

Trinity Times

A newsletter for the members and friends of Trinity Episcopal Church

Trinity Episcopal Church
The Episcopal Church in Athens since 1842
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Easter - Pentecost - May, 2021

Rumination: May, 2021 Eastertide Continues

(Ruminations of an Armchair Theologian Series)

The Rev. Benjamin Lee Lentz

The other day while scrolling through social media, I came upon a video with a woman explaining why she didn't need to wear a mask or get a Covid-19 vaccination. Her simple reasoning was that she was washed in the blood of Jesus. (Note to self: future rumination on where in the scriptures Jesus performs a healing for stupidity.)

Despite the fact that I have hemophobia, this video set me to ruminating on the Biblical references to blood – 337 in the Hebrew Scriptures, 88 in the Christian Scriptures – and then to thinking more broadly about Christian Atonement Theology. That's how ruminations work: from a video of a smug, self-righteous woman, who cares for no one other than her own redemption, to atonement theology in a split second!

Christian Atonement Theology (CAT – that's not an official acronym, just my penchant for felines) is an attempt to examine and explain how it is that people are redeemed through the actions of Jesus and in part why the crucifixion occurred. This is perhaps the most widely disputed topic in orthodox Christianity: the mystery of the Lord's redemptive work.

CAT is basically an attempt to explain the reconciliation between God and humanity (atone – at one) and is greatly influenced by the Hebrew Scriptures. The rejection of human sacrifice (Abraham/Isaac story – Genesis 22:1-19) and the substitution of animal sacrifice in the Hebrew

Scriptures primarily set the stage for the Christian development of atonement.

John, Paul, and Peter, all raised with a Jewish background, attempt to explain how Jesus closes the gap between the ultimate goodness of God with the fallen (sinful) nature of humanity. For them, Jesus does what the Law (Torah) or animal sacrifices, could not do.

Although there are at least seven approaches to discussing CAT, the oldest four are: (1) RANSOM THEORY (God reclaims fallen humanity from Satan through the sacrifice of Jesus); (2) SATISFACTION OR RESTITUTION THEORY (propitiation: the appeasing of God for the evil that exists in humanity through the sacrifice of Jesus); (3) CHRISTUS VICTORY THEORY (Jesus' resurrection frees humanity from death, sin and Satan); and (4) MORAL INFLUENCE THEORY (Jesus' action of ultimate selflessness shows the path for humanity).

There are many variations of each of these four and each creates problems when examined closely. The *reductio ad absurdum* of these are that: (1) God and Satan are co-equals, (2) God's justice demands blood punishment, (3) God can only defeat death through death, or (4) humanity can redeem itself simply by using Jesus as an example.

Each one of these theories arise from specific passages of Christian Scripture which emphasize a different aspect of atonement, frequently leading to contradictory theories.

Despite the fact that every theologian has a scriptural text to put forward as justification for their belief, "There has never been any official

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formulation in orthodox Christianity of the mystery of the Lord's redemptive work and that there is every likelihood that a variety of emphases and interpretations will continue." [Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, pg 105, 1974]

I suppose the reason a consensus is never truly attained derives from the fact that it is the human (the finite) attempting to explain the action of God (the infinite). Although the quest for knowledge of the unknowable is laudable, it is too easily a path leading to human hubris – a path too many Christians are willing to follow.

Why can't a mystery just be a mystery? Perhaps that is why the scriptures, both Hebrew and Christian, give various explanations of how it occurs – acknowledging the mystery.

Certainly, we must recognize that a gap exists between God (the infinite) and humanity (the finite) and that it is immeasurable – a gap that can never be traversed through only our (the finite) endeavors. God is the one that initiates and completes the atonement. Our part in the atonement process is to respond through repentance to God's invitation .

To get back to the issue of the 'blood of Jesus' which instigated this rumination, I believe that this imagery is too much of an extension of the Hebrew Scripture's belief in the efficacy of the blood of an animal sacrifice, sprinkled upon repentant sinners, in the bringing about of atonement. The imagery also relies too heavily upon a literal reading and therefore misreading of the Book of Revelation

It is love and selflessness, established most fully by Jesus, which sets us free to be fully what the Creator had in mind when humanity was brought into being.

The important thing is: He is risen (still)! Happy Easter!

Fr. Ben

The Good News ...

Our junior warden, Nate Schwartzberg, has begun work on the **sacristy steps**, an undertaking that is his gift to the church. He started by jack-



hammering the sunken and crooked concrete steps. Ultimately, the sacristy entry will have a small porch with railings and a timber frame roof. We're keeping an album of the progress and will post pictures along the way.



Thank you, Nate!

... And the Bad News

When Alan Caum felt water dripping on his shoulder as he sat at his desk, we knew we had a problem. The vestry is in the process of reviewing bids to **replace the rectory roof**.

There are also many places the church building bluestone **needs to be re-pointed**. Both of these are crucial projects and the vestry is exploring options to pay for them. Obviously, they will both be expensive. Your suggestions and support are most welcome as we undertake this work and seek to continue be good stewards of our buildings.





Trinity Episcopal Church - May 2021

Easter
Pentecost

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<i>Trinity Cycle of Prayer: 5/2 Patricia Gurney, Paul Kelley. 5/9 Trula Hollywood & Karen Nichols. 5/16 Kay Horton, Jake Parshall. 5/23 Chris, Heather, Adam, Brandon, and Caleb Hunsinger. 5/30 Hazel & Ron Hunt.</i>		<i>Kajo Keji: 5/2 Emmanuel Parish Logili. 5/9 St. Peter Logu and Kanyi Parishes. 5/16 St. Paul Loopo Parish. 5/23</i>	If the current downward trend in Covid-19 cases continues, we may be able to hold in-person worship again late this month. Please check the church website for updates. Get your vaccine now and we might even be able to have coffee hour again.			1 St. Philip and St. James <i>Mary Patterson</i>
2 Easter 5	3 AA 7 and 8:00 pm	4 <i>Patrick Kelley</i>	5 AA Intergroup 5 pm AA 7:30 pm	6 AA 5:30 pm <i>Kim Murray Noah Gurney</i>	7	8
9 Easter 6 <i>Hazel & Ron Hunt</i>	10 AA 7 and 8:00 pm	11 <i>Lyude Paul Savannah Paul</i>	12 AA 7:30 pm	13 AA 5:30 pm <i>Colleen Barton</i>	14 <i>Theo Lentz</i>	15
16 Easter 7 **Vestry Meets** <i>Dave & Shelly Fish</i>	17 AA 7 and 8:00 pm	18	19 AA 7:30 pm <i>Phil Kelley Amanda Bivins Caleb Hunsinger</i>	20 AA 5:30 pm	21	22 <i>Patricia Martin</i>
23 The Day of Pentecost  <i>Ginny Ford</i>	24 AA 7 and 8:00 pm <i>David Bivins</i>	25	26 AA 7:30 pm	27 AA 5:30 pm <i>Dan Gerhart</i>	28	29
30 Trinity Sunday  <i>Virginia Caum-Lake</i>	31 The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary / Memorial Day AA 7 and 8:00 pm <i>Kim & Chuck Cornell</i>	<i>Anglicans Around the World 5/2 The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East, Bishop Michael Lewis. 5/9 The Anglican Church of Kenya, Bishop Jackson Ole Sapit 5/16 The Anglican Church of Korea, Bishop Moses Nagjun Yoo. 5/23 Anglican Communion Sunday; The Anglican Church of Melanesia, Archbishop Leonard Dawea.</i>		<i>Bethlehem: 5/2 Prince of Peace, Dallas; Youth Council. 5/9 St. George's, Hellertown, St. Stephen's, Whitehall. 5/16 Grace Church, Honesdale. 5/23 St. Peter's, Hazelton; New Bethany Ministries. 5/30 St. James' and St. George's, Jermyn.</i>		

May at Trinity

Worship on Sundays in the church is currently suspended due to Covid-19. The Diocese of Bethlehem has issued guidelines for when we might reopen: the average number of cases per 100,000 must be 25 or less for a period of two weeks. After a lull in March, the number of cases skyrocketed and Bradford County was designated "Extremely High Risk." From a high of 63 per 100k in mid April, that curve has begun to move in the right direction. At press time, the number had dropped to 30.

If the trend continues, it's possible we may be able to hold in-person worship again by the end of May. Keep an eye on our website, where we update the numbers every few days. You'll be notified by email or mail when the numbers drop low enough that we can meet again.

The New York Times updates the numbers daily at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/bradford-pennsylvania-covid-cases.html>

When we gather again, worship will be Sundays at 10 a.m. And, if everyone is fully vaccinated, we may even be able to have coffee hours again! Everyone 16 or older is now eligible for the vaccine at no cost.

Is your pledge current? While our expenses have been less during this time of closure, we still have bills to pay. For example, though we keep the church thermostat very low, the building is still maintained at a constant temperature to protect the organ and

interior. We still must pay other utilities, our diocesan assessment, insurance, employees, maintenance ... so, yes the expenses do continue. You can mail your donation to the office, 701 S. Main, or PO Box 9.



Did you get a chance to watch our Easter video? Fr. Ben gave us a wonderful welcome and sermon and the images and music in the video took us from Palm Sunday to Easter. You'll find a link on our website, or you can go directly to

<https://youtu.be/GZO38vGf0kQ>



It was a banner year for the daffodils and hyacinths in the memorial garden. Next - daylilies and daisies.

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To seek and serve Christ in all people