

Abstract

“BEHOLD WHAT YOU ARE, BECOME WHAT YOU RECEIVE:
PREACHING AS CATECHESIS”

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Project under the direction of Professor David Stark

Both scholarly studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that the average American churchgoer would not perform well on a religious literacy test. The historical reasons for this decline in religious knowledge are numerous, but the real question is not how we arrived at this point, but rather where do we go from here? Compounding the issue is that a good number of those in the pews are not attending Bible studies or formation classes, nor are they reading works about faith or theology. Furthermore, as those who did not grow up in a religious household join a worshipping congregation, they have little foundation upon which to build. The result of all of these conditions is that the sermon becomes the primary, and in many cases, the only, vehicle for the catechetical task of bringing people into a lively faith. But how ought the preacher approach this task? In previous generations, sermons given by preachers such as Cyril of Jerusalem and Isaac Williams had clear catechetical foci. In modern times, preachers like Rowan Williams and Samuel Wells have tended to weave catechesis into sermons that are not expressly doctrinal lectures. The sermons of these preachers provide insight into how the catechetical task might be approached today. As a test-case for such catechetical preaching, a sermon series about the importance and place of the Eucharist in our liturgical lives is considered. The goal being not merely religious knowledge, but the turning of lives towards God and a recognition of God’s abundant grace.

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Behold What You Are, Become What You Receive:
Preaching as Catechesis

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In the name of the Holy Trinity
✙
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dedicated to the glory of God
with thanksgiving for

Tyler, Eleanor, and Rowen Black

and for

The Rev. Robert “Bob” McGee,
who taught me to “see Communion in everything.”

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Chapter I: Introduction – The Need for Catechesis

Background

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”¹

This passage, known as the Great Commission, contains Jesus’ final words to his followers (according to Matthew) and reveals the mission and ministry of the Church.

The term “disciples” is a word in Greek that carries a connotation of pedagogy and being a student. This idea is reinforced when Jesus says that the task of his followers is to teach his commandments to all nations. Teaching, then, is central to the ministry of the Church. Jesus also notes that this teaching is a part of the process of incorporation into the Body of Christ, as he also makes the ministry of baptizing central to his parting message. In the Anglican tradition, Baptism, and particularly adult Baptism, assumes some sort of formation in the faith. As Jesus suggests, baptism and learning (that is, discipleship) go hand in hand.

Jesus also reassures his followers that he will always be with them. How exactly Jesus meant that he would be with them isn’t spelled out. There are at least three ways in which the Church has interpreted this ongoing presence: 1) through the Holy Spirit; 2) through the Sacraments, and the Eucharist in particular; and 3) through the proclamation of the Word.² It is this third means of knowing Christ that is the focus of this project, though the second will be foundational to the project’s substance.

¹ Matthew 28:19-20. All Scripture citations are New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), National Council of Churches, 1989.

² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* Vol. I, Part 1, *trans* G.W. Bromiley (London: T&T Clark, 1936), §4.

More than a decade of regular preaching in the parish context has taught me that though the Church has focused on the notion of making Jesus known through Word and Sacrament (and service), there has not been an equal emphasis on discipleship or formation. The first time I fully grasped the impact of this deficiency was on Trinity Sunday 2014. I had preached a sermon focusing the mystery of the Trinity. Later that day, a parishioner approached me at a parish event and said to me, “I enjoyed your sermon this morning. I was wondering though, can you please explain the Trinity to me?” My initial thought was “Ha! No. But if you’ve got a while, I’ll explain some ways to think about it.” But before responding, I discerned that the question was a surface-level one. I responded by saying “The Trinity is God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” I figured if he wanted to know more, he’d ask; but better to start simple than start deep and lose him before we get started. He said “Thank you, I’ve always wondered about that. I didn’t realize that’s what we meant by Trinity. And can I ask a follow up? Is the Holy Spirit the same as the Holy Ghost.” I told him, “Yes, in the language of Rite I, it’s Ghost.” This interchange came with a man in his forties. His father and grandfather are also members of the parish. He grew up in this congregation, attended Sunday School, was Confirmed, had a child baptized, and attends fairly regularly with his family. He has heard many sermons through the decades and in each liturgy has heard at least a few references to “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” And yet the concept of the Trinity being “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit/Ghost” was new for him. It was then that it hit me like a ton of bricks: we’ve failed in making disciples.

Since then, I have been interested in how preaching can be a significant means of addressing the need for greater catechesis. This project argues that while a sermon can be

preached that teaches about a topic, but what the church needs is more than interesting tidbits in preaching; deep and intentional formation is needed. This project will explore the intersection of homiletics and catechesis.

The Work of Catechesis

It is important to define what catechesis is, as the goal of this project is not merely having people be more knowledgeable about their faith. Knowledge may be a fine byproduct of catechesis, but it is not the goal. While the work of catechesis does not have a universally agreed upon definition, catechesis is more than knowledge because it is about transformation and growth more than it is simply being aware of the Church's stated positions. One definition of catechesis is "the growing of God's people in the gospel and its implications for doctrine, devotion, duty, and delight."³ Such a definition is helpful because it names catechesis as a process of growth. In referring to Baptism, Tertullian notes that "Christians are made, not born."⁴ Catechesis grows out of our Baptismal identity and vocation.

Catechesis, then, is an ever unfolding process akin to sanctification. John Pless writes that catechesis is about "shaping the Baptized in their life in faith"⁵ and is a part of the sanctifying growth in the Spirit. He cautions though that this should not be considered something like James Flower's Stages of Faith in which one "progresses" up a ladder.⁶ Instead, catechesis is more about downward movement into the depths of the Baptismal waters than it is an ascent out of them. The Roman Catholic Church's catechism has a

³ J.I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, "The Lost Art of Catechesis," *Christianity Today* (March 2010), 26.

⁴ John Westerhoff, Lois Sibley, ed. *Called To Teach and Learn: A Catechetical Guide for the Episcopal Church* (New York: The Protestant Episcopal Church, 1994), 16.

⁵ John T. Pless, "Catechesis for Life in the Royal Priesthood," *Logia* Vol.III, No. 4 (October 1994), 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*

similar goal in mind when it states that catechesis is “education in the faith of children, young people, and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.”⁷ Catechesis is a road by which we travel towards the abundant life intended for us in Christ.⁸

Secondly, catechesis has implications for doctrine, devotion, duty, and delight. This is helpful to bear in mind, as catechesis is not simply about imparting information, it is about the formation of disciples. John Westerhoff reminds us that we need to form both hearts and minds.⁹ This fullness of the Christian life is about participating in the truth, not just knowing about it.¹⁰ A similar point is made in reference to teaching children by Hylden who notes that teaching children is not about communicating facts but rather facilitating experiences.¹¹ Thus, effective catechesis will teach doctrine so that the Body of Christ is united in belief as they come to experience the topics studied. That is, salvation is to be experienced more than it is understood. John Westerhoff says, “Catechesis is the acquisition and appropriation of God’s story into our own lives.”¹² We are brought into the story of God and come to recognize it as our own and this is what a shared doctrine describes. So catechesis unites the Church.

⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church (Vatican City, 1993), Prologue.II.5
http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P3.HTM (Accessed July 19, 2019).

⁸ John 10:10.

⁹ From the Editors. “Will Our Children Have Faith?” *The Christian Century*.
<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2003-05/hearts-and-minds> (accessed March 23, 2020).

¹⁰ Andrew Davidson and Alison Milbank. *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 30.

¹¹ Hylden, “Will Our Children Have Faith?”.

¹² John Westerhoff, *A Pilgrim People: Learning through the Church Year* (New York: Seabury Classics, 2005), 2.

Doctrine not only unites the Church, but it can also give strength and endurance to her members. Stanley Hauerwas notes that doctrine is crucial to seeing these connections between what we proclaim and how we live.¹³ A trust in God’s loving providence, abundant grace, and abiding presence, are all matters of doctrine, yet they not meant to be mere academic declarations, but rather experienced as the manifestations God’s grace.

Catechesis also shapes our devotions, as the process of learning about the faith is itself an act of worship. Catechesis is about more than teaching facts because facts are usually not transformative. Knowing that London is the capital city of England has little bearing on one’s life. However, the Church’s proclamation that God is the Creator of all-that-is does greatly impact how life might be lived as such a theological worldview impacts how we view the environment and economy, as well as our place within them. Catechesis does more than teach because, being grounded in and developed out of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason, it testifies to the truths received by the Church. Catechesis shows the faithful what is at the core of faith and helps to order priorities and passions.

Fostering a sense of Godly obedience or duty is another implication of the catechism of the Church. Much in the same way that it is helpful to read the Beatitudes as a description instead of a prescription, the work of catechesis is to describe the life of faith so that it can be incarnated. The very setup of the catechism of the Prayer Book in the question and answer format reinforces this point. It is not presented as a series of pronouncements but rather is dialogical,¹⁴ suggesting that these are topics that are

¹³ Stanley Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 17.

¹⁴ James Turrell, “Catechisms,” *Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer*, eds. Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 500.

relevant to life. The 19th century Anglican priest and social reformer Stewart Headlam wrote that this work is “not only for preparation for life hereafter, but for this life and makes us inheritors of the kingdom.”¹⁵ Catechesis is not about giving the “right” answers, rather it is training in righteous living so that the faithful might encounter abundant life presently.

Catechesis is also about delight, as it draws us deeper into that which is good, true, and beautiful. As doctrines are experienced in such a way that they become core to one’s identity, there is a sense of delight that comes when lived experience is aligned with the teaching of the Church and the joy of the Gospel. No longer is God’s grace an abstract idea, but through catechesis becomes a lived reality and this brings us to delight. The transformative power of catechesis lies in the fact that it can take us from knowing about God to actually knowing God, which leads to delight.

When looking at the catechism in The Book of Common Prayer (BCP), it becomes apparent that catechesis is education about Christian doctrine and the Biblical narrative, in preparation for participation in the Body of Christ through service and evangelism. As ideas such as “holiness” or “gratitude” become a part of our formation, we are then able to more actively practice such virtues and seek to cultivate them. The catechism might well be seen as a training manual more than a textbook, as its end is to foster participation in the doctrine it proclaims. Thus, catechesis is not only about the transfer of knowledge, but also (perhaps more importantly) is about the integration of that knowledge into a transformative faith and a resulting set of actions. The BCP itself calls

¹⁵ Stewart Headlam “The Secular Value of the Church Catechism,” *Love’s Redeeming Work*, Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, Rowan Williams, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 503-4.

it a “brief summary” of the faith and an “outline for instruction.”¹⁶ The work of catechesis is thus both about sharing the Good News and creating a doorway by which the believer can enter into a life lived in response to this Good News.

Thus, it has been shown that catechesis is about the formation of disciples who are more than students, but apprentices of the Kingdom. Catechesis is grounded in Baptism and is a part of the sanctifying process of growing in this Baptismal love, identity, and vocation. As Ronald Allen writes, “Christianity is *paideia*; it is not merely learning skills and information, but the formation of character, deep thinking, and integration.”¹⁷ The work of catechesis is about the transformation of minds and hearts so that those who partake of it might see themselves as citizens of the New Creation and be given tools to flourish even when faced with the challenges of living in secular society.

The Need for Catechesis

While it has been shown that catechesis is vital for both understanding and incarnating faith, the evidence that effective catechesis has been done is sorely lacking. There is no shortage of data to support this claim. In a groundbreaking 2007 book, Stephen Prothero notes that “Americans are both deeply religious and profoundly ignorant about religion.”¹⁸ He further notes that religious literacy is well documented, especially in younger generations.¹⁹ This combination of vigor and illiteracy is a dangerous mix. Prothero developed a “religious literacy” quiz and reports dismal results. He notes that studies have found that only half of Americans can name one of the four

¹⁶ *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979), 844

¹⁷ Ronald J. Allen, *The Teaching Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 15.

¹⁸ Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – And Doesn't* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

Gospels, most cannot identify Genesis as the first book of the Bible, only a third know that Jesus delivered the Sermon the Mount, and, sadly and amusingly, 10% believe that Joan of Arc is Noah's wife.²⁰ Prothero's book cites many other studies and anecdotes that all illustrate that the United States, despite still relatively high rates of religious belief, is a largely religiously illiterate nation. Many who have worked in the Church can also share such stories of the dissonance between the position of "My faith is one of the most important things in my life" with not being able to articulate those "sincerely held religious convictions" with anything more than surface level specificity or details.

Though Prothero's book was published over a decade ago, the story has not changed for the better. Recent research by the Barna Group confirms that Prothero's conclusions are still valid. In a 2019 article, Barna reports that more than half of US churchgoers have not heard of the Great Commission and 37% cannot match Biblical passage with their common name.²¹ Another 2017 article cites a professor who writes that "the majority of my students... are familiar only with the thin slice of modern Christian religion they've been exposed to, and are often baffled by religious ways of life that differ from their own."²² A report was published by Pew Research in July 2019 that adds more recent data to this trend line. The research shows that mainline Christians know less about religion than do Evangelicals and that all Christians scored worse on a survey of religious literacy than did Jews, atheists, or agnostics. In particular, on questions related to Christianity, atheists and agnostics had higher scores than did mainline Christians.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "The Future of Teaching the Great Commission: A Q&A," under "Faith & Christianity" (Barna Research Group: January 15, 2019) <https://www.barna.com/research/future-teaching-great-commission/> (accessed July 19, 2019).

²² Alan Levinovitz "Americans-Not Just Liberals-Have a Religious Literacy Problem" (Vox: January 5, 2017), <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2017/1/5/14166366/religious-illiteracy-conservative-liberal> (accessed July 19, 2019).

Pew’s research also suggests that younger generations are less knowledgeable about faith, which is to say that the changing catechetical landscape has impacted religious literacy.²³ Whether the evidence is anecdotal or research-based, it is clear that religious illiteracy is the landscape in which this catechetical work must be done.

While religious knowledge and participation is on the decline, more Americans now identify as “spiritual” rather than “religious.”²⁴ While such a self-identification may be more of a rejection of hierarchal religion than it is of faith in general, this reality means that beliefs about religion are still valued even if these beliefs are not expressed in institutional religious structures. This is where there is an opportunity and need for catechesis. Beliefs are not being rejected outright; if they were, “spiritual” would not be a label people would choose for themselves. Even more broadly speaking, nearly every single person has an animating story and set of values by which they make decisions and find meaning in their lives. Whether this is labeled as “faith” or merely a “philosophy” does not matter as much as the fact that people still hold these foundational beliefs. Catechesis is needed to properly form these beliefs.

Diana Butler Bass, in her 2012 *Christianity After Religion*, writes about this phenomenon by noting that faith is becoming less doctrinal. She writes that “Christianity is moving from being a religion *about* God to being an experience *of* God.”²⁵ It seems that some are attempting to solve the issue of religion being off-putting because it is

²³ “What Americans Know About Religion” (Pew Research Center: July 23, 2019): pages 16, 33, 47, <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2019/07/Religious-Knowledge-full-draft-FOR-WEB-2.pdf> (Accessed August 3, 2019).

²⁴ Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz, “More Americans Now Say They’re Spiritual But Not Religious” (Pew Research Center: September 6 2017), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/> (accessed July 19, 2019).

²⁵ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), 110.

dogmatic and is perceived as “telling people what to do” by emphasizing orthopraxy over orthodoxy, by focusing on actions instead of foundational beliefs. While our faith should always be incarnate, faith very much is about our worldview and perspective. To say that “it’s okay if people don’t know doctrine, so long as they find community and hope” is to reduce the Christian faith into moralistic-therapeutic-deism.²⁶ The proclamation of the Word cannot be reduced into such a system of mere “how to” lessons and pep talks, and so catechesis that encourages both kerygmatic teaching and faithful living is needed. Fred Craddock also makes this point when he writes that focusing on deeds over words “has eroded the authority of the church’s proclamation and created a crisis in preaching.”²⁷ The problem is that while it is certainly true that “faith without works is dead,”²⁸ it is also true that works without faith is incomplete. Catechesis is about the intersection of doctrines and actions; about both knowing about God and having experiences of God. Karen Armstrong notes that “belief” is actually best understood not as intellectual assent, but as loyalty, fidelity, or commitment; that is, faith is an orientation of the heart.²⁹ Catechesis seeks such loving knowledge because “love must act as light must shine and fire must burn.”³⁰ The work of catechesis is to kindle such fires of faith.

Catechesis can function as a container for such experiences of faith leading to works and works finding their meaning in faith. As will be seen in the project component of this thesis, the Eucharist is often a way in which people experience God in community. What good catechesis does is not to define this experience and therefore restrict its

²⁶ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 163.

²⁷ Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority* 4th ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 6.

²⁸ James 2:20

²⁹ Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God* (New York: Anchor Press, 2009), 87.

³⁰ James Otis Sargent Huntington quoted by Adam McCoy, “A Generous Spirit,” *The Living Church* Vol. 218.2 (January 10, 1999), 13.

meaning, but rather it expands the experience by giving people tools to think about their experience and encounter layers of meanings that might not be immediately apparent.

Butler Bass suggests that faith is moving from “what do I believe?” to “how do I believe?”³¹ She writes that “When we ask *how*, we are not asking for a fact, conclusion, or opinion. Rather we are seeking a hands-on deeper knowledge of the thing... *how* weaves our lives with the information.”³² When catechesis is done well, it speaks to this “how” as those beliefs become incarnate and expressed in the Christian life. The Catechism tells us not as much what God has done and is doing, but rather it speaks to how God is doing these things. Much of the Catechism is written in the present tense as it does not describe actions of the past, but rather presents the answers as current realities. Furthermore, many of the Catechism’s questions are asked in the second-person, making the answers directly relevant to the “how” of faithful living.

And while “how” is certainly an important question, Simon Sinek argues in his book on leadership that we should always “start with why.”³³ What motivates people to change is this foundational question of meaning and purpose meant by “why.” Addressing the “why” is not so much about using that exact language, rather it is about getting to the fundamental core which animates a belief. The Catechism does this with its effectively short responses. One is not easily “lost in the weeds” of the Catechism but can rather easily locate the “why” of topics as important as atonement or eschatology. While the “how” that Bass is important in helping people understand how the faith is to be

³¹ Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 113.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 146.

applied, it but always be derived from the “why” which is the strong foundation to sustain these actions of faith.

David Brooks, in a recent book about finding purpose, quotes Nietzsche who said that, “He who has a ‘why’ to live for can endure any ‘how.’”³⁴ Doctrine, when put to its best use, provides the “why” of faith enabling believers to stand firm amidst the trials and temptations of life as well as inspiring us to act in generosity, love, and service. This “why” is what leads to conversion and transformation, which is at the very heart of belief. Butler Bass notes that “to believe” is more about loyalty, allegiance, and love than it is to hold certain intellectual positions.³⁵ This is what catechesis seeks to do – to train our lives and passion to be aligned with the truths of God; to have orthopraxy shaped by orthodoxy instead of placing those two ideas as competitors for authentic faith. For example, the answer to question in the Catechism, “What is the mission of the Church?” is not merely a recitation of the line that says, “the mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ,”³⁶ rather it is to hold this message of reconciliation at the core of our purpose and identity.

The challenge of catechesis is that doctrine is sometimes viewed as a bludgeoning instrument to enforce groupthink and not as an entrance into the beauty and depths of faith. Butler Bass notes that “Doctrine is seen not as divisive, but as contrary to the message Jesus himself taught. Many people stumble on the creeds, thinking them to be a sort of doctrinal test for church membership.”³⁷ And while creeds are often associated with initiation rites, their function ought not to be seen as interrogative, but rather as

³⁴ David Brooks, *The Second Mountain* (New York: Random House, 2019), 30.

³⁵ Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 117.

³⁶ *BCP*, 855.

³⁷ Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 111.

narrative and descriptive of the life that will follow. Bass goes on to suggest that the “Age of Belief” is giving way to an “Age of Belonging.” Catechesis can serve as a bridge to bring people from a faith that seems dogmatic to one of relationship to God and belonging to a community of faith precisely because, when done well, catechesis addresses both the “how” of daily living and the “why” of meaning. We can both believe and belong.

The fact that religious illiteracy is high has led to many problems both within the Church and the world. The first of these issues is that what weak catechesis has left the Church with are the extremes – either militantly dogmatic approaches to the faith that are repulsive to many or an impotent faith that stands for nothing. Prothero notes that for many religious groups, in the name of unity, what has been achieved is lowest-common denominator.³⁸ It should not be surprising that neither of these approaches has been found attractive in a market-driven culture where meaning and purpose can be pursued outside the confines of organized religion.

This ineffective catechesis (either too strict or lax) has been a contributing factor to the decline in church attendance in the United States. Nearly every decade in the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st century has seen a marked decline in church attendance.³⁹ Butler Bass notes that if belief is misunderstood then beliefs will be rejected.⁴⁰ J. Mark Beach says that “We live in an age of doctrinal ignorance... [in which the focus is] psychological theology or therapeutic religion.”⁴¹ The issue with these soft

³⁸ Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, 92.

³⁹ Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades” (Gallup: April 18, 2019) <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx> (accessed July 19, 2019).

⁴⁰ Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 107.

⁴¹ J. Mark Beach, “The Pastoral Necessity of Preaching the Catechism,” *The Outlook* Vol. 45.4 (April 1995), 9.

approaches is that they do not address the effects of sin, the finality of death, or the specter of meaninglessness. Beach further comments that catechesis is not just about teaching facts or doctrines, but providing support joists of our faith.⁴² What is evident is that without catechesis, we are left living with a foundationless faith.

Another problem with this religious illiteracy is that it is not a harmless case of ignorance but can be the root of negative actions towards others. Walter Brueggemann cautions against the ways that religion has been co-opted by consumer capitalism and militaristic patriotism.⁴³ If, through a failure of catechesis, there is not a firm foundation of doctrinal faith, it will be a challenge to differentiate these civic ideas from Christian faith. Here the axiom holds true: those who stand for nothing will fall for anything. Some have even gone as far as to claim that it is religious ignorance that leads to injustice and prejudice carried out in the name of religion. For example, the “Muslim ban” in the form of the 2017 travel restrictions in the United States has been cited as an example of the dangers of flawed religious assumptions.⁴⁴ When people do not fully understand what a faith system, in this case, Islam, stands for, caricatures will stand in for authentic understandings. And if people are able to depict Islam as a “false religion” that is all about violence, then evil against Muslims may, sinfully, be excused or even condoned. Furthermore, when Christians misunderstand faith as a private matters instead of an all-encompassing worldview great evil can happened. Ignorance is not bliss, it is dangerous.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Word Militant: Preaching a Decentering Word* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2010), 133.

⁴⁴ Maha Elgenaidi “Religious Literacy Can Fix the Faulty Foundation Beneath Trump’s Muslim Ban” (Religious News Service: October 23, 2017) <https://religionnews.com/2017/10/23/religious-literacy-can-fix-the-faulty-foundation-beneath-trumps-muslim-ban/> (accessed July 19, 2019).

Additionally, religious institutions have served as a benefit to society by providing places of community and meaning. The problem is that with the erosion of these affiliations there has been rise in loneliness and directionlessness.⁴⁵ David Brooks calls this phenomenon of being cut loose from communities, relationships, and stories “the great disembedding.”⁴⁶ He further concludes that “All the numbers suggest people do not feel they are part of some larger story they can believe in and dedicate their lives to.”⁴⁷ This sense of belonging is a major part of what it means for the Church to be the Body of Christ, but this has been left behind when a lack of catechesis has led to a forgetting of the story of faith. The result, Brooks notes, is a rise in unhealthy tribalism that has replaced positive religious belonging.⁴⁸

All of these issues are particularly pernicious for Christianity because, as Marcus Borg put it, “Knowing and understanding Christian language is in a state of crisis.”⁴⁹ And he further notes that this is particularly a concern as religion is a “cultural-linguistic” tradition.⁵⁰ At the start of both the Old and New Testaments, the importance of language (the spoken words of Creation and the Word becoming flesh) is a major theme. Hauerwas has written about understanding Christianity as a grammar or language.⁵¹ Without learning this grammar through an intentional process of catechesis, faith becomes incoherent babel.

⁴⁵ Brooks, *The Second Mountain*, 31.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁹ Marcus J. Borg, *Speaking Christian: Why Christian Words Have Lost Their Meaning and Power-And How They Can Be Restored* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁵¹ Stanelly Hauerwas, “Begotten, Not Made: The Grammar of Christmas” (ABC Religion & Ethics, December 22, 2011), <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/begotten-not-made-the-grammar-of-christmas/10100920> (accessed July 19, 2019).

But what led to this place of religious illiteracy? While there is a fallacy in assuming that there ever was a “golden age” of catechism in which all of the faithful were models of Christian learning and virtue, the work of catechizing the faithful has been more effectively done in previous generations. Catechetical preaching flourished in the 2nd-5th centuries as there was little cultural awareness of Christianity. Catechesis was necessary to bring people into this story of faith. Not to heap further blame on the post-Constantinian Church, but the work of catechesis floundered after these initial centuries.⁵² Prothero notes that a rise in religious fervor in the 19th and 20th centuries led to faith becoming about emotions and piety instead of learning doctrine.⁵³ This anti-intellectual movement resulted in Christians becoming “evangelicals and forgetters.”⁵⁴ Whereas religion used to be widely taught, this is no longer the case.⁵⁵

Fred Craddock notes of this trend in the pulpit that the “how” of faith has been surpassed by the “what.”⁵⁶ Questions of definitions do not transform hearts, minds, or lives and the faithful have not been trained in righteousness. Peter De Jong argues that there came to be a divorce between preaching and teaching because of congregations’ desires for a simple faith that is a function of cheap grace.⁵⁷ As moralist-therapeutic-deism became more common among believers, sermons have often met those believers where they are.

William Brosend concludes that this lack of catechesis became an obstacle to a dialogue with tradition, and as the foundation of tradition was eroded, membership

⁵² Packer & Parrett, “Lost Art of Catechesis.”

⁵³ Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, 93, 95.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 54, 62, 72, 80.

⁵⁶ Fred Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 4.

⁵⁷ Peter Y. De Jong, “Comments on Catechetical Preaching,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* Vol.1.2 (October 1985), 156.

declined and expectations were lowered.⁵⁸ And with this weakened focus on orthodoxy, orthopraxy has slipped. As Martin Luther King notes,

“So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound... There was a time when the church was very powerful--in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.”⁵⁹

The end result of this failure of both faith development and works of charity is “not merely that Christianity is unfamiliar, it is misunderstood.”⁶⁰ As Hauerwas has critiqued American Christianity, faith has simply become boring and uninteresting. He says that “the God most Americans believe in isn’t interesting enough to deny.”⁶¹ The erosion of catechesis as a means of bringing people into the story of faith so that they might see it as their own story has led brought us to a place where not only is religious illiteracy high but religious dedication has waned.

Conversely, a rejuvenation of the catechetical task of preaching can be a part of the solution. Centuries earlier, John Calvin said, “Believe me, Monseigneur, the church of God will never be preserved without catechesis.”⁶² In a modern context, Prothero notes that while religion is not only about knowledge, “faith without knowledge is dead.”⁶³ Simply put, “we need to know what we believe and why.”⁶⁴ Catechesis can address the

⁵⁸ William Brosend, *The Preaching of Jesus: Gospel Proclamation, Then and Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 54.

⁵⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html (accessed January 23, 2020).

⁶⁰ Borg, *Speaking Christian*, 9.

⁶¹ Mike Ferguson, “Theologian says 'end of Protestantism' may make U.S. Christianity interesting” (Presbyterian Church USA, June 15, 2014), <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2014/6/15/theologian-says-end-protestantism-may-make-us-chri/> (accessed August 3, 2019).

⁶² Calvin, “Letter to the Lord Protector of England,” 1548 quoted by J.I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, “The Lost Art of Catechesis,” 26.

⁶³ Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, 146.

⁶⁴ Allen, *The Teaching Sermon*, 35.

problem of religious illiteracy because it tells and explains the story of faith so that people will have a handle on beliefs. But more than simply teaching, catechesis is a process of formation through which these lessons become not facts but guiding principles and saving grace. What differentiates catechesis from teaching is that in catechesis “we return to the same old lessons.”⁶⁵ The goal of catechesis is not to make academic theologians out of church members, rather it is to help them remember who God is, who they are in relation to God, and how abundant life is found in participating in the faith once given.⁶⁶

The Context of Preaching

The sermon is not the only place that the work of catechesis can be done, but it is perhaps the best candidate for doing this important and holy work. William Brosend notes that this is exactly how Jesus taught and formed the disciples, as he blended preaching and teaching together.⁶⁷ Though St. Paul’s writings are in the form of epistles, their public reading gives them a homiletical character. And his writing “clearly implies [the letters’ recipients] were given knowledge of Jesus’ life as a prerequisite to the apostles’ reminders to emulate him.”⁶⁸ Since the very beginnings of Christianity, the sermon has been a vehicle for teaching and catechizing into the faith. This kerygmatic and didactic style of preaching is the goal of catechetical preaching.⁶⁹ Such preaching announces the New Creation in which the hearer is able to participate.

⁶⁵ Beach, “The Pastoral Necessity of Preaching the Catechism,” 9.

⁶⁶ Jude 1:3

⁶⁷ Brosend, *The Preaching of Jesus: Gospel Proclamation, Then and Now*, 55.

⁶⁸ Douglas Mohrmann, “The Power of Proclamation in the New Testament,” *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (Winter 2019), 34.

⁶⁹ Mohrmann, “The Power of Proclamation in the New Testament,” 33.

While there are many purposes for the sermon, one of the most significant is for the cultivation of discipleship.⁷⁰ Yes, the sermon must also proclaim, challenge, comfort, inform, inspire, and praise, but the catechetical component of the sermon is one of the most important. The reality is that fewer people attend Sunday School or are engaged with programs or classes aimed at discipleship. The sermon has become “ground zero” for the work of catechesis.

However, as has been previously noted, catechesis is not simply teaching. The task is not about the academic study of Christianity, spirituality, or Scripture. Rather, catechesis is about discipleship – both knowing and following Jesus Christ. While sermons can be didactic, they often are not most effective when they are described as “lectures.”⁷¹ Sermons are a means of manifesting Jesus’ presence through the proclamation of the Word of God. Preaching is an event in which the truths of Christ’s teachings are manifest in their proclamation and explication.⁷² Effective sermons, therefore, have a sacramental reality to them that simply does not exist in other lecture style formats.

The sermon is the primary place of theological reflection for most church members and this is a goal that the sermon is built to address.⁷³ The tension that may seem to exist between proclamation and catechesis is a false distinction. The truths that are being proclaimed are the very truths that the catechism seeks to have people enter

⁷⁰ Susan Brown Snook, “Preaching for Congregational Vitality,” *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (Winter 2019), 7.

⁷¹ Jeremy Driscoll, “Catechisms and Doctrine in Liturgical Preaching,” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), 10. <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/homiletics/upload/PMF-Notre-Dame-USCCB.pdf>. (Accessed August 3, 2019).

⁷² Steve Paulson, “Preaching is an Event – And Not an Event.” (Working Preacher, November 16, 2007). <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1658> (accessed January 24, 2020)

⁷³ Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Church*, 12.

into. Hauerwas notes that “We can get something out of a sermon and learn;”⁷⁴ it is not an either-or proposition. The key for the catechetical sermon is that the goal of disciple formation must remain at the forefront of the preacher’s mind. If the questions being addressed are not of interest or deemed relevant to the congregation, the sermon will not do the work of catechesis but rather will only continue the trend of ineffective preaching.

Scot McKnight writes that in the Anglican tradition (along with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches), the focus has been on making members. The focus of such preaching is about knowledge and allegiance, not to the faith, but to the institution. In Evangelical traditions, the focus, he claims, has been on “decision making” and getting people to be moved to the point of “accepting” Jesus. These sermons focus not so much on knowledge but emotions. He claims that these improper homiletical foci have contributed greatly to the demise of the Church in Western culture.⁷⁵ The goal of catechetical preaching goes beyond membership and decision-making to focus on discipleship and apprenticeship, where one not only learns about the faith but puts it into practice by following the example of Jesus. The Greatest Commandment is that we love God with hearts, minds, souls, and strength.⁷⁶ Catechetical preaching engages the mind, but also the heart, as it inspires the soul and motivates responsive action. Such preaching, however, does not happen accidentally, it must be an intentional goal of the sermon and so the preacher must bear this in mind to avoid falling into the routines of preaching for membership or affiliation. Instead, the end of catechetical preaching is a transformed life.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁵ Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 30-31.

⁷⁶ Luke 10:27

The sermon does not happen in isolation and so its liturgical context cannot be ignored. Because the liturgy is a gathering of the community and includes prayers, a Confession, thanksgivings, Scripture readings, words of blessing, and the celebration of the Eucharist, it becomes an “invaluable opportunity to advance the Church’s catechetical ministry.”⁷⁷ In liturgy, the faith can be both explained and experienced, so it is the ideal context for catechesis.⁷⁸ This natural fit for catechesis is one reason why the reading of the catechism was done regularly at Evening Prayer.⁷⁹ While catechesis need not be confined to liturgy, it is a natural home for this work.

Working within the confines of a sermon within the Sunday Eucharist in the Episcopal tradition though does mean the catechetical task will have some boundaries around it, as these liturgical norms cannot be blatantly ignored. In such a setting, the sermon is but one part of the liturgy and time must be reserved for hymns, Scripture readings, prayers, and the celebration of the Eucharist. Most church-goers are not going to accept a 50% increase in the length of the service to accommodate longer sermons, even if they understand the need for catechesis. The 12-16 minute sermon is a boundary that, in most cases, will need to be preserved. While sermon length varies greatly, according to a 2019 Pew study, the average sermon in Protestant traditions is 25 minutes and in a Roman Catholic setting it is 14 minutes.⁸⁰ This is not the place to debate which of those categories best describes the Episcopal Church – however, the fact that the

⁷⁷ “Preaching the Mystery of Faith: The Sunday Homily” (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2012), 21. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/priestly-life-and-ministry/upload/usccb-preaching-document.pdf>. Accessed (August 3, 2019).

⁷⁸ Driscoll, “Catechisms and Doctrine in Liturgical Preaching,” 4.

⁷⁹ Turrell, “Catechisms,” 504.

⁸⁰ “The Digital Pulpit: A Nationwide Analysis of Online Sermons.” Pew Research Center, December 16, 2019. <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/12/16/the-digital-pulpit-a-nationwide-analysis-of-online-sermons/> (accessed January 24, 2020)

Eucharist is central in most Sunday liturgies skews the average sermon length to the shorter Roman Catholic average.

Another factor that must be considered in many settings are the Scripture texts. Many churches, including The Episcopal Church, wisely use a lectionary that provides the Scriptural passages for each occasion. While some may want to debate the merits of being bound to a lectionary, it is the landscape which many congregations inhabit and must be respected. On a typical Sunday, most congregations will read from the Old Testament, Psalms, New Testament, and Gospels on a Sunday. However, as Brosend has suggested in his writing on the topic of the “lectionary captivity of The Episcopal Church.” A sermon need not be confined to the passages appointed by the lectionary, as there are many other “texts” on which to preach.⁸¹ Hymns, the Collect of the Day, the Creed, the Confession and Absolution, the Eucharistic prayer, church architecture, and even the flow of the liturgy itself can all be “texts” on which to preach. Furthermore, the lectionary leaves out many parts of Scripture. A simple search through a reverse lectionary reveals that large swaths of Ezekiel and Daniel are left out of the cycle of readings, as are Matthew 19, Acts 20-25, and much of Revelation. This does not mean that preachers should ignore the Scripture that is assigned, but it need not always be the homiletical starting point for a sermon. That being said, if a preacher never addresses the Scripture that is read, the congregation may, rightfully, question why the Scripture is even read. A catechetical sermon should always be informed by and responsive to the day’s Scripture, but it need not be restrained by it.

⁸¹ William Brosend, “Preaching in Lent, Year B – Why not a ‘series’ on the Ten Commandments?” *The Episcopal Preacher* Vol. 3, No. 2 (February 2015, The Episcopal Preaching Foundation), 1.

However, it must be stated that the lectionary and the work of catechesis are not in competition with one another. The most effective and authentic catechesis is grounded in the study of Scripture.⁸² The question then becomes how the Scripture of the day can be used for an intentionally catechetical purpose. One way to address this question is through the use of sermon series. In a book about preaching the lectionary through series, Amy Butler says, “I have experienced what my colleagues have told me to be true: people like series – in fact, more than like. People in the pews engage at a deeper level with a ‘handle’ to hang onto.”⁸³ For one, many catechetical topics cannot be covered adequately in one sermon. But moreover, a series of sermons gives great import to the topic and invites reflection between sermons on the theme. And though a sermon series is likely not going to solve the issue of inconsistent attendance,⁸⁴ it does at least give listeners additional encouragement to be present for the remainder of the series.

Preaching a sermon series that is focused on the Catechism requires the preacher to both be acquainted with the contents of the Catechism and the flow of the lectionary. It will be necessary to sit down with a liturgical calendar and prayerfully map out themes in the lectionary that lend themselves to topics found in the Catechism. The good news in this is that with four Scripture readings each week and with the breadth and depth of each Biblical passage, connections can be made to nearly any catechetical topic without stretching the Scripture too far. Advanced and deliberate planning is one of the most important ingredients for a catechetical homiletic.

⁸² Gerard Sloyan, “The Homily and Catechesis: The Catechism and/or the Lectionary?,” Introduction the Catechism of the Catholic Church, ed. Bernard Marthaler (New York, Paulist Press, 1994), 139

⁸³ Amy Butler, *A Preacher’s Lectionary Sermon Series: Thematic Plans for Years A, B, and C* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 13.

⁸⁴ Mike Graves, “Harry Emerson Fosdick’s Timeless Question,” *What’s the Matter with Preaching Today?*, ed. Mike Graves (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 3.

An important factor in the sermon that ought not to be overlooked is the congregation. Sermons preached to empty pews will not do any good, nor will preaching sermons in a way which will lead to empty pews. The Christian faith is about the good, true, beautiful, and joyful – and sermons on the Catechism should reflect these qualities. Sermons need to be crafted in a way that not only tells the truth, but allows the truth to be heard.⁸⁵ This means that there is no “one size fits all” approach to preaching, as all sermons are relational and contextual. A catechetical sermon preached in a grade-school chapel will not usually work, without adaptation, as the sermon at a solemn high Mass on Christmas Eve. The occasion and the congregation matter just as much as the texts do. William Harmless notes that part of what made St. Augustine of Hippo such an effective preacher was that he was aware of the role emotions played in hearing a sermon.⁸⁶ Augustine wrote that preaching is done to “teach, conciliate, rouse, tell”⁸⁷ in order to make clear what was obscure.⁸⁸ Again, a catechetical sermon is not a lecture, but should rouse people to faith. More than having the congregation say “Oh, that’s interesting,” the goal is to lead them deeper into the Christian story which they entered through Baptism.⁸⁹

Catechesis is an art that requires practice.⁹⁰ Augustine said that “To teach is a necessity, to delight a beauty, to persuade a triumph.”⁹¹ Not every sermon will be a persuasive triumph, and that is fine. Ultimately, the preacher is a midwife, not a guru.⁹² Every sermon will not transform every heart and mind, but instead should be a part of a

⁸⁵ Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 11.

⁸⁶ William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 168.

⁸⁷ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.4.6. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1202.htm> (Accessed August 3, 2019).

⁸⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.11.26.

⁸⁹ Allen, *The Teaching Sermon*, 59.

⁹⁰ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 349.

⁹¹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.12.27.

⁹² Allen, *The Teaching Sermon*, 15

faithful and lifelong endeavor of plunging more deeply into the saving waters of the Baptismal faith. In preaching, what is needed is not more explanation but more exploration, with less explication and more evocation.⁹³ Sermons must invite people into the truths which they proclaim and help them to experience the grace of these truths in their daily living.

Butler Bass observes that people are rejecting doctrinal faith because it is not incarnated.⁹⁴ Catechetical preaching is intended to bridge this gap, to explain the faith in such a way that it can take root in people's lives and flourish as it is nourished by the Holy Spirit. There have been faithful preachers who have done this work throughout the generations. Chapter 2 will explore four such preachers with a goal of gleaning techniques and studying how they sought to catechize on the topic of Eucharist. The preachers studied are chosen because of their clear catechetical focus in preaching and the wide accessibility of many such sermons to study. These preachers were respected teachers and preachers of the faith.

Chapter 3 is a modern model of doing such catechetical homiletics in a parish setting and an evaluation of how such preaching was effective in the task of catechesis. In order to give a tighter focus to both the research and the project, a particular catechetical topic will be central: the Eucharist. In the Anglican tradition, the Eucharist is the central act of Sunday worship and communal life. The Catechism of the Roman Church claims that the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian life."⁹⁵ As most Episcopalians encounter the Eucharist as the primary liturgy of the Church, it seems

⁹³ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 365.

⁹⁴ Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 107.

⁹⁵ "Catechism of the Catholic Church," Part 2, Section 2, Chapter 1, Article 3.I. ¶ 1324 (1993), http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a3.htm (Accessed August 9, 2019).

appropriate to ensure that a solid catechetical understanding of the Eucharist is promoted. This is not to say that other catechetical topics are not worthy of consideration. Rather, given the centrality of the Eucharist in our common life, this catechetical topic will already have an established touchstone in the life of the congregation. As the source and summit of the Christian life, a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the Eucharist will lead to a fuller experience of God's saving and transforming grace, which is the end of all catechesis.

May God grant us the wisdom, grace, and strength to go to all people and, through the work of catechesis, make disciples who know and are transformed by the Good News.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Matthew 28:19.

Chapter II: Survey of Catechetical Preaching on the Eucharist

Introduction

Trusting in the great cloud of witnesses which surround the modern preacher, this chapter will consider four preachers as a means of constructing a method for and understanding of catechetical preaching: Cyril of Jerusalem, Isaac Williams, Rowan Williams, and Samuel Wells. Special attention will be paid to what rhetorical strategies are used as they seek to teach through their preaching. These preaching strategies are not exclusive to catechetical preaching but they are consistently used in such sermons.

The goal of this research and chapter is not to propose a simple formula that can be applied to any chosen catechetical topic with the result being a fully formed catechetical sermon. Rather, various tools will be examined which might selectively be applied in my own catechetical preaching series. The strategies identified in this chapter are not ubiquitous, as each preacher uses a different set of tools in order to approach the catechetical task. The patterns that each preacher uses though suggest a thoughtful and deliberate approach to preaching catechetically.

Catechetical preaching has waxed and waned throughout Church history. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, there is a drought of such preaching. In an article by J.I. Packer and Gary Parrett whose title, “The Lost Art of Catechesis,” makes this claim, and it is noted that catechesis “flourished between the second and fifth centuries in the ancient church.”¹ This trend did not continue though, as “catechesis floundered” through the Middle Ages and was not given much focus until the Reformation.² This reclamation of catechetical preaching has waned since the 16th century. Peter De Jong notes that “For

¹ Packer & Parrett, “The Lost Art of Catechesis,” 26.

² Ibid.

several centuries catechetical sermons... were standard fare... today [catechetical sermons] suffer from more than partial eclipse.”³ He notes that the modern issue is that there has been “a divorce from ‘preaching’ and ‘teaching.’”⁴ While sermons on the catechism were common in previous eras of the Church, today they are rare.

This ought not to be an unexpected shift, as preaching itself has changed significantly from the periods of the Reformation and the Early Church. Some sermons are explicitly catechetical (Cyril of Jerusalem and Isaac Williams) as they exegete particular sections of the Apostles’ Creed or Catechism. Others (Rowan Williams and Samuel Wells) are preaching to people who are expecting to receive a lecture on a catechetical point, but rather the catechesis is woven throughout a sermon that may well have a main point that is parallel to the particular catechetical topic.

While sermons today could certainly be preached in a point-by-point style on the Catechism, this approach could be received as a gimmick – something that is done for a season but is not the normal approach to preaching. However, given the deep need for catechesis which was outlined in Chapter I, a sustained and intentional process of catechesis is necessary within the Church. It is not my goal to retrain a congregation how to hear a catechetical lecture, but rather is to construct sermons which have a catechetical foundation and goal. These sermons may not share an outline with the Catechism, but should be a conversation with the contents to the Catechism.

³ De Jong, “Comments on Catechetical Preaching,” 155.

⁴ Ibid., 156.

Cyril of Jerusalem

The exact birthplace and date for Cyril of Jerusalem is unknown, but it is generally assumed that he was born in the early 4th century and was brought up in Jerusalem in a Christian household. He was ordained as a deacon, priest, and then became Bishop of Jerusalem in either 349 or 350. The sermons that will be considered here come from his “Catechetical Lectures” which were delivered when he was a priest in 347 or 348.⁵

These sermons were preached in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre during Lent, Holy Week, and Easter week.⁶ In consideration for this research are Lectures I (Introduction), Lecture V (On Faith), and Lecture XVIII (On the Resurrection of the Flesh, the Catholic Church, and the Life Everlasting) which were given in Lent. The Easter Week lectures under consideration are Lecture XIX (On the Rites Before Baptism), Lecture XXII (On the Body and Blood of Christ), and Lecture XXIII (On the Communion Service).

Catechesis, for Cyril, is about hearing hope and receiving armor against evil powers.⁷ He uses the metaphor of being a budding tree in his introductory lecture to his catechetical sermons, where faith is the bud and the catechetical process which culminates in Baptism is the production of fruit.⁸ The assumption in this approach is that catechesis is a crucial part of Christian vocation. Catechesis is the process by which one is led into the deeper aspects of the faith and is transformed by them.

⁵ John Henry Parker, “Notes,” *The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril* (London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1839), 283.

⁶ Parker, “Notes,” 304.

⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril*, trans. John Henry Parker (London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1839), Lecture I, ¶ 4, 10.

⁸ Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture I, ¶ 1.

While Cyril's overall approach to catechesis is one that is helpful to consider in our own time, his context is radically different from ours. This becomes clear on two fronts. The first is that by the time he is delivering catechetical sermons, he is able to assume that his hearers have already begun a catechetical process. Many church-goers today may not be seeking catechetical formation or they are expecting a sermon to have another goal such as entertaining, comforting, challenging, or inspiring. Cyril's goal is much more straight-forward: communicate the faith.

The other significant difference is the notion of reserving knowledge. Cyril was preaching to those who were not yet baptized. There is a different starting assumption in many modern congregations where the vast majority of people are already baptized, even if they are lapsed in their practices of faith; or even if they have not yet been Baptized, they have access to Christian knowledge. Cyril speaks of "hearing mysteries, yet not understanding."⁹ He says this because his hearers have never participated in the sacramental mysteries. In the Episcopal context, Eucharist is celebrated weekly. So it is not that we have no basis for understanding these mysteries, but rather that we have not deeply engaged with their meaning and transformative power.

While religious affiliation is on the decline, in many places in the United States, some basic familiarity of the Christian story can be assumed. Furthermore, given that many of our hearers are baptized, there is no theological basis for withholding truth from them, as Baptism is "full initiation" into the Church.¹⁰ The ubiquitous status of "Baptized" in many parishes changes this assumption. Cyril instructs his hearers,

"Should a Catechumen ask, what the teachers have said, tell nothing to a stranger; for we deliver to thee a mystery, even the hope of the life to come: keep the

⁹ Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures*, Introductory Lecture, ¶ 6.

¹⁰ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 298.

mystery for Him who pays thee. Let no man say to thee, What harm, if I also know it?... See thou let out nothing; not that the things spoken do not deserve telling, but the ear that hears does not deserve receiving.”¹¹

This dynamic is not at play in many modern congregations, though with the changing religious landscape, it may indeed become more common to have congregants who are not Baptized and mostly ignorant of the Christian faith.

The fact of the matter is that many people hearing sermons today have heard a lot about Christianity – some of it true and helpful and some of it less-than-true and less-than-helpful. Whereas Cyril’s process of catechesis was to build knowledge, our modern task is not only to build knowledge, but also to deconstruct false narratives that have been learned. This does not mean that Cyril’s approach to preaching the catechism is not enlightening for today’s preachers, but it does mean that some of his techniques, such as reserve, will need to be recast. It is not that our hearers are unaware of what happens in the Eucharist, but rather they have not been fully instructed on or incorporated its meaning. We are approaching the catechetical task from the opposite direction to Cyril. It will be important in this modern setting to relate the knowledge of what happens in the Eucharist with its transformative power. The goal of having a lively faith remains, but our starting places of experience without exploration is different than Cyril’s of exploration without experience.

One strategy that Cyril deploys often in his catechizing is the use of metaphors to make a catechetical point more relatable. Certainly, the use of metaphor is not limited to the catechetical sermon, but the consistent deployment of metaphors communicates Cyril’s linkage of the catechism to daily living. In speaking about the regeneration of the

¹¹ Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures*, Introductory Lecture, ¶ 12.

soul, Cyril compares this truth to a plant which must be planted deeply within us. He also is clear that a methodical approach to catechesis is necessary, as in the way that a building can only be constructed by placing one stone on top of another.¹² With this metaphor, Cyril refers to the idea of reserve, which is to say that certain principles can only be learned after a foundation has been laid. The layout for his entire set of lectures is systematic and so these two metaphors are intentional – he wants these teachings to be planted deeply within the believer and serve as building blocks for a fuller understanding of God.

Cyril uses metaphors not only as he is setting up his argument in the introductory lecture, but throughout as a tool for aiding his listeners in grasping the catechetical point. His metaphors remain rooted in the natural world. In his sermon on the last stanza of the Creed, he speaks of Resurrection using the images of blossoming trees, wheat and corn that are harvested, and shoots coming out of trees.¹³ Though belief in the Phoenix's existence is not today what it was for Cyril, he also compares what is assumed about the natural world, as seen in the Phoenix, with the Resurrection to eternal life.¹⁴ And when Cyril writes about the Communion service, he uses metaphors of a king's authority¹⁵ and swimming.¹⁶ By drawing on common metaphors, Cyril aids his congregation in connecting the lived experiences of being under authority or in water to doctrines such as God's sovereignty or the waters of Baptism.

It is evident that, for Cyril, the natural world, as God's own creation, bears signs which point us towards deeper realities. Throughout his preaching, he points to examples

¹² Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures*, Introductory Lecture, ¶ 11.

¹³ Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture XVIII, ¶ 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ¶ 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Lecture XXIII, ¶ 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ¶ 17.

that will resonate with the catechumens that he is instructing. In one lecture, he appeals to various aspects of life and different types of work (marriage, sailing, farming) to make sure that people with varied experiences will all be able to connect with his teaching.¹⁷

If connecting the catechetical topic by analogy to common experience is one pedagogical tool used by Cyril, another that is often used is a connection to Scripture. Throughout his lectures, Cyril uses examples from the Bible to reinforce the point he is making. His lectures are saturated with Scripture. Though the catechumens have been introduced to Scripture, as they continue to experience Scripture as they mature in faith, these seeds which he has planted will bear much fruit.

In his lecture on faith, Cyril quotes from or alludes to Biblical passages from Genesis, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Timothy, and 2 Thessalonians. Using such a polyphony of Biblical passages is not the exception, but rather the norm in Cyril's catechizing. There are sections where nearly every other line includes a Scriptural reference.¹⁸ Whether or not modern congregations would be able to receive such whirlwind tour of Scripture in a single sermon is debatable, but Cyril's extensive use of Scripture makes a clear point about both the Creed and the catechetical process, namely that both are exegetical outcomes of Scripture and not fabrications of the preacher. Not only does the appeal to Scripture make his preaching more authoritative, it is also catechetical in its own right as it plants the seeds of faith into the hearer's mind.

¹⁷ Ibid., Lecture V, ¶ 3.

¹⁸ *The Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture XVIII, ¶ 34-35

Another tool used by Cyril is his anticipation of questions, or critiques, that his audience may have.¹⁹ For example, he says, “And I wish to persuade you by an illustration. For I know that many say, what is a soul profited, which departs from this world either with sins, or without sins, if it be commemorated in the prayer?”²⁰ Not only does this tool add a dialogical element to his preaching, but it also shows that he has taken his hearers into consideration as he prepared the sermon. By addressing concerns and questions that might lead his hearers to stumble, he removes any detours that might prevent them from reaching his homiletical destination.

All preaching is contextual. One of the most common homiletical tools used by Cyril in *The Catechetical Lectures* is mystagogy. He consistently points to the liturgy both to illustrate the catechetical lesson and to explicate the deeper meaning of the liturgy. One way that he does this is to use the liturgy as an illustration of what is happening in the life of the faithful. When speaking of the transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, he links that transformation of the souls that partake of the Eucharist with the transformation of the elements themselves.²¹ By giving his hearers a deeper understanding of the Eucharistic liturgy, the liturgy itself becomes a tool for reinforcement of his catechetical point. In an earlier lecture, Cyril said “rehearse it with all diligence.”²² Our faith is not something to file away in our memories, but something to practice throughout our lives. The gift of God’s grace in the liturgy can be a tool for such rehearsal once that gift is unwrapped, which is what Cyril does by including mystagogical connections to the catechism.

¹⁹ *The Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture XVIII, ¶ 5, 8, 9; Lecture XXIII ¶ 10

²⁰ *The Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture XXIII, ¶ 10

²¹ *The Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture XXII, ¶ 9

²² *The Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture V, ¶12

Through his lectures on the Eucharist, Cyril draws his audience into recalling liturgical actions that they have witnessed. In his sermon “On the Communion Service,” he says, “Ye saw then the Deacon give to the Priest water to wash, and to the Presbyters who stood round God’s altar... this washing of hands is a symbol.”²³ By recalling actions and words of the liturgy in an exegetical fashion, Cyril reveals the significance of these actions, thereby allowing his congregation to more fully participate in the sacred mysteries.²⁴ And not only does Cyril explain the various liturgical actions, but he also clearly gives instruction on how to participate in the liturgy. In one instance, he instructs “Approaching therefore, come not with thy wrists extended, or thy fingers open; but make thy left hand as if a throne for thy right, which is on the eve of receiving the King.”²⁵ As is often said today, “praying shapes believing.” By instructing his congregation on how to participate in the liturgy through understanding their actions, he is using the liturgy to its fullest extent to be a tool for catechism.

When it comes to his teaching on the Eucharist, Cyril focus on two main aspects: unity with Christ and the sanctification of the believer. As he beings his lecture “On the Body and Blood of Christ,” Cyril says “yet you are of the same body and blood with Christ.”²⁶ Then, comparing the Eucharist to the transformation of the water into wine at Cana, he notes that Christ will bestow his presence on his people in the sacred meal.²⁷ As Cyril describes the hearers’ relationship to the Eucharist, he uses the active verb “partake” often.²⁸ He is signaling that the Eucharist is something that we enter into, not

²³ Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture XXIII, ¶ 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, ¶ 3-22.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, ¶ 21.

²⁶ Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture XXII, ¶ 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, ¶ 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, ¶ 3; Lecture XXIII, ¶ 21, 22.

merely something that we observe. And in speaking of the liturgical Peace which precedes the Eucharistic prayer, Cyril says that in the liturgy our “souls are mingled together.”²⁹ Cyril’s instructions on the Eucharist make it clear that its communal aspects are central to a proper catechetical understanding.

The second main thrust of Cyril’s catechetical emphasis about the Eucharist is on its transformational, or sanctifying, nature. As we partake of the Eucharist, we become partakers of the divine nature.³⁰ Though the bodily senses may tell the hearer that what has been received are merely bread and wine, Cyril admonishes his congregation to know that they have received not mere elements, but the transformed Body and Blood of Christ which, in turn, sanctifies our body and soul.³¹ As Cyril concludes one lecture on the Eucharist, he says that this understanding of the transformative power of the Eucharist will lead us “from glory to glory.”³² Significant attention is given to how the elements are transformed into the Sacrament³³ which then sanctifies the recipient.

As Cyril concludes each lecture, he always does so with a doxology.³⁴ Such a strategy has at least two advantages. First, it provides for a clear and consistent conclusion to his speaking. His audience does not need to worry about false endings of a sermon, nor does he have to spend excess time coming up with the “perfect” way to finish speaking. And secondly, by concluding with a doxological formula, he is pointing towards the purpose of his preaching and the entire liturgy in which the preaching takes place. These catechetical lessons are not given so that his audience might be more

²⁹ Ibid., Lecture XXIII, ¶ 3.

³⁰ Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture XXII, ¶ 3 (referencing 2 Peter 1:4).

³¹ Ibid., ¶ 5, 6; Lecture XXIII, ¶ 20.

³² Ibid., Lecture XXII, ¶ 9.

³³ Ibid., Lecture XXIII, ¶ 7, 20.

³⁴ This is true for every single lecture being considered in this section.

knowledgeable for the sake of being intelligent, but rather so that God might be praised. In our modern age, sermon hearers often speak of wanting to be inspired, comforted, challenged, or otherwise edified by a sermon. These are fine secondary goals, but the chief concern in preaching is always to glorify God and by consistently ending in doxology, Cyril makes this doxological end of preaching clear. Doxology is a fitting end for catechesis, as it shows that the faith has been delivered, received, and the hearers incorporated into the Body of Christ.

Isaac Williams

Isaac Williams was born in 1802 in Wales and was prominent in the Oxford Movement of the 19th century. He spent his early years in London and matriculated at Trinity College. He was a student of John Keble, who also inspired Williams in his studies. John Henry Newman was also an important influence on Williams, who served as his curate. Ordained in 1829, Williams was known for his practical preaching style. In addition to serving as a parish priest, Williams authored Tracts 80 and 87 in the *Tracts for our Times* series. He died due to illness in 1865.³⁵

In order to have a fuller insight into Williams' approach in doing the work of catechesis, his two tracts on using reserve in communicating knowledge will be considered before moving onto his sermons on the catechism. As was seen concerning Cyril of Jerusalem, the concept of using reserve within Christian formation was common in the early church, when certain teachings and truths were delayed until the learners were deemed sufficiently prepared to receive and integrate them. Thus, reserve is a

³⁵ "Isaac Williams." Project Canterbury. (London: The Catholic Literature Association, 1933). <http://anglicanhistory.org/bios/iwilliams.html> (accessed August 9, 2019).

pedagogical tool meant to not overwhelm those being catechized, but rather give them the space to assimilate the information at a rate that can be absorbed. It is akin to teaching basic algebra before more complex differential calculus, or learning how to scramble an egg before making a frittata. When Williams also appeals to the early Church for examples of how and why reserve was used, he cites Cyril of Jerusalem's "Catechetical Lectures" as a case-in-point.³⁶

Williams roots the practice of using reserve in Scripture, as he notes that Jesus did this very thing in the way that parables were used in order to reveal certain aspects of the faith in proportion to the person's condition. He writes, "In speaking of a Parable as a veil, I would be cautious against mentioning anything as the end proposed in the operations of God.... I would only say that the Parable did serve this purpose among others."³⁷ Williams furthermore cautions that we ought not to "give that which is holy to the dogs" or "cast pearls before swine."³⁸ His comment is not a classist remark, but rather indicates that without sufficient preparation, certain religious claims will fall on deaf ears or cause confusion. Using one of Jesus' own parables, we might say that soil must be prepared to receive the seed.³⁹ Reserve is used because not of some sort of gnostic belief that knowing too much grants people with power, but rather that the referent of religious knowledge (God) is worthy our highest praises, and not all will recognize this at first. Williams writes, "I think it may be considered without doubt as a general rule, that the

³⁶ Isaac Williams, "On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge, cont." *Tracts for the Times*. No. 87 (New York: Charles Henry, Publishers, 1840), IV.5. <http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract87/> (accessed August 9, 2019).

³⁷ *Ibid*, I.4.

³⁸ Isaac Williams, "On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge, cont." *Tracts for the Times*. No. 80 (New York: Charles Henry, Publishers, 1840), I.4. <http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract80/> (accessed August 9, 2019).

³⁹ Matthew 13:8; Mark 4:8; Luke 8:8

benefits conferred in the Gospel are in a sort of measured proportion to the faith of the recipient or person engaged.”⁴⁰ It is often said that Jesus met (and continues to meet) people where they are. Williams is suggesting that this truth is manifest in how people receive the faith. Those that are ready to hold much receive much, and those who can only handle a little will receive a sufficient and proportionate amount. There are simply some things that cannot be built unless the foundation is ready to support them.

This holy nature of such knowledge means that what is taught is not simply the sharing of facts, rather it is the building the foundation of faith; in fact, this knowledge is itself a gift from God.⁴¹ Thus he writes,

“We gather this fullness of assurance from the recurrence or repetition of many single circumstances, so also a divinely illuminated mind, in the course of practical obedience, necessarily must accumulate numerous facts which necessarily lead to certain conclusion, or convictions of divine truth, so as to be open to the heart, and full reception of higher knowledge, when presented to it.”⁴²

Williams also notes that the seed of this sort of knowledge will never bear fruit if it remains an intellectual experience; it must be incarnated in one’s life. He writes, “The truth must ever be propagated by some way of this kind [works and practices], and not by argument.”⁴³ And not only is such knowledge to be imparted and received for the purpose of spiritual edification, there is “some very great and peculiar danger when the heart was not prepared to receive.”⁴⁴ So it is not only that religious knowledge builds up faith, but when the foundation is not ready to be built upon, what is constructed may actually become a tower which might topple on those who are not ready for such knowledge.

⁴⁰ Williams, Tract 80.I.5. (a similar point is made in III.3 and 87.IV.5)

⁴¹ Williams, Tract 80, II.2.

⁴² Ibid., I.7.

⁴³ Ibid., III.3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., II.8.

As Williams concludes the argument in this tract, he speaks against the preaching of 19th century Evangelicals who emphasized emotion responses to the faith. As noted by Benjamin J. King, “Newman’s answer was that the Church of England had gone wrong in dumbing everything down, and placing few moral demands on the people, and making the spiritual authority of bishops appear insignificant compared with their worldly power. All this had to change.”⁴⁵ Reserve though is used not to heap upon knowledge until the desired emotions can be coaxed out of the people, but rather reserve is used to build a strong faith upon a solidly built foundation. Williams summarizes:

“This reserve becomes necessary and unavoidable. If we make those secrets of God known to [the world], we shall injure ourselves, by bringing the gaze of the world into the secrets of God, and His holy place; and inure others also, for those things which they cannot understand, they will not reverence.”⁴⁶

Similar to how St. Paul suggests that while we now see in a mirror dimly, we will come to know these things more fully,⁴⁷ Williams concludes by writing,

“Remembering always, that this reserve... is ever calculated to lead on our thoughts by a necessary connection to that great manifestation, when there is ‘nothing secret that shall not be manifest;’ neither any thing hid that shall not be known and come abroad, when He who now ‘seeth in secret, shall reward openly’ [Matt. 6:4] those that wait for Him.”⁴⁸

As the ways of God are mysterious and beyond our full knowing⁴⁹ until we know God face-to-face, reserve in religious knowledge will always be an aspect of faith, and perhaps even a helpful aspect as it allows us to gradually grow in faith. But our hope is

⁴⁵ Benjamin J. King, “Reviving the past to meet the needs of the present: John Henry Newman from 1835 to 1838,” 3. Unpublished, provided by the author.

⁴⁶ Williams, Tract 87.V.11.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:12

⁴⁸ Williams, Tract 87.V.11.

⁴⁹ Isaiah 55:8-9

that, at the last, all shall be known and nothing will be hidden. Until then, the catechetical preacher must consider what the congregation is prepared to hear and receive.

In Williams' catechetical preaching on the Eucharist, reserve is a tool which he deploys. In speaking of Sacraments as outward and visible signs, Williams also notes that a symbol, by its very nature, includes as an element of reserve. A symbol can be interpreted on a surface level and the deeper meanings await deeper discovery when the faithful are ready to perceive them. He notes the symbols given to Israel, such as the Passover lamb, the parting of the Red Sea, and the manna in the wilderness, were not fully understood. He writes, "They were altogether outward and visible signs of things inward and spiritual, which the Jews understood not... holy men, indeed, saw in some degree the meaning of them."⁵⁰ While these comments are problematic in that they are an example of anti-Semitism and ought not to be used in modern sermons, they nevertheless reveal Williams' understanding how reserve ought to be used in teaching the faith.

Though we may observe with our senses these symbols, we do not initially perceive "how much these words contain."⁵¹ Williams also notes that the miracles of Jesus functioned in the same way as "our Blessed Saviour began to show more clearly and fully to mankind what he was about to do when he should send down the Holy Spirit to establish his Church."⁵² In a sermon on the Eucharist, Williams admonishes "how much danger this Holy Sacrament is encompassed [with], lest we should not esteem it worthily."⁵³ As seen in his tracts, reserve not only is used to bring people into the faith in

⁵⁰ Isaac Williams. "The Outward Visible Sign." *Plain Sermons on the Latter Part of the Catechism* (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1851), 163.

⁵¹ Isaac Williams. "The Bread and Wine," *Plain Sermons on the Latter Part of the Catechism* (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1851), 252.

⁵² Williams, "The Outward Visible Sign," 166.

⁵³ Isaac Williams. "The Body and Blood of Christ." *Plain Sermons on the Latter Part of the Catechism*. (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1851), 270.

a manageable way, but also protects the hearer from being overwhelmed by that which they are not ready to receive. As Williams puts it, “In addition to such holy reserve, and the suggestions of humility, another circumstance, which tends to produce the effect here described, are the commands of Holy Scripture, which enjoin the concealment of religious actions.”⁵⁴ Such concealment is indeed not to be secretive for its own sake, but rather holding back such teachings until they are ready to be received fully.

Williams is also quite clear in these sermons that he is preaching catechetically, as he very often refers his hearers to the words of the catechism. Thus, he is making the catechism accessible to his hearers. It is not as if he is simply preaching about “church teaching” in the abstract, but is drawing on established tradition and is elevating the role of the catechism in the life of the believer. Williams does this in numerous places,⁵⁵ making it clear that the catechism should not be a “behind the scenes” document which merely influences his preaching, but also a text worthy of the faithful study of his hearers. Indeed, the catechism is to be rehearsed⁵⁶ and lived not merely as doctrine but as guiding principles in the life of the faithful.

Williams is clear to establish that his exposition of the catechism is undergirded by the tradition and practice of the Church. He often refers to Scripture and Church tradition throughout his preaching. For instance, as he preached on the inward grace of Eucharist, he cites passages from 2 Corinthians and Revelation, as well as appealing to

⁵⁴ Williams, Tract 80, II.7.

⁵⁵ Isaac Williams. “The Two Sacraments.” *Plain Sermons on the Latter Part of the Catechism*. (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1851), 148; “The Outward Visible Sign, 161; “The Inward Spiritual Grace, “174; “The Body and Blood of Christ,” 265; “The Strengthening and Refreshing of the Soul,” 275; “Self-Examination Before Communion,” p. 369.

⁵⁶ Isaac Williams, “Self-Examination Before Communion.” *Plain Sermons on the Catechism*, Vol. 2. (London: Rivington, 1882), 70.

the writings of St. Irenaeus.⁵⁷ When preaching on the outward visible sign, Williams appeals to each of the four Gospels thirteen times in just a few paragraphs.⁵⁸ And in a sermon on the two Sacraments, he invokes Augustine, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Cyril in rapid succession.⁵⁹ The effect of rooting his explications in Scripture and Tradition is not only that his arguments become more credible, but that such a move invokes the very mystic nature of the Sacraments of which he is speaking by bringing ancient voices into the conversation. Just as the Sacraments transcend space and time, so too does Williams' foundation in preaching.

Further, Williams often uses the liturgy itself to advance his catechetical preaching. By pointing to the liturgy he creates verbal cues which will resonate when his hearers hear those words repeated in the liturgy. As he refers to the words of institution in the Eucharist, he notes,

“It is to be observed, that it is in our Lord's own words that our Church keeps on this subject her treasure of doctrine, thinking nothing less than his own divine words a sufficient sanctuary, a worthy means in which to enshrine this, her sacred deposit, the great mystery of our faith.”⁶⁰

This method of mystagogical preaching allows Williams to connect his teaching to the liturgy so that his point will be reinforced each time the words of the liturgy are heard. Such references to the liturgy were common in the Oxford Movement. King notes that it was public worship, not preaching, that Newman thought was the best way to convey the

⁵⁷ Williams, “The Inward Spiritual Grace,” 174.

⁵⁸ Williams, “The Outward Visible Sign,” 167-8. Here, Williams refers to the healing of Jairus' daughter, the hemorrhaging woman, the widow of Nain's son, blessing the little children, the calming of the sea, the healing of the blind man, and the man with a speech impediment.

⁵⁹ Williams, “The Two Sacraments,” 150. Here, he begins four consequence sentences with “St. Augustine says,...”, “St. Ambrose says,...”, “St. Chrysostom says,...”, and “St. Cyril, of Alexandria speaks of the Blood and Water...”

⁶⁰ Williams, “The Body and the Blood,” 265.

faith.⁶¹ In pointing to the liturgy, he transforms the words of the liturgy from being heard passively to that which should be actively reflected upon.

Another tactic which Williams uses to catechize the congregation is defining the terms which he is using. As he begins a sermon on the two sacraments, he makes it clear that “by these two we are joined on to Christ; we are made parts of his body.”⁶² Similarly, he reminds hearers of what makes a sacrament (both outward sign and inward grace) before citing many examples in Scripture of how this doctrine is manifest.⁶³ Related to this tactic, Williams also of makes declaratives statements to advance his teaching. Such statements unambiguously allow the hearer to know what point is being made; when it comes to teaching the catechism, Williams does not require any speculation on the part of his congregation.

Such declaratives are found when Williams notes the obvious conclusions that anyone would draw when considering the topics at hand, using phrases such as “will lead anyone to see,” “you will find,” and “you will see by all this.”⁶⁴ And instead of using phrases such as “we might understand” or “one way of interpreting this,” Williams directly states the point he wants his listeners to receive. For example, in preaching on the bread and wine Williams says, “In this bread and wine is our restoration and strength.”⁶⁵ This clear and precise speech allows him to teach the catechism without leaving room for misunderstandings. Williams also concludes many of his sermons, not with exhortative pleas for action or prescriptions, but with declarations which summarize his main

⁶¹ King, “Reviving the Past to Meet the Needs of the Present: John Henry Newman from 1835 to 1838,” 5.

⁶² Williams, “The Two Sacraments,” 148.

⁶³ Williams, “The Outward Visible Sign,” 169.

⁶⁴ Williams, “The Two Sacraments,” 157.

⁶⁵ Williams, “The Bread and Wine,” 261.

catechetical point, such as in the case of his sermon on the inward and spiritual grace in which we concludes: “If we hold him fast, by our earnest faith and desire, He will abide with us, and manifest himself to us in the breaking of bread, more than he yet has done.”⁶⁶ Williams use of the declarative makes it clear that what is being communicated is truth to be incorporated into the faith of the believer.

Williams, though, is aware of the fact that there are other interpretations of these foundational aspects of the faith, as he often considers the counter-arguments and questions of his congregation. In preaching about the inward spiritual grace, Williams notes that “some have taken the outward sign and reject the thing signified.”⁶⁷ He then explains the error in denying the sacramental mystery of these rites (marriage, in this particular example). Often, Williams is countering the Roman proclivities that some may be accustomed to, as when he warns against the dangers of “making the consecrated bread itself and object of adoration and worship.”⁶⁸ While such remarks betray certain polemics of Williams, they also show that he takes seriously his context and the questions that his hearers might have.

He demonstrates this by addressing their assumed questions about the Body and Blood of Christ. In one sermon, he responds to several rhetorical questions such as “is Christ really present at this Holy Sacrament?,” “but is Christ substantially present?,” and “but is it a corporeal, that is, a bodily presence?”⁶⁹ Not only is Williams responding to

⁶⁶ Williams, “The Inward Spiritual Grace,” 183.

⁶⁷ Williams, “The Inward Spiritual Grace,” 176

⁶⁸ Williams, “The Bread and the Wine,” 253. (a similar refutation of Rome is made in “The Two Sacraments,” 159.)

⁶⁹ Williams, “The Body and Blood of Christ,” 271.

such questions, he is also leading deeper into the faith of the catechism by asking such questions in a progression of faith.

When it comes to the Eucharist, Williams makes a few central points related to God's graciousness. This point is beautifully stated when he says,

“The noise of the world rings in our ears, what we all need is a simple love of the truth. We were all made for God; in him only can we find rest; we seek for rest everywhere else but in him; and yet all that he asks of us is, that we return to him, and find rest in his truth.”⁷⁰

This message of grace continues in another sermon in which he states: “But in this we may see the great mercy and loving-kindness of God, that he is pleased to condescend to our infirmities, and through sensible things and bodily wants and desires to represent to us the invisible things of his kingdom.” Later in the same sermon, quoting a Psalm, he declares “For God satisfieth the empty soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.”⁷¹ This grace is transformative: “How gracious are these his continual invitations to meet him... blessed are they... who husband such opportunities as the most precious things which they are given them on earth; so that thereby they may ever increase in repentance, and in newness of life, and in living faith, and in thankfulness, and in charity.”⁷² For Williams, the catechism about the Eucharist is an enactment and reminder of God's grace.

Rowan Williams

Rowan Williams is a prominent scholar of the 21st century, revered for both his towering intellect and spiritual depth. He was born in Wales in 1950 and studied at

⁷⁰ Williams, “The Body and Blood of Christ,” 274.

⁷¹ Williams, “The Strengthening and Refreshing of the Soul,” 277.

⁷² Williams, “Self-Examination Before Communion,” 383.

Cambridge and Oxford.⁷³ Williams taught as Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford and served as the Bishop of Monmouth and the Archbishop of Wales before being appointed as the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury, a position he held from 2002-2012. Since his resignation from that position, he has Master at Magdalene College, Cambridge.⁷⁴ In considering Williams' contributions to catechetical preaching, one should look first at some of his writings as a way to explore his theological foundation for preaching on the Eucharist.

To begin, in *On Christian Theology*, Williams writes about the nature of a sacrament, noting that “being human, being bodily, and being a user of ‘signs’ are inseparable.”⁷⁵ Here Williams reflects frequently upon the idea of signification. A sign can both point to meaning and also bear meaning itself. He states that all experience and meaning is mediated through signs and symbols, as “symbolic forms are not just lying around... they are what we live through as humans.”⁷⁶ A sign can function dually as both a sign and its own meaning because “It is clear that the tradition of [Jesus’] deeds and words is heavily influenced by the sense that he was a sign-maker of a disturbingly revolutionary kind.”⁷⁷

Thus, the experience of God to humanity is always mediated by symbols of language. As Williams sees it, the sacraments are revelatory symbols not because of “some ‘specialness’ in the action, but because of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in his

⁷³ Owen Cummings, *Canterbury Cousins: The Eucharist in Contemporary Anglican Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 139.

⁷⁴ “Dr. Rowan Williams.” Magdalene College. <https://www.magd.cam.ac.uk/user/williams> (Accessed November 5, 2018).

⁷⁵ Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology: Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 201.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

dying and rising.”⁷⁸ Moreover, “Jesus, baptized, tempted, forgiving and healing, offering himself as the means of a new covenant, is himself ‘sacrament’: it is his identity that is set before us as a sign, the form of a new people of God.”⁷⁹ Jesus is where the sacraments find their telos and it is the Passion of Jesus, in particular, that is the animating force behind all Christian imagery and symbolism. For Williams, the Death and Resurrection of Jesus is the prism through which we are to interpret our reality which is suffused with symbols. Jesus is the prism by which we are to understand and receive sacramental signs. Williams’ preaching seeks to both focus attention on this sign and also to give an interpretative lens by which to read the sign.

In modernity, there are few examples of the sort of catechetical preaching as found in the preaching Cyril of Jerusalem. The cultural and liturgical settings and homiletical expectations have shifted dramatically even since Isaac Williams. Rowan Williams does not preach sermons in the same explicitly catechetical style; however, he clearly has an underlying theological framework which he consistently advances in his lectures and sermons. And he utilizes sermons as tools for doing this work of making the Good News known. He writes, “Ultimately, a good sermon is one that makes you love God more and trust God more. But in the process of helping you love God more and trust God more, it should make that possible love and trust come alive.”⁸⁰ Preaching then is always a catechetical exercise in this view, as it builds a relationship of knowing and leads to transformation into new life.

⁷⁸ John 1:1, 14a

⁷⁹ Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 204.

⁸⁰ Cummings, *Canterbury Cousins*, 140.

When it comes to Williams' Eucharistic theology, he begins with the assertion that the purpose of a sacrament is to make human beings holy, that is, they are to sanctify us.⁸¹ As such, sacraments "are the drawing of believers into the life of the Kingdom of God."⁸² This transformative and sanctifying foundation of the Eucharist will be seen throughout his preaching. This transformation is seen in that the Eucharist not only recalls the Passion of Jesus Christ, but also reframes this story of betrayal and death as an Easter feast. The Eucharist embodies the transformation of death into Resurrection and is something that we are given to participate in as this feast is not a mere memory of a past or future victory, but rather the Eucharist is a meal in which the "source-event" becomes itself present.⁸³

This preaching is about so much more than seeing something in the Eucharist, rather it is about being. Williams' goal does not seem to be having people properly understand what the Eucharist is or means, rather he is interested in their participating in it. The end is not merely partaking in the ritual of Eucharist, but rather seeing oneself as being a recipient of the grace offered in the Sacrament. So he begins by affirming that "The Last Supper [is] interpreted as a sign of Jesus' death and its effects... the wine poured out as a sign of the shedding of blood is the mark of a covenant being made"⁸⁴ and that "the table fellowship of the early church was seen as the context in which the Resurrection story could be best and most fully told."⁸⁵ But he cautions that "we have

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Cummings, *Canterbury Cousins*, 141

⁸³ Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*. (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd Ltd, 2014). Kindle edition.

⁸⁴ Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 214

⁸⁵ Rowan Williams, "Sacramental Living," (St. Peter's Public Lecture, Trinity College, University of Melbourne, 2002), 14. <https://www.trinity.unimelb.edu.au/getmedia/b1ef15dc-6fdc-4212-81ed-c699ca1dd1f9/TrinityPaper32.aspx> (accessed September 13, 2019).

often been at sea in thinking of the Eucharist as first and foremost the representation of Christ's passion."⁸⁶ Something is lost when there is too much focus on what the Eucharist means rather than on what it does. Thus, Williams says "the more we focus on the Eucharist as the representation of the Passion in and of itself, the more I believe we lose that sense of the Eucharist as the act of encounter with the Risen Christ."⁸⁷ He goes as far as to say "Holy Communion makes no sense at all if you do not believe in the Resurrection."⁸⁸ The Eucharist, for Williams, is not a ritual which the Church enacts, rather it is a participation in the Resurrection which we are given to take participate in throughout our lives.

As a part of the New Creation, the Eucharist is given as a vehicle to communicate this grace to the world. Williams asserts, "The Eucharist hints at the paradox that material things carry their fullest meaning for human minds and bodies – the meaning of God's grace and of the common life thus formed – when they are the medium of gift, not instruments of control or objects for accumulation."⁸⁹ The fullness of this gift comes when it is made tangible in the Sacrament.

This saving grace of the Eucharist is seen particularly in that "We take Holy Communion not because we are doing well, but because we are doing badly."⁹⁰ In a sermon on God's amazing grace, Williams recounts the words of John Newton who authored the hymn text bearing that title: "I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Jesus is a great savior," and Williams adds further, "Now when we come to Holy

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Rowan Williams, *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 45.

⁸⁹ Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 218.

⁹⁰ Williams, *Being Christian*, 53.

Communion, brothers and sisters, that is what we are to remember.”⁹¹ There is a link to the other dominical sacrament of Baptism as it is viewed as the forgiving of sins.

Williams says, “Holy Communion itself is spoken of as ‘an enlightenment,’ a moment when the radiant light of our baptism blazes up afresh to transfigure our knowledge.”⁹²

The grace bestowed in Baptism is refreshed in the Eucharist.

As is true for Baptism, Williams also makes it clear that Eucharist is God’s actions towards us, not ours, noting that “to share in the Eucharist... means to live as people who know that they are always guests.”⁹³ Throughout his writing and preaching, Williams portrays the Eucharist as an act of hospitality with God as the host, noting that this invitation to encounter the Resurrection is “more powerful than anything that human beings can do.”⁹⁴ God is the active agent in transforming, inviting, and sanctifying.⁹⁵ The Cross is the precipitating event to this invitation as “it takes the cross to show us... what this invitation is capable of overcoming,” namely death.⁹⁶

This invitation transforms us and also makes us able to extend the hospitality that has been extended to us. Williams says that “celebrating the Eucharist not only reminds us that we are invited to be guests; it also reminds us that we are given the freedom to invite others to be guests as well.”⁹⁷ This is because, as Williams claims, “Holy

⁹¹ Rowan Williams, “Amazing Grace – A Sermon at Zanzibar Cathedral” (February 7, 2007). <http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/1588/amazing-grace-sermon-at-zanzibar-cathedral> (accessed September 13, 2019).

⁹² Rowan Williams, “Sermon given a St. Paul’s, Athens,” November 27, 2010. <http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/606/sermon-at-st-pauls-anglican-church-central-athens> (accessed September 13, 2019).

⁹³ Williams, *Being Christian*, 41.

⁹⁴ Williams, “Sacramental Living,” 14.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15, 18.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁷ Williams, *Being Christian*, 46.

Communion changes the way we see things as well as people.”⁹⁸ In Eucharist, we come to see that all people are invited by God which says something powerful about their innate dignity and worth.⁹⁹

Furthermore, in the Eucharist “we ask the Holy Spirit to effect a miraculous change in all of us, to make us capable of receiving these gifts, and as we receive them to go out, ‘in the power of the Spirit’ to live to God’s praise and glory.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, the Eucharist is not an isolated incident, rather it “overflows into the rest of our life.”¹⁰¹ There is an invitation to have the whole of our lives transformed by the Eucharist. This transformation includes the orientation and destination of our lives because “the Eucharist is somehow a revelation of God’s final act and purpose... and in the Eucharist we are at the end of the world.”¹⁰² This eschatological framework always exists in the Eucharist, as “the Eucharist itself [is] a sort of anticipation of the end of all things... something is anticipated, something is realised in advance.”¹⁰³ Because the Eucharist reveals to us the end of all things, it gives shape to our lives. Indeed, Williams sees the Eucharist as emblematic of humanity’s telos as he expands on the phrase “Homo Eucharisticus” from Gregory Dix. Williams says that humans are supposed to be eucharistic in our orientation, which is “a distinctive style of being human.”¹⁰⁴

As noted earlier, Williams does not set out to preach sermons which directly explicate a section of the catechism, rather his catechetical formation is done within the context of preaching on other topics. However, he consistently features the Eucharist as

⁹⁸ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁹ Williams, “Sacramental Living,” 18.

¹⁰⁰ Williams, *Being Christian*, 57.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰² Ibid., 57, 59.

¹⁰³ Williams, “Sacramental Living,” 19.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 16.

an illustrative point for sermons on a variety of topics. For one, this makes clear that Williams sees the Eucharist as being central to Christian faith and practice. And it also allows Williams to catechize in indirect ways on a more regular basis. In a lecture entitled “Sacramental Living,” given at Trinity College (Australia), Williams spoke about the Eucharist. Because it is a lecture and not a sermon, some of the stylistic elements will not translate to catechetical preaching, however this lecture reveals how Williams develops his Eucharistic theology in an instructional manner. He offers a clear and concise summary in his conclusion. The concluding strategy is to reinforce his points before then showing how this knowledge is a reality to participate in, and therefore encounter anew.¹⁰⁵ These strategies will also be found in his sermons. At the outset, he declares both what Eucharist is about and for: “Table fellowship is the concrete and specific form of ‘being with Jesus’ which brings about healing and wholeness.”¹⁰⁶

In a sermon on the task of witnessing, Williams expounds on different aspects of being a witness: having a story to tell, being changed by that story, sharing in that story to the end that the story makes things happen. He notes that stories have this power when there is a “moment of recognition” in which we see ourselves within them.¹⁰⁷ In this particular sermon, Williams goes on to speak about his audiences’ context, making the point about stories relatable to them. In order to summarize his story and provide a tangible example, Williams then brings in the Eucharist.

Unlike Cyril, he does not need to explain what the Eucharist is to neophytes who have never experienced it. Instead, his congregation is quite familiar with the Eucharist

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰⁷ Rowan Williams, “Witnessing,” *Sewanee Theological Review* No. 52, Issue 1 (2008): 11.

and so he is able to use it as an inductive illustrative tool instead of needing to preach a deductive sermon about the Eucharist. He is able to draw on this experience of the Eucharist not only to serve as an example for his sermon about the power of story, but also to catechize about the Eucharist by lifting up how, as a story, it is transformative.

In another sermon, Williams speaks of this transformation of the Eucharist as mirroring that of our own by saying,

“When it’s not only the bread and wine on the table that are transfigured and shot through with the life and glory of God, it is our substance too that is transfigured in the sacrament... We come so that [God’s glory] can be absorbed into our flesh and blood and the grace of God can reveal the glory of God in us.”¹⁰⁸

In the final sermon of the 2008 Lambeth Conference, Williams says “[we come to] a liturgy in which what we do is precisely to tell the story that makes something happen.”¹⁰⁹ He then uses the key words which he introduced in the beginning of the sermon and explicated in the body, phrases such as “tell that story,” “something happens,” “enables us to recognize,” and “God invites to share his table.”¹¹⁰ Throughout this sermon, Williams has been foreshadowing his use of the Eucharist as the embodiment of his lesson about the power of a story. Thus, in his conclusion, Williams is able to say “Here, at this Eucharist, we experience – each one of us – what it is for a story to be told that makes something happen.”¹¹¹ Williams catechetical point here is that the Eucharist is the transforming aspect of the liturgy and he then shows how “something happens” to us through the grace of the sacred meal.

¹⁰⁸ Rowan Williams, “Sermon given by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the Concluding Eucharist of the Lambeth Conference” (January 20, 2010). <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2008/08/sermon-given-by-the-archbishop-of-canterbury-at-the-concluding-eucharist-of-the-lambeth-conference.aspx> (accessed March 23, 2020).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Williams, “Witnessing,” 13.

Using the Eucharist as both the ultimate illustrative point the theological point of the sermon is a technique Williams deploys often. By pointing towards the table in his preaching, he prepares the congregation to more fully receive it, thereby catechizing them in the process. This is evident when he concludes a sermon called “Fear Not” by saying,

“A lifetime’s work, but also a moment’s gift, in the sudden grasp of the mystery of this celebration of God made human, in the words we hear from the gospel, in the bread and wine of the Eucharist: ‘from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.’”¹¹²

The Eucharist, even when not the chief focus of the sermon, is often present in Williams’ preaching just as the Eucharist is present in the liturgy.

In a sermon given at the Cathedral in Dogura, Papua New Guinea, while the major focus is on unity, he uses the Eucharist both to give an example of this unity and to teach about the unitive power of the Holy Communion. Here, he mystagogically invites people into an imaginary state of unity saying,

“That is why we must keep on coming to Holy Communion together, in fellowship and love, then the strength of his life will be in us, and we will be able to go out and go on bringing peace to the world, bringing people into that one family, which is Body of Christ, the fellowship, the friendship of all believing people here in Papua New Guinea, with us in in Britain... one family because all of you are being served by Jesus.”¹¹³

This same mystagogical approach is used in another sermon which builds on the rainbow in Genesis 9 in which, in the conclusion, he alerts the congregation to pay attention that “when the bread and the wine are raised above the altar, as they are broken and shared, see there the rainbow of God’s promise.”¹¹⁴ Williams locates the Eucharist at the center

¹¹² Rowan Williams, *Choose Life: Christmas and Easter Sermons in Canterbury Cathedral* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 22.

¹¹³ Rowan Williams, “Sermon at the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul in Dogura, Papua New Guinea” (October 23, 2012). <http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/2688/archbishop-serving-jesus-means-breaking-down-walls> (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹¹⁴ Williams, “Amazing Grace – A Sermon at Zanzibar Cathedral.”

of the Church's faith and worship, brilliantly planting the seeds of his turn towards the Eucharist throughout the sermon to have them bear fruit at the climax of his argument. Likewise, in a sermon about anticipation given at the General Synod, he speaks about a "foretaste" before getting to the Eucharist later in the sermon: "Here is God's future. Here the Holy Spirit called upon our assembly – these gifts of bread and wine – here God's future is real."¹¹⁵ The Eucharist is at once an illustrative example of faithful anticipation and also is being given catechetical treatment as its eschatological dimensions are fleshed out.

When preaching about eternal life, the Eucharist is again used both as a metaphor and a topic for teaching. By saying something about the nature of the Eucharist, Williams is able to say something larger about humanity and God because he so often treats the Eucharist as a Rosetta Stone for faith. And so he is able to say:

"Here is the reality of Jesus Christ, the humanity in which God's life was most fully lived, offered as food for our humanity. Here is eternal life. And when we come and receive the bread and wine of Holy Communion it is to deepen, to recreate in us, the relationship we have with the life God has breathed into us."¹¹⁶

The Eucharist is apocalyptic in that it reveals these truths: "This is what heaven will be like... Eternal life is visible and tangible."¹¹⁷ Moreover, because of the Eucharist, following Williams' example, we might also say that it is tangible in liturgy.

Throughout the preaching and writing of Rowan Williams, his approach to the Eucharist is to draw attention to its transformative and sanctifying power which comes

¹¹⁵ Rowan Williams, "Sermon at the General Synod" (February 8, 2012). <http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/2350/general-synod-archbishops-sermon-at-eucharist> (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Rowan Williams, "Sermon at Lichfield Cathedral" (November 7, 2010). <http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/804/archbishops-sermon-at-lichfield-cathedral> (accessed September 13, 2019).

through the invitation of God into the richness of the symbols of Christ's Passion. For Williams, the Eucharist is a sign which points us towards the deepest truths of God. This strategy enables him to always point towards the Eucharist as he preaches on a variety of other topics. Given that the Eucharist is central in most Anglican worship, this approach to the Eucharist is quite helpful when it comes to catechizing about this most sacred meal.

Samuel Wells

Born in 1965, Samuel Wells has served as the Vicar of St. Martins-in-the-Fields in London, England since 2012. Prior to this position, he was the Dean of Duke University Chapel in Durham, North Carolina after serving churches in Newcastle, Norwich, and Cambridge, England. He matriculated at Edinburgh, Oxford University, and the University of Durham.¹¹⁸ Of the preachers that have been considered, Wells most closely aligns with the role of the preacher in many Episcopal congregations. He is rooted in a particular place and he preaches in a liturgical, Eucharistic, and lectionary-based context. While his current parish is quite large and he does not preach every Sunday, he does preach regularly, which was also the case at Duke Chapel. In exploring his sermons from Duke and St. Martin's, it is clear that Wells is interested in the ability of the sermon to both catechize and to focus attention on the Eucharist.

Given that Wells' modern hearers have expectations for shorter (12 minute) sermons and may not have a strong catechetical foundation, he uses several rhetorical devices to bring along the congregation. One such technique is to clue his hearers into how many points he will be making. In one sermon he says "I suggest [Jesus] meant four

¹¹⁸ "Samuel Wells to Become Dean of Duke Chapel" (March 21, 2005). https://today.duke.edu/2005/03/wells_0305.html (accessed September 13, 2019).

things.”¹¹⁹ In another sermon, he lays out his trajectory in stating “What I’d like to do is to describe three things.”¹²⁰ This deductive strategy helps the listener to move through the sermon along with Wells and also makes the conclusion a summary instead of an attempt to sum up disparate points. While is a fairly basic rhetorical tool, Wells’ use of it demonstrates that the basics can still be effective. Other tools that Wells uses include “rhetorical questions,”¹²¹ applications to modern life (how the teaching applies to modern campus and political life), and giving “homework” so that the lesson can be reinforced in everyday life.¹²² The effect of these devices is that the listeners are guided along through the sermon and given a clear understanding which they take with them and apply to daily living. In this sense, the catechism is not merely intellectual, but informs and gives shape to the Christian life.

Wells also often uses the declarative to make his points unambiguous. While there is certainly something to be said for the use of inductive preaching, such deductive declarations can become a helpful foundation upon which to build. And, for those who are not aware of such definitions, these declarations ensure all have solid ground from which to hear the sermon. Wells uses this deductive technique effectively as a formulaic refrain in a sermon about the Eucharist. At the end of each section, he concludes with a declarative summary such as “The Eucharist makes us free for friendship” (or “gives us everything we need,” “is the Cross of Christ,” “is a moment of heaven on earth”).¹²³

¹¹⁹ Samuel Wells, “This is My Body” (April 13, 2006). <http://chapel-archives.oit.duke.edu/documents/sermons/2006/060413.pdf> (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹²⁰ Samuel Wells, “Rethinking Heaven and Hell” (May 14, year unspecified). https://www.chichestercathedral.org.uk/dyn/_assets/_pdfs/_folder2/SamWellsRethinkingHeavenandHellChichesterMay07_2_.pdf (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹²¹ Samuel Wells, “Teaching Eucharist” (September 20, 2009). <http://chapel-archives.oit.duke.edu/documents/sermons/Sept20TeachingEucharist-1.pdf> (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Wells, “This is My Body.”

Likewise, in a sermon on heaven and hell, Wells uses the construction “noun is adjective” repeatedly.¹²⁴ Given the modern attention spans of congregations, such a strategy is helpful because it allows Wells to keep his listeners together on what the main points of the sermon are.

As with the other preachers in this study, Wells refers to Scripture often. In sermons on the Eucharist, Wells peppers his preaching with Scriptural allusions and references.¹²⁵ For example, to give the context for the Eucharist, Wells recalls several Old Testament passages, saying:

“Passover links together the three great themes of the Old Testament: God is the liberator who sets Israel free, a freedom represented by the parting of the Red Sea; God sets Israel free in order for his people to be his friends, a friendship represented by the Covenant made with Moses on Mount Sinai.”¹²⁶

The Bible is a central foundation for the preached word and Wells keeps that in focus.

Wells’ preaching is also contextually aware of the liturgy which surrounds it. In a sermon on the Eucharist given on Palm Sunday, Wells uses Eucharistic language throughout the sermon before explicitly naming the Eucharist as a focus of his sermon. Even though the Last Supper is best not seen as a Seder, as Wells retells the Passover ritual, he does so by using Eucharistic language such as “cup,” “drink,” “bless,” and “broken” repeatedly.¹²⁷ These cues are intended to invoke a Eucharistic imagination so that when Wells says, “these four things are as significant today about every celebration of the Eucharist as they were in the upper room in the sharing of the Last Supper” his listeners will have already had their minds oriented towards the Eucharist.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Wells, “Rethinking Heaven and Hell.”

¹²⁵ Wells, “This is My Body” and “Teaching Eucharist.”

¹²⁶ Wells, “This is My Body.”

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

This focus on the liturgical context for the sermon is further evident when Wells offers mystagogy, or liturgical exegesis, by pointing towards various aspects of the liturgy and offering insight. In a sermon that was delivered in the “instructed Eucharist” style, Wells comments on everything from the opening carillon to the final hymn and most everything in between.¹²⁹ By uncovering this rich imagery and catechetical power, Wells shows how the liturgy itself offers its own preaching.

Wells also consistently points towards the Eucharist in his sermons, exhibiting a trust that the Eucharist will reinforce his point as a “sign-act.” In a sermon that does not focus on the Eucharist, but rather the communion of saints, Wells still points towards the Eucharist both because it reinforces what he has been saying and because the Eucharist will enact that which he has been preaching about. As he is speaking about this “mystic sweet communion,” he then says “They’re in communion. And then, in a moment, we shall enact together the meal in which we will never hunger or thirst again... the body of Christ will become a part of us. Communion again.”¹³⁰ Likewise, in a sermon on Remembrance Sunday, while speaking of sacrifice, Wells points to the Eucharist by saying: “When we gather at the altar, when we recall the cross by breaking the bread of Christ’s body, when we share the banquet of Christ’s resurrection in bread and wine, we celebrate the good news that the war, the real war – against sin, death and the devil – is over.”¹³¹ By foreshadowing the Eucharist which will follow the sermon, Wells brings its transformative power into the preached word of God while also bringing the preached

¹²⁹ Wells, “Teaching Eucharist.”

¹³⁰ Samuel Wells, “Mystic Sweet Communion” (November 6, 2011) <http://chapel-archives.oit.duke.edu/documents/Nov6MysticSweetCommunion.pdf> (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹³¹ Samuel Wells, “Three Kinds of Sacrifice” (May 27, 2007) <http://chapel-archives.oit.duke.edu/documents/sermons/2007/070527.pdf> (accessed September 13, 2019).

word into the Eucharistic celebration. Wells consistently points towards the Eucharist because he says that “the Eucharist is at the center of the life of the Church.”¹³²

When it comes to Wells’ Eucharistic theology, his central frame for understanding this sacred meal is rooted in the idea of companionship. In a sermon that is explicitly about the Eucharist, Wells states “the crucial question at the heart of the Eucharist and the heart of our faith is: ‘What does it mean to be God’s companions?’”¹³³ Wells notes that the entire Eucharistic prayer and the act of distribution is where the answer is found, as “a companion literally means one with whom you share bread.”¹³⁴ He then points towards several places within the liturgy where this sharing is seen.¹³⁵ This theme of companionship runs throughout Wells’ preaching about the Eucharist and is further seen when he says “This is how God’s people come to share his life: they enter the broken heart of God and become his companions in the breaking of the bread.”¹³⁶ Wells does not need to return to the etymology to make the point each time, but the idea of companionship is baked into the image of a sacred meal.

Transformation is also central to Well’s Eucharistic theology. As the bread and wine are transformed, so too are those who receive them. Wells says, “Everything we do at the Eucharist is about allowing our life to be shaped around Jesus’ life.”¹³⁷ As we engage in companionship with God in the Eucharist, “we are made friends with God and one another when we eat together in worship. In eating together we recall the transforming meals Christ shared before, during, and after his passion, and we anticipate

¹³² Wells, “Rethinking Heaven and Hell.”

¹³³ Wells, “Teaching Eucharist.”

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Samuel Wells, “Broken and Shared,” *The Christian Century* (June 14, 2005).

<http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2005-06/broken-and-shared> (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹³⁷ Wells, “Teaching Eucharist.”

the great banquet we shall share with him.”¹³⁸ It is not only that our lives are transformed in the Eucharist, but time itself becomes folded into our Eucharistic celebration as the meal that Jesus took part in (and through which we partake in him) through the end of time.

This transformation for Wells is rooted in the four-fold action of the Eucharist – the taking, blessing, breaking, and giving. He says, “When the Eucharist is served, a reshaping of human society begins” and then connects the ways in which the bread and wine are taken, blessed, broken, and given to how those apply to both the life of Christ and the congregation.¹³⁹ And then Wells declares, “As the bread and wine are offered, transformed and received, the congregation, and through it the whole creation, is offered, transformed and received.”¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, in his teaching sermon, he lays out this four-fold action – saying, “And in this dynamic of transformation we see how salvation works... God taking ordinary people and through this story and these actions turning them into the body of Christ, God’s companions forever.”¹⁴¹ In that sentence, the fullness of Wells’ Eucharistic theology is on display – through the acts of the Eucharist, which are rooted in the Passion of Jesus, we are transformed into being those who eat with God, that is, God’s companions.

Conclusion

Before concluding this chapter with some common strategies and Eucharistic theologies which might serve as the basis for my own sermon series, the makeup of preachers considered must be addressed. All are men and three out of the four are British,

¹³⁸ Wells, “Rethinking Heaven and Hell.”

¹³⁹ Wells, “Broken and Shared.”

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Wells, “Teaching Eucharist.”

white men that were educated at some of the world's most prestigious and elite universities. In wanting to survey both ancient and modern preachers, the issue of diversity is not easily addressed prior to the 20th century.

However, the fact that both modern examples are white men is lamentable. The reason why Rowan Williams and Samuel Wells were chosen is because they are widely published and have many sermons which deal with the topic of the Eucharist to be studied. While both Isaac Williams and Rowan Williams are Welsh giving them some marginal status within an English established church, greater diversity would better reflect the grandeur of God's creation. One goal of the research was to find preachers who regularly preached, as opposed to those who preach only occasionally. Barbara Brown Taylor was considered as a preacher to study, but there were not enough sermons that I could find to study her preaching through the lens of catechesis or the Eucharist. I also consulted with the Cuban-born Luis León, but he told me that he did not recall preaching explicitly about the Eucharist on any sort of regular basis. A preacher that I was not as familiar with when this project began is Fleming Rutledge, who would have been a good preacher to study.

The point though remains: the vestiges of racism, sexism, and elitism are still found in the Church. The lack of preachers who are female or ethnic minorities and have become well-known enough to have a significant enough corpus of sermons to consider is troubling. It is my prayer that the Church in the 21st century continues to grow in diversity so that it will be easier to point to examples of strong female and minority voices in the pulpit who are widely published and acknowledged for their preaching prowess. That being said, the lack of diversity of these four preachers should not lessen

the truth of the Word which their preaching points towards or their deftness in the homiletical task.

As far as homiletical strategies that are used in common, several are apparent. First of all, Scripture is clearly the foundation for all four of these preachers. Not only do they tightly focus on their primary text, but they use Scripture throughout their preaching. Isaac Williams is the one who most often points towards the catechism itself as a source, but the other preachers also clearly have their own take on what the central points to be proclaimed about the Eucharist are, and they make these points throughout their preaching. Both Scripture and the central teaching of the Church are featured in this sort of catechetical preaching.

Second, all of these preachers are also liturgically aware of the centrality of the Eucharist in the worship life of the congregation. They exegete the liturgy through mystagogy, explain the various aspects of the liturgy, and consistently point towards the Eucharist. Rowan Williams uses this strategy most often and it is quite effective. By so consistently pointing towards the Eucharist, it becomes clear to the congregation that the Eucharist is, indeed, the source and summit of the Christian life.

In my own context and preaching, the strategy of pointing towards the Eucharist which will be celebrated soon will be helpful. The Eucharist is a given in our Sunday worship, and so an intentional effort to help people think more deeply about this ritual should bear much fruit. Preaching in the context of the Eucharistic liturgy differs from other forums for preaching because the sermon is not the liturgical climax. It is far more likely for someone in the Episcopal tradition to say that they attended “Mass” than it is for them to say they went to “preaching” (a term sometimes used in the South to refer to

Sunday morning worship). This means that the sermon, while important, is not the “main event.” It is not uncommon to hear Episcopalians who might attend a different church for a family Confirmation or Baptism say that what they missed was the Eucharist. Given this liturgical gravitas, sermons preached in the liturgical shadow of the Eucharist ought to point in that direction.

Third, metaphors are often used by these preachers. Particularly, metaphors are deployed to connect the theological point to the common, everyday experiences of the congregation. They often speak of the Eucharist in terms related to sustenance and table fellowship which people regularly experience so that they might see the sacred meal in similar ways. Metaphors concretize and make tangible what might be abstract theological ideas with incarnate experiences. Wells’ use of “companionship” is good example of this, as he connects the Eucharist to our human experiences of sharing a meal with friends.

Fourth, a strategy used by Cyril and Isaac Williams is that of reserve. While this strategy could certainly be useful in some modern situations, such as a church that is primarily made up of “seekers” or those new to the faith, it is a more difficult strategy to use in a congregation such as the current parish that I serve in which there are two members with doctorates in systematic theology and the Old Testament (and teach at a local seminary), a retired priest, and one retired bishop, not to mention the many other members who are fairly knowledgeable about matters of faith. In many Episcopal congregations, there is no single starting place that can safely be assumed, so the use of reserve may not be as fitting. However, the idea of reserve does force the preacher to think through the strategies for preaching to make sure that points are being laid out in a logical order so that a pathway deeper into faith can be built. While Rowan Williams and

Samuel Wells do not deploy reserve in the same way as do Cyril and Isaac Williams, they do often structure their sermons in such a way that they build to a crescendo before striking a note about the Eucharist. In such cases, what might not have seemed to be a sermon about the Eucharist ends up showing how the Eucharist really is at the heart of the Church's identity and mission.

Fifth, when it comes to preaching about the Eucharist, these four preachers proclaim in their own way that the Eucharist is all about transformation. Though all four preachers speak of this, it is Cyril who most often uses this language of transformation. Through the Sacrament, the sanctifying grace of God is held up as a symbol in the bread and wine. And as these elements are transformed, so too, are those who receive them. The Eucharist not only reminds us of God's saving grace, a point often made by Isaac Williams, but also is an invitation to participate in this saving grace, a point often made by Rowan Williams. It is Wells who has developed the idea of companionship as a phrase to describe this participation. Given that Eucharist is viewed as a Sacrament of transformation, preaching about the Eucharist will then point towards how that same transforming grace is present in the lives of the hearers.

Finally, as these four preachers illustrate, the Eucharist is both the culmination and model of Christian living, showing that it is not only something that we "do" (or participate in) but it is also a metaphor for everything about the Christian faith. The Eucharist can be a key to understanding the Christian faith and life when approached from this position. As catechetical preaching is about understanding that leads to incorporation into the hearers' lives of doctrines of the faith, sermons on the Eucharist will need to describe the Eucharist in ways that are relatable to everyday life and are

connected to other aspects of Christian doctrine. In the Eucharist, we see doctrines of salvations, sanctification, and eschatology on display. Preaching on the Eucharist can then use a common ritual (the Eucharist) as a means of understanding these core beliefs. The Eucharist not only expresses truths of the faith, but is also a model for Christian living by emphasizing humility, God's provision, and thanksgiving. By noting these elements, congregations will not only come to be more informed about the Eucharist, but will see how the Eucharist informs their lives. And this is the transformative goal of catechetical preaching which is also mirrored in the transformational aspect of this central Sacrament of the Church.

The following chapter is a series of four sermons preached in Eastertide that seek to do this catechetical work of teaching various ways of understanding the Eucharist. These sermons build upon the rhetorical strategies for preaching catechetically found in the four preachers studied in this chapter. And as these preachers are part of the wider Christian tradition, their approaches to the Eucharist will be incorporated into the content of the sermons as well. Beyond leading the congregation to more fully appreciate the Eucharist, this sermons series aims to shape the congregation to living Eucharistically. As my college chaplain was fond of saying, "See Communion in everything." To do this, we must understand what the Eucharist represents so that we can notice it and we also come to see that all of life is Eucharistic, as the Eucharist shows us the grain of the universe.¹⁴² These examples of catechetical preaching will show a congregation not only the direction

¹⁴² Stanley Hauerwas, "The Grain of the Universe." Gifford Lectures, University of St. Andrew's, 2001. <https://www.giffordlectures.org/lectures/grain-universe> (accessed September 13, 2019).

of such grain, but also how to work with it to find the abundant life given to us by Jesus.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ John 10:10

Chapter III: The Project – Catechetical Sermons on the Eucharist

Introduction

A four-part sermon series was preached in Eastertide 2019. The focus of these sermons is on the Eucharist through the lens of the Catechism. The goal of these sermons is not merely to help people to understand or appreciate foundational Eucharistic theology, but is to have them participate in the transforming grace of the Sacrament. So these sermons are intended both to teach and form, which is the goal of catechesis.

These sermons have four primary formational objectives to share: that Christ is present to us in the Eucharist, that the Eucharist nourishes our faith, that the Eucharist is a foretaste of God's ultimate peace, and that the Eucharist sanctifies our lives by giving shape to them. These points are all drawn from the Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer. The intended catechetical outcome is to draw people more deeply into their faith and have them appreciate how receiving the Eucharist on Sunday helps them to interpret their lives.

The context for this preaching is at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in downtown Salisbury, North Carolina (an exurb of Charlotte with a population of 34,000). The average Sunday attendance for this parish is 160, and is made up of mostly professional white adults, however we do have several members from Liberia and some African-American members as well. Sermons are preached within the context of a liturgy of Holy Eucharist which could be categorized as "broad church," though the parish does lean towards the higher side of that spectrum. The typical sermon duration is 12-16 minutes, and these sermons are intended to fit within that congregational norm. Eastertide is liturgical location for this sermons series both because the lections and the Paschal theme of Christ's victory and grace lend themselves to reflection on Eucharistic theology.

After these sermons are preached, I will analyze what the sermons were intended to do and reflect on how effective this process of preaching with the Catechism in mind was in faith formation. While no formal surveying of the congregation took place to measure any such formation, preachers are often able to effectively gauge homiletical interest both by congregational attention during the sermon and follow-up remarks after the liturgy and in the weeks to come. In fact, during an adult Sunday School class about Baptism and Eucharist that was held five months after this sermon series was preached, some parishioners still held in mind some of the content of these sermons. Such informal feedback also provides a means of assessing the impact of such catechetical preaching. What follows is the text of the sermons as preached.

Sermon 1: Easter 2C – The Eucharist as Jesus’ Presence

Be with us, O Lord, for if you are with us, nothing else matters; and if you are not with us, nothing else matters. Amen.¹

At the center of who we are, what we believe, and why we gather on Sunday morning is the Holy Eucharist. As we gather to share in the Lord’s Supper, we enter into a rich and deep story and set of symbols which point us towards the majesty and salvation of God. It has been said that “the Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church,”² and indeed, coming together to share in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup is not only our identity, but also our purpose. Put another way, others have said that the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of the Christian life.³ Everything

¹ A prayer that I’ve heard the Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor use.

² Henri de Lubac quoted in “The Church and the Eucharist” by Chito Arevalo. <http://www.clerus.org/clerus/dati/2002-03/25-999999/06SAIEN.html> (accessed September 13, 2019).

³ “Catechism of the Catholic Church.” Part 2, Section 2, Chapter 1, Article 3.I. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a3.htm (accessed September 13, 2019).

that we do as Christians flows out of the Eucharist and returns back to this Great Thanksgiving.

Over the next four Sundays, the sermons will focus on the Eucharist – what it means about God and us, how it embodies and expresses the Christian faith, and why it is so central in our worship life. What I’ll say in these four sermons will be drawn from the Catechism, which serves as an outline of the faith. The Catechism is found at the back of the Prayer Book, and I’d highly commend it to all for reading and reflection.

As you know, one of the other names that this sacrament goes by is “Holy Communion.” The Eucharist is all about being in community with God. Certainly, as we gather to hear Scripture read, to make music together, to kneel at the altar and receive bread and drink from the same chalice, we are united to each other, and that is important. But what makes the Eucharist so sacred and special is that Jesus is present when we gather in his name to share in the bread and wine.

In Eucharistic Prayer A, we proclaim the mystery of faith that “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.”⁴ And mystery is the right word for this. What happened in the tomb on Easter morning, we can’t say for sure – we know that Jesus was dead when he went in and walked out in Resurrection life. What matters about Easter isn’t the mechanics, but rather the power and the love that make Resurrection a new reality for us all. And the same is true of the Eucharist. You can find volumes and volumes of books and arguments on the topic of how it is that Jesus is present in the Eucharist. And if you find that sort of dialogue interesting, by all means, dive in.

⁴ *BCP*, 363.

The most that we can definitively say is that it is a mystery of faith – just as Christ is risen, Christ is present in the Eucharist, not figuratively, not metaphorically, but he is really and truly sacramentally present. My goal in these sermons is not to have us paradoxically understand the mystery, but rather to appreciate the mystery, and this morning’s Gospel passage from John helps us to see how Jesus is present in our lives and through the Eucharist.

It all begins on Easter evening. The disciples are terrified out of their minds – Mary Magdalene had, earlier that day, come to them and shared the Good News that she saw the risen Lord. But they have more questions than they do answers. Will Jesus be angry at them for their betrayal? Will the Romans send soldiers to silence his followers? So they lock the doors of the house.

But those locked doors do not stop Jesus from coming to them. Their fears are not too much for him. Their doubts are not too much for him. Their betrayal is not too much for him. Jesus comes and meets us where we are. We can lock the doors of our minds and of our hearts, but Jesus comes anyway and says “peace be with you.” Jesus comes not in the name of giving us what we deserve, or in telling us what we could do better, but rather he comes with a word of peace on his lips.

That’s the beauty of the Eucharist, there’s nothing that we have to do in order to deserve it. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, writes “The Eucharist is not a reward for good behavior. It is the food we need to prevent ourselves from starving as a result of our own self-enclosure and self-absorption... We take Holy Communion not because we are doing well, but because we are doing badly.”⁵ Just as

⁵ Williams, *Being Christians*, 53.

Jesus came to the disciples in their fear and uncertainty, Jesus comes to us in the Eucharist to meet us where we are.

The thing about the Eucharist is that, although it may look like it is our meal, in actuality it is Jesus who is the host and we who are the guests.⁶ So we can always be confident that Jesus is with us when we celebrate the Eucharist because without him, there is no Eucharist. We gather in his name, in his temple, as his Church to receive his body. Through and through, the Eucharist is about Jesus. And so Jesus breathes on the disciples, giving them his own Holy Spirit. He gives himself to them, and so the breath that animates his risen life is now the breath that fills them. In the Eucharist, the same is true. Jesus gives himself to us in this sacred meal so that we participate in his risen life.

Thomas, though, wasn't there when Jesus appeared to them and bestowed the Holy Spirit on the disciples. Thomas says, "Unless I see the mark in his hands, I will not believe." For Thomas, Jesus' presence is all about body and blood. This is what the Holy Eucharist is all about. It is not as if the Eucharist is about *thinking* that Jesus is among us, instead it is about receiving his very body and blood in the form of bread and wine.

As Jesus said earlier in John, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."⁷ Now, we have to acknowledge that this sounds strange: it did when Jesus said it, too. Cannibalism was no more acceptable then than it is today. But just as God fed the people in the wilderness with manna from heaven, so too does God feed us with the bread of heaven made flesh. In Leviticus, we read the prohibition against eating any meat that

⁶ Ibid., 41.

⁷ John 6:54-56

still has the blood in it, because “the life is in the blood.”⁸ But it is this very blood, the life itself, that Jesus tells us to drink in remembrance of him.

What we receive in the Eucharist is so much more than bread and wine. Yes, the physical elements are bread and wine – I am not claiming that we are given a piece of flesh and a sip of plasma. But it is by faith that we recognize that the bread which Jesus gives for the life of the world is his flesh.⁹ By faith, we trust that as we drink of the wine, that it is the very life of Jesus that we receive. And so it is not a stretch to say that when we celebrate the Eucharist that Jesus is really and truly with us. By the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and the wine are Jesus’ own body and blood. They do not cease to be bread and wine, but they become much more than simply baked grains and fermented grape juice. The “how” of this transformation is not what matters; rather God gives us the faith to perceive that Jesus is really with us in this sacred meal.

When Jesus appears to Thomas he comes bearing those scars of his crucifixion. The miracle of the Resurrection did not erase those wounds. The miracle of the Eucharist does not erase the fact that the bread is bread, but it does give new meaning to the bread just as Jesus’ Resurrection gives new meaning to his wounds. The Eucharist is that holy meal in which our host, Jesus, comes to us and gives us his own body and blood to nourish our souls.

And in coming face to face with the living God, the Eucharist grounds us in humility. When you think of all the people you’ve ever met, it’s likely that you’ve noticed that the most humble and pure in heart people that you know are also some of the closest to God. The Eucharist helps us with this humility by reminding us who we are

⁸ Leviticus 17:11

⁹ John 6:51

before God – people who are both wonderfully made by God and people who desperately need the mercy of God. It's when Thomas draws near to the Body of Christ that a humble faith is sparked in him. Humility comes from nearness to God, and the Eucharist draws us into this presence where we see both who God is and who we are.

What makes this Eucharistic presence so important is that we consume it. If God wanted to be among us in worship only, it could have happened differently. It could have been more like Baptism, we could just sprinkle you each week to remind you that God loves you, saves you, and is always with you. Or it could have been that we'd turn on a big fan and pray that as the wind blows across our church it would be that same Holy Spirit which Jesus blew on the disciples. But, no; God has chosen to show up in bread and wine – things that we have to put inside us and digest. Through the Eucharist, God gets inside of us.

And so in a very real sense, we all become chalices that are walking around this world carrying the very body and blood of Jesus Christ. The lifeblood of God comes together with our own. His body gives nourishment to our very being. Never forget that as you go forth from this church, you do so not only as yourself, but you carry Jesus with you. You are made holy by what is inside you.

While Jesus reliably is present in the celebration of the Eucharist, the fact that Jesus comes to us in the simple elements of bread and wine show us that God can come to us in all sorts of unexpected ways. Jesus shows up in acts of forgiveness, in tears of agony and joy, in a helping hand, in a word of peace. The Eucharist shows us that God wants to be with us and among us.

In Revelation, we heard it said that God is the one “who is and who was and who is to come.”¹⁰ The place where we encounter this eternal God is in the Eucharist. Notice how Thomas reacts when he encounters the risen Jesus – he exclaims, “My Lord and my God.” As you stretch forth your hands to receive the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation, it’s quite okay for you to say the same thing, either in your heart or with your lips: “my Lord and my God;” because that is exactly what you are receiving.

You might know that the word “Eucharist” comes from a Greek word meaning “good grace” or “good thanks.” Thanksgiving is how we can respond to coming face to face with Jesus at the altar. We give thanks. Our Psalm this morning¹¹ did just that – “Hallelujah... Praise God for his mighty acts; praise God for his excellent greatness.” Praise God for the mystery of faith, that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Praise God for giving us his very body and blood in Jesus. Praise God for being our host and inviting us to partake of bread and wine. Praise God for giving us this sacred meal so that we might be united to one another. And most importantly, praise God for being known to us in the breaking of the bread.

Sermon 2: Easter 3C – The Eucharist as Our Nourishment

O Lord, give us this day our daily bread. Amen.¹²

Meals are central to what it means to be human. Of course, all animals eat, but only us humans make a meal out of getting the necessary nutrients into our bodies. And there’s nothing quite like a meal’s ability to serve as the foundation for so many different occasions. Need to close the deal with a client? Take them to a nice restaurant. Want to

¹⁰ Revelation 1:8

¹¹ Psalm 150

¹² Luke 11:3

celebrate a romantic relationship? Open a bottle of wine and have a nice meal.

Celebrating a wedding? Make sure you have a good caterer to provide for a celebratory meal. Have a friend who is mourning the loss of a loved one? Take them a casserole.

Birthday parties, farewell receptions, job promotions – sharing a meal is at the center of how we mark these occasions.

We use meals this way because we've figured out that a meal provides a lot more than dietary sustenance; meals are also good for bringing us into fellowship, for giving a shared experience, for creating the opportunity to celebrate. It should come as no surprise what Jesus has told us to do in remembrance of him is a meal. The Eucharist is rooted in the most human of experiences, a meal, and nourishes us with the most divine of blessings, the grace of God. Isn't it interesting, and telling, that when Jesus wants to teach his disciples about salvation and the meaning of his death, he doesn't give them a lesson, but a meal?

When the disciples ask Jesus how it is that they are to pray, he instructs them, "Our Father... give us this day our daily bread." In other words, give us what we need to survive. The Eucharist is God's response to our prayer for daily bread and in it we receive not only the bread we need for today, but the bread that gives us eternal life. In Eucharist, we come to see that God nourishes us.

In the Resurrection appearance recorded in John 21, we see how it is that we are fed by God. The Resurrected Jesus appears here as a chef, cooking breakfast for his disciples. God is always the host of the Eucharist,¹³ providing for us the sustenance that we need. And Jesus not only provides, but he provides an abundance. John notes that the

¹³ Williams, *Being Christian*, 41.

disciples had been fishing, but they caught nothing. We are not able to provide our own salvation, our own nourishment, our own purpose and meaning. Sure, we can try to be the best version of ourselves, we can pretend that we don't need to rely on others. But, like those disciples fishing, we'll always come up short.

You'll notice that John sneaks in a little phrase to tell us what is about to come. John notes that Nathanael was from "Cana of Galilee." Immediately, our minds recall how, when they ran out of wine at a wedding banquet, Jesus provided an abundance of superior wine.¹⁴ Their efforts to fish were fruitless, but Jesus tells them to try casting their nets to the other side and they end up with a haul of 153 fish. There are seven disciples present, plus Jesus, meaning there are about 20 fish for each person – a super-abundance. It reminds us of the abundant life that God intends for us in Christ.¹⁵

Up until this point, no one had recognized that this person telling them how to fish was Jesus, but as soon as their nets were full, the beloved disciple exclaims: "It is the Lord." In abundance, Jesus is recognized. So much of our lives are built on the assumption that there is not enough. We work long hours and sacrifice family and personal time because we've been taught that we need more money. We endlessly critique ourselves because we've been told that we're not thin enough, or confident enough, or smart enough, or easy-going enough. Everything in our world has become a competition because we don't think there is enough for you and for me, for us and for them. And so we fight, we cheat, we deceive, we steal in order to make sure that we have enough. The result is that we end up being enslaved – to the economy, to expectations, to the idol of "winning."

¹⁴ John 2:1-11

¹⁵ John 10:10

What God offers us though in the Eucharist is abundance. The Eucharist shows us that with God there is always enough love, enough mercy, enough acceptance, enough grace. It's why we pray for and receive daily bread from God. Because if our minds are fixed on what we need for today, we'll see that, indeed, there's not only enough, but an abundance. And once we're done with trying to get more than we need, we actually find the salvation of God.

God's abundance gives us freedom. Freedom from having to make ourselves worthy, freedom from worrying about the future, freedom from having to look over your shoulder to see if they got more than you. The Eucharist reminds us that God feeds us abundantly, that there is enough, that we have been given more than we can ask or imagine.¹⁶

Another way in which the Eucharist nourishes us is that in it, we are reassured of our standing before God. If you think back to the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter tells Jesus that he will never abandon him. Jesus though tells Peter that Peter will deny him three times before the night is over¹⁷ and that is exactly what Peter does. I can only imagine the heartache that must have caused Peter. We've all been there – we had the best of plans, the best of intentions, but then we got swept up in the moment and failed miserably. For Peter, the stakes couldn't have been higher, his teacher was being put to death and he pretended not to know him.

Maybe you, like Peter, feel like you've let God down. There's no sense pretending that it isn't true – we let each other down. As a son, husband, priest, and friend, I often let people down. There's a version of the Confession that asks for pardon

¹⁶ Ephesians 3:20

¹⁷ John 13:38

when we “fail to be what we claim to be.”¹⁸ And that’s just how it is being human – we all fall short. But the Eucharist reminds us that we stand forgiven, redeemed, and restored in God’s eyes. As we know from the Prayer of Humble Access, “We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under God’s Table. But God is the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy.” The Eucharist is a place where we can be honest – where we can stop pretending to be perfect or to have our lives put together, and instead we can examine our lives, admit that we need help, and state our desires to live more authentically and in harmony with God and others.

Certainly, God feeds us in the Eucharist, but the very important antecedent to this feeding is the invitation. You are invited to this altar each week by being reminded that these abundant gifts of God are for you, the people of God. You are not God’s people because you’ve done everything right, but rather because God loves you, and that can never be taken away from you.

And so Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him, giving him three chances to counter the three times that Peter denied Jesus. Peter is reconciled to Jesus, just as we are reconciled to God. The Eucharist reminds us that we are forgiven by the very fact that God continually invites us to share in the Body and Blood of Christ despite the fact that we so often fail to be what we claim to be.

One theologian has said that “The Eucharist is our symbol of what it mean for the Lord’s Prayer to be answered fully: God feeding his people through the death and resurrection of Jesus, which establishes that new community of the Spirit in which

¹⁸ *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, 1988), 479.

forgiveness is the common currency.”¹⁹ In the Eucharist, we all stand on the foundation of God’s gracious mercy and in being forgiven, we are freed to forgive others.

Being forgiven, we are fed abundantly – that much we have seen so far about the Eucharist. But at the heart of this meal is love. Jesus asks, “Do you love me, do you love me, do you love me.” In that great hymn, we sing “O love, how deep, how high, how broad... For us he bore the shameful cross and death; for us he gave up his dying breath.”²⁰ In the earliest Church, the gatherings of Christians around meals were called “agape meals” and “agape” is the Greek word for love. And it is this agape love that comes to us in Jesus.²¹

When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, the prayers always remind us about how God lovingly created all that is, how God is full of steadfast-love for us, how God loved us so much as to come and be born of Mary to be with us, how God was willing to be handed over to suffering and death because God loves us so much. And then we break the bread and shout “Alleluia,” that great victory shout of Easter morning which proclaims that love is not conquered by death but rather that love is come again like wheat that springeth green.²²

The Eucharist is that great feast that God has thrown for us in love. There is ample food and drink and even though we don’t deserve an invitation, we’ve been given the seat of honor. Jesus then tells Peter three times to feed his sheep. We’ve been nourished not only for our sake, but for the sake of the children of God. This abundance,

¹⁹ Williams, *Being Disciples*, 45-46.

²⁰ “O love, how deep, how broad, how high,” *Hymnal 1982* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1982), trans. Benjamin Webb, 448.

²¹ John 3:16

²² John Macleod Campbell Crum, “Now the green blade riseth,” *Hymnal 1982*, 204.

forgiveness, and love is the meal that we take with us to give to others. It's not that God needs our good works, but our neighbors do.²³ We have been lavished upon at God's table and are nourished with the bread of life, and so we are equipped and sent out to feed God's people.

Just look around, it doesn't take long to see that the world is hungry. We are desperate to be loved, to be accepted, to be have meaning, to have comfort. In the Eucharist, God gives us all of these things in abundance, so come and eat your fill, and feed God's flock with it. We live with so much division, so much blame, so much distrust, so much rejection in our society. We are slow to forgive, reluctant to be vulnerable, and rarely do we give the benefit of the doubt. Our political life isn't about having debates about who has the best ideas, it's become about who can dig up the most dirt on each other. Our economic life isn't creating an economy that works for everyone, it's about more, more, more. But love is different; love has been defined as "willing the good of the other."²⁴ Through the Eucharist, each week we see that God wills the very best for us and we are commissioned to give the best of ourselves to God and to each other.

Over the last year at St. Luke's, we've been using that phrase "Come and See" from John²⁵ as a model for our mission and identity, and it's a good one. When it comes to the Eucharist though, we might tweak it just a bit to "Come and Eat." We've all been told about the importance of eating a good breakfast, and this morning in John, Jesus

²³ Martin Luther quoted by Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1957), 10.

²⁴ Augustine, quoted in the "Catechism of the Catholic Church," Part III, Section 1, Chapter 1, Article 5.I. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a5.htm (accessed September 13, 2019).

²⁵ John 1:39

prepares breakfast for the disciples just as he prepares the Eucharist for us. So come and eat, being nourished by the abundant bread of life. Come and eat, and taste the goodness of the Lord in the forgiveness of all your sins. Come and eat in this meal of God's fathomless love for you. Come and eat.

Sermon 3: Easter 4C – The Eucharist as a Foretaste of Heaven

Grant us, Lord, always to sit at your table and dwell in your house for ever. Amen.²⁶

Think for a moment about the best meal that you've ever had. Maybe it was a home-cooked specialty made by your grandmother or perhaps it was at a high-end steak house. Think back to what made that meal so special. The food was probably good, the atmosphere was likely nice, but I bet that with more certainty than telling me what food you ordered or what music was playing in the background, you can tell me who you were with. What makes a meal sacred is the people gathered around the table with you. I've had some really lousy food, but the meal ended up being a good experience because I was surrounded by loved ones. This truth is what makes the Holy Eucharist such a special meal, because in it we are gathered with the dearest of people.

Another aspect of what makes the Eucharist is that it isn't just another meal; it's not like the lunch that you'll have after today's liturgy. Throughout Scripture, when the Kingdom of God is envisioned, it is described so in terms of food. But it's never a simple meal. Isaiah calls it a feast, Jesus calls it a wedding banquet, the Psalmist this morning sees it as a table where we are anointed and have our cup running over, Revelation portrays it as the feast of victory of the Lamb of God. As we think about the Eucharist,

²⁶ Psalm 23:5-6

it's helpful to think of it not in terms of a quick bite to eat, but as a once-in-eternity sort of banquet.

Just as Psalm 23 envisions a meal in which a table is spread before us, where fear of our enemies does not stop us from enjoying a good meal, where we are covered with the blessings of God's mercy, where our cup is always full, where we are overrun by God's goodness and mercy, the Eucharist is that sort of meal. It's a vision of what heavenly peace is like – no enemies, abundant grace, and overflowing blessings. It is the grace of God that allows us to participate in this very banquet every time that we gather in the name of Jesus, recalling his Death and Resurrection, as we break the bread and share the cup.

In the vision of the heavenly banquet from Revelation, we see a similar idea – the people of God robed in white, carrying palm branches as a sign of victory. God is worshiped and we are told that those gathered around the throne of God will “hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to the springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” It's a beautiful vision, isn't it? No hunger, no thirst, no suffering, no tears, but instead the waters of eternal life will surround us. And if this vision of heaven was all we had, it would remain a compelling and hope-filled vision – that one day, we would feast with God and be free from all that causes us pain and suffering. But the hope of God is not locked up in the future, it is made present to us in the Eucharist.

The Holy Eucharist has been called a “thin place,” one of those moments when the veil between heaven and earth is translucent. We see the eternal and gracious light of

God shining through the bread and wine. The songs that we sing, like the “Holy, holy, holy” of the *Sanctus*, is our joining in the very song that is being sung around the Lamb on the throne. The unity that we experience as we participate in the Eucharist as children of God is but a foretaste of the peace of the heavenly banquet. This is what makes the Eucharist such a special meal – because the Eucharist happens at the end of the world.²⁷

If you’ve been to the National Cathedral in Washington, you’ve probably noticed the stained glass called “the Space Window.”²⁸ What makes this particular window so special is that at the center of the window is a 2-inch moon rock. Now, one way to view that window is that it’s nothing special; after all, it’s just a rock. But we realize the absurdity of such a statement – it isn’t just a rock like one that you can pick up outside. It’s a moon rock. It comes from another world, and even though it looks like a rock and feels like a rock, it is so much more than a rock. What makes this window special isn’t that it has a piece of rock in it, it’s where that rock comes from that makes the window so majestic and powerful.

It’s the same for the Eucharist that we partake of. As far as food goes, the Eucharist is actually pretty lousy – it’s okay to admit that. Viewed one way, it’s a bite-sized piece of stale bread and a sip of below-average port wine. But the Eucharist is more than this because of where it comes from. The Eucharist is not our ritual, instead the Eucharist is one of God’s many gifts to the Church. What we are given in the Eucharist is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, a taste of God’s ultimate peace, a taste of the end and purpose of all things.

²⁷ Williams, *Being Christians*, 59.

²⁸ “The Space Window,” Washington National Cathedral. <https://cathedral.org/cathedral-age/the-space-window> (accessed September 13, 2019).

One of the holiest moments that I've ever experienced happened when I was in college, doing an astronomy lab. I was on the roof of a building looking up at the night sky. And certainly, there is a beauty in looking up at the stars. But then I peered through the lens of a telescope, and with my very own eye, gazed upon the planet Saturn and its stunning rings. It was a transcendent experience. This is what the Eucharist does – it brings into focus and proximity those grand promises of God's peace. Through the Eucharist, no longer is God's love an abstraction, but it becomes tangible.

By knowing that the Eucharist is a window into the eternal banquet of heaven, we are able to read this passage from Revelation in a fuller way. Because the Eucharist reveals the destiny of all things, it's not that the Eucharist shows us what to hope for in the future, rather the Eucharist is the means by which the future infiltrates and permeates the present.

And so when we read in Revelation that "there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages," we realize that this feast is universal and all of the boundaries that we have become accustomed to are erased, as they all join in one voice to praise God. It's one of the things that I cherish about the altar rail – rich and poor, powerful and weak, liberal and conservative, devout and skeptical, young and old, black and white – all people come to this rail empty handed and all receive the Body of Christ. And this unity is a reflection of that ultimate unity of God's kingdom.

I also love how the Eucharist makes me rethink my relationship to time. Because the Eucharist happens both at the end of time and throughout time, it unites us not only to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in this church, and not only does it unite us to

Christians around the world who are breaking bread this day, but it also unites us to all those who have ever and will ever partake of the Eucharist. The Eucharist comes from eternity into this moment and it brings with it the fullness of eternity. So as you partake of this meal, know that on the other side of the veil is not only Jesus, but also St. Luke and St. Mary, St. Augustine and St. Julian. Joining us at God's banquet are the names and faces lost to history, as well as our own dearly departed. At this holy table, we share a meal with grandparents, parents, children, and spouses who have died. We might even go as far to trust that joining us in this feast are generations yet to be born. Yes, what makes this such a special meal is where it comes from: it comes from God's eternal love that encompasses all of Creation.

What makes this all work is that, as Revelation reveals to us, the host of this meal is the Lamb of God – Jesus Christ, the Passover lamb who was slain and rose again. At the heart of the Eucharist is this sacrifice of God's reconciling love. There's a wonderful image of this loving sacrifice of God as a fallen tree. The truth of God's loving and redeeming sacrifice on the Cross is eternal, and in the moment of the Crucifixion, we see those rings of the tree revealed because that is where eternity cut into history. But if we were to cut that tree at any other point, those same rings of mercy and salvation would be just as evident.²⁹ In the Eucharist, we see this truth as the bread is broken and the wine is poured.

Given that the host of this banquet is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and grants us peace,³⁰ we are shown the grain of the universe.³¹ Though the

²⁹ Helen Waddell, *Peter Abelard* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947), 264.

³⁰ "Agnus Dei," *BCP*, 337

³¹ Hauerwas, "The Grain of the Universe."

Lamb was killed, this is the feast of the Lamb's victory over Sin and Death.³² Because the host of the heavenly banquet is the Lamb of God, we know that all things are heading towards the peace, mercy, grace, and love of God that we saw in Jesus. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are made to participate in this sacred meal even now. Just as the Eucharist shows us what will be at the end, it also shows what is possible now by that same grace and love of God.

Our Christian hope is that one day, the whole earth will be filled with the glory of God.³³ Because the Eucharist has its roots in that fulfillment of all things, worlds collide when the bread is broken. Though we are not been trained to think in this way, it really is quite possible for heaven to come on earth – we pray for it daily in the Lord's Prayer. And that happens, heaven and earth are united in his sacred meal. By grace, God opens our eyes to see this mystery of faith as our hearts burn within us as we meet Jesus in the breaking of the bread.³⁴ And as we meet God face to face, we are given a foretaste of the reconciliation of all things, a glimpse of our union with God and all of Creation, a sign of holiness that surrounds us.

When I was serving a parish in DC that had a weekly Eucharist in Spanish, something that I really enjoyed was the Fraction Anthem in Spanish. Whereas, after the priest says "Alleluia. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us" and our response is "Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia," in Spanish the response is "Celebremos la fiesta. Alleluia."³⁵ That's some solid Eucharistic theology – celebremos la fiesta!

³² "Worthy is Christ, the lamb who was slain," Revelation 5:12-13, adapt. John W. Arthur, *Hymnal 1982*, 417.

³³ Psalm 72:19

³⁴ Luke 24:32

³⁵ *Libro de Oración Común* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1989), 259.

For one, “let us keep” isn’t nearly as good as “celebremos.” This isn’t some ritual to keep, it’s something to celebrate. And though “feast” is a decent description of the Eucharist, “fiesta” is a lot better. Because the Eucharist is a grand party. It’s the fiesta that comes from the end of all things, a fiesta where all of God’s beloved children are present, where the Lamb of God is the gracious host. And though the fiesta is located in God’s future, we are invited to have a foretaste of this eternal life and we participate in this through the Eucharist. So come, let’s celebrate the fiesta of God.

Sermon 4: Easter 5C – The Eucharist as the Shape of Faith

Grant us, O Lord, in the Eucharist to remember what we are and become what we receive. Amen.

Have you ever walked into the kitchen only to forget why you were there? Or maybe you’ve started an email and then forgotten what you needed to say. Perhaps you’ve forgotten something more important – someone’s name, a family member’s birthday, a meeting that you were supposed to attend. We all know what it is to forget things. One of the reasons why the Church celebrates the Eucharist with such intentionality and so often is because it reminds us of some very important things.

For one, the Eucharist reminds us that we have not been forgotten. The Eucharist reminds us of things that are good, beautiful, and true, things like unity, forgiveness, hope, and love. In this sacred meal, we are connected to the source of these blessings and as we are invited to be God’s guest at the Eucharist, we come to trust that God has not forgotten us. We are reminded that God lovingly created all things, that God rectified our relationship through the blood of Christ, that God is among us and within us through the

Holy Spirit. As you reach forth your hands to receive the Eucharist, know that God is reaching towards you. The Eucharist reminds us that we are not forgotten.

You've heard of amnesia – the condition where you lose your memory; sometimes it's so bad that you can't even remember who you are. Even if you've not had a concussion or medical condition that effects your memory, we all suffer from spiritual amnesia. Sometimes we forget that we are God's people. Sometimes we forget that we have been Baptized into the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Sometimes we forget that we have been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be holy people in this world. The world has a way of making us forget who we are. We forget that we are God's beloved sons and daughters, we forget that our neighbors are not problems to solve but people through whom we serve God, we forget that we are a part of God's eternal and unfolding story of salvation.

God has, therefore, given us the Holy Eucharist to help with this amnesia; the Eucharist is a vehicle of grace that feeds your Baptismal identity and calling. The theological word for this is "anamnesis," coming from a Greek word which means "to remember." Specifically, in the Eucharistic prayer, the anamnesis is the part that recalls the life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus. And this idea of remembering isn't simply recalling certain things to mind, the Biblical idea of remembering is about making those events of the past alive again in our own time. Our Eucharistic liturgy reminds us of who we are in God as we are united in this Sacrament of grace, praise, and thanksgiving.

That prayer that I used to open the sermon comes from a paraphrase of one of St. Augustine's sermons on the Eucharist – Behold what you are; become what you

receive.³⁶ That first part, “behold what you are” is in the invitation to remembrance. Remember that you are enough, that you are forgiven, that you are loved, that you are given the Holy Spirit to be God’s presence in this world. Remember what you are – a royal jewel in the crown of the God³⁷ who loves you deeply, and fully, and eternally.

The reason why God has given the Eucharist to the Church is so that just as the bread and the wine are transformed by the mystery of God’s grace into the Body and Blood of Christ, so too are we transformed into becoming the Body of Christ in this world. In other words, you become what you receive. This story of God’s loving creation, merciful saving, and abiding presence among us shapes us into what we are to become.

Based on the feeding miracles of Jesus, and indeed of his entire life, it has been noted that there is a four-fold pattern to the Eucharist: take, bless, break, give;³⁸ and this shape is what we are to become as we are formed by the Eucharist. The Eucharist not only unites us to Christ and others, it not only nourishes us, it not only gives us hope, but is also shapes us by reminding us who we are and what we are to be.

First, the wheat is taken from creation, from the good gifts given to us by God and is shaped into the bread we need to survive. The Eucharist shows us the holy interplay between God and Creation. St. Augustine once said that “Without God, we cannot; without us, God will not,”³⁹ and we see this in the Eucharist that God comes in the collaborative work of making wheat into bread into Christ’s Body.

³⁶ Augustine, Sermon 57 “On the Holy Eucharist” quoted in “The Feast of Saint John the Evangelist, the Beloved Disciple,” Society of St. John the Evangelist. <https://www.ssje.org/2009/05/02/the-feast-of-saint-john-the-evangelist-the-beloved-disciple/> (accessed September 13, 2019).

³⁷ Isaiah 62:3

³⁸ Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1964), 3.

³⁹ Attributed to Augustine, though no direct quotation is available; perhaps a paraphrase of “He who created you without you will not justify you without you” from his Sermon 169. See Robert Edward Luccock, *If God Be For Us: Sermons on the Gifts of the Gospel* (New York: Hartper, 1954), 38.

Sometimes, though, what God gives us to take is a challenge. Consider what St. Peter experienced in this morning's reading from Acts. His entire life, he had kept kosher laws, never having eaten those things which were forbidden by Jewish custom. And yet, it is exactly those unclean things which God sets before Peter in a vision and tells him to eat. Peter resists and a voice from heaven counters, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."

Peter had to rethink everything at this point, not only about food, but everything. If unclean foods could be eaten, did that mean that people who were previously considered unclean could be a part of God's promise of salvation? Just as Jesus took on human form in a way that seemed to be beneath God,⁴⁰ Peter came to realize that the distinctions that we make between holy and profane are boundaries that do not exist for God. Sometimes what God will give us to take is beyond our ability to comprehend, and so the Eucharist reminds us that we are to have a humble posture. We don't have all the answers, we are not the gatekeepers of holiness, we are not the granters of salvation. What God has given us is a love beyond measure, and we spend our entire lives doing our best to take that in, even if we never fully understand it.

Next, the bread is blessed, that is, it is offered to God. In the Rite I Eucharistic prayer, we pray "And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee." We are asking that God sanctify us, that is, to make us holy, to grant that the Spirit given to us at Baptism flourishes in our lives. By partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, having them within us, we become what we receive – the Body of Christ. As the bread and wine are blessed

⁴⁰ Philippians 2:5-8

to be used instruments of God's grace to the world, we are blessed in the Eucharist to be mirrors of God's grace.

Now, the bread and the wine still look and taste like bread and wine, and you may not look or feel different after being blessed by God. It's not so much a transformation in terms of substance⁴¹ as it is a transformation in meaning and purpose. The Eucharist reminds us that truest and most original thing about us is that we are loved and blessed by God, and in being blessed we are given our identity and our mission. God has given you experiences, gifts, talents, quirks so that God's blessing might come through you. You are sanctified – blessed to be a blessing.

After the bread is blessed, it is broken. This brokenness reminds us of the sacrifice of Jesus and way that God's Kingdom is breaking into our world even now. In Revelation, we heard the one on the throne saying that he is "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." The Lamb on the throne is in all things, through all things, and with all things. There is nothing that is not redeemed by Christ. The way that the Eucharist unfolds, it is a retelling of the entire story of faith from Creation to Culmination. Eucharist reminds us of our place in this story.

As the bread is broken, it becomes so much more than bread. On the Cross, Jesus did not simply die, he was exalted as the Savior of the world. The breaking of the bread reminds us that things are not always as they seem. The Eucharist reminds us that there is always more to the story than we might recognize. Light can shine in darkness, forgiveness can follow wrong-doing, division can be healed, new life can come out of death. This is the story of God, that God is doing infinitely more than we can ask or

⁴¹ Article XVIII, *BCP*, 873.

imagine.⁴² As the bread is broken, new possibilities are broken open for God's grace to be revealed.

The last movement of the Eucharist is that it is given. As Jesus says in John, "The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."⁴³ We are reminded that the movement of the Christian story, of the Eucharist, and of our lives is always outward; we are always moving towards the other. This orientation to the other is exactly what Jesus speaks of in the passage we heard this morning: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."⁴⁴ We are made holy by this love so that this love might flow in and through us to be given to all the world.

The Eucharist is a love feast in which we see that the story of God is the story of love,⁴⁵ from Alpha to Omega, from beginning to end. Above all things, this love is what we need to remember and the Eucharist not only reminds us about this love, but it also allows us to experience this beloved communion with God and each other.

God gave Jesus to the world in love, the Spirit was given to the world in love, you will be given the Eucharist in love, and God gives you to the world in love. As we gather at the altar in obedience to Jesus' command to do this in remembrance of him, we respond with our own sacrifice of thanksgiving as we enter into the story of our salvation.

The Eucharist reminds us who we are, the beloved children of God, and the Eucharist shapes us so that we might see Communion in everything. By living a Eucharistic-shaped life, a life that is taken, blessed, broken, and given, we pray that we

⁴² Ephesians 3:20

⁴³ John 6:51

⁴⁴ John 13:34

⁴⁵ 1 John 4:8

might become what we receive – the love of God made known in the Body of Christ. O Lord, grant us to remember what we are, that we might become what we receive. Amen.

Sermon Analysis

Based on the content of the sermons and the comments made by people afterwards, there is good reason to believe that this sermon series helped people to have a better understanding of the Eucharist and that they might now appreciate the Eucharist as a more integral part of their faith. In this sense, the sermon series was a success in that it both taught people about the Eucharist and enriched their faith. What follows is an analysis of how each sermon approached the catechetical task and how each could have been strengthened in that work. Following this analysis of each sermon is a reflection on the overall series and the approach of catechetical preaching.

Sermon 1

The central point in the first sermon about Christ's presence was that, through the Eucharist, we are united to Christ because he is present in the Eucharistic celebration. A related point was that, since Christ is manifest in the bread and wine, Christ is present with us throughout our lives in other ways and is also present within us because we become "chalices" for his Body and Blood after receiving the Eucharist. Thus, the sermon sought to connect a catechetical point (Christ's presence in the Eucharist) to a formative one (Christ is present with us).

In particular, the image of being a chalice in the world after receiving the Eucharist was intentionally chosen to be a bridge between Christ's presence in the Eucharist and throughout our lives. Just as the chalice holds Christ's presence in the wine, once we consume that wine, we too become a vessel of God's presence. This image

both conveyed that Christ is present in the elements and that Communicants are empowered and commissioned as they carry this presence with them. Catechetical preaching hinges on giving people metaphors or images to take with them. Intellectual arguments may not stick in the minds and hearts of a hearer, but an image has a better chance to do so.

As this parish has a monthly liturgy of Choral Evensong, I've noticed that different approaches and understanding of that liturgy to our Sunday morning Eucharist liturgies. Evensong is generally viewed as a transcendent experience where it seems that we are lifted into heaven, whereas the Eucharist is more incarnational in that Jesus comes to us. The image of being a chalice helps in seeing this difference. Something fills the chalice in our presence, whereas liturgies as Evensong seem to be about transporting us. While being lifted into the presence of God is a wonderful thing to happen in liturgy, we rarely live on such mountaintops. Instead, we live the valleys and plains of life and this image of the chalice helps people to know that the grace they received in the Eucharist is something that remains with them in the midst of their everyday lives. This is the sort of goal of a catechetical sermon, as it not only makes a claim (Christ is present in the Eucharist) but it shapes the Christian (to see themselves as united with Christ) and forms them (to act as vehicles of God's grace in the upcoming week).

Some things that could have been strengthened in this sermon all relate to the specifics of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. For one, the phrase "sacramentally present" might sound theologically rich, but it's also dense at best and obtuse at worst. A catechetical sermon ought not to use unexplained jargon, which that phrase is. The intention of such a phrase was to differentiate between the extremes of literalism and pure

metaphor. In the Eucharist, Christ is not literally present in that the molecules of his resurrected body are not constituted in our midst nor is Christ only present as a metaphor that is empty of any real or tangible presence. The phrase “sacramentally present” sought to walk this line, but fell short.

Similarly, my emphasizing Christ’s Eucharistic presence in liturgy could have been misconstrued that Christ is only present through the Eucharist. Instead of saying that the Eucharist is “the” place where God is encountered, it could have been said that the Eucharist is “a” place or a “consistent” place.

The application piece of the sermon could have also been strengthened by speaking more about what difference it makes that we come face to face with Christ in the Eucharist. While there were allusions to this, these implications could have been drawn out with a few short examples that built upon the chalice imagery.

The sermon also ended with a “doxological run” which is common in the sermons of Cyril and Isaac Williams which were examined in the previous chapter. This strategy of concluding with a series of statements about Jesus Christ is often used in black preaching and is called a “run.”⁴⁶ The goal of such a technique is to demonstrate that all catechesis leads to an awareness and participation in the glory of God. Furthermore, this strategy in this sermon also sought to rhetorically make Christ present just as he is sacramentally present in the Eucharist.

Sermon 2

The second sermon about the Eucharist as our nourishment had a goal of not merely outlining the various ways in which the Eucharist nourishes us, but providing

⁴⁶ Cleophus Larue. “Rethinking Celebration: From Rhetoric to Praise in African American Preaching,” (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 115.

something like a description one might find a restaurant that allows people to more fully taste and appreciate the meal they will eat. There were three main ways in which the Eucharist nourishes us that were listed in the sermon: giving us a lens of abundance instead of scarcity, reassuring us of our forgiveness and standing before God, rooting us in the love of God. Furthermore, in the section about the forgiveness of sins, the sermon alluded to the point made in the Catechism about preparing ourselves to receive by examination.⁴⁷ One of the central images to make these points about nourishment was that of food, and specifically the daily bread which we pray for and the abundant haul of fish with which Jesus feeds the disciples breakfast.

Being fed and given strength can also lead people to a works righteous mentality – a sense of duty or obligation – to share this bread with those who are hungry. That point was not explicitly made in the sermon, and was not actually an intended conclusion. This sermon was intended to focus more on the grace of being fed by God and not the law of what we must do after being fed. The possibility of being misunderstood always exists in preaching, and so the utmost care must be taken when the goal is catechesis. It would behoove the preacher to consider how particular phrases and points might be interpreted differently. In addition to simply making a point, the preacher must consider how the point will be heard, and possibly misheard.

An example of such an unintended reading was in the statement that Jesus is recognized in abundance, which is certainly true. But is also just as true that Jesus can be encountered in situations of dire scarcity. The point was that abundance points us to a God of abundant grace and love, not that the God is only present when things are going

⁴⁷ *BCP*, 860

well. More precise language could have helped in this instance by saying something such as “While God is present in moments of feast and famine, the abundance seen in the Eucharist shows us the unlimited nature of God’s love for us.”

Often using the liturgy to reinforce homiletical points can be helpful in connected these catechetical dots. One such example was the reference to “love is come again” which comes from a hymn. In isolation, this reference would likely be missed. However, that verse was used as the doxology right before the Eucharist prayer began this Eastertide. The inclusion of language in other places in the liturgy helps to make the sermon and larger catechetical points more resonant.

Through this sermon, I sought to emphasize the abundance, forgiveness, and love made manifest in the Eucharist. By addressing Peter’s forgiveness, there was a connection to our own faith lives and the fact that just as Jesus gave Peter three opportunities to profess his love, so too will we be given ample opportunities to follow Jesus. Here, keeping the language to include the listener could have strengthened the point. Instead of saying “Jesus then tells Peter,” it could have been more impactful as “Then, like Peter, we are told to feed God’s sheep.” When it came to the forgiveness section, using phrasing from the Prayer of Humble Access in the liturgy was a helpful touchstone that allows people to connect their liturgical memories to the sermon. And though many people in most Episcopal congregations have heard “God loves you,” people cannot hear this message too often.

One other way of making this sermon more catechetically effective would have been to use the language of food more consistently throughout the sermon. For example, in speaking about our desires to be loved, accepted, and comforted, poetic language such

as receiving a “chalice of comfort” or “feast of acceptance.” Such poetic language can often help to make the statements easier to assimilate. However, the risk is always forcing poetic images where they don’t easily fit. Some might get tripped up on what a “chalice of comfort” is. The preacher must be careful to not mix metaphors or juxtapose things that may be too jarring and distraction for the congregation.

A formational goal of the sermon was that once people recognize the Eucharist as a Sacrament of abundance, forgiveness, and love, they will be on the lookout for these things in themselves and in others, with the intention of mimicking these Eucharistic virtues in their lives.

Sermon 3

The third sermon about the Eucharist being a foretaste of heaven was intended to address the question “what makes the Eucharist so holy?” When preaching catechetical sermons, the framework of the actual catechism can be a helpful model. Many catechisms, including the one in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer are set up in question and answer format. Beginning a catechetical sermon with a question in mind can be a good starting point. Dialogical pedagogy is tool that is deployed by many preachers, as was seen in the cases of Cyril and Isaac Williams. The great catechetical preacher of the early Church, Ambrose of Milan, also quite often used dialogue and rhetorical questioning in his teaching of the faith.⁴⁸

The answer that this sermon presupposed is that the Eucharist is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. This sermon sought to draw that connection between our liturgy and the Divine Liturgy of heaven. The familial connections in the Eucharist, of us to all

⁴⁸ Craig Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan’s Method of Mystagogical Preaching* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 135, 279, 349

believers across time and space, also was intended to help people relate personally to the Eucharistic feast.

This sermon, in particular, used more analogies (Space Window, Saturn through a telescope, tree rings, fiesta) than did other sermons. This was, at least partially, because when trying to make a connection between our Eucharistic liturgy and the victory feast of the Lamb of God, there is no way to speak that is not metaphorical. Using strong images allow people both to grasp and to enter into the Sacrament. This is important because, on its own, the idea that the Eucharist is our participation in the eschatology banquet is rather difficult to grasp or might seem like little more than wishful thinking. And so symbols that are drawn from ordinary life help people to approximate what we mean by saying that the meaning of something can be larger than its physical properties. As we know from John's prologue, the Word became flesh; in other words, the divine became symbolized in the flesh of Jesus. Our language about God will also need to be symbolic so that faith remains not merely an intellectual experience but rather one of entering into the abundant life opened to us by Jesus.

A formational objective in this sermon was to help people to recognize the proximity of God not only in the Eucharist, but throughout their life. The ongoing and timeless nature of the Eucharist can help people connect to faith not merely as a set of passed-down thoughts, but as a living tradition in which they can participate. The first reading on this Sunday was the story of the raising of Tabitha (Acts 9:26-43) and though the sermon did not refer to this passage, having people see this power of God in the Eucharist will then help them see that same transformative power throughout their lives.

While all aspects of our liturgy (such as hymns, readings, fellowship, and the sermon) are important, it is no accident that the Prayer Book names the entire liturgy as “Holy Eucharist.” Both liturgically and architecturally, everything is pointing to the altar. For example, the Peace is not an isolated event that is important in a community of faith, it is an essential precursor to coming together as the Body of Christ to receive the Body of Christ. In the conclusion, the “fiesta” analogy was intended to remind people of the nature of the Eucharist and of the invitation to partake of it in their lives. The usage of a cross-cultural symbol here worked because people understand what a “fiesta” is and no homiletical energy had to be devoted to explaining the metaphor. This is an important point for the preacher to bear in mind. Symbols are only helpful so far as they continue people along the trajectory of a deepening faith and not become a distraction. That being said, sometimes cross-cultural examples can be quite useful because they remind the congregation that God is not limited to our set of cultural symbols and understandings.

This sermon could have been strengthened with a stronger connection between the opening paragraph and first section. The connection between a meal with loved ones to the banquet wasn’t as explicitly made as it could have been. There were also a few places in this sermon where terminology could have been tightened up to aid the hearers. Instead of saying that the Eucharist is a “once-in-eternity” banquet, the word “eternal” would have been less cumbersome. Likewise, when saying that the Eucharist is a “lousy” meal, while adding some comedic value, might also lead some to think that it is a “lousy” foretaste of the banquet, which is not the case. This could have been addressed by saying something like “If the Eucharist is only seen as food, it’s unsatisfying. But because of where this meal comes from, it is grand.” Finally, giving more examples of how worlds

collide in the Eucharist could have helped people to connect this Eucharistic truth more concretely to their lived lives of faith, which is the point of catechesis.

Sermon 4

The final sermon on the Eucharist as the shape of our faith was focused on the sanctifying action of the Eucharist in the lives of its recipients. Using a paraphrase from a sermon of St. Augustine, this sermon came in two movements. The first focused on how the Eucharist enables us to “behold what we are,” as the world makes it difficult to remember our sacred story of our salvation. The second movement was to describe the shape of a sanctified life as “we become what we receive.” This shape was described as the Eucharistic pattern of take, bless, break, and give.

After this sermon, an interesting comment was offered by from a retired bishop who said that he was curious to see how a sermon series of this sort would work within our modern context. He appreciated the way Scripture was treated and noted that it was a “very Anglican approach” of not ignoring the text nor forcing it to say what the sermon needed it to. He described it as not eisegesis nor pure exegesis, but more interrogative – what does this text have to say about the Eucharist? If the Catechism cannot be explained on the ground of Scripture, then many will (rightfully) question its validity. This was a helpful comment, as throughout the entire series, and in this sermon in particular, the goal was to put Scripture, the Eucharistic liturgy, Church Tradition, the Catechism, and the lives of the faithful in dialogue.

Based on comments that people made as they left church after this final sermon in the series, it seems that this was the sermon that was the most impactful. Based on feedback at the church steps (which is a barometer, even if not scientifically accurate),

this was the best sermon in the series (which was not at all my perception as the author/preacher). For one, it's a humble reminder that the Spirit moves as it does and there is no predicting its movement. There is also the cumulative effect, as in a "grand finale," of a sermon series that could have been playing a role in this perception.

In terms of substance, it seems that the Augustinian phrase of beholding and becoming served as a helpful capstone for the series. The "behold" was the invitation to remember all that had been learned about the Eucharist through this series, but it also had a personal element in the "become" which spoke directly to people's hearts. The shape of the Christian life as revealed by the Eucharist as what we are to become seems to have fed this desire in people. In seeing the Eucharist not only as a ritual which imparts grace, but as a pattern which responds to grace some people indicated that this sermon "closed the loop" on why the Eucharist is so vital in our faith.

This sermon could have been strengthened in a few ways. The first is to avoid generalizations that might provide places of disagreement with the congregation. Instead of saying "We all suffer from spiritual amnesia," it could have been stated that "Because of pride, sin, and ego, it can be easy to have a case of spiritual amnesia." Not only does this provide an expanded framework for understanding this spiritual amnesia, but also doesn't accuse people of something that might not be ready to own.

A second, and larger, issue in this sermon was simply that I tried to do too much. In wanting to draw on Wells' sermon about the four-fold shape of the Eucharist, there were too many catechetical points competing for attention. This is because it was the final sermon in the series and a fifth sermon, which was not available due to scheduling issues, would have been necessary to fit all of these points in. This sermon discussed the

idea of remembrance in the Eucharist, the Augustinian phrase about beholding, the four-fold action of the Eucharist, and then tried to slip in something about obedience to Jesus' command to "do this in remembrance of me." While the sermon was not disastrously unfocused, it could have been a much stronger sermon, especially from a catechetical perspective, if it had been tighter. The four-fold action and the idea of remembrance (and beholding) are two separate sermons, but were crammed into one. The preacher must remember that no sermon will ever be exhaustive and does not need to be a systematic theology of an entire subject. While I did work to blend the two ideas with each other, it was simply too much. Just as the Catechism only answers the question that it asks, so too does a sermon need to only answer one question.

Assessment of Series

In evaluating the entire series, the series did the work of catechesis. This claim is made on two grounds. The first is that in evaluating the sermons, they addressed the catechetical text of both teaching and forming. Secondly, based on comments from people and observing their approach to Eucharist and follow-up questions, they were clearly engaging with the topic. A goal that seems to have been achieved in this was to have people engage with the liturgy more with their minds and bodies. I noticed several more people open the Prayer Book and follow the liturgy, seems as if they had turned off the "auto-pilot." The series was intended to get people thinking about things that they had taken for granted or help them to make connections between various points that they had learned through the years. Using Eucharistic language, these sermons sought to "put flesh on the topic."

When it comes to the work of formation and not simply teaching facts, this catechetical way of preaching had a positive impact as well. Such a style of preaching helps people to envision a fuller picture of what we mean by words such as “Communion” or “grace.” And with this fuller picture in mind, they are then able to share that with others and invite them to participate.

As people left the church after each week, some people would comment on topics that they wish had been covered more fully or what new questions they had. These questions fell into a three primary categories. The first is logistics; that is, why do we do what we do. These questions included the rationale for using port wine instead of grape juice, unleavened wafers instead of a loaf, and how our Eucharistic liturgies were developed. Another class of questions were about formation and practice: do children need to do a “First Communion?,” “how do I explain Eucharist to others whose traditions don’t take it so seriously?,” and “what makes the Eucharist special and distinct from other ways that God nourishes us?” The final sort of question might be described as the ecclesiological and came in the question “Why do you have to be Baptized to receive the Eucharist?” To be able to respond to such a question, one must be fully rooted in what the Eucharist is, otherwise the conversation quickly devolves into a debate about hospitality, which is not where the answer to that question lies.

Through this sermon series, it was anticipated that strategies for preaching a catechetical sermon would be identified, such as how Scripture is used, how analogies are deployed, and whether or not growth was measurable both in terms of knowledge and spiritual formation. Certainly, this series shows that a lot of planning is required for preaching such a catechetical series of sermons. Unless the preacher intends to preach

single sermons on catechetical topics, it will be necessary to look at the lectionary for months ahead of time and find which 3-5 week run of lessons will best serve as the platform for a series. A single sermon on a catechetical point could certainly be done, but given the depth of the Catechism and the multiple questions and answers on each topic, such stand-alone sermons might have to leave too many questions on the table.

A series must also have clear goals which address the question: “What do I want people to understand, feel, hope, and participate in through this series?” It’s not simply a question of “What do I want people to know,” but “How do I want them to be shaped?” In this particular series, the four most essential elements of the Eucharist were identified (Christ’s presence, our nourishment, foretaste of banquet, and means of sanctification) and then arranged to best fit the appointed Scriptures with a goal having people not only understand the Eucharist more deeply, but to engage with the Scriptures and to have them see Eucharist as a reflection of their faith and live Eucharistically-oriented lives. The repetition of key words and phrases is important in doing this work, as is having one or two analogies for people to latch onto as they leave the church building and go into the world. While catechesis begins with information (the answering of a theological question) it must also move towards transformation (a participating in the answer). Using metaphors allow people to take the ideas with them more easily so that the work of formation continues beyond the sermon.

Both introductions and conclusions are important rhetorical devices. For these sermons, I chose to use prayer before the sermon prayer to introduce the major theme. While a standard Trinitarian prayer is always appropriate, the short prayer at the beginning of a sermon is a valuable tool for the preacher to use. Not only does it cue the

listener into the major theme, but also invites the Holy Spirit into the preaching and hearing in a more focused way. Likewise, the conclusions of the sermons are also important in summarizing the catechetical message and helping people connect the Church's teaching to their lives. These sorts of learnings were expected and it was edifying to see them at work in the congregation as evidenced by the reverence by which they approached and commented on the Eucharist. The opening prayer and concluding paragraph are vital frame in a sermon that is intended to deliver a clear catechetical focus.

Drawing on figures from within the broad Christian tradition, such as Rowan Williams and Augustine of Hippo, also advanced the catechetical goes. For one, using such authority figures lends credibility to the preacher. But when preaching about facets of the faith such as the Eucharist, having voices included from across the world and history furthers the point that the Eucharist is a catholic feast. While using too many citations in a sermon can be distracting or seem presumptuous, it is important to connect modern sermon hearers with the tradition of the church through the ages. It seems fitting to use names of theologians and other sources when they are names the preacher wishes the congregation to be familiar with, which is certainly in the case of Williams and Augustine.

However, there was also an unexpected learning in this sermon series about how to do the work of catechetical preaching. After the third sermon, I realized that something was happening in the sermons and it had nothing to do with the approach or topic, but everything to do with the congregation. Because they knew that these sermons were a part of the project for my Doctor of Ministry thesis and they wanted to support me in this work, they were more attentively listening during the sermon and more reflectively

responding afterwards. One person told me, “I never write notes in my bulletin, but found myself doing just that in this series.” Several people mentioned that knowing that these sermons were a part of an intentional series and that I would welcome their feedback had the effect of shaping them into more intentional and focused listeners.

Psychologists call this the “Hawthorne Effect,” where people behave and react differently if they know they are being observed or are part of an experiment.⁴⁹ Some people told me that by merely knowing that these sermons were are part of my thesis work that they listened more deeply and stayed focused more as listeners.

Many people who heard these project sermons are people who attend regularly and could compare these sermons to my “regular” ones. One person even told me that, at first, he thought the sermons were a lot better than normal, but then realized that the sermons weren’t of a different quality, but rather it was that his listening had been “stepped up.” A goal of preaching catechetically is not simply to use particular rhetorical devices, but also to assist the congregation in hearing and being transformed

This project demonstrated that preaching a catechetical series can be done within the Episcopal tradition and the bounds of the lectionary. Intentional planning and attention to the Catechism and the lectionary are essential to do this sort of catechetical preaching. Using vivid metaphors and repeating key words is helpful in preaching formative sermons. Having strong conclusions which point people in the direction of integration is what leads to formation. But the real “work” of this series seems to have

⁴⁹ Abraham Zaleznik. “The Hawthorne Effect.” 1984.
<https://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/hawthorne/09.html#nine> (accessed September 13, 2019).

happened not based on the strengths of the preacher, but rather the intentionality of the listener as they expected to catechesis to happen.

Active listening and reflective responding is what made this catechetical sermon series effective. So the question then becomes how is this posture of attentiveness and reflectiveness maintained even when there not a doctoral project happening? One idea is to use the technologies that many churches already use to do this work – the Sunday bulletin and the weekly email. This requires some extra work by the preacher, but all effective preaching requires that the preacher do more than the bare minimum.

One way to continue this active listening and reflective responding would be to, before the sermon, put questions in front of the congregation that will help in focusing their listening. This could be done with a strong introduction or conclusion to the sermon, but will likely bear more fruit if the introduction reinforces this work instead of bearing its full burden. In either or both the weekly email that is sent out prior to Sunday and the Sunday bulletin, 2-3 questions could be developed each week to guide the congregation in active listening. As an example, consider the second sermon in this series – questions such as “We know that meals are important in our relationships for reasons beyond our need to receive nutrients, what other things do you get out of meals?” and “We pray for our ‘Daily Bread’ in the Lord’s Prayer, have you ever felt like God fed you in the Eucharist?” could be quite helpful in engaging with the ideas of the sermon. These questions invite people to be thinking in terms of nourishment and clues them into what to be listening for.

The same can be done with reflective responding – questions to encourage further reflection could be included in the bulletin, perhaps in the announcements section and

labeled as “Sermon Reflections” and could be duplicated the email that goes out the following week. In considering the third sermon in this series, these questions might be “Where have you recently seen heaven on earth and how can you participate in this fiesta?,” or “As you sing the ‘Holy, holy, holy’ of the *Sanctus*, how does thinking about being gathered around the throne of God impact your participation in the Eucharist?,” or “What do you most hope for in heaven? Have you ever had a small taste of that even now?” These sorts of questions invite people to continue reflecting on the themes of the sermon with the goal of having them take root in their lives.

While the preacher cannot control how a sermon will be heard or what will be done with it, the environment for active listening and reflective responding can be created through the practice of having clarity in sermons and creating questions to help people in both listening and responding. Augustine’s prayer that was offered in the final sermon in this series suggests such a model – “Behold what you are” invites us to be attentive and “Become what you receive” is about reflecting that which we have been given.

Throughout this sermon series, more careful attention could have been paid to the verbs of intellectual assent being used in favor of declarative statements. In sermon 1, it was said “Never forget, as you go from this church...,” sermon 3 said “As you partake of this meal, know...,” and sermon 4 used “remember” at a few points. These verbs imply knowledge, which is not a bad thing, but mere knowledge is not catechetical formation. Instead, declarative statements such as “As you go from this church, you are a vessel” (sermon 1). Using declarative or experiential verbs more often could have helped to create a homiletical framework for transformation instead of merely relaying facts.

Another issue is that of irregular church attendance. While this is largely out of the control of the preacher, it is a reality that must be acknowledged. There were some church members present for all four sermons in this series, but the vast majority were not present for the entire series. For one, this should help the preacher in attempting to cram everything into the series and not fall into the trap of doing too much, which happened in the fourth sermon. But such attendance patterns might also necessitate the need for a short summary of previous sermons in the series in the introductions. While this could be seen as “wasting homiletical time,” it is also a pastoral concession to reality. Each sermon must both stand on its own and also be a part of a larger homiletical conversation. This context requires the preacher to have not only a plan for each sermon, but also for the overall series. Given the technological tools available, such as podcasts and blogs, the preacher can also make sermon content available outside of the regular Sunday liturgy. The sermons, therefore, can be a part of a larger culture of catechesis beyond Sunday mornings.

The goal of catechetical preaching is to have Christians better understand what the faith proclaims and participate in the salvific truths of the faith. More than simply knowing, catechesis seeks transformed living in the life of the Spirit. This sermon series sought to do this by instructing the congregation about ways to understand and approach the Eucharist so that the grace of this Sacrament might permeate their lives and allow them to experience and flourish in the abundant life given to them in Jesus Christ and expressed in the Holy Eucharist.

Addendums

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Additional Sermon

Throughout the sermon series, parishioners shared particular questions that they had about the Eucharist. Some of these questions I was able to answer quickly after church, but many could not be appropriately responded to in the context of those sessions. After the sermon series was over, I chose to preach an additional sermon on the Eucharist. This sermon started not with what I wanted to clarify further, but what questions the congregation had.

This is important for two reasons. The first is that people are going to be more interested in hearing a sermon that speaks directly to their questions. Secondly, by preaching a sermon around their questions, it demonstrates that their input and questions are valued, which is an important part of any healthy pastoral and homiletical relationship. Though I did not collect any data on this sermon, the anecdotal evidence based on comments is that the sermon was appreciated and well-received and functioned

as a fitting capstone to the sermon series. I include this additional sermon as an addendum to demonstrate how such feedback can be used to further the goal of catechetical preaching.

Easter 7C – Questions about the Eucharist

Grant, O Lord, that in the Holy Eucharist we might behold what we are and become what we receive. Amen.

This sermon, unlike the last four that I preached, is not a part of my doctoral thesis project. However, the topic will still be the Eucharist. This is the encore that you didn't necessarily ask for, but nevertheless, is being given. First of all, I want to thank you all for your attention to those four sermons and for filling out the response sheets. I took last week as vacation and worked on writing the chapter of my thesis about those sermons and your input was incredibly insightful and helpful in doing that work. I did get everything done that I had hoped to last week and now just have one more chapter to write. The reason why I want to continue to consider the Eucharist though is that many of you asked me follow-up questions about the Eucharist and I'd like to respond to in order to round out that sermon series.

The questions fall into three broad categories: logistics, formation, and essence. One person also said, "Maybe you can tell us what the Eucharist means to you." In a sense, I did that through the four sermons, but I didn't do it in personal terms, so I'll do that as well. First though, logistics. Starting with history, there were several who wanted to know more about the Eucharist itself – when did it develop? The Eucharist has its roots in the Last Supper of Jesus, which, in turn, had its roots in the Jewish Passover. In 1 Corinthians, St. Paul writes about the practice of Communion and in Acts we read about

the practice of the disciples gathering for the “breaking of bread.” By the late first century, there are a few Christians writing letters that mention the celebration of the Eucharist and we have a Eucharistic liturgy that dates to around 215, which, in part, serves as the basis for our own Eucharistic Prayer. So all that is to say that the Eucharist has been a central feature of the Church since the very beginning.

There were also some very practical questions of logistics, such as “Why do we use unleavened bread instead of regular bread?” The answer to most of these sorts of questions is always two-fold – there is the pragmatic answer and there is the theological. The pragmatic answer is that wafers are just easier – easier to distribute, they don’t get crumbs everywhere, and you don’t have to worry about them going bad as quickly. But there’s also the theological answer. Unleavened bread reminds us of the manna that God nourished the Hebrew people with while they were in the desert. When it comes to why we use port wine, and not grape juice is that wine is celebratory, it is what was used at the Last Supper, and is rooted in Jewish tradition. And practically, we use port wine because it stays fresh longer and the higher alcohol content is better at killing germs.

In the Episcopal Church, a good number of our members are former Roman Catholics. Why that is would be the subject of another sermon, but that fact makes it not surprising that several people asked about the doctrine of Transubstantiation – the Roman belief that the bread and the wine actually are transformed into the substance of body and blood. I’ll quote from the Thirty-Nine Articles, which is found at the back of our Prayer Book: “Transubstantiation is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthrows the nature of a Sacrament, and has given occasion to many superstitions.”⁵⁰ That being said,

⁵⁰ Article XVIII, *BCP*, 873.

the Thirty-Nine articles are descriptive of the historical Anglican position, they are not prescriptive in that they do not tell you what you must believe.

Where I come down on it is this: in the Eucharist, Jesus is uniquely and reliably present in a Sacramental way. Part of the problem is that we too often rely only on our five-senses. Sure, our senses are really good at interpreting the world, but they are not sufficient on their own. Why a sunset, or a child's laugh, or a Beethoven symphony are beautiful cannot be reduced to an analysis of pigments or sound waves. Beauty is deeper than that. So is truth. The truth of my love for my wife is not something that the senses can determine. And the same is true for so many other things – the courage of a paratrooper, the compassion of a nurse, the patience of a teacher – these things are all undeniably true, but they cannot be described by the five senses. It's the same for Christ's Presence in the Eucharist. If we limit ourselves to sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste, we might never find Christ in the Eucharist. But if we keep our other senses open, our senses for what is good, and true, and beautiful, then, indeed, we'll perceive Christ to be truly and really present in the Eucharist.

And to respond to another question – “What is so special about the Eucharist, doesn't God show up in other ways?” It is the reliability of the Eucharist that makes it a Sacrament of the Church. Yes, God can and does show up in hospital waiting rooms, and in hikes in the woods, and in making love with a spouse, and sometimes even in sermons. The difference is that Christ is uniquely and reliably present in the Eucharist. He has told us that whenever two or three are gathered in his name that he will be with us. He has told us to do this, this very specific thing, in remembrance of him. He has told us that this

is his Body and this is his Blood. And so we can trust that Christ is always present in the Eucharist.

So as you think about how to talk about the Eucharist to others, particularly those in churches that are not Eucharistically centered, which was a question a few of you asked, you can put it in these terms of Christ reliably being present with us, just as he promised to be, to give us the bread from heaven which nourishes our souls and shapes us into what we are to become.

Those were the questions of logistics, now to some questions around formation – which really revolves around the question “How do I take the grace of the Eucharist with me as I go from the church?” One is to be more attentive to how you receive it. There are wonderful prayers to use both before and after receiving the Eucharist in the Prayer Book on page 834. You might use those during the Offertory, as you wait to come forward, and after you return to your pew. Something I do is to repeat a mantra quietly to help me prepare to receive the Eucharist – you might use “Grant me to behold what I am that I might become what I receive,” or “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us,” or “Lamb of God, grant us your peace.” The other suggestion is to engage in practices of faith: read Scripture, pray, give generously, do service. Doing these things will make you hungry for the Eucharist because the Eucharist is the food for the faithful. The Eucharist is what fuels our discipleship and transformation.

And this brings us to the third of the questions around the Eucharist – the question of essence. What exactly is the Eucharist? And, depending on how we answer that question, it leads us to the question that some of you asked – “Why is it required that you be Baptized to receive the Eucharist?”

For some, I know this is a sensitive question because some view it in terms of hospitality versus exclusion. But I would suggest that is not the best lens for addressing the question. It's also worth remembering that all people are welcome at the rail to receive a blessing, some in the form of Eucharist and others in the form of a prayer. Furthermore, to be clear, for me, grace always prevails. If someone comes forward to the rail with their hands outstretched, they get bread. The rail isn't the place for theological debate or checking credentials.

The reason why Eucharist is for the Baptized is because of its essence. The Eucharist is not a ritual of belonging, that's what Baptism is about. The Eucharist does not bind us to one another; that is what Baptism does. The Eucharist strengthens those bonds, but it does not create them. Part of the reason for the confusion around who can receive Eucharist is that we've forgotten the importance of Baptism. Everything in the Christian faith, including the Eucharist, flows from Baptism – our immersion into the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And so we are given the Eucharist to reinforce the union with Christ and all others who are a part of Christ's Body.

No analogy is perfect, but imagine if we were giving out gasoline instead of bread and wine. Now, the assumption would be that you have a car to put that gasoline into and that gas will power your vehicle. But if you don't have a car and you come up to receive the gas, there's little it's going to do for you, and, in fact, might actually cause you to injure yourself. St. Paul makes this point when he cautions “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.”⁵¹

⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 11:27

For these reasons, Baptism has always preceded Eucharist. This is the case in the New Testament, in the early Church, and throughout Church history. It is why the Baptismal font is located near the door – architecture shows that we enter the faith through Baptism and are then nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ as we go deeper. It's not a question of hospitality because the most gracious thing to do is to bring someone to Baptism where they begin their journey of growing in Christ.

Apart from Baptism, Eucharist makes little sense and could actually do grave damage in delaying or undermining Baptism as the core of who we are. And this is also why, as some of you asked, why we don't really do First Communion classes for children in our tradition, because all the Baptized are invited and encouraged to receive the Eucharist. In my experience, most children understand the Eucharist more fully than adults do because it takes a certain sense of wonder to enter into this sacramental mystery, and children are better at wonder than most adults. We do sometimes have Communion Classes to discuss aspects of the catechism about, but that class is in no way a requirement.

Finally, what does the Eucharist mean to me? A lot of it really is rooted in what Jesus says in today's Gospel text from John. Jesus prays to the Father saying, "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." The Eucharist is the vehicle by which we grow the glory of our Baptismal identity, it nourishes our union with God and all those who are in Christ, and reminds us that God loves us.

There's a story about St. Thomas Aquinas who, in the 1200s, had written a lengthy piece about the Eucharist but didn't think it was very good. So he went to pray and heard the voice of God say to him "Thomas, you have written well of my Body, what do you desire as a reward?" Now, I'll be honest, the notion of God giving out rewards for good writing doesn't strike me as the sort of thing God would do, but it's still a good story. And according to the story, there was another monk present who witnessed it. But it's what Aquinas says in response that I find so captivating – he said, "Nothing but you, O Lord."⁵²

For me, the Eucharist is that reminder that there is nothing that I need other than God. Using a phrase from St. Julian of Norwich, the Eucharist helps me to trust that "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."⁵³ The Eucharist reminds me that God's love is the purpose of Creation. It reminds me of Jesus' Death and Resurrection. It reminds me of the power of the Holy Spirit that moves through this world. It is a sacrament of wonder, mystery, love, and grace.

And in the Eucharist, I feel as close to God as it gets and I feel closer to my brothers and sisters in Christ, both you all and those how have died. When I was just a young child, I remember a family friend saying that after receiving the Eucharist that she felt like she could slay a dragon, and the Eucharist gives me a sense of that strength. And it also gives me a sense of peace, knowing that God's got the whole world in those divine hands of love. In the Eucharist, I participate in my salvation and give hearty thanks for God's abundant and amazing grace.

⁵² Thomas Aquinas, cited by Robert Barron, "Domine, non nisi te," <https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/blog/domine-non-nisi-te/> (accessed September 13, 2019).

⁵³ Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love*, Chapter XXVIII (Project Gutenberg, 1373). <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/52958/52958-h/52958-h.htm> (accessed September 13, 2019).

And it was my college chaplain who often talked about the importance of “seeing Communion in everything.” When I receive the Eucharist, I pray that the holiness rubs off on me and that it trains me and enables me to live a life of love, joy, and service. That is why the Eucharist is so important to me – it reminds me of the blessings of God and allows me to grow in grace so that because of the Eucharist, my prayer is always “I desire and need nothing but you, O Lord.”

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