

Introductory

I don't usually do this study on the OT reading because I always preach from the Gospel text on Sunday morning. I will preach from the Gospel text this Sunday, which is short, and which I have thoroughly studied several times, with large doses from the Genesis text. Creation is an important thing, greatly misunderstood and not understood by Christians.

To say that the biblical teaching about creation is "under attack" is to understate; we are at war with the forces of evil on this and many other fronts. The people in the pew wander into this battle far more often than we do, and for them it's almost overwhelming. They believe what they believe, and they want to have the tools to fight for those beliefs.

I'm not big into apologetics, but I perceive that I constantly make apologia for this and other teaching of Christianity from the pulpit. At the end of the day, the Word of God goes out and some become Christians and others don't, and you aren't going to convince them otherwise. But being able to better explain and defend the Faith is a good and useful thing.

The LCMS is one of the few church bodies who confess to a literal six day creation. While that used to be a fundamental and universally held teaching of the Church, most have fallen away from it, and as is the way of things, those people have progressed to attacking us for our holding on to beliefs like this. It all began, in modern times, with Charles Darwin.

Darwin was born into a prominent English family that included several pastors, and he married a devout Christian woman, who desperately wanted him to believe in God, and he sincerely wanted to believe in God, but he found that he could not. But Atheism was not popular in Victorian England, so he kept that – and his work at first – under his hat.

He took an interest in bugs and the like and famously hitched a ride on *H.M.S. Beagle*, and ended up on the Galapagos Islands, where he made observations. Those observations were the genesis of what would evolve over the years to modern evolutionary theory, which has little – and by that, I mean nothing – to do with science and much to do with Atheism.

Evolution is bad science, if it's science at all, and it isn't, and I say that often from the pulpit. Probably I will say it again on Sunday. There are plenty of books by Ken Hamm and the like, and people seem to get a lot out of the Creation Museum in Kentucky, and I look at all those books on this subject on the shelf – there's a lot of good stuff out there.

At first, Rome fought against “Modernism,” but they have all but given up the fight. Evolution is taught at every level of RC education, and the further you go, the worse it gets, and I’m not sure you can even find a creationist at places like Notre Dame. The Little Man famously rejected that God used a “magic wand” to create, and he likes the Big Bang.

Case in point. To think that an explosion produced this complex and orderly universe is to go against every scientific observation ever made about explosions. See cities like Hiroshima and Nagasaki and any major German city after The War. Take a firecracker – if they are legal in your state – and blow something up, and what do you see?

At our last LCMS Convention, I was surprised and pleased that we were so bold as to proclaim that God created all this in six literal days. I was surprised that I was surprised, but it’s just so unusual to hear people actually saying that. But I guess those are my people, and they believe like I believe, and we had declared the same in 1932 and 1973.

The resolution also encourages pastors to study reports from the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations, particularly *Creation in Biblical Perspective* (1970), *Together with All Creatures: Caring for God’s Living Earth* (2010) and *All things Hold Together in Christ: The Intersection of Science and Christian Theology* (2015).

Finally, the resolution instructs Pastors to focus on teaching the parishioners they serve, especially youth, about these issues. It asks pastors to equip their people to give a respectful Christian witness about the biblical teaching regarding creation and the intersection of faith and science. We should be doing all those things, all the time.

Other issues with Creation come up, our people are constantly bombarded with them, and they need to be addressed. One such issue is the “Two Creation Accounts” fallacy. There is one creation account, and we find it in the first two chapters of Genesis. That idea is novel as well, and it does not come from a diligent study of the text and its context.

Assuming that Moses was the author of Genesis, and that he was educated in the Egyptian Court – neither of those assumptions is held by the World – the creation account in Genesis is just what you would expect. By that, I mean that an Egypt-educated man like Moses would have written just what we read. It’s not often the way we do it, but we aren’t Moses.

First, in the first chapter, Moses writes a very orderly overall account of how God created the universe – including man “male and female” in six days. Then, in the second chapter, his focus shifts to the most important and noteworthy of God’s creation, man. He gives us a more detailed and complete account that compliments and does not contradict the first.

Another fallacy put forth by The World is the age of the earth, and for that we can also thank Charles Darwin. Bishop Ussher famously counted backwards and determined that

they earth was about 10,000 years old. I'm not sure if all of them, but at least some versions of the KJV Bible have the date being written about in italics at the bottom of the page.

As his "theory" – it's not a very good theory, it's a bad theory – developed, thinking people realized that the evolution they put forth would take a long time. How long? Surely longer than 10,000 years. We need at least 100,000 years, and then more, and more, and then Carl Sagan's famous "billions and billions of years," none of it driven by science.

Talk about the tail wagging the dog! So we are treated to Carbon dating, which doesn't even come close to dating things that far back – a few thousand years at most – and layers caused by The Great Flood being put forth as geological ages, and it's all out there in the books and on the Internet, and I'm not sure how much apologetics to do from the pulpit.

I went to FW at a time when you didn't have to learn Hebrew – I think you have to now – but I learned Hebrew. I don't use the Hebrew much, but have what we would call a "working knowledge" of the language, and there are a lot of great resources out there, and places like bible hub allow a person like me to do a lot of work in a short amount of time.

When my wife's co-worker asks an OT question, I can go to bible hub and read the Hebrew, and I can go down to the basement stacks and pull out K-D – it's probably online – and understand what he's saying. When I teach Genesis – like I was doing before The Thing – I study Genesis in the original, and I have studied Genesis quite a bit over the years.

I usually do a lot of cut and paste of the original Greek text, but I don't plan on doing as much of that for this Genesis study. It's a long reading, and would require a lot of cutting and pasting, and Microsoft Word knows when you have pasted Hebrew, and it starts typing backwards, and it's pretty easy to get pretty boggled up – Word is easily confused.

Textual Notes

1 - 2. Go ahead and teach your hearers the Latin term "ex nihilo." It means "out of nothing," and it's what was there before God began His work of Creation. The first order of Creation was to make "the heavens and the earth," what we live on and what's up there in the sky. Darkness, juxtaposed to light, reigned. The "Spirit" of God is the Holy Spirit.

The scientific Law of Conservation of Mass says that matter can be neither created nor destroyed. That means that we can't create atoms, and we can't destroy atoms. Atoms can, and they do all the time, change in form, often in nature. The planet is living, and it's changing all the time, but matter is neither created or destroyed in those changes.

What do the pencil, a lump of coal, and the diamond all have in common? They are all made up mostly or completely of Carbon atoms. Nature did not create more atoms, but it did take Carbon atoms and change them to another form, most dramatically from coal to diamond. Nature changed those atoms, but it did not create new or destroy old ones.

Sometimes atoms are deliberately changed at the hand of man, who is very creative, but we cannot, and we do not create or destroy them. I will often refer to atoms as God's building blocks, and He uses them like a child uses Legos or Lincoln Logs to build different things. Legos are a big deal right now, and the children will understand the concept.

3. We note throughout that the means of creation is the Word of God. God said, "let there be light," and it was. The light stands in stark contrast to the "darkness" right before this, and light is fundamental to life; life needs light, and without light nothing lives that lives. This is obvious in the plant world. We are currently in the process of the spring weed kill.

Our front sidewalk is made up of flat stones with spaces in between. You put pebbles in the gaps, and weed seeds find their way in, so we cover it in black plastic. When we take it off in a month, there will be no living things where the plastic covered, nor will there be any weeds on the patio or any place we want to cover in black plastic and cut off life.

Animals need light as well. In the way of things, most animals eat plants, which need light, and after the fall some will eat other animals. As is the case with humans, the animals need sunlight to form Vitamin D, essential to strong bone formation. Most animals also need light – obviously – to be able to see things, and some don't need much light to do that.

4. So it is that God proclaims light to be "good," a pronouncement He will make at the end of each of the first five days of creation. At that time, He distinguished light from darkness, and we note here that the Sun will not be created until the fourth day. When the Sun is later created, it will be set over the planet to "separate the light from the darkness."

5. Before that, here on the first day, we have "day" and "night" and we have "evening and morning, one day," and it's why we teach a six day creation. The Hebrew word "יום – day" means just that; a twenty-four hour day. There is a Hebrew word for what we might call "epoch" or "period," but that's not the word used here. It's יום, and it means day.

There is a thing called "light," which is related but different from what we might call the "source" of that light. The simplest example of that is a light bulb producing light, or the Sun producing light. We are not told the source of the light on the first three days before the creation of the Sun, and Moses apparently must think it not particularly important.

Either that, or he doesn't bother to state the obvious; the light on the first three days came from somewhere other than the Sun. When they do road construction or play baseball after dark, they have lights. The lights of the construction workers are portable and temporary. Whatever light source God used for the first three days; it was like that.

In addition, if we can take a peek at the fourth day, we see that the Sun is created as part of a unit, the unit we know as the Solar System. We call it a “system” because it’s made up of many pieces that all work together, and if you take away one piece – you can’t do that. The Sun is at the center of the System, and the Church did not fight against that.

The planets that orbit the sun are held in that orbit by the Sun’s gravity. Moons that circle the various planets are held by that planet’s gravity. Our moon, for example, is kept in its orbit by earth’s gravity. You can go on from there and get as detailed as you want when talking about the “system,” but that will suffice to make the point in a sermon.

I suppose you could go from there and ask how the earth was held in place before the Sun, and I would say that either the earth stood still, or God made it to orbit without the Sun. Remember, He is God, and He can do what He will, and when you create something for the first time, you probably do things like that as well, even though you aren’t God.

The Sun is the source of all energy on the earth. Plants use photosynthesis to convert sunlight into energy, and animals eat plants that provide them with energy, and animals eat other animals to get energy, and man eats them all. Solar energy obviously comes from the Sun, but not so obvious so do all the “fossil fuels” that power so much of civilization.

That organic matter – plants and animals – got energy from the Sun, then died and were buried deep underground – probably in the flood (see Rehwinkel’s book by that name) – and many years later that stored energy had its origin in the Sun. Wind power also has its origins in the Sun, which heats up the planet and causes movement: winds and currents.

Those horizontal winds and vertical currents transport things around the planet, and without it things could not live. We know about the oxygen – carbon dioxide cycle, plants give off the first, which humans and animals need to live, and we give off the latter, which plants need to live. Winds and currents are what circulate the living Earth’s atmosphere.

6 – 8. On the Second Day, God created the “רָקִיעַ – firmament” (fr. Latin) or “expanse,” a word that occurs several times in the OT, mostly in the first chapter of Genesis. As we read the description here, the word means what we would call the Earth’s atmosphere, the space between the waters above and the waters below, which are separated by it.

At this time, there was no dry land, so Earth was covered by water. Even now, there is water in the sky in the form of clouds, and water on the surface of the Earth in oceans, lakes, and other bodies of water. There is also a lot of water below the surface of the Earth, something a lot of people don’t know, or don’t understand very well. Explain it to them.

9 – 10. On the Third Day, God created land, and geology tells us *how* He did that. He made some of the earth rise into mountains, and gravity made water run down to form rivers and

streams, and erosion shaped the face of the planet. Earth was created as a living, breathing, changing thing; it changes all the time, and sometimes we can observe that change.

You can observe it at Kilauea National Park on the Big Island, which has been erupting since the early eighties, destroying everything in its path, creating new land as it rolls into the sea and cools. Plate Tectonics teaches that the huge plates of land are constantly on the move, pushing, pulling, running into one another sometimes causing earthquakes.

11 – 13. The Third Day was a busy day, with God directing the Earth to bring forth life in the form of vegetation and trees. Up to this point, God has been preparing the planet to support life, creating the “atmosphere” including oxygen and carbon dioxide, water, and light, the basics needed by every living thing. Now it’s time to create living things.

The vegetation and trees he creates are extremely self-sustainable, and the planet has been sustaining itself for a long time. There are many different kinds of plants, and they all have seeds, which become the genesis of the next generation. The flora and fauna interact in a sustainable manner, and different ecosystems have different plant interaction.

14 – 19. On the Fourth Day God calls for various “מָאוֹר – lights” in the sky “to separate day from night” and also for “signs to mark seasons...days and years.” As opposed to whatever light source God was using before this, here He sets in motion the system that will run itself, powered by the Sun’s energy, and it just keeps going, and going, and going.

There is a certain predictability built into creation. The Sun will always rise and set, and the phone seems to know exactly when that will be at any given time and place. The seasons as well are predictable, even if the weather isn’t, and even the Natural Man knows how to tell by things like the Winter and Summer Solstices when a year has passed.

It is God who creates what we know as the seven-day week, which has become very much ingrained in our Western Culture. It’s one of many Christian things that non-westerners have adopted without even thinking much about it. That predictability lends a certain order to life, and we can expect what comes with the new season because we’ve seen it before.

20 – 23. On the Fifth Day God spoke and the waters brought forth things that swim, and birds began to fly “above the earth across the firmament of heaven,” God directed them to multiply and fill the earth, and He gave reproduction to make that happen and to produce the next generation, much like plants have reproduction built in to do the same.

If you look at fish flesh, it’s different from bird flesh, which is different from the flesh of land animals. Fish are good swimmers, and as Jared Diamond says, don’t have to spend their entire lives fighting gravity, and they draw oxygen from water (H²O). Birds are built to fly, engineered like modern aircraft to fight against gravity and win.

We note once again the progression of creation; the birds and fish need sunlight, oxygen, and water to live, and they need something to eat. Whereas plants draw nutrition from the ground, animals feed themselves on plants and smaller animals. I don't know of any fish that eats birds, but fish seem to be at the bottom of the meat food chain.

The eagles have come back to the Quad Cities, and you can see them hanging out over the Mississippi and other rivers waiting for a fish for lunch. You can also see them eating roadkill. Other birds as well eat fish and smaller land animals. On the farm, hawks, eagles, and owls eat a lot of flesh, but are usually eaten themselves only by man.

All this talk about eating animals makes me remind myself that there was no killing before sin. With the fall into sin, the killing begins, and there's a lot of it. We are surrounded by woods on all sides, and it's a jungle out there. When the Bible talks about a time when animals will not be killing and eating each other, it's talking about a return to Paradise.

24 – 25. Finally, and we continue to see the pecking order shape up, on the Sixth Day God created the great land animals, including the dinosaurs. What happened to the dinosaurs? They became extinct, probably gradually, as is the manner of animals. Humans are remarkably adaptive, but animals are creatures of habit – instinct – and can't change.

One aspect of Science – it's the way the human brain is built – is to organize things by categorizing them. Moses categorizes animals into three categories; things that swim, things that fly, and thing that walk about on dry ground. The Ancients – particularly Aristotle – liked to categorize, and modern science has made categorization into a science.

This comes into play, for example, with Jonah and “the whale” or “the big fish.” The critics want to tell us how whales are mammals, and the Bible is stupid and full of contradictions, which is what they do. The thing that swallowed Jonah – probably a Sperm whale – was by biblical categorizing a living thing that swims in the water.

26 - 27. Now that we have sun, oxygen, and water, and now that we have plants and vegetation, now that we have fish and birds, including Salmon filets and chicken wings, now that we have bacon and ribeye, the creation is ready for man. We hear the persons of the Trinity speaking to one another “let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

It's that being in the “image and likeness” of God that makes man not only a higher creation than the rest, but in a different category altogether. This is important in a time when we are being told that we are only one of many animals that have to share the planet, and the rest of the animals are probably better than us, at least in terms of morality.

Of course, the rest of them know nothing of morality, the first and primary thing that makes us unique among all living creatures. The dog is amoral. We call him “bad dog,” but we don't mean it. Nor do we mean it when we rub his neck and say, “good dog.” When animals kill, they don't do it out of hatred or evil, but only because it's hungry – or not.

Man alone thinks in theological terms; Natural Knowledge tells us not only that some things are right and others are wrong, but also that there is a divine who rewards good and punishes evil. Man invents religion, including things like holy places, places of sacrifice, holy men, holy days and seasons, and varied and often elaborate ritual for that religion.

From the time of first consciousness, he knows he's going to die, and since the Natural Man knows about the afterlife, religion becomes an attempt to spend the afterlife in a good place, not a bad one. Their religions are all different and all the same; the way to avoid hell – whatever you call it, to obtain heaven – or Valhalla, is to do good and avoid evil.

Animals do none of those things. Because we are created in the image of God, we create new things, imitating God, and man is creating new things all the time. It's like God put all this stuff on the earth, and then turned man loose with his brain uniquely built to use reason and logic and look at him go. Lookee, lookee, he even learned how to fly!

We create things to improve our lives, to adapt to new circumstances, to cross rivers and oceans, to build buildings, and new scientific discoveries lead to new technology like the microchip, the Internet and the dish. As per Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, when we get the other things sorted, we can create works of art: paintings, writings, music, and the like.

For the good, the bad, and the ugly, we possess emotions. Cats can do drama, but not even they hold a candle to the humans. We take the food God has places here for us and cook it, using fire, water, air and earth, and fermentation. We combine foods and spices to create good-tasting, delicious recipes, and we share them. You ever watch an animal eat?

28. God then told man to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth,” and they sort of did that. Rehwinkel thinks there were a lot more people on the earth at the time of the Flood than most people think. After most of humanity was killed in that Flood, Noah and his were told to do it again, and we have. But there's still room for more.

We have fringe elements on both ends of the “birth control” spectrum. Like a lot of things, birth control is not a new thing. Nature sets some limitations on a nursing mother, and there are other ways humans have always figured out to prevent conception. What's different these days is that birth control is more reliable and more available.

Nobody ever asked me about using birth control, or not, and the RC ban on it is almost universally flouted or ignored, and not only in America. That seems to make it a matter between husband and wife, who do talk about it – to each other. Legalism creeps in at both ends of the spectrum, and we have fringe elements on both ends in our church body.

The one end holds that all birth control is always sinful, and it is my understanding that the LCMS used to teach that, back during the Golden Age of Lutheran Phariseism. The other

end of the heretical spectrum says that we have enough people on the planet and having even one is sinful. I have begun fielding questions I Adult Bible Class about “legalism.”

In addition to that, man is to “כָּבַשׁ – subdue” the earth. The word means to gain and have control over something. It occurs thirteen more times in the NT, mostly in connection with victory in warfare where the winner conquers and has control of the loser. The other word is “to dominate – הָרָה” and both are in the Imperative (Command) mode.

This is not the way much of the World sees the relationship between man and the animals, and that’s a new thing. The idea that humans and animals are essentially equal morally and qualitatively comes from the Christian West. You don’t see it a lot in the rest of the world, but our children are hammered with it every waking minute of every day.

We assume that animals were the same animals before the fall as we see them now, after the fall, except that they were not eating each other. To exercise control over them meant on a very basic level that animals were put here for man and not the other way around. I suppose Adam could have ridden a horse, but a horse would never ride Adam.

Adam could – and apparently tried – find a certain companionship with a dog, but he would have trained the dog, and not the other way around. If manual labor was needed, it would be Adam, the “Gentleman Farmer,” who used the horse or mule. You could even see him putting up fences and the like to control animals – you don’t want the cows in the house.

After the fall, things got harder, and wild animals are part of the “sweat of your brow” by means of which man will scratch out a living. Where do we start with man’s battle to control the animals? He can use his brain and opposable thumb to make and use weapons to use against wild animals. After the Flood he has permission to eat what he kills.

It’s one of several reasons why from very early on man has domesticated animals. Not all animals are easily domesticated. Jared Diamond talks about that in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. One of many examples he gives is of the Horse, which is easily domesticated, and the Zebra, which is almost impossible to control, and they like to bite and hang on.

Animals like sheep, pigs, cows, and goats are well suited to domestication for the purpose of things like wool, milk, and meat. Over the years, man has bred out aggressive behavior and bred in compliance in animals. Diamond opines that sheep used to be not so docile as they are now, but the aggressive and non-compliant were bred out long ago.

As for wild animals, as Americans moved into new areas of the country, they hunted and ate what they killed, and they killed off or drove off predators like wolves, bears, and big cats. Those animals are slowly making their way back into civilization, and as they do, the results are predictable, and for many Americans it’s the humans who should leave.

I was at the local McDonalds a few years ago the day after the Cubs won the World Series – you don’t have to ask “which World Series” – and I mentioned deer control out at the ranch. A complete stranger overheard and said, “the deer were there before you,” and I was speechless. To clarify, my fellow human was taking the side of the animal over me.

29 – 30. In Paradise, everybody was a vegan, including Adam and Eve. If that makes you uncomfortable, then wait until the Flood. After that you can eat meat. But there was no killing or dying in paradise, and both science and the Bible make a distinction between plant life and animal life. Simple observation reveals the same.

Holy Trinity – June 11, 2017
Going and Baptizing – Matthew 28: 16-20

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
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Introductory

This text is not appointed to be read in the one-year TLH lectionary. The reading ther for Trinity Sunday is John 3: 1-15. In LW, the Matthew 28 text before us is appointed to be read in the One-Year Series. It is also appointed for Year A of the three-year series. LSB as well has the John 3 text appointed for Holy Trinity in the One Year Series.

This might be a good time to invite the hearer to stop and look around at where we are in the Church’s year. Beginning with the Advent Season, we have been following the life and work of Jesus in a mostly chronological order. His Ascension, forty days after the Resurrection, marks the end of His walking about on the earth as a man.

Pentecost, ten days after that, is generally considered to be the beginning of the Christian Church, the baton being passed on from Jesus to His Apostles and the others, who will continue on proclaiming Him in His absence. They will also write it down, so that we can continue to proclaim the same thing they did.

In doing this, I would maybe begin by talking in general terms about calendars; they are cyclical, they include special days, and there is significance to those special days. We are in the midst of several special days on the secular calendar, Memorial Day, Mother’s Day, and Father’s Day. Then talk about the Church Calendar.

You have probably heard that Trinity Sunday is the only Sunday on the calendar that observes and celebrates a doctrine. That statement, while not untrue, does not really fully

articulate the importance of the day. We are talking about the Holy Trinity, the One that Jesus calls “The One True God,” as opposed to all the other “false” gods.

On a very fundamental level, we should begin this season of focus on the teachings of Jesus by teaching about The Triune God as revealed most fully in Jesus. This being the teaching season, it ought to be noted that we should not hold to a sharp dividing line between proclamation and teaching. Preaching and teaching are the same thing.

Good preaching should proclaim the Gospel, and it should also teach about the Gospel and other things. Good Christian teaching includes proclamation of the Gospel, and in nine years in the classroom of Lutheran High Schools, I was able to proclaim the Gospel daily in the classroom, as well as at daily chapel services.

It’s a good thing when people come out of church and say, “I learned something today,” or even better, “I have been hearing that text (the Baptism of Jesus) all my life, and for the first time, I finally understand what it means.” The Bible is a book of inexhaustible knowledge because God can never be fully known. But we try.

This Sunday we should proclaim the Good News that the One True God is a loving and merciful God, and that out of that love He has created, redeemed, and sanctified us. We should also teach the Trinitarian God. The Creed is a good place to start. Any of them will do, but they are most familiar with the Apostles’ Creed, so maybe start there.

If you read the Athanasian Creed (p. 319), which we read in its entirety on Trinity Sunday, then reference it. Go ahead and quote at will from *Luther’s Small Catechism*, and if you can do that from memory, all the better. It assures people that you aren’t expecting something from the little ones that you aren’t willing or able to do yourself.

Most people don’t really know what a creed is, and since they say one in church every Sunday, they would like to know, so tell them. I know just enough Spanish to know that “creo” (“credo” in Latin) is “I believe,” which happen to be the first two words of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.

Tell them that these are “trinitarian” creeds and why, explain where they came from, their historical context and import, that adherence to the doctrine they proclaim has historically distinguished “Christian” church bodies from those that aren’t, that not all churches believe in the concept of creed and why.

Tell them why we *do* believe in the concept of creeds and why, and other things that you well know and that their knowing would give to them a better understanding of their religion. It would not hurt for people to work on their vocabulary. Christians should understand and be able to explain the concept of One God, Three Persons.

Talk about each of the three persons, explaining who they are and what they do. Such a thing outlines well. Speaking of the Person of Christ, He has Two Natures of Christ; the Divine Nature and the Human Nature. Use those words and explain to your hearers what those words mean, then use it. That's how we build vocabulary.

Note that words like "person" and "nature" are old words, to Christians have a very specific meaning, and that those meanings have not much to do with the way that we use those words outside of the church these days. What would the guy on the street think if you talked to him about the "person" of Jesus?

And what if you talked about the two "natures" of Jesus? That's why we have to learn them as vocabulary words and understand what they mean, so to better understand our God, Who will never be completely understandable. That's a concept that also has to be taught; many think we have to understand everything about God and expect to.

The following is framed, and has always hung in my study:

The Lutheran Church has never been and can never be the home of the theology of cultured gentlemen whose marks are their manicured hands and their spotless clothes, who give the appearance of having gently put down their tea cups. But their marks are those of one who has wrestled with God and whose soul shows the bruises of theological combat. For men arrayed in soft clothing, who will not do battle for or with the Lord of hosts have not place in God's Church. Those who cry out for the legendary position of the golden middle are more Aristotelian than Christian. For the cry to take up sides for God's sake has been heralded by Moses, Joshua, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Jesus. For who here can gainsay that noble cloud of witnesses. David P. Scaer

Matthew goes right from the bribing of the guards, shortly after the Resurrection, to Galilee, to a mountain. If this incident indeed takes place immediately before the Ascension, then that means Matthew entirely left out the forty days between the Resurrection and that event, while Luke and John have a lot to say about them.

This pericope is well-known as The Great Commission, and these particular words of Jesus have been, from Post-WWII until now, very much a focal point of how we see ourselves as a church body. When this pericope has been proclaimed and taught, it has been proclaimed and taught as the Law.

Where are these churches getting the sign that says, "You Are Now Entering the Mission

Field?” The Law has its purpose, but don’t forget the Gospel. Go and tell people about Jesus (Law), but don’t forget to listen to the Good News that He has for you, and leave your people with “peace” ringing in their ear on the way out.

Textual Notes

16. Matthew calls them “Οἱ δὲ ἑνδεκα μαθηταὶ - The eleven disciples.” He does not call them “apostles,” but when Matthew talks about “the twelve” and then, after the departure of Judas “the eleven,” he’s talking about the Apostles, those who have been and will be “sent” out to continue the work of Jesus.

Those eleven “ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν – went into Galilee,” and then more specifically, to “εἰς τὸ ὄρος οὗ ἐτάξατο αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς – to the mountain that Jesus had designated to them.” Galilee is mentioned frequently in all four gospels, and Jesus spent a lot of time there. Matthew mentions it three times in this last chapter.

On Easter Sunday morning (7), at the tomb, we have the “angel” instructing the women to tell the men that Jesus has risen, and that He is going “to Galilee; there you will see him.” As the women are going to do that, Jesus Himself meets them and tells them to “go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

We know from Luke and John that the men did not follow these very explicit instructions, at least not at first. We also know from John that they reason why they were in a room with all the openings closed and locked was “fear of the Jews.” The picture that emerges is that of men who are petrified with fear, unable to take any sort of action.

They are unable even to leave the sanctuary of that room, where they were at least a full week after the first appearance of Jesus to them, men who at some point are able to screw up the courage – or at least overcome their fears enough – to leave that room and make their way to Galilee. That’s where we find them now.

The verb “τάσσω – directed,” is an aorist middle indicative which bespeaks orderliness, organization, and of somebody with a plan. The mountain to which they were directed is not named but apparently was known to them, because they went to it, and no hesitancy or uncertainty is indicated. Luke tells us that the Ascension was from Bethany.

I spent a little bit of time looking in books and on the Internet for some inkling of which mountain in Galilee – there are several – but nobody seems to know, and since Matthew doesn’t tell us, it’s probably not that important. It was a mountain, and it was in Galilee, and that will suffice. Bethany is at the foot of Olives, and it happened sometime after this.

17. When they saw Jesus, the men went all oxymoron, “προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίσταναν – they worshipped Him; but they doubted.” Both verbs are aorist active, simple past action. The first verb is προσκυνέω, literally, “towards to kiss,” a bending of the knee to the ground as if to kiss the ground.

It is the typical word and posture for one who is revering another. In the NT, it is most often used when one is revering as God. The second verb is διστάζω, literally “two standing,” which pretty much says it all. This would be the person who is straddling both sides of the fence, a precarious position, not to mention uncomfortable.

Observing these humans in the time of Jesus, we note that they are a lot like the humans in our own time. The disciples of Jesus continue to worship Him on Sunday morning, while at the same time continuing to have doubts and confusion about their lives and their religion. Sometimes things come up that try the most solid faith.

On the one hand, they had heard Him proclaim no less than three times that He was going to Jerusalem, and that the end of that trip would be His resurrection from the dead, and there He was, standing in front of them – again. On the other hand, was this really Jesus, and was He really standing there, or was this all just a dream.

It’s something that has troubled Christians to this day. Several heresies arose which in many and various ways questioned whether this all took place the way that orthodox Christianity says they took place. And how many Christians go to the Sacrament not understanding or doubting the presence of Jesus there.

18. These worshipping and sometimes doubting men are whom He has chosen and tasked to carry on His work when He is gone. Having come to that place, “Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς – Jesus preached to them, saying ‘all authority in heaven and on the earth has been given to Me.’”

The verb “λαλέω” here means to proclaim, and “ἐξουσία – authority.” In the NT, all authority, including earthly authority (Romans 13) finds its genesis and source in God. As we move through the life of Jesus, we see that in the Kingdom of the Right, authority begins with the Father, and is given to the Son.

Jesus makes no bones about it; The Son has things like power, glory, and authority from The Father. Now He hands that same authority over to these men. What follows is an articulation of just what kind of authority has been passed on, and how they are to exercise it. Now that they are dead, that authority has been passed down to us.

We see beginnings of this transfer of authority in Matthew 9 and 10, where the Apostles are “sent out” and do and say the same things as Jesus does and says. Jesus spoke of it in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17, and we see it in John 20, where He gives the Apostles the authority to “bind and loose” sins.

But before they die, these men – and others – write it down; under inspiration of God, they write much of the NT. They see their writings as the very Word of God, and so do we. And if they are the very Word of God, then those words are without error or contradiction or anything of the sort, and they are.

19. Now the command from Him to them, “πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη – going therefore, and teach all nations.” The second verb is not the normal word for “teach.” It is the verb form of the cognate noun “disciple,” and it means a very thorough teaching and training leading to a deeper understanding of the Faith.

The word for “nations” is ἔθνη. It is the etymological root of “ethnic,” and includes all races, the final indication of something that Jesus has been hammering on for His entire ministry, that the Gentiles (non-Jews) are included in the Kingdom. Or to put it another way, as we sing, “red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. is the one who said that Sunday morning is the most segregated time in America. No, it isn't. Historically, the Christian church came into a world that was very conscious of ethnicity. Besides the Jewish view of Gentiles, both the Romans and the Greeks considered all others to be Barbarians; different and inferior.

If one asks if the basis of Jew/Gentile conflict in the time of Jesus was religious or racial, one would have to answer both. It was also political. There was a special animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews considered the Samaritans heretics with impure blood lines, and the Samaritans thought more highly of themselves than that.

For Jesus to speak as He does here about “ἔθνη – ethnic groups” was anathema to His countrymen – recall why the home folks in Nazareth were going to toss Him off a cliff; because He said that the Kingdom was for Gentiles too – and a breath of fresh air to everybody else.

Though certain of them had entered through the crack of exception into the OT Church, Jesus has now flung that door wide open to them, and when word of that got out, they streamed through and into the Church. While most of the early converts were Jewish, the Gentiles very soon got into the Acts.

We see Jew/Gentile friction several times in the NT, but the Early Church was truly an ethnic melting pot of every Gentile ἔθνη. Think of all the places to which Paul travelled on his three journeys, and look at all the many and various places the Twelve went – see the Internet – to see just how open was the Christian religion to all people.

Modern racism has its philosophical genesis in the Enlightenment, as human reason – not that there's anything wrong with that – pushes out Divine Revelation in man's quest to

understand God and His Creation. Among “enlightened” thinkers, some races were thought to be simply superior to others.

The eleventh edition of Encyclopedia Britannica (1910) has the following entry, in part, for the definition of “negro;”

Mentally the negro is inferior to the white... the arrest or even deterioration of mental development [after adolescence] is no doubt very largely due to the fact that after puberty sexual matters take the first place in the negro's life and thoughts."

There's more, a lot more, but you get the idea. When Kipling wrote about “the white man's burden,” he was reflecting not only a common, but the prevailing view of his time.

Human zoos sprang up throughout European cities, and the masses flocked to see, and to poke, and to look at, and to throw food at, people of varying races from all over the world. For further reading see WIK articles on Scientific Racism and Human Zoos. For further reading regarding Martin Luther's alleged racism, see this online article

http://qconline.com/archives/qco/print_display.php?id=462653

The Church will make disciples by baptizing, a present active participle. Go ahead and expound upon the wonderful Gospel that is the Sacrament of Baptism. Maybe a review of the four questions in the Catechism would be in order, or at least hit the issues addressed in the Catechism, which are the issues we need to address today.

The meaning of “name” in that day meant a lot more than it does these days. Perhaps that's why faithless or ignorant pastors these days take such liberties with the words given to be used to Baptize, an issue not addressed in Luther's Catechism, because who would have thought that people would actually do such a crass act of sacrilege.

It's probably been fifteen years since we went to that LCMS church in Iowa West while on vacation. The sign said “alternative service” at 10:30, which we took to be Matins, but it wasn't. Stuff happened in that sanctuary that day, including an infant being brought to the front, and the pastor putting some water on that infant.

As he did that, he said, “I baptize you in the name of the parent, the child, and the spirit.” Was that a valid Baptism? Every time I ask anybody, they all say no. You have taken a thing that one should be able to point to with a certainty as the time and place when you were given all the benefits connected to Baptism, and made it into an uncertainty.

20. Now the more common word for teaching “διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν – teaching them to do whatever things I have commanded you.” God

gave us each a brain, and nobody is baptized – nobody becomes a disciple – in a vacuum. Teaching and learning more about God and man is part and parcel of Christianity.

Compare and contrast other religions who do not want their adherents to know more about their god(s) and man. You may get an idea of which religions I'm talking about by looking at a map or graph or chart that compares worldwide literacy rates. Did you know that Boko Haram means "western education is forbidden."

The things we are to teach to those who learn are all the things Jesus had taught them, and we pass those things on to those who follow us. It means to teach factual things about Jesus and His religion, and it means to proclaim Law and Gospel. For the Pastor, it means to shepherd the flock along in their walk along The Way.

Jesus offers this final assurance to these men, that "ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος – I am with you to the end of eternity" The verb of being is a present indicative active – this is the way it is, and the last word assures us that this promise of His presence will never end.

Logic is the science of correct thinking, and one of the ways that humans think correctly is to distinguish and categorize. It's something we do without even thinking about it. Sometimes we compel ourselves or are compelled by another to do distinguish and categorize. Distinguish between the kinds of "with you" that Jesus offers us.

God is not everything (pantheism), but God is everywhere (Christianity), and Jesus is with us always and everywhere. God was with those men at that time and place in a very localized and physical way, until He ascended into heaven. After the Ascension, He is still present, but not in that same physical and localized way.

The child who says that "Jesus lives in my heart" is not wrong, and if the Christian sees the pastor standing "in the stead" of Jesus as he pronounces Absolution, he is likewise correct. But if you want to see the most certain and concrete presence of Jesus among us, the primary meaning of "lo, I am with you always," look to the Sacrament of the Altar.

It's what we mean by "real presence," and it's why we make a big deal of the Sacrament. Besides that being a profound truth in and of itself, there are implications for that truth. I will maybe ask what your posture would be were your favorite President or famous person coming to be really present with you, and then let them fill in the blanks.

Law/Gospel

False gods/True God – Most of the world has invented and attached themselves to false gods. If you don't know the true God, then you will invent one, and the world does. How blessed are we that the One True God has chosen us. Why has He chosen me? That's another one of those things that I don't know, but I am glad that He did. Go ahead and rejoice, Christians, that by God's grace you are a Christian.

No Baptism/Baptism – If you look at what the Bible says, there are a lot of good things going on in Baptism. Without Baptism, you are missing out on those good things. Parents who want the best for their children will want them to receive those good things, and an adult who becomes a Christian will likewise want them.

Proclaimer/Proclaimee – The Law commands us to go and proclaim the Gospel. The Gospel is that we have had the Gospel proclaimed to us, faith has been worked in us, and we are saved. I have, in the past, from the pulpit expressed gratitude for the many people that God has sent into my life to proclaim the Gospel to me, starting with my parents and continuing to this day with many individuals. It makes it personal.

Sermon Titles

Christian Baptism

One God, Three Persons

The Presence of God

Hymns

Holy, Holy, Holy – LSB 507

All People That on Earth Do Dwell – 791

The Lord, My God, Be Praised – LSB 794

Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee - 803

Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow - 805

From All That Dwell Below the Skies – LSB 816

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Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa

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