

Catechetical Evangelism in the Newspaper



by
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DESCRIPTION

Evangelism springs from Luther's Small Catechism into the newspaper. This book shares from the author's experiences in writing religion articles published in his local newspaper. It presents ideas about the Catechism and evangelism, and about newspaper evangelism. It explains an approach to writing catechetical newspaper articles and includes three dozen of the author's published articles as examples of the approach.

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Introduction

This book is about evangelism that springs from Luther's Small Catechism. It is about adapting catechetical evangelism to presentation in newspapers. It shares ideas and experiences from writing religion articles for my local newspaper.

The Community section of my local newspaper, the *Sidney Herald*, Sidney, Montana, includes a Religion page on Sundays. The page carries a column contributed by a group of local columnists. In 2012, the contributors were coordinated by Rev. Dr. Matt Richard, then Pastor of the Sidney Lutheran Brethren Church, and now Pastor of Zion Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Gwinner, North Dakota. Pastor Richard invited me to join the group and contribute columns. Since then I have been trying my hand at newspaper evangelism that proclaims truth from the Catechism.

The following chapters present:

- some of my ideas about the Catechism and evangelism;
- how the Catechism is a source of ideas for newspaper articles; and
- an approach to writing catechetical newspaper articles.

Following that explanation, this book includes three dozen of my published articles as examples of this experiment.

The combination of the materials is offered to assist others who might want to contribute evangelistic articles in their own local newspapers.

No formal training in theology, evangelism, or journalism lies behind what is presented. Instead, this is only the result of an approach tried as an experiment over a few years after having been invited to contribute to the religion column in my local newspaper.

Evangelism and the Small Catechism

Luther's Small Catechism is suited to evangelism. Luther reformed catechisms that had been deformed, and made the Catechism evangelical again.

Martin Luther did not invent the catechism. The word, to catechize, is a Greek verb that described a form of instruction used in ancient schools: *kata* and *echo*, to sound over or repeat again. It denoted a form of oral instruction. The teacher said something, and the children responded: learning by repetition. Paul used the word in Gal. 6:6 to refer to Christian instruction, so that it seemed to become almost a technical word among Christians for how they instructed believers.¹

Reformation of the Catechism

By the late Middle Ages, catechetical instruction was connected to the Sacrament of Penance. Catechisms presented a theology of laws and merits. The order of the material climaxed in what we must do to be saved. "Christian instruction had become the recipe for spiritual uncertainty."² "Luther did more than simply preserve cherished catechetical traditions – he re-formed them, making them evangelical in the process."³

¹ Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Luther's order moves from Law to Gospel to prayer for help. This rejects moralistic legalism, antinomian legalism, and penitential approaches of all stripes.⁴

The pious egotism that searches for correct motives and emotions ... is replaced by a brutally honest assessment of the commandments' demands and a brilliant confession of Christ's victory over sin.⁵

Have I done enough? It is precisely that religion that Martin Luther set out to break in the catechisms. And he did it in one simple stroke. He changed the order. The old order was the order of musts – from creed to commandments to prayer. Here is what you must believe; now that you believe, here's what you must do; now that you feel guilty, here are the right words to pray. The new order was the order of baptism: from death to resurrection; from terror to faith and comfort; from commandments to creed, that is, from law to gospel.⁶

Luther's catechisms are locked in mortal combat with the religion of the old creature – a religion that dominates the American religious scene and makes Luther's approach to Christian instruction look out of date and silly. Lutherans have often fallen off Luther's catechetical horse on one side or the other: Either disturbing the order so that they can make the law and its fulfillment into the real project for the Christian or downplaying Luther's little book to such a degree that students are forced to create their own creeds, engage in service projects, lead worship, and

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

do a thousand other things that, whether the catechists intend it or not, obscure God's grace and mercy in Christ and force the students to rely on themselves.⁷

Our society, including much of the church in America, is trying to tread water in a sea of moralism, legalism, therapy, and antinomianism. The Catechism throws the lifeline onto the waves.

The Catechism is brief. The Catechism is simple. The Catechism is adequate. The Catechism is for both babes in Christ and elders. What an adult needs is the same thing that a child needs. What a child needs is the same thing that an adult needs.

The Catechism offers an up-front Word from God with no bait-and-switch. The Catechism is oriented to Baptism, and it never supplants Baptism with Penance or some other self-help project.

In the Great Commission, Jesus told the apostles to make disciples. He told them to do this by baptizing and teaching. The Catechism is a chief means of teaching that connects with Baptism. It is a chief means of making disciples.

Evangelical Even Where Not Expected

The Catechism always takes an evangelical stance. It does this in ways that might escape notice and where not expected. To illustrate this (not to extensively prove it), consider:

- The reorganization of the Creed
- The explanation of the First Article

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. viii

- The explanation of “Our Father”
- The treatment of the Ten Commandments

The legendary tradition of the early Church divided the Creed into twelve articles. Luther instead presents the Creed in three articles on the basis of the three persons of the Trinity. For purposes of presenting Catechisms, Luther does not delve into speculations about the inner motions and relations within God by the three divine persons. He focuses instead on their outer works of salvation. This is the evangelical focus.

Luther deliberately reorganized the creedal material, without altering the wording, by reducing the twelve articles (corresponding to the twelve apostles) common in the late Middle Ages to the three articles common in the early church. More than a desire for historical accuracy on Luther’s part accounts for this rearrangement. He wanted to concentrate the catechumen’s attention on the saving work of the triune God and further emphasize the *pro nobis* character of God’s work “for us” in all aspects of our life.⁸

Luther’s explanation of the First Article appears to be hopelessly naïve⁹ when considered in the light of knowledge of cosmology, astronomy, and anthropology. Luther invites little children, working middle aged adults, and physically worn out saints on their death beds to believe that their Father in heaven, purely for the sake of his fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, has made them the center of the universe, the center of his creative activity. He invites us to

⁸ Charles P. Arand, “Luther on the Creed,” Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Pastoral Luther*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), p. 148.

⁹ Albrecht Peters, *Commentary on Luther’s Catechisms: Creed*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), pp. 70, 72, 86-87, 95.

believe that first, “God has created me.” First, in his creative work, God gives something to me. He gives me my life.

Then, Luther invites me to believe that God created the rest of creation as gifts to me, to sustain this bodily life. To be assured that God did all this for me is the evangelical view of creation. All that I might think I create or earn, right down to my shoes, God gives me. Everything is a gift from my Father, for all of which I should thank, praise, serve, and obey him.

You might say this is self-centered, but faith centers the heart of the believer on the believer’s heavenly Father and the Father’s giving of himself to the believer through his creative work. True worship is to receive from God the gifts He has announced He wants to give us, and this does not wait until the Second Article. It begins at once, at creation, and in the First Article.

Luther’s explanation of “Our Father who art in heaven,” is a startling surprise. What is prayer? Isn’t prayer us talking to God? Yes, it is, and yet, look at Luther’s explanation.

With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.

The words “Our Father” appear to be words we say to the Father. It appears that we are saying something to God. But Luther turns them around, evangelically, as words of salvation God speaks to us. God gave us these words to pray, so, firstly, He said them to us. True enough, we pray them, and we speak them to God. But the catechized believer knows that he is repeating back to God his promise. The Father promises to you that He is and will be your Father, and then you say those words to your Father because you believe them.

Even in the Ten Commandments, while Luther explains that each commandment means that we must fear God, he also includes love and trust. The Law commands love, but gives no power to love, so the Law alone would strike dread and despair. Certainly trust would be beyond hope, except that we already are anticipating the Gospel. This is a presentation of the Law that leads to Christ. Learn these words, “fear, love, and trust.” Meditate about why Luther chose them. These words make all of the commandment parts of the First Commandment, and these words lead to the Gospel.

Throbbing with Genius; Ready to Give an Answer

Peter says, “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.” (1 Peter 3:15) Jesus says, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34) The Catechism is little enough, vital enough, and assuring enough to become abundant in your heart. The Catechism can fill the heart of evangelism.

To be a witness for Christ does not require learning something more or different from what you learned to be a Christian confirmed in your baptismal faith. When opportunity to be Christ’s witness arises, simply think catechetically. As you listen to your relative, neighbor, friend, or coworker, think to yourself, what part of the Catechism touches this? Then bring forth that part. The Catechism is small enough and simple enough for this.

At every turn, the Catechism is throbbing with evangelical genius, already all worked out for you, and distilled into a couple dozen pamphlet-sized pages.

Newspaper Evangelism

Here are some of the ideas I have used to in newspaper evangelism.

Fountain of Ideas

Writers who are required to produce on a schedule commonly say that they run out of ideas. This is not a problem for us, because we have Luther's Catechism.

Take just the second chief part of Christian doctrine, the Creed, for example. Here is the marvelous topic of the Trinity, which is essential to salvation, and which generates a host of article ideas.

Here is the person and work of Christ. The Second Article identifies his person and then traces his state of humiliation and his state of exaltation. Through these, the person and work of Christ are evangelized.

Christ's state of humiliation has five steps that the Creed confesses, and his state of exaltation has five steps that the Creed confesses. So his person, his humiliation, and his exaltation provide ideas for at least 11 articles if you write only one article about each of those things.

Have Something to Say

Before starting to write an article, focus on a single, propositional statement of catechetical Christian truth that you want to proclaim. You don't have to stare into space trying to imagine such a statement. Simply keep several explanations of the Catechism on hand. Look through their statements on,

say, Christ's birth in poverty. The Catechism will provide you with the focus statement. (Concrete examples are discussed under "Inspiration and Perspiration.")

The Catechism also will provide you with Scriptures to use in proclaiming the focus statement. By no means are you confined to using the Scriptures that explanations of the Catechism use, but thanks to the explanations, you never will be at a loss for Scriptures directly on the point of your chosen focus statement. By all means, from your own knowledge of Scripture, bring in what seem to be the best Scriptures for your focus statement.

When you have the focus statement and the Scriptures related to it, they drive the creation of the article. Typically, the Scriptures become the climax in the rising action of the article. Everything moves in the direction of the Scriptures.

Welcome Your New Friend: the Word Limit

When I first became a columnist for the *Sidney Herald*, Pr. Richard instructed me that the column has a word limit of 500 words. That was not an easy limit. I would write an article, like it, but then suffer because the article was too long. It pained me to think about cutting out parts of the article. But it was a requirement, so like it or not, I had to do it.

Before long, though, it came to light that the word limit is my friend.

The limit forced me to make decisions about what to cut. While doing this, remember the earlier admonition, "Have Something To Say." What is your single, simple, focus statement that you are trying to proclaim? That statement is the scalpel that cuts away the cancer from your first draft.

In the process of editing, lay that focus statement beside each paragraph, and then beside each sentence. I discovered that many of my sentences and even whole paragraphs really did not advance toward the focus statement, or, even if they did, another paragraph already had made the same point sufficiently.

Sometimes a paragraph you cut out has good stuff. Fine. The word limit is not burying that paragraph forever. There you have the start of another article, and thus the word limit helps with the chronic writer's problem of running out of ideas for articles. Editing revealed that you actually had two articles started when you composed the first draft.

The word limit is your friend in another way. You are writing not to be paid, but to proclaim the Gospel. That does not happen if people don't read your article. The word limit helps attract people to read your article. The limited article looks less burdensome to read.

Over the course of time, the word limit in the *Sidney Herald* was relaxed to 800 words. Some of the articles I saw were so long that, in newspaper format, at a glance, they seemed dense. I did relax from 500 words to about 625 words for a couple articles. On my 8.5 x 11 inch paper, the articles still seemed good. But when I saw them in the newspaper, they seemed a little dense. Aha, the word limit is my friend, so I went back to 500 words even though the newspaper would accept 800.

Wisdom Cries Out in the Street

Where are you? Where are you proclaiming the Gospel? You are in the newspaper. You are in the market. You are in the street. Consider what this means for how you write.

Wisdom cries aloud in the street,
in the markets she raises her voice;
at the head of the noisy streets she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

Because I have called and you refused to listen,
have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded,
because you have ignored all my counsel
and would have none of my reproof.

(Proverbs 1:20-21, 24-25)

Wisdom cries aloud in the street, raising her voice over the noise, and does not get an audience. We face this problem: lack of attention.

During his time at the United States Military Academy at West Point, they taught my older brother, Richard, how to train and instruct soldiers. They taught that the first step in training and instruction is the attention-getting step. Even in a context where people show up to learn, they don't pay attention unless you perform the attention getting step. How much more this is so in the newspaper, given that few people purposely go to the newspaper for religion.

A story is told of Clarence Darrow defending someone on the charge of murder. The defendant was accused of stabbing a man to death by a tree in the night. It was a brightly moonlit night, and an eye witness saw the crime. As the prosecution was approaching that part of its case where the eye witness would be called to the stand, Darrow ran a wire through the center of a cigar and lit up. When the eye witness reached the point in his testimony when he described seeing the defendant stab the victim, not one of the 12 jurors heard the witness say it, because they were all distracted by more than four inches of ash that would not break off and fall from the cigar. The jury

acquitted. Proof of the crime was in their ears, but they did not hear it, for lack of attention.

But, we can use cigar ash and other curiosities that might *distract to attract*.

Write your article with a view to achieving the first step, the attention-getting step. This happens most especially in the title, and then in the first sentence or two. The title might get the reader to stop turning newspaper pages and read your first sentence. At that point, the reader is just sampling, tasting to see if he wants to read any further. Whether the reader go on from the first sentence depends on what attention that sentence maintains or interest it develops.

If you get a reader through the second sentence, and your article exploits the word limit so that graphically it does not appear to be dense, you have a very good chance the person will read the whole article. This has been my experience.

Notice I said title, not headline. This is evangelism, not journalism. Newspaper editors are taught that the function of the headline is to digest the article to the extent possible in the space of a headline. That is not the function of a title in evangelism, and a headline might actually repel attention from your article. Curiosity is what turned Moses aside to the bush. Curiosity is ruined by a headline digest because it answers the question before a person even reads the article.

“Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.’” (Exodus 3:3) Give your audience something to turn aside to see. Often this can be done by using the form of asking a question. It can be done by an unexpected assertion. For example:

Who goes with you into surgery?

Why was Jesus dead only until the third day?
Who should judge a talent contest, or your whole life?
Talking about the black sheep of the family
Jesus' senior picture was not in the newspaper
The Spruce Goose and the bodily resurrection of Jesus

Interest and Illustration

The first parts of most of my articles have sought to maintain interest after the title got attention. Interest can be maintained in a variety of ways. Often I use personal experiences, local events, current affairs, historical events, and the common experience of people in my community, such as farm life. They are selected for their interest, but also for their ability to illustrate something that will connect to the focus statement of Christian truth that the article is aiming to proclaim.

The example articles reprinted in this book demonstrate this. For purposes of this introduction, I will explain one instance.

In a particular article, I wanted to show why the Trinity is indispensable to our salvation. The Trinity is indispensable for our salvation for multiple reasons. One reason is that, only with the Trinity is sacrifice for sin even possible

Now, let's face it, if you lead with that in a newspaper, not many will get past the first sentence. So we lead with a story about a noted local experience showing how, at first, a subject was of little interest, but then became of great and personal interest. I was able to accomplish this by taking advantage of an overwhelming local weather situation that everyone knew about and everyone was concerned with.

Last year at our farm at Wildrose, we reached the peak in a long period of historically high precipitation. Sloughs ran over. Fields were saturated. Few crops were planted. By July, nearly all my neighbors were talking about seepage into their basements. They were going on about their sump pumps.

My basement didn't have seepage yet. While I was sympathetic about my neighbors' problems, I was not interested in the solution. Sure, I was vaguely curious how one could put something electric in water without electrocution or fire, but I was not interested in how sump pumps work.

Then it happened. Water started seeping into our basement. It welled up from deep within the house. If not stopped, it would flood the floor and rise. It would make the foundation crack and settle. It would ruin everything with rot and mold.

Once I had the problem and knew I was in trouble, I wanted to know more about it and the solution.

It is like that with sin and salvation. As long as sin is only our neighbor's problem, we have less interest in the problem and the solution. Once we have the problem and know we are in trouble, we want to know more about sin and its solution, the sacrifice of Christ. Just as questions about how a sump pump works become vital when our own basement is flooding, so questions about how sacrifice works become vital when our own soul is seeping from within, flooding, cracking, settling, rotting, and molding.

Inspiration and Perspiration

You don't have to write articles the same way I do. Your method of getting attention does not have to be a "burning bush" title like mine. Your method of illustration and interest does not have to be like mine. Whatever methods we use, however, we all must get attention and maintain interest.

For what good it might do, I can tell the steps that lead me to titles, illustrations, and interest material. I can tell you my theory of why it works for me.

Perspiration —work — prepares me to recognize things that could become illustrations.

That is the problem we are trying to overcome, failure to recognize things that could become illustrations, even when those things are right in front of us. Many times the problem is not that we did not come across an illustration. The problem is that, while looking at something useable, we did not recognize the correspondence between what we were seeing and the thrust of our article.

Inspiration is nice, but we don't absolutely need it. Recognition is plenty good, and we can work toward recognition. Here is the work method that does it for me, cast into prescriptive steps that I began to follow purposely.

Type your focus statement at the top of a page. Below that, assemble a generous pile of Scriptures that teach or contribute to teaching the truth expressed in the focus statement. Using Bible software or online Bibles is great for this, by copy-and-paste. You might have Bible verses for three or four pages.

Read those Scriptures. Stop to think about them. Compare them to one another. Compare them to the focus statement. Read them again tomorrow.

You might experience an urge, as I do, to reshuffle the Scriptures, bringing to the top the ones that most directly and simply teach your focus statement.

When your heart is full of the truth you are trying to illustrate, then you can find an illustration. The Word of God is living and active. It does not return void. The Word does stuff. Finding an illustration just means recognizing the correspondence between two things, one that you want to say, and another that could help you say it, illustrate it, or bring interest to it. The Word gives the capacity of recognition.

In my experience of writing newspaper articles, saturation with a truth of the Gospel — God’s Word in God’s words — puts the mind on the hunt. Then when we come across something possibly useful, recognition alerts on it like a hunting dog.

Recognition sets at various times and places. It sets in during conversation, when the news is on the radio, when you look through a magazine in a waiting room, in the shower, during windshield time, at the movies, from the oldies station, at work, while paying bills, while looking through family photos, or while watching a documentary.

Sometimes it takes weeks to come across something useful for a given article. There is a way to speed things up. Work on several at the same time.

Find the focus statements for three or four articles and start studying them all. That provides you three or four things that you could recognize as you go about everything else you are

normally doing. The first illustration you recognize might be for the second, third, or fourth focus statement. If you had not bunched some statements together, you might walk right past an illustration and never even see it because you had not yet put your mind on the hunt for that bird.

We can illustrate this with one of the five steps of Christ's state of exaltation in the Second Article, the resurrection. The explanations of the Catechism teach us that we have at least these four benefits from Christ's resurrection.

Christ's resurrection assures me that He is the son of God.

Christ's resurrection assures me that He has paid fully for all my sins.

Christ's resurrection assures me that his teaching is true.

Christ's resurrection assures me that my body shall be raised in glory.

You might be having a dry spell in trying to find illustrations for the first and second statement, but look at the third one. Christ's resurrection assures me that his teaching is true.

Because of your study and meditation, the situation becomes more alive. Jesus had been teaching about the resurrection. Jesus called himself the resurrection and the life. When he raised Lazarus, that's when the leaders irreversibly plotted to kill him.(John 11:45-57). In his trials, Christ's accusers made a big point about his teaching being false because He said, destroy this Temple, and I will raise it in three days. (Mark 14:58)

You start to think, if Jesus' body did not rise from the ground, it would look like He had no idea what He was talking about. So long as his body was grounded, his teaching looked false.

While you are in these studies, you see the film *The Aviator*, where Howard Hughes says the Spruce Goose can rise from the water. People think he is crazy. He sounds like he does not know what he is talking about. He seems to be wrong about aeronautics — and it hits you — wrong the way Jesus was wrong about resurrection. Recognition sets in, but only because your mind is full of the thing you want to illustrate. This happened to me, and out rolled an article, “The Spruce Goose and the bodily resurrection of Jesus.”

During World War II, Henry Kaiser, steel magnate and shipbuilder, conceived the idea of a massive flying transport. He turned to Howard Hughes to design and build it. It was 6 times larger than any aircraft of its time. Beyond its size, creating this airplane was challenging because of government restrictions on war materials like steel and aluminum.

Hughes designed this “Flying Boat” entirely in wood. Hardly anyone thought it could rise from the water. Hughes did not seem to know what he was talking about. His ideas of aeronautics seemed wrong.

The plane originally was designated the HK-1 for Hughes-Kaiser, but even Kaiser withdrew from the project. The plane was re-designated the H-4. But the press insisted on calling it the “Spruce Goose,” despite its being made almost entirely of birch. It was their way to ridicule an idea that would not get off the water.

But on November 2, 1947, during a taxi test, Hughes made an unannounced decision to fly. With a co-pilot, several engineers, crewmen and journalists on

board, the Spruce Goose rose from the water and flew.

Jesus had his own Spruce Goose. It was his flogged, crucified, and dead body. He said it would rise from the grave, and people thought he was crazy or demon possessed.

In one of the four trials of Jesus, “Some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, ‘We heard Him say, “I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.’” (Mark 14:58) He had not said, “made with hands.” He had said simply, “this temple,” about the temple of his body. He meant that after his crucifixion, death, and burial, on the third day he would rise in his body from the grave.

Jesus said publicly that He “must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly.” (Mark 8:31)

John tells us the value of this rising of Jesus in his body from the grave. “When He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.” (John 2:19-22).

Because of the resurrection, they believed what Jesus had said. His bodily resurrection showed that He knew what He was talking about. As Hughes knew something about aeronautics, Jesus knows something about resurrection. Christ’s resurrection assures us that his teaching is true.

The teaching is what Jesus told Martha. “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” (John 11:25) The Apostles “preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” (Acts 4:1) The Church still preaches today that by faith in Christ, our sins may be forgiven and our bodies may rise from our graves to eternal life and blessedness.

Confessional Fidelity

Having spoken about adapting catechetical evangelism to the newspaper medium and the newspaper audience, we must caution about the dangers of this. As we work on an article, we tend to oscillate between two poles: the focus statement of a Christian truth, and adapting our mode of communication to the audience. I am convinced that the adaption can be good, but mindful that if we oscillate too far in that direction, the medium actually can change the message.

Bear in mind that the adaptation feature of your writing is a servant in the service of a master. The true, confessional, focused proposition of the article is the master, and adaptation must serve that master, or it becomes a usurper.

The adaptation serves the message by gaining attention to the article. The adaptation serves the message by maintaining attention to the article. The adaptation serves the message by illustrating the message. It is helpful to go this far with adaptation, but going further risks that adaptation might become a substitute for message. Overly adapted writing ends up only telling an unregenerate reader what that reader already thought. It leaves him in his carnal, unregenerate, lost thoughts.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. It is essential always to use Scriptural quotations with book, chapter, and verse references in every article. Some of the best articles are the ones that use the most Scripture.

It is not always easy under the press of writing deadlines to arrange an article to use many Scriptures, and still adapt the article enough to attract readership or to flow smoothly. Yet, even with a 500 word limit, it is surprising how many times a smooth flowing article can use six, seven, and eight Scripture quotations.

Never forget, all the rest of the article only served the purpose of bringing your reader to these Scriptures. Nothing else in your article is going to do anything evangelical for your readers besides bringing them to the Word of God, and by this I mean God's Word in his own words, not ours.

You are imitating Philip. "Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'" (John 1:46) The adaptive features of your article are only a means to bring Nathanael to see the Word, Christ. The hearing of the Word is the sole means the Spirit promises to use in his evangelical work. (He promises to use Baptism and Communion too, but that can't happen in a newspaper.) Your article merely arrests people in the noise of the city to be addressed by the Spirit through the Word.

In the example articles reprinted in this book, my own success at maintaining a proper location between the polls of adaptation and message varies. Take some encouragement from these two things: none of us can make every article as good as our best ones; and your weaker articles at least keep you writing, which leads to more, better articles. To write

Gospel proclamation conscious of your flaws is not so bad and is worth doing.

For Lutherans, a key part of confessional fidelity is Law and Gospel. Every article should have Law. Every article should confess the verdict of the Law that we are sinners. Every article should have Gospel. Every article should proclaim Christ as Savior from sin. The Law never should be softened, but in every article, the Gospel should predominate.

Along with that, every article should proclaim Christ, not the Christian. This is evangelistic — and evangelical — writing. We are not trying to tell people how to be better people, even though when people receive faith, then good works do follow. We are not trying to tell those who already are Christians how to be better Christians. We are proclaiming over and again one same thing, sin and salvation, Law and Gospel, and Christ the savior of the world.

The necessity of confessional fidelity is one of the reasons evangelism should be catechetical. We need the Catechism to keep us on our mission. Loss of message is loss of mission. The Catechism is able to make our part in mission Christian.

Who volunteers for humiliation?

At Landsberg, Germany, as the U.S. Army occupies and loots the defeated German town, Capt. Lewis Nixon carries on his quest for Vat 69, a Scotch blended whiskey. He has become a drunk, but will drink only the best. He finds a house that looks rich enough to have some. Inside, the home is well appointed. He sees a framed photograph of a high-ranking officer, looks at it, and drops it. The officer's wife appears behind him. She looks at the broken glass, then at Nixon. She glares at him defiantly.

Outside Landsberg, the army liberates a concentration camp of wasting survivors and corpses. Local civilians deny knowing anything about it. Gen. Maxwell Taylor orders them, ages 14 to 80, to clean it up and bury the dead.

Nixon sees charred corpses carried one by one. He sees the same woman, finely dressed, doubled over, trying to drag a dead body from a pile. She meets his gaze, still with an air of defiance, the arrogant kind that festers into impotent rage.

When an exalted person is forcibly brought low, that is humiliation, but the person is not necessarily humble. He is humiliated by force, not by his own humility. Nixon saw that in the woman of rank.

Although Jesus came from heaven and ranks with the Father and the Holy Spirit, He was humiliated in five stages: birth in poverty, life of suffering, crucifixion, death, and burial. But Jesus is different from the officer's wife because his humiliation was voluntary. His own humility brought on his humiliation. No one forced it on him. "He humbled himself by

becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Ephesians 2:8)

Jesus knew He was going to be humiliated. “He began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, “They will ... mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him.” (Mark 10:32-34)

When Jesus was arrested, “One of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place. ... Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled?’” (Matthew 26:51-54)

Laying aside twelve legions, Jesus volunteered. He said, “I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” (John 10:17-18)

When Jesus spoke that way, “Many of them said, ‘He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?’” (John 10:20) With them, we are tempted to think we are above needing him to humiliate himself for us. The Holy Spirit calls us to contrition and faith. He calls us to see the enormity of sin, and the humble power of Jesus to save.

The silver spoon Jesus left in a drawer

Before 1700, common folk had wooden spoons. Well off people had silver. The saying, "He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth," views a high-born person as knowing nothing about the struggles of life.

As the Son of God, Jesus has a silver spoon, his divine powers. But He was born under the law and usually left his silver spoon in a drawer.

Paul says, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law." (Galatians 4:4-5) The church teaches that his life under the law was part of Christ's suffering and humiliation.

Scoffers say, "Man is born under the law. Jesus was a man. It's no big deal that he should be under the law like the rest of us. How can you say this was suffering and humiliation?"

Believers also have difficulty understanding Jesus' life under the law. We know Jesus is both God and man. We are prone to thinking it was easy for him to obey from his divine powers.

Jesus always had divine powers. We see them break forth at times, as when He fed thousands, raised Lazarus from the dead, cleansed lepers, and cast out demons.

Usually, however, Jesus voluntarily laid aside his divine powers and did not use them. While He could walk on water, he usually used a boat. While He could turn water into wine and multiply loaves and fishes, He usually used food and drink that were furnished naturally.

As Mediator, Jesus came “to redeem those who were under the law.” To mediate, Jesus needed to be under the law in the same way as those He would redeem were under it: as humans. So, in matters of temptation and obeying the law, Jesus “humbled Himself and became obedient.” (Philippians 2:8) While still having full divine powers, He voluntarily did not use them. He fought temptation under the law only by human power.

Jesus fought from weakness, in his humanity. He had to watch. He had to pray. He had to defeat the Devil and the world every moment. We face temptation for a little while, and then give in. Jesus suffered all the way, and He suffered using only humble power.

Beyond that, He suffered what we never do. He was tempted right at the point of his humility. He was tempted to quit using only his human powers. He was tempted to pick up and use his divine powers to save his holiness, to show his divine glory. He had an easy way out. He could have quit his office as Mediator. He could have abandoned us in our sin. He stuck with the hard way, all the way. He humbled himself for us, and kept humbling himself, to the bitter end that gives us a new beginning.

So, let us not scoff or be confused, but believe and adore him, and receive the redemption He earned for us through his innocent, humiliated, suffering life.

Jesus is the real nowhere man

The Beatles sang:

He's a real nowhere man
Sitting in his nowhere land
Making all his nowhere plans
For nobody

They weren't singing about Jesus, but if we leave aside for a moment what we know about him because of faith, their words make a picture of his life. Jesus looked like the real nowhere man from a real nowhere land. He came to earth because of what looked like his nowhere plans. His plans were for nobodies, like us.

Jesus was born in a barn. Mary wrapped him in strips of cloth, not regular clothes. When Jesus' parents appeared for Mary's purification in the Temple, they offered a pair of turtledoves, the usual offering of the poor who could not afford a lamb.

King Herod knew Jesus was born in Bethlehem. That was walking distance from Herod's palace. Herod had a chariot. He didn't visit. Jesus was beneath him. The only ones who visited were poor shepherds and a handful of foreigners.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, population no more than 480. Nazareth was mentioned nowhere in the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, by Josephus (the noted ancient Jewish historian), or in the Talmud (a central text of mainstream Judaism).

Nazareth had a no-account and evil reputation. When Philip told Nathanael that the disciples had found Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

The region around Nazareth was Galilee. The Jews wouldn't even claim it as their own. They called it "Galilee of the Gentiles" or "Galilee of the Nations."

Jesus warned a scribe who wanted to follow him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." When Jesus was challenged to pay the Temple tax, he did not have a shekel. When he died, he had no will, no burial plot, no tomb. He could not provide for his mother. From the cross he put her into the care of John.

This nowhere man came to earth because of his nowhere plan to save nobodies from their sin. He planned to go to the cross, the place of shame, guilt, weakness, foolishness, and condemnation, which is to say, into our place, into our nowhere land of sin.

When the Canaanite woman, who was not among the children of Israel, wanted Jesus to deliver her daughter from a demon, He said, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Kneeling, she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." She made herself a nobody, a dog. She called Jesus her master. She believed He would give her what she needed. Jesus called that faith and delivered her daughter immediately.

By faith, the Nowhere Man delivers nobodies from the nowhere land of sin into the Kingdom of Heaven, the forgiveness of sin, and righteousness before the Father. "Though He was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." (2 Cor. 8:9)

The saddest face I ever attempted to paint

Artist Francis B. Carpenter said Abraham Lincoln had “the saddest face I ever attempted to paint.” His law partner said Lincoln’s “melancholy dripped from him as he walked.” His life was an unceasing litany of sorrows, tragedies, and dangers leading to the Civil War. With many assassination threats, finally he was shot on Good Friday, 1865.

Jesus died on Good Friday. He too was a man of sorrows. His life was constant suffering, opposition, and threats.

Jesus would “suffer many things and be treated with contempt?” (Mark 9:12) People said He was a sinner, glutton, drunkard, blasphemer, was insane, and had a demon.

In his home town, people ridiculed Jesus for his family’s low station. Authorities ridiculed him for lacking education. A Samaritan village refused him lodging. The Gadarenes begged him to leave their region. “Not even his brothers believed in him.” (John 7:5) His own family “went out to seize him ... saying, ‘He is out of his mind.’” (Mark 3:20-21)

During infancy, King Herod tried to kill him. In his home town, “They rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.” (Luke 4:29) Crowds picked up stones to kill him. (John 8:59; 10:31) After a trip to Judea, he “would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him.” (John 7:1)

The Pharisees conspired how to destroy him. (Matthew 12:14; Mark 3:6) When he healed a man with a withered hand, the scribes and Pharisees “were filled with fury and discussed

with one another what they might do to Jesus.” (Luke 6:11)
“The scribes and the chief priests sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.” (Luke 20:19-20)

A crowd cried crucify Jesus and give us Barabbas. That name says two things about the rejection of Jesus. “Bar” means “son of,” and “abbas” means either “his father” or “the father.” Translating it as “son of his father,” what man is not the son of his father? That name signifies the most generic man, to say “Give us anybody but Jesus.”

Translating it as, “son of the father,” once more, the Trinity is at the center. “This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because ... he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” (John 5:18) They hated Jesus for revealing the truth of the Trinity, the truth that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, though three persons, are one God and equally divine. To choose Barabbas as “son of the father” is to reject Jesus as Son of the Father and to reject the Trinity.

The saddest face is the Savior’s, when people refuse the forgiveness of sins that is offered to them through the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Who goes with you into surgery?

One of my vain ideas was to reach 60 without being an inpatient of a hospital. Didn't work. Two Januaries in a row, I was hospitalized. I was a suffering puppy, though still nothing like many around me. My condition meant many trips to Billings this past year for surgeries.

It's amazing how nurses and doctors, besides providing medical treatment, comfort their patients. As great as they are, I hope none of them will take offense when I say, they can't hold a candle to Marilyn, my wife. She is my companion in suffering. She goes with me everywhere I hurt. She is there in every emergency room, every surgery room, every hospital room, and in my heart.

Probably more than anything else, suffering causes us to doubt or question God. Why must people suffer, especially those we consider to be good people. We want answers. In my medical sufferings, Marilyn gave me a lively experience of the truth that there is something better than an answer: a companion.

You can't hold hands with an answer. You can't share a pillow with an explanation. Reasons don't shed tears with you.

But Jesus sheds tears with you. Yes, He does. In that He has suffered, He knows you in your suffering. Jesus defines sympathy and companionship. Jesus suffered continually in body, mind, and soul. He said, "I am with you always." (Matthew 28:20)

As bad as most sufferings are, worse is the suffering of temptation. As unfair as sickness is, our being sinners from conception forward seems more unfair. We have inherited sin

from Adam. This inherited sin nature, to say nothing of our particular sins, brings defeat, guilt, condemnation, the wrath of God, and his threats to punish sin. Death is no escape, because eternal hell follows. I'll admit it. I have questions.

But, what is true of other sufferings also is true of the suffering of temptation. Better than an answer is a companion. Jesus suffered from relentless and fierce temptation. In that He suffered temptation, He knows you in your temptations. He is able to save you, and a Savior is better than an explanation.

“We do not have [in Jesus] a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

(Hebrews 4:15-16) “He had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”
(Hebrews 2:17-18)

The question of suffering is answered in the sufferings and sympathy of Christ. Jesus goes with us in all sufferings, even into the surgery of temptation.

One word in absolute darkness

With the oil boom, it seldom is dark anymore at our farm. There is usually some light from gas flares. It's not like the experience of darkness we used to have in the field when walking back to a truck or the yard. On nights with no moonlight, the going could get tough. One night the sky was overcast and a fog rolled in. My eyes were little help, but the lay of the field through the soles of my boots gave enough sense of where I was to make it back.

Blacker still was the night I learned that the wife of someone close to me was going to divorce him. The suffering coming on him gripped me. I was trapped for some hours staring into a bottomless pit of darkness that both pressed in and fled away at the same time. It was the menacing horror of being forsaken.

Much of Christ's suffering on the cross was in daylight. People saw what was visible to the human eye. But then, there was an eclipse of the sun, and it got dark. "From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour." (Mathew 27:45; Mark 15:33) During those hours, the sufferings of Christ were out of sight. They were invisible transactions within the Trinity. It is impossible to look into them.

But, in the darkness, the word of God was spoken. Near the end of those hours, when it was about the ninth hour, Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1, crying, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me." (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34) R.C.H. Lenski says, "The darkness and the agonized cry of Jesus go together." Darkness and forsakenness.

Because of the Trinity, because the words Father and Son are not just two titles for one person, Christ's cry of forsakenness is not just negative psychological self-talk. It is not a cry of self-alienation. This is the Father, who praised his Son when He was baptized, and who praised him on the Mount of Transfiguration, forsaking him. The Only Begotten Son of God, who had always been in the bosom of his Father (John 1:18), is deserted in darkness.

The Father did not forsake him because of any loss of faith. Jesus still called his Father, "My God." Not long after that He said, "Into your hands I commit my spirit." These are words of faith, just as in Psalm 22 where Messiah believes that God will deliver him in the end.

What, then, caused the Father to forsake his sinless, faithful Son? This was the forsaking that our sin deserved. "He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:21) This is mystery upon mystery: the mystery of Christ's forsakenness explained by the mystery of Jesus being our substitute. We cannot see in the darkness, but we can hear and believe the Word.

Did Jesus use the iPhone's Apple maps?

When iPhone got Apple Maps, Apple received a storm of criticism. The maps were inaccurate. Australian police issued a warning not to use them to get to the town of Mildura. It would leave users stranded in Murray-Sunset Nation Park, 70 kilometers off target, and in a dangerous place without proper preparation.

Jesus looks like He used Apple Maps. He was the King. He should have been on his way to glory. “He set his face to go to Jerusalem,” (Luke 9:51), turned onto the Cross road and arrived at shame.

The hallmark of kingdoms is glory. Jesus spoke of King Solomon “in all his glory.” Salome and her sons, James and John, used the words kingdom and glory as synonyms. She asked Jesus to give them high places “in your kingdom,” while they asked for the same places “in your glory.”

In the wilderness temptation of Christ, the Devil “showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.” He promised, “I will give all this authority and their glory.” The kingdom and glory belong to Christ. (1 Peter 4:11; Hebrews 2:7; Revelation 1:6; 5:13) How was it temptation to offer him kingdoms and glory, when they are rightfully his?

Jesus told the twelve He would be “shamefully treated.” (Luke 18:32) When He said He must suffer many things and be killed, Peter rebuked him and said such things should not happen to him. Jesus wheeled on Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan! (Matthew 16:21-23) Why the strong reaction?

When we know the facts about crucifixion, we can see Peter's point. Crucifixion is gruesome and grisly, ghastly and ghoulish, and yet Mark Goodacre says, "It was not merely the excruciating physical torture that made crucifixion so unspeakable, but the devastation of shame that this death, above all others, represented." Crucifixion was so shameful, the Roman Senator, Cicero, said, "The very word 'cross' should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears." A king without glory, a shameful king, is a scandal and an offense.

The Devil's promise was temptation because Christ's road to glory was the Cross. Jesus was not lost. He knew the road. Afterwards he said, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26)

Necessary? Why? To save us, He had to undergo our shame. Peter's problem, like ours, was revolt against needing so much from God, against his own shame put on display in Christ's Cross. Peter was not protecting Christ's glory, but his own, just like Satan, just like us.

Satan tempted Jesus to abandon sinners, but Jesus did not get lost on the way to the kingdom. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He found us in our shame and saved us. We can't afford glory. We must receive the grace of his shame for us. The Father exalts Jesus because of what Jesus did for sinners.

From empire to execution in four days

Napoleon moved with his army through Switzerland. People hailed him everywhere with thunderous applause and cheers. He seemed unimpressed. Someone said, "Isn't it great, this roaring support of the people?" Napoleon replied, "The same people cheering for me today would cheer just as loudly at my execution."

When Jesus showed his glory, people liked him. When He fed 5000, the crowd wanted to "take Him by force to make Him king." (John 6:15) When He paraded into Jerusalem in the traditional way of kings, crowds blessed him as "the King of Israel!" (John 12:13) That was Palm Sunday. By Thursday, they cried, "Crucify him!" Like Napoleon said.

When Jesus hid his glory, people hated him. He told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world; [otherwise] my servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered." (John 18:36) No fight, no power, no glory. The chief priests said, "We have no king but Caesar." (John 19:15)

When Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, at first Herod was glad to see him. "He was hoping to see some sign done by him." (Luke 23:8) Jesus showed him no sign. Because he saw no glory in Jesus, "Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe." (Luke 23:11)

Pilate's soldiers also mocked Jesus. Each mockery was directed against his kingship. They clothed him with a purple robe, twisted a crown of thorns, put the crown on his head, put a reed in his right hand like a scepter, bowed the knee before him, saluted him with "Hail, King of the Jews," worshiped

him in mock worship, struck him with their hands, and spit on him. They struck him on the head with a scepter-like reed showing themselves as kings more than he was.

When the Romans crucified a criminal, they wrote the condemnation on a placard, such as, Traitor, Insurrectionist, or Assassin. On Jesus' placard they wrote, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." Such shame, to think you are a king and be so weak. They wrote it in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Let everyone read the shame.

At the cross, people mocked Jesus as a king without glory. "If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." (Matthew 27:42) They were like Herod. They demanded glory.

Isaiah prophesied of this, "Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior." (Isaiah 45:15) The power and glory, wisdom and holiness of God were hidden deeply under their opposites, weakness and shame, foolishness and guilt. The Cross is the opposite of glory. The Suffering Servant is the opposite of a king. He hides, suffers, and serves to be our Savior.

Jesus endured our rejection of him that we might have his acceptance with the Father. On the basis of Christ's blood, we receive "his grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved." (Ephesians 1:6)

FUBAR: Fouled up beyond all recognition

In the movie, Saving Private Ryan, Private Reiben asks, "Where's the sense of riskin' the lives of the eight of us to save one guy?" Captain Miller says, "We all have orders, and we have to follow 'em. That supersedes everything, including your mothers." Private Reiben asks, "Even if you think the mission's FUBAR, sir?" "Especially if you think the mission's FUBAR," answers Captain Miller.

Corporal Upham asks, "What's FUBAR?" As things go from bad to worse, he learns what FUBAR means: fouled up beyond all recognition. (sanitized version).

When something is messed up so badly that it cannot be recognized as what it is supposed to be, that's FUBAR. That's what happened to Jesus when He was executed for our sins. Not only was He so messed up that He could not be recognized as God, even his humanity did not appear. Both were hidden under our sin that He was bearing.

“His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind,” or “His appearance was so disfigured that He did not look like a man, and His form did not resemble a human being.” (Isaiah 52:14) Before crucifixion, Roman flogging already had accomplished this.

Flogging was a legal preliminary to Roman execution. Hebrew law prohibited more than 40 lashes. The Pharisees established a law of only 39, in case of miscount. Roman law was different. The executioner had discretion over the number of lashes. Some never made it to their crosses.

The tool for scourging was the flagellum, a short whip with several heavy, leather thongs. Some had lead balls near the end of each thong. Others had jagged stone, broken pottery, or pieces of bone. The pain of blows was intended, but the idea went further, to cut the skin.

“Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn bleeding tissue.” (C. Truman Davis, M.D. in the journal *Arizona Medicine*) In the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, Mel Gibson was not exaggerating.

As preached by the apostles, the point was not how badly Jesus suffered, but that his appearance portrays how bad our sin is. Sin makes us unrecognizable as the humans we once were in Adam before the fall. We are FUBAR.

Our ruin showed on Jesus when He took our place and carried our sin. But Jesus triumphed over our sin with all its damage. He went from humiliation on our behalf to glorification. He rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven. He sat down at the right hand of the Father where He rules over all things. As He once shared our sinful ruin, now He shares again his Father’s glory. This glory is more dazzling than the ugliness of our sin. He prays for us. He sends us the Holy Spirit to commend the Gospel of forgiveness to us. Through the Gospel, He promises to share his glory with us in our resurrection.

You're not supposed to hit a substitute that hard

When the quarterback sprained his ankle, his substitute came into the game. On the next play, there was no backfield blocking. Both outside line backers came in fast and hit the quarterback hard. His helmet came off. The ball rolled out of his hands. He lay there dazed. Finally being shifted to a stretcher, he said, "You're not supposed to hit a substitute that hard."

How many real football players would say that? Not many. Being a substitute puts a player into the game fully for the starter.

Christ is our substitute. He is in fully for us. In Gethsemane, he had no backfield blocking. He got hit hard by two charging linebackers.

There, Jesus "began to be sore amazed" (Mark 14:33) The Greek word is ekthambeo. It means to throw into terror, to alarm thoroughly. He saw something appear suddenly. It already was approaching him when first he saw it. It had the drop on him. It forced itself upon him. It was an assaulting, menacing horror. Jesus saw a killing nightmare.

His saying, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Mark 14:34), was not a look forward to the cross. The horror was killing him already in the garden. The nightmare would have killed him on the spot had not an angel strengthened him. (Luke 22:43) He saw the twin causes of death: sin and wrath. Those were the two linebackers that hit him.

Jesus' cries in Gethsemane are not cowardly snivels, as if whining that linebackers should not hit a substitute so hard. They are his heroic substitution for us in facing the wrath of God on our sin. Facing wrath is lethal. It was killing Jesus. Before the foundation of the world, He had agreed bravely to this suffering.

Because Jesus was acting as our Mediator to bring us to God, he also had no backfield blocking against being hit by sin in his conscience. The qualification of a mediator is sympathy. To bring alienated parties together, the mediator must understand each party. Without sinning, Jesus suddenly felt what it is to be a sinner. He saw sin in his conscience as a killing nightmare. His holiness and his sympathy for sinners made him feel sin the way we should but can't.

Francis Pieper says, "The transfer of our sin to Him was a purely juridical divine act [but this] penetrated to the very heart and conscience of the suffering Christ. ... He felt the sin and guilt of all men in His soul as His own sin and guilt."

Jesus took sin and wrath to give us forgiveness and peace. "Bless the LORD ... who forgives all your iniquity." (Psalm 103:2) In justification, God gives us Christ's righteousness and declares us innocent. Christ's righteousness brings peace and joy. "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God." (Romans 5:1) Matthew Harrison explains Romans 14:17, "Where Christ's righteousness is laid hold of [by faith], there is peace of conscience and where there is peace of conscience, there is a profound joy."

Talking about the black sheep of the family

The children of a prominent family commissioned a biographer to write a book of family history. They warned him about the black sheep of the family, an uncle executed in the electric chair. The biographer said he could avoid embarrassment. “I’ll say he occupied a chair of applied electronics at an important government institution. He was attached to his position by the strongest ties, and his death came as a real shock.”

By contrast to the full truth, that’s how we usually speak of Christ’s crucifixion. We water down the embarrassment. In truth, the cross is a shame (Hebrews 12:2). Paul calls “Christ crucified a skandalon,” the Greek word for scandal. (1 Corinthians 2:23).

The cross is a scandal. Roman Senator Cicero said the very word “cross” should be “far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes, and his ears.”

“In light of the crucified’s degraded status and the heinous nature of the punishment, Gentiles understandably and not surprisingly viewed the victim with the utmost contempt. Indeed, ‘crucifixion’ was a virtual obscenity not to be discussed in polite company. The cultured world did not want to hear about crucifixion, and consequently, as a rule, they kept quiet about it.” (Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*)

Notre Dame Professor Jerome H. Neyrey shows that the entire process from arrest to crucifixion and beyond was an extended series of degradation rituals. The purpose was not to try guilt

and execute justice. It was to label the accused not only as one who did wrong in the case, but as a wholly shameful person in all that he was, did, thought, or hoped to be. The rituals made shame his total identity.

Classical authors report crucifixion had about 19 typical stages. Their purpose was progressive humiliation and loss of honor. We might list them, but crucifixion is so cruel, bizarre, and obscene that we might lose focus.

The apostles went everywhere preaching this scandalous Gospel: Christ crucified. In Corinth, Paul said, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2:2)

They proclaimed God was this crucified Jew. They said this totally degraded, absolutely dishonored Jesus could save us from our sins! They said Jesus was scandalized not on his own account, but by the shame of our sin that He was bearing for us. They said, “For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2)

Passing from cross to throne, from shame to glory, He is able to bring many children with him to glory. (Hebrews 2:10) The glory He will give us includes even reigning with him. (2 Timothy 2:12) So Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”

Socrates was too wise to be saved

Socrates said, “Know thyself.” He didn’t.

No one has enough self-knowledge until he sees himself in the mirror of Christ crucified. The cross was our place because of sin. He bore our sins and went to our cross for us. To see Jesus on the cross is to see how sin looks to God. To miss this is to have an incomplete view of ourselves.

Christ’s crucifixion portrays sin partly by its medical effects, major and contributing. “The major pathophysiologic effect of crucifixion was an interference with normal respiration. Accordingly, death resulted primarily from hypovolemic shock and exhaustion asphyxia.” (Dr. William D. Edwards, MD, Mayo Clinic.)

Breathing became so much work that Jesus died from lack of breath. “Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last.” (Luke 23:45) “He said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (John 19:30)

In a manner of speaking, sin is breathtaking. It knocks the wind out of us. In Adam’s sin, we are without the breath of life, which is the Holy Spirit.

In creation, God breathed into man the breath of life. (Genesis 2:7) In the valley of dry bones, God told Ezekiel to say “Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.” (Ezekiel 27:5) After his resurrection, Jesus “breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” (John 20:22) Breath and Spirit are

life, but before salvation, we were spiritually dead in sin. (Ephesians 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:15)

A contributing cause of death in crucifixion was dehydration. Water leaves the body by: perspiration urination, defecation, regurgitation, salivation, and bleeding. Crucifixion painted a true portrait of sin on the body of Jesus. That is our mirror. Socrates did not know himself. He never looked in the mirror of the cross. (Isaiah 53)

We must look in the mirror of the cross, but also beneath its surface. While the surface shows our sin on Jesus, hidden deeply under that guilt and shame were the holiness and glory of the Only Begotten Son of God. Jesus was able to bear our sins without losing his own hidden glory.

In his glory, Jesus had authority to lay down his life for us, and he had authority to take it up again. (John 10:17-18) Jesus “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.” (Romans 1:4) “God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” (Acts 2:24)

If we follow Jesus by contrition and faith to the cross, we may follow him also to resurrection. “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Romans 6:5) The resurrection is a mirror too, showing Christ’s gift of sainthood.

Why he went out of state for surgery

The week he was gone from work, no one knew where he went. When he came back, he didn't say, and no one asked. He seemed to be himself, except he was not going on like he usually did about his healthy lifestyle.

In time he confided in a coworker. He'd gone out of state for surgery. He gave a thin explanation of his condition. The coworker asked, "Don't any surgeons in this state do that kind of surgery." He said, "Yes, but I was ashamed."

"Everyone has health problems," the co-worker said. "There's nothing to be ashamed of in that." "There is for me," he said. "You know I'm all about healthy lifestyle. Every part of my life is ruled by health consciousness. Some people say I preach it. Getting this condition ruins everything. It makes everything I've done and said foolish. It's humiliating. I didn't want people to know."

The Church teaches that death is one of five steps in Christ's state of humiliation. But why? Everyone dies. Where's the humiliation in that?

It was humiliation because death made Jesus look like the healthy lifestyle preacher who, in truth, was sickly. Jesus not only preached life. He said He is life, that He has life in himself (John 5:26), that He can give life (John 6:33), abundant life (John 10:10), and eternal life (John 6:40). He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) Because He preached such things, for him to die seemed to ruin everything He had done and put the lie to everything He had said.

Jesus went so far as to claim that all of Scripture is about him and his power to give life. He said, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” (John 5:39-40) As extreme as that is, He went further, saying, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:39) Really? All Scripture is about him? We must lose our lives for his sake? Wow. If that’s not true, talk about vanity!

But if it is true, talk about the humiliation of his dying. Christ “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.” (Philippians 2:8) This Person, who is life, obediently died to give life to us who were dead in our trespasses and sins. (Ephesians 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:13) He snuffed the light of his life, hid his glory, and took our death-shame of sin.

Jesus willingly humiliated himself in death for us that we might live. “Christ died for the ungodly,” (Romans 5:6) “that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” (Hebrews 2:14-15) This He did openly, being crucified for the entire world to see, because he is not ashamed to call us his brothers. (Hebrews 2:11)

One big wrong makes us right

As lousy moments go, it was one of the lousiest. It was during a visit to Stordahl Cemetery. Not much there. The church building is gone. Only the bell and cemetery remain. From that forlorn spot of prairie, I could see my grandfather's homestead across the terrain and my father's grave at my feet. We had buried him a couple weeks earlier.

Death is bad enough all by itself, but Paul speaks of its sting. "The sting of death is sin." (1 Corinthians 15:54) "Sin is the point of the spear that kills us." (TLSB) Who wants to think that his father died because, due to his sin, he deserved it? I hope no one.

Yet, for every one of us, it is the bitter truth. "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) For us to die is not humiliation because we have earned it. Harsh? Yes. Reality? Yes. Every spiritual autopsy comes to the same answer: the cause of death is sin.

Still, there is something worse: the death of a righteous man, an innocent man. For Jesus to die is quite a different thing than it is for us to die. He had not earned death. Death was not due him. For Jesus, to die was an injustice. "In his humiliation justice was denied him." (Acts 8:33)

Practically everyone knew it. "He went about doing good," (Acts 10:38) Yet leaders sought testimony to put him to death. They found none. Many bore false witness, but their testimony did not agree. (Mark 14:55-56) While Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man." (Matthew 27:19) Pilate said, "I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him.

Neither did Herod. Nothing deserving death has been done by him.” (Luke 23:14-15)

But Pilate’s judgment contradicted his verdict. Jesus died under condemnation of guilt, and He was counted with transgressors “Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.” (Luke 23:32)

Judas told the authorities, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They replied, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” (Matthew 27:4)

When Jesus died, “the centurion . . . praised God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent!’ And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.” (Luke 23:47-48)
R. C. H. Lenski says, “They came to witness a show, they left with feelings of woe.”

Jesus volunteered to humiliate himself in the death we deserved. He volunteered for the injustice of it. Only because He was our substitute, justice slayed him. ”Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.” (1 Peter 3:8) “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:54-56)

Combining was pretty rough on Jesus

The combine, originally called the combine harvester, is a machine that harvests grain. It combines three harvest operations: reaping, threshing, and winnowing.

Winnowing uses wind to separate chaff and dust from grain. In ancient farming, harvesters gathered the crop onto an outdoor threshing floor. They tossed the mixture into the air with winnowing forks. Wind blew away straw, chaff, and dust. Grain, being heavier, did not blow away. It fell to the threshing floor and was saved.

Combines use a fan to make wind. They blow chaff and dust out the back of the machine and save the grain into the hopper. Farmers still use the ancient expression to talk about the job a combine is doing, “saving grain.”

John the Baptist used winnowing as an illustration of God’s judgment on sin. He said about Messiah, “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” (Matthew 3:12)

The Bible compares destruction to being made “like the dust at threshing.” For example, “There was not left to Jehoahaz [much of] an army ... for the king of Syria had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing.” (2 Kings 13:7)

Dust refers to the curses for sin. Because the Devil sinned by tempting Adam and Eve, God cursed him. His curse was to eat dust. “The Lord God said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, you are cursed ... on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust.’” (Genesis 3:14)

For Adam's sin, God said, "Cursed is the ground for your sake." (Genesis 3:17) He cursed the dust from which Adam came and to which Adam would go in burial. Under the curse, the field brought forth weeds with the crop. (Genesis 3:18) Jesus used weeds as symbols of sinners sown by the Devil. (Matthew 13:24-30) After pronouncing this curse, God next said, "For out of [the ground] you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:19)

For Jesus to be buried is to go the way of dust, sin, curse, and judgment. Jesus volunteered to be buried for us. He hid his holiness in the grave, under dust, under our sin. "He assigned His grave with wicked men." (Isaiah 53:9).

Combining was pretty rough on Jesus. It blew him out the back of the machine like dust, returning to the ground. In burial, Jesus underwent the winnowing of God for us. He went to the place of dust and was under the judgment of God for our sins, while we, like grain, were saved.

Burial did something to Christ's glory. Burial humiliated him for our salvation. Because Jesus went to our grave for us, He has sanctified our graves. He removed sin, curse, shame, and judgment from our graves, and made our burials in him holy and blessed.

Jesus' senior picture was not in the newspaper

I redesigned my Dad's '69 Chevy pickup. From a stop sign on a side street, I pulled into an intersection entering a 4-lane avenue. Wham! I hadn't seen that car to my left. The officer gave me a date to appear. Wearing my Sunday suit, I walked 20 blocks to court. The judge asked, "How do you plead?" "Guilty." "Your fine is \$40." In 1970, that was a pile of money for a high school junior. The judge wanted it all, now. I didn't have it. My imagination conjured severe consequences.

The judge's laser-targeted eyes shifted from me to something behind me. I looked where the judge looked. My Dad had followed me to court. He had been sitting quietly in the back, but now was coming forward with a check already made out. His love for me was showing.

The next year, our class was supposed to submit our senior pictures to the newspaper. Local businesses sponsored them in the graduation edition. Dad was the manager of a business that was going to sponsor mine. Through neglect, I failed to get my picture to the paper. When the edition came out, Dad was deprived of showing his regard for me. He suffered.

God the Father likes to show that He loves his Only Begotten Son. At Jesus' baptism, He said so everyone could hear, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." In Christ's transfiguration, the Father said it again and added, "Listen to him." Jesus always was aware of his Father's love. (John 11:41-42; 15:9; 17:23-26; Mark 12:6; Luke 20:13)

In Psalm 88, Jesus speaks ahead of time about his burial. He said, "Is your steadfast love declared in the grave?" (v 11) It is

not declared. The grave silenced the Father's love. Jesus was deprived the honor of love's declaration, and the Father was deprived of showing his regard for his Son. They both suffered. Instead of a senior picture in the newspaper, Jesus went to the grave. Burial humiliated Christ because dust hid the Father's love for him under wrath for our sin. The Psalm says,

I am counted with those who go down to the pit;
Adrift among the dead,
Like the slain who lie in the grave,
Whom You remember no more,
And who are cut off from Your hand.
You have laid me in the lowest pit,
In darkness, in the depths.
Your wrath lies heavy upon me,

Derek Kidner says, "There is no sadder prayer in the Psalter." For our sin, Jesus descended from the bosom of the Father to burial and banishment by his Father. He did this to bring us to his Father. "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." (1 Peter 3:18) Through the burial of Christ when the Father was silent about his love for him, the Father openly declared his love for us. In our burials, we have the hope of the resurrection.

You are nominated for the King's Choice Award

Hollywood royalty. Millions watch them in theatres. More millions watch them when their movies are on television. Still more watch them receiving Oscars, Golden Globes, Emmys, and People's Choice Awards. In those pageants, the media rank their glory by what they wear, who their designers are, who does their hair, and who arrives with whom. They are royalty, so they go from glory to glory.

Not so with the King of Kings. Jesus is a strange king. He kept voluntarily hiding his glory. He hid his royal glory by his birth in poverty, life of suffering, crucifixion, and death. In burial, the hiding was complete. To feel the weight of his humiliation in burial, it helps to recall the prominence of his Kingdom in the Gospel.

The Gospel is called the “gospel of the kingdom.” John the Baptist and Jesus announced the kingdom. The Twelve and the Seventy taught the kingdom. Between his resurrection and ascension, Jesus taught the kingdom. He sent out the Apostles to teach the kingdom. The end comes after the kingdom is preached in the whole world.

The Beatitudes begin and end with the kingdom. The kingdom is what most of Jesus' parables are about. In them, He repeatedly says, “The kingdom is like.” Jesus says to seek the kingdom first. The purpose of being born again is to see the kingdom, and the purpose of being converted is to enter the kingdom.

Jesus entered Jerusalem in the style of a king. He was crucified as King of the Jews. Soldiers mocked him with a

crown of thorns. People mocked him, saying if He was a king, He should come down from the cross and save himself. The repenting thief on the cross asked Jesus to remember him when Christ came into his kingdom.

The hallmark of kingdoms is their glory. In the doxology added to the Lord's Prayer, we pray, "For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory." As King, Jesus was entitled to glory. With the prominence of his Kingdom in the Gospel, we could expect a display of glory. Instead, He was buried in dust.

The Bible pictures dust as the opposite of royal glory. The Lord said to King Jehu, "I lifted you out of the dust and made you ruler over my people Israel." (1 Kings 16:2) In Hannah's prayer, she said, "He raises the poor from the dust ... to set them among princes and makes them inherit the throne of glory." (1 Samuel 2:8)

Instead of going from dust to throne, Jesus went from throne to dust. He buried himself in the grave we deserved, to give us his glory. He "calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:12) He is "bringing many sons to glory." (Hebrews 2:10) In the resurrection they "will receive the unfading crown of glory." (1 Peter 5:4) Through the word of his burial, you are nominated for the King's Choice Award, his gift to you.

Who are these people, really?

This is a presidential election year. There have been so many candidates. People wanted to know, who are these people, really? Who are these promise makers?

One of the parties started with four candidates. One candidate is a political veteran who has been known for decades. The others are less known. People wondered, who are they? Even about the veteran, media and political people ask, do we really know her?

Another party started with 17 candidates. Most of them are political veterans, but known mostly only in their own states. One is a national celebrity, but he never ran for office before. Media reports paint him as flexible in his positions. Pundits ask, who is he, really?

Many people had a similar reaction to Jesus.

Many thought Jesus was a political figure. Wise men from the east asked, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” (Matthew 2:2) That title, King of the Jews, recently had been newly coined by King Herod for himself and himself alone. It was a political title, and the use of the title by the wise men sounded like political trouble from a rival. “When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” (Matthew 2:3) They all wanted to know, who is Jesus, really?

The question, who is Jesus, persisted. The religious leaders feared that He was a threat also to them. When Jesus said, “My Father gives you the true bread from heaven,” and “I am the bread that came down from heaven,” they grumbled,

saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” (John 6:42)

In his home town of Nazareth, his neighbors said, “‘Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?’ And they were offended at Him.” (Mark 6:3)

To say that He came down from heaven and that He is the bread His Father gives from heaven was to say that He is the Son of God. That is why they tried to deny it by saying who his earthly father, mother, brothers, and sisters were.

But, Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4) The resurrection brings Christ from his state of humiliation, by which he voluntarily laid aside his appearance of glory, to his state of glorification, in which his Father made it plain that Jesus is his Son.

All Jerusalem knew of his resurrection because of the political turmoil about his empty tomb. The apostles and many disciples saw him alive. In one case, more than 500 disciples saw him at once. (1 Corinthians 15:6). “The graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” (Matthew 27:52-54)

Why does it matter who He is? Because just like presidential candidates, if He is not truly who He says, He cannot make good on his promises. Jesus “was delivered [to the cross] for

our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”
(Romans 4:25) Jesus promises justification, the forgiveness of sins. Because Jesus really is the Son of God, because He is resurrected, He really gives justification. “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9)

Why was Jesus dead only until the third day?

In May of this year, a federal judge in Brooklyn sentenced a woman convicted of drug importation with intent to distribute to probation rather than prison time. The theory was, the restrictions on felons outside bars are punishment enough. The New York Times reported that Judge Frederic Block suggested anything more would be overkill.

In 1701, attorney Basil Montagu published an address to both houses of the British Parliament titled, “Hanging not Punishment Enough for Murderers, Highwaymen, and Housebreakers.” He noted that many laws had been enacted to try to reduce the tide of those crimes. With those laws, there was an increase in executions, but still the tide was rising. Hanging, it seemed, was too short a punishment for the crimes.

That is the civil realm. How about the spiritual realm? How much punishment does sin deserve?

We need to include in our computation two aspects of sin: original sin, and particular sins. We usually think of only our particular sins. Limiting the issue that way, we pick out some of our sins, ignore the rest, and go to work diminishing how bad they are. After a while, we have ourselves convinced that our sins are not so bad, and our punishment from injuries, sorrows, and disappointments in this life probably is enough, and when we die our souls will fly straight to heaven.

We tend not to see our sins the way those we've hurt do. How much does God love those we've hurt? What should He do about that?

Worse yet, Americans today have practically no conception of original sin, or think it is not really sinful sin, or think it is not such sin as condemns in and of itself without any particular sins. Of course we'd say that. We are not the victim of it. It is more realistic to consider who we offend by sin, and let that Person have a say. That Person will be in this heaven we think we're going to. It shouldn't be hard to imagine that He will have a say there, even if we won't give him one here. Maybe we need to be a little more objective.

There is a goodly number of people who already have been more objective, who sense the enormity of their sin, and wonder how enough atonement ever could be made for their sin. They are fearful and doubtful. If you are one of these, it is to you that I speak now, and ignore the rest for the time being.

There is a way you can know the atoning death of Jesus was enough punishment for your sin. You can know because of his resurrection, ascension, and being seated at the right hand of the Father. You can know because, three days is not the measure of his sacrifice. His value as the Only Begotten Son is the measure. His holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death are enough because of who He is. Because it was him, God raised him from the dead and said, "Enough," for the whole world, for you.

Jesus "was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." Romans 4:25 "They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day." Acts 10:39-40 "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 His value as the Only Begotten Son is more than a match for your sin.

The way out for General MacArthur, Jesus, and us

During World War II, General Douglas MacArthur was on the Philippine island of Corregidor helping to defend that country from invasion by the Empire of Japan. Fearing that Corregidor would fall and MacArthur would be taken prisoner, President Franklin Roosevelt ordered MacArthur to go to Australia.

MacArthur balked from February 20 to March 11. He argued that help could make it through the Japanese blockade, and save the Philippine people from enslavement. A submarine was provided for MacArthur's escape, but he wanted to show that there was a way out. By showing that there was a way out, he would be showing that there was a way back, a way of salvation for the Philippine people.

MacArthur obeyed the President, but broke through the blockade with his "Bataan Gang" staff in PT boats. He set out after sunset. After two days of being bounced around on rough seas, nearly being spotted by a Japanese warship, and thought to be dead and buried under the waves of the ocean, on the third day, he reached Cagayan on Mindanao.

When MacArthur reached Melbourne, Australia, he declared, "I came through and I shall return." MacArthur showed that there was a way out and a way back to deliver the people from slavery.

Jesus showed that there was a way out, a way back, and deliverance from slavery to sin, death, and the Devil. On the mount of transfiguration, "two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."

Luke 9:30. That word “decease” is a translation into English of the Greek word that also is translated as “exodus.” Exodus, like exit, is a way out.

Exodus for the Hebrews was a way out of bondage to Pharaoh and Egypt. This, like General MacArthur escaping through the sea, was an escape through the Red Sea. In Jerusalem, Jesus would accomplish an exodus, a way out of bondage to the Devil, the world, and the sinful human nature. He, being fully divine and fully human, would take our place, suffer death, be buried, and on the third day rise again to life. Like MacArthur, He promises to use that way out as a way back, to return for us, and deliver us into the freedom of his everlasting kingdom.

People asked Jesus for a sign of who He was and how He could do all the things He was saying He would do. He answered, “No sign will be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

This referred to the death and burial of Jesus. From the fish’s belly, Jonah prayed, “You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me.” Jonah 2:3. Nearly these same words are spoken by Messiah in a Psalm when he is dead and buried for our sins. He cries, “All Your waves and billows have gone over me.” Psalm 42:7.

In passages like these, the Bible frequently uses being under water as a symbol of death and burial. Apostle Paul uses that imagery to teach Baptism. “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:4. In Baptism, we

go under water, joining Jesus in his death and burial. Rising out of the water, we join Jesus in new life.

Make sure you enjoy being in the field on your way to resurrection

One spring when I was a teenager, my Dad injured his back. He landed in the hospital in traction. That left seeding the crop to me. Could I get it done? I doubted and dreaded.

When I got to the farmyard, before I knew what I was doing, I had climbed the windmill tower and surveyed the fields, then looked down at the grain drill. It was 16 feet. How was I supposed to cover those fields with 16 feet? Wouldn't that take an eternity? Would I make it to the end?

After filling the drill with seed and fertilizer, I started for the first round. One glimmer of hope appeared. It's been done before. I tried to keep that thought in front of me.

That night I visited Dad in the hospital to give the daily report. I was surprised how unconcerned Dad seemed to be. He even commended me on the acres I'd seeded. As I was stepping from his room to head home, he called my name. When I turned around, he said, "A lot of acres there." "Yahh," I exhaled. "Well," he said, "just make sure you enjoy being in the field, round by round, because before long, seedtime will be over, and you'll miss it."

That gave me a lot to chew on. He was giving me assurance. As he had gone before me and seeded the farm in the past, I could follow. I too could seed the farm. He wanted me to have an assurance so strong that I could work in hope and joy, not in doubt or dread.

The Lord's Word is like that, giving us assurance not only about seeding this year's crop, but about our whole life, and our resurrections after our bodies die.

What will happen when we die? How can we be resurrected to eternal life? Our eyes cannot see any more than my eyes could from the top of the windmill tower. Our eyes see hundreds and hundreds of acres. Our eyes see a 16 foot drill. But God's Word shows us what our eyes cannot see.

Just like seeding the farm, resurrection has been done before. Jesus has gone ahead of us into the resurrection. We can follow.

Paul writes, "God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power." (1 Corinthians 5:14) He writes, "If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6:5) "He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence." (2 Corinthians 4:14) "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." (Romans 8:11)

Jesus himself said, "Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live." (John 14:19)

As I was to enjoy being in the field, round by round, we also are to live our lives toward our resurrections with joy. Peter writes, "Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:8-9)

The Spruce Goose and the bodily resurrection of Jesus

During World War II, Henry Kaiser, steel magnate and shipbuilder, conceived the idea of a massive flying transport. He turned to Howard Hughes to design and build it. It was 6 times larger than any aircraft of its time. Beyond its size, creating this airplane was challenging because of government restrictions on war materials like steel and aluminum.

Hughes designed this “Flying Boat” entirely in wood. Hardly anyone thought it could rise from the water. Hughes did not seem to know what he was talking about. His ideas of aeronautics seemed wrong.

The plane originally was designated the HK-1 for Hughes-Kaiser, but even Kaiser withdrew from the project. The plane was re-designated the H-4. But the press insisted on calling it the “Spruce Goose,” despite its being made almost entirely of birch. It was their way to ridicule an idea that would not get off the water.

But on November 2, 1947, during a taxi test, Hughes made an unannounced decision to fly. With a co-pilot, several engineers, crewmen and journalists on board, the Spruce Goose rose from the water and flew.

Jesus had his own Spruce Goose. It was his flogged, crucified, and dead body. He said it would rise from the grave, and people thought he was crazy or demon possessed.

In one of the four trials of Jesus, “Some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, ‘We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I

will build another made without hands.’” (Mark 14:58) He had not said, “made with hands.” He had said simply, “this temple,” about the temple of his body. He meant that after his crucifixion, death, and burial, on the third day he would rise in his body from the grave.

Jesus said publicly that He “must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly.” (Mark 8:31)

John tells us the value of this rising of Jesus in his body from the grave. “When He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.” (John 2:19-22).

Because of the resurrection, they believed what Jesus had said. His bodily resurrection showed that He knew what He was talking about. As Hughes knew something about aeronautics, Jesus knows something about resurrection. Christ’s resurrection assures us that his teaching is true.

The teaching is what Jesus told Martha. “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” (John 11:25) The Apostles “preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” (Acts 4:1) The Church still preaches today that by faith in Christ, our sins may be forgiven and our bodies may rise from our graves to eternal life and blessedness.

Jesus plays no harp. He swings a hammer.

The website TV Tropes has an article about a figure often used in television, called “Fluffy Cloud Heaven.” In this figure, heaven is heavenly blue. It is in the clouds. The clouds are solid enough to walk on. When we die, we get our wings, a white robe, and a halo. We become angels, float in clouds, and play harps. Heaven seems like a place for dawdling.

In reality, we know of only one person who has ascended into heaven. That person is Jesus, Is Jesus just floating on clouds and playing a harp?

The apostles saw Jesus ascend into heaven. “While they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’” (Acts 1:9-11)

What is Jesus doing in heaven? He said, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:2-3)

On earth, Jesus was not a slacker. He was a carpenter. He worked. He built houses. In his ascension, He is not loafing around in Fluffy Cloud Heaven. He is building mansions. He is not playing a harp. He is swinging a hammer.

God is industrious. During his earthly ministry, Jesus said, “My Father is still working, and I am working also.” (John 5:17) Fluffy Cloud Heaven assumes we rise to the heavens that exist now, but the Apostle John said, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” (Revelation 21:1) God says, “I will create a new heaven and a new earth.” (Isaiah 65:17)

Christ is working, building a new heaven and mansions in his Father’s house. Christ’s ascension teaches us to think often of heaven, and look forward with joy to our heavenly home. The Apostle Paul says, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Colossian 2:1-2)

Paul said, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” (Philippians 3:20-21)

Repent, believe the Gospel, and look forward with joy to your ascension into the real, new heaven.

What is Jesus doing in his retirement?

Retirement affects people differently. One friend worked 50 years, got his gold watch, retired, and died less than a year later. Someone said he died of not having enough to do. Another friend said he had to retire to have enough time to get all his work done. He is busier now than when he was working. Another friend served to retirement in the military, and then started a second career teaching English.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus said, “My Father is still working, and I am working also.” (John 5:17) On the cross, “He said, ‘It is finished!’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.” (John 19:30) The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. (Mark 16:19; Romans 8:34; 1 Peter 3:22)

So, what is Jesus doing now? It sounds like He finished his career, went into retirement, and is just sitting. What does sitting at the right hand of God mean?

To be “seated at the right hand” is a rich figure that the Bible uses many times. It means Jesus shares the power and glory of God the Father, rules over all things for the benefit of the Church, prays for us, sends us the Holy Spirit, protects his kingdom from its enemies, and acts as mediator and advocate for sinners with God.

Jesus has not gone into retirement. He has gone into another part of his career. Every day, He is working for your salvation.

Jesus today makes constant intercession for us. “Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right

hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” (Romans 8:34) “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 John 2:1) “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25) “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” (Hebrews 9:24)

Dr. Martin Luther says Christ comes forward daily for us before God “as a faithful, merciful intermediary, savior, and unique priest and bishop of our souls.” Because He “offers and shows His body and blood ... before God daily, on our behalf, we may obtain grace.”

Christ’s sacrifice is not just in the past. It protects us still, in the here and now, from the accusation of God’s holy law. It opens for us free access to God’s fatherly heart. It does this now, by means of confident prayer. It will do this in the future, when by sight we will offer up our adoration.

As exalted high priest, Christ provides protection from the divine wrath of the holy God for all who believe.

Who should judge a talent competition, or your whole life?

Television has many talent competitions. Big hit shows include Pop Idol, American Idol, Britain's Got Talent, America's Got Talent, The Voice, and The X Factor.

Sometimes the choice of judges is controversial. Highly accomplished vocal performer, Sir Tom Jones, took a swipe at The X Factor's Simon Cowell, saying he is not qualified to judge because he has never sung live on stage himself. Jones refused to become a judge until he knew his fellow judges were musicians too. He said, "I watched other talent shows [thinking] how can this person ... give singers advice if they've never gone through it themselves?"

Jones is on to something. To judge, it helps to have "walked a mile in their shoes."

This is more important in spiritual judgment. When Jesus said, "Judge not," He went on to say, "That you be not judged, for with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." (Matthew 7:1b-2) He also said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with right judgment." (John 7:24)

So, Jesus is not against all judgment. He is against unfair, unqualified judgment. Jesus himself will judge. Based on many passages in Scripture, the Apostles Creed says, "He will come to judge the living and the dead."

Can we say to Jesus, "Who are you to judge me" or "You don't know what I am going through?" Has Jesus walked a mile in our shoes?

Before Jesus is exalted as judge, first He voluntarily humiliated himself to be tempted and suffer completely as we do. While Jesus gave the Law through Moses, He also was “born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law.” (Galatians 4:4-5) He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin,” and thereby He can “sympathize with our weaknesses.” (Hebrews 4:15) He is not what Jones objects to, a judge of singers who himself never sang.

Jesus is exalted to the place of judge because He is humble. “He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.” (Philippians 2:8-10) “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power.” (Revelation 5:12)

Jesus has done everything He judges. He will judge by a standard of fair notice in the Word that He preached. “The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.” (John 12:48) By his sufferings, He earned for us the way out of judgment, which is the forgiveness of sins. “He who hears my word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” (John 5:24)

Is love a lie?

What is more common than talk of love? The word is overused. So much love is false. Billy Joel sang truth in “A Matter of Trust”:

Some love is just a lie of the heart
The cold remains of what began with a passionate
start
Some love is just a lie of the soul
A constant struggle for the ultimate state of control
Some love is just a lie of the mind
It's make believe until it's only a matter of time

With all the lies of love, with all the wounds, betrayals, cruelties, deceptions, and abandonments, we still hope for true love, love eternal, love divine.

But, without the Trinity, love is abolished.

Before creation of heaven and earth, there was only God. There were no creatures, angels or humans. Suppose there were not three persons in God. Suppose there was only one. Where was the love? It never was.

We might imagine a god who, though only one person, still loved. The love of such a god must have been self-love. That person had only himself to love. Love's nature would be so altered that it is no longer what we desire. Love would become hellish. Bishop Kallistos Ware says “Self-love is hell; self-love signifies the end of all joy and all meaning. Hell is not other people; hell is myself, cut off from others in self-centeredness.”

In the Trinity, even before creation, there was love. There was the Father and Son. The Father loved his Son and the Son loved his Father. That was family. That was home. The Son had a home in his Father and the Father had a home in his Son. The Trinity is love's eternal home.

Even richer, there was the Holy Spirit. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit all loved each other eternally. Before a blade of grass ever felt the dew of morning, before a tree heard a bird song – before Adam saw Eve – love already was true, divine, and eternal between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus said to his Father, “You loved me before the foundation of the world.” John 17:24

Such love was full of glories and wonders, pleasures and comforts. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit were one in the heavenliness of heaven.

What happiness to never need to wonder what the other person said behind one's back, to never wonder what was meant by a comment, to never be unsure of the attitude behind a look of the eye, for an expression of the face to never be a riddle or mask, to trust, to believe all things, to bear all things, to hope all things, for there to be no wrongs or record of wrongs, no envy, no rivalry, no rudeness, no gossip, for every moment and every blink of consciousness to be all kindness and faith perfectly.

Through the blood of Christ, the Trinity invites us into a love like theirs, the love that is no lie.

How well are you loved?

“Mom always liked you best.”

That was the signature line of the comedy act, the Smothers Brothers. In an interview by PBS, Tommy Smothers recalled how it started. He was the younger, dumber brother. Dick was the older, smarter brother. Dick, as usual, was running Tommy down. He did it so convincingly that the audience stopped thinking it was only an act.

The audience started to hiss and boo Dick. Tommy said, “He’d do this one litany, about five or six lines in a row. ‘You’re stupid. You’re dumb. You’re not a man. You’ve never done anything right. You’re a failure. You’ll never amount to anything.’” Tommy answered, “Yeah, and mom liked you best.” The audience fell apart.

Why was that funny? Why did that relieve the tension that was running so high against Dick? The audience had a pent up desire to see Tommy win, to top Dick, to play trump. Unexpectedly, he did. Suddenly, in a bitter way, the brother who was supposed to be a failure was a smashing success.

Tommy won the argument with one, simple statement. The dumber brother showed that in one important way, he was smarter. Unpack the line, “Mom liked you best,” and it says, if you’re so smart, why do you think you can hurt me with all those rotten things you are saying, when I already have been hurt as badly as anyone can be? Does it get any worse than my mother not loving me as well? I am down so far, how did you think you could put me down any farther? It is like saying, “What a dummy you are.”

Life does that to us. It tells us we are not loved as well as others. As bad as that is when it involves our mothers, it is worse when we feel that way about our Heavenly Father. The Devil, the world, and our own fallen thinking try to take away our assurance of how well the Father loves us.

As with so many problems in our faith, the Trinity is the answer. Because of the Trinity, we can receive assurance of how well loved we are.

Jesus said to his Father, “You sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” John 17:23. The Only Begotten Son of the Father says the Father loves us, his adopted sons, exactly as He loves the Only Begotten. The love in the Trinity between the Father and the Son is the same love that the Father gives to us. We are loved as well as Jesus is.

The Only Begotten Son tells us He, too, loves us exactly as the Father loves him. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.” John 15:9.

The Spirit also brings us the same love. “You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Roman 8:15-16.

Through the blood of Christ, we receive Trinitarian love.

How do sump pumps and sacrifice work?

Last year at our farm at Wildrose, we reached the peak in a long period of historically high precipitation. Sloughs ran over. Fields were saturated. Few crops were planted. By July, nearly all my neighbors were talking about seepage into their basements. They were going on about their sump pumps.

My basement didn't have seepage yet. While I was sympathetic about my neighbors' problems, I was not interested in the solution. Sure, I was vaguely curious how one could put something electric in water without electrocution or fire, but I was not interested in how sump pumps work.

Then it happened. Water started seeping into our basement. It welled up from deep within the house. If not stopped, it would flood the floor and rise. It would make the foundation crack and settle. It would ruin everything with rot and mold.

Once I had the problem and knew I was in trouble, I wanted to know more about it and the solution.

It is like that with sin and salvation. As long as sin is only our neighbor's problem, we have less interest in the problem and the solution. Once we have the problem and know we are in trouble, we want to know more about sin and its solution, the sacrifice of Christ. Just as questions about how a sump pump works become vital when our own basement is flooding, so questions about how sacrifice works become vital when our own soul is seeping from within, flooding, cracking, settling, rotting, and molding.

There are questions about how sacrifice works. It does not work for a person to make a sacrifice to himself. If Jesus is the sacrifice for our sin, to whom did he make his sacrifice?

Sacrifice results in death. When Jesus was dead and buried, who presented his sacrifice?

How did Jesus rise again to life for our justification?

As with so many things vital to our faith, the answer is the Trinity.

Hebrews 9:14 says, “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” The Father, the Son, and the Spirit all work together in the sacrifice. Jesus, the Son, sacrifices himself for us. His sacrifice is to God, the Father. His sacrifice is presented through the Spirit. Without the Trinity, sacrifice would not work.

The Father and the Spirit together raised Christ from the dead. Galatians 1:1, Romans 8:11, Ephesians 1:17, 20.

Apostle Paul says, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” The Christian confession, the confession of the sacrifice that saves us from sin, is a confession of the Trinity. It is a confession that the Father raised Jesus from the dead for our justification.

Will we ever hear the end of it?

You have seen a kid like him. One day, he is trying too hard to please everyone. The next, he doesn't give a rip what anyone thinks. One minute, he walks with ease. The next, the ground beneath his feet turns uneven and rocky.

You're there one day when he gets into trouble. He "borrowed" his brother's toy without asking, and he broke it. His parent lights into him. He is grounded and loses his allowance for two months.

Then the parent says, "This is just like when you broke the window, and when you played with matches," and on and on. The parent drags up past infractions. When will he ever hear the end of it? He feels that punishment never is enough. There never is real restoration. His conscience worries him with intrusive fears of condemnation.

The whole human race was in the same shape. Under Moses, God prescribed sacrifices for sin. Those sacrifices never laid condemnation to rest. Sacrifice had to be repeated. Sacrifice peaked on the Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 16) Even that had to be repeated again next year. Like that kid, Israel never heard the end of it.

Those sacrifices pointed to Christ. As with the Day of Atonement, when the sins of Israel were laid onto the sacrificial animal, on the cross, the sins of the world were laid onto Christ. Israel's sin brought death to the sacrificial animal, and our sin brought death to Christ.

But that's not enough, if Jesus, like that kid and Israel, never hears the end of it. Our only way out of sin is to have him as

our substitute. Once He takes our sin, does He ever hear the end of our sin? If our substitute never hears the end of our sin, neither do we. What can clear our conscience from fear of condemnation?

Once again, the answer is the Trinity. The resurrection of Christ is not only his coming back to life. It also is his going to the Father. He could go to the Father because the Father accepted his sacrifice as the end of condemnation for our sin. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, and the Father has put angels under Christ's authority. (1 Peter 3:22) Jesus is seated while the Father defeats Christ's enemies. (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:13) That's acceptance. That's restoration. That's hearing the end of sin and condemnation.

Peter says Jesus went to God "that He might bring us to God." (1 Peter 3:18) Our hope of going to the Father lies in the Trinity event that Jesus went to the Father. He went to God to give us a "good conscience," (1 Peter 3:21) so we could "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." (Hebrews 10:19-20) Our conscience is cleared by what happened between the Father and the Son for us. They are steady, even when we feel unsteady. The Trinity makes the resurrection of Christ our justification.

You'll have to draw me a picture

I almost flunked out of high school. The first time was in algebra, trying to solve polynomials. “Solving” means finding the roots of many terms. My translation? Trying to make sense of a heap of concepts. Good gravy.

After my algebra disaster, it was surprising how well I did in geometry. It's not that geometry lacks concepts, but geometry drew me a picture. I could see it.

Just as surprising, my best friend, who'd been an ace in algebra, did poorly in geometry? He learned better from concepts. I learned better from pictures.

It is the same way when getting to know Jesus. During Epiphany, we celebrate the revelation of Jesus. Jesus is introduced to us. Who is He? Because people learn differently, the Bible uses many teaching methods to reveal Christ. It uses concepts, but it also draws pictures.

In John 1:1-3, John writes, if I may say, to the algebra students, using concepts. He says that in the beginning, Jesus was God and Jesus was with God. There are 13 terms in the Greek New Testament that are translated into English as “with.” See the polynomial. Withness is a polynomial concept. Try to resolve the root of that! The upshot is in the question, does it make any sense to say that one person is “with” himself? It could, if we make an error in resolving the root, but considering which term John used, the answer is, it doesn't. So those verses reveal that Jesus is a person of the Trinity, because he “is” God, and yet is “with” God.

I'm pretty happy with that, but I still like pictures better. Only a few verses later, John pictures Jesus as "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father." Bosom. Here is a picture we can see. Jesus is in the bosom of the Father.

By this we understand the Trinity for sure. John could not be saying that the words Father and Son are just two titles for one person, so that the Father is in his own bosom. No, one person is in the bosom of another. God is the God of bosom, the Triune God.

The prophet Nathan, when confronting David over his sin with Bathsheba, used the word bosom in a tender image. He told David a story about a poor man who "had nothing, except one little ewe lamb ... and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him." (2 Samuel 12:1-3)

That lamb lay in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Jesus, Lamb of God, is in the bosom of the Father, and He is the Son to Him.

Either from concepts like "is" and "with," or from pictures like "bosom," John gives an epiphany of the Trinity, and the Trinity reveals who Jesus is.

Sitting in the biggest corner ever

A mother ordered her naughty son to sit in a corner. After a few minutes, he told his mother, “I’m sitting down on the outside, but I’m standing up on the inside!” He obeyed, but he didn’t submit. The conflict of wills between two different persons remained.

In Gethsemane, the Father told his Son to go and sit in the biggest corner ever, the corner of the sins of the whole world. He was to sit, not for any naughtiness of his own, but for the iniquities of us all. He obeyed. He went to the cross. Is that all, or did He also submit? Did Jesus sit down on the outside while standing up on the inside?

Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”
(Matthew 26:39)

Suppose there were no Trinity. Suppose “Father” and “Son” were just different titles for the same person. What would it mean to say that Jesus submitted to his Father? Is there any such thing as submission with only one person? If God were a one-person god, Jesus would be talking only to Himself. He would not be giving up His will for the will of His Father.

Because the Son and the Father are different persons, one person is speaking to another. Prayer is real. It is not psychological self-talk. When Jesus says to His Father, “Let this cup pass from me,” one person is speaking to another. The Father wants the Son to go to the cross. The Son does not want to go. This is a dreadful temptation to a conflict of wills. Prayer deals with real issues between real persons.

The language “not as I will, but as You will” reveals the temptation clearly: “I will” versus “You will.” The I and the You are real. “I” refers to one Person. “You” refers to another. The temptation shows the distinction of the Persons of the Trinity. They are different enough for Jesus to experience temptation to a conflict of wills, sweating blood.

The temptation was resolved by submission. The Son submitted to the Father. Through the submission of Christ, the unity of the Trinity was preserved. Because his submission was ready, the temptation did not lead to sin. R.C.H. Lenski says, “From the first word of the prayer to the last Jesus submits to his Father’s will.”

In Gethsemane we are not viewing melodrama. Because of the Trinity, both the temptation and the submission are concrete — a sweaty, bloody affair. The innocence of the suffering of Christ goes beyond obedience to submission. He sat down not only on the outside, but on the inside, in our corner, for us, for our sins.

The sacrifice for our sins needed to be perfect. It couldn’t be mechanical obedience. It couldn’t be simulated or half-hearted. Because Jesus not only obeyed, but obeyed submissively, He is perfect to the uttermost, and his submission saves us to the uttermost.

World-famous humble little country doctor

Many ask, “If God exists, why doesn’t He show himself? Then we would worship him.” Answers have been given from reason, philosophy, and piety, but God is not impressed with that. His reasons are personal.

Linus told Charlie Brown what he was going to do when he grew up. “When I get big I’m going to be a humble little country doctor. I’ll live in the city, see, and every morning I’ll get up, climb into my sports car and zoom into the country. Then I’ll start healing people. I’ll heal everybody for miles around. I’ll be a world-famous humble little country doctor.”

We laugh, but that’s us, and we expect God to be like us and show off. If He won’t, we doubt him.

In Trinity, God is humble in many ways. For today, here is one: the Father is humble towards his Son. The Father glorifies his Son, not himself. That’s his personal reason for not showing off.

When Jesus was baptized, “a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” (Mark 1:10-11). Jesus was not practicing ventriloquism. He was not throwing his voice to sound as if it were coming from heaven. That would be one person saying how pleased he is with himself. That would be vainglory. Because of the Trinity, the voice really is from heaven. The voice really is from another Person, the Father. The Father also is not speaking vaingloriously of himself. He praises the Son.

When Jesus was transfigured, “a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen

to him.” (Matthew 17:5) The Father directs attention to his Son. He tells us to listen to Jesus.

When the Devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he said, “If you are the Son of God,” do this and that to prove it. Because Jesus trusted the Father, He resisted the temptation. When people said, “Are we not right in saying you have a demon,” Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me.” (John 8:54) Jesus trusted the Father to glorify him. He knew his Father’s humility.

In the resurrection, the Father gave all authority to the Son in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18) In the ascension, the Father seated the Son at his right hand (Acts 2:32), and “highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.” (Philippians 2:9-11) When the Church is resurrected, she will ascend into heaven. The Father will make something of a production. The production will not center on the Father himself. It will center on Jesus, the Lamb of God, in his marriage to the Church. (Revelation 19:6-9)

Though God does not show off, He shows up. The humble Trinity saves us from our pride through the shame of the cross. That shows enough for us to worship him, and to love him because he first loved us.

No CEO of Holy Spirit Incorporated

George Carlin said, “One nice thing about egotists: they don't talk about other people.” The Holy Spirit is not an egotist. He does not talk about himself. He talks about the Son.

Tom Peters wrote: “Big companies understand the importance of brands. Today, in the Age of the Individual, you have to be your own brand. Here's what it takes to be the CEO of Me Inc.” He tells how to promote SELF™.

Such is the world. The Holy Spirit is not of the world. The Spirit is not of this Age of the Individual. He is not the CEO of Me Inc. or Holy Spirit Incorporated. He promotes a brand, so to speak, but not his own. The Spirit promotes the brand of Jesus.

John says, “By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.” (1 John 4:2-3)

We recognize the Spirit's work by seeing where the brand of Jesus is recognized. Here is Jesus' brand: the man Jesus is God come in the flesh. Wherever we see Jesus recognized as God incarnate, there is the Spirit.

“When the Helper comes ...the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” (John 15:26)
“He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:14)

The humility of the Spirit becomes clearer when we realize his magnificence in the Trinity. The Athanasian Creed summarizes from Scripture that the Spirit is uncreated,

infinite, eternal, almighty, God, and Lord. It says, “In this Trinity none is before the other or after another; none is greater or less than another.” The Nicene Creed says the Spirit “with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified.”

The Spirit is glorious, but He makes little of himself. With the Father, He gives the Kingdom to the Son. At the end of the age, the Spirit, with the Son, will return the Kingdom to the Father. At different times, the Father and the Son have the Kingdom, but the Spirit never does. The Spirit always is building a Kingdom for Others.

The great promoter, P. T. Barnum, said, “Without promotion, something terrible happens: nothing.” Without the Holy Spirit, nothing happens. Paul said, “No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”(1 Corinthians 12:3)

So Martin Luther says in his Small Catechism: “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

How can we expect this to work?

The first time my Dad sent me out seeding alone, a feeling of pessimism overcame me. That night I said, “How can we expect a green, leafy, lush crop from this? We are dropping dry seed through dead iron machinery into dirt.” He said, “It’s made to work.”

That gave me something to think about. There is a Maker. He made seed and soil. He made them work. He could have made things some other way, but He chose this. In creation, “God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed.’” (Genesis 1:11). God’s Word made it happen.

It is the same with baptism. The natural question is, “how can new life come from plain water? How can water do such great things?” Had it not been for God’s Word, it wouldn’t.

God could have said whatever He wanted. But once He did say, “Baptism now saves you” (1 Peter 3:21), it does. The Word makes baptism do what it does. Without the Word, there would be only water and no baptism.

The Word does in the new creation what it did in the first creation. In the first creation, the Word created life. In the new creation, the Word creates new life when by faith we use the means God said to use. He told the Apostles to baptize in the whole world.

God speaks of what He does in baptism repeatedly because it’s important. “He saved us . . . by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5) “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as

Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4)

It works because God is at work. “Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses ... God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.” (Colossians 2:12-13)

The story of Naaman pictures baptism. He had leprosy. He came to the prophet Elisha to be cured. Elisha told him to wash in the Jordan River seven times. The Jordan was a dirty river. Naaman was angry. He could not see how that would work. But his servants said, “it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you.” (2 Kings 5:13) Naaman was looking only at the water. His servants were looking at the Word with the water. “So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” (2 Kings 5:14) Because of the Word of God, the water of baptism does this for us spiritually, even though it looks as foolish as washing in the Jordan River.

He that believes and is baptized
Shall see the Lord’s salvation
Baptized into the death of Christ
He is a new creation
Through Christ’s redemption he shall stand
Among the glorious heavenly band
Of every tribe and nation

Jesus visited Doc Martin's surgery

In the British television show, Doc Martin, the newly arrived doctor in a small village is annoyed by villagers using the waiting room of his surgery as a social club. They assemble without having medical complaints. Doc Martin rudely tells them, "If you don't have an actual medical complaint, just get out."

John the Baptist did that too, with people who came without spiritual confessions.

John proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People were baptized by him, "confessing their sins." (Matthew 3:6)

But then John saw some coming without confessing sin, without repenting. He said, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matthew 3:7) He outdid Doc Martin with that one. Without confession and repentance, John did not baptize. This is important to know later when Jesus came to John to be baptized. What did Jesus need to be baptized for?

John said someone was coming with a greater baptism. He said, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I. ... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3:11)

Who can baptize with the Holy Spirit? Who can baptize with fire? This must be a holy person. John said it was Jesus.

So, when Jesus came to be baptized, "John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now,

for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”
(Matthew 3:14-15)

Jesus already was righteous. He came from heaven that way. He had no sin, nothing to repent about. What did He mean?

Luther says Jesus accepted baptism from John because “he was entering into our stead ... becoming a sinner for us, taking upon himself the sins which he had not committed, and wiping them out and drowning them in his holy baptism.” (AE 51:315) Jesus came to Doc Martin with an actual problem, our disease of sin.

The atonement already was under way at the river Jordan. Jesus already was carrying our sins. Being substituted into our place as sinners, He substituted himself into the repentance that was due from us. In his state of humiliation, Jesus confessed and repented for us without himself deserving condemnation. He presented his confession and repentance on our behalf to the Father, and the Father credited us with these merits of Christ.

The baptism of Jesus is offensive. It tells us we need to repent. Worse, it says we cannot repent, so Jesus had to do it for us. It says we have to take charity; we are charity cases. That’s what happens when Christ’s beloved Church baptizes us into the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In baptism, Christ gives to each one personally the gift of his repentance for us, for the forgiveness of sin, and then his repentance lives in us as we continually remember and return to our baptisms.

About the Author



T. R. Halvorson was born in Sidney, Montana on July 14, 1953, baptized at Pella Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sidney, Montana on November 8, 1953, and confirmed at First Lutheran Church in Williston, North Dakota in 1968. He and his wife, Marilyn, are members of Trinity Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Sidney, Montana. They have three sons and six grandchildren. T. R. farms at Wildrose, North Dakota, and is Deputy County Attorney in Sidney, Montana. He has been a computer programmer; and an author, conference speaker, instructor, and consultant to industry in online legal information. He is among the authors of the religion column in the *Sidney Herald* at Sidney, Montana. He is the Editor of LutheranCatechism.com, a regular contributor at *Brothers of John the Steadfast* (SteadfastLutherans.org), and blogger at *Twin Stone Warden* (twinstonewarden.com).

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