in the act of making covenant but that this crucial opportunity is now ours at this table. The use of the cultural image can help make the biblical stories accessible to contemporary listeners. Obviously, the sermon works best when the audience is one in which this cultural image is understood and is a positive one.

The homiletical structure is provided by the use of the opening hypothetical question: What would it look like if God had a business luncheon? By casting this question as a hypothetical one, the sermon keeps the possibility open that not only might the past events answer this question but our present experience at the Lord's Supper does as well.

Notice that the sermon tends to be instructional in tone, in line with the personality of its author. But the sermon does more than merely explain; it provides a sense of mystery by its invitation to encounter God, just like the biblical types, in our own act of eating and drinking.

This sermon does not, of course, exhaust the meanings of the Lord's Supper, even for its intended audience. It was not preached to be exhaustive. Creative sacramental preaching revels in the surplus of meanings for the sacraments. Some sermons will pile up the meanings within their own bounds, whereas this one presumes that the preacher will explore other meanings for the sacrament in additional sermons.

The Ultimate Business Luncheon

Communion Sermon by Lester Ruth

Then [God] said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship at a distance. Moses alone shall come near the LORD; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.”

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, “See the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

(Exodus 24:1-11)

Hypothetical situation: What kind of event would it be if people were invited to sit down with God, eat a meal, and enter into a lifelong agreement and contract—sort of an ultimate business luncheon? Two parties sitting down, the first making a gracious offer, the second responding, all coming to an acceptable agreement, shaking hands, and then sealing it off with a meal to show the goodwill between the two. Suppose God wanted to have a business meal—what kind of event would that be?

Perhaps it would be like the situation on Mount Sinai described in today’s Scripture lesson. We are all somewhat familiar with the story of Moses on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments on two tablets.

Our lesson tells us about something else that happened up on that mountain at about the same time. First, God tells Moses to come up with Aaron and some of the key representatives from the nation of Israel. But God was careful to warn them not to come too close too quickly. Unless God permits it, it can be very hazardous to approach the presence of the living God. Then Moses comes down and tells all of the people what God had made known to him on the mountain.

Moses does something interesting: He builds an altar, has the people bring animals, and sacrifices the animals. He takes half the blood from those sacrifices and throws it against the altar. The blood covers the whole altar. Then after reading the book of the covenant aloud, Moses throws the other half of the blood among the people while shouting, “See the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you.” Hearing the commands and the law of God, the people respond, not once but twice, that they would be obedient to all that had been commanded.

Moses, Aaron, and the national representatives then climb all the way back up the mountain. This time, however, instead of God instructing them to stay away, he graciously invites them to come close. Oh, and they see God! Oh, and how wonderful the sight is! They view God in all his glory and purity and radiance. And God graciously welcomes them. The last verse in the lesson is short, but it has the most important statement: “They beheld God, and they ate and drank.” They beheld God, and they ate and drank. How interesting!

Could this be God’s business meal?

Moses’ words as he throws the blood on the people gives us the important clue: “See the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you.” The blood of the covenant? Yes, this is, in a way, God’s business meal: God creating a covenant with the nation of Israel. A covenant is somewhat like what we would consider a contract or agreement. However, a covenant goes much deeper than that. A covenant is a mutual agreement by two parties to exclusive commitment and relationship to each other. Perhaps our closest, common, modern example is a marriage. Remember that the wedding service asks the couple if they have “duly considered the holy covenant [they] are about to make.”⁵² Indeed, the idea of covenant between God and Israel is the dominant thought in the Old Testament. The covenant on Mount Sinai sets the pace for the rest of the Old Testament. On one hand, God promises the selection of Israel as the unique people of God, and also promises mercy, faithfulness, love, protection, and blessings. On the other hand, Israel promises gratitude coupled with a sense of obligation, exclusive devotion, worship, and obedience. That this is a covenant service explains some of the (what seems to us) strange

activity. The sacrifice of the animals and the throwing of the blood seal the agreement. They act much like signatures or handshakes. The blood thrown on the altar is the covenant reminder to God. The blood thrown on the people is the covenant reminder to them. But the ultimate seal for this covenant deal is the fellowship meal. How did they know that God would be loving, and that God would have fellowship with them? They sat down and ate a meal: “They beheld God, and they ate and drank.”

What kind of event would it be if God invited people to sit down, eat a meal, and enter into a lifelong agreement and contract with God? It would be like Moses and Israel on Mount Sinai beholding God and eating and drinking.

Or perhaps it would be like a scene 1,200 years later. It is the town of Jerusalem, filled with the hustle and bustle of religious pilgrims who have arrived to celebrate the great yearly religious feast. However, in a small out-of-the-way room, a carpenter from Nazareth sits with a small group of men who have followed him and traveled with him for more than three years. All but the carpenter seem nervous and antsy; the others squirm in their seats. They have been in Jerusalem all week, and the opposition seems to be mounting each day against them and their leader. Their master and teacher should have been more anxious than he seemed. Then as they were eating, the carpenter, Jesus, takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples, saying, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And then he takes a cup, gives thanks, and gives it to those same anxious people, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant.” The disciples ask, “What is Jesus doing?” Then they start nudging one another and asking, “Don’t those words ‘this is my blood of the covenant’ sound familiar? Where have we heard them before?”

Where had they heard them before? Then it comes to them. They echoed the words that Moses had used on Mount Sinai when the original covenant was made: “See the blood of the covenant.” As astonished as they are, there is Jesus making a new covenant with them and presenting the covenant reminders. But where is the covenant reminder for God? Ah, that would be supplied the next day as Jesus hung wounded and dead upon a cross. Where is the covenant reminder for the people? They have the bread and the cup.

Yes, Jesus had done it; he made a new covenant with a people, a new covenant similar to the old but now newly centered and focused upon him, Jesus Christ. One thing had not changed. Just like the Israelites on Mount Sinai, in the making of the covenant, the people beheld God, and they ate and drank.

What kind of event would it be if God invited people to sit down, eat a meal, and enter into a lifelong agreement and contract? Perhaps it would be

like Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai; perhaps it would be like the early disciples eating with Jesus at the Last Supper. Perhaps it would be like today, during this hour, at this table. Here, now, we have our own chance to behold God and to eat and drink. Here, now, we have our own chance to hear God's gracious commitment to us.

Our Communion is a covenant meal, God's covenant meal, if you like. Communion is a time and place, like Mount Sinai and the upper room at the Last Supper, where God and people sit down, make mutual commitments and pledges to one another, use signs to seal that agreement, and then enjoy common fellowship around a meal. Communion is a time and place, like Mount Sinai and the upper room at the Last Supper, where God's people behold God and eat and drink. Our Communion today is a covenant meal: It is a meal where God first makes promises to us and in return we respond. God promises us love through Jesus Christ, new life in Christ, the constant presence of Christ with us, and finally the church, the body of Christ. Listen closely to the prayer. In it we offer praise and thanksgiving; we ask to make a living and holy surrender of ourselves to God; and we desire to faithfully serve Christ in the world. Are you ready to receive God's promises? Are you ready to make your own commitment of thanksgiving, surrender, and service in the world? If so, then you should come to this table. Come ready to behold God and eat and drink.

Our Communion today is a seal to that covenant, a meal where reminders and witnesses to the covenant are provided. We will hear the words spoken by Moses and by Jesus: "See the blood of the covenant." We will see the bread as the body of Christ; we will see the cup as the blood of Christ. We will see and touch and taste, and thus be reminded about this covenant. But what about God? Where are God's covenant reminders? God's covenant reminders are the most awesome. Ever beside God in heaven sits the resurrected Christ, who still bears, even on his glorified body, the wounds he suffered at the cross. Ever before God is the living reminder of God's own crucified Son. The presence in heaven of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is the reminder and witness of the covenant to God.

Our Communion today is a covenant meal, a meal of fellowship. By faith we will come and eat with God. Like Mount Sinai and the upper room, we will behold God and eat and drink.

Hypothetical situation: What kind of event would it be if people were invited to sit down with God, eat a meal, and enter into a lifelong agreement and contract—sort of an ultimate business luncheon? Two parties sitting

down, making mutual offers, coming to an acceptable agreement, shaking hands, and then sealing it off with a meal to show the goodwill between the two. Suppose God wanted to do that—where would God do that? Perhaps Mount Sinai, perhaps the Last Supper in the upper room, perhaps (*preacher walks to the table*) right here and now.

Crumbs Under the Table Commentary

We include this sermon as an example of one that does not appear initially to fulfill the method outlined in this book. Mention of the sacrament does not occur until late in the sermon, for example. It begins with a humorous account of the preacher's dog, in order to introduce the idea of gathering crumbs from beneath a table. The preacher, having established this idea, uses it to make a bridge to the Scripture. The bulk of the sermon is a dramatic first-person retelling of this biblical story. It is in the sermon's ending that it fulfills this book's method. Notice how the preacher weaves the biblical story, her own experience presented in a way to elicit empathy, and the listeners' common experience of a familiar liturgical text to create the way in which the Bible story becomes our own.

Crumbs Under the Table Communion Sermon by Cathy Felber

From there [Jesus] set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

(Mark 7:24-30)

My husband and I owned a dog for fifteen years. His name was Rambo. He was a ferocious—not!—eight-pound, long-haired, *Yo quiero* Taco Bell, Chihuahua.

We used to laugh when we told people that we had taught him two tricks: “Eat, Rambo, eat!” and “Sleep, Rambo, sleep!”

Even when he was old, senile, hard of hearing, and almost blind, he never lost his sense to eat. He couldn’t hear you when you came into the house, but anytime anyone was in the kitchen or the dining room, he was under the table. He especially loved it when our grandson, or nieces and nephew, came to visit. Pickin’s were always better from the floor then.

Rambo loved the floor feast. He was really happy when food accidentally fell on the floor, which was most of the time! And because he was so darn cute—his little eyes watering in hopeful anticipation of the food he might get—he always received extra crumbs that fell from the table, even from the big kids who came to dine with us. Everyone made sure that Rambo had enough to eat. He was always assured he would be feasting at the same time we were.

Who would have thought that this little dog would have ever been used as the opening for a sermon, which I’ve entitled “More Than Just a ‘Crummy’ Children’s Story,” taken from Mark 7:24-30.

Let me set it up for you: Jesus was on his way with his disciples to the region of Tyre, which lies just outside and north of Israel, after having a heated discussion with the scribes and Pharisees about what was clean and unclean. Jesus, in his usual way of making a point even clearer, heads off for this Gentile region in quiet defiance of what would have been properly acceptable for a Jew.

He and his disciples needed a much-deserved rest, but what is about to unfold in the house he is heading to is another divine appointment with someone in need. You see, when Jesus enters people’s lives and their situations, nothing ever stays the same. Listen in as the story unfolds as I tell it from the viewpoint of one of its participants.

“O my sweet daughter, what a night it has been again. You’re finally sleeping, a fitful sleep, though. The twitching of your muscles promising this is just a reprieve from the horror that continues to torment you.

“Oh, your beautiful black hair, matted with sweat that comes from the struggle, the awful twisting and jerking, the contorting of your body.

“How much longer can this go on? How much longer can your body stand the racking fits that this demon puts you through?

“How much longer can I stand to watch as you are tortured day and night with this cruel evil spirit that keeps you captive in its vices?”

“Yes. Who’s there? Oh, hello, Sophia. Yes, it has been another bad night. Yes, she is sleeping, but fitfully. In a few hours I will try to go to the... What? Oh, I’m sorry, you were trying to tell me something?”

“Jesus? You mean the Jewish healer? He is coming here? How do you know, Sophia? When is he coming? Where...where is he staying?”

“What am I doing? I’m going to go see him.

“He has to see me. I’ll beg him to help. I’ll throw myself at his feet and beg him. He has to help. Oh, I hope he can help.”

Can you see this mother running desperately to the house where Jesus had come to stay? He just arrived a few minutes before.

“I have to see him. Let me in, I beg you. He’s my only hope. You must let me see him!”

She pushes her way in with a burst of strength that only frantic hopelessness can muster. A final thrust of desperation, and pleading she falls face down at Jesus’ feet.

“Sir, please, my little girl, my baby, my beautiful daughter...the demon, it tortures her day and night. Please, sir, please help her. I heard you can. She’s so little and she’s so...”

Jesus looks down at his feet and sees her sobbing and begging. And yet he knows his mission is for the children of Israel, Yahweh’s covenant children. He is not yet to be offered to the Gentiles.

And so he says to her, “First let the children be fed until they are full. It’s not right to take the bread from the children and throw it to the dogs.”

She looks up at him. *He’s right*, she says to herself, but, still, she needs him to make an exception. It is her daughter.

“Sir,” she cries. She looks up and sees his eyes, those eyes looking deep into her soul, tired yet tender eyes. “Sir,” she starts again, “even the dogs under the table get to eat the crumbs that fall while the children are eating. The crumbs, sir, I just need the crumbs.”

Those gentle eyes look straight into her own tired, tear-blurred eyes.
She looks and sees...hope!

Jesus speaks, "Because the words that you speak show the faith in your heart, go! The demon has left your daughter."

"He gave me more than crumbs! He gave me more than crumbs!"
she kept repeating as she cried and laughed and ran toward home.

Jesus heard that Syrophoenician woman's plea more than two thousand years ago, giving us a glimpse of the hope for the Gentiles, who soon would be invited to the banquet feast in the kingdom of God. And in Spring 2000, another Gentile woman had a divine appointment with Jesus in another house.

I quickly slipped into my seat in the seminary chapel, front row, center left section, by the aisle where the side door chancel split is. I don't remember what the sermon was about, but it doesn't matter. As a new student at seminary, I just about made it from chapel to chapel. It was here I found refuge, comfort, and strength to refresh my confused and weary soul.

This Thursday morning I was especially troubled and desperate, for the tormentor that plagued the child in my soul was telling me that I didn't belong here; I wasn't smart enough to make it; I didn't deserve to be at seminary.

And then the Communion service began. And those who would be offering the elements marched forward. They seemed like those who belonged, those who knew they were welcomed.

The two students who were serving my section took their position just slightly ahead of the pew where I sat. The ushers directed those in the rows behind me to form a line and to come take a small piece from the shared loaf and dip it into the common cup.

"The body of Christ which was broken for you...the blood of Christ which was shed for you."

One by one they came forward.

"The body of Christ which was broken for you...the blood of Christ which was shed for you."

Each one in their turn feasting from the table.

"The body of Christ which was broken for you...the blood of Christ which was shed for you."

And then I saw them! Why I had never seen them before—on the royal blue carpet, around the servers’ feet—I don’t know.

And the words to the prayer came to mind: “We do not presume to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold mercies.”⁵³

The crumbs, I saw the crumbs.

The liturgy, the Prayer of Humble Access, takes on new meaning: “We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table. But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy.”⁵⁴

Can you see the Gentile woman as she comes back into her home? Quietly walking over to the couch where her little girl lies, . . . watching for a minute, . . . gently touching her daughter’s cheek, . . . the child slowly opening her eyes, smiling, then throwing her arms around her mother’s neck, free from the demon that had plagued her.

Jesus still meets people in the continuity of time and history.

The usher tells me it’s time to get out of my seat. It’s time to come to the table. He gave me, his child, more than crumbs, just as he had given that other woman.

A Short, Multisensory Baptismal Sermon Commentary

The techniques of creative sacramental preaching can be used for shorter presentations, too. The following sermon was inspired by Ambrose, a fourth-century preacher in northern Italy. It uses a series of biblical stories about wood and water to create an association: first, of these two elements being a saving combination and, second, specifically of the cross of Jesus being powerful for us through the waters of baptism.

The sermon adapts the general techniques of creative sacramental preaching in several ways. It uses a question-and-answer format to tell the biblical stories. It uses a refrain in order to highlight the central point. Finally, it is done in a way to be tactile and participatory. This sermon presumes a primary audience of children.

A Short, Multisensory Baptismal Sermon Adapted From Ambrose

Materials needed: wooden cross, clear glass bowl filled with water

Outline

1. Hold up the cross from the altar or other convenient point and lay it down in the center of the circle, long end pointing away from you.
2. Ask, “Does anyone know what this is? (*Let them answer.*) Yes, that’s right, a cross. What happened on the cross? (*Let them answer.*) Jesus died for us. What is the cross made out of? (*Let them answer.*) Wood.”
3. Move the bowl of water from the altar and place it beside the cross. Ask, “And what is this? (*Let them answer.*) Water, that’s right.”
4. Lean forward a little and lower your voice just a bit as if you have a wonderfully important secret. Say, “Now, listen closely. The combination of water and wood is a powerful, mighty combination. Have you heard of Noah? (*Let them answer each question.*) What happened to him? How did he escape the Flood? And what was the ark made out of? By riding on the instrument of wood (*Pick up the cross and turn it ninety degrees*)

-
- over the water (*Act out the movement with the cross as the ark*). There was water and there was wood, and it was a saving combination.”
5. Say, “Have you heard of Moses? What happened when he and all God’s people got trapped by the Red Sea? The Lord told him to hold out his walking stick, and the sea divided. Moses held out the instrument of wood (*Hold the cross above the water*) and the water divided, a wall on the left and a wall on the right (*Use your free hand to make sweeping motions over the water as if you are sweeping the water to the left and then to the right*). And the people walked through the water, saved. There was water and there was wood, and it was a saving combination.”
 6. Say, “Do you know what happened when Moses and the people got to the desert? It was so hot that the people got thirsty. They were almost dying of thirst. And the Lord told Moses to take his stick and strike a certain rock. And do you know what happened? Moses obeyed and hit the rock with the stick (*Hit the water with the cross*), and a stream of wonderful water poured out to save those people. There was water and there was wood, and it was a saving combination.” (*Lay the cross down in its original position next to the water.*)
 7. Say, “And that is what we have when we baptize. There is water. And the preacher takes a handful and puts it on the person (*Take a handful of water*) and says, ‘I baptize you (*Let the water fall through your fingers back into the bowl*) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’”
 8. Say, “And there is wood (*Hold up the cross over the water*). And then the preacher makes the sign of the cross on the head of the person.” (*Do so to yourself with your hand. Invite the children to do the same if it seems appropriate.*)
 9. Say, “That is what we have when we baptize. There is water (*Place your hand on the bowl*) and there is wood (*Hold up the cross*), and it is a saving combination. Wonderful things happen when we experience the wood of Jesus’ cross in the waters of our baptism.”

Contributors

Stephen Castleberry is the Associate Minister of the United Churches of Durham, Connecticut. He holds a B.A. from Hamline University and an M.Div. from Yale Divinity School. Previously, he was a journalist and is currently completing the S.T.M. degree at Yale while pursuing a Th.D. in Liturgics from Boston University. He has one son, Justin.

Cathy Felber is a seminarian at Asbury Theological Seminary. Born in New York City, she has lived for the past twenty-five years in Palm Beach Country, Florida. She worked as a registered nurse for twenty-eight years, including eighteen in hospices. She is also proud to report herself as a wife, mother, and grandmother. She is completing the candidacy process for ordination as an elder in The United Methodist Church.

Kate Heichler is a seminarian at Yale University's Divinity School. Prior to Yale, she was a playwright in New York City. She has a B.F.A. in drama from New York University. She hopes to be ordained in the Episcopal Church. She is a full-time intern at Christ Episcopal Church in Bethany, Connecticut, where she started a contemporary Communion service. Her passions include finding innovative ways to enliven classic worship.

Lester Ruth is Assistant Professor of Worship and Liturgy at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. He comes to that position from Yale University's Divinity School and Institute of Sacred Music. He has served several pastoral appointments in The United Methodist Church's Texas Annual Conference, of which he is a member. He has a doctorate in liturgical studies from the University of Notre Dame.

Craig Satterlee, an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is Axel Jacob and Gerda Maria (Swanson) Carlson Assistant Professor of Homiletics at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. A parish pastor for thirteen years, he served congregations in upstate New York and Michigan. He received his doctorate in liturgy and homiletics from the University of Notre Dame.

Endnotes

- 1 From Hymn 39 in *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (Second American Edition), by J. Ernest Rattenbury, edited by Timothy J. Crouch, OSL; page 170. © 1990 OSL Publications. Used by permission.
- 2 Compare *Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacrament*, by Kathleen Hughes (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999).
- 3 From *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA* (Second Edition), by Edward Yarnold, S.J.; page 158. © 1994 T&T Clark, Ltd. Used by permission of The Liturgical Press.
- 4 From *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA* (Second Edition), by Edward Yarnold, S.J.; page 104. © 1994 T&T Clark, Ltd. Used by permission of The Liturgical Press.
- 5 For more information, see *Introduction to Christian Worship* (Third Edition), by James F. White (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), pages 217–19 and 248–51.
- 6 See *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, by William Harmless, S.J. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), page 367. We draw generally from Harmless' insights in this section.
- 7 See "The Means of Grace," Sermon 16 in *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 1, edited by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), page 381.
- 8 From *Journal*, Ms., 25 January 1789, James Meacham (Durham: Special Collections Library, Duke University Library).
- 9 From *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, edited by J. P. Migne, Volume 54, page 398.
- 10 Paraphrase of Ambrose's sermon as found in Edward Yarnold's book *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA*; page 114. © 1994 T&T Clark, Ltd. Used by permission of The Liturgical Press.
- 11 For a fuller discussion of the early church view, see *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, by Alexander Schmemmann (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), pages 135–51.
- 12 See *The Bible and the Liturgy*, by Jean Daniélou, S.J.; pages 4–5. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956).
- 13 From *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology*, by Andrew Louth; page 120. © 1983 Andrew Louth. Used by permission of Oxford University Press.
- 14 From *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA* (Second Edition), by Edward Yarnold, S.J.; pages 72, 73, and 90. © 1994 T&T Clark, Ltd. Used by permission of The Liturgical Press.

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- 15 See *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA* (Second Edition), by Edward Yarnold, S.J. (Collegetown: The Liturgical Press, 1994), page 102.
 - 16 See *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA* (Second Edition), by Edward Yarnold, S.J. (Collegetown: The Liturgical Press, 1994), pages 157 and 158.
 - 17 See *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA* (Second Edition), by Edward Yarnold, S.J. (Collegetown: The Liturgical Press, 1994), pages 179 and 180.
 - 18 See *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA* (Second Edition), by Edward Yarnold, S.J. (Collegetown: The Liturgical Press, 1994), page 71.
 - 19 See *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA* (Second Edition), by Edward Yarnold, S.J. (Collegetown: The Liturgical Press, 1994), pages 121 and 129.
 - 20 Indeed, the Lenten texts in some recent lectionaries have been selected to reflect on the meanings of baptism. For more information, see *Scripture and Memory: The Ecumenical Hermeneutic of the Three-Year Lectionaries*, by Fritz West (Collegetown: The Liturgical Press, 1997), pages 90–96.
 - 21 See *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, 14, 6, by John Calvin, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, LCC, XXI (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), page 1281.
 - 22 Mennonite: *Welcoming New Christians: A Guide for the Christian Initiation of Adults*, by Jane Hooper Peifer and John Stahl-Wert (Newton, Kansas: Faith & Life Press and Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1995), page 81; United Methodist: *Come to the Waters: Baptism and Our Ministry of Welcoming Seekers and Making Disciples*, by Daniel T. Benedict, Jr. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996), pages 107–8; Lutheran: *Welcome to Christ: A Lutheran Introduction to the Catechumenate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), page 21; Episcopal: *The Catechumenal Process: Adult Initiation & Formation for Christian Life and Ministry* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1990), pages 74–78; Individual Theologians: *Liturgical Evangelism*, by Robert E. Webber (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1986), pages 99–112, and *Journey to Jesus: The Worship, Evangelism, and Nurture Mission of the Church*, by Robert E. Webber (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).
 - 23 From “Post-Baptismal Catechesis,” by Robert Brooks, in *The Baptismal Mystery and the Catechumenate*, edited by Michael W. Merriman; page 144.
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- 24 Adapted from “Recovering Christian Mystagogy for Contemporary Churches,” by Ron Lewinski, in *Before and After Baptism: The Work of Teachers and Catechists*, edited by James A. Wilde; pages 85–86. © 1988 Archdiocese of Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications, 1800 North Hermitage Avenue, Chicago, IL 60622 (800-933-1800). All rights reserved. Used by permission.
- 25 See *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*, by Alan Kreider (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), page xv.
- 26 For an overview, see *A Primer on Postmodernism*, by Stanley J. Grenz (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).
- 27 Reprinted by permission from “A New Reformation: Re-Creating Worship for a Postmodern World,” by Leonard Sweet, Chapter 9 in *Experience God in Worship*; pages 177–82. Published by Group Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 481, Loveland, CO 80539 (www.grouppublishing.com). For more of Sweet’s thinking in this regard, see *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999) and *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).
- 28 From *The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World: Electronic Culture and the Gathered People of God*, by Tex Sample; page 83. © 1998 by Tex Sample. Used by permission of Abingdon Press.
- 29 From *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, by William Harmless, S.J.; page 367. © 1995 by The Order of St. Benedict, Inc. Used by permission of The Liturgical Press.
- 30 Compare *A Primer on Postmodernism*, by Stanley J. Grenz (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), page 44.
- 31 From *Imagining a Sermon*, by Thomas H. Troeger; page 55. © 1990 by Thomas H. Troeger. Used by permission of Abingdon Press.
- 32 See *Theology for Preaching: Authority, Truth, and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos*, by Ronald J. Allen, Barbara Shires Blaisdell, and Scott Black Johnston (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), page 92.
- 33 From *Liturgical Evangelism*, by Robert E. Webber; page 8. © 1986 by Robert E. Webber. Used by permission of Morehouse Publishing.
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- 36 From *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*, by Robert Webber; page 96. © 1999 by Robert Webber. Used by permission of Baker Books.
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- 38 See *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*, by Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), page 105.
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- 41 See *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (Second American Edition), by J. Ernest Rattenbury, edited by Timothy J. Crouch, OSL (Akron: OSL Publications, 1990).
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- 44 See “Creating Space for Baptism and the Renewal of the Baptismal Covenant,” by Lester Ruth and “How to Introduce Baptism by Pouring or Immersion,” by Daniel T. Benedict, Jr., in *Worship Matters: A United Methodist Guide to Worship Work* (Volume II), edited by E. Byron Anderson (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1999), page 93–100 and 134–41.
- 45 See *This is the Night: A Parish Welcomes New Members* video (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992; 800-933-1800 or www.ltp.org).
- 46 See *Come to the Waters: Baptism and Our Ministry of Welcoming Seekers and Making Disciples*, by Daniel T. Benedict, Jr. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996) and *Welcome to Christ: A Lutheran Introduction to the Catechumenate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997).
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- 48 From Hymn 117 in *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (Second American Edition), by J. Ernest Rattenbury, edited by Timothy J. Crouch, OSL; page 189. © 1990 OSL Publications. Used by permission.
- 49 From Hymn 2 in *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (Second American Edition), by J. Ernest Rattenbury, edited by Timothy J. Crouch, OSL; page 161. © 1990 OSL Publications. Used by permission.
- 50 From *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA* (Second Edition), by Edward Yarnold, S.J.; page 121. © 1994 T&T Clark, Ltd. Used by permission of The Liturgical Press.
- 51 From “Baptismal Covenant I,” in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, page 91. © 1976, 1980, 1985, 1989, 1992 The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.
- 52 From “A Service of Christian Marriage II,” in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, page 129. © 1964, 1965 Board of Publication of The Methodist Church, Inc. © 1992 The United Methodist Publishing House; renewal © 1992 UMPH. Used by permission.
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Lester Ruth is Assistant Professor of Worship and Liturgy at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. He comes to that position from Yale University's Divinity School and Institute of Sacred Music. He has served several pastoral appointments in The United Methodist Church's Texas Annual Conference, of which he is a member. He is the author of *Accompanying the Journey: A Handbook for Sponsors* (Discipleship Resources, 1997). He has a doctorate in liturgical studies from the University of Notre Dame.



Craig A. Satterlee, an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is Axel Jacob and Gerda Maria (Swanson) Carlson Assistant Professor of Homiletics at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. As a parish pastor for thirteen years, he served congregations in upstate New York and Michigan. He has a doctorate in liturgy and homiletics from the University of Notre Dame.



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