



Taste and See...

VOL. 4 No. 4

ISSN 2561-6684 (print)

ISSN 2561-6692 (online)

WINTER 2021

A Sermon for Christmas Eve _____

Rev. Canon Gene Packwood

Many years ago, I was challenged by Rev. Joseph Walker's "Two Kinds of Christmas Sermons" on his Felix Hominem blog. Father Joe described them this way:

The first one is sort of like having tea with a distant relative whom

you visit once a year. Christmas is, after all, often that time when we see people we haven't visited all year long.... There is a sort of Christmas sermon which wrestles, to a greater or lesser extent, with this reality. We really haven't seen Jesus all year long, but it's time to drop in for a visit and see if He is still there. God is rather like the elderly aunt whom we humor with our presence, and hope that someday we will get some kind of inheritance when the time is right.

The second species of sermon is an attempt to trump up Jesus beyond all the

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Taste and See... is the quarterly publication of



Anglican Renewal Ministries
Canada

Subscriptions:

\$15 / year individual, \$30 / year group (4 copies to one address), \$10 / year digital

distractions of the rest of the season, lament about the fact that there is no Christ left in Christmas, and try to lay out the whole plan of God's salvation, explain in 10 minutes or less all the jargon of the Christian life – sin and grace, redemption and eternal life, prayer and repentance, joy, peace and love, what it means that Jesus is "Lord and Saviour," and give everyone a chance to have a conversion experience in less than one hour. I don't have that particular expertise.

I'm not particularly good at laying out the whole plan of God's salvation in 10 minutes either, but I just can't seem to let it go by without at least putting the question somehow. So, I will envision myself in church on Christmas Eve, and make an attempt.

"See, your Saviour comes!" trumpeted the prophet Isaiah (Is. 62:11). And so he has. What's a Saviour? One who saves. Who needs saving? Someone who is in danger. In danger from what? Enemies, for one thing, says Isaiah in v8 of the same chapter. Eternal death for another, the opposite of the "eternal life" to which Paul refers in his letter to Titus (Tit. 3:7).

Enemies and eternal death; pretty negative for Christmas Eve some might say. But it's the truth. Jesus wouldn't have been necessary if humanity hadn't been in serious trouble. Jesus himself experienced that trouble by being born into it. First there was Herod. Then there were the

religious leaders of his day. Not to mention the cross. That's pretty negative, too. But it's part of the true story.

As we celebrate this Christmas Eve, there are people sleeping in homeless shelters down the street. And there are families wondering from where their next meal is coming. I'm not saying this to try and spoil your Christmas. I'm just saying there was trouble, suffering and grief when Joseph, Mary, the angels and shepherds celebrated Jesus' birth then, and there is trouble, suffering and grief as we celebrate it now.

That's the dark side. What's the bright side?

Let's take a closer look at Paul's statement in his letter to Titus: "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." (Tit. 3:4-7)

That appearance, the one we celebrate tonight and for the next twelve days, saves us, if we choose to believe it, receive it and live it out. It saves us not because of the good things we've done, or because we deserve it, "but because of his mercy," wrote

Paul. "He saved us through the washing of rebirth," should we have believed and been baptized, "and renewal by the Holy Spirit." In other words, the regeneration and transformation that comes with a way of living which is aligned with what the birth we celebrate tonight represents. All of which was, "poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour."

His birth is chronicled in some detail in the gospel of Luke, a trustworthy physician and a learned man. You'll find the story in Luke 2:1-20. Luke calls it "good news of great joy... for all the people... a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." And, rather like the shepherds, each year we leave our homes and places of work to find Mary and Joseph and the baby again, to see the thing that has happened.

Jesus brought us all here tonight. Oh, some of us might think we're here for other reasons, but if Jesus hadn't been written about and looked forward to for hundreds of years through all the Old Testament, if Jesus wasn't the hero and the point of every story in there, and if when the time came (Lk. 2:6) Jesus hadn't been born a human baby, miraculously and supernaturally conceived in Mary, who was an actual virgin, I don't know what we'd all be doing tonight.

If there had been no trip to Bethlehem, no inn, no shepherds and

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Taste and See...

From the Editor

Alison Stortz

At my home church, the Christmas Eve service usually ends with my favourite carol: *Joy to the World*. It's about the arrival of Jesus, but not the baby Jesus of the manger. This carol is about the arrival of the reigning King to his kingdom. It's all about pomp and circumstance. I picture enormous gates thrown open, people lining the streets, waving and shouting, a joyful noise echoing off the surrounding buildings and the hills beyond. This is Jesus riding triumphantly into Jerusalem - but wait, that's not what Christmas is about, is it?

The Jesus for whom we wait throughout Advent is not just the Jesus of the manger, but also the Jesus of the cross. The line that gets me every time: "Let every heart prepare Him room." The King is coming - not to a stable in a far-away land, but to *me*, to my heart, right now, wherever I am. Am I ready?

A friend once gave me a card that read, "Christmas is because God had in mind Easter." Even though we have all sinned, all gone astray, God still loves us and Jesus, the embodiment of Love, came at Christmas to lay down his life for us (Is. 53:6). This is what I think of as I sing, "the wonders, wonders of His love."

I pray all our hearts will be open to receive the Risen King this Christmas. Joy to the World! The Lord is Come!

I look forward to hearing from you.

Alison ☺

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Volume 4 Number 4 WINTER 2021

The quarterly magazine of
Anglican Renewal Ministries Canada

The National Church
Executive Committee has
sanctioned the use of
Anglican Renewal Ministries

Please submit communications to
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ARM Canada is a registered non-profit organization supported by tax deductible donations.
(Registration No. 0664250-47)

Editor: Alison Stortz

Subscriptions:
\$15/year individual (paper),
\$10/year individual (digital),
\$30/year group
(4 copies to one address)

Submissions for publication in

Taste and See...

may be emailed to
arm@armcanada.org

Writer's guidelines are on
our website:

www.armcanada.org

WINTER 2021

angels, no haste, no child lying in a manger, no miraculous joyful stories told, no amazement, no treasured and pondered words in a new mother's heart, no returning, glorifying and praising God because of the wonder of it all, and no Christmas — there would no trees at home, no seriously wound-up kids, no carols, no Santa Claus, either — the list doesn't stop there: no Easter, no Church, no salvation, no hope. Okay, maybe we'd have thought of some other reason for the gifts and the turkey — Stanley Cup Day or Festivus, perhaps. But still.

Jesus is the reason I'm here tonight. One day the truth about Jesus was conceived in me and I was amazed that the good God and Father of my LORD Jesus Christ loved *me* — a rather full of myself, thirty something husband and father who made television programs for a living.



After that first revelation, I started to treasure and ponder the words and the stories about Jesus and his miracles. I started to read the Bible and pray. I started going to church (following in the footsteps of Jude, my wife, who was already here) to learn more of Him, to worship Him, to pray to Him, to follow Him and try to live my life as if He were me. I'm not very good at that yet. But every day, especially in church on Sundays — any church, no matter what the music or the style — the goodness and loving kindness of God we heard about in Titus helps me along. And the Holy Spirit, “poured out on me richly through Jesus” (Tit. 3:6), empowers me to see things I can't see on my own, and to do things I wouldn't be able to do on my own.

If I, or any of you, are to be saved from the awful non-reversible effects and consequences of sin — our own and of others — if you and I are to be saved from death, Jesus is the only one who can do it for us. Jesus is the one who saved us (Tit. 3:5). I also learned that Jesus saved me, “not because of any works of righteousness that I had done, but according to his mercy” (Tit. 3:5). I couldn't earn it, be good enough to deserve it, be kind

enough, or anything else. All I could do was turn away from the sin and the self of which I was so full and turn to Jesus, The One who is the reason we're all here tonight.

It hasn't always been easy, but it's been rich and good — something beyond mere happiness — joyful. It has set me deeper into life, anchored me. God's goodness, loving kindness and empowering Holy Spirit that Jesus brings to me are like spiritual winter tires (I know, guy image, but bear with me). As a result my traction is better, I am more sure footed, I am a lot less likely to spin out and off the road that leads me home to life eternal. I can relax and enjoy the ride.

It is an amazing story. Consider what we've heard about Jesus this evening:

- Jesus has, indeed, come into the world
- He represents the kindness and love of God
- He saved us
- He is Christ (which means God's anointed One)
- He is Lord; that is, he is King of Kings, absolute Sovereign of the Universe.

Time after time I come to church, not just because it's my job, but because, like the shepherds, I want to hear again “this good news of great joy for all the people” (Lk. 2:10) and “see this thing that has taken place, which the LORD has made known to us” (Lk.

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Introducing... Rev. Daniel Joseph

Hello everyone! I was born into a Christian family and grew up in Singapore, receiving my initial Christian teaching in the Assemblies of God. At the age of 3, I committed my life to Jesus with water baptism. I received an infilling of the power of the Spirit at the age of 6, speaking in tongues completely unintentionally.

Thinking it the most natural thing in the world, I became active in ministry at 10 years old, taking multiple roles in the choir, the praise band, the children's ministry and the youth ministry (it took a few years to realize that I was the odd one!). I spent 16 years as a Pentecostal pastor, and then heard a call to come to Canada and subsequently came to the Anglican Church (which is quite a conversion in a different way). Throughout my ministry I have

been active in church planting, discipleship and moving in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I have been happily married to Rev. Janice Renee Ng for the past 13 years.

I am now midway through my M.Div. studies at Wycliffe College, Toronto School of Theology, and working as the Community Connections Director at Trinity Church Streetsville.

I felt God was leading me to be an ARM board member because there is something about the powerful move of the Holy Spirit that is so precious to the life of the Church. I hope my involvement will be part of a new generation capturing this for themselves. We are the living stones, we are God's Temple and to fulfill that role we need to be alive, breathed-upon

and completely energized through the Holy Spirit; only then can we glorify the Father through the Son. My burden for the Anglican Church is to see Word and Sacrament as alive as can be. May the ministry of the Word and the Sacrament lead us to encounter the Eternal Word in a tangible and supernatural way!



CHRISTMAS EVE, continued

2:15). I especially love the glory of the LORD that shines around us in radiant beams from the holy face of Jesus this holy night. It never fails.

Like Joseph and Mary, I want to make sure I'm registered in my home town — where Jesus was, is and will be forever. And that's where I hope you are tonight. Safely registered, having the found the child, amazed at what he means, treasuring and pondering the words about Jesus in your hearts, ready to return to your

Christmas celebrations glorifying and praising God for all you have heard and seen, as it has been told to you (Lk. 2:20). And if it's been a while since you last saw Jesus, maybe since last Christmas, I'd really like you all to come back next Sunday to check and see if he's still here.

On this Christmas Eve, I want to encourage you to suspend any disbelief and decide to believe it all; the virgin birth, the cross, the resurrection, the whole nine yards. Let's face it. You're in

trouble. I'm in trouble. And we can't get *ourselves* out of the trouble we're in. Jesus has. Jesus is able. Jesus will.

All we have to do is believe that the message of this holy night is true and ask him to save us. And he will.

Gene Packwood blogs at GENERALities www.kiwirev.blogspot.ca and can be found on Facebook and Twitter (@kiwirev).

Holy Spirit in the Prayer Books, Part 20

Rev. Canon Gene Packwood

A pastor/priest in a church I know has started a Wednesday evening series called “Foundations of the Faith,” in which he is teaching what amounts to a Catechism. He and the leadership of the church believe that, at this time, people need to learn about and be reminded of the basics of their Christian faith. That got me thinking about the Catechism in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, what it has to say about the Holy Spirit, and if there is anything we need to learn or about which we need to be reminded.

There are five Holy Spirit mentions in the Prayer Book Catechism:

1. Under the heading of **THE CHRISTIAN FAITH** is the answer to a question arising out of the Apostle’s Creed and the Articles of Belief:

Catechist: What do you chiefly learn in these Articles of your Belief?

Answer: I learn to have faith in the one true God: in God the Father, who made me and all the world; in God the Son, who redeemed me and all mankind; and in God the **Holy Spirit**, who sanctifies me and all the people of God. (*BCP*, p545)

First of all, notice that the answer is Trinitarian. Notice also descriptors of each Person of the Trinity. God the Father does the

making, God the Son does the redeeming, and God the Holy Spirit does the sanctifying. The Holy Spirit consecrates us, makes us holy and sacred, blesses, hallows and sets us apart, dedicates us to God and anoints us for ministry – ministry which is to be done in the power of the Holy Spirit – whereby, as the bishop prays during Confirmation, through God’s “manifold gifts of grace,” including “the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and might; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness” (Is. 11:2), we would also “daily increase” in the “Holy Spirit more and more” (*BCP*, p560).

That is a big prayer, which fits right in with St. Paul’s exposition on the Holy Spirit and his gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7: “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” You, and me, and all the people of God are sanctified by the Holy Spirit for the common good.

2. Under **THE SACRAMENTS**

Catechist: What is the inward and spiritual grace in Baptism?

Answer: A death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness; for being by nature born into man’s

sinful state, we are hereby made the children of grace by the power of the **Holy Spirit**. (*BCP*, p550-551)

Grace is God’s empowering presence enabling us to be who God created us to be and do what God calls us to do. That is who children of grace are and what they do. It is the power of the Holy Spirit which makes us such.

3. In **A SUPPLEMENTARY INSTRUCTION**

Question: What is the Church?

Answer: The family of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the **Holy Spirit**. (*BCP*, p552)

We children of grace, who also happen to be temples of the Holy Spirit ourselves (1Cor. 3:16, 6:19), are supernaturally built into a spiritual community, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. What are temples for? Temples are for worship, sacrifice, prayer and for the safe-keeping and enjoyment of holy things.

4. On why the Church is called Holy, along with One, Catholic and Apostolic:

Answer: Because the **Holy Spirit** dwells in it, sanctifying all its members and endowing them with gifts of grace. (*BCP*, p553).

The Church is Holy because the indwelling Holy Spirit makes it so.

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Thoughts from my Bay: Customs Old and New

Lois Martin

My iPhone has been busy. First, Brian and Camillia sent pictures of the children dressed for school in their Halloween costumes. Camillia created a "Loki" costume for Emma with magnificent horns and a cape. Lapis is a beautiful "mushroom lady," bedecked in a magnificent hat created by both of them and an ensemble to match. A few hours later, Robert and Azusena sent photos of her Mexican celebrations to honour the Day of the Dead, for which she baked special orange-flavoured bread with sugar and butter on top. In Regina, Jocelyn and Glen are empty nesters. They will hand out candy to small folks who come to their door. These are the varied customs of my family.

Soon it will be time to begin the Christmas customs.

Jocelyn will bake her Holiday Ring Cake and Ayrshire Shortbread. On Christmas morning, she will host a family brunch. There will be crepes rolled and soaked in maple syrup, waffles with whipped cream and fruit,

sausages, scrambled eggs and bacon, and so on. Santa stockings will be opened and there will be a huge Christmas tree.

Azusena will also have a tree. She said in Mexico they decorate a live tree in the front yard shortly after All Saints Day. It stays decorated until Lent. She will have a small tree in the apartment. The Spanish Bible translation of the Christmas Story will be on the table. She will have baked Christmas bread and later, at Epiphany, she will make the Bread of the Kings.

Camillia will enjoy decorating the Christmas tree and house, and entertaining a multitude of guests.

Christmas customs are fun. But sometimes they have to be revised. Jocelyn and Glen do not have any children at home. As children marry or move to far-away places, new customs have to be created. Azusena and Robert have to work at Christmas, looking after hotel guests. For them, going to church isn't going to hap-

pen, but there is a Lessons and Carols service in the village one night. Brian and Camillia's blended family have to find a suitable date for turkey dinner, while accommodating former spouses' needs.

Despite all the changes and conflicts in plans, we will all celebrate Christmas. Some things do not change: the old familiar story of the shepherds, angels and wise men, the birth of God's Son. All that will be re-told year after year. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we will sing and praise God for the gift of His Son, our Saviour. And that custom will never change.

And there were shepherds in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. (Luke 2:8-9)

Lois Martin attends St. Mary the Virgin Anglican Church in Regina, SK.

PRAYER BOOKS, continued

The gifts of grace "are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills." (1Cor. 12:11, and various lists of gifts in 1Cor. 12:7-11 and 28, Rom. 12:6-8 and Eph. 4:11-12).

And finally:

5. How did our Lord provide for the life and work of the Church?

Answer: Our Lord sent his **Holy Spirit** upon the Church and upon his Apostles. (*BCP*, p553)

Quite simply, no Holy Spirit means no sanctification, no grace, no temple, no gifts of grace, no

real, redemptive life and work in the Church. It is the Holy Spirit who fills us and makes us go.

Gene Packwood blogs at GENERALities www.kiwirev.blogspot.ca and can be found on Facebook and Twitter (@kiwirev).

At the time of Christ's birth, while at night shepherds were tending their sheep, an angel appeared to them along with a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, saying: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth **peace** among those with whom he is pleased!*" (Luke 2:14)

But to whom is God's Peace given, and with whom is He pleased? God's peace came with His salvation, and those who receive it also have His Peace. It is the fruit of the Spirit, and by it we are identified as belonging to Christ. (Gal. 5:22-23)

In Romans we are reminded, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have *peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God." (Rom. 5:1-2)

The angels proclaimed God's Peace at the birth of His Son. When Jesus was ready to depart this earth, He comforted His disciples with these words: "Peace I

leave with you; my peace I give you. *I do not give to you as the world gives.* Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27)

Notice, Jesus did not promise peace through circumstances, for that peace comes by the ways of this world. But the peace He promised comes through faith. The promise of peace is to the ones who pray in all their circumstances, trusting God to take care of it all: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. *And the peace of God*, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:6-7)

Is there an exception to being unafraid if we are in Christ Jesus? God's Word tells us "No": "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." (2Tim. 1:7)

Therefore, if we are in Jesus Christ we have peace with God and with one another. For Christ reconciled us to God through His sacrifice and taught us to love. So what separates the believer from the unbeliever is faith in His blood. For we have peace through faith in His righteousness and not in our own. (Heb. 13:20-21)

When Jesus entered Jeru-

salem to lay down His life, He was met with similar words the angels proclaimed at His birth: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:38)

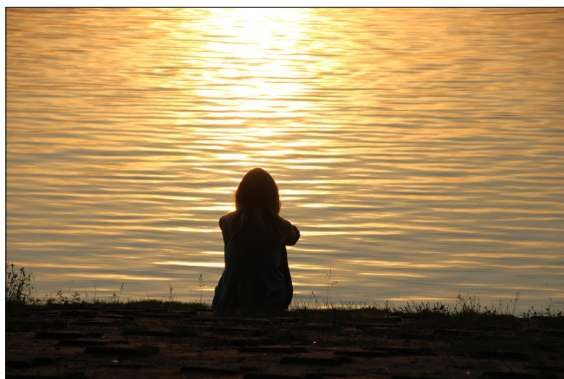
But not all accept His Peace of salvation; it is a choice: "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:41-42)

It is prophesized that the end will occur when people find peace not in Christ's salvation but embrace the peace of this world: "For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape." (1Thess. 5:3)

So let us remember, lasting peace can only be found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and knowing His Word. (Hos. 4:6, John 15)

*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have **peace**. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

Mary Ahlborn blogs at Doula Faith <https://doulafaith.org/>.



ADVENT EMBER DAYS...

Being the Wednesday, Friday and Saturday after the Third Sunday in Advent, are coming up December 15th, 17th and 18th. You'll find prayers and readings to help in the *BCP* pages 100-101 and 210, in the *BAS* page 395, and at <https://lectionary.anglican.ca>.

The Prayer Book calls them *Days of Solemn Prayer*, i.e. formal and dignified, not cheerful or smiling, characterized by deep sincerity, says Mr. Google's dictionary. Fair enough. The church has some serious needs.

It's a bit rough having to eschew smiling and cheerfulness that close to Christmas, I suppose; might cramp our Christmas run-up. But, it would be an opportunity to be seriously Advent-ish for a few days. You know, Adventurers in a little fasting and abstinence. Think of it as setting yourself up for an even sweeter Christmas and a thriving Church full of the Holy Spirit and Fire Jesus brings. It's in one of those wonderful 3:16 verses; Luke this time (check out the Matthew, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Timothy and 1 John versions, too).

RICH IN SPIRIT

As I wrote last time, I've been exploring *Benedictine Daily Prayer* of late. In particular, *A Short Breviary (Second Edition)*, Compiled and Edited by Maxwell E. Johnson, Oblate of Saint John's

Abbey and the Monks of Saint John's Abbey, Liturgical Press, 2015). Sundays include a passage from one of the Church Fathers. Last Sunday's was a piece from the *Letter of Barnabas*, which began like this: *This is the way of light: if you wish to reach the appointed place, watch over what you do. How are we to walk in this path? Love your Creator, fear your Maker, glorify your Redeemer. Be simple of heart and rich in spirit.* (p727)

Simple-hearted saints are the richest in Spirit.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. (2Cor. 8:9)

...where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Mt. 6:21)

All the Gifts and Fruits *...are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1Cor. 12:11)*

To each one. Individually. You. Me. All who are filled with the Spirit. Guaranteed.

It's really obvious in some of us. Not so obvious in others. Rich in spirit can be more or less obvious. The Holy Spirit apportions them with perfect wisdom across the whole spectrum of Christian worship, witness and service; from

our secret prayers (Mt.6:6) and almsgiving (Mt. 6:3-4), to letting our lights shine before others so they will see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven (Mt. 5:16).

Not a bad way to work Advent, methinks; love, fear (in other words, respect and obey) and glorify God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Be simple-hearted with God and neighbor, that is, anyone in need of our help or kindness, especially those within our households and families.

Life is complicated. Our responses don't have to be. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and the rest (Gal. 5:22-23) come best from forgiving simple-heartedness.

CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

And finally, all the sleeps get done and the big day comes: that which was conceived by the Holy Spirit is born (Mt. 1:20). Incarnation, on a Holy Night radiant with the brilliance of The One True Light (*BAS*, p273). Jesus, a Saviour who is Christ the LORD, arrives. And finally, we being regenerate, and made God's children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by the Holy Spirit (*BCP*, p104). So it has been, more or less, ever since. Day by day.

We just have to be simple-hearted enough to believe and receive the

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Words of Wisdom from J. I. Packer

Roger Spack

Some years ago, I was given The J. I. Packer Classic Collection, (The Navigators, 2010). At that time, I was very busy and I largely ignored the book until my wife suggested that I take a good look at it. I did, probably because I had some contact with the author about 20 years ago and really appreciated Dr. Jim Packer as a wise Christian leader and speaker.

I got to know Dr. Jim through the Essentials Movement that Anglican Renewal Ministries was part of at that time. When he died last year, many wrote about the incalculable influence he had within the church generally, and even outside the church. Dr. Jim was a great man of God, who lived his faith devoted to the Bible. He was author or co-author of over 70 Christian books and was the General Editor of the English Standard Version of the Bible when I first knew him.

I am now using his Classic Collection regularly as a devotional, and have received new insights into our faith. The book contains

Packer's teaching on various biblical subjects, as a good theologian might provide for his students. It is set up with 52 weeks' worth of daily "one page-bit" readings.

The subject for Friday of week 30 is, "God's Power and His Purposes," based on 2 Peter 1:3: "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness." In just 3 paragraphs, we gain impressive understanding of this subject. Dr. Jim writes so that, as much as possible, each sentence is packed with information (Packer-packed sentences!).

Packer says, "God shows himself as sovereign. He is working out his own purpose for each individual person, human or angelic, and for the history of the universe, over which he rules and which he directs toward its climax according to his eternal plan. God is exerting his power here and now in order, step by step, to bring about this final consummation."

He continues, "God has made his

purpose a matter of promise to us. The Bible is full of particular promises in which aspects of his purpose are spelled out as a basis for our responsive trust. Were it not so, you could hardly call our contact with God a personal relationship at all. Real personal relationships always involve personal commitments, and promises are the utterances that regulate such commitments. A promise is a word that reaches into the future, creating a bond of obligation on the part of the one who gives it and an expectation on the part of the one who receives it... That our mighty Creator should have bound himself to use his power in fulfilling promises to us — 'precious and very great promises' as Peter 1:4 puts it — is one of the wonders of biblical religion."

What a way to connect God's promises to the personal relationship God wants with each of us!

Roger Spack, an ARM board member, attends St. Michael and All Angels Anglican Church in Pierrefonds, QC.

CHAIR, continued

Gifts God offers. Then, as the divine simplicity grows, we become richer in spirit. Daily. Right where we are.

EVENTS

Things seem to be loosening up as I write (late October). LORD willing, I'll be joining folk from St

Barnabas Anglican and Victory Lutheran, Medicine Hat, for a few days on The Holy Spirit and You in mid-November. LORD willing also, an ARM Canada team will be traveling to Texas at the end of January to visit Bishop Fraser Lawton's parish for a week to do some teaching and ministry.

Please pray for the LORD's will to be done and that we will all be baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Please let us know if you would like to organize something in your area.

Gene+

Truth and Healing

The Very Rev. Dr. Donald P. Richmond

Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, boldly asserts that he is *the* way, *the* truth and *the* life (John 14:6, emphasis mine). These words are as essential today as when he first proclaimed them two thousand years ago. These brief words, relating the person and the proclamation of God in Christ, are absolutely crucial to health and to healing.

Knowing and growing in Jesus empowers healing. It is the person of Jesus Christ, who is *the only* way, which roots us in absolute truth that leads us to abundant life. If Jesus will “himself” sanctify us wholly, resulting in the soundness of our bodies, souls and spirits (1 Thess. 5:23), then we must carefully attend to the person and the proclamations of Jesus Christ himself. Person and proclamation – as well as his prescriptive medicines for socio-psycho-pneumatic health – go together.

In spite of my stating what appears to be the obvious, our churches and culture are increasingly challenging and contradicting the obvious. Absolute truth is denied. Absolute morality is decried. Some years ago, I preached on the Lectionary reading for the day, John 14:6. In doing so, I boldly asserted the words and ministry of Jesus as the *only* way, truth and life. Although my ser-

mons were regularly published online, this message was removed from the parish website.

Truth is a “trigger” to many people in our culture today, sadly including many who claim to be Christians. But without the truth about who Jesus is, and what Jesus does, the ministries of healing are entirely compromised. To get Jesus wrong is to get justification wrong, sanctification wrong and



glorification wrong. Proclaiming the whole Jesus “himself,” as 1 Thessalonians 5 tells us, is to assert healing for the whole person – body, soul and spirit. Truth matters!

We are living in what has been called an “emotive” culture, which asserts that if a person feels something, anything, the feeling must be rooted in reality. In short, for many people today, what we feel is what is real. This is, of course, devilish, dangerous and delusional. We may feel a great many things that are not in keeping with reality. We may feel that there is

no God, but that does not change the fact that there is a God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. We may feel that we are not sinners, but this does not change the primal fact that we are sinners and in need of healing. We may feel that the world is flat, but the world is not flat. There are multitudes of things that we feel that may not be real.

Emotions play an important role in our lives. They must be attended to. But we must attend to them with truth, with reality. Teaching people the facts about the person and work of Jesus, about his facts and not our fictions, is fundamental to healing. Jesus Christ, through Holy Writ, makes claims about the message, motives and means of his ministry (Matt. 4:23). Central to these claims is the truth about who Jesus is, what Jesus wants, and how Jesus will assist us in accomplishing his plan. He is faithful, and he will do it (1 Thess. 5:24). Healers must help people escape the emotionalism dominating our culture and (often) our churches.

God has provided the means by which we can *receive* the wholeness that we need. God, in Christ, came down to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Contrary to the self-help gurus of today, God does not suggest or sup-

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port any achievement-oriented enlightenment or enlivenment. "Heaven came down," as says the song by John W. Peterson.

Although we can encourage the works of God in our lives through the practice of spiritual disciplines (The Celebration of Discipline, Richard J. Foster), healing and wholeness and holiness and enlightenment are not in any way self-help initiatives. We receive. Period! Those of us who are engaged in Christian healing, need to understand and honor this priority.

We are living in a highly skeptical age and society. Almost everything is doubted – except, of course, doubt – and almost everything is questioned. With this in mind, how do we functionally confess any creed which asserts God as Father-Creator, Son as Redeemer, Spirit as Sanctifier? How do we say that we BELIEVE in God when the world militates against such an assertion? How does health and healing occur in an age of doubt?

There are no easy answers. I have myself repeatedly wrestled with the "where is God when....?" questions of life. In fact, at times, I have been plagued (dogged) by them. These questions consistently bark and howl for my attention (very much like my spoiled cat, but that is another story). Maybe you are wrestling with the

same issues.

Here are some lessons I have learned (and of which I must often remind myself).

1. How do we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land (Psalm 137:4)? The first answer to unwholesome doubt is found later in this text: Remember. We remember in two fundamental ways. First, we immerse ourselves in the written word and seek to live by the power of the Holy Spirit.



Word and Spirit in community help us remember. Second, we record and refresh ourselves by recollecting what God has *personally* done for us. God has taken action in us! How? But, importantly, also remember that in this life, for now, we are in a foreign land. This can be a challenge.

2. When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do (Psalm 11:3)? As with our text above, the answer is given later in the reading: The Lord is in heaven and He is in His holy temple. In other words, in spite of how things may appear, God is in charge. No matter what circum-

stances may prevail, no matter what we may feel, God rules. Jesus Christ is our ascended Lord who has sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts and lives. God is sovereign. Healing and hope depend upon this.

3. Lord, I do not attend to things too great for me (Psalm 131:1-2). The mysteries of iniquity and inequity, and so many other things, are beyond us. Although God does reveal "True Truth" (Francis Schaeffer), God does not reveal exhaustive truth. Humility is in order. We cannot see it all. We cannot understand it all. We cannot do it all. Many things are beyond us. Consequently, we nestle in God, hoping in him, as we read later in the text. The first and best tool for anyone engaging in healing ministry is triumphant and emphatic humility! We are, and must always remain, children.

4. Wrestle. Every person engaged in healing ministry must wrestle with God for answers. Not just revealed answers, such as were just hinted at above. Not just for right answers. Not for reasonable and realistic answers. All of these are important, but we must wrestle for personally relevant answers, rooted in humility and hope, that resonate within us.

We live in an age of doubt and rabid skepticism. God, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, gives us (we

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Prayers from the Word

Jane Jones

CONFESSION FOR SALVATION

Lord Jesus Christ, I believe that You are the Son of God who came in the flesh to destroy the works of the devil. You died on the cross for my sins and rose again from the dead. I now confess and repent of my sins and ask you to forgive me and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. I ask you to come into my life as Lord and Saviour. I believe that Your blood cleanses me now from all sins. Thank you for redeeming me, cleansing me, justifying me and sanctifying me by

Your precious blood. (Rom. 10:9)

FOR BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT

Lord, You say You give good gifts to Your children and I desire to walk in the fullness of all that You have for me. I ask You now to fill, and soak me in Your Spirit. I believe that You have a special heavenly language (tongues) for me, and I pray right now for the release of it. (Luke 11:13)

And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they

will speak in new tongues. (Mark 16:17)

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:4)

When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. (Acts 19:6)

Jane Jones is the ARM Prayer Coordinator. She lives in Okotoks, AB. This is an excerpt from her book, Prayers from the Word.

HEALING, continued

receive it) the means of faith by which healing and hope may be offered. The “proof” is in proclamation. But we must wrestle and we must weep.

How many times have we heard the phrase, “if it works, it works”? Doing what works, at least superficially considered, seems to be far superior to doing what does not work. Doing what does not work, again and again, is insane. Or is it, at least from an ethical and moral perspective? Are healing initiatives advanced by an “any means necessary” mindset? The sons of Sceva painfully discovered that what works often doesn’t really work (Acts 19:14-16). Here we see seven sons involved in healing ministry, and apparently enjoying some “success” at it. But

their way was not God’s way, and they paid a price for their insolence.

Healing ministry is about God’s word, “Wind,” will, works and ways being in dynamic correspondence. Jesus worked the works of God, and so must we. We must have the Holy Page and the Holy Paraclete, not pragmatic solutions to painful human conditions.

We return to our beginning. Satan is a murderer and a liar. He has been so, according to Jesus, from the beginning (John 8:44). The devil’s plans continue; he has not changed. He traffics in lies. As such, errors, lies, deceptions, and half-truths are what we as ministers of healing seek – in large part – to combat.

Truth matters! Although this dictum stands fast, “In essentials, Unity; in non-essentials, Liberty; in all things, Charity,” there are essentials upon which we must unwaveringly stand fast, firm, immovable. If we believe truly in Christ, in Christ-centered socio-psycho-pneumatic catharsis, if we believe that healing and hope and home are “in Christ,” then we must unswervingly assert Jesus Christ as *the* way, *the* truth and *the* life. True life, healing and wholeness are in Christ as the way of truth.

Donald P. Richmond, DD, a widely published author and illustrator, is an Anglican Priest serving in the USA.

Pentecost in the Pentateuch: An Honest Joe

Rev. Canon Gene Packwood

In the very beginning, as God was creating the heavens and the earth, when the earth was, as yet, without form and void and everything was still dark, “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:1-2). The Holy Spirit was there, hovering, moving, sweeping, brooding over it all; a Divine Wind bringing order out of chaos. Light out of darkness. Life from nothing.

This is the verse which prompted Canadian Doctor A. B. Simpson, founder of The Christian Missionary and Alliance Church, in The Holy Spirit, his excellent survey of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, to describe the Holy Spirit as “the Mother Heart of God” – an apt and fitting metaphor for the second person of the Holy Trinity who brooded over creation, brought it to birth and has nurtured it ever since. A lovely image.

When I think Pentecostal thoughts, they are most often to do with New Testament writings,

especially Luke’s gospel, Acts, what Jesus had say about the Holy Spirit in John’s gospel, and Paul’s letters. But the Holy Spirit in the second verse of the whole Bible is the same Holy Spirit as in the New Testament! Even then, he would have been doing what Jesus and Paul said he does: helping, comforting, counseling and bearing witness about Jesus who, according to the first few verses of John’s gospel, was there, too!

The same Holy Spirit who breathed life and order over the face of those creation waters filled the house at Pentecost with that mighty rushing wind.

In other words, there is Pentecost in the Pentateuch! *Pentateuch* is the five dollar Greek-based word for the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The whole history of salvation, of God’s dealings with humankind, is shot through with the Winds of the Holy Spirit. He is like a trade wind for Christians – warm, con-

stant, totally reliable and gets us to where The Father wants us to be so we can do what The Father wants us to do.

The next direct reference to the Holy Spirit in the Pentateuch comes in Genesis Chapter 4. After Joseph (of *The Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat* fame), had been through some very hard times – sold into slavery by his envious brothers, falsely accused of sexual assault by his employer’s wife, doing jail time for several years during which he accurately (in the power of the Holy Spirit exercising the gifts of words of knowledge and wisdom and of prophecy) interpreted some dreams for a couple of Pharaoh’s servants – he was eventually released from prison and brought before Pharaoh to interpret (also exercising Gifts of the Spirit) a couple of his dreams to do with a coming famine in Egypt.

Joseph then went on to deliver a prophetic word of wisdom, telling Pharaoh how to manage the crisis. Pharaoh was so impressed he said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?” (v38). A pagan king recognizes and acknowledges the Holy Spirit at work in Joseph. The result? Joseph gets a big promotion to Second in Command of Egypt.

Pharaoh’s question is still a good one. Can you and I find women

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PENTATEUCH, continued

and men today in whom is the Spirit of God? If so, how do we recognize them? Where are they, what do they look like, and how do they behave?

Joseph is a helpful model. Here are some things to consider and look for with Joseph's story in mind:

- They are often dreamers. (Gen. 37:5-11)
- People aren't necessarily going to think well of them; even family members. (Gen. 37:11)
- The LORD may well cause them to be successful. (Gen. 39:3, 39:22-23, 41:16)
- People are blessed through them. (Gen. 39:5-6, 39:22-23, 41:16)
- They maintain their virtue. (Gen. 39:7-9)
- They give Glory to God. (Gen. 40:8)
- They sometimes have to wait patiently for God to act. (Gen. 41:1)
- They are honest. They tell the truth even when it might be hard to hear. (Gen. 40:16-19)
- Joseph was obviously exceptionally gifted for dream interpretation, but he was also open and available for God to release other Gifts

of the Spirit through him, such as the Word of Wisdom he gave Pharaoh concerning how to manage the famine. We will also see such Spiritual Gifts operating in people we encounter in whom is the Spirit of God.

This Advent, as you wait for The LORD's appearing, watch for Honest Joe people like Joseph; people in whom is the Spirit God and who show it by their words and deeds.

So enjoy God's good creation this Advent and Christmas as you wait and watch for Jesus and his return. May it be a Honest to God new-creation Pentateuch-style Pentecostal time for you and your family.

Love in Jesus,
Gene+

Gene Packwood blogs at GENERALities www.kiwirev.blogspot.ca and can be found on Facebook and Twitter (@kiwirev).

Look for more of this series in an upcoming issue of *Taste and See...*

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* Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province

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To offer times of refreshing so God's people may be empowered by the Holy Spirit through teaching, equipping and fellowship in the love of Jesus. (Acts 3:19-21)

Our Vision:

Rediscovering the Holy Spirit's refreshing presence in our lives and in the church.

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ARM Canada believes that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord and the only way to the Father; it accepts the authority of Holy Scripture and affirms that the Holy Spirit empowers authentic worship and ministry. ARM Canada seeks to contribute towards spiritual renewal among Christians both personally and corporately, and to be of service to the Anglican Church.

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