SERMON NOTES — January 19, 2025

Stories of transforming our practice of Holy Communion over the past fifty years:

- Visiting my parents church as a child — Trinity Lutheran (Missouri Synod) in downtown Detroit — where you had to register for Communion the week before, to make sure that only Missouri Synod Lutherans were communing.
- Presiding at Communion (Prince of Peace Lutheran, Portage, MI in around 2010) when a visiting Muslim professor accepted our invitation to come to the Lord's Table, receiving only the bread out of respect to both the invitation and his being non-Christian.

This transformation in practice, from exclusive to inclusive, is in keeping with what we talked about last week regarding seeing baptism in terms of a Gospel message revitalized towards the biblical picture of God saving us from our enemies by eventually working to turn all of us into friends. Obviously, it's already been a long process with still a long ways to go.

So this biblical way of seeing God's salvation is in keeping with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s saying that 'the long arc of the universe bends toward justice.' It helps those working towards racial justice, in a world still so filled with racism, to keep working — seeing the world as it is promised to be rather that simply as it is.

This is similar to saying, "The long arc of God's salvation is toward peace." Toward a time when there are no longer friends and enemies but only friends. Living into this arc of salvation is like the living according to the motto of the Palestinians on the farm near Bethlehem (see Sermon Notes from two weeks ago), "We refuse to be enemies." This must also be our motto for our practices of baptism and communion.

The long arc of God's salvation bends toward a number of things: Justice, peace, abundance, life. In general, it bends toward New Creation.

This is what we see very much in the Gospel of John, where the "signs" Jesus performs help us to see the world as God is saving it to be, not as our sin has made it. It requires faith to see the world in terms of the long arc of God's salvation. Examples:

- *Bending toward peace and justice*: in John 13 the story of the Last Supper features Jesus washing his disciples' feet. Friends treat each other as equals, mutually serving one another, instead of the world we live in, where the weak are forced to serve the rich and powerful.
- *Bending toward abundance, not scarcity*: John 6 features the bread of Communion in the story of miraculously feeding a large crowd in the face of scarce resources. John 2, today's Gospel and the "beginning of signs," features the wine that has run out at the wedding of Cana, but Jesus shows a world of abundance by turning water into wine.
- *Bending toward life, not death*: the climactic sign of the cross and resurrection. Mary finds the tomb empty on Easter and learns to see Jesus through her tears of grief. Even as we learn to see new life, new creation, in this world still filled with so much death.

One more change in our Communion practices over the past forty+ years: hymns of praise based on the picture of New Creation found in the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation — which is structured precisely as a way to begin picturing the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven in the midst of our monstrous empires and nationalisms. Reigning in the new Jerusalem is the lamb slain. I give the last word to our Gathering Hymn, "Now the Feast and Celebration" — written by Marty Haugen (composer of the beloved *Holden Evening Prayer*). It is very much a song that teaches us to see the long arc of God's salvation as bending toward what we see in Jesus, not what we see in the world:

Now is the feast of the Lamb once slain,
whose blood has freed and united us,
to be one great people of God.
Now the feast and celebration,
all of creation sings for joy
to the God of life and love and freedom,
praise and glory forever more.