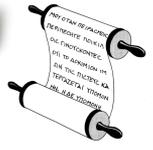


THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



Volume XXII, Number 5

May 2015



May 2015

This Month's Cover

Our cover picture this month is Rembrandt's *The Ascension of Christ*. It is oil on canvas, painted in 1636. It is displayed in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. It is a relatively small painting, measuring only 36½"x27". The small size was due to an agreement with Constantijn Huygens, secretary to the Prince of Orange (and the father of the physicist Christian Huygens), that he paint a series of five paintings on the Passion of Christ that were to be modeled after the Rubens altar piece in Antwerp, but which were to be only one twenty-fifth the size of the Rubens paintings. The painting is particularly interesting in that it contrasts the glory of the risen and ascending Christ with the darkness of the earth, illuminated only by the Light of Christ. Christ is ascending to the Holy Spirit at the top of the painting, surrounded by *putti*.

Putti ("baby angels") were a common image in Renaissance art. They originated in ancient Rome as images of the boy-god Cupid, the son of Venus and Mars, who was actually a capricious and cruel god. His image was placed on ancient Roman tombs to avert evil spirits. For some reason early Italian Renaissance artists picked up the image and by the High Renaissance it had become very popular in paintings and sculpture, probably because it was deemed cute and sweet. It actually represented a nasty little god. It is likely that most of the artists were unaware of its pagan roots.

Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn was born in 1606 in Leiden in the

Dutch Republic (now the Netherlands). His father was a prosperous miller and a leader in the Dutch Reformed Church, while his mother, the daughter of a well-to-do baker, was a devout Roman Catholic. Religion was a central theme in Rembrandt's art, although there is no evidence that he was a member of any religious body. His five children, however, were baptized in the Reformed Church. As a boy he attended the Latin School and studied at the University of Leiden, although his only interest was in his painting. It is unclear whether he was ever graduated from the university. After his apprenticeship he opened a studio in Leiden in 1624, and soon thereafter was discovered by the statesman Constantijn Huygens, who procured for him several lucrative commissions from the court of Prince Fredrik Hendrik of Orange at The Hague. In 1631 he moved to Amsterdam, and in 1634 married the prince's cousin Saskia. His life was full of sorrow, with the death of three children in infancy and the death of Saskia. Only their fourth child, Titus, born a year before Saskia's death, survived to adulthood. Several years later he had a daughter, Cornelia, with Hendrikje Stoffels, whom he never married. To have married her would have meant the loss of a large trust that Saskia had set up for Titus.

Rembrandt lived well beyond his means, although he had received many well-paying commissions. He died in poverty in 1669 in Amsterdam, and was buried in an unmarked grave.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

In Gethsemane Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39). We often have the image of Jesus going to the cross in peace, knowing that he was about to fulfill the purpose for which he came into the world. This was not at all the case. He took upon himself full humanity, and thus was as fearful of his crucifixion as any human would be. He went willingly because it was his mission, but he went in dread of the hideous pain he was about to bear. He went, nonetheless, because it was the will of his Father.

We have all been faced with things that we really did not want to do and did not have to do, yet we did them anyway because we voluntarily submitted our will to that of someone else whom we loved or respected. Likewise, Jesus did not want to die on the cross, and he did not have to. He was free to refuse, because he had the same free will that God has given all of us. When Satan offered him power over the whole world in exchange for worshiping him, Jesus refused. To force all mankind to obey would have been the easy way, but it was contrary to the will of his Father, because it would have made us slaves to God instead of willing servants. He was certainly tempted—that was the whole point of the matter—but he submitted to the will of his Father and chose the hard way that would save mankind rather than the easy way of forcing us into obedience. He thus made us able to be voluntary servants of God rather

than involuntary slaves.

It is a moral mandate for every Christian not to do his own will, but to do the will of God. This is far easier said than done, of course. If it were easy to submit our will to his, then there would be no sin. It is not easy, however, and Jesus knew that better than we could ever imagine. If it were easy for Jesus in his humanity to be righteous, then he has nothing to say to me. "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9). He learned obedience by always submitting his will to his Father's. We too can learn obedience by the same submission, except that in our weakness we more often fail than succeed. Notwithstanding, God in his love and forgiveness will help us go "from strength to strength in the life of perfect service" as long as we are willing to make the effort to do so.

One of God's greatest gifts to us, and one that is so easy to abuse, is the freedom to disobey him. Subjugating our will to God's can place us in great worldly peril, but that is often what strengthens us the most. When the Blessed Virgin Mary was told that she had been chosen to bear God's Son, her reply was, "Be it unto me according to thy word." By the law of the time, as an unwed mother she was subject to death by stoning, yet she never hesitated in submitting to God's will. Neither should we.

Father Rick Losch

Evening Prayer and Supper

Our May service of Evening Prayer will be on Wednesday, May 20th, at 6:00 p.m. with an “Old-Time Southern Supper” following in the parish house. Sign-up sheets for various food types are posted in the parish house kitchen, as well as a sheet for those planning to attend so that we may know how many to plan for. As always there will be plenty of good food and fellowship. Please make your plans to attend.

Hiram Patrenos

Sunday School Summer Recess

Our last day of Sunday School for children and adults this school year will be Sunday, May 17th. Sunday School will resume in the fall on the first Sunday after Labor Day. Thank you to our dedicated children’s teachers, Ethel Scott, Rosalie Dew, and Madelyn Mack, who give their time and energy to make Sunday School available for our children, and to Fr. Losch for teaching the adult classes.

Hiram Patrenos

Forward Day By Day

The new *Forward Day By Day* daily devotional booklets for May, June and July are available in the tract rack in the parish house. In addition to the small booklets we have large print editions available. Please feel free to take either size.

Hiram Patrenos

ECW Yard Sale

The Episcopal Church Women (ECW) will have a yard sale May 14th to 16th during the Highway 11 Antique Alley Yard Sale. They plan to set up for the sale on the afternoon of Wednesday, May 13th, and to pack everything remaining after the sale on the afternoon of Sunday, May 17th. Everyone is encouraged to keep this in mind as they clean attics, storage buildings, and closets. Furniture is especially sought during this sale and we will be happy to help you move any items you wish to contribute. If you have items to be contributed, please speak with Hiram Patrenos to make arrangements to get the items to our storage space.

Hiram Patrenos

Fifth Sunday

The Livingston First Presbyterian Church will host the Fifth Sunday Community Service this month at 11:00 a.m. The Presbyterians and we are the last survivors of this old Livingston tradition, and it is important that we support it. Please plan to attend and show that St. James’ still believes in the ecumenical spirit. While we may have theological and liturgical differences, we need to remember that we are all still one in Jesus Christ.

Richard R. Losch+

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Be Wordly Wise

Credibility

A large number of English words derive from the Latin *credere*, to believe. To the ancient Romans, belief consisted of considerably more than simple acceptance of the validity of a fact or situation; it also implied trust and commitment or dedication to it.

Two related words that derive from *credere* and are very often incorrectly interchanged are incredible and incredulous. We frequently hear on the news something like “It was an incredible statement” when incredible should have been used, or “She knew he was lying and she was incredible.” If you are incredible there is reason not to believe you, and if you are incredulous you do not believe even though you have no proof of falsehood. If you lie to me you are incredible, and it is likely that I will be incredulous. Incredible is also often used to mean amazing, although it literally simply means unbelievable.

Many other words also derive from *credere*, and all imply belief or trust of one sort or another. Among them are credence, credential(s), credit, credulity, creditable, creed, accredit, discredit, creance, recreant and miscreant. We hope we are not being credulous in our credence that it is a very productive word.

Richard R. Losch+

Gift of God

The name “Gift of God” is ancient, and it appears in many forms in many languages. In Greek it is Theodore (Theodoros) and Dorothea, in Latin Adeodatus (that was St. Augustine’s real name), and in Hebrew Nathaniel or Nathaniah. The name of the Israeli Prime Minister, Netanyahu, is a modern Hebrew transliteration of Nathaniah. Other popular names with very similar meanings are the Hebrew Mataniah, and Matthew (Mattatyahu), the Greek Dositai, the Slavic Bogdan¹ or Bohdan, the Arabic Atallah, the Persian Danish, the Hindi Dinesh and the Sanskrit Devadatta. Godiva was the Anglo-Saxon feminine form of the name, so in modern times Lady Godiva would be Lady Dorothy. The most common of all, however, are the dozens of variations of Theodore, including Fyodor, Fedor, Feodor, Tewadros (the name of two Ethiopian emperors), Teodoro and Teodor. The British royal family name Tudor was a variation of Theodore. In Japanese the name is Seodora². In Russia the name Fyodor is popular; a common nickname for it (the equivalent of Teddy) is Bozo, which has worked its way into English as a name for a stupid or insignificant person. You now know far more about the name Theodore than you probably ever wanted to.

Richard R. Losch+

The fact that jellyfish have lived for 650,000,000 years without having a brain is very consoling to government bureaucrats.

¹ The movie director Peter Bogdanovich is Peter “of the family of the son of Theodore.”

² In Japanese there is no ‘th’ sound, so it is replaced with ‘s,’ and almost all names end with a vowel.

Parochial Report Statistics for St. James'

	2013	2014
Total Active Baptized Members	25	33
Total Communicants in Good Standing	22	27
Average Sunday Attendance	19	23
Easter Day Attendance	26	44
Total Sunday Holy Communions	50	51
Total Weekday Holy Communions	5	5
Private Holy Communions	0	0
Daily Offices held on Sunday	2	4
Daily Offices and other services held on Weekdays	10	11
Burials conducted	1	0
Marriages conducted	0	1

Parochial Report Statistics for St. Alban's

	2013	2014
Total Active Baptized Members	4	4
Total Communicants in Good Standing	4	4
Average Sunday Attendance	11	14
Easter Day Attendance	N/A	N/A
Total Sunday Holy Communions	11	11
Total Weekday Holy Communions	1	0
Private Holy Communions	0	0
Daily Offices held on Sunday	0	1
Daily Offices and other services held on Weekdays	0	0
Burials conducted	0	0
Marriages conducted	0	0

I'm always slightly terrified when I exit Microsoft Word and it asks me if I want to save any changes to my ten page report that I swear I did not make any changes to.

Special Days of Prayer

May 11-13 are designated as Rogation Days, and the 27, 29 and 30 as Ember Days. The Rogation Days are always the three days before Ascension Day, these being the last days that Christ was physically present on earth after the Resurrection. Our focus of prayer should be on taking upon ourselves the responsibility to live by the Gospel with the help of the Holy Spirit instead of irresponsibly depending on Christ to do everything for us. The name of the days comes from the Latin *rogare*, "to ask."

The Rogation Days are rooted in an ancient fast set for the blessing of the harvest by blessing the newly planted crops. This is still done in many agricultural regions. In the Middle Ages every parish church had clearly defined boundaries. An old British custom was "the beating of the bounds," in which all the members of the parish would make a solemn procession around the parish boundary on one of the Rogation Days.

Ember Days come four times a year on the Wednesday, Friday and Saturday following St. Lucy's Day (December 13), the First Sunday in Lent, Pentecost, and Holy Cross Day (September 14). Some traditions set them at other times as well. These are days of prayer for spiritual growth and the growth of the Church. On Ember Days it is traditional to pray especially for seminaries and seminarians, and for the increase of the ministry. The name of the days comes from the Old English *ymbryn*, "period" or "cycle."

Richard R. Losch+

The Love of God

In the New Testament there are at least 25 passages (and at least 5 in the Old Testament) that clearly state that God loves mankind even though he hates sin. The classics, of course, are John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" and 1 John 4:16, "God is love." He may hate the sin, but he still loves the sinner. The very foundation of Christianity is God's love for us, his forgiveness of the repentant, and our response in loving him.

One of the major differences between Christianity and Islam is that Islam, unlike Christianity, does not teach the love of Allah for all mankind. The Qur'an has 16 verses that declare whom Allah loves.¹ Nowhere does it state that he loves mankind,² although it contains dozens of passages identifying whom Allah does not love. We do not point this out as a condemnation of Islam, but to belie the common myth that we all worship the same God with just a few little differences in how we go about it. The Judeo-Christian and Islamic concepts of God are very different. John Ash-

¹ Those who do good (2:195, 3:134, 3:148, 5:13, 5:93), those who fear him (3:76, 9:4, 9:7), the just (5:42, 49:9, 60:8)), the righteous (19:96), the pious (85:14), the repentant (2:222), the steadfast (3:146), and those who rely on him (3:159).

² The closest to that is 11:90, which says, "My Lord is most merciful, most loving." There are no other passages that imply that love for mankind is a major attribute of Allah.

croft was once asked what he believed to be the difference. He said, "Islam worships a God who expects you to give your sons to die for him. Christianity worships a God who gave his Son to die for you." That pretty well sums it up.

Jews and Christians believe that God judges and condemns sinners, but because of his love he will place before them every opportunity to repent and turn to him and thus be forgiven. It grieves him when some choose to reject him. Islam teaches that Allah sent the prophet Muhammad to show the way, and those who reject his teachings anger Allah and are damned. The extremists (who do not represent the majority of Muslims) go so far as to teach that Allah wants them to kill any who reject him. This may be some twisted form of justice, but it is not love.

The Mosaic Law forbids Jews from cursing anyone. They have come up with a powerful curse that does not violate this law: "May God deal with you with justice." Islam believes that God is just. Judaism and Christianity teach the love of God for mankind, and that his love manifests itself in mercy and forgiveness to all who repent of their sins and strive to obey him. Christianity expands on this, teaching that "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Richard R. Losch+

*Chivalry isn't dead. It just followed
wherever being lady-like went.*

I Believe

The Creeds are statements of the Church's faith that briefly summarize the basic teachings of the Church. In the Catholic tradition (Anglican, Roman, Orthodox and some Lutheran) there are three creeds that are officially recognized for use in the liturgy: the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. Fortunately, the Athanasian Creed is rarely used in corporate worship (if you check it out on page 864 of the Book of Common Prayer you will see why I say fortunately). St. Athanasius of Alexandria wrote it in the 4th century in response to the Arian Heresy.¹ Traditionally, the Nicene Creed is always used at the Holy Eucharist, and the Apostles' Creed at all other services.

The word creed comes from the Latin *credere*, "to believe." To the ancient Romans and Greeks, however, "I believe"² meant a great deal more than simple acceptance of the veracity of something. It meant total trust, dedication and commitment. To an ancient Roman, to say that you believed in God was not just to say that you acknowledged that God exists, but

that you were willing to trust him with all that you had, including your life itself. The ancient Romans were very superstitious, but very few of them believed in the gods in any personal sense. They acknowledged their existence, but they felt no sense of commitment to them. Their commitment was to Rome, and an important factor of that commitment was to please the gods who supported and blessed Rome. In the Roman religion, the gods did not care a bit whether or not you loved them or had any sense of commitment to them. All that was expected was that you say the proper prayers, make the required sacrifices, and go through the specified rituals. Doing this ensured their continued protection of Rome. What was in your heart was totally irrelevant. This was one reason that the Romans failed to understand the relationship that the Jews and Christians had to God.

A modern example of the ancient idea of belief is shown in a story of the great French aerialist Charles Blondin (1824-97). Several times he stretched a tight-wire over Niagara Falls and walked across and back. Every time the crowd's cheering was deafening. One time he asked, "Do you believe that I could do it carrying someone on my shoulders?" Again, the crowd went wild. Then he asked, "Who will ride?" There was dead silence. Finally a little boy came forward and said, "I will." Blondin said, "This child is the only one here who believes I can do it." That little boy, being willing to stake his life, believed. All the rest of those who

¹ An Alexandrian priest named Arius promulgated the Arian Heresy, and in the 4th century it threatened to destroy orthodox Christianity. Arianism has nothing to do with the racial bigotry of Aryanism that was espoused by Hitler. Arianism denies the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. Its primary vestige today is in the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

² *Credō* in Latin and *pisteuo* (πιστεύω) in Greek. Both were interpreted in the same way, meaning total commitment, not just assent.

cheered simply acknowledged that the odds were in favor of Blondin's success. The bad news is that most of us are like that crowd. We do not believe in God to the point that we will risk our lives for him. The good news is that God understands our weakness, and to the extent that we will let him, gives us the wisdom and strength to strive for that goal.

Understanding strengthens belief, but it is not a requirement for it. If it were, we would be in big trouble. God is vastly beyond our limited human understanding. Saint Augustine of Hippo often walked along the seashore when he meditated. One day he saw a little boy who had dug a hole in the sand with a large shell, and was running back and forth to the water's edge filling the shell and pouring the water into the hole. Each time the water immediately seeped into the sand and disappeared. Augustine asked him what he was doing. "I'm putting the ocean into this hole," the boy replied. "Don't be silly," Augustine said. "You can't put the ocean into that little hole." The child then revealed himself to Augustine as Christ and said, "Neither can you put God into your little mind."

When the Nicene Creed was first produced it was intended as a sort of "McCarron Act" statement of loyalty to the orthodox faith—affirm that this is what you believe, or be considered a heretic. It still carries that same overtone, but in a very positive sense. It is not "I must sign this or burn in hell," but rather "this is the teaching of the Church to which I commit my-

self." Those who do not fully understand it can still accept it on the grounds of two thousand years of the spiritual experience of saints who did understand it and committed themselves wholly to it. "I believe" does not mean "I understand this," but "I accept and commit myself to this."

Although some of the modern translations render the Creeds as "We believe," they were originally written in the singular: "I believe." They were seen as a personal, not a congregational obligation. Reducing it to a congregational obligation allows us to "go along with the crowd" without the sense of personal individual commitment. It is a matter of whether or not we accept the essential teachings of the Church, even when we may not fully understand them.¹

The theological definition of belief is that state of the mind by which one assents to propositions not by reason of empirical evidence, but because of authority. Philosophically, belief can be distinguished from knowledge, science, doubt and opinion. From knowledge, because what we believe may not be intuitively obvious; from science, because there is often an absence of empirical evidence; from doubt, because it is a positive and voluntary assent; and from opinion or conjecture, because in these assent

¹ Another change in many modern translations is the addition of "in": "I believe *in* one holy, catholic and apostolic Church" as opposed to the original "I believe one ... Church." There is a big difference between believing something and believing *in* it.

cannot be complete. Faith and belief are not totally synonymous terms, but they are close enough in meaning that for all practical purposes we can treat them the same.¹ The writer to the Hebrews says, “Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1).

Theologians and philosophers have disputed for centuries over the question of where knowledge ends and belief begins. Consider the statement, “I know that Christ strengthens me.” To what extent is this belief, and to what extent knowledge?” Those who have experienced Christ in their lives can make such a statement without doubt, and thus to them it is knowledge. Others, however, would claim that it is a matter only of belief. In another example, given any two points on a line, no matter how close, another can be found between them. While this makes intuitive sense and can be proved mathematically, beyond a certain point it is impossible to prove it by empirical evidence. Is this then belief, or knowledge?

I accept the principles of mathematics simply on the grounds that those who know vastly more about them than I could imagine have understood and accepted them. I accept them on authority even though they are beyond my comprehension. In other words, I believe them. On the same basis, as Christians we can ac-

cept the teachings of saints and thinkers whose experience far transcends our poor ability to comprehend them. We can believe, even though we may not have empirical evidence to enable us to prove our belief to others.

Belief will not cause us to act. Rather, willingness to act is a sign of belief. If our belief is strong enough, we will be open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, who will give us the wisdom, courage and strength to act when action is called for. This is what saw the martyrs through their ordeals over the centuries. Unfortunately, belief is also no proof of truth. It is belief in false ideals that can lead fanatics to horrible acts. In the early 1930s Churchill said of Hitler that he was the most dangerous man in Europe, because he was the only leader who truly believed in what he was doing.

Job said, “I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth” (Job 19:25). He did not say “I think,” or “I am pretty sure,” but “I know.” That is a statement of belief, not of opinion. This is the level of belief that we should seek, and that will be given us in time as long as we continue to seek it and pray for it.

Richard R. Losch+

Pentecost

Pentecost, one of the most important days in the Church year, is also one of the most ignored and taken for granted. This year it falls on May 24. Without the first Christian Pentecost there would be no Church, or at best the Church would be no

¹ Faith involves hope, while belief does not. Theologically, hope does not mean wishing for something better, but rather the acceptance of God’s will with confidence that ultimately all will work out for the best.

more than a worthy and well-intended worldly organization; and without the Church, our hope of salvation would be tenuous at best. Pentecost is often called the Birthday of the Church.

The word Pentecost comes from the Greek for "fifty." Pentecost is a joyful Jewish festival, the Feast of Shavuot, which falls fifty days after the second day of Passover. Originally a spring harvest festival, by Jesus' time it commemorated the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. A very large number of the thousands of pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for Passover remained there until Shavuot. This is why there were such huge crowds who heard Peter's sermon on the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2:5). In Christian tradition, the Day of Pentecost falls fifty days after Easter (and ten days after Ascension Day), and thus always falls on the seventh Sunday after Easter.

On the Pentecost following the Resurrection, the Apostles and several other disciples were gathered together, undoubtedly in a quandary about what they should do next. Jesus had charged them to go out and preach the Gospel, but they were unsure as to where, how, and to whom. "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:1-4). They immediately not only understood the Faith, but were infused with all the knowledge, wisdom, courage

and strength to fulfill Jesus' command. Theologically this is known as the Deposit of Faith, and the Church teaches that at that moment they were given what is called the One True Faith, deposited once and for all time with the Apostles and their successors (the bishops). It is not subject to amendment to fit the current culture, but rather is intended to bring about the amendment of the culture to fit the Will of God. The moment the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles was the beginning of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and He has resided in it ever since to continue to guide and inspire it.

Over the centuries the Church has been broken apart, and has been subject to corruption, sin, and sometimes to overt evil. This is not the fault of the Church, however, but of the broken, corrupt, sinful and sometimes evil men who make it up. That, however, is the very reason it was given to us. We are by our very nature broken, corrupt, sinful and sometimes evil. In spite of that God loves us, and gave us the Church to bring us to redemption and salvation. Think of how much worse the world would be without it!

The mess that we have made on earth is not all there is to the Church, however. It includes all the departed who are being prepared for Heaven, and it includes all the saints of God who are now with Him there. And the Holy Spirit resides in all of it, including the earthly Church that still is active in fighting the evils on earth, including those that are within it.

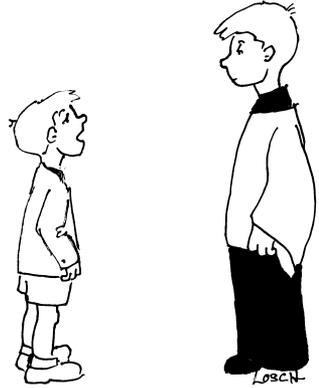
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Don't Forget
INTERFAITH
MEN'S
BREAKFAST
MAY 3
7:45 A.M.
Mark your Calendar

LIVINGSTON FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



*"My mom prays for me every night.
When I'm going to sleep I hear
her say, 'Thank God he's
finally in bed!'"*



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