

Diakonia Program – Northern Illinois Synod ELCA

Christian Doctrine

**Session 3, Segment A
Jesus Christ – Risen One & Crucified One**

- I. Opening Devotions
- II. What Shall We Make of Jesus? The Jesus of Culture

“Thus Jesus, for perhaps the vast majority of Euro-American Protestants in North America, is a good, mild-mannered, sexless, kindly but serious, nonpolitical male of indeterminate age, who counsels devotion to God, evenness of temper, patient acceptance of difficult experiences, courtesy in one’s dealings with others, obedience to those in authority, and resignation with cheerfulness in the face of sickness and death.” (Hall, PF, 485)

- III. Jesus Christ – Risen from the Dead

- a. Resurrection was a symbol of hope rooted in Jewish expectations of the establishment of God’s everlasting reign. It was not universally held by all Jewish people of Jesus’ day - notably, the Sadducees. *“Resurrection was associated with the transformation of the world, with the eschatological and salvific act of God. It was universal in scope.” (Peters 196)*
- b. The resurrection of Jesus - What it meant:
 - 1. The end of the old order has begun - the new creation has broken into our world. *“...if Jesus has been raised, then the end of the world has begun... The expectation of the end of history was certainly not fulfilled in the world as a whole. It was fulfilled in this one person. The person of Jesus became the microcosm revealing what would happen to the whole... As Jesus’ destiny led to his demise and resurrection, so also can we expect the world to hit its end and become subject to renewal by God.” (Peters 197)*
 - 2. Jesus’ life, ministry, and death have been validated by God. *“In this event God has ratified his Son’s claims. Without Easter his accusers would stand correct: Jesus was a blasphemer... Easter determines what has been true all along.” (Peters 197-8)*
 - a. This validates his teaching as true
 - b. This validates his healing as in-breaking of God’s new creation, not as magic tricks.
 - c. This validates his inclusion of outcasts, sinners, etc.
 - d. This validates his suffering and redeems it.
 - 3. What we say about Jesus grows out of his resurrection. He is:

- a. Son of God - intimately tied to the one who creates and raised the dead;
 - b. Messiah - his position as anointed one is confirmed in death and resurrection;
 - c. Son of man - he is the true human; the one who shows us what it is to be human;
 - d. King - Only he has the power over death
 - e. Prophet - his vision of the kingdom of God is not just testimony, but comes from the future it announces.
4. God is revealed in Jesus - If God is indeed the power of the future, and that is revealed in Jesus, then we see what we can see of God in him. *“God’s glory has made appearance in the Christ in a way that cannot be surpassed... The person of Jesus embodies yet represents the history of creation in its entirety.”* (Peters 199) Creation, redemption, new creation - the whole of history is revealed in him.
5. Jesus’ resurrection is for “the nations” - Since the promise of Israel was always to be a blessing to the nations, and Jesus’ resurrection inserts the end into our midst, the Gentiles are welcome.

IV. What do we mean by “Resurrection?”

- a. Historical Event that is not only history

“The truth of the Easter message cannot be demonstrated by modern historical research. Faith in the resurrection is not reducible to the claim that the corpse of Jesus was resuscitated. Even if there were strong evidence that the tomb of Jesus was empty, this would not prove the claims of faith... it is possible to become so preoccupied with these sorts of questions that ‘the question of why the resurrection should be good news now almost disappears.’” (Migliore 192)

- b. Faith Event that is about more than faith

On the other hand, the meaning of the resurrection of Christ must not be reduced to a change of mind and heart on the part of the early disciples. In this view the resurrection was not something that happened to Jesus... (but) something that happens in the disciples.” (Migliore 192)

- c. “End” event that is not the end, but discloses the reality of the end in the context of history.

“We must conceive of God’s action of raising Jesus to be an intervention into history as well as a form of ending history. The eschatological new reality has entered the flow of historical events in the person of Jesus. Even though the fullness of its transforming power remains outstanding, it has come to authentic

expression in the person of Jesus as one event among others within finite history.” (Peters 203)

V. Resurrection called for re-interpretation of the “Christ-event.”

a. Reflection on the resurrection forced *“a retroactive interpretation of the events of Jesus’ birth and career as a teacher, miracle worker, and victim of crucifixion... Jesus life could be viewed as a whole, and something awesomely dramatic was perceived. The creator had become the created. The eternal had entered time. The future had become present. The infinite had become finite. The impassible had become subject to suffering. The immortal had become subject to death. The king had become servant.” (Peters 204)*

b. The Dimensions of Crucifixion

1. Jesus is fully human - The breadth and depth of humanity physically, psychologically, emotionally
2. The cross was a fulfillment of human response to God across time
3. Christ chooses the cross, is not a hapless victim
4. The cross unmasks the violence of the world, the rejection of God, and the bondage of humanity. It is an event of judgment.
5. Christ’s death on the cross shows the depth of God’s love. In the act of love shown, forgiveness is communicated to a violent world.
6. The crucified Christ opens up a new way where hope for peace, reconciliation and an end to violence and evil can be imagined.
7. *“Christian belief in God is from the start bound up with this specific human being, this particularity, this historical man, this story, this unique individual. The abstract is replaced by the concrete.” (Hall, CC, 120)*

c. Resurrection of the man Jesus - Human & Divine

1. The controversies of the early church were the fires from which this tension was forged.
2. Lutherans have always been rooted in the cross - theopassianism -- *“God genuinely suffers.”*
3. A Crucified God
“When the crucified Go is called the ‘image of the invisible God,’ the meaning is that this is God, and God is like this. God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in this humanity.” (Moltmann in Peters, 209)
4. God Incarnate and as Trinity

“The two-natures discussion is a response to an event in which God altered our definition of what constitutes divinity. In the incarnation God ceases to be God in a previously stereotypical sense and enters fully into the plight of human suffering. The history of Jesus is divine history. Through the resurrection of Jesus - and eventually the eschatological consummation wherein the Spirit unites all of creation to its Lord Jesus Christ - God sweep the human reality up into the divine life proper. What appears at first to be alien is, in fact, God. God defines the Godself through historical action. Our interpretation of this action reveals to us that God is a Trinity.” (Peters 210)

Session 3, Segment B **The Work of Jesus Christ**

VI. The Work of Christ (Atonement) – The Tradition

- d. Christ saves – but from what and how?
- e. Christus Victor – Christ triumphs over evil by defeating (even tricking) evil into releasing humanity (creation) from its grip. This particularly addresses the oppressed and outcast. Its weakness is in the on-going presence of evil and the triumphal conclusions wrongly drawn.
- f. Satisfaction Theory – (Anselm) The cost of sin is greater than can be paid, but it must. Only God can provide the price, and does so in love. The balance of justice is restored and God’s honor as well. This tends to make God against God in some fashion. Modern scholars prefer “representation” over substitution.
- g. Moral Influence – (Abelard) God’s love revealed in the sacrifice is a compelling force which changes us... The work happens when we change. The weakness is the movement away from Christ’s work to our acceptance
- h. Teacher of True Wisdom - True wisdom is revealed most fully in the Christ event. Christ as *Logos*. Weakness is in the tendency to cut off universal meaning - only the “insiders” grasp it; any wise teacher can work in this system.

VII. Guiding our Reflection

- a. Respect the diversity of approaches to the work of Christ.
- b. Atoning work is found in the whole gospel story – incarnation, ministry, teaching, cross, resurrection.
- c. It is God’s work of grace, and calls for a response in humanity.
- d. Includes judgment, which serves grace. One serves the other, they don’t conflict.
- e. Atonement is individual, societal, and cosmic in scope.

VIII. Atonement in our Age

- a. Christus Victor – Saved from oppression, bondage, and the powers of evil.
- b. Satisfaction – Saved from the guilt and shame of being wholly other than God, unworthy in our identity and deed.
- c. Moral Influence – Saves us from the powerlessness we face in times of evil and darkness.
- d. Scapegoat - The history of humanity's struggle with evil and sin has centered in scapegoats - self-justification, cruelty etc... Jesus' bears the fate but ends it in his resurrection.
- e. End to Self-Justification - Forgiveness is a powerful act that removes the need for self-justification and replaces it with God's gracious act. The power of the cross is the power of God's love for all creation. It removes the need for self-justification. The power of this approach is that it actually makes forgiveness a legitimate force in the redemption of creation. Additionally, it recovers the relevance of the sacraments as means of not just ritual acts of guilt remission, but redemptive activities of great power. The forgiveness of sins is the mission of the church in a way that resonates with Jesus own mission. *"(A)bove all (the Church) is empowered to absolve people of their sin, to release them from their sin on behalf of God. By carrying out its mission it gives comfort, and splendor returns to the world."* (Gestrich, 81) Attention to numerical growth betrays the true mission of the church as an agent of forgiveness. Word and Sacrament ministry is the center of the mission of the church.
- f. What of our Age – Meaninglessness? Despair? Emptiness?
"We are people in despair, but it is a covert despair – a despair that will not and perhaps cannot admit itself... It is unfortunate that our churches are, on the whole, places where people feel constrained to be even more hidden than usual." (Hall, CC. 131)
"Theologies of glory have been productive of soteriologies that can seem to bring closure to the human predicament: eternal life in place of death and fate; forgiveness in the place of preoccupation with guilt. But no theology of glory will be able to bring closure to the question 'What are people for?' For that anxiety, the only answer that will suffice is the participation in our lives of a God who shares the question, whose Presence gives us courage and hope." (Hall, CC, 133)

IX. Salvation, Justification, Sanctification

- a. These are the work of Christ
- b. Carl Braaten, in his book *Principles of Lutheran Theology* says that *"Salvation is the most inclusive term for what the Bible declares God to have accomplished for the world through the person of Jesus."*
- c. Our doctrines, beliefs, sacraments, preaching, practice, prayer — all are rooted in the work of God in Christ = salvation.
- d. It is all grace -- nothing we can do -- Only Christ:

“In Jesus’ death and resurrection, the whole test-passing, brownie-point-earning rigmarole of the human race has been cancelled for lack of interest on God’s part. All he needs from us is a simple Yes or No, and off to work he goes. If we say Yes to something wrong, or No to something right, he will reconcile it all by himself. Not only can he handle it, he’s already handled it; he has all our messes fixed in Jesus—right now, even before we make them.” (Capon 9)

- e. The *imago dei*—the image of God. Creatures corrupted by sin — our image is twisted, not what it was to be. We were created to be *god-like*.
- f. Salvation for most Lutherans and Protestant Christians has been rooted in a “forensic” (legal) understanding of justification. God makes us right by forgiving us our sin; by pronouncing us “not guilty by reason of grace.” Salvation ends here — we’re still broken and far away from the *imago dei*. This is a small vision of salvation that deals with our state but not our being. It also tends to remove salvation from daily life, postponing the ultimate necessity of salvation on life after death.
- g. What if salvation not only forgave, but restored us to the image of God? Bigger salvation. What if God’s work in Christ not only pays the price for our sin, but makes a way for us to become what God made us to be? What if our repentance was not just a glum “I’m sorry” but our faithful move into union with Christ — and so, God.

Luther in a Christmas Sermon of 1514: *“Just as the word became flesh, so it is certainly also necessary that the flesh become word. For the word becomes flesh precisely so that the flesh may become word. In other words: God becomes man so that man may become God. Thus power becomes powerless so that weakness may become powerful. The logos puts on our form and manner.”*

Session 3 Bibliography

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