

“Your kin-dom come:”

Embodying Advent Hope

Dwight and Linda Vogel

When we pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven,” what is it that we are praying? In a world where the few remaining kings and queens are the subject of exposés and have little political power, we have often substituted “your *kin-dom* come”—sensing that it is not a political kingdom to which Jesus referred, but rather to the whole family of God’s children on earth.

So when we are praying alone, or in such a large community that it does not detract from the community at prayer, we pray “Your kin-dom come...” as we remind ourselves that God’s kin-dom includes everyone—no exceptions! We are a part of the family of God—with all God’s children everywhere and in every time, even in the presence of hurricanes, wars and earthquakes.

For us, this petition reminds us that our faith is not about “pie in the sky, bye and bye.” It is faith in a living God who is present with us as the Holy Spirit. This living, present God offers us the gift of kin-dom living now as well as then. Because we have died to self, we have been raised in Christ and are no longer bound by the power of death. As baptized persons, raised to new life in Jesus Christ, we are called to do kin-dom work here and now—feeding the hungry, doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God. (Micah 6:8) So it is that we can truly sing the words of Julian of Norwich: “*And all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.*”

When we look at the petition “Your kin-dom come” through Advent lenses, we find ourselves reflecting on the meaning of the verb “come.”

Advent is all about *coming*: From “Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat” to “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus” and everything in

between! We bemoan the business culture's obsession with celebrating Christmas even before Halloween. But even a culture that elongates that celebration for two months before, rather than twelve days after, knows that it all centers on Christmas day. That's what all of the getting ready is for. By evoking the day itself in music and symbol, the culture seeks to "put us in the mood" for buying gifts to give and food to eat on the special day.

Ah, but what mood is that? On the one hand, there's the hurried, harried world of our culture, and on the other the quiet, tranquil world of our dreams, but the meaning of Advent is far removed from both.

In *Syncopated Grace*, we spoke of the depth dynamic of Advent as "*longing for things to be different.*" That has many different dimensions: the yearning for our lives to be different may be primary, but don't we also yearn for our churches to be different, for our nation to be different, for our world to be different? Aren't those Advent longings as well?

If we were to rewrite the memorial acclamation of the Great Thanksgiving with Advent themes, we might say: "Christ came, Christ comes, Christ will come again." If we listen to the Advent readings in the common lectionary, that rich meaning is clear. We prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ in the manger of Bethlehem; we prepare to receive Christ into our hearts in the here and now; we prepare for the time when "Christ will come in final victory and we feast at the heavenly banquet," as we pray in the Great Thanksgiving.

The temptation, enhanced both by popular evangelical pietism and the emphasis on self-centered getting in our culture, is on the personal. The shopping-mall-Santa's query to every child: "What do you want for Christmas?" is all too frequently heard in our churches as well.

The Wesleys were right in insisting that Christian living involves both personal and social holiness. In the months and years before Jesus

came, the longing for a Messiah had social and political overtones. If we really mean what we pray when we say “Your kin-dom come,” it will have social and political overtones, too.

If our worship reflects the depth dynamic of Advent, it will be concerned not only, or even primarily, with the way I see my world, but with the kin-dom for which we pray, the kin-dom the Holy Spirit leads us into envisioning and co-creating.

What happens when we put that longing for God’s kin-dom to come in the framework of Advent hope? The old theological tension between realized and future eschatology can’t be escaped.

- Are we praying for God’s kin-dom to come as in the future final consummation?
- Or are we asking that the kin-dom which is already “realized” as having come in Christ may come into our hearts and lives?
- Or are we committing ourselves to live in light of the kin-dom values we believe God is calling us to incarnate here and now, even as we work with God to bring that kind of world into reality?

Just as when we consider the eucharist and baptism, the temptation to simplify is dangerously reductionistic. For the Advent hope captured in this petition is all of these and more. Kin-dom living involves *both personal and social* holiness as well as *both realized and future* eschatology. The Advent hope dares to believe that God is with us in the here-and-now inviting us to be co-creators with the Holy Spirit of the kin-dom we pray will come. Our vision of what that world would be like is characterized by scripture and by the sacraments.

The current interest in spirituality, especially in its new age forms, can be very privatistic. “What do I want? Can some form of spirituality provide me with a sense of well-being, with inner joy and peace?” Let’s not underestimate that kind of longing in our culture. It is a giant step beyond materialism. And, if we are honest, we recognize it is exactly in that spirit that we often come to the

eucharist---for a sense of acceptance, well-being, inner joy and peace. That's not bad; it's good. *But it's not enough.*

When we view worship as world-making through Advent eyes, we recall that the longing for the Messiah to come did not include an expectation that he would turn the tables of the money-changers upside down, or pronounce judgment on the religious leaders, or end up on a cross, condemned as a political agitator. As we long for joy in our lives, we hear the disconcerting words that "for the joy that was set before him, Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame."

Rituals have the power to do good and these rituals are liberating; Rituals also have the power to do evil and these rituals are coercing and enslaving. Our Advent worship, just as our celebrations of baptism and eucharist, have been and can be practiced in both ways. Yet the Holy Spirit continues to break open the old wineskins to bring us new life in Jesus Christ. The deep yearning that we will recognize the presence of God even in the stable places of our lives is answered by the assurance that God is with us—Emmanuel. God's grace is the source of our Advent hope.

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Our task as persons who offer liturgical leadership in denominations and congregations is to create safe and hospitable space where persons will dare to be empowered to face their own stories and to bring them to the Gospel stories in ways that can offer new life in Jesus Christ to them, their faith communities and the world. This is what it means to understand liturgy as world-making. This advent journey can lead us toward God's gracious kin-dom.

In a chapter entitled "Liturgy Shaping Society,"¹ Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda of Seattle University affirms that "the eucharist reorients

¹ Chapter 10 in Dirk G. Lange and Dwight W. Vogel, eds., *Ordo: Bath, Word, Prayer, Table: A Liturgical Primer* (Akron: OSL Publications, 2006).

and forms its participants into a worldview that includes a love for the earthy and embodied conditions of life on Earth. That re-orientation leads the community to serve the well-being of those who are in need and to care for the Earth.”

We see that as part and parcel of our Advent hope—the nature of the kin-dom for which we pray and toward which we work, and the Advent theme of seeking to welcome the Word-made-flesh should make that earthy application clear to us.

The Advent hope leads us to face the dangerous but life-giving potential of worship to help us confront uncomfortable questions. In the depth dynamic of Advent, we hear the call to stand and act for liberation, peace, and justice.

We learned an important lesson about that call during the turbulent sixties when we were in graduate school in the Chicago area. Professor Murray Leiffer and his wife invited a number of us to their home one evening to talk with one of the African-American pastors who was a leader in the civil rights struggles of the day. He shared with us the challenges the movement faced and the challenges he faced, in a congregation where not all wanted to walk the difficult and dangerous road he walked. At the end of the evening, he looked around at us and said:

“If there are no values for which you’re willing to be dismissed from your church for holding and acting on, you’re not being faithful.” He paused, and then added: “And if you’re willing to go to the mat for everything, you’ll be ineffective. Choose wisely.”

Those words have stuck with us and guided our ministry. We’ve seen congregations torn apart by well-meaning and committed pastors with whose values we agree, but who take on issue after issue without pastoral concern. They leave many of those churches more entrenched in their old perspective than they found them, and it takes years for them to recover. Some of them never do. From the standpoint of political strategy, let alone pastoral and theological stewardship, their approach is disastrous.

If we know the Advent hope to be world-making, and we're committed to the kin-dom of peace, justice and liberation we believe Christ calls us to embody, how do we put that into practice? Here are our suggestions:

1. *Acknowledge that the world-making power of the liturgy is already there.* You don't have to create it. The language of the sacraments, of the psalms, of prayer and praise, confession and lament already contain subversive and world-changing themes. Let the tradition of the Church carry the weight instead of thinking you always have to put it in new baskets or new words.

2. Learn from the great preachers of the early church that, second only to scripture, the *words and actions of the liturgy* themselves are the primary references for our preaching, teaching and learning together. Look for the connections, quote the words, refer to the actions as embodied examples of the great themes of the faith. Each time you use them, you re-enforce the pathways, enabling the synapses of memory and significance to fire more readily.

3. *Use the language of prayer, invitation, and question more readily than that of judgment and command.* Great social problems do not have easy answers; indeed, they seldom have a single answer. Invite people to pray about them, and ask questions that help us think together about how to work with the Holy Spirit in bringing God's kin-dom into the here and now.

4. *Seek to be a bridge-builder,* recognizing the truth in the folk-wisdom that says "bridges get walked on from both ends." Being a bridge requires that we see multiple sides to every issue; that we learn to share our stories while inviting others to tell us theirs; we must answer questions with questions, and with our actions. We must always humbly acknowledge that "we, too, see through a glass dimly."

5. *Trust the Holy Spirit to be the chief actor.* That calls us to humility, recognizing that we have neither the wisdom, the courage, nor the power to create a world. That is God's

work. Our task is to pray and embody the Advent hope implicit in our prayer: "Your kin-dom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The key to the Advent hope is incarnation. The yearning for things to be different that is a mark of Advent is a yearning for incarnation--for the embodiment of the kin-dom as we pray: "come to us, abide with us, Emmanuel; be born in us today!!" For the Advent hope calls us to transformed living here and now in that kin-dom for which we pray.

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Worship as world-making involves both liberating and dangerous rituals. Two of the most dangerous and the most liberating are Baptism and Eucharist! There is no correlation between the power and the morality of ritual. Rituals have the power to do good and these rituals are liberating; Rituals also have the power to do evil and these rituals are coercing and enslaving. Baptism and eucharist have been and can be practiced in both ways.

Ritualization is a pathway that is embodied in

speech, body language, gesture, tone. Speech itself, Driver says, is a ritual that is both repeatable and improvisational. (28-30)

Ritualization makes new forms thru which expressive behavior can flow. Ritual connotes an already known, richly symbolic pattern of behavior and can be seen as a continuum:

Ritualizing -----established rituals
(i.e., rites-in-the-making)

“It is not as true to say that we human beings invented rituals as that rituals have invented us.” (31) As contexts and circumstances change, rituals also change or they risk becoming obsolete. One of the dangers we find in some congregations today is that the ‘communion liturgy’ is no longer connected in people’s minds to any of the biblical feeding stories and so it becomes a dead ritual (which may be one reason some congregations have a lower attendance on communion Sundays).

Driver talks about an experience that mirrors my own when we each visited the Peace Park in Hiroshima. It is a sobering, holy place. Made holy, he suggests, because something so unspeakably bad happened there. Made holy in a way that requires ritualization. The human response requires ritual.

He and I both felt guilty and horribly ashamed by what we Americans had done there. The Japanese we encountered there (even strangers) simply did not blame us—they were gracious and friendly. They blame “the war” or “the bomb” but not America or Americans and certainly not him or me.

Driver suggests that Hiroshima teaches us that:

- (1) The desire for ritual seems to grow most urgent when people feel a prolonged or acute absence of moral guidance.
- (2) Much of modern life, including its warfare, has turned away from ritual, pursuing instead the technologies of genes, machines, electrons, and particles."

Modernity's loss of ritual's moderating influence pertains not only to warfare but also to sex, food, the power to dominate, and violence. What we need today is not the abolition of rituals having to do with sex and power but their transformation or replacement so that newly conceived values in sexual ethics can create pathways along which more just and humane sexual behavior may go." (46)

A ritual is moral territory, (secular or religious) that has been staked out—that marks a boundary. (47)

"The territory' that rituals mark is both literal and metaphoric." i.e., "sacred space" (49) We often speak of it as "liminal space."

Established "rituals guide practitioners along known paths; rites-in-the-making create pathways in response to new moral obligations." (50)

Driver teaches us that the continuum between ritual and ritualizing offers continua between *limits/innovation* and between *formation/transformation*.

Established rituals and rites-in-the-making are complementary in human life.

" They constitute a polarity within which ritual practice moves.

- *When limit is given too great a value, there ritual becomes the servant of oppression.*
- *Where innovation is sought without regard for restraint, there ritual will lose itself in chaos and confusion."* (51)

Dwight

(pass out handout)

Foley and Anderson's book, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals*, shows how we create stories and live according to their narrative assumptions. (6)

Storytelling and ritualizing have the power to transform persons and communities of faith into signs of the presence of God. (ix)

As we move into the 21st century, our culture manifests:

- an absence of appropriate rituals to help people thru traumatic situations of change or loss that creates a palpable void.
- standard public rituals in churches that are often ceremonies without stories—disconnected from peoples' lives.
- standard rituals (e.g. around birth and death) that have radically new contexts and require rethinking.
- a splintering of our social structure so pervasive...we lack ways of telling stories that bind us together in community.
- difficulty finding ways to weave the divine narrative with our human stories because this presumes we know stories of our religious traditions--& we have an increasingly limited pool of metaphors and images to draw from.
- Many signs of fragmented ministry (x)

John Dominic Crossan explains that all stories are someplace on a continuum between myth and parable:

- Myth mediates between irreducible opposites; it seeks to resolve contradiction and paradox, thereby providing stability.
- Parable creates contradiction and irreconcilability; it challenges our expectations and inserts agents of change &/or disruption; parable creates contradiction in both narrative and ritual in order to reveal a truth that is otherwise hidden. (xi-xii)

We are in danger of being isolated in our life narrative whenever our storytelling conceals more than it reveals. An amazing dynamic exists between our lives and stories—each one shapes the other. They are the joint product of person and environment.

Understanding our story in relation to God's story is necessary for persons of faith. For persons of faith, storytelling is an act of hope. Our rituals become an expression of both who and whose we are. (10-12)

"If our narrative is out of touch with the parabolic, there is the real danger that we will be trapped in a dishonest dream." Parable is especially difficult in our time when so many seek simple "truths." One enemy of the parabolic is secret keeping. Secrets become "deceptively mythic." (15-17) Most secrets are toxic.

Linda

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Rituals are a basic way by which we construct reality and make meaning. (21) Rituals are essential for our survival. We employ rituals for establishing courtship, organizing the hunt, caring for offspring, and avoiding life-threatening conflicts. Rituals are essential and a powerful means for world-making that is both habitable and hospitable. (22)

Eucharist and baptism can be life-transforming rituals when they resonate with persons own life-stories and the Gospel in ways that challenge us to step toward God's kin-dom (which is almost always away from many of the values so prevalent in our culture). When we domesticate these liturgies to avoid upsetting folks or creating conflict, they become death-delivering rituals.

Our task as persons who offer liturgical leadership in denominations and congregations is to create safe and hospitable space where persons will dare to be empowered to face their own stories and to bring them to the Gospel stories in ways that can offer new life in Jesus Christ to them, their faith communities and the world. This is what it means to understand liturgy as world-making. This advent journey can lead us toward God's gracious kin-dom.

BREAK AND MID-MORNING PRAYER

[Embodying Advent hope

Dwight:

In a chapter of the Lathrop festschrift entitled "Liturgy Shaping Society,"² Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda of Seattle University asks:

"In the current context, . . . how can Christian liturgy play a role in reshaping society toward life-ways that allow Earth to flourish and all people to have the necessities for life with dignity?"

She points to Gordon Lathrop's "life-savoring hope" that liturgy may "profoundly re-orient us toward earth-honoring, justice-making worldviews and ways of life." In the face of suffering and tragedy---hurricanes and earthquakes on the one hand, war, oppression and injustice on the other---how can worship be world-shaping?

For Moe-Lobeda, the sacraments are "God's ways of getting through to us in at least two ways. They open our eyes to reality, even when reality may seem too painful to face. And they bring us faith, hope, and love, the ingredients of agency for responding to reality in ways that reflect and serve God's mission to heal and liberate the world. The sacraments "open our eyes" and bring us the capacity to respond as God's "hands and heart."ⁱ

She insists that the question – "Can liturgy reshape society?" – is answered initially: Yes, because in Word and sacrament, "the living God who is creating, saving, and sustaining the world comes to, into, and through us. The God who is liberating and healing from sin, both individual and structural, becomes one with us in this sacrament. That in-breaking Word of God changes the world. *Society is not exempt from that transforming love*".

Linda:

² Chapter 10 in Dirk G. Lange and Dwight W. Vogel, eds., *Bath, Word, Prayer, Table: A Liturgical Primer* (Akron: OSL Publications, in process).

Yet, she recognizes that while the claim that the eucharist shapes how we live is life-giving, [it is also] offensive, because it reveals the opposite. Those of us whose lives are marked with economic privilege regularly and sincerely celebrate the eucharist. Listen to her indictment: "Yet our lives are not regularly transformed toward social and ecological justice. We do not love neighbor by resisting economic arrangements that buy our luxury at the price of others' blood."ⁱⁱ Instead, we share "generously" from our wealth, fail to ponder its connections to others' impoverishment or to Earth's distress, and carry on with life as usual. History deepens the offense. Christians who celebrated the eucharist also practiced chattel slavery, plundered Africa, and killed entire peoples in the Americas. What was and is missing or distorted in our practice of the eucharist, that we can so readily and blindly deal death?"ⁱⁱⁱ End quote.

Sri Lankan theologian, Tissa Bala-su-RI-ya puts it well: "Why is it that in spite of hundreds of thousands of eucharistic celebrations, Christians...who proclaim eucharistic love and sharing deprive the poor people of the world of food, capital, employment, and even land... inequities grow... [and] the rich live like Divës in the Gospel story?"^{iv}

Moe-Lobeda spells it out: "He is talking about caring, compassionate Christians like you and me who unwittingly benefit from and comply with economic arrangements that enrich some, including many of us, by impoverishing many and consuming Earth's natural capital. The transfer of wealth from the impoverished nations to the rich is mind-boggling.

For many of the poor, notes a Salvadoran Jesuit priest, "poverty means death."^v How is it possible that a people gathered and fed by God to spread the truth of God's healing, liberating, justice-making love could go forth from the eucharist into a "life as usual" that contributes, albeit unintentionally, to life-shattering poverty?"

Dwight:

She sharpens the question: *Given our role in the global economic and environmental story, how are we to receive, perceive and practice the world-changing gift of Christ's body and blood such that we*

repent, change direction,^{vi} and take our place as God's "rusty tools"^{vii} in God's work to save this generous and broken planet?^{viii}

She finds in the eucharist [=] "a school for living and for morally empowering seeing: seeing what is, what could be, and the power and presence of God "fill[ing] all things."^{ix} She argues that through the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, God offers morally empowering vision for reshaping society, and that we receive this gift when we practice the sacrament both as communion (*koinonia*) and as eucharist (*eucharistia*) in their fullest senses."

With her, we need to ask: "To what will the sacrament open our eyes if, through it, God is enabling Her people to see differently so that they may live differently, "reoriented" (the term is Lathrop's) toward the healing of the world? What vision will evoke the wisdom and courage to struggle toward society re-shaped along contours of compassion, economic justice, and sustainability?"

She identifies three realities entailed in providing "a morally empowering vision: "First, the reality of what is happening in our world; second, the reality of what could be (understood as more just and ecologically sound ways of being human), and third, the reality of God's power and presence coursing through all of creation, "even the tiniest leaf."^x Together, these three constitute what [Moe-Lobeda] refer[s] to as the "critical mystical vision," that is the gift of the eucharist. We believe they are also critical to the meaning of our prayer: Your kin-dom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Without them Advent hope becomes superficial.

Linda:

First in her list is

"Seeing What Is: Where Evil Masquerades as Good"

Theologian Douglas John Hall underscores the peril of failed vision. He notes that the prevalent vision in the modern period was the inevitable "emergence of a better world within history... manifest in daily demonstrations of progress..." He writes: "So long as the ideology of progress could seem to be sustained by experience, it did not require so great an effort to *close ones eyes to the evils that were present*, always, even at the height of the age of progress... In these decades [the vision of progress] could be maintained only at the expense of *shutting ones eyes* to experience altogether. The non-recognition and minimalization of evil, which was part of this enterprise from the outset, has assumed the proportions of a way of life."^{xi} Modern Christianity, Hall asserts, has *"shut its eyes to the data of despair."*

And, Moe-Lobeda insists with ringing, stinging conviction: "we recognize that " the realities – of ecocide and economic violence –are brutal. They are the "data of despair," and they invite it. From acknowledging realities like these, we flee. Not seeing them – moral blindness – is far more bearable. Blindness failing, numbness sets in. Where numbness thaws, despair makes sense. We retreat into denial and defensiveness, privatized morality, or overwhelmed exhaustion. Holy outrage and lament are stillborn, and we hide our hopelessness regarding systemic evil under the comforting cloak of virtue in private life." [This chapter is well-worth the price of the whole book!]

Dwight:

Second, our prayer "Your kin-dom come," our celebrations of the eucharist, and our Advent hope must include *Seeing What Could Be*.

Cynthia insists that “Eucharistic vision, if it reveals the devastating impact of economic life as we know it – on the Earth itself and on neighbors who are dispossessed by our possession – is perilous unless simultaneously that vision reveals another reality. It is the vast array of more just and sustainable alternatives already in existence or in the making.

As Gordon Lathrop insists: “The church is charged with seeing that “the oppressive structures [truly surrounding us]... are not eternal; they should be challenged and changed.”^{xii} In baptism we are born into an alternative reality, nay, the true reality...an everyday life in which we resist the principalities and powers that thwart abundant life for all.

When crises come, we need to pray: “Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire---through water inundations and homeless people and suffering AIDS victims, and call us—not only to meet the needs of those suffering at the moment, but to see *what could be* if look at the systems that make people vulnerable.”

The second question in the Baptismal Covenant makes it clear: “Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?” In the new members’ classes in the parish, I would point out that social holiness—concern for social issues—has been part and parcel of the Methodist movement since the time of the Wesleys. We would look at the Social Principles and I would observe that if you didn’t think the church had any business dealing with these issues, you were joining the wrong denomination.

Methodists don’t always agree about what is right, but that we *ought* to be talking about such things has been a given. The problem, of course, is that we have trouble articulating those principles and then living into them. Not only our tradition, but our sacramental worship calls us to the task of world-making.

In the eucharist, Cynthia insists, “we are led to live into that true reality of challenge and change.” She issues a clarion call: “The church can bring to this work of crafting alternatives the wisdom offered by millennia of teaching and learning ways of economic life that cohere with God’s will of abundant life for all, as that will and way are revealed in Jesus Christ and the faith tradition in which he lived, died, and rose. In Word [and Sacrament] we [are] in fact, . . . placed into alternative relationships... relationships of “living justly with neighbor.”^{xiii} We are charged with perceiving and then embodying those relationships! We are charged with seeing what it looks like to live according to the right relations that God has given us in the gracious gift of justification. What a splendid charge: it is to shape our daily lives, our searching the scriptures, our prayer, our building of church structures, our evangelism and stewardship.” End quote.

Gordon Lathrop would have us believe that the eucharist, set with Word and prayer, may thus “reorient” our vision. The meal with Word may “heal our eyes,” drawing participants to “see a new order in the cosmos itself.” That order includes human life as God would have us live it – earth-honoring and justice-making ways of being human.

Linda:

Third, our prayer “Your kin-dom come,” our celebrations of the eucharist, and our Advent hope must include *Seeing the Power and Presence of God Filling All Things*.^{xiv}

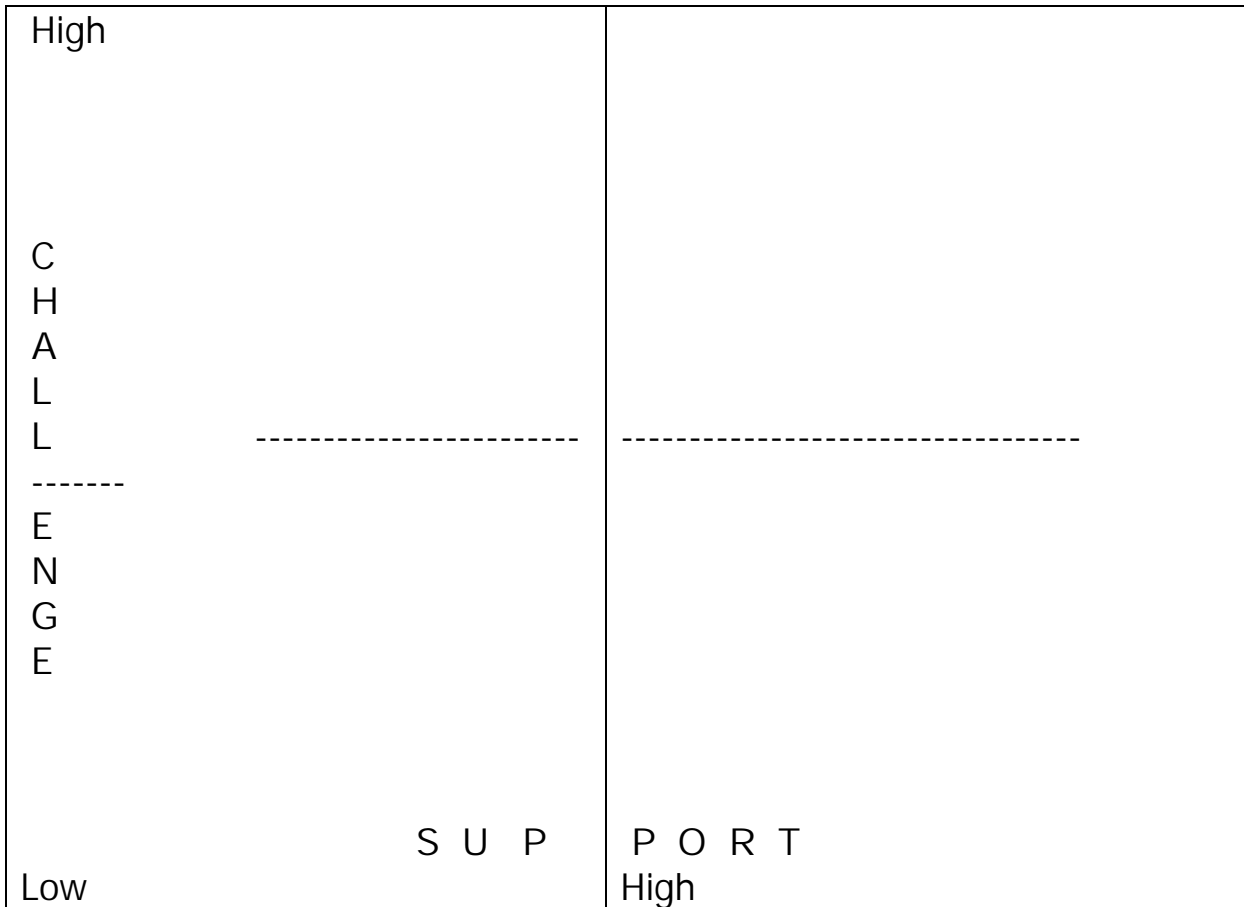
In memorable language and imagery Cynthia Moe-Lobeda recognizes that [quote] “the forces lined up against that re-oriented way of life are indescribably powerful and agile. Human agency alone has not the strength to confront them. And so God provides. Encounter with Christ in the elements of Earth – water, wine, grain – assure this: we face the powers of death and destruction neither alone nor by our power alone. Humans are sensual creatures.

We know through visible, taste-able, touchable signs, through our senses. In the meal, we taste, see, touch, smell that the Creator and Liberator of all that is, is with and *within* this good creation, we human creatures included. Perhaps it is God's sage response to the human mammal's pernicious proclivity to create God in our own image: 'Remember me and receive me in *the elements of Earth, in grain eaten and wine taken into your bodies* am I present. Touching, tasting, smelling, seeing them, know that I am with you.'

For Moe-Lobeda, this third form of seeing offers us "ever-greater glimpses of the life-giving, life-saving, life-sustaining, life-savoring Mystery that we so lamely call God, indwelling flesh and earth and working toward abundant life for all. Only at great peril," she insists, "will we face the powers of structural sin without an awareness of this Mystery indwelling us and all the created world."

She weaves these three themes together when she writes: "Christian living in the United States today has at its heart the task of holding together these three (what is, what could be, and the indwelling Mystery) in order to discern where and how God is working to heal Her splendid creation, how the church may serve that mission, and wherein lies its moral-spiritual power to do so. That this critical mystical vision is inevitably and monumentally fallible and partial, and that we gravitate toward sacralizing our version of it, is no excuse to evade it as both gift and obligation. " [End quote]

How can we, as pastors and teachers, liturgical leaders and preachers, offer this "world turned upside down" in ways that invite congregations to embrace it, to change the way they live and spend their money? I believe Larry Daloz helps us help folks examine their assumptions, to "let air under those assumptions" so that they feel safe enough to consider changing.



[on newsprint ahead of time:

Eucharist = School for Seeing

Communion (koinonia) and Thanksgiving (eucharistia)

Dwight:

The Advent hope we express as we pray and seek to live out our prayer, "Your kin-dom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" resonates with Cynthia Moie-Lobeda's conviction that the two basic components of the Eucharist as a *School for Seeing* are *Communion and Thanksgiving*, or to use the Greek: *koinonia* and *eucharistia*.

There are good reasons for the fact that through the centuries Christians "have referred to the sacrament of Christ's body and blood as communion, the English translation of the Latin *communio*, which in turn translates the Greek *koinonia* of the New Testament.

According to Paul, what we know as the eucharist and as communion is just that, *koinonia*. New Testament scholar Barbara Rossing notes that "one of the earliest and most powerful Christian proclamations of *koinonia*" is the body and blood of Christ shared by the community gathered in Christ's name:^{xv} "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing (*koinonia*) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing (*koinonia*) in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16)."

When we say and hear these words at the time of the breaking of the bread in every eucharist, the synapses fire, the path is reinforced, and latent recognition is patterned ready to be harvested by the Holy Spirit when the time is right.

Moe-Lobeda reminds us that "in the Hellenistic world, *koinonia* originally referred to financial partnership, partnership in work, friendship with a willingness to share material possessions, mutually shared obligation, and other relationships of sharing. In the Second Testament and other Christian writings of the first two centuries, the word means "to share with someone in something." As a noun, *koinonia* retains this meaning and is used to express other dimensions of the communion created by God in Jesus Christ and the Spirit."

[koinonia list on newsprint ahead of time]

Linda:

Cynthia notes that the concept of *koinonia* was rich and varied for the early church.

First, it referred to the communion and union believers had with Christ, and their participation in Christ by the Holy Spirit, both in the present and, in a more fully realized way, in the future.^{xvi}

A second layer of meaning involved communion among believers, manifest as sharing in sufferings of ... others, or being companions of those who are suffering.^{xvii}

A third meaning referred to this communion among believers, as it was manifested in economic sharing. Paul writes:

“When I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone” (Phil. 4: 15). The *Didache* instructs “You shall not turn away the needy, but shall share everything with your brother or sister, and shall not say that it is your own. For if you are sharers in the imperishable, how much more in perishable things (*Didache* 4.8).^{xviii}

A fourth dimension was the communion and union with Christ and among believers experienced in the Eucharist.^{xix}

And finally, there is communion with the Holy Spirit.^{xx}

She cautions us against reducing the sacrament to a single dimension. “To live the eucharist only as a mystical moment with Christ, or simply as a sign and promise of forgiveness, or even as a shared moment of union between the community and Christ,” she insists, “ is a tragic reduction having monumental, even life and death implications. The communion with Christ that is experienced in the Lord’s supper, also is a communion of being with and being for^{xxi} those who are in need by becoming Christ’s love for them and receiving Christ’s love from them or from others.”^{xxii}

She turns to the term ‘solidarity’ to signify this sacramental practice of being with and for others. For her, the sacrament of the body and blood of Jesus Christ inherently entails the sacrament of solidarity^{xxiii} as it “re-members” the body of Christ on Earth.”

So Gordon Lathrop speaks of “eucharistic economics.”^{xxiv} “The eucharist,” Lathrop writes, “makes an economic proposal, its house-ordering idea for house-hold Earth.”^{xxv} Thus, for Moe-Lobeda, “the eucharist reorients and forms its participants into a worldview that includes a love for the earthy and embodied conditions of life on Earth. That re-orientation leads the community to serve the well-being of those who are in need and to care for the Earth.”

We see that as part and parcel of our Advent hope—the nature of the kin-dom for which we pray and toward which we work, and the Advent theme of seeking to welcome the Word-made-flesh should make that earthy application clear to us.

Dwight:

In his book *Torture and Eucharist*,^{xxvi} William Cavanaugh writes that in the eucharist a body is formed, the body of Christ, a body of “social practices, the true body of Christ capable of resisting... worldly power” where that power bred injustice. It was a body of “evangelical defiance, defiance of humanly constructed systems that thwart God’s intent of life abundant for all.” In the faith communities of Chile, as in the first Christian communities, the eucharist entailed solidarity among and with those suffering persecution and torture; it re-membered the body of Christ.

We must beware of sanitizing the concept of solidarity and thus, depleting it of its content. Tissa Balasuriya claims that the eucharist is “in captivity” and will be freed to serve God’s work of justice-making and peace-making only when the church:

- “1) seeks truly to see from perspectives of people historically and contemporarily on the underside of colonizing power,
- 2) takes “into account what is happening to these peoples and the causes of their worsening situation,”
- 3) repents for the role that Christianity has played in varied forms of oppression, and
- 4) “makes a fundamental choice to struggle against contemporary forms of oppression.”^{xxvii xxviii}

When we are able to hold these components together, solidarity can have transformative power.

Moe-Lobeda also calls our attention the role of thanksgiving or *eucharistia* in this eucharistic school of seeing. As we know, that is why we call it eucharist in the first place. But she notes that *what we give thanks for* matters.

It is all too easy for us to be like the Pharisee in the temple, giving thanks that we are not like others. To thank God for all our material blessings as if that proves God loves us more than others is a dreadful travesty of the meaning of eucharist. So she asks these pointed questions:

Are the people gathered around the table giving thanks to God for saving me for eternal life after death?

-for saving all believers for eternal life after death?

Or are we giving thanks for the entirety of God in God's fullness as creator, savior, and sustainer of all that God is creating?

That is, do we offer gratitude to God for creating this magnificent world;

for saving it from sin in all forms, be they systemic or individual;

and for creating, gathering, and sending the church to "participate in God's mission?"^{xxix}

Do we give thanks that God in Christ has freed us from . . .

"being turned in on oneself" as persons and as societies?

Is our thanksgiving for the *life* of Jesus – including his willingness to challenge the powers of exclusion, violence, and domination of his day – and our call to follow his way as well as for his death and resurrection?

Are we thanking God for having revealed Godself in earth's elements and creatures, for being so intimately present with us, that we may touch, see, taste the incarnate God?

Do we truly give thanks to God for the incarnation, for giving – in Word, bread, wine, and water, through the power of the Holy Spirit – the living Christ to abide in us?

Do we sing out in gratitude that God has called human creatures to be God's hands and heart on earth... that "through faith in Christ and through our eating, we... have Christ abiding in us with [Christ's] might, power, strength, righteousness, and wisdom"?"^{xxx}

Linda:

Unsettling questions, indeed! Further, she notes, in addition to the fact that *what we give thanks for matters; who is giving thanks also matters*.

In the current crisis of inequity, argues theologian Sallie McFague, “who we are should be understood in terms of how much we consume of the planet’s bounty, both in terms of its health and of justice to other inhabitants.”^{xxx1}

Thus, Moe-Lobeda insists: “ Given *who we are* in that sense, giving thanks has a less-recognized sister: communal lament.”^{xxxii} “

Our former colleague and Christian ethicist Emilie Townes claims that, for people living in covenant relationship with God, social healing begins with communal lament. A loss of lament means “also a loss of genuine covenant interaction with God.”^{xxxiii} Where the assembly praises God but does not lament, “covenant is a practice of denial and pretense.”^{xxxiv} Communal lament, as Townes explains it, is the assembly crying out in distress to the God in whom it trusts. It is a cry of sorrow by the people gathered, a cry of grief and repentance and a plea for help in the midst of social affliction. Deep and sincere “communal lament... names problems, seeks justice, and hopes for God’s deliverance.” Lament . . . she says, forms people; it requires them to give name and words to suffering.

So Moe-Lobeda concludes: “The crucified and risen Christ present in bread and wine in the gathered community reminds the people why they can lament without drowning in despair: In the sacrament of the supper, we taste and we see that the only power that can heal this beautiful and broken world is present with, among, and within the stuff of earth. That saving presence is incarnate – abides in the earthy and earthly – and flows instinctively to life’s broken places, there nurturing power for reshaping society in the contours of abundant life for all. . . .

The sacrament of the body and blood of Christ offers morally empowering vision for reshaping society where the eucharist is communion (*koinonia*) in the fullest sense of the word – profound solidarity – and where communion is eucharist (thanksgiving) in all its plentitude.”[End quote]

Dwight:

In the work of Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, we find resonance with our own perspective. The key to the Advent hope is incarnation. The yearning for things to be different that is a mark of Advent is a yearning for incarnation---for the embodiment of the kin-dom for which we pray.

Let hymn 196 express that truth to us and for us:

“Come Thou Long Expected Jesus”

Linda: [exercise]

Do you still have that piece of paper from the first session? If you do, take it out again. If not, you can do it again.

On the left side were three or four descriptors of the world as you experience it.

On the right side were three or four descriptors of the world you believe God is calling us toward.

Take a few minutes to reflect on how these descriptors are, or could be, reflected in your worship experiences. What can you do to enable yourself and others to recognize worship as world-making?

* * * *

Talk with one or two other persons about your questions or conclusions.

* * * *

Share briefly, insights with all of us.

Wrapping it Up (Concluding Comments)

Dwight:

So we return to where we began with the question: “How can we understand worship to be world-making? We remember Walter Brueggemann’s affirmation that

Worship entails a willing suspension of disbelief, a re-entering of a definitional memory, and a readiness to submit to the memory as identity-bestowing³

What have we learned as we have thought together about that question?

Linda:

We’ve recognized that liturgical time is paschal time, that worship as world-making has to do with the world as we come to understand it in and through Jesus Christ.

Dwight:

We’ve seen how a Lenten perspective on world-making calls us to leave some things behind, to find nourishment along the way, to see all that we take along in a new way, and to be open to the new life in Jesus Christ.

Linda:

We’ve seen how the-way-our-brain-works helps us understand the power of liturgy to form the world we see, and are called to help create.

Dwight:

We’ve identified ritual as a basic way human beings have of world-making, and seen the value both of traditional rites and rites-in-the-making.

³ *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 1 , p. 778

Linda:

We've appropriated the unrecognized potential of ordinary time to help us sculpt the world for which we pray.

Dwight:

The key to the Advent hope is incarnation. The yearning for things to be different that is a mark of Advent is a yearning for incarnation--for the embodiment of the kin-dom for which we pray.

Linda:

Amen.

i Martin Luther.

ii This claim, I make not lightly, but with deep grief. It has been articulated by countless voices. Hear, for example, Bishop Bernardino Mandlate of the Methodist Church of Mozambique in a presentation to the United Nations PrepCom for the World Summit on Social Development Plus Ten, New York, February, 1999. The international debt of the most indebted nations, he declared "is covered with the blood of African children. African children die so that North American children may overeat." So too spoke a Mexican strawberry picker addressing a delegation of U.S. elected officials that I led on a fact-finding delegation to Mexico: "Our children die of hunger because our land which ought grow food for them, is used by international companies to produce strawberries for your tables."

iii Sri Lankan theologian, Tissa Balassuriya, asks a similar question: "Why is it that in spite of hundreds of thousands of eucharistic celebrations, Christians ...who proclaim eucharistic love and sharing deprive the poor people of the world of food, capital, employment, and even land...inequities grow,...[and] the rich live like Dives in the Gospel story" (xi-xii)? His concern and response resonate strikingly with Luther's. He responds that in "hundreds and thousands of masses"...the dynamism flowing from the Lord's Supper has been suffocated by ritual formalism and conformity to the prevailing power system" (xii). He attributes this to 'a domestication of the sacraments within the colonial system,' (5) claiming that the eucharist has been distorted by the "powerful official controllers of the eucharistic its" into a "very supple instrument for the domestication of believers," (3) an efficacious way of personal sanctification..." (3).

iv Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), xi-xii.

v Jesuit priest, Jon Sobrino, in conversation.

vi The New Testament Greek word for "repent" in fact means "to turn around and walk the other way."

vii Luther, *W.A.*, 2, 413, 27, cited by George W. Forell, *Faith Active in Love* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1954), 92.

viii “We” and “us” are loaded words, fraught with ambiguity both evident and concealed. In this essay, the words refer very generally to Christians of the United States who have more than enough material wealth and have income sufficient to enable concerns beyond survival. Space precludes elaborating the problems with the terms and with a specified referent this broad and heterogeneous. For more coverage, see Moe-Lobeda, *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 22003), chapter 1.

ix Martin Luther, “The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ--Against the Fanatics,” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 321.

x Martin Luther, “That These Words of Christ, ‘This is My Body,’ etc. Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics,” *LW* 37:57.

xi Douglas John Hall, *Lighten Our Darkness: Toward an Indigenous Theology of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 113.

xii Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2003), 111.

xiii Martin Luther, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” *LW* 31:297.

xiv Martin Luther, “The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ--Against the Fanatics,” in Lull, 321.

xv Barbara Rossing, “Models of *Koinonia* in the New Testament and Early Church,” in *The Church as Communion* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 199?), 71. The following two paragraphs are derived from this article by Rossing. Any mistakes in my interpretation of her fine work are my fault alone and should not be attributed to her.

xvi See, for example, 1 Cor. 1:9, and 1 Jn.1:3 and 6.

xvii See, for example, Phil.1:7; Heb. 10:33.

xviii See also 161 Jn. 1:3,6; Rom.15:26-27; Rom. 12:13; Phil: 4:15-16; 1 Cor.9:11; 2 Cor. 9:13.

xix See, for example, 1 Cor.10:16ff.

xx See, for example, Phil. 2:1.

xxi The words are Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s.

xxii Wayne Meeks, in his seminal inquiry into the morality of Christian communities of the first two centuries, concludes that the moral sentiments and behaviors of early Christian communities were shaped by their practices which, in turn, expressed or taught those values and mores within the faith communities and to outside observers. Baptism, for example, frequently is referenced in

early writings as a reminder to people of how they are to “walk” in the world. The Lord’s Supper was practiced in such a way that it refigured awareness of self in relationship, proscribed ways of living that shamed the have-nots, and rendered people concerned for and committed to the those who were in need (96-98). (Meeks presupposes Alasdair MacIntyre’s theory--itself grounded in Aristotelian notions of “practice” forming virtue--that social practices shape moral inclinations. Meeks, however, emphasizes the social dimension of this dynamic over the individual.) While evidence is insufficient to determine “how much baptism really changed behavior of people who were baptized, the evidence “does at least help us to understand the horizons of expectation that baptism established” (92). See Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993). Other recent research argues that, indeed, the distinguishing feature of early Christian communities was their profoundly counter-cultural practices of caring for the sick, poor, persecuted, and otherwise vulnerable people, not only within the Christian community but also outside its boundaries. See, for example, Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997). Early Christian communities were enormously varied in practice and belief. What seems relatively constant were the convictions that: 1) the moral life --“to walk in the way “worthy of the God who has called you” (I Thes. 2:12) – was to behave in accord with the character and action of God as revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ; 2) character and behavior was a character and behavior of solidarity with those who were in profound need, including material need; and 3) the sacramental community understood itself to be giving social form to the body of Christ, re-membering the body of Christ on Earth. The communion and union with Christ and among believers that was experienced in the Lord’s supper, also was a communion of profound solidarity – taking on the burden of the others’ suffering and need, be it material or otherwise.

xxiii I first use this term and develop it somewhat in *Healing a Broken World*, ch.5.

xxiv The similarity in the eucharistic economic ethics of Luther and of Lathrop is, of course, only partial. For example, while both see eucharist as forming the assembly into people who love and express that love in meeting the needs of people who are impoverished, Lathrop’s claim that this happens through re-oriented worldview is not shared by Luther (at least explicitly), and Luther’s theology of the indwelling Christ as the love with which Christians love neighbor is not integral to Lathrop’s eucharistic economics. Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 148.

^{xxv} Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 152.

xxvi William Cavanaugh, *Torture and the Eucharist* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 279. Cavanaugh’s theorizing of eucharist as power for resistance is similar to mine, but distinct in many ways, one of which is the locus of dominating power that he describes as confronted by the eucharist and solidarity. His work discusses power in the form of the repressive state, and mine at power in the form of unaccountable global economic players. My agreement with Cavanaugh’s weaving together of solidarity and eucharist (and with his political ecclesiology) does not signal agreement with all of his christological presuppositions.

xxvii Lutheran diaconal ministers from around the world, gathered in South Africa, iterate the last of these: “We acknowledge with gratitude the many kinds of diaconal work that the Church has carried out through the centuries, and which necessarily continues in our own day. This work is now challenged to move toward more prophetic forms of *diakonia*. Inspired by Jesus and the prophets who confronted those in power and called for changes in unjust structures and practices,

we pray that God may empower us to help transform all that leads to human greed, violence, injustice, and exclusion.” “While *diakonia* begins as unconditional service to the neighbor in need, it leads inevitably to social change that restores, reforms and transforms.” “An Epistle from the LWF Global Consultation on Diakonia,” 7 November, 2002: 1.

xxviii The claim made in this essay, and made by Gordon Lathrop and Luther before him--that the eucharist may change people toward a form of neighbor love that leads to earth care and to heeding the needs of the vulnerable--has at least one great fault. It is the problem of classic virtue ethics when not accompanied by social value based ethics: Character shaped into the form of love, even at its best, is not adequate to lead people into lives that actually ameliorate poverty because it does not account for its systemic causes. These “contents” of solidarity go far in resolving that problem. They are one try at a necessary complement to the ethic of character/virtue.

xxix *Constitutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, 4.01–02.

xxx Martin Luther, “Commentary on the Gospel of John”, *LW* 23:146.

xxxi Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 128.

xxxii This paragraph regarding lament is taken from Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church: For the Life of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 68-9. See it for more extensive inquiry into the role of lament in the live of the church.

xxxiii Townes, 24, drawing upon the ideas of Walter Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (1986): 60.

xxxiv *Ibid.*