Call to Greatness

“I will show you a still more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31)

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Living Bulwark is committed to fostering renewal of the whole Christian people: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. We especially want to give witness to the charismatic, ecumenical, evangelistic, and community dimensions of that renewal. Living Bulwark seeks to equip Christians to grow in holiness, to apply Christian teaching to their lives, and to respond with faith and generosity to the working of the Holy Spirit in our day.
Spirit-filled Reflections for the New Year

by Dave Quintana

The Power of the Word, The Power of a Word

The Word became flesh some 2,000 plus years ago, and God speaks still today. He does not keep silent. He speaks to and through simple men and women like you and me, and his Word is living and active. And so I've dedicated my life to being a Servant of the Word, and these meditations are an attempt to share with others some of the words that God has spoken to me.

Dare To Be Great

I’m not much into politics, and won’t share many of my political viewpoints with you, but I love this quote by Teddy Roosevelt: “Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth"... and David girded his sword over his armor, and he tried in vain to go, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these; for I am not used to them." And David put them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the brook, and
put them in his shepherd's bag or wallet; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

1Samuel 17:32-33, 39-40 RSV translation

**Convinced in Mind**
I suppose all stories, certainly all good stories, start “in the beginning”, so that’s what we’ll do this week – start my story “in the beginning.” Like most good Catholic families, we went to church every Sunday, and like most (good?) Catholic boys I made it a point to complain about it every week. I suppose I admired people’s faith (especially Gramma Q’s and my mother’s), but it didn’t connect with me very much. It was in high school (secondary school) when I met a young (23 or so) guy from church who seemed to be really convinced regarding the truth of Christianity when faith began to come alive. I became convinced that all the things that I’d heard all my life were true, and if they were true, it seemed obvious that they should make a difference for how I lived my life. And so the journey of faith began and my life began to be transformed. Where did your journey begin? Is your faith fully alive?

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2 RSV translation

**Conquered in Heart**
Part two of my story really turned my world upside-down (which by the way is right-side up for Christians – just think about it!). Still in high school, and away on a retreat in the mountains of California, God came to me in a powerful, tangible way. The simplest and best way to describe it is as being completely overwhelmed by the love and mercy and goodness of God, and being overcome by a burning desire to love God and others in return. Everything seemed as nothing compared to being able to know and love the Lord. o this day, I can easily picture the setting and the sentiment of this life-changing and life-directing encounter. Has the Lord turned your world upside-down? How has he worked to conquer your heart?

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Philippians 3:7-9a RSV translation
Called to Community

I could still point out to you the place where I was walking along the sidewalk by the University of Michigan Union (I went to U of M in Ann Arbor, Michigan USA) as my freshmen year wound to a close where I felt so clearly God inviting me and calling me to community life. I had been participating in The Word of God community for most of a year and was very attracted to it as a group of people radically living out their Christian lives and seeking to make a difference for God in the world. While I deeply desired that, I also found aspects of community life that I didn’t particularly like or even that turned me off. Pondering everything and pondering nothing that day, I again experienced the Lord in a life-directing way. God is alive, and he has a plan and purpose for each of us. While it isn’t always fun and can be horribly scary, embracing his call and his will is the only way to live life to the full. In what ways has God drawn you to a “community of believers?” In what ways has God shown you “there are no Lone Rangers in this Western?”

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:9-10 RSV translation

Contact with Servants of the Word
Suffice it to say that my first encounter with “the brothers” was not overly positive. A bunch of guys all in one house? Living together? Kinda strange if you ask me! But that perspective didn’t last long, and as I got to know a few of the brothers, I found the idea of giving oneself fully to God, sacrificing everything, and living single for the Lord a very attractive one. It was certainly far, far from anything that I might have expected or that anyone might have expected for me, but it sure made sense to consider it if I was looking to live my life for the Lord as fully as possible. To my great surprise, another very significant life-directing aspect of life began to fall into place. In what ways has the Lord surprised you in the call he has placed upon your life?

Peter began to say to him, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

Mark 10:28-30 RSV translation

**Life Sentence**

For a guilty criminal, receiving the judge’s verdict “life sentence” is about the worse thing he could possibly hear. For one declared innocent by the Father who sent his only beloved Son to pay the price for our debt, “life sentence” is a call and an invitation that is like sweet music to the ears. Early on, I told the Lord that whatever I could do to serve him I would do. Of course I didn’t really know what I was saying at the time – but God certainly did! And he took me up on it. The greatest joy in life is to be called and created for something, and to embrace that and live it as fully and completely as you can! Have you yet embarked upon a road of 1-1 discipleship? How might the Lord want you to “forget what lies behind” and “press on for what lies ahead?”

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14 RSV translation
“I Want to Know More of Your Love”

It was Good Friday and I was praying before a cross in our local parish in San Jose, Costa Rica. It was the early 1990’s and I was doing campus outreach work there alongside some other Servants of the Word brothers. I loved my life, I loved my work, and I loved the people that I was serving. And yet, as I pondered the love of God for man, made manifest supremely in Christ dying for us on a cross, I found myself praying “Lord, I want to know more of your love.” I can still almost hear the words I found echoing in my being that day, “Are you sure?” Something to the effect of, “Do you really know what you are asking for? Are you really ready for what you are asking for?” That is, “Look out!” As sincere as I was that day, the Lord seemed more sincere still. So I nobly responded, “ugh, well, ughhh… let me get back to you on that!” At any rate, after a bit more prayer and reflection, I again poured out my heart to the Lord, “Yes Lord, of course Lord, yes, I do want to know more of your love.” And by his grace, over these many years I have come to know more of his love. It has led me along unimaginable and incredible paths, and brought me indescribable joys and pains, both of which at times seemed unbearable. Would you like to know more of his love? Are you sure? Ask him for it.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

1 John 3:16 RSV translation

A Guiding Vision

Many years ago while praying, I had a picture (vision?) of a group of young people, 50 or so in number, singing, worshipping God with arms upraised. Then, I saw the Lord begin to walk up and down among them, much the way an usher taking up a collection would, in order to take up an offering. But the Lord wasn’t just looking for a few spare coins, or even a few large bills – he was taking up a freewill offering of lives, of young lives, for himself. The scene engaged me at a profound level, and I felt (knew) that in some way my life was to be dedicated to helping him take up that offering… and it has been. And so here I am many years later, still walking (and flying) up and down, still passing the basket and still taking up the freewill offering of young lives!

Then the heads of fathers' houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. They gave for the service of the house of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and a hundred thousand talents of iron. And whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the LORD, in the care of Jehi'el the Gershonite. Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the LORD; David the king also rejoiced greatly.

1 Chronicles 29:6-9 RSV translation
Seize the day! What a great challenge. What a great way to greet the dawning of a new day. Seize the day, each day, everyday, while it is today. Robin Williams, as a boarding school teacher in the movie “Dead Poet’s Society”, welcomes the new recruits into the great hall. The display cabinets are filled with photos and awards of those that have gone before them. He tells the new arrivals to look in to the photos, and to listen … and then he walks up behind them whispering “carpe… carpe diem … carpe diem!” My sentiments exactly. May we look into the eyes and lives of those that have gone before us and may they whisper to us and shout to us, “Carpe diem”! Seize the day!”

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you. Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

1 Timothy 4:11-16 RSV translation

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Daily Meds from the Q Source
by Dave Quintana, published by Tabor House, 2012, 250 pages, $11.00

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Covenant Prayer for the New Year

written by John Wesley

John Wesley (1703-1791) was the founder of the Methodist movement. A brilliant organizer, he formed societies throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. He appointed itinerant, un-ordained preachers to evangelize and care for people in the Methodist societies. Wesley wanted every Christian to attain the status of perfect love, wherein the love of God and neighbor would reign in the hearts of people. Wesley preached in the fields, halls, cottages, chapels – and in churches that would allow him entry.

In 1755 Wesley wrote the following covenant prayer as part of an annual Covenant Renewal Service which he developed for the Methodist societies. The annual renewal service was usually held during the first Sunday of the new year in each of the local societies in Britain. The Covenant Prayer expresses profound gratitude, trust, and humility towards God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and a generous faith-filled offering of one’s life in total dedication and service to Jesus Christ.

[Note: Minor word and style changes were made to allow the text to be more accessible to modern readers. Editor]
The Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
exalted for you, or brought low for you.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
May this covenant made on earth continue for all eternity.
Amen.

The following petition was often added after the Covenant Prayer:

Christ has many services to be done. Some are easy, others are difficult. Some
bring honor, others bring reproach. Some are suitable to our natural
inclinations and temporal interests, others are contrary to both... Yet the
power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us.

> See The More Excellent Way, a sermon by John Wesley

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The More Excellent Way

adapted from a sermon by John Wesley

John Wesley (1703-1791), founder of the Methodist movement, traveled extensively throughout Britain. He preached in the fields, halls, cottages, chapels — and in churches that would allow him entry. He was also a prolific writer. He printed several volumes of his sermons, 141 sermons in total, during his lifetime, Wesley wanted every Christian to attain the status of perfect love, wherein the love of God and neighbor would reign in the hearts of people. His sermon on “The More Excellent Way was written in later life. It is a stirring call to chose for the more excellent way of love and holiness.

Note: The following text is a paraphrased adaption for modern readers. It is excerpted from the first half of the sermon. The original full-length sermon is available online. Editor.

Earnestly desire the higher gifts – and I will show you still a more excellent way.

— 1 Corinthians 12:31

Now, by the grace of God, may we choose the "more excellent way" in following Jesus Christ. I would like to contrast this excellent way with the way most are inclined to go.

Let me give some examples: First, do we as Christians devote ourselves to good spiritual disciplines – such as the practice of taking a personal time for daily prayer and reading of Scripture? Do we choose the more excellent way of a structured and consistent pattern of daily prayer? Second, how do we as Christians approach
our responsibilities and daily tasks – are we diligent or idle? Sloth is inconsistent with the good practice of our religion. Third, how do we as Christians approach daily family life and common practices, such as eating meals together? Do we begin each meal with a prayer for God’s blessing and then at the end of the meal offer a prayer of thanksgiving to our Heavenly Provider for all the blessings he gives us? Fourth, do we make good use of our free time, especially times for diversion and relaxation? And fifth, how do we as Christians use our money – are we good stewards of our resources? Is there not "a more excellent way we can choose in all of these matters?"

**Gifts of the Holy Spirit**

In the preceding verses of 1 Corinthians 12, St. Paul has been speaking of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit – such as healing the sick, prophesying, (foretelling things to come), speaking in strange tongues that the speaker had never learned, and also the miraculous interpretation of tongues. The Apostle says that these gifts are desirable. He even exhorts the Corinthians, at least the teachers among them… to earnestly desire such gifts so they can be used for helping Christian and non-Christians alike. “And yet,” he goes on to say, “I will show you an even more excellent way” that is far more desirable than all these extraordinary gifts put together. This way of excellence will surely lead you to happiness both in this world and in the world to come...

I presently wish to pass over addressing the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, and instead focus on the “ordinary” gifts that we should earnestly desire so we can more profitably use them in serving others today. Some of the gifts which I think we should earnest desire are: the gift of convincing speech – especially to awaken the unbelieving heart, and the gift of persuasion, to move the affections, as well as to enlighten the mind with understanding. We can earnestly strive to grow in knowledge, knowledge of God and his works, both his providential care and work of grace in our lives. We can earnestly desire a measure of the gift of expectant faith which goes far beyond the power of natural causes. God grants this gift on particular occasions, both for his glory and for our happiness. We can desire the gift of speaking well in whatever situations we may find ourselves, with a pleasing manner of speech that is useful to the hearer and which is also pleasing to God and in accord with his will.

![Image](http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/january2013p3.htm)

**The more excellent way of love**

While it is good to desire these gifts, there is still an even “more excellent way” which God wants us to earnestly seek. That more excellent way is the way of love – of loving all people for God's sake. Such love is characterized by humility, gentleness, and patience – as the Apostle Paul admirably describes in chapter 13.
Paul goes on to explain that without love, all of our eloquence, all knowledge, all faith, all works, and all sufferings, are of no more value in the sight of God than the sound of clanging brass or rumbling cymbals... they do not help us in the least towards the goal of eternal salvation. Without this gift of divine love, all that we know, all that we believe, all that we do, and all that we suffer in this life will profit us nothing in the great day when we must give an account of our stewardship to God.

**Choosing the higher path**

I would like to examine this text from a different angle and point out "a more excellent way" in another sense. One of the very early Christian writers observed from the beginning of the church two types of Christians – those who followed the lower path or higher path of holiness. Those on the lower path sought to remain innocent in terms of avoiding serious sin, but often in their outward behavior they conformed to all the customs and fashions of the world around them. They did good deeds, abstained from gross evils, and generally observed the commandments of God. And they endeavored to maintain a good conscience that brought no offence to God. But their outward behavior didn’t really look any different from their non-Christian neighbors. They lived pretty much the same customs and style of life as their neighbors.

The Christians who chose to follow a higher path of holiness not only strove to avoid doing evil, they were also eager to do as much good as they could for others and to attentively live out the teaching of the commandments with a zeal for holiness of life. They strove to put on the mind of Christ and to eagerly follow in the footsteps of their beloved Master. They followed the path of self-denial to pursue God’s will – preferring what was pleasing to God over every other pleasure which stood in the way. They strove to take up their cross daily. They struggled, without letting up, to enter the straight and narrow gate which Christ set before them. And they spared no pains to arrive at the summit of Christian holiness, which can be summarized in the New Testament verses:

> “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity [also translated as “perfection" or “completeness”]” (Hebrews 6:1), and “to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19).

From observation and long personal experience, I am inclined to think that whoever finds redemption in the blood of Jesus, whoever is justified by Christ, has then the choice of walking in the higher or the lower path of holiness. I believe the Holy Spirit sets before such a person who has found new life in Christ "the more excellent way," and inspires this person to pursue the one best way which Christ offers, and to aspire after the heights and depths of holiness, striving to be fully transformed in the image of God. If such a person does not accept this offer from Christ, he or she will invariably choose a lower path towards holiness of life. Such a person can still go on in living a good life, in serving God in some degree, and in receiving God’s mercy in the close of life through the blood of the new covenant in Jesus Christ.
Obtaining a crown of glory
I would be far from quenching a flickering or smoldering wick, from discouraging those that serve God in whatever measure – however small it might be. But I could not wish them to remain there. I would encourage them to come up higher, without thundering some threat of punishment or condemnation. I would endeavor to point out to them "a more excellent way" they could choose to follow.

However, let us not forget that in the age to come, those who have chosen to pursue the lower path of holiness will not be raised to a high place in heaven as they would have had if they had chosen the better path. And will this be a small loss – having much fewer stars in your crown of glory? Will it be a little thing to have a lower place than you might have had in the kingdom of your heavenly Father? The Lord assures us that there will certainly be no sorrow in heaven. There all tears will be wiped from our eyes – but if it were possible that grief could enter there, we should grieve at that irreparable loss. Irreparable then, but not now. Now, by the grace of God, may we choose the "more excellent way."
No Mere Mortals

by C.S. Lewis

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor’s glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken.

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.

All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.

Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations -these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.

This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously – no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be a real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner – no mere tolerance, or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbor, he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ vere latitat– the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself is truly hidden.
[quote from *The Weight of Glory*, by C.S. Lewis. Lewis delivered this sermon at Oxford University Church of St. Mary the Virgin, on June 8, 1941. It was originally published in January, 1942.]

Clive Staples Lewis (1898 – 1963), commonly referred to as C. S. Lewis and known to his friends and family as Jack, was an Irish-born British novelist, academic, medievalist, literary critic, essayist, lay theologian and Christian apologist. He is also known for his fiction, especially *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Space Trilogy*.

Lewis was a close friend of J. R. R. Tolkien, and both authors were leading figures in the English faculty at Oxford University and in the informal Oxford literary group known as the "Inklings". According to his memoir *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis had been baptised in the Church of Ireland at birth, but fell away from his faith during his adolescence. Owing to the influence of Tolkien and other friends, at the age of 32 Lewis returned to Christianity, becoming "a very ordinary layman of the Church of England". His conversion had a profound effect on his work, and his wartime radio broadcasts on the subject of Christianity brought him wide acclaim.
On Breeding Spotted Mice

by A.W. Tozer

The Associated Press lately carried an interesting if somewhat depressing story out of London about a certain British peer who had died just a few days short of his eighty-ninth birthday.

Having been a man of means and position, it had presumably not been necessary for him to work for a living like the rest of us, so at the time of his death he had had about seventy adult years in which he was free to do whatever he wanted to do, to pursue any calling he wished or to work at anything he felt worthy of his considerable abilities.

And what had he chosen to do? Well, according to the story, he had "devoted his life to trying to breed the perfect spotted mouse."

Now, I grant every man the right to breed spotted mice if he wants to and can get the cooperation of the mice, and I freely admit that it is his business and not mine. Not being a mouse lover (nor a mouse hater for that matter; I am just neutral about mice), I do not know but that a spotted mouse might be more useful and make a more affectionate pet than a common mouse colored mouse. But still I am troubled.

The mouse breeder in question was a lord, and I was born on a farm in the hill country of Pennsylvania, but since a cat can look at a king I suppose a farm boy can look at a lord, even look at him with disapproval if the circumstances warrant. Anyway, a man's a man for a' that, and I feel a certain kinship for every man born of woman; so I cannot but grieve for my brother beyond the seas.

Made in the image of God, equipped with awesome powers of mind and soul, called to dream immortal dreams and to think the long thoughts of eternity, he chooses the breeding of a spotted mouse as his reason for existing. Invited to walk with God on earth and to dwell at last with the saints and angels in the world above; called to serve his generation by the will of God, to press with holy vigor toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, he dedicates his life to the spotted mouse not just evenings or holidays, mind you, but his entire life. Surely this is tragedy worthy of the mind of an Aeschylus or a Shakespeare.
Let us hope that the story is not true or that the news boys got it mixed up as they sometimes do; but even if
the whole thing should prove to be a hoax, still it points up a stark human tragedy that is being enacted before
our eyes daily, not by make believe play actors, but by real men and women who are the characters they
portray. These should be concerned with sin and righteousness and judgment; they should be getting ready to
die and to live again; but instead they spend their days breeding spotted mice.

If the spiritual view of the world is the correct one, as Christianity boldly asserts that it is, then for every one
of us heaven is more important than earth and eternity more important than time. If Jesus Christ is who He
claimed to be; if He is what the glorious company of the apostles and the noble army of martyrs declared that
He is; if the faith which the holy church throughout all the world doth acknowledge is the true faith of God,
then no man has any right to dedicate his life to anything that can burn or rust or rot or die. No man has any
right to give himself completely to anyone but Christ nor to anything but prayer.

The man who does not know where he is is lost; the man who does not know why he was born is worse lost;
the man who cannot find an object worthy of his true devotion is lost utterly; and by this description the
human race is lost, and it is a part of our lostness that we do not know how lost we are. So we use up the few
precious years allotted to us breeding spotted mice. Not the kind that scurry and squeak, maybe; but viewed
in the light of eternity, are not most of our little human activities almost as meaningless?

One of the glories of the Christian gospel is its ability not only to deliver a man from sin but to orient him, to
place him on a peak from which he can see yesterday and today in their relation to tomorrow. The truth
cleanses his mind so that he can recognize things that matter and see time and space and kings and cabbages
in their true perspective. The Spirit-illuminated Christian cannot be cheated. He knows the values of things;
he will not bid on a rainbow nor make a down payment on a mirage; he will not, in short, devote his life to
spotted mice.

Back of every wasted life is a bad philosophy, an erroneous conception of life's worth and purpose. The man
who believes that he was born to get all he can will spend his life trying to get it; and whatever he gets will be
but a cage of spotted mice. The man who believes he was created to enjoy fleshly pleasures will devote
himself to pleasure seeking; and if by a combination of favorable circumstances he manages to get a lot of
fun out of life, his pleasures will all turn to ashes in his mouth at the last. He will find out too late that God
made him too noble to be satisfied with those tawdry pleasures he had devoted his life to here under the sun.

[Excerpt from *Man - The Dwelling Place of God*, by A. W. Tozer. In the public domain.]

Aiden Wilson Tozer (April 21, 1897 - May 12, 1963) was an American Christian pastor, preacher, author, magazine editor, Bible
conference speaker, and spiritual mentor. For his work, he received two honorary doctorate degrees.

Among the more than 40 books that he authored, at least two are regarded as Christian classics: *The Pursuit of God* and *The
Knowledge of the Holy*. His books impress on the reader the possibility and necessity for a deeper relationship with God.

Living a simple and non-materialistic lifestyle, he and his wife, Ada Cecelia Pfautz, never owned a car, preferring bus and train
travel. Even after becoming a well-known Christian author, Tozer signed away much of his royalties to those who were in need.

Tozer had seven children, six boys and one girl. He was buried in Ellet Cemetery, Akron, Ohio, with a simple epitaph marking his
Prayer was of vital personal importance for Tozer. "His preaching as well as his writings were but extensions of his prayer life," comments his biographer, James L. Snyder, in the book, *In Pursuit of God: The Life Of A.W. Tozer*. "He had the ability to make his listeners face themselves in the light of what God was saying to them," writes Snyder.
The Miracle at Cana

Wine in Abundance

By Jeanne Kun

This first miracle, in appearance the least “spiritual” of all, prepared them for what was to come, [and] introduced them to the unimaginable mystery.

– François Mauriac, Life of Jesus

At the wedding feast in Cana we catch a glimpse of Jesus’ kindness, the warmth of his personality, and his enjoyment of a good party. “I cannot imagine Jesus sitting alone with a serious face,” wrote Jean Vanier, founder of L’Arche, in Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John. “Instead, I see him a part of the celebration, singing with everybody else, rejoicing in the festivity, profoundly happy to celebrate with people he knows and loves. . . . Jesus is so beautifully human!” Yet at this feast much more than Jesus’ humanity and empathy was made evident – the divine glory of Jesus was manifested at Cana.

Cana isn’t far from Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth, so it’s
likely that the wedding Jesus and Mary attended was that of a close relative or neighbor. To run out of wine would have been quite an embarrassment for the newlyweds, since Middle Eastern hospitality demands that hosts care for their guests graciously. So, at his mother’s discreet request – the only record in Scripture of Mary’s asking her son to fill a need – Jesus remedied the awkward situation.

Mary simply told Jesus, “They have no wine” (John 2:3) – and initially he replied that his “hour” had not yet come (2:4). Mary’s words, however, implied more than the expectation that her son would do a favor for the bride and groom. She was prompting him to do something out of the ordinary (for surely she didn’t merely think that Jesus would send his disciples to buy more wine). And, in this way, Mary was releasing Jesus from his responsibilities at home and suggesting that he now take up his divine work. Ultimately, when Jesus acted at his mother’s urging and began to reveal himself by his action at Cana, he signaled that the fulfillment of his hour—that is, Jesus’ redemptive mission, his passion and death, his resurrection and ascension in glory (7:30; 8:20; 12:27; 16:32; 17:1) – was drawing near.

“Fill the jars with water. . . . Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward” (John 2:7-8). With these simple instructions to the waiters, Jesus changed 120 gallons of ordinary water into fine wine. This miraculous transformation was effected by his creative power and divine authority. The abundant quantity of wine highlights the greatness of the miracle as well as the generosity of God.

An abundance of wine is one of the dominant images that characterized the visions of the messianic era foretold by the ancient prophets of Israel (Isaiah 25:6; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13-14;). And the wedding feast mirrors the Old Testament image of marriage as an expression of God’s relationship to Israel (Isaiah 54:5-6; 62:4-5; Hosea 2:19-20). In the New Testament, this messianic age is likened to a wedding banquet (Matthew 22:1-14; Revelation 19:9). When Jesus changed the water held in jars used for Jewish ritual purification (John 2:6) into wine, he was hinting that the messianic age had now arrived. With this “new wine” (Luke 5:33-39), a new era had begun – an era in which Jesus himself is the bridegroom (John 3:29). For, by providing wine in plenty at a marriage feast – a responsibility of the bridegroom – he pointed to his identity

Understand

1. John wrote that the wedding in Cana occurred “on the third day” (John 2:1), that is, three days after Jesus’ encounter with Nathanael (1:43-51). What significance do you see in this chronology? What other events in Scripture involve a time framework of three days?

2. Why, in your opinion, did Jesus perform this miracle? Note the reasons that are stated in the text as well as those that seem to be hinted at or implied. What impact do you think this miracle had on the various people who witnessed it?

3. What do Mary’s presence, words, and actions at the wedding at Cana and afterward at Capernaum indicate to you about her? About her relationship with her son?

4. Is faith evident in this scene? If so, in what ways? Whose faith? What do the results of the servants’ actions suggest about the importance of obedience?
as divine bridegroom and Messiah and to the new covenant he was to accomplish by his life and death.

John called this miracle of Jesus a “sign” (John 2:11) – the first among many that the Evangelist recorded in his gospel. The mighty work that Jesus did in Cana was not simply an extraordinary act done out of kindness and compassion. It was a sign that revealed Jesus’ glory and unveiled God’s power and love actively working through him – and a sign that invited all who witnessed it to faith in the one whom God sent to fulfill his plan of salvation.

In the Spotlight

Jewish Wedding Customs

In Jesus’ day, it was customary in Palestine for the bridegroom and his friends to carry the bride in a chair from her parents’ house to the groom’s house in a torchlit procession. There the couple – who had already been pledged to one another at their betrothal – concluded the marriage ceremony.

Nuptial festivities followed, which lasted from three to eight days and included singing, dancing, and feasting (Genesis 29:27; Judges 14:10, 12, 17; Job 9:12; 10:1). Relatives and friends – even townspeople and people passing through – came to greet the bride and groom and join in their joy. Flowing wine added to the celebratory atmosphere and cheered the hearts of the guests. In fact, the Aramaic word used to describe a wedding feast is mistita, which has the same root as the word “drink” and literally means “drink-festival.”

Hospitality is highly esteemed in the culture of the Middle East, so to fail in one’s duties as a gracious and generous host leaves a blot on the family’s reputation. In first-century Palestine, a bridegroom and his family could even have been heavily fined or taken to court for not providing sufficiently for their guests. Thus, by miraculously providing wine in abundance when it had run out at the wedding in Cana, Jesus saved the newlyweds from social embarrassment and from the displeasure of their guests and prevented a disruption of the festivities.

5. How is the miracle at Cana a sign of the coming kingdom of God? What is its value as a sign? (Note that six other “signs” are recounted in the Gospel of John: the healing of the official’s son – 4:46-54, the healing of the paralyzed man – 5:2-9, the multiplication of the loaves – 6:1-14, the healing of the blind man – 9:1-41, and the raising of Lazarus – 11:1-44.)

Grow!

1. Mary brought the newlyweds’ need to Jesus’ attention. When have you been an advocate for someone in need? How were you able to help? What could you do to make intercession a more active and effective part of your prayer life?

2. “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5) are the last words of Mary recorded in Scripture. Think of a time when you did something because you felt that Jesus told you to do it. Was it easy or difficult for you to obey him? What were the results?

3. The miracle at Cana shows Jesus’ kindness and concern for the bride and groom. Recall a situation when someone cared for your needs. How did their attention affect you? How did they reflect the face of Christ to you?

4. Jesus changed ordinary water into wine – in a plentiful quantity – at Cana. Write a prayer asking Jesus either to transform some “ordinary water” in your life into “good wine” (John 2:10) or to provide abundantly in an area of your life where you feel a lack or limitation.

5. The disciples “believed in him” after they had seen Jesus transform water into wine (John 2:11). What “signs” of God at work in your life have caused your faith to grow and deepen?

Reflect!

1. Think about how you and your family or
The Hour of Jesus’ Glorification

The sign of water turned into wine at Cana already announces the Hour of Jesus’ glorification. It makes manifest the fulfillment of the wedding feast in the Father’s kingdom, where the faithful will drink the new wine that has become the Blood of Christ. (1335)

The Church attaches great importance to Jesus’ presence at the wedding at Cana. She sees in it the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ’s presence. (1613)

The Gospel reveals to us how Mary prays and intercedes in faith. At Cana, the mother of Jesus asks her son for the needs of a wedding feast; this is the sign of another feast — that of the wedding of the Lamb where he gives his body and blood at the request of the Church, his Bride. (2618)

— From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

In the Spotlight

friends celebrate special occasions such as weddings, birthdays, graduations, first Communions, and anniversaries. What could you do to make your celebrations more meaningful and more festive for your guests?

2. Reflect on the following Scripture passages to enhance your understanding of Jesus’ mission as the Messiah:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”
— Isaiah 52:7

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.
— Matthew 9:35-36

[T]hey brought to [Jesus] all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered together around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.
— Mark 1:32-39

When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on
God's Abundant Provision

Marguerite d'Youville founded the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, commonly known as the Grey Nuns, after she was widowed. During the eighteenth-century colonization of French Canada and the hardships of the French and Indian War (1754–1763) she and her sisters ran a hospital for the sick and infirm as well as an orphanage for abandoned babies. Blessed John XXIII called her the Mother of Universal Charity. St. Marguerite d'Youville was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1990.

Once, after checking her accounts, Mother d'Youville discovered that she had only one small silver coin left. At that moment, a poor woman came to claim her payment for nursing a baby in their care—a payment of the exact amount of the coin. Marguerite reached into her pocket, only to find a whole handful of coins! Amazed, she reached into her other pocket and brought out yet another handful! At another time, when the sisters and their patients were close to starving, six barrels of flour inexplicably “appeared” in their dining room. The Eternal Father never failed to care for his daughters and for the poor they served.

– In the Land I Have Shown You: The Stories of 16 Saints and Christian Heroes of North America

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Growing in Christian Character Series

Magnanimity

Giving the best we have and holding nothing back

By Don Schwager

The crowning virtue
Magnanimity has long been recognized as a key virtue for leaders and for everyone who desired to do great and honorable deeds for the people they served, even in the face of difficulty, and at the cost of great personal sacrifice. It is an essential virtue for parents and those who work with young people, for teachers, mentors, and pastoral workers who aspire to excellence in training and helping others grow in maturity and strong character. Aristotle called it “the crowning virtue.” Like a magnificent crown adorned with numerous jewels and precious gems, magnanimity ennobles all of the virtues and directs them to the generous service of others – to many great and noble deeds.

The word “magnanimity” comes from the Latin word, magnanimus, which is derived from the Greek word, megaloopsuchia, which literally means “great of soul”: magnus in Latin means “great,” large,” and “noble,” and animus in Latin refers to “heart,” mind,” “soul,” or “spirit.”

Magnanimity describes the man or woman who has a “great heart,” a “noble mind,” and a “generous spirit” who takes delight in doing great deeds for the benefit of others. It is especially marked by an attitude of benevolence – freely giving to others and aiding them without any expectation of repayment or reward. Magnanimity not only treats others with fairness and kindness, it is also generous in forgiving insults and injuries, even of one’s enemies, because it refuses to be swayed by petty resentfulness or vindictiveness.

David was magnanimous towards King Saul, even when Saul tried to kill David out of jealousy.
Afterward David also arose, and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth, and did obeisance.

And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your hurt'? Lo, this day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave; and some bade me kill you, but I spared you." I said, "I will not put forth my hand against my lord; for he is the LORD'S anointed." ...

And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil."

- 1 Samuel 24:8-10, 16-17

Aristotle (384-322 BC) described the magnanimous person as one who aims at great acts of virtue and who attempts things genuinely worthy of honor. Such a person attempts and achieves great things because they are appropriate expressions of the excellence he or she has, and not because he or she craves affirmation from others or desires glory. The magnanimous person "is more solicitous about truth than about human opinion. Such a person "does not depart from what he ought to do...because of what others think."

**Great heart and noble mind**

When something is "magnified" it is made bigger or greater, and held in higher esteem. Magnanimity enlarges the heart of the giver to be ever more generous and ready to give the best one has to offer. It also enlarges the mind to think more nobly and well of others because it recognizes the great value and worth of those who receive the gift or benefit. Receiving a generous gift or benefit can also enlarge the heart of the recipient who accepts with great gratitude and thanksgiving what has been given. And it can enlarge the mind as well when the recipient recognizes the great value of the gift.

We “magnify” others by expressing to them their true worth when we bestow on them the best we have to offer. God gives generously and always for the benefit of those he wishes to bless and make great. We imitate God when we give to others the best we have. Scripture reminds us that God has created every man and woman in his own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27) – that is where their true value and greatness come from and that is why they are worthy to receive the best we can give to them.

How can we be like God? When God revealed himself to Moses, he expressed his character to him:

The LORD passed before him [Moses], and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for
We reflect God’s likeness most when we treat others with generous and gracious acts of kindness, compassion, steadfast love, forbearance, patience, and forgiveness. These are the qualities and great character traits which make us truly like God.

**All for God**

The word “magnanimity” is rarely used in the Bible – there are only a few uses of the term in the Greek manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments. However, the Scriptures do use a variety of expressions to describe the great quality of this virtue. I believe that one key expression of this virtue can be found in the biblical use of the word “all” – especially when describing how one should relate to God. God is very generous and magnanimous towards us – he is all-loving, merciful, and faithful. And God commands that we in turn give him our *all* as well. We see this in first and great commandment:

“You shall love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, and with *all* your soul, with *all* your mind, and with *all* your strength” (Mark 12:29-30; Deuteronomy 6:5; Luke 10:27). The second is, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:31; Leviticus 19:18).

Love of God and love of neighbor are never to be compromised – they are *all*-encompassing and meant to permeate everything we do with our lives.

John Wesley (1703-1791), the great founder of the Methodist revival, wrote the following verses as a summary of his rule for Christian living:

*Do all the good you can,*
God gave all for us in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and he desires that we give him our all as well. If we desire to be “all-out” for Christ, then it is fitting that we give him our 100 percent – all that we have, and hold nothing back because he is worthy.

**Models of generous giving**

In the Gospel accounts we can see how Jesus honored individuals who were “all-out” in giving generously to the Lord. Jesus praised a poor widow who offered to God *all* that she had:

He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury; and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. And he said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in *all the living that she had*” (Luke 21:3-4).

Jesus promised great reward to Peter and to all the disciples who left *all* to follow him:

Peter said to him [Jesus], “We have left *all we had* to follow you!” “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:28-30).
Jesus praised a woman who poured out all of her very expensive ointment, worth more than a year’s wages, as an expression of gratitude for Jesus’ mercy towards her:

Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head, as he sat at table. But when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for a large sum, and given to the poor.” But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me... Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her” (Matthew 26:6-10,13).

Grateful stewards of God
For the Christian, magnanimity is only truly a virtue when it is rooted in gratitude, humility, and the acknowledgment of our dependence on God. Magnanimity gives freely and generously because it acknowledges that everything we have is a gift from God – our health, strength, wisdom, and talents. God wants us to use our talents and resources for the building up of his kingdom and for the generous service of his people.

Jesus’ parable of the talents praises those who wisely and generously invest the gifts and resources which have been entrusted to them by their master. And he also warns those who ignore or refuse to use their talents and resources for the Master’s sake, whether out of personal fear or self-interest.
When he returned, having received the kingdom, he commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading. The first came before him, saying, “Lord, your pound has made ten pounds more.” And he said to him, “Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.” And the second came, saying, “Lord, your pound has made five pounds.” And he said to him, “And you are to be over five cities.” Then another came, saying, “Lord, here is your pound, which I kept laid away in a napkin; for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow. He said to him, “I will condemn you out of your own mouth, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money into the bank, and at my coming I should have collected it with interest?” And he said to those who stood by, “Take the pound from him, and give it to him who has the ten pounds.” (Luke 19:15-24)

Like the good stewards in Jesus’ parables (Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 19) who freely invest all the resources the Master has placed at their disposal, the magnanimous man and woman of God take delight in investing all of their resources, including their time, strengths, and talents, for the Lord and the people they serve. They trust that God will not only be pleased with their generosity, but will increase and multiply their fruitfulness in doing even greater works. God loves a cheerful giver, and returns many times more than we can give, expecting more generous deeds to follow, and granting more fruitful harvest in return.

Is there anything we possess, whether gifts, talents, and resources, which we can claim as simply our own? As Christians we know that we belong to God and everything we have belongs to him as well. We are simply his stewards who have been ransomed from slavery to sin and death “with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19), who suffered and died on the cross for our salvation. That is why gratitude is the only proper response to the exceeding grace and mercy which God has lavished upon us through his Son, Jesus Christ.

But our gratitude for what Christ has done for us cannot be complete until we give back to God an offering of
thanksgiving. God the Father has given us the best he has through his Son, and he desires that we give him the best we can offer in return. The best act of thanksgiving we can make is the giving over of our entire lives and all that we have to God.

When magnanimity is properly rooted in gratitude to God and dependence on God’s help and power, it frees us to pursue even greater works for the Lord, while at the same time expecting God to increase our capacity and strength for carrying them out. Magnanimity requires trust in God and not in ourselves. God has called us, and with the call gives us all the strength and help we need.

Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, in her excellent dissertation on “Aquinas’s Virtues of Acknowledged Dependence: A New Measure of Greatness”, shows how dependence on God and trust in his help frees us from presumption and faint-heartedness, so we can serve God and others generously with magnanimity.

For God’s power in us to be efficacious, we must be willing to receive God’s gracious assistance, to receive it as a gift, and to trust that what is needful will be given. Precisely because magnanimity depends on God’s power and trusts his goodness, it protects us from smug presumption on the one hand and pusillanimous (small-minded/faint-hearted) despair on the other. Both vices are caused by a view of the self and its accomplishments without the aid of grace. The first takes the form of thinking our own power is sufficient for goodness so that we are independently worthy of honor; the second thinks that since we are absolutely helpless and hopeless on our own there is no reason to even try to be good. Thus to the presumptuous person, God says, “You cannot do this on your own” – and to those overwhelmed by a sense of their own inadequacy, God says, “You don’t have to do this on your own…. The gifts are given, not just for us, but also for God and for others. When the pusillanimous (small-minded/faint-hearted) person shrinks back from using his or her gifts to help others and meet their needs, then his or her neglect will be their loss as well. Pusillanimity makes the world a poorer place.

There are many examples throughout Christian history of great men and women of magnanimity who generously served God and their communities. John Wesley is one example of an ordinary Christian who struggled for a long time in trying to serve God on his own strength, before discovering how the gift of faith and the power and working of the Holy Spirit enabled him to pursue great things for advancing the Lord’s work in England.

**John Wesley’s covenant with God**

One of the greatest worldwide evangelistic renewal movements of the 18th century began in London in 1737. It was started by an unlikely and ordinary minister from the Church of England named John Wesley (1703-1791). John went to the new colonies in America to evangelize the native Indians, but he returned in failure and disgrace. It was only after he sought counsel and help from the Moravian brethren, who were known for their radical faith and trust in God’s guidance and power, that he discovered what was missing in his relationship with God. One evening after listening to the Moravians speak about Christ’s work of salvation in their personal lives, John experienced a profound and personal encounter with the Lord. He wrote in his journal that his “heart was strangely warmed” that evening. He experienced his faith coming alive through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit.

John began to go from church to church, preaching from the pulpits on the power of faith and the work of the Holy Spirit to make Christ come alive in the hearts of individuals. His message met stiff resistance from most of the clergy. After a number of church doors were closed to John, a new door and field for evangelism and mission opportunities began to open. John began to boldly preach throughout the public town squares of England, and even in the open fields. The response was immediate and electrifying – dozens of people, young and old who had never or rarely set foot in a church, came to hear his preaching. As word of mouth spread, hundreds and then thousands came...
Living Bulwark
to hear John Wesley preach.

John’s method of outdoor preaching and forming disciples for Christ began to spread rapidly throughout the British Isles. It quickly spread to the colonies in North America, and in time grew into a worldwide movement through the preaching of Methodist missionaries.

Wesley’s method of preaching and forming disciples for Christ was simple and very effective. He first went directly to the people and spoke the gospel message in the open market places, inns, and countryside, wherever people would gather. He spoke the gospel message in the words the people could understand and he trusted in the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit to open the ears and hearts of his listeners to believe and understand what the Lord Jesus had done for them and was offering to them through the work of the Holy Spirit. He followed up his preaching by establishing local societies that met regularly for common prayer and teaching, and cell groups (usually composed of no more than 12 people each) that met weekly for the study of Scripture, prayer support, and personal growth in holiness through mutual care and accountability. The local societies also organized many voluntary works of mercy for those in need, especially for the poor, those in prison, and people struggling with addictions, the slave trade, and prostitution.

John Wesley wrote a Covenant Prayer for the members of the Methodist Societies which grew up as part of his work. The Covenant Prayer beautifully expresses profound gratitude to God and the offering of one’s life in total dedication through a covenant commitment with God.

    I am no longer my own but yours.
    Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will.
    Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
    Let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
    exalted for you, or brought low for you.
    Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
May this covenant made on earth continue for all eternity.
Amen.

This covenant prayer was solemnly renewed each year in all of the local Methodist Societies. In many of the yearly Covenant Renewal Services the following prayer was also added:

Christ has many services to be done. Some are easy, others are difficult. Some bring honor, others bring reproach. Some are suitable to our natural inclinations and temporal interests, others are contrary to both... Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us.

The generous witness of Chuck Colson
Chuck Colson (1931-2012), who passed away in April, was a generous, warm-hearted, and magnificent lay Christian leader who brought the gospel message of forgiveness, reconciliation, and transformation in Christ to prisoners and their families, and to numerous Christian fellowships and communities around the world through the Prison Fellowship ministry which he founded. Like John Wesley’s movement, the Prison Fellowship ministry focused on evangelism and personal conversion, and the formation of small groups that meet regularly for Bible study, prayer support, and personal accountability, as well as outreach service to those in need. In his book, Against the Night, Colson describes how one individual can make a significant contribution and even impact history for better or for worse. He highlights how godly women and men of faith, who strove to give their all to God, were able to accomplish great things for God, amidst tremendous struggles and challenges, and even in some of the darkest places of the world where corruption, slavery, and persecution abounded.

Yet it is men and women, under his [God’s] jurisdiction, who write the pages of history through the sum of their choices. We never know what minor act of hopeless courage, what word spoken in defense of truth, what unintended consequence might swing the balance and change the world. “The death of a man at a critical juncture, his disgust, his retreat, his disgrace, have brought innumerable calamities on a whole nation. A common soldier, a child, a girl at the door of an inn, have changed the face of fortune, and almost of Nature,” said Edmund Burke.

Burke was referring to historical figures. The man who died at a critical juncture was Pericles, the Athenian general who shaped his culture; the man who retreated was Prime Minister Pitt on his retirement from public life. The child was twelve-year-old Hannibal, taking an oath to one day attack Rome; and the girl at the inn was Joan of Arc.

History pivots on the actions of individuals, both great and ordinary. In this regard one cannot help thinking of Esther, the young Israelite woman who married into royalty just when evil men were plotting the annihilation of the Jews in the fourth century B.C. Her uncle urged her to plead with her husband the king to save her people; when Queen Esther faltered, he added his famous remonstration:

“Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”

Esther found her courage renewed, despite the knowledge she might die. Advisors, friends, and officials had been executed for provoking her husband’s wrath. Nevertheless she went to him, leaving
her uncle the message: “I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

Esther did not perish. Her decision to act without knowing the outcome changed the history of an entire race of people, an event still celebrated at the annual Jewish Feast of Purim.

No mere mortals
C.S. Lewis reminds us that there are no ordinary people – no mere mortals. Each person’s destiny will lead to immortal horror or everlasting splendor.

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor’s glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken.

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.

All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.

Nations, cultures, arts, civilization – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.

This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously – no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner – no mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. (The Weight of Glory)

Humble trust in God’s strength
Another key virtue which is essential for magnanimity to be properly directed is humility. The virtue of humility is properly grounded in the truth – the truth that we are sinners who can do nothing apart from Christ (John 15:5), that is, nothing of spiritual and eternal consequence unless we are united with Jesus Christ and cooperate with his guidance and help. The Lord Jesus Christ entrusts each one of us, as members of his body the church, with spiritual power, authority, and gifts. Many of us fail to recognize and use the gifts God gives us, often because of our own ignorance. We fail to recognize the Lord’s call and the spiritual authority and gifts which come with the call. Sometimes we fail to respond out of false humility. We think we are too weak and unworthy to do great works for God. This false humility is really a form of pride because we refuse to believe that God chooses to work in and through ordinary and “cracked vessels” for his glory. Paul the Apostle reminds us of an important spiritual truth in two of his letters:
For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us (2 Corinthians 4:7).

True humility allows us to place our trust firmly in the Lord Jesus who wills to work in and through us for his glory. The Lord Jesus, at his last supper on the eve of his sacrifice, told his disciples,

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father (John 14:12).

A key obstacle that can hold us back from doing great things for the Lord is our refusal to believe and trust in God’s power to work in and through us by his Spirit. That is why Paul the Apostle urged his fellow believers and co-workers in mission to not give into fear or forget God’s presence and power residing within each believer.

God is all-powerful and all-sufficient. He has no need of us, mere men and women, who are weak, ignorant, and subject to sin. But he has chosen through his divine plan to do nothing without us. That is why his Son became a man of mortal flesh who suffered, died, and rose for our sake. The Lord Jesus told his disciples that they would carry on the work which he began – proclaiming the good news of the Gospel, and bringing God’s mercy, healing, and deliverance to a lost generation in search of peace, happiness, and freedom.

**Vessels for noble use**

Paul the Apostle urges us to choose to be noble vessels for the Lord who are consecrated and ready to do any work which the Lord chooses to give us.

In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble. If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work. (2 Timothy 2:20-21)

Our mission as disciples of Jesus Christ is to boldly live and proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God and to act as his ambassadors. When the world looks at Christians – especially those who call themselves disciples of Jesus Christ, do they see the face of Christ, the heart of Christ, the mind of Christ, his loving gaze, his healing touch, his warm embrace, his mercy and forgiveness? It is the Lord’s desire to transform us into his likeness – if we cooperate with him and allow his Holy Spirit to change and purify us from within. The Lord Jesus himself puts within each of our hearts the burning desire to be light that points others to himself, and to be the hands, feet, and mouth of Christ who bring good news to the poor, the lame, the oppressed, and those blinded by sin and ignorance. In short, to be magnanimous as he is.
## Being “small-minded / faint-hearted” and “big-headed / self-important”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small-minded, Faint-hearted</th>
<th>Noble-minded, Great-hearted</th>
<th>Big-headed, Self-Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Holds back from serving and giving to others out of fear of failure or lack of confidence | Noble in character and noble-minded  
Strives to do what is noble and excellent | The vain person thinks he or she is worthy of great things when he or she really is not because they lack the character to pursue excellence |
| Holds back from giving or serving others due to ignorance of one’s own personal gifts, strengths, and talents | Strives to do great things for the benefit of others  
Thinks the best of others and holds them in high estimation and esteem | Big-headed and swollen with conceit – exaggerated estimation of oneself |
| Mediocre, half-hearted, irresolute | Strives to give others the best that can be offered  
Great-hearted – takes delight in doing good deeds and helping others | Vanity – thinking they are more intelligent and gifted than they are |
| Timid, insecure, afraid to take risks | Benevolent and generous in giving to others for their benefit and not for the sake of reward or payment | Puffed up with self-importance and vanity – thinking too highly of oneself and not measuring up |
| Pre-occupied and anxious about self | The wise person who remains meek in the face of insults  
The judge who is lenient in judgment  
The ruler who is kind in his governance | Demands that rights, including one’s own, should be upheld at all costs |
| Puny, stingy, petty | Free from petty resentfulness or vindictiveness, especially towards one’s enemies  
Fair and equitable, loves justice, but doesn’t insist on the letter of the law in order to preserve the spirit of the law | Rash, harsh, abrasive, and prone to unbridled anger |
| Lacks consideration of others, their needs, and best interests | Reasonable, fair, gentle, mild, patient, and considerate  
Generous and gracious in forgiving, tolerant in the face of insults  
Can resolve personality conflicts | Clashes too easily with others, hard to get along with |

> See related articles on [Christian character](#) in the Living Bulwark archives.

[Don Schwager is a member of the Servants of the Word and author of the Daily Scripture Readings and Meditations website.]

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A Life-changing Journey to Uganda

This past August a Kairos Mission team from the European region of the Sword of the Spirit spent two weeks serving in Uganda. The team was made up of 10 young people, ages 18-26. They came from Glasgow, Dublin, Belfast, London and Germany. The team worked alongside local Ugandans, one week with the African Children's Mission and one week with the missions team of Kiwoko Hospital, Luwerro District.

Our main aims were to practically serve alongside local Christians, to get to know different Ugandan mission organisations and support their mission work, to provide opportunities for team members to grow in discipleship, leadership, service, teamwork and spiritual life, and to learn about poverty, mission and development. The trip was successful and richly rewarding for everyone involved. The following reflections from the team members highlight the impact the trip had on our team.

At the end of the Trip we asked each team member to sum up what they believe God had been doing in them and through them during this trip. The following were the ten words:

- change, courage, new beginnings, vision, mission,
- pressed, timing, tempering, move, reference point.

I believe God was deeply at work during our time in Uganda. Since returning we have seen signs of how our joy and zeal has had some impact on our own communities and on each of us as we continue to pursue God's call for our lives.

Phil Morrison, Mission Team Director

My time in Africa was really life-changing for me, and I arrived back in Glasgow with a heart for service, and on fire for mission with our local University Christian Outreach to students. The key word I have taken from this trip is courage. God worked in me, an anxious and fearful person, and said to me, “Be strong and courageous.”

- Meg Jackson

We saw people full of God and his promise
by Meg Jackson
(21, Nursing student, Glasgow)

He must increase, I must decrease (John 3:30). These words were prayed out by a Lebanese brother as we gathered in London the night before we left to put God at the center of our trip to Uganda. One of the team members prayed for real vision, for our eyes to be opened. That we may see Uganda as he sees it.

And we did. We saw a country broken and fearful and divided, but full of God and his promise. The team spent themselves for God on this trip, and he worked in powerful and majestic ways. There was mud and prayer and paint and roosters and matoki and heat and a pastor called Shadrach and kids who
God's tangible presence in Uganda
by John Moran, (19, Engineering student, Dublin)

Uganda…Where to start? I can only describe it as a time where. God was more tangible than I ever imagined he could be. It has been the most significant and truly life-changing weeks of my life. I was dying to see what Africa was actually like... and I loved it all, the long drops (pit latrines), bucket showers, snakes, mosquitos, worms, termites, matoke (only sort of - it's a cooked dish made from the pulp of green banana), the "starts" (for getting the day going), the people, the work we did… everything, it was all amazing. I especially loved how the children we were working with were always so excited to see us ‘Muzungus’ (African expression for white people), and how the smallest things like a football or an old t-shirt, could make them so happy, genuine "ear to ear" happiness.

Here are a few highlights from the two weeks...

Week one: The ten of us ventured out into the bush through the rocky roads of Kampala to the Ekitangaala ranch where we would stay the first week working with the African Children's Mission. Building mud houses is something that everyone has to try at least once in their life, but building a mud house for a family who were living in the most extreme poverty, with no food, water or shelter is something that completely changed my life. To think that this family of 5 would now came up and gave their hearts to Jesus when they heard of his love. God's protection on us was tangible, and it is clear to us that our small plans were nothing compared to what God has done and is still doing in our lives and those we reach out to.

Step up for him
by Kevin Coyle
(21, Engineering student, Glasgow)

The main word I received from God during the two weeks was a challenge to “step-up” for him and a promise that he would respond. As someone who is quite reserved I find it tough to put myself out there for God but I felt him calling me to do this and that if I did he would work powerfully. On the back of this I have volunteered for several service roles in my home community this year and also lead the feedback session at a prayer meeting in Glasgow. Two things I would never have done before going to Uganda.

God's power to transform lives and cities
by John Robinson
(25, Fine Arts student, Belfast)
have a roof over their heads to keep them dry and safe, and seeing the excitement on the kids’ faces and the happiness that this had brought to them was so rewarding and heart-warming.

Week two: we traveled to Kiowoko hospital where we would spend the remainder of our time. Travelling through the clay roads of Uganda, seeing all the people, the food, the animals, the culture and the scenery was all just so... African. We met Shadrach, a man whose passion and energy for life I envy deeply; his thirst to spread God's love to people is truly remarkable.

We visited three different primary schools in the following days. Playing, singing and teaching the kids was such an amazing experience. The welcome that we received from the children was so genuine and sincere. My favorite experience was an afternoon we spent in the wards praying with the patients. They spoke little or no English, and most of them were seriously sick or injured. It was extremely overwhelming, but God was so present in these peoples’ lives, their hope and trust in God was so encouraging to see. To many it would seem that they have so little, but to them, they had the one and only thing they needed.

God only asks me to show them love
by Marie-Claire Flynn (20, Engineering student, Glasgow)

One of my highlights from the two weeks was when Meg and I had a chance to pray with women in the maternity ward and the babies in the intensive care unit. I really felt God present with us, especially when I did not have the words to say....

Regardless of my lack of wisdom, God used me, and in my feeble attempts to show love to others, He showed me something of his love for the poor. God showed me that it is not for me to fix the suffering of others, as he is able to do that in his own time; God only asks me to show them love.

Team impact
by Christiane Lewerentz

The team prepared for the trip with a team weekend in June and two preparation days in London at the start of the trip. Every team member had a significant role in the preparation and running of the trip – from travel arrangements, finances, worship and kids programme to coordinating gifts and keeping our supporters up to date. The positive team dynamics, mutual support and good relationships were remarkable and contributed to fruitful teamwork, helpful discussions and everyone feeling comfortable to share challenges and personal learning during the trip. Most evenings, we shared as a team or separately as men and women about highlights and challenges of the day to process together what we had experienced.

Joining our hosts’ prayer times, through our own morning prayer and meditations,
Living Bulwark team members with Ugandan family

intercession nights and mentoring conversations, every team member had deep encounters with God and learned a lot about God’s love for the poor, His call on our lives and the sacrifices we need to make to build God’s kingdom. It was great to see how everyone found their place on the team, contributed, took on challenges, stepped out of their comfort zones and engaged with the people we served.

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On Youth Culture by Michael Shaughnessy

YOLO!

Google-search YOLO and you will get 26 million hits. Ask a social savvy teen what it means and you might just get an eye-roll. YOLO is one of social media's hot phrases. It's an acronym for: “you only live once.”

The idea that you only go around once in life isn't new – and it is true – you do only live once.

"You only go around once in life, so you have to grab for all the gusto you can get." – Schlitz Beer ad 1970

Teens use #YOLO to update friends on the latest buzz in their life. By using the YOLO hashtag on Twitter they contribute to making YOLO a "trending topic" so all Twitter users can access every tweet with the hashtagged word.

That you only live once should be a basis to take life seriously. In youth culture, however, #YOLO is used to justify a selfish, reckless risk taken without regard to longterm consequences.

FOMO!

FOMO is an acronym for “fear of missing out.” It is the ugly first cousin of envy and characterized by a strong desire to be in on everything! Missing out could put a dent in your career, status or happiness – and that would be tragic. FOMO is more prevalent in older teens as a smorgasbord of choices expands open before them.

However, it's not just the multitude of choices that produces FOMO; it is the pressure to choose the right one now!

Modern social media, especially Facebook, text messaging, Twitter and Instagram enable instant awareness of countless people's current activities and everything one could be doing right now.

“I'm not really in the mood to go out, but I feel like I should” is the kind of statement made by those who fear leading a life that might be less than it could be – even though FOMO, fear, is in fact making their life worse.

Once again what was a good principle, fear of wasting the life God gives us, has been twisted into something utterly self-centered: fear of missing out on every pleasure, vain status or fleeting fame.
YOLO has become a basic moral principle for the choices of the modern teen. It can be used to justify anything: you only live once. As Sherman Ave, a blogger, states, “YOLO will always make sense as long as you don’t think about it.”

The post-modern mind speaks again.

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Michael Shaughnessy is an elder in The Servants of the Word and the Director of Kairos in North America. Kairos is an international federation of outreaches to high school, university and post university aged people.

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

– Daily Readings and Prayers for January 18-25 2013

Theme and Biblical Text from Micah 6:6-8:
What shall God require of us?

‘With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’ He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? - Micah 6:6-8

Introduction

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is actually an 8 day observance or “Octave” of prayer. It has been this way from the beginnings of this international movement in 1908. Following are a set of 8 daily scripture readings, a short commentary on the readings, and a prayer. These materials for 2013 were developed by a group of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant leaders and scholars living in India and were sanctioned by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. These readings and prayers are intended to be prayed in common by all those participating in the Week of Prayer around the world.

Additionally, we have added a specific daily intercession for various aspects of our ecumenical life and mission in the Sword of the Spirit.
For Saturday’s observance, we have also included a short Lord’s Day prayer that can be inserted in the section following the Blessing of the Wine which can be used similarly to the other seasonal variations in the Lord’s Day prayers if you find this helpful.

Please use these materials in any way you find most helpful in your personal and family worship times during this season of prayer.

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**Friday January 18th, 2013: Walking in conversation**

**Readings**

- Genesis 11: 1-9  The story of Babel and legacy of our diversity
- Psalm 34:11-18 “Come...listen”. God’s invitation to conversation
- Acts 2: 1-12  The outpouring of the Spirit, the gift of understanding

**Commentary**

To walk humbly with God means to walk as people speaking with one another and with the Lord, always attentive to what we hear. And so we begin our celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity by reflecting on scripture passages which speak of the essential practice of conversation. Conversation has been central to the ecumenical movement, as it opens up spaces for learning from one another, sharing what we have in common, and for differences to be heard and attended to. In this way mutual understanding is developed. These gifts from the search for unity are part of our basic call to respond to what God requires of us: through true conversation justice is done, and kindness learnt. Experiences of practical liberation from all over the world make clear that the isolation of people who are made to live with poverty is forcefully overcome by practices of dialogue.

Today’s Genesis reading, and the story of Pentecost, both reflect something of this human action, and its place in God’s liberating plan for people. The story of the tower of Babel first describes how, where there is no language barrier great things are possible. However, the story tells how this potential is grasped as a basis for self-promotion: “let us make a name for ourselves”, is the motivation for the building of the great city. In the end this project leads to a confusion of speech; from now on we must learn our proper humanity through patient attentiveness to the other who is strange to us. It is with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost that understanding across differences is made possible in a new way, through the power of Jesus’ resurrection. Now we are invited to share the gift of speech and listening orientated toward the Lord, and towards freedom. We are called to walk in the Spirit.

The experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is a conversation taking place in a context of travel together, but also of loss and disappointed hope. As churches living with levels of disunity, and as societies divided by prejudices and fear of the other we can recognise ourselves here. Yet it is precisely here that Jesus chooses to join the conversation - not presuming the superior role of teacher, but walking alongside his disciples. It is his desire to be a part of our conversations, and our response of wanting him to stay and speak more with us, that enables a living encounter with the Risen Lord.

All Christians know something of this meeting with Jesus, and the power of his word “burning within us”; this resurrection experience calls us into a deeper unity in Christ. Constant conversation with each other and with Jesus - even in our own disorientation - keeps us walking together towards unity.
Prayer

Jesus Christ, we proclaim with joy our common identity in you, and we thank you for inviting us into a dialogue of love with you. Open our hearts to share more perfectly in your prayer to the Father that we may be one, so that as we journey together we may draw closer to each other. Give us the courage to bear witness to the truth together, and may our conversations embrace those who perpetuate disunity. Send your Spirit to empower us to challenge situations where dignity and compassion are lacking in our societies, nations, and the world.

God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen

Questions

- Where do we practice true conversation, across the various differences that separate us?
- Is our conversation orientated towards some grand project of our own, or towards new life which brings hope of resurrection?
- What people do we converse with, and who is not included in our conversations? Why?

Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit

Let’s pray that God give us all a common vision in the Sword of the Spirit for the Ecumenical call and mission that he has for us. May our hearts be open to all that he has for us in living out our lives in unity.

Saturday, January 19th, 2013: Walking with the broken body of Christ

Readings

Ezekiel 37:1-14 “Shall these dry bones live?”
Psalm 22: 1-8 God’s servant, mocked and insulted, cries out to God
Hebrews 13: 12-16 The call to go to Jesus “outside the camp”
Luke 22: 14-23 Jesus breaks the bread, giving the gift of himself before his suffering

Commentary

To walk humbly with God means hearing the call to walk out of the places of our own comfort, and accompany the other, especially the suffering other.

“Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.” These words from Ezekiel give voice to the experience of many people across the globe today. In India, it is the “broken people” of the Dalit communities whose lives speak vividly of this suffering - a suffering in which Christ, the crucified one, shares. With injured people of every time and place, Jesus cries out to the Father: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Christians are called into this way of the cross. The Epistle to the Hebrews makes clear not only the saving reality of Jesus’ suffering, in the place of the margins, but also the need for his disciples to go “outside the camp” to join him...
there. When we meet those who have been excluded and we recognise the crucified one in their sufferings, the
direction we should be going is clear: to be with Christ, means to be in solidarity with those on the margins whose
wounds he shares.

The body of Christ, broken on the cross, is “broken for you”. The story of Christ’s suffering and death is prefaced by
the story of the last supper: it is then celebrated as victory over death in every eucharist. In this Christian celebration,
Christ’s broken body is his risen and glorious body; his body is broken so that we can share his life, and, in him, be
one body.

As Christians on the way to unity we can often see the eucharist as a place where the scandal of our disunity is
painfully real, knowing that, as yet, we cannot fully share this sacrament together as we should. This situation calls
us to renewed efforts towards deeper communion with one another.

Today’s readings might open up another line of reflection. Walking with Christ’s broken body opens up a way to be
eucharistic together: to share our bread with the hungry, to break down the barriers of poverty and inequality - these,
too, are “eucharistic acts”, in which all Christians are called to work together. Pope Benedict XVI frames his
reflections on eucharist for the church in just this way: that it is a sacrament not only to be believed in and
celebrated, but also to be lived (Sacramentum caritatis). In keeping with the Orthodox understanding of “the liturgy
after the liturgy”, here it is recognised that there is “nothing authentically human” that does not find its pattern and
life in the eucharist. (SC 71)

**Prayer**

God of compassion, your Son died on the Cross so that by his broken body our divisions might be destroyed. Yet we
have crucified him again and again with our disunity, and with systems and practices which obstruct your loving
care and undermine your justice towards those who have been excluded from the gifts of your creation. Send us your
Spirit to breathe life and healing into our brokenness that we may witness together to the justice and love of Christ.
Walk with us towards that day when we can share in the one bread and the one cup at the common table. God of life,
lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

**Questions**

- In light of that prophetic tradition in which God desires justice, rather than ritual without righteousness, we
  need to ask: how is the eucharist, the mystery of Christ’s brokenness and new life, celebrated in all the places
  where we walk?
- What might we do, as Christians together, better to witness to our unity in Christ in places of brokenness and
  marginality?
Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit

Let’s pray today for growth in ecumenical charity and courtesy in our midst. May our hearts be open to one another, to understand and appreciate the work of God in each of our separate traditions.

Prayer for the Lord’s Day—this prayer may be used after the blessing of the Wine similar to the other seasonal variations in the ceremony.

Leader: Let us thank him this day especially for the unity we enjoy in the Body of Christ and for our call to Ecumenical Life in the Sword of the Spirit. May we all become perfectly one, so that the world may know and believe. Lord our God, you are bringing us into the fullness of unity through the work of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Group: Now we live with him through the Holy Spirit, and we look for the day when we will dwell with him in your everlasting kingdom.

Sunday January 20th, 2013: Walking Towards Freedom

Readings

Exodus 1: 15-22 The Hebrew midwives obey God’s law over the command of Pharaoh
Psalm 17: 1-6 The confident prayer of one open to God’s gaze
2 Cor. 3: 17-18 The glorious freedom of God’s children in Christ
John 4: 4-26 Conversation with Jesus leads the Samaritan woman into freer living

Commentary

Walking humbly with the Lord is always a walk into receiving the freedom he opens up before all people. With this in mind we celebrate. We celebrate the mystery of the struggle for freedom, which takes place even in the places where oppression, prejudice and poverty seem to be impossible burdens. The resolute refusal to accept inhuman commands and conditions - like those given by Pharaoh to the midwives of the enslaved Hebrew people - can seem like small actions; but these are often the kinds of actions towards freedom going on in local communities everywhere. Such determined journeying towards fuller living presents a gift of Gospel hope to all people, caught up, in our different ways, within the patterns of inequality across the globe.

The step by step journey into freedom from unjust discrimination and practices of prejudice is brought home to us by the story of Jesus’ meeting at the well with the woman of Samaria. Here is a woman who seeks, first of all, to question the prejudices which confront her, as well as to seek ways of alleviating the practical burdens of her life. These concerns are the starting place for her conversation with Jesus. Jesus himself engages in conversation with her on the bases both of his need for her practical help (he is thirsty) and in a mutual exploration of the social prejudices which make this help seem problematic. Bit by bit the way of a freer life is opened up before the woman, as the reality of the complexities of her life are seen more clearly in the light of Jesus’ words. In the end these personal insights return the conversation to a place where what divides these two groups of people - where they should worship - is transcended. “Worship in spirit and in truth” is what is required; and here we learn to be free from all that holds us back from life together, life in its fullness.

To be called into greater freedom in Christ, is a calling to deeper communion. Those things which separate us - both as Christians searching for unity, and as people kept apart by unjust traditions and inequalities - keep us captives, and hidden from one another. Our freedom in Christ is, rather, characterised by that new life in the Spirit, which enables us, together, to stand before the glories of God “with unveiled faces”. It is in this glorious light that we learn to see each other more truly, as we grow in Christ’s likeness towards the fullness of Christian unity.

Prayer

Liberating God, we thank you for the resilience and hopeful faith of those who struggle for dignity and fullness of life. We know that you raise up those who are cast down, and free those who are bound. Your Son Jesus walks with us to show us the path to authentic freedom. May we appreciate what has been given to us, and be strengthened to overcome all within us that enslaves. Send us your Spirit so that the truth shall set us free, so that with voices united we can proclaim your love to the world. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

Questions

- Are there times, even in our own Christian communities, when the prejudices and judgments of the world, - with regard to caste, age, gender, race, educational background - stop us seeing each other clearly in the light of God’s glory?
- What small, practical steps can we take, as Christians together, towards the freedom of the Children of God (Romans 8.21) for our churches, and for wider society?

Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit

Let’s pray today for growth in ecumenical charity and courtesy in our midst. May our hearts be open to one another, to understand and appreciate the work of God in each of our separate traditions.

Monday, January 21st, 2013: Walking as Children of the Earth

Reading

Leviticus 25: 8-17  The land is for the common good, not personal gain  
Psalm 65: 5b-13  The fruitful outpouring of God’s grace on the earth  
Romans 8: 18-25  The longing of all creation for redemption  
John 9: 1-11  Jesus’ healing, mud, bodies and water

Commentary

If we are to walk in humility with God, we will need always to be aware of ourselves as part of creation, and recipients of God’s gifts. There is a growing recognition in today’s world that better understanding of our authentic place in creation must become a priority for us. Among Christians, especially, there is a growing awareness of the ways in which ecological concern is a part of “walking humbly with God”, the creator; for all we have is given by God in his creation, and so is not “ours” to do with as we wish. It is for this reason that from 1 September to 4 October Christians are called to observe the Time for Creation – a practice increasingly observed by many churches.
In 1989 the Ecumenical Patriarch, Dimitrios I, proclaimed 1 September as a day of prayer for the environment. The Orthodox Church’s liturgical year starts on that day with a commemoration of God’s creation of the world. On 4 October, many churches from the Western traditions commemorate Francis of Assisi, the author of the “Canticle of Creation”. The beginning and closing of the Time for Creation are thus linked with the concern for creation in the Eastern and the Western traditions of Christianity, respectively.

The Christian story is one of redemption for all creation; it is creation’s own story. The belief that, in Jesus, God becomes a human person, in a particular place and time is a central belief around which all Christians gather. It is a shared belief in the Incarnation which carries with it a profound recognition of the importance of creation - of bodies, food, earth, water, and all that feeds our life as people on the planet. Jesus is fully part of this world. It may be slightly shocking to hear how Jesus heals using his spittle and the dust from the earth; but it is true to this real sense of the created world as integral to God’s bringing us to new life.

Across the world the earth is often worked by the poorest people, who frequently do not themselves share in the fruitfulness that results. At the same time it is these communities who have a particular care for the earth, as the practical wisdom of working the land is shown forth in their labours.

Care of the earth includes basic questions of how human beings are to live within creation, in ways which are more fully human for all. That the earth - its working and ownership - should so often be a source of economic inequalities, and degrading work practices is a cause for great concern and action for Christians together. The covenantal recognition of these dangers of exploitation with regard to the earth is spoken about in Leviticus’ instructions concerning the Year of Jubilee: the land and its fruits are not given to be an opportunity for “taking advantage of one another”, rather the working of the land is for the benefit of all. This is not just a “religious idea”; it is tied to very real economic and business practices concerning how the land is managed, bought and sold.

**Prayer**

God of life, we thank you for the earth, and for those who care for it and bring forth its fruits. May the Spirit, the giver of life, help us to recognise that we are part of creation’s web of relationships. May we learn to cherish the earth and listen to creation’s groaning. May we truly walk together in the steps of Christ, bringing healing to all that wounds this earth, and ensuring a just sharing of the things that it brings forth.

God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

**Questions**

- Today’s readings invite Christians into a deep unity of action in common concern for the earth. Where do we practice the spirit of the year of Jubilee in our life as Christians together?
- Where, in our Christian communities, are we complicit with things that degrade and exploit the earth? Where can we work more together in learning and teaching reverence for God’s creation?

**Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit**

Let’s pray today for the Servants of the Word and their efforts to welcome men to their brotherhood from many different Christian traditions. May God open the way especially for many young men from Protestant and Orthodox traditions to join the Servants of the Word.
Tuesday, January 22nd, 2013: Walking as the Friends of Jesus

Reading

Song of Solomon 1.5-8  Love and the beloved
Psalm 139.1-6  You have searched me out and known me
3 John 2-8  Hospitality to friends in Christ
John 15.12-17  I call you friends

Commentary

To walk humbly with God does not mean walking alone. It means walking with those who are those vital signs of God’s presence among us, our friends. “But I have called you friends” says Jesus in John’s Gospel. Within the freedom of love, we are able to choose our friends, and to be chosen as a friend. “You did not choose me, but I chose you” Jesus says to each of us. Jesus’ friendship with each of us transfigures and transcends our relationships with family and society. It speaks of God’s deep and abiding love for us all.

The Bible’s love poem, the Song of Solomon, has been interpreted in various ways such as the love of God for Israel, or the love of Christ for the Church. It remains the testimony of passion between lovers which transcends the imposed boundaries of society. While the lover says to her beloved “I am black and beautiful”, her words come with the plea “do not gaze at me because I am dark.” But the lover does gaze, and chooses love, as does God in Christ.

What does the Lord require of those called to walk with Jesus and his friends? In India it is a call to the churches to embrace the Dalits as equal friends of their common friend. Such a call to be friends with the friends of Jesus is another way of understanding the unity of Christians for which we pray this week. Christians around the world are called to be friends with all those who struggle against discrimination and injustice. The walk towards Christian unity requires that we walk humbly with God with – and as – the friends of Jesus.

Prayer

Jesus, from the first moment of our being you offered us your friendship. Your love embraces all peoples, especially those who are excluded or rejected because of human constructions of caste, race or colour. Filled with the confidence and assurance of our dignity in you, may we walk in solidarity towards each other, and embrace each other in the Spirit, as children of God. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

Questions

- Who are those in your communities whom Christ calls into your friendship?
- What prevents the friends of Jesus from being friends with one another?
- How does being the friends of the same Jesus challenge the divided churches?
**Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit**

Let's pray today for many open doors to leaders and allies across the Christian world. May God use us as a servant to bridge differences amongst his people and through our experience of ecumenical life to help bring his people together in ways both large and small.

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**Wednesday, January 23rd, 2013: Walking beyond Barriers**

**Reading**

- Ruth 4.13-18  The offspring of Ruth and Boaz
- Psalm 113  God the helper of the needy
- Ephesians 2.13-16  Christ has broken down the dividing wall between us
- Matthew 15.21-28  Jesus and the Canaanite woman

**Commentary**

To walk humbly with God means walking beyond barriers that divide and damage the children of God. Christians in India are aware of the divisions among themselves. St Paul lived with the devastating divisions in the earliest Christian community between Gentile and Jewish Christians. To this barrier and to every subsequent one, Paul proclaims that Christ “is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall between us.” Elsewhere Paul writes, “As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3.27-28). In Christ, all the deep barriers of the ancient world – and their modern successors – have been removed because on the Cross Jesus created in himself one new humanity.

In a world in which religious barriers are often difficult to cross, Christians who are a tiny minority in the multi-religious context of India remind us of the importance of interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Matthew’s Gospel tells of the difficult journey for Jesus – and his disciples – to cross the barriers of religion, culture and gender when he is confronted by a Canaanite woman who pleads with Jesus to cure her daughter. The disciples’ visceral instinct to send her away and Jesus’ own hesitation are overcome by her faith, and by her need. From hence Jesus and his disciples were able to cross the imposed human barriers and boundaries of the ancient world. Such is already present in the Hebrew Bible. The book of Ruth, the Moabite woman of a different culture and religion, concludes with a list of her offspring with the Israelite Boaz. Their child Obed was the father of Jesse, the father of David. The ancestry of the hero-King of ancient Israel reflects the fact that God’s will may be fulfilled when people cross the barriers of religion and culture. The walk with God today requires that we cross the barriers that separate Christians from one another and from people of other faiths. The walk towards Christian unity requires walking humbly with God beyond the barriers that separate us from one another.

**Prayer**

Father, forgive us for the barriers of greed, prejudice, and contempt that we continually build which separate us within and between churches, from people of other faiths, and from those we consider to be less important than us. May your Spirit give us courage to cross these boundaries, and to tear down the walls that disconnect us from each
other. Then with Christ may we step forth into unknown terrain, to carry his message of loving acceptance and unity to all the world. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

Questions

- What are the barriers that separate Christians in your community?
- What are the barriers that separate Christians from other religious traditions in your community?
- What are the differences and similarities between walking beyond the barriers that separate Christians from one another, and walking beyond those between Christianity and other religions?

Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit

Let’s pray today for growth in Protestant membership of our communities. May God be gracious and bring many men and women from the Protestant world to join with us.

Thursday January 24th, 2013: Walking in Solidarity

Reading

Numbers 27.1-11 The right of inheritance to daughters
Psalm 15 Who shall abide in God’s sanctuary?
Acts 2.43-47 The disciples held all things in common
Luke 10.25-37 The Good Samaritan

Commentary

To walk humbly with God means walking in solidarity with all who struggle for justice and peace. This poses a question for those who pray for the unity of Christians this week: what is the unity we seek? The Faith and Order Commission, which includes the members of the fellowship of the World Council of Churches as well as the Catholic Church, understands unity as “visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship.” The ecumenical movement is dedicated to overcome the historic and current barriers that divide Christians, but it does so with a vision of visible unity that links the nature and mission of the Church in the service of the unity of humankind and the overcoming of all that harms the dignity of human beings and keeps us apart. As Faith and Order has said:

The Church is called and empowered to share the suffering of all by advocacy and care for the poor, the needy and the marginalised. This entails critically analysing and exposing unjust structures, and working for their transformation... This faithful witness may involve Christians themselves in suffering for the sake of the Gospel. The Church is called to heal and reconcile broken human relationships and to be God’s instrument in the reconciliation of human division and hatred (Nature and Mission of the Church).

There are many examples of such acts of healing and reconciliation by the Indian churches. Until very recently, Christian inheritance laws in India disempowered daughters. The churches supported the demand for a repeal of this archaic law. The story of the daughters of Zelophehad, in which Moses turned to God for justice in support of the rights of the daughters, was invoked to demand justice for women. Thus, Dalit Christians have been moved in their struggles for justice by such biblical witness.
A biblical image of Church united in solidarity with the oppressed is Jesus’s parable of the Good Samaritan. Like the Dalits, the Good Samaritan is from a despised and outcast community, who is the one in the story who cares for the man abandoned by the wayside, and who proclaims by his solidarity in action, the hope and comfort of the Gospel. The walk towards Christian unity is inseparable from walking humbly with God in solidarity with any and all in need of justice and kindness.

**Prayer**

Triune God, in your very life you offer us a unique pattern of interdependence, loving relationships and solidarity. Unite us to live our lives in this way. Teach us to share the hope that we find in people who struggle for life all over the world. May their endurance inspire us to overcome our own divisions, to live in holy accord with one another, and to walk together in solidarity. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

**Questions**

- Who in your community stands in need of the solidarity of the Christian community?
- What churches are, or have been in solidarity with you?
- In what ways would more visible Christian unity enhance the Church’s solidarity with those who stand in need of justice and kindness in your context?

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**Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit**

Let’s pray today for our efforts to plant new ecumenical communities in Germany, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Fiji. Let’s pray as well for those single denomination communities that are actively desiring and working to grow ecumenically in membership. May God graciously anoint our efforts in these places and go before us.

**Friday, January 25th, 2013: Walking in Celebration**

**Reading**

- Habakkuk 3.17-19 Celebrating in a time of hardship
- Psalm 100 The worship of God through all the earth
- Philippians 4.4-9 Rejoice in the Lord always
- Luke 1:46-55 The Song of Mary

**Commentary**

To walk humbly with God means to walk in celebration. The visitor to India is struck by the hardships and struggles endured by Dalits, but at the same time by their sense of hope and celebration.

Hope and celebration occur together in today’s biblical readings. The prophet Habakkuk rejoices in the Lord at a time of drought and crop failure. Such testimony that God will walk with his people in their difficulties is a celebration of hope. The Blessed Virgin Mary walks to her cousin Elizabeth in order to celebrate her pregnancy. She
sings her Magnificat as a song of hope even before the birth of her child. And from prison, Paul exhorts the Christian community at Philippi to celebration: “Rejoice in the Lord always.” In the Bible, celebration is linked to hope in God’s faithfulness.

The celebratory aspects of Dalit culture bear similar testimony to a gospel of faith and hope, forged out of the crucible of the Dalit experience of struggle for dignity and resilient survival. As we pray for Christian unity this week, we turn to the celebration of life that we see in India with focus on the faithfulness of Dalits to their Christian identity in the context of their struggles for life. Our celebration for a unity among Christians which has yet to be achieved likewise occurs in hope and struggle. It is grounded in hope that Christ’s prayer that we may be one will be achieved in God’s time and through God’s means. It is grounded in gratitude that unity is God’s gift, and in recognition of the unity we already experience as the friends of Jesus, expressed in one baptism. It is grounded in the conviction that God calls each of us to work for that unity, and that all our efforts will be used by God, trusting with St Paul “in everything by prayer and thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” The walk towards Christian unity requires that we walk humbly with God in celebration, in prayer, and in hope.

**Prayer**

Gracious God, may your Holy Spirit fill our communities with joy and celebration, so that we can cherish the unity we already share, and zealously continue in the search for visible unity. We rejoice in the faith and hope of peoples who refuse to allow their dignity to be diminished, seeing in them your wonderful grace and your promise of freedom. Teach us to share in their joy and learn from their faithful endurance. Rekindle our hope and sustain our resolve, that in Christ’s name we may walk together in love, raising a united voice of praise, and singing together one prayer of adoration.

God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.

**Questions**

- What are the struggles towards justice in your community? What are the causes for celebration on the way?
- What are the struggles towards Christian unity in your community? What are the causes for celebration along the way?

**Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit**

As we conclude our week of prayer and in particular as we focus today on the need for reconciliation, let’s pray for a spirit of ecumenical revival to sweep across God’s people, ourselves included. May God grant us an awakening and revival of love for one another and a deep desire for unity.
Keeping The Lord's Day Holy

A study of the implications of the third commandment and its sanctification of time for the new evangelization

Part 1

by Nico Angleys

Introduction

Western culture has long been preoccupied with the keeping and the measuring of time. Today our technological societies require greater precision in time tracking than ever before. The scientific evolution of our world has reduced matters of time to chronometrical accuracy and has thus obscured the notion that time belongs to God. In his eternal and infinite wisdom, he gave us a command pertaining to time: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). The Psalmist sings of the goodness of the commands of God: “Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD” (Psalm 119:1). Jesus upholds this command and is given the title “Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28, Matthew 12:8, and Luke 6:5). In the Great Commission, Jesus tells his disciples: “teach them [the disciples of all nations] to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). Thus, in our day, the work of evangelization involves teaching the third commandment and declaring the blessing of sanctified time to a culture fixated on time.

On several occasions in the last few years the Holy Spirit has led me to read about sabbath-keeping and to reflect on my own practices. He has thus made me more aware of the beauty and purpose of this command. My aim here is to show how the commandment to keep the Lord’s Day holy teaches, heals, and gives rest to the modern person. In this thesis, I will first examine the biblical teaching on the Lord’s Day, noting its roots in the Old Testament, its application in Jesus’ life, and its further development in the New Testament. Then I will observe the theological implications of the third commandment for the modern age. And finally, I shall propose five areas in which this commandment offers insight into the evangelization...
I. Biblical Teaching on the Lord's Day

A. Sabbath in the Old Testament

The commandment to keep a day holy is rooted in the Old Testament command regarding the sabbath. The word “sabbath” means to rest or to cease and in all likelihood is derived from the Hebrew word “to stop.” Thirteen distinct passages instruct God’s people about the sabbath, revealing a rich tradition of making a day holy. From these texts we can identify three distinct reasons for keeping this day holy to the Lord.

1. God Creates

The first mention of the sabbath is at the beginning of the biblical narrative at the conclusion of the creation account. In Genesis 2:1-3, we hear that God himself rested on the seventh day. The first thing to note is that the author repeats several terms in the three short sentences of this passage: the seventh day (three times); God rested (twice); and the work which he had done (three times).

The repetition of the “seventh day” highlights the significance of the day both because of the use of the number seven and because none of the other days in the creation account are mentioned more than once. A philological link between the word “sabbath” and “seven” in Hebrew noted by scholars further strengthens the connection between the seventh day of creation and the sabbath. The term “rested” is contrasted with the work God did on the other days, and its primary sense is to “desist from work.”

Finally, the word for work is the ordinary word for human work. Perhaps, as one commentator suggests, “this word was deliberately chosen to hint that man should stop his daily work on the seventh day.”

God's purpose of the sabbath day

The second thing to note is that God hallows a day. The first thing made holy in the Scripture is a day, not a created physical thing or a place, as much of the hallowing will be in the rest of the Pentateuch, but a period of time. This means that the seventh day belongs to God in a special way. The biblical meaning of the fact that God rested and hallowed a day reveals the initial purpose of the sabbath. Keeping the sabbath means ceasing from work and orienting the day towards the Creator.

This brief account of the first sabbath places the practice of keeping a day set apart within the very fabric of creation.
The sabbath initially, in the order of revelation, is not a result of a special relationship with the God of the covenant, but is rather a part of the natural order of things. As Bruce Vawter writes, the author of Genesis is “declaring the Sabbath rest proper for men in general and not simply an important observance of Judaism.”

The theme of creation is then revisited in Exodus when the LORD instructs his people on a way of life: his third “word” in the Decalogue is to “remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). The first part of this command is stated in the positive unlike most of the other ten commands. Verse 8 acts as a header for the fuller explanation of the commandment: Israel is to remember and to keep holy. The explanation for this commandment as it is given here in Exodus is based on the example of creation when God rested on the seventh day.

The people of God, as heirs of Adam and Eve, made in the image of the creator (Genesis 1:26-28), are to rest as well. Both this version of the third commandment and the one in Deuteronomy 5:12-15 list all the members of the household as being under this commandment. Vawter writes that “the later rabbis proposed the sabbath as a mark of man’s basic equality, since on that day all became one, rich and poor, those to whom leisure was a way of life and those for whom it was a surcease from backbreaking labor.”

**Expression of loyalty to God**

Brevard Childs affirms that the cause for the sabbath command in Exodus is the creative act of God and thus anchors this hallowing of the seventh day into the “very structure of the universe.” One Jewish commentator presents the sabbath observance described in Exodus as an “emulation of God’s activity” and the “quintessential expression of loyalty to God.”

**Creation roots of the sabbath**

The creation roots of the sabbath tell us four things. First, the rest commanded by God is for all human beings. Second, the seven day pattern of rest is in harmony with the order of the world and more specifically its Creator. Third, this commandment hearkens back to the goodness of the Creator and the goodness of creation itself. Keeping
this day holy enables God’s people to be filled with awe at “the One who brought all things into being from nothing.”

Fourth and last, the sabbath recalls a seventh day which in the creation account has no end. Unlike the other six days of creation, the description of the seventh day does not contain the expected formulaic conclusion which suggests an open end to the account. As Göran Larsson writes, “it is a day that transcends our temporal existence. It gives a taste of eternity.”

**Sabbath structure of creation**

Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) speaks of the “sabbath structure of creation.” He describes the sabbath as the day for worship which is a participation in the freedom of God. The sabbath points to the covenant in three different ways. First, the Scriptures tell us in Exodus 31:16-17 that the sabbath is a sign for ever of the perpetual covenant.

Second, the celebration of the sabbath, from a creation account perspective, is intended to remind and make present the truth that “the worship of God, his freedom, and his rest come first. Thus and only thus can the human being truly live.” The covenant reveals the love of God for his creatures and the sabbath is a means to remember this love.

Third, Scott Hahn proposes audaciously that the word for “seventh” found in Genesis 2:2 is closely linked to the Hebrew word *shava*, which is the verb for swearing a covenant oath. He concludes that the sabbath is the first swearing of a covenant in the Old Testament: “The seventh day, then, was the sign of the covenant – the sacrament of the covenant. Its name was used synonymously with the covenant.”

Apart from the sabbath, all other measurements of time in the Scriptures are based on the natural and observable cycles of the created order such as days, months, seasons, and years. The sabbath is the only unit of time that is given by the word of God alone. The sabbath is a revealed unit of time. The creation account centered on God as creator is the first and primary motivation for keeping the sabbath in the Old Testament.

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**2. God Delivers**

When the LORD instructs Israel on the sabbath in Deuteronomy, the reason given for keeping this day holy is because God delivered Israel from Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). This second motivation for keeping the sabbath
holy is rooted in God’s salvific action, as distinguished from his creative action. God’s redeeming work is to be remembered and the sabbath is the means by which Israel is to effect this calling to mind. On a weekly basis Israel must remember her Redeemer and all his wonderful works.

**A work of re-creation**

This second reason for the sabbath is an extension of the first in the sense that deliverance is the work of re-creation of the fallen human race. Israel’s redemption from Egypt is a sign that the God who created all things is faithful to his promise and he desires to bring his people into the rest of the seventh day. Jeffrey Tigay offers another way of formulating the distinction between the Exodus and the Deuteronomy sabbath command: “Their references are not mutually exclusive but serve different functions: Exodus explains the origin of the Sabbath, while Deuteronomy explains its aims and offers a motive for observing it.”

**A celebration of remembering**

In his commentary on this commandment, Pope John Paul II writes that to keep something holy means to remember. He goes further in declaring that the action of remembering is done through celebration. Many of the feasts of Israel, described in Leviticus 23, begin or end with a “sabbath of rest” and celebration that commemorate God’s action. In Nehemiah 8:9-12, we read that celebration is the way to keep the feast day holy. God’s deliverance, remembered in the sabbath, is worthy of great celebration and thus the keeping of the day as holy means to celebrate on that day. Walter Bruggemann adds his voice to this view: “The celebration of a day of rest was, then, the announcement of trust in this God who is confident enough to rest. It was then and is now an assertion that life does not depend upon our feverish activity of self-securing, but that there can be a pause in which life is given to us simply as a gift.”

### 3. God Provides

The third reason given in the Old Testament for keeping a day holy is the importance of trusting in God. The story of miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness is punctuated by the command to rest from collecting the divine sustenance on the seventh day (Exodus 16:23-29). Even before the third commandment is given, the practice of rest every seven days is instituted. The provision of manna was surely cause for trust in God, yet in his wisdom, he gives twice as much on the sixth day so that Israel would rest on the seventh day.

On the seventh day, as the people enjoy the sabbath, they are to trust God even more, because their food is from him and will not fail them. Rest is instituted within the framework of complete trust in God for survival in the wilderness. Childs claims that this passage has a joyful ring to it: “The sabbath is not a day to go hungry and mourn. Rather Israel is to eat, for ‘today’ is God’s special day. Later tradition expanded greatly on the theme of the joy of the sabbath, but the kernel of the theme is already present in the manna story.”
A perpetual covenant and sign forever
We read in Exodus 31:14-17 that the sabbath is a sign forever of God’s sanctification, of his perpetual and irrevocable covenant with Israel. The author restates, in verse 15, the same reason for this commandment as found in Exodus 20, namely the Genesis 2 account of God resting on the seventh day. This is the third text that grounds the sabbath in the creation account. This Exodus passage also has several terms indicating the enduring quality of the sabbath: Israel is to keep the sabbath “throughout their generations” (verses 13 and 16); the sabbath is to be a “perpetual covenant” (verse 16) and a “sign for ever” (verse 17).

An eternal sabbath
This suggests an eternal sabbath. This passage on the sabbath follows a multi-chapter exposition of the building of the tabernacle which began in Exodus 25 and precedes the delivery of the covenant on the tablets of stone. The context is significant because the tabernacle is the spatial, physical dwelling place of God on earth, a God who makes covenant with his people and writes that covenant on tablets of stone. The sign of that covenant is the sabbath. In verse 18, the covenant is given on the tables of the testimony, but these do not last very long, as chapter 32 narrates Israel’s rebellion and Moses destroying the tables.

A sign that endures
The sabbath however is the sign that endures. The enduring quality of the third commandment is a reflection of the faithfulness and steadfastness of the God who makes covenant with his people. Keeping the sabbath holy is an expression of fidelity and trust in the living God. The sabbath is first a sign between God and Israel, so that Israel will know and remember, but it is also a sign to the surrounding nations that God has sanctified Israel.

As mentioned earlier, there are numerous other Old Testament passages referring to the sabbath. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Nehemiah all offer further insight into the understanding of the sabbath but due to the limited scope of this thesis, these passages will not be addressed here. In the next issue I will study the biblical teaching of the third commandment in the New Testament.
Keeping The Lord's Day Holy: Part 1, by Nico Angleys

Footnotes

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

2 “Sabbath,” in Allan C. Myers (ed.), The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 897. The consensus among scholars is this definition of the word. Minority views have proposed the Arabic thabat (referring to the stations of the moon) or the Accadian sabattu (the fifteenth day of the month: the full moon), or even that it is a derivation of the word seba (meaning seven) as other possible origins for the meaning of the word sabbath. Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, The Old Testament Sabbath – a Traditional-Historical Investigation (Society of Biblical Literature for the Form Criticism Seminar, 1972), 9. ph’s chastity 39:7–20 follows close on the story of Judah’s deficiencies in that respect in chapter 38.


7 Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 35.

8 “The seventh day is the very first thing to be hallowed in Scripture, to acquire that special status that properly belongs to God alone. In this way Genesis emphasizes the sacredness of the Sabbath. Coupled with the threefold reference to God resting from all his work on that day, these verses give the clearest of hints of how man created in the divine image should conduct himself on the seventh day.” Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 36.


10 Vawter, On Genesis, 62.

“The fact that Sabbath observance is an emulation of God’s activity and an acknowledgement of His creation of the world explains why observing it honors Him. It explains, too, why the Sabbath command is the longest in the Decalogue and why it is sometimes paired with the prohibition of idolatry: like the latter commandment, observing the Sabbath is one of the quintessential expressions of loyalty to God.” Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 68.

*Dies Domini*, 9.

In Genesis 1, each day’s account is framed by the terms “God said” (1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24) and “there was evening and there was morning” (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31) followed by the numbering of the day. The seventh day does not have this concluding term.


Ibid., 32.


*Dies Domini*, 16-17.


*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 2171.

“To this day, the Jewish people continue to build their tabernacle in time every seventh day to recall and confess their covenant with God and to demonstrate their firm hope of final freedom. In this sanctuary they have found rest and refreshment for body and soul, strength and security even in most turbulent times, solidarity and unity in times of discord. Here they have dwelt in the presence of the Lord, who put a sign upon them by entering into an eternal covenant with them. Hence, the Sabbath will forever stand as a sign of both God’s and Israel’s faithfulness.” Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 244.

“But the actual sign of the covenant is the sabbath. There the observance of the sabbath and the building of the tabernacle are two sides of the same reality. Just as the sabbath is a surety of Israel’s sanctity (31:13), so the meeting of God with his people in the tabernacle serve the selfsame end (29:43). There can be no genuine tension between these two signs. The witness of the tabernacle and that of the sabbath both testify to God’s rule over his creation (31:17).” Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 541-42.
Nico Angleys grew up in France, just outside Geneva, in the Alps. He is a member of The Servants of the Word, an ecumenical brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. Nico is the UCO director of University Christian Outreach in North America. He currently lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. In May 2012 he completed his Masters in Theology at Sacred Heart Seminary, writing his thesis on the Keeping the Lord's Day Holy, copyright © 2012. Used with permission.
I was at a restaurant waiting for a friend when I overheard a three-way conversation at the next table. I didn’t mean to listen, but they were loud and seemed unaware of others.

One person complained – just a little – of his spouse’s odd eccentricities; another found fault in a boss’s stupidity; and the last grumbled a bit at her grown child’s ingratitude. Just normal middle-class Americans griping at everyday discomforts.

Then the first told of a documentary he had seen on tribal peoples in the South American Rain Forests, people who had little to no contact with the rest of the world.

The threesome turned out to be Christians, and they wondered about the eternal future for such people. One asked, “If someone never heard the gospel, do they have any chance of heaven? Or is hell their only option?”

Another had just read a book which claimed that everyone is going to heaven. After all, if God really loves the world, wouldn’t he save the whole world? Everyone at the table seemed swayed by this argument (which I think is faulty), and everyone sighed in relief.

Then someone asked, “If God is going to bring everyone to heaven, why on earth would anyone spend any time trying to evangelize anyone?” They concluded there is no need, and frankly no reason.
They collectively breathed another sigh of relief. I too was relieved. Not because of Universal Salvation – which I don’t believe.

I was relieved that these three would never try to evangelize.

**Let me be clear**

I’m in favor of evangelism. I am simply relieved it wouldn’t be done by this threesome. Their sole reason for evangelization was eternal life. It had nothing to do with today.

But Jesus said, “I came that they may have an *abundant life* [or a rich, satisfying life]” (John 10:10). He said he came to bring something that changed the quality of the lives we can live *today*. He came to restore a richness in our lives that was lost in the fall.

Nobody at that table even hinted at a richness in their lives. Nobody said, “I have a joy in my heart that overwhelms my circumstances.”

They may have been breathing – at least in relief – but they didn’t seem to be fully living.

I wonder what they even meant by eternal life. From what I could gather, an eternal extension of their lives would be – well – hell.

**What can we expect?**

The gospel is more than dried-up intellectual understanding, and it is more than dutiful external behavior. The Scribes and Pharisees were full of those, yet Jesus said of them:

> Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across land and sea to make a single convert, and when he converts, you make him twice as fit for hell as you are yourselves.  
> – Matthew 23:15

The gospel unquestionably brings new beliefs of the heart, and it certainly changes how we act. But these come from a new joy at something done for us.

When Jesus told his Nazareth hometown about his purpose on earth, he said that he had come to rescue (as in “save”) the poor and brokenhearted, and the captives and prisoners (Isaiah 61:1-2 quoted by Jesus in Luke 4). Jesus proclaimed good news of great joy.

The gospel brings joy. Jesus came to pour out gladness (joy) to replace mourning.

**What do we most need?**

The world is filled with brokenness and despair. We read about oppressive regimes in the third world countries, and we see broken relationships among our families and friends. The ensuing despondency and despair brings death, even as we breathe.
So what is our normal response? We work ever so hard at filling our activities with meaning, or we simply numb the pain. We try to make our families the best families, or we step on others to climb the corporate ladder, or we anesthetize our hearts with leisure, media, chemicals, or romance.

Or – perhaps more insidiously – we both strive and numb our hearts with dead religion.

In our strivings (and in our numbing) we contribute to the brokenness around us. We work too hard as parents and our kids rebel; we work too hard at our jobs and we leave a wake of broken friendships; we anesthetize our pain with the drugs of distraction or dead religion, and we see the destruction of hope deferred.

What we most need – really the only solution is – the joy of salvation.

**How does it work?**

King David contributed to the brokenness of the world through adultery, murder and cover-up. Yet his prayer was not simply, “forgive me,” though he begins Palm 51 that way. No, his prayer was, “Restore to me the joy of salvation” (Psalm 51:12). He knew what he most needed, God’s joy again.

What will he do with that joy? The very next verse says, “Then I will show your ways to the broken ones, and sinners will return to you.”

David is beginning (dare I say it?) … to evangelize. And you know what? I’m okay with that. More than okay; I’m thrilled. The inner joy that comes from the rescue of God fills David with abundant life, a life worth living. He is not just breathing; he is a life on fire.

Is it okay to evangelize? Frankly, people are “evangelizing” all the time (even the people who try to covert others not to evangelize anyone). So let’s bring God-given joy to others.

Don’t we want a life on fire for everyone? A joyful, rich, abundant life? Then eternal life will be moving from one degree of glory (joy) to the next. Forever.

I’m good with that.

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Sam Williamson grew up in Detroit, Michigan, USA. He is the son of a Presbyterian pastor and grandson of missionaries to China. He moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1975. He worked in London England from 1979 to 1982, helping to establish Antioch, a member community of the Sword of the Spirit. After about twenty-five years as an executive at a software company in Ann Arbor he sensed God call him to something new. He left the software company in 2008 and now speaks at men’s retreats, churches, and campus outreaches. His is married to Carla Williamson and they have four grown children and a grandson. He has a blog site, www.belongsoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.
5. Being Generous Toward God

Kids learn lessons in surprising ways and at surprising times. One of the most significant lessons my Dad ever taught me (and he may not have been aware that he even did it) was to be generous toward God. It happened like this:

Dad was describing a time when he was in Paris. He had a long-established pattern of taking whatever loose change and bills he had in his pocket and putting it in the offering plate whenever a collection was taken up. It was a little expression of “giving everything” – he gave everything in his pocket at the time.

Well, here he was in Paris. He went into church, and they took up a collection. He reached into his pocket and to his horror discovered that he had a lot of money there – he had just exchanged a bunch of dollars for French Francs a short while before. But he stuck with his decision, and put it all in the plate. It hurt at the time, but that was what he had decided to do, and he knew God would honor it. As he recounted the story, I almost ached with the agony of parting with that much money, but I also felt Dad’s determination to be faithful to his decision to honor God.

A few weeks later, we were in church. It was the day after my birthday, and I had been given five dollars by my grandfather – a lot of money to a little boy in 1960. I was carrying it with me, because I just enjoyed having so much money in my pocket.

So there I was, and the collection plate came around. I felt that five dollars in my pocket, and I remembered my Dad’s
story about the large sum of money he had put into the offering plate in Paris. I felt again the ache of his parting with so much money, but in my little 10-year-old heart, I decided to “be like my Dad” and put in everything I had too. On one hand it hurt to part with the money, but the thrill of being like my Dad was strong enough to overcome the agony.

And you know, God honored that big gesture by a little guy trying to be like his Dad. A seed was planted in me that enabled me to give myself to God in more significant ways later in life. As I grew, and especially as I grew in spiritual maturity, I came to know the difficulty of giving things up, but also the tremendous rewards of a life lived for God. It’s a lesson acted out and learned over and over again. But for me it began by giving “everything I had” – just like my Dad.

(c) 2011 Ted Kennedy III

Ted Kennedy is a member of the Servants of the Word, an ecumenical brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He is steward and trainer for the Servants of the Word international formation house in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. Ted is a vice president at Service Brands International, a franchising company headquartered in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

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Story 6  I Would give it All Up in a Second
From Father to Son: Things My Dad Taught Me About Life

by Ted Kennedy III

6. I’d Give It All Up in a Second

One Saturday morning, all of the kids were sitting on Dad’s bed. He was still in his pajamas, and we were just talking. At that point in our lives, all of us had made some kind of profession of Christian faith.

One of us asked if Dad had done anything special to help bring this to pass. He said that he and Mom had prayed for each of us every day, and had done everything they could to instruct us in the faith, but that it was ultimately not something they had done, but rather God's work in us.

Then he stretched out his hands, indicating the bedroom and the rest of the house, and said something I will always remember: “The Lord has blessed us with many good things, but one thing your mother and I have always felt: we would give all this up in a second in exchange for each one of you knowing the Lord.”

I remember thinking to myself at the time: “Well, that’s got to be a major part of the equation. Anyone who is that dedicated to getting something to happen will have a significant impact.”

As I think back over the years, I can see that this was not an exaggeration on Dad’s part. He and Mom consistently made choices that showed that God was first in their lives, and showed the importance they placed on each of us kids knowing the Lord personally.
Living Bulwark

Mom and Dad worked hard to provide for the family, but they worked hardest at providing the most important thing for their kids – an environment in which we could come to know, love and serve God.

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Make your Love as Big as the World

by Augustine of Hippo (185-254 AD)

Augustine said:

It is by running along the road of true love that we can reach our heavenly homeland.

Without love, everything we do is useless. We are wasting our energies if we do
not have love, which is God.

Human beings only become perfect when they are overflowing with love.

One can believe in the right way, but without love one cannot attain eternal happiness.

Love is so strong that without it neither prophecy nor martyrdom avail.

Love is the sweet and saving food without which the rich are poor, thanks to which the poor become rich.

Enlarge your love to the size of the world if you want to love Christ, since the members of Christ are to be found all over the world.

Only those who have the perfection of Christ's love are able to live together. Those who are without it continually upset one another and their anxiety is a misery to the others.

Aurelius Augustine was born in 345 in the town of Tagaste, in Roman North Africa, in what is today Algeria. His mother was Monica, a very devout Christian who had a significant influence on her son's life. His father, named Patricius, was a pagan of significant status in society. Patricius became a Christian shortly before his death.

Augustine was educated at Carthage where he enjoyed academic success. He also enjoyed the party life, and at the age of 17 fell in love with a woman whom he never named. They lived together unmarried for 13 years and had a son whom Augustine named Adeodatus, meaning "gift from God." His son died in his youth.

At the age of 19, after reading Cicero's Hortensiusat, Augustine fell in love with philosophy. He later wrote, "It gave me different values and priorities. Suddenly every vain hope became empty to me, and I longed for the immortality of wisdom with an incredible ardour in my heart." While he pursued Platonic philosophy and the theology of the Manichaens, a Christian heretical sect, he became restless for truth and virtue. Shortly before his 30th birthday, Augustine encountered Ambrose, the saintly bishop of Milan. Augustine was moved by Ambrose's example and his inspired teaching and preaching of the gospel. At the age of 32 Augustine found peace with God and was baptized by Ambrose during the Easter liturgy in 387. Augustine returned to North Africa and formed a monastic...
community with a group of friends. He was ordained a priest in 391 and became a noted preacher. In 396 he reluctantly became a bishop and remained the bishop of Hippo until his death in 430. He left his monastic community, but continued to lead a monastic life with the parish priests of Hippo in his episcopal residence. Augustine died on August 28, 430, during the siege of Hippo by the Vandals.

Augustine was a prolific writer and original thinker. His numerous writings, including theological treatises, sermons, scripture commentaries, and philosophical dialogues, number into the hundreds. His autobiography, the *Confessions*, was considered the first Western autobiography. It was highly read among his contemporaries and has continued as a classic throughout the ages.

Augustine is one of the most important figures in the development of Western Christianity. He is esteemed as a great Latin church father and a Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church. Many Protestants consider him to be one of the theological fathers of Reformation teaching. Among Orthodox he is called St. Augustine the Blessed.
From Heaven's Light

Click to listen to an MP3 audio clip

Lyrics and music by Ed Conlin
(c) Servants of the Word

Lead vocalist is Dominic Schriver. Aaron Galer played drums, Wil did tamborine, Dominic played Guitar and John Prost played bass. Recorded in the summer of 2012 by the Detroit Summer Outreach 2012 team in St. Benedict's Church, Highland Park Michigan. Will Cannon was recording and mixing master.

From Heaven's Light was written as a call to worship. Inspired by the worship of Revelation described by the Apostle John (see Book of Revelation chapters 4 and 5), its imagery beckons us to consider the reality of Heavenly Praise and God's ultimate rule.

I like the chorus which is separated for men and women so as to layer the voices over one another and echo the Thrice Holy proclamation of heaven's hosts. It gives an energy and creates a sense of singing with the choirs above! (At least I like to think of it that way when I hear the women join in!)
Lyrics to the song From Heaven's Light by Ed Conlin

From heaven’s light a voice within cries, ‘further up, come further in!’
Behold the One in glory, ruling in power, seated upon his throne.
So bow as mighty Cherubim join ceaseless voice with Seraphim,
Surrounded by the heavenly throng now lift your voice in heaven’s song!

**Chorus:**
Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God almighty  
you who were, who are, who will be!  
Worthy, worthy of glory, honor and majesty  
For all things – have their being in you who sit on the throne.

And from the throne a mighty voice, as angels bow and saints rejoice,  
As thunder rolls and lightnings flash before the shining sea of glass.
The worship turns, the censor fills, with prayers of saints as heaven stills,  
For now has come the reign of God o’er every race, nation and tongue!

*Repeat chorus*
community in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan, USA, and works as a licensed substance abuse counselor and chaplain with the Capuchin Franciscan Ministries in Detroit.