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# Sanctified; a Formational Hermeneutic of the Sanctuary in Seven Reflections

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

SANCTIFIED; A FORMATIONAL HERMENEUTIC OF THE SANCTUARY IN SEVEN REFLECTIONS



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

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PORTLAND, OREGON

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## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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## Dedication

To those dedicated disciples who continue to gather atop mountains and meadows awaiting His return. For Rey, we shall gather by the river.

## Acknowledgments

This is the culmination of a journey spanning three years of intense research, countless conversations, coffee cups, and zoom meetings. It represents my journey with a faith tradition I deeply love and on occasion loathe. There have been so many conversation partners throughout this journey. The wonderful pastoral team at Loma Linda University Church who gave me both grace and space. Phenomenal stakeholders who continued to prod and ask poignant questions. Parishioners who have reminded me that theology continues to be broken thought. Students who inspire me with their resiliency. Family, friends, and colleagues who have tirelessly cheered me on. Mentors who continue to share the sweet scent of Jesus, and a community of Awesomes that have become family. Above all Linda, Micah, and Malachi you are my true north, thank you! This is truly a shared effort.

Linda, mi amor. There are no words to express what you have meant and continue to mean to me; it is so apropos that I write this on Valentine's Day because this project has been a labor of love. The English language lacks the flair and gravitas to convey what you mean to me, but perhaps Pablo Neruda comes close when he writes:

"Te amo directamente, sin problemas ni orgullo: porque no se amar de otra manera." Te amo asi porque mereces eso y mas.

# Epigraph

*Fidens quaerens intellectum et caritas quaerens intellectum*

# Table of Contents

Dedication .....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Epigraph .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
Research Method.....	ix
Abstract.....	x
Introduction .....	1
Discover.....	2
Design .....	3
Delivery.....	4
Evaluate .....	4
Next Steps .....	5
Doctoral Project .....	6
The Offering .....	18
The Shekel .....	24
The Laver .....	31
The Anointing Oil .....	36
The Incense .....	42
The Skilled Craftsmen .....	48
The Sabbath .....	54
Project Launch Plan .....	60
Doctoral Project Description.....	61
Audience .....	61
Development Plan .....	62
Development Process .....	62
Appendix A- Milestone 1 The NPO Charter.....	63
Personal Research Manifesto.....	64
NPO Statement.....	64
NPO Scope and Constraints.....	64
NPO Context.....	64
Root Causes .....	64
Discovery Workshop Stakeholders.....	65

One-on-One Interviews .....	65
3-5 Key Biblical Texts .....	65
Academic Resources .....	65
Discovery Workshop Description .....	65
Discovery Statement.....	65
Critical Insights from Discovery Workshop.....	66
One-on-One Interview Discoveries .....	66
Synthesis.....	67
Next Steps .....	67
Discovery Workshop Documentation .....	67
One-Page Post-Workshop Message to Stakeholders .....	71
One-on-One Interview Documentation .....	71
Appendix B- Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay .....	73
Story as Scripture’s Serpentine Song .....	74
Remembering: Inclusion and Exodus .....	75
Restoring: Neo-Liturgy and Nehemiah .....	76
Reframing: Matthew and Kingdom Ethics .....	79
Story as Reactionary Reality .....	80
Heschel and the Shoah.....	82
Her Story: John and Gender.....	84
Gutierrez, Cone and the Thickening of the Gospel.....	85
Story as Synthesis .....	86
Appendix C-Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report .....	89
NPO Statement.....	90
NPO Scope and Constraints.....	90
NPO Context.....	90
Root Causes .....	90
Definition of Done.....	90
Three Big Ideas .....	90
Concept Pitches .....	91
Stakeholders.....	91
One-On-One Interviews .....	91
Additional Resources.....	92
Description.....	92
Documentation.....	93
Message To Stakeholders.....	93
One-On-One Interviews .....	94
Appendix D-Milestone 4 Prototype Iteration Report.....	95
Introduction .....	96
Prototype.....	96
NPO Statement.....	97



Research Question.....	97
Assessment Benchmarks.....	97
Participant Description .....	97
Summary .....	97
<i>Theologia Viatorum; A Response to the Call</i> .....	97
<i>A Theology of Exousia; The Gift of Commissioning</i> .....	98
<i>Seeds and Stumps; Toward a Theology of Surrender and an Ecclesiology</i> <i>of Mission</i> .....	100
Most Viable Prototype .....	102
Appendix E-Documentation .....	103
Bibliography .....	105

## Research Method

This Doctoral Project utilized a blended research and design methodology called ‘Collaborative Design for Ministry and Nonprofit Contexts’. In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder Workshops, and an iterative process of continuous adjustment using ‘just enough’ feedback information at each juncture of development, practitioners produce an application-oriented Project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change.

## Abstract

The initial impetus for the project was to produce a hermeneutical approach that would privilege diversity within the Adventist church. The NPO as initially envisioned was directed to church leadership; the *foci* however shifted toward a local congregation as it dealt with denominational pressure and internal conflict.

The notion of a heavenly Sanctuary that serves as a replica of the Earthly tabernacle looms large in Adventism, it remains foundational to the denomination's understanding of eschatology, ecclesiology, and missiology. Adventism espouses the belief that Jesus has been ministering in this heavenly Sanctuary since October 22, 1844. This unique understanding of Christ's intercessory role has resulted in spirited debate and schisms within Adventism. The NPO that holds the project together is that: A novel hermeneutic approach to the Sanctuary will produce a congregation that is more comfortable with the idea of spiritual formation.

Two key insights that emerged through this project; first, preaching continues to hold primacy in the Adventist church. Second, Adventism's rationalistic nature has engendered an inherent mistrust when it comes to spiritual formation. Thus, preaching much like leadership consists in disappointing people at a rate they can tolerate. Skillful homiletics is the art of connecting concepts that are familiar i.e., the Sanctuary with ideas that seem foreign i.e., Spiritual formation.

This area of study is of particular interest to me as I serve as the pastor for study, research, and spiritual development at the Loma Linda University Church of Seventh-day Adventists. Our congregation is connected to a university as well as a health care system and remains the most influential Adventist church in North America.

The project consists of a brief historical sketch on Adventism accompanied by seven reflections on the Sanctuary which coincide with seven speeches YHWH delivers to Moses in chapters 25 to 31 of Exodus.

## Introduction

Lao Tzu famously quipped, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."<sup>1</sup> Three years ago I embarked on this journey hoping to develop a hermeneutical approach that would provide a voice for those long excluded from theological discourse. The first few steps of the journey were both exhilarating and excruciating as I realized that the scope of my project was too ambitious. I then pivoted toward a series of reflections that would help my congregation become more comfortable with the concept of Spiritual Formation. Thus, I decided to craft a series of sermons that would meld the concept of Spiritual formation with the Adventist idea of the Sanctuary. This approach resulted in a focused NPO, that could be summarized as follows: *A novel hermeneutic approach to the Sanctuary will produce a congregation that is more comfortable with the idea of spiritual formation.*

The Sanctuary remains both a controversial and contentious subject within Adventism. This doctrine contends that on October 22, 1844 Christ moved from the holy to the most holy apartment in the heavenly sanctuary in order to commence the last phase of his intercessory ministry. Adventist fundamental belief number 24 summarizes the church's official position on the sanctuary as follows:

"There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle that the Lord set up and not humans. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. At His ascension, He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and, began His intercessory ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the holy place of the earthly sanctuary. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. (Lev. 16; Num. 14:34;

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<sup>1</sup> Lao Tzu, *Dao De Jing: A Minimalist Translation*, Bruce Linnell trans. (Berkley, University of California Press, 2001)

Ezek. 4:6; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Heb. 1:3; 2:16, 17; 4:14-16; 8:1-5; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; Rev. 8:3-5; 11:19; 14:6, 7; 20:12; 22:11, 12.)<sup>2</sup>

## Discover

The contextual setting for my vocational life is as diverse and complex as the population in Southern California. We are a multi-cultural, inter-generational, institutional church located at the intersection of a health care system and a university campus. Loma Linda has received its fair share of attention over the past few years because of its status as a “blue zone.” This term is used to define geographical locations where life expectancy is significantly higher than the median average. Thus, our congregation offers a unique mix of octogenarians, medical professionals and university students. This generational divide, has forced our church to adapt two distinct worship services in an attempt to better serve our congregants. Sadly, while we continue to experience numerical growth, my congregation is bereft of formational language or practices.

The initial project attempted to mitigate the mistrust of formational language in Adventism by creating a hermeneutical culture that championed diversity. This was the idea as I conducted my initial workshop, stakeholders seemed hesitant as we met amidst social distancing and isolation to discuss denominational leadership and interpretive approaches. The pandemic severed institutional ties and denominational loyalty while highlighting the importance of local congregations. This reality pushed us to switch the initial audience for the project from denominational leadership, to the local church. The shift allowed us to discover that there existed a disconnect between the different layers within our denominational structure.

Adventism is a highly organized institution, this has allowed for a systematized approach to evangelism, health care, and education, it also has produced a siloed reality within the different denominational layers. Adventist structure is comprised of 5 distinct layers that move from the local congregation, to the local Conference, Union, Division, and finally the General Conference. My stakeholders represented individuals with a vested interest in their local parish who alerted me to the fact that institutional leadership often has a negligible effect on the local church.

The one-on-one interviews sought to in broaden the voices in my stakeholder tent, I reached out to seminary professors and local pastors in order to gauge if the shift in focus from institutional leadership to local congregation was warranted. I approached a mentor during the interview process who asked me if I could share the primary reason why I decided to attend George Fox University? This conversation led me to discover that I was attracted to GFU's formational approach. Thus, I recognized surreptitiously that Spiritual Formation needed to feature prominently in any future conversations.

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<sup>2</sup> Fundamental belief number 24 as printed in, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, (Hagerstown, Published by the Secretariat, 2005)

I scheduled a second workshop with my original stakeholders and asked them to weigh in with their thoughts on Spiritual Formation, most of them admitted that they had little knowledge of what I meant. The term however was not neutral; rather, it had negative connotations as most of the stakeholders associated it with practices that made them uncomfortable. These conversations drastically altered the scope, audience, and purpose of my NPO. I no longer was interested in producing something for the denomination as a whole; instead, I wanted to see if I could alter the way my congregation viewed formational practices.

## Design

The design phase of the project pivoted as stakeholders were asked to enumerate the core values that our church practices. The results of this exercise astonished me, for years we have been pushing Discipleship as foundational to our congregational ethos, yet when asked to list our values stakeholders overwhelmingly pointed to worship. I asked us to expand on that conversation and discovered that worship is often equated to an experience where preaching is prioritized. It then seemed clear that I would again have to shift the focus of my project in order to leverage our services and the pulpit as catalysts for change. Three primary prototype ideas were pitched to address our NPO:

1. Areopagus Weekend-The concept was to create a weekend that explored different hermeneutical approaches and their use in broadening our congregation's understanding of the text. We however decided that as our community produces various seminars, the concept would get lost amidst the avalanche of programs we offer. There is however an update on this prototype as I have been empowered to utilize the same approach, I posit in my project to craft a seven-part conversation on the book of Revelation.
2. The Longest Table- The group proposed a campus wide meal to be hosted by families that would invite people to sit at their tables. The idea was that these spaces would create the opportunity for inter-generational engagement and conversation, this then would form a forum to discuss our stories. The longest table is now part of our church rhythm as we offer three gatherings that coincide with the start of the different school terms.
3. Intersection Spaces-This idea garnered the most excitement. The group felt the church needed to be more intentional creating cross sectional spaces. With a membership of over 6500 people, the task of intentionally separating into smaller groups seemed herculean. Our Discipleship pastor proposed to focus on our core leadership team, and as the prototype launch was set for the Summer of 2022, we combined it with our training session for new leaders which commenced in April 2022. The plan sought to highlight formational principles through intentional selection, training, and equipping of a cross sectional crop of leaders. The prototype focused on this select group as its intended audience because we felt it was necessary to experiment on the margins before launching something to the church at large. The question of delivery still weighed heavily on us, a leadership training seminar, activities and materials such as the ones outlined in Appendix D might move the barometer with our leaders, but the ultimate goal is to target the whole congregation.

The answer emerged as prototyping allowed me to discover that exposure creates comfort and that transformation takes time. Cognizant of our church's capacity to navigate change I decided that the safest way to introduce formational language into our hermeneutical framework was to repurpose something distinctively Adventist and yet often forgotten. The decision for a final project became clear in May of 2022. I would present a series of reflections on the sanctuary through a formational lens.

## Delivery

The choice to move from the relative safety of academia to the messy world of homiletics filled me with dread. As the flagship church for our denomination, the messages we share have influence beyond our campus. The Sanctuary has long remained a contentious and thorny issue within Adventism, perhaps what I did not consider was that though my congregation may have been ready to embark on these conversations we remain part of a worldwide church. The scope of the project has had then to be reshuffled, messages have been curated and adapted to speak to the reality of the congregation I serve, while at the same time disappointing our worldwide denomination at a rate it can withstand.

Benchmarks remain difficult to measure, for I add my quivering voice to a conversation that has raged in my denomination since its inception. How then do I measure what the Spirit will do, do I dare and quantify it through baptisms, giving patterns, attendance, or views on our digital platforms? The reality is that I remain hopelessly stuck when trying to think about benchmarks. This past week an older lady brought me some tangerines from her backyard. She is on a fixed income; her children are gone and she has felt out of place since her family moved from India over 40 years ago. She smiled slyly and said: "These are for you pastor you are one of us." I started this journey of a thousand miles hoping to produce a hermeneutic that would allow for diversity because I yearned for some of my members to feel like they had been seen. Perhaps tangerines are not a scientific way of benchmarking, but I hope after we are done my congregation will be able to see and hear each other better. I am in the process of preparing questionnaires that will ask my congregation's views on formation and the sanctuary. Praying that after I am done, some of the contentiousness may disappear and the discomfort dissipate. This summer we will take another few steps as I continue to add sermon and educational material to our resource base.

## Evaluate

There have been several obstacles I have encountered; first and foremost was confronting my own biases. The research process reminded me that disagreements on the sanctuary had caused a major schism within the church in 1980, and the theological camp I identify with was forced to leave the denomination. I had then to contend with the temptation to dismiss those with whom I continue to disagree. Adventism is a diverse body, which in turn led me to grapple with the realization that the disconnect between institution and congregation is so great that change at this time can only occur in local pockets. These obstacles have proven to serve as a beachhead for opportunity as I have been forced to analyze my congregation's immediate needs.

I have come to the realization that this project is not just about a doctrine espoused by a small Protestant denomination. This is not just about the formational process, it is a tool to problem solve, a pathway to recognize problems, and to leverage needs into opportunities.

This portfolio however remains a work in progress, preaching, teaching and reflecting are merely the first steps in the trek towards systemic transformation. Long lasting change requires more than skillful preaching, this remains perhaps the greatest shortcoming of this project. Incumbency is an albatross, and Loma Linda University Church remains the poster for incumbency. My primary concern is that this project may get lost amidst the torrent of programs, plans, and initiatives vying for my congregation's attention.

The research journey has provided insight into several alternatives worth pursuing if my contextual reality was different. Had the discovery workshop occurred in a post-pandemic world, I have a feeling that I would have pursued a plan that sought to shift our approach to hermeneutics at an institutional level. If my church were smaller, or could tolerate more change, I would perhaps dedicate a few years to analyze the whole of Adventist doctrine through a formational lens. Perhaps then, the most important discovery was that context is key when determining a research process.

## Next Steps

Tzu was correct in his assessment when it comes to journeys, this portfolio represents the culmination of what has felt like a thousand-mile trip. This summer I have the opportunity of commencing a new journey, as I continue to track my church's openness to formational language. The results from the surveys after the project is delivered will inform some of the next steps to take, as well as to point out some new avenues for research.

I continue to be overwhelmed by the support of my cohort, faculty, and mentors during this process, this remains both the greatest joy and biggest surprise. The community I have forged a George Fox has always viewed ecumenism as a gift, and has immersed itself in my Adventist lingo in order to become a thoughtful and encouraging conversation partner. The biggest surprise then is that in this polarized time the Church can continue to affirm that, Christ supersedes any theological or doctrinal difference we may have. I am disappointed then, that this part of the journey has ended, but will remain forever grateful because the person I am today is vastly different from the one that set out three years ago.

What then are my dreams for this project? Dreams possess an uncanny ability to inspire people to change. I may not have a fully developed plan, but perhaps I do not need one, maybe all I need is a dream. A dream that my denomination will hold hands with other faith traditions as we sit at the table of fellowship. Dreams however are often condemned to die afflicted by desperation and an incapacity to answer the most important question of them all: Now What?



# Doctoral Project

"Most founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the movement today if they had to agree to the denomination's 28 fundamental beliefs"<sup>3</sup> This provocative pronouncement constitutes the opening line of George Knight's seminal work on Adventist history; both historians and theologians would agree that any study of Adventist hermeneutics must commence with a historical and epistemological survey of Adventism. A faith tradition boasting more than 21 million members worldwide, a vast network of healthcare institutions, and the second largest parochial education system in the world. This denomination however, had a rather inauspicious beginning, birthed as it was amidst the renewed religious fervor prevalent in America during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The story commences with William Miller, a disillusioned Deist intellectual, that combined America's rediscovery of Restorationism with a systematic approach to the study of Scripture, to stoke the flames of a movement that would spread like wildfire through the parishes of parochial New England. His message would galvanize bucolic congregations as they experienced the same imminent eschatological expectation that emboldened the Apostolic church. Driven by dreams of disappearing seas, salvaged souls, and opened scrolls, Miller crafted a narrative that could be adopted or affronted but could not be ignored. His hermeneutical approach lacked the elegance of Schleiermacher, the thoughtfulness of Ritschl, or the contentiousness of Strauss; it was far removed from the conversations in Göttingen and Tübingen. Millerism was an apt reflection of America; industrious, mechanical, systematic, and practical. The reluctant Bible scholar described his methodological approach as follows, "I commenced with Genesis, and read verse by verse, proceeding no faster than the meaning of several passages should be so unfolded so as to free me from embarrassment...Whenever I found anything obscure my practice was to compare it with all collateral passages."<sup>4</sup>

William spent several years in intense study, aided only by an old Crudens concordance, until he came to a curious passage found in the 14<sup>th</sup> verse of the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter in the book of Daniel: "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."<sup>5</sup> Miller adopted the common interpretive premise that when considering prophetic texts, a day equals one year. He then proceeded to interpret the sanctuary as the Earth, which was to be purified through fire. 2,300 years stood between prophecy and purification; there was still however, the issue of when to start counting.

The start date was set by cross-referencing the prophecy in Daniel 8 with the prophecy of the 70 weeks found in Daniel 9. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and

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<sup>3</sup> George Knight, *A Search for Identity; The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs*, (Hagerstown, Review and Herald Publishing, 2000), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel 8:14, King James Version.

to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, Miller concluded that Earth’s ticking clock would start with the edict to restore and rebuild Jerusalem issued by Artaxerxes in 457 BCE. A simple mathematical estimate concluded that the 2,300-day prophecy would culminate sometime in 1843. This conclusion of Christ’s premillennial return clashed with the more accepted idea, that the Messiah would return after the millennium. Afraid and aware of the potential fallout of these conclusions, Miller would spend the better part of five years fine tuning his hypothesis, raising objections, and praying for discernment. Sleepless nights, and countless hours of Bible study concluded with a solemn commitment from the Deist turned exegete, that if God would open the way, he would go and share his message of impending doom. Adventist mythology states that no sooner had Miller finished his prayer, when he received an invitation to speak at a local congregation.

From that fateful day forward, Millerite hermeneutics tapped into the Restorationist desire to return to Scripture. This laudable aim forged an exegetical framework that championed the notion of the Bible as its own interpreter, and while this approach could be applied to any portion of the Canon, the fledgling movement found its niche in eschatology. Thus, early Millerism remained for the most part, a one doctrine movement. Adventist historian George Knight defines the genesis of the church as: “Focused on the visual, literal, premillennial return of Jesus in the clouds of heaven.”<sup>7</sup> The fledgling movement might have been relegated to an afterthought, an oddity in the densely populated landscape of American born religious expressions, had it not been for the work of Abraham Joshua Himes. Himes, was an influential minister in the Christian Connection, a predecessor to the United Church of Christ. Miller may have been the exegete and theologian but remained a country preacher; Himes on the other hand, was the pastor of the influential Chardon Street Chapel in Boston. A master advertiser, Himes pioneered the use of the printing press to produce pamphlets extolling the qualities of Miller’s hermeneutical approach. Two periodicals were mass produced in short order, in what historian Nathan Hatch describes as: “An unprecedented media blitz.”<sup>8</sup> As 1842 drew to a close, Himes had managed to blanket New York state with over 600,000 copies of the *Midnight Cry*. The Boston preacher was also immensely influential in developing the concept of the Adventist camp meeting; from the summer of 1842 to the autumn

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel 9:24-25, New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>7</sup> George Knight, *A Search for Identity; The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs*, (Hagerstown, Review and Herald Publishing, 2000), 42.

<sup>8</sup> Nathan Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989), 142.

of 1844, the movement sponsored over 130 camp meetings with a combined attendance of 500,000 people, which meant that 1 out of every 35 Americans attended a Millerite camp meeting.

Miller had been leery of setting a specific date for the fulfillment of his prophetic timetable, but as the calendar turned to 1844, he began to face increased pressure to set a time. The issue would come to a head in August 1844 when S.S Snow, a prominent Millerite minister would convincingly demonstrate that the Daniel 8:14 prophecy would be fulfilled in Autumn of 1844. Snow claimed that he had calculated the day to coincide with the Jewish day of atonement which fell on October 22, 1844. The presentation produced an epidemic of excitement as people joyously returned to their homes to await the return of the bridegroom. George Storrs, another millerite minister captured the sentiment of the believers when he wrote, "I take my pen with feelings such as I never before experienced. Beyond a doubt, in my mind, the tenth day of the seventh month, will witness the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are then within a few days of that event. Awful moments to those who are unprepared but glorious to those who are ready. I feel I am making the last appeal I shall ever make through the press. My heart is full."<sup>9</sup>

The date however, came and went and Jesus did not appear in the clouds to collect the people who had heard the midnight cry. Cynics may scoff at the Millerite claims, or dismiss the experience as fanaticism driven by apocalyptic neurosis but the pain experienced by those disappointed believers ought not to be so summarily dismissed. Take the words of Josiah Litch written on October 24, 1844 as a case in point: "It is a cloudy day here, the sheep are scattered and the Lord has not come yet."<sup>10</sup> The heart wrenching image of families that had chosen to be marginalized from society for the sake of conviction, returning now, to those same communities destitute and disappointed is almost too much to bear. The sting of disillusionment lingered for decades as Washington Morse would muse more than half a century later, "That day came and passed, and the darkness of another night closed in upon the world. But with that darkness came a pang of disappointment for the Advent believers that can find a parallel only in the sorrow of the disciples after the crucifixion of their Lord. The passing of the time was a bitter disappointment. True believers had given up all for Christ, and had shared His presence as never before. The love of Jesus filled every soul; and with inexpressible desire they prayed, 'Come, Lord Jesus, and come quickly'; but he did not come. And now, to turn again to the cares, perplexities, and dangers of life, in full view of jeering and reviling unbelievers who scoffed as never before, was a terrible trial of faith and patience."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> George Storrs, *Midnight Cry*, October, 3, 1844.

<sup>10</sup> Letter written by Josiah Litch to William Miller and Abraham Joshua Himes, October 24, 1844

<sup>11</sup> George Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, (Hagerstown, Review and Herald Publishing, 1999),25

Heartbreak is the lifeblood of Adventism, a tradition that despite a litany of issues has formed resilient people desperately seeking to see Jesus. Christology may not always be the whole of Adventist theology, but it has always sought to be the hermeneutical lens from which every doctrine is understood. I am an Adventist, and as is the case with most formative relationships, my kinship with the faith tradition is complicated. The church has provided me with purpose, a calling, and an identity. The same hope that pushed Millerites toward the mountaintops awaiting a glimpse of a Messiah never to come, inspired my grandparents to escape Cuba and pursue an education and a life in America. Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz named the unmentionable angst that has accompanied me as I have sought to clarify my relationship to a church that I often fail to recognize; Milosz writes, "My Mother tongue, you were my native land; . . . I believed that you would also be a messenger between me and some good people not born as yet."<sup>12</sup> Hermeneutical language and an eschatological grammar have allowed me to find my tribe; a people baptized by disappointment, forged in expectation, and formed in a corn field.

The debacle of disappointment resulted in three primary responses from my faith forerunners; The first, was to admit that nothing happened on that fateful October day, discouraged, many former members returned to their congregations in an attempt to resume a normal life. The second, was to propose that Christ had indeed returned on the allotted date. His coming however, had been a spiritual one and the people of God were now living in a millennial Sabbath. Fanaticism though quickly spread among this group and they soon disbanded. The third response posited that they had been correct on the time, but wrong on the event. They believed that something indeed happened on October 22, 1844, they just did not know what. Historians of the time, commenting on the plight of disillusioned Millerites quipped that some had indeed returned to their churches, others had given themselves over to strong drink, and still others had migrated to California. Creative as that statement is as a cover story, the next chapter in the tale that is Adventism would be written amidst tall cornhusks.

French philosopher, Simone Weil noted that, prayer consists of paying attention.<sup>13</sup> Weil would have found fluent conversation partners in the life and experience of three men desperate to assign meaning to their disappointment. The first step in this process would be to develop a hermeneutical framework that could be employed to understand what, if anything occurred on October 22, 1844. Hiram Edson, a Methodist farmer from Port Gibson, New York felt convicted "that light should be given" concerning the Great Disappointment. After a particularly intense prayer session Edson and a companion set out to offer encouragement to their fellow believers. As the two men were crossing a field Edson reported "I was stopped about midway and heaven and Earth seemed open to my view...I saw distinctly, and clearly, that instead of our High Priest coming out of the Most Holy of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth on the tenth day of the seventh month, at the end of the

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<sup>12</sup> Czeslaw Milosz, *New and Collected Poems*, (New York, Ecco Press, 2003)

<sup>13</sup> Simone Weil, *An Anthology; On Human Personality*, (New York, Grove Press, 2000), 49-78

2300 days, that he for the first time entered on that day the second apartment of that sanctuary; and that he had a work to perform in the Most Holy before coming back to this earth.”<sup>14</sup> Edson’s vision led to intense study sessions with two other former Millerites, O.R.L. Crosier and F.B. Hahn, these discussions would represent the foundation for an Adventist understanding of the Sanctuary. The prime points espoused by Edson, Crosier, and Hahn could be summarized in the following manner:

1. Drawing from the epistle to the Hebrews they concluded that there was a literal sanctuary in heaven.
2. The Jewish sanctuary services served as a full representation of the plan of salvation.
3. Just as the earthly high priest performed a two-phase ministry in the sanctuary, Jesus had a two-phase ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. The first phase of ministration commenced at the ascension, whereas the second commenced on October 22, 1844, when Christ would move from the first apartment of the sanctuary to the second.
4. The first phase of Christ’s ministry dealt with forgiveness; the second deals with the blotting out of sin and the purification of the individual believer.

These four premises provided a rationalization for the disappointment experienced by early Millerites. Friedrich Nietzsche once said, “human beings can bear any how if they have a why.” This vision had provided the Advent believers with a why, drawing from the loquacious language of Revelation, disappointment now had meaning.

Miller’s midnight cry was soon equated to the scroll from Revelation, which is sweet to the lips but bitter to the stomach. That cadre of disillusioned devotees knew a lot about bitterness, and yet they found meaning in the command uttered by the prophet from Patmos to prophecy again. Prophetic language is the discourse of lament, it is reserved for those who venture into foreign lands and are forced to sing Zion songs amidst the disorientation of exile. Sadly, the words uttered by John from his island cell have often been wrenched from the context to forge a hermeneutical approach that privileges fear. Holy lament is then replaced by triumphalist readings of the text, which often descend into a *neo-gnostic* approach to eschatology that prioritizes our capacity to decipher the prophetic code. Adventist exegetes would do well to remember the words the revelator pens at the outset of his epistle, “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.”<sup>15</sup> The words of that old minister echo across the sea, they transcend time and supersede space. This message is both timeless and timely. If you have not understood the Gospel, you have no business delving into the world envisioned by the seer. Trembling amidst the theophany, John will fall to his knees. He will shake and quiver until he senses the kind caress

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<sup>14</sup> George Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*, (Hagerstown, Review and Herald Publishing, 1999), 30

<sup>15</sup> Revelation 1:1, New International. Version

of a hand that whispers an oft forgotten interpretative premise, “Do not be afraid.” Hermeneutics then ought to be a sacred task we perform in order to quell fear and quench the spirit.

Adventists throughout history have often been called to reorient the church. In 1888, A.T Jones and E.J Waggoner pushed the church to rediscover the life affirming doctrine of righteousness by faith. Ellen White, the church’s most influential voice would invest the later part of her career refining the denomination’s position on Christology, missiology, and soteriology. A.G Daniels, the movement’s most able administrator, spent the first part of the twentieth century attempting to demythologize the institution’s approach to inspiration. Edward Heppenstall, lent his keen theological insight in a valiant attempt to curb anthropocentric understandings of salvation. Desmond Ford, lost his ministerial credentials while trying to provide new hermeneutical possibilities for the Sanctuary. These voices along with countless others continue to call our church back to its essence.

Adventism’s understanding of truth remains our premier contribution to America’s theological landscape. The church’s Anabaptist roots, mixed with an inherent mistrust of organized religion, made the adoption of creedal confessions a difficult proposition. John Loughborough, an early Sabbatarian Adventist captured the nascent movement’s position towards creedal rigidity with the following statement: “The first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what to believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth is to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And, fifth, to commence persecution against such.”<sup>16</sup> Early Adventism understood truth as both present and progressive. This approach resulted in a hermeneutical methodology that allowed for continued conversations and revisions to our interpretative approach to Scripture. The preamble to the church’s statement on fundamental beliefs serves as a perfect illustration of this dynamic approach to the text, it reads: “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.”<sup>17</sup>

Jemar Tisby’s haunting treatment of the history of race in the American church, pushes ferociously against the notion of historical determinism.<sup>18</sup> History, ought then to be viewed as the record of a myriad of decisions that have shaped our preferred narrative. Critical historical analysis is the assessment of the consequences engendered by those decisions. This brief historical survey of

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<sup>16</sup> John Loughborough, *Review and Herald*, October 8, 1861, 148.

<sup>17</sup> The Graybill preamble to the Statement of fundamental beliefs printed in *The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, (Hagerstown, Published by the Secretariat, 2005)

<sup>18</sup> Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2019)

Adventist history and hermeneutical approaches to the sanctuary has attempted to note that this doctrine has often driven our obsession toward eschatology; resulting in Adventist angst. An existence driven by eschatological caffeine and fed by visions of judgment and condemnation. A formational approach to hermeneutics however, may provide the new and intoxicating interpretative possibility that the Sanctuary exists not to condemn but to restore. Pangs of disappointment are at once replaced with praise as we recognize that the building, that shabby tent in the middle of the wilderness was conceived as a microcosmos, intended to repair something long ago broken. *Berakhot* is ultimately about the renewal of intimacy, a close reading of the text may alert us to the miraculous possibility that we may still chose to shift our language from condemnation to restoration. Thus, if the garden represents paradise lost, the Sanctuary can be seen as paradise regained.

What if the Sanctuary was more than a methodological approach to mitigate our disappointment? What if we could go back to scripture driven by an intense desire to replace formulaic approaches with a formational hermeneutic? Robert Bellah defines religious bodies as both “communities of memory” and “communities of practical reason.”<sup>19</sup> Bellah contends that these communities are the only antidote to the toxicity and isolation driven by Western rugged individualism. Don Browning, professor of Religion at the University of Chicago takes up Bellah’s work arguing that the only possible way for these communities to make sense is if they are led by “reflective practitioners.”<sup>20</sup> Churches however, are also communities of tradition, woven together by a collective mythology. Hermeneutics then, ought to inspire us to more than the proper use of interpretative tools when it comes to the sacred text, it must also be a gentle process that seeks to untangle the communal ethos in search for understanding. The old Anselmian adage of *Fidens quaerens intellectum*, may shift to *caritas quaerens intellectum*. How then, can communities of tradition also become communities of memory and practical reason? Browning’s question lingers, waiting for the response of practical hermeneuticians courageous enough to question their tradition.

This paper represents a humble attempt at recovering an approach that holds truth as both present and progressive. I question my faith tradition not because I desire to move away from it, but because mission is about entering new spaces boldly in order to both transform them, and to be transformed by them. The purpose of an academic program that seeks to train students to become doctors of the church, is to equip reflective practitioners for works of service. This then, represents my attempt at applying that training so that the body may be built up. These reflections are not intended to be dogmatic, nor do they intend to diminish Adventism’s rich interpretative tradition.

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Bellah et al. *Habits of the Heart; Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, (Berkley, University of California Press, 1985), 152-157

<sup>20</sup> Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology; Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1991), 2



This project however does propose a new hermeneutical paradigm intended to enrich the conversation around the Sanctuary.

"You are not going to transform something unless you love it." That simple phrase has remained a mantra as I have navigated a process that continues to test my commitment to an institution that I love and loathe. This process has also been formational, in that it has alerted me to the reality that at times I have put so much emphasis on taking over the power structures that I have become a prisoner to them. The purpose of revolution is to create solutions, to advance humanity; revolution, is not a search for power it is a search for problems. So, we come back to the text, beaten, battered, and bruised clinging to the promise that even as we see the problems we will not let go until we are blessed.

I once heard a story about a pair of shopkeepers, sworn rivals with most bitter animosity; their stores were across the street from each other. So, they would spend each day sitting in the doorway, keeping track of each other's business. If one got a customer, he would smile in triumph at his rival. When the other got a new shipment delivered, he would smirk mockingly at his enemy. One night, an angel appeared to one of the shopkeepers in a dream and said, "God has sent me to teach you a lesson. He will give you anything you ask for, but I want you to know, that whatever you get, your competitor across the street will get twice as much. Would you be wealthy? You can be very wealthy, but he will be twice as rich. Do you want to live a long healthy life? You can, but his life will be longer and healthier. You can be famous, have children you will be proud of, whatever you desire. But whatever you get, he will get twice as much. "The man frowned, thought for a moment and said, "All right, my request is: strike me blind in one eye." This jocose anecdote often rings true in the church; as Loughborough stated more than 150 years ago, we become enamored with creedal statements and weaponize faith reducing hermeneutics to a zero-sum game with no victors. My hope instead is that these reflections may push us to hear the council of a pastor and spiritual mentor who advised us long ago to resist disarray, disappointment, and division, in order to, "Meet together in the name of Jesus...He is your Prophet, your Shepherd, your Bishop, your Priest in the midst of you, to open, and to sanctify you, and to feed you with Life, and to quicken you with Life."<sup>21</sup>

A brief note should be shared regarding the scope, methodology, and history of this project. The initial NPO I proposed was connected to a process that would develop and champion a hermeneutical approach intended to promote diversity and inclusivity within the Adventist church. I spent the better part of two years selecting stakeholders, preparing an expertise essay, and processing launch plans. Focus however, remained elusive as I was always met with a response that can best be described as polite acquiescence. As conversations continued two things became painfully apparent:

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<sup>21</sup> George Fox, *Epistle 288*, 1672, quoted in Quaker Religious Thought Vol. 15 (Winter 1973-1974), 23

1. My church had not resolved some of the inherent hermeneutical challenges within our own faith tradition.
2. The focus of my NPO was viewed by my stakeholders as overly academic, fodder for the ethereal theological conversations that populate academia, but with no practical value for the church.

Paul's letter to the church in Corinth proved foundational in shifting my approach to this project. The Corinthian congregation is divided over multiple issues, the reader is then tempted to prescribe a solution without taking into consideration the inherent complexities that comprise a community of faith. The solution to the controversy of *glossolalia* seems simple enough, train more interpreters. A closer analysis of the text seems to suggest that while charismatic controversy often focuses on the need for interpreters, translators are more useful when trying to engender corporate transformation. Translators are people courageous enough to allow their lives to be translated time and again as the Spirit gives them new utterance. The shift in scope of this NPO is my attempt at functioning more as a translator and less as an interpreter. I could attempt to expose my congregation to the challenges afflicting Christian communities in a world that no longer seems to have a need for voices of faith as part of the marketplace of ideas; the danger is that the epistemological and experiential gap between the current ideological climate and the lives of my suburban, affluent, and highly educated parishioners remains too broad to bridge.

The Gospel witness provided a helpful framework in navigating this tension. The healing, teaching, and fleshy ministry of Jesus seemed to follow a rather simple pattern. Christ would commence by establishing some common consensus, and then proceeded to shift people from the known to the unknown. Suddenly, a new exegetical vista opened up as I recognize that it would be impossible to convince my congregation of the value of diverse hermeneutics, if we did not first address some of the oft ignored interpretative issues we still struggle with. How could I pour new wine, which posited a hermeneutical framework that championed Exodus as a text for liberation and immigration, if I did not first contend with the old wineskin of the Sanctuary. I also recognized that my faith tradition prioritizes preaching, and so instead of writing a theological treatise I opted for reflections that could be read as sermons. I recognize both the power and the paltriness of preaching as I walk weekly with a congregation, and I am astounded by a God who often uses preaching as poor as mine to produce profound change in people's lives.

I also am keenly aware that preaching is punctuated by an eternal imbalance; namely, the message is always far greater than the messenger. Homiletics is mere commentary on what the Spirit is already doing, so the preacher never stands alone, she/he is forever shrouded in the Spirit. The methodological approach to this project mirrors the one I employ when preparing a message, whereby I seek to lean into a paradox that attempts to fuse a hermeneutic of hope with a hermeneutic of suspicion, where transparency is held in the highest regard. Holden Caulfield, the audacious protagonist of J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, exposes the hypocrisy of religious types who simplify hermeneutical tension and transform faith into a masquerade, mere performance art. Caulfield states, "If you want to know the truth, I can't even stand ministers. The ones they've had at every school I've gone to; they all have these Holy Joe voices when they start giving their sermons."

God, I hate that. I don't see why the hell they can't talk in their natural voice. They sound so phony when they talk."<sup>22</sup>

The Bible is a book pregnant with paradox, Jesus employs paradoxical language as a teaching tool to unveil the reality of the Kingdom come. Phrases like: "The first shall be last" or "Whoever guards his life will lose it" speak to the now and not yet reality of Divine rule. Paradox is not exclusive to the Gospel story, for it plays out beautifully in the Exodus tale that deftly merges both deliverance and death-march. This is more than a mere dualistic story of good versus evil; the Exodus narrative represents a critique of the politics of power and with-it God's condemnation of our manmade monarchies. Consider how the tale unfolds, YHWH places Moses in the palace, equips him to fulfill a particular purpose; Moses however, cannot fathom the Divine designs for liberation and as result he exchanges the call to lead a people for the gratification of providing relief to one individual. The primary paradox present throughout Exodus is that God sees value, where we only see brokenness. The story will shift then from interpersonal conflicts, to quarrels between nations. The book pushes the bold theological assertion that the God of Israel is in control of the basket in the brook as well as the destiny of nations. This is the poetry of polarity, a shocking story of a God who transforms bareness into birth, and bitterness into blessing. YHWH will intervene and in doing so, Israel's weakness will become her strength and Egypt's strength will become its weakness.

The paradoxical apex in Israel's desert dwelling narrative can be found in 7 speeches YHWH delivers to Moses. These missives are intended to provide the people with clear instructions for the construction of a sanctuary. In a preamble to the incarnation, God casts His lot with a bewildered lot of former slaves. The reader thumbs through the pericope found in chapters 25 to 31 to discover a shocking reality. YHWH is both interested and invested in collaboration. If the universe is the space God makes for us, then the Sanctuary is the space we make for God. Triumphalist theologies that promote divine election, and sovereignty over land, crumble when we realize that Exodus was not about Canaan; it was about sharing in God's own way of existence. I believe that this hermeneutical approach can be both healing and transformational for my denomination, but as has been the case for most of our history we Adventists prefer to trek down the road less traveled.

My prayer is that these reflections will in a roundabout way lead you to worship the one who makes the crooked path straight.

"My life flows on in endless song above earth's lamentation;  
I hear the real though far-off hymn that hails a new creation. . .  
No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that Rock I'm clinging.  
Since Christ is lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> J.D. Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, (New York, Little Brown Publishing Company, 1979)

<sup>23</sup> Robert Lowry, *How can I Keep from Singing*



## The Offering

I was placidly perched in that place christened by Robert Louis Stevenson as the Land of Nod,<sup>24</sup> when the tense and tenacious buzzing of the phone woke me from my slumber. Dazed, miffed, and still a bit confused, I glanced at the caller ID. The light beamed as the name on the screen came into focus, it was the lead pastor of our church phoning me. I felt a jolt of angst flooding my body, after all, calls that ring in the dead of night are rarely harbingers of good news. “Miguel, I am not feeling well. I hate to do this to you but could you cover for me today?” I immediately felt relief mixed with anxiety, as adrenaline and endorphins flooded my body. “My sermon notes are on my desk”, the voice continued, even as I had already begun to process the tenor of the message, I would deliver to the most influential congregation in the Adventist world. Bleary eyed, I dressed and drove to the church as day began to break. I was greeted by sounds, sights, and smells that seemed both foreign and familiar. Crisp pages neatly stacked on a desk, and a manuscript that begun with the promising phrase, “This is a safe space”; we tend to talk about safety a lot, particularly in a context that has become ripe for partisanship. We often believe that life is nothing more than an exercise in discerning those who are for us, from those who are against us. Ignorant of the reality of time, cultural difference, history, and trauma we throw up our flags, foolishly hoping that those who agree with us will surround us; thus, ensuring the exclusion of the unwanted, the foreign, the other.

The late great American pastor Eugene Peterson tells a tale that serves to illustrate our compulsion to confuse candidness with callousness. Peterson writes, “A number of years ago my wife and our three children were in Yellowstone national park, the first of our national parks. I often think of our national parks as sanctuaries parallel to our churches. Our churches are sanctuaries for the cross, the covenant, and salvation. The parks are sanctuaries for creation, places for protecting creation from exploitation, places we can look at the Earth and fullness thereof, be in adoration of the creator, and in awe of His creation. Yellowstone was the first place in our continent to be set aside in this way. So, my family and I were walking in a mountain meadow in Yellowstone Park, there was a little girl of four or five about 30 yards out in the meadow picking exquisite alpine flowers. It is against the rules to pick flowers in national parks. Even my children knew this, they were well versed in the motto of the Sierra Nevada Club: “Take nothing but pictures leave nothing but footprints. I was outraged. Sacrilege taking place on holy ground. I yelled at her, “Don’t pick the flowers.” She just stood wide-eyed, innocent and terrified. She dropped the flowers and started crying. You can imagine what happened next. My wife and children, my children especially, were all over me. “Daddy, what you did was far worse than what she did! She was just picking a few flowers and you yelled, you scared her. You ruined her. She is probably going to have to go for counseling when she’s 40 years old.” My children were right. You cannot yell people into holiness. You cannot terrify people into the sacred. My yelling was a far worse violation of the holy place than her picking a few

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<sup>24</sup> See Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, (New York, Simon & Shuster, 1981),

flowers. Later, I had plenty of opportunity to reflect on this, reminded, as I frequently was, by my children. I do that a lot, bluster and yell on behalf of God 's holy presence, instead of taking off my shoes myself, kneeling on holy ground, and inviting whoever happens to be around to join with me."<sup>25</sup>

One of the most divisive doctrines we possess as Seventh-day Adventists is that of the Sanctuary. The purpose of these seven short reflections is to refocus our understanding of the Sanctuary as connected to God's redemptive action. The reality is that the idea of sanctification has prompted an interesting dichotomy among members of our faith tradition, on the one hand, we coalesce with the sisterhood of Protestant churches to confess *sola gratia*; on the other, we continually seek to add that which is *adiaphora*. On the one hand we sing, "Jesus paid it all"; on the other, we seek to attempt and cover the balance in our soteriological account. On the one hand, we live as though we hope in nothing else but Jesus' blood and righteousness; on the other, we die devoid of assurance of salvation. The truth is that our faith tradition is every bit as conflicted as we are. Too often we have attempted to resolve the conflict, when perhaps it would be more apropos to inhabit the paradox. May I humbly suggest that what is needed then, is a return to Scripture in order to reorient our conversation regarding the Sanctuary.

Permit me to propose that there are two primary questions that may serve as our compass during our conversations on the Sanctuary. The first is, "What is God doing?" The second is, "What do we do in response?" Now that we have those queries before us, let us go to the text. I want to invite you to turn with me to the twenty fifth chapter of the book of Exodus as we inhabit the first nine verses. The pericope opens and we find ourselves at the lip of Sinai, our toes curled up on this side of eternity, like Peterson's child we are gripping our holy flowers as tears stream down our cheeks, for we are witnessing a transitional time. The Exodus story is all about shifts; there amidst sea, sand and Sinai, Israel will experience a formational metamorphosis. They will swiftly shift from bondage to Pharaoh to bonding to YHWH, from brick building to shaping a sanctuary, and from desperation to doxology. The people however, are not the only ones that will change, YHWH's presence will also move from occasional to ongoing, as tabernacle and tent will serve as template for a new relational reality.

This transition serves as a prime opportunity for value realignment. A decade ago, I experienced one such transition, as my wife and I readied ourselves to become parents. I was terrified at the thought that we were now wholly responsible for another life. The fear however subsided as I became intoxicated with visions of me holding a beautiful baby girl. Enamored, excited by endless potential and possibility we visited the obstetrician buoyed by expectations that seemed to sore with each sound of the sonogram machine. Suddenly, the physician stopped as she picked up a faint heartbeat. The rapid palpitation introduced Linda and me to a new song, the symphonic reality

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<sup>25</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 83-84

we refer to as parenthood. The same YHWH who thundered from Sinai was now speaking in hushed tones, that Exodus presence of pillar and cloud was not as majestic but it remained every bit as magnanimous as we caught the first glimpse of our baby boy. "Congratulations daddy" that phrase, neither profound, nor poetic shifted in an instant my paradigm, expectations, and aspirations. Visions of a baby girl and processions down a wedding aisle, were quickly replaced by the sacred liturgy that is a conversation between a father and son. The sanctuary serves as a prime opportunity to shift our tired and rather prosaic views of God, with a new reality that is both poignant and poetic. That is: God tabernacles among us, He transcends time and space in order to be relationally present. Adventism has sadly often thought that the Sanctuary is about geography, when it has always been about grace.

The twenty fifth chapter of Exodus depicts Israel in a season of transition, acts of apostasy coincide with mumbling moments in order to forge the theological baggage Israel carries into its desert dwelling experience. Thus, our first question comes into focus, "What is YHWH doing?" Let's go to the text: "The Lord said to Moses: Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to give you shall receive the offering for me."<sup>26</sup> Note that it is YHWH who calls for an offering, what is truly striking is that this is to be a voluntary offering. Nothing is demanded as payment for Israel's liberation, instead there is only an invitation to construct a tent, a flexible and portable symbol of God's presence.

The Pentateuch seeks to draw a connection between the first two books of the Bible, if the story of the Universe begins with creation in the Genesis account, then Jewish history must also commence through a creative act in Exodus. British rabbi and theologian Jonathan Sacks used the following table to illustrate this notion:<sup>27</sup>

The universe (Genesis)	The <i>Mishkan</i> (Exodus)
"And God made the sky"	"They Shall make Me a Sanctuary"
"And God made the two great lights"	"They shall make me an ark"
"And God made the beasts of the earth" (1:7,16, 25)	"Make the table" (25:8,9,23)

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<sup>26</sup> Exodus 25:1-2, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Exodus: The Book of Redemption (Covenant and Conversation)*, 199-200, Kindle Edition.

"And God saw what he had made, and behold it was very good" (1:31)	"Moses saw all the skilled work and behold they had done it" (39:43)
"The heavens and earth and all of their array were completed." (2:1)	"All the work of the Tabernacle of the tent of meeting was completed" (39:32)
"And God completed all the work that He had done" (2:2)	"And Moses completed the work" (40:33)
"And God blessed" (2:3)	"And Moses blessed" (39:43)
"And Sanctified it" (2:3)	"And you shall sanctify it and all its vessels" (40:9)

Thus, the picture that begins to emerge from the first two books of the Bible is that YHWH views creation as a collaborative enterprise. The voice that forged cosmos out of chaos, now speaks again from the mountain; bring me what your heart desires, that we may build a tabernacle together, and every time you pitch, or pull apart, every time your calloused hands and journey weary feet are busy at work creating, you will remember that you and I are joined together.

The invitation that God has always extended to us is to build tents. The problem is that we are much more adept at building boxes. God tells us, build me something portable and pliable, and we retort, what you need is something structured and rigid. Build me tents and we say what you really need is a temple, and even then, God is relentless in His pursuit; "And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them."<sup>28</sup> This first appearance of the word Sanctuary is linked not to ritual but to relationship. The author chooses to employ the Hebrew **וּשְׁכֵנִי**, which denotes the idea of setting up permanent lodging. YHWH has in essence decided to cast His lot with Israel. Echoes from the farewell discourse of the rabbi from Nazareth flood the mind as we hear that same word on Jesus' lips: "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me."<sup>29</sup> Abiding is God's ultimate attempt to inundate us with His presence, to fill the spaces that exist between us, as we experience Divine overflow. The Sanctuary then, cannot be about what God is doing or has stopped doing; rather it is about the act of being overwhelmed by the Divine. The challenge however, is that we continue to choose our boxes.

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<sup>28</sup> Exodus 25:8, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>29</sup> John 15:4, New Revised Standard Version



If you follow the story of Israel and their attempt at building something portable and pliable, you will note that the story concludes in the sixth chapter of the first book of Kings. Here the author attempts to forge a clear linguistic connection: "In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord."<sup>30</sup> There is however a stark difference, for when Solomon builds his temple, he does not request a voluntary offering. Instead, he conscripts thirty thousand men and forces people to build houses, walls, and granaries. Scripture utilizes the Hebrew *on* to describe Salomon's labor force; this word evokes Israel's generational trauma, for it is the same word utilized in Exodus to describe Pharaoh's slaves.<sup>31</sup> YHWH sought to offer rest as the invitation is extended from Sinai to come freely, the tragedy of supplanting tent for temple and blessing for box, is that instead of receiving rest, all that is left is restlessness; restlessness fed by fear. So, if Adventist eschatology or our understandings of the Sanctuary prompt fear, perhaps the time has come to engage in a hermeneutic that prioritizes rest and hope.

Old Testament scholar Terrence Fretheim notes that the Exodus narrative is one that moves from bane to blessing. The opening chapter of the book presents a people who have been faithful to the Genesis command to be fruitful and multiply, "Verse 7 multiplies language regarding the growth of this people. Five verbs are used to stress an extraordinary increase in numbers. This language connects with the promise of fruitfulness to Israel's ancestors."<sup>32</sup> They have however failed in the directive to subdue the land for they themselves are to be subdued. Slavery, Sinai, and Sanctuary are all movements in YHWH's symphony of salvation, attempting to allow humanity to once exchange the bitter fruit of the Garden, for a land that flows milk and honey. The scores of women, men, children, and live-stock that have been invited to partake of Israel's desert dwelling experience are invited to an existence that is at times disorienting, and disorganized. The Sanctuary is God's presence in the midst of disorder and disorientation, what then, is God doing? He is pleading to be placed in our disorientation; YHWH desires to dwell in the midst of our mess. That experience, connectedness and honest vulnerability can only occur when one comes to God freely.

The seven speeches concerning the Sanctuary in Exodus commence with the command: "Build me a Sanctuary that I may dwell among you", they conclude with the promise of Sabbath lived out in ceremonial law. Leviticus opens with the formulaic line, "The Lord summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting."<sup>33</sup> There is a deeper point at play here that ought not to be missed

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<sup>30</sup> I Kings 6:1-2, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>31</sup> See I Kings 9:15 & Exodus 1:11

<sup>32</sup> Terrence Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Westminster John Knox Press.) Kindle Edition., 24

<sup>33</sup> Leviticus 1:1, New Revised Standard Version

by the reader, because YHWH is saying: if you invite me to tabernacle amidst your mess, then, I will speak to you from that very mess. This is the Adventist God, the incarnational God, the One who comes, our Creator who is invested in invading our reality. Incarnation then, is not merely the Divine response to sin; it is also the commitment of a God who desires to speak to and become part of our mess. John's gospel captures this reality in its poetic prologue, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."<sup>34</sup>

So, how do we respond in responsible ways to this relentless God who never tires in His pursuit of us? Perhaps a proper place to start is to put away the long theological manifestos, the doctrinal statements, and liturgical predilections, that we may recognize we possess inherent value. Scripture presents the wondrous reality that we are the sanctuary, much ink has been spent, and blood spilled attempting to answer the question, what is Jesus doing in heaven? Adventism has to concern itself with a new question, namely, what is Christ doing in my heart? Because YHWH dwells in the builders, not the building; when we make this distinction, then we will recognize that what matters is: Not the building that houses the church, but the church that inhabits the building. People always possess primacy in the economy of the Kingdom.

Theologian, and pastor Richard Foster proposes that we live out the commission to be and become Sanctuary by returning to the practice of spiritual disciplines. Like the farmer on a field, the Christian recognizes that she/he cannot grow the seed, or ensure the harvest. The farmer can only prepare the soil that will house the seed. Praxis is the art of inner preparation so that our soul-soil may house the Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

"Build me a Sanctuary that I may dwell among you" Indeed this is a safe space, one that may invite us to remove our shoes that we may revel in his salvation. To all of us who have tried to scare people into holiness, the Gospel reminds us that none is righteous for: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."<sup>36</sup> Foster again cautions us against the inclination to supplant surrender with willpower, he writes: "The moment we feel we can succeed and attain victory over sin by the strength of our will alone is the moment we are worshiping the will."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> John 1:1,14, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>35</sup> See Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline; A Path Toward Spiritual Growth*, (San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1998)

<sup>36</sup> Romans 3:23, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>37</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline; Special Anniversary Edition*, (HarperCollins. Kindle Edition), 5

So today, we surrender our burdened, and battered sanctuary because we want to be beguiled by His presence. Perhaps you are wondering how to do this in a practical way, permit me to invite you to consider the following prayer as you pluck daisies and pick daffodils in that grace filled garden.

"Jesus, today I offer up my \_\_\_\_\_"

## The Shekel

Today America finds itself with an unhealthy obsession with perfection. Celebrities and civilians alike carefully curate a persona designed to promote the myth of the immaculate image. American journalist Kathryn Schulz attempts to deconstruct this ideal with a book aptly entitled "Being Wrong." Schulz boldly proposes that mistakes are pathways towards greater resilience. She illustrates this point by recounting the story of Ross Gelbspan, a journalist that spent over thirty years covering issues on the environment. Gelbspan attended a conference in 1972 titled, "The Limits to Growth", there he heard a multitude of speakers present on a variety of topics that ranged from economic exploitation to population explosion. As Ross listened to these rather drab and dreary topics, he was captivated by one of the presenters, a woman named Donella Meadows. Meadows, a professor at Dartmouth was an iconic figure in the environmental movement. What intrigued Gelbspan that day however, were not the sustainability models Meadows was presenting, but rather an odd juxtaposition. As Ross listened, he was fascinated by what seemed a paradox because amidst a seemingly grim future, Donella appeared to be pregnant. Ross furiously returned to his typewriter determined to tell a new type of story, one that focused on hope and the indomitable spirit that propels us to dream even as we confront disconcerting truths. The editors at The Village Voice, were so impressed with the article that they decided to run with it as their cover story.

There was however a slight problem, one might call it a minor oversight or perhaps just a tinge of fake news. Donella Meadows was not pregnant; some mistakes may kill us, but most just make us incessantly mortified. Ross wanted to die, as he later recounted: "I was mortified. I mean mortified. I was not a rookie. I'd been a reporter since 1961. I'd worked for the *Philadelphia Bulletin*; I'd worked for the *Washington Post*. But I'd never made an error like that, and I cannot begin to describe the embarrassment. Truth is, I'm still mortified when I talk about it."<sup>38</sup> What strikes me is that the mistake still stung even after more than four decades, Ross recoils at the notion that an experienced journalist who meticulously cross referenced every detail of a story could mistake bloating and pregnancy. The lesson I learned from this whole debacle is to never ask or assume someone is pregnant.

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<sup>38</sup> Kathryn Schulz, *Being Wrong; Adventures in the Margin of Error*, (New York, Harper Collins, 2010), 26

Mistakes are often difficult to stomach, they force us to stretch the limits of our linguistic frameworks. Have you ever heard someone who upon committing a transgression says; "Oh, I could just die." Often, however our peccadilloes cause us to want to disappear, to crawl into a proverbial cave. Still yet, there are times when errors take on a less drastic and more gastric motif, such as with the phrases: "You just made me eat crow" or "I could just eat my shoe." The concept that identity and expertise are linked to our capacity to avoid error has made us look at mistakes as something difficult to digest, rather than something to savor.

Imagine it, we pitch our tent on the slopes of Sinai desperate to experience the presence of YHWH, yet also petrified to make a mistake. The image comes to focus and you feel anxious about what the encounter will bring, that is how Israel felt in our reading for this section found in the thirtieth chapter of the book of Exodus; focus with me on the passage comprising verses 11-16. This section commences with the familiar phrase, "The LORD spoke to Moses:" This sentence is foundational in the economy of the Sanctuary, for God gives seven instructional speeches to Moses, which all begin with this grammatical construction. The section continues, "When you take a census of the Israelites to register them, at registration all of them shall give a ransom for their lives to the LORD."<sup>39</sup>

Two things jump off the page as we consider this opening statement; first, the perceived problem with a census; second, the offense committed that requires a ransom. A census is a valuable tool for governance, if you are trying to collect revenue you need a concise picture of the population in order to tax them, if you are trying to raise an army, you need to know how many able-bodied men you can conscript into service. When it comes to the economy of this world, numbers reign supreme; they serve as the metric by which we measure ourselves. While Adventism may have fallen prey to the fallacy that equates numbers with success, YHWH may be inviting us to quantify something more meaningful.

Consider three questions that may aid us in a corporate conversation; first, what do we do when we face a mistake? Second, how do we face these mistakes? Third, where do we face these mistakes? Let us attempt to answer these questions by considering a word that appears at the outset of the pericope, a word my Bible translates as ransom. The Seventh-day Adventist commentary notes: "Ransom or covering, in the same way that insurance "covers" a man and releases him from further obligation."<sup>40</sup> Ransom in the book of Exodus is connected to the concept of being covered, this same notion governs our relationship with insurance providers as month after month we pay our premium that we may be covered. Allstate, one of the largest insurance providers in our country developed a wildly successful corporate culture embodied by the slogan: "You are in good

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<sup>39</sup> Exodus 30:11, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>40</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume I*, Francis D. Nichol, ed. (Washington, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953), 659.

hands"<sup>41</sup>, and we believe them, that is why, month after month we faithfully send our insurance payment. The disorienting thing is that too often we decide to place more faith in Allstate, than in Jesus. Confession is the ultimate act of faith, for it entails coming to God with our mistakes with the conviction that He will react by saying "You are covered" because we are in good hands.

What then, do we do when we make a mistake? The answer is surprisingly simple, we confess. First John, that beautifully pastoral epistle dripping with congregational care, counsels: "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."<sup>42</sup> The discipline of confession is woven throughout the pages of Scripture, but we still recoil at the prospect of confessing our shortcomings. I firmly believe, this misconception stems from a misunderstanding of the nature of sin. As I do not want to digress into a diatribe on *hamartiology*, I will simply propose that most of us understand sin as a behavioral issue. The problem then, is that if we define sin primarily as what we do, then the solution to the issue of sin is simple, STOP DOING IT! The painful reality is that careful exegesis would suggest that sin alienates us from God and one another, it erodes the relational bonds in the body of Christ because sin thrives when it isolates us. Confession is the antidote to sin, not merely because it allows us to make things right with God, but because it relationally restores us to one another. Go back to our Exodus reading, it is all there in black and white, how do you confront mistakes? You come together, each bearing a shekel.

The Hebrew **קֶלֶח**, as a unit of measurement is closely connected with the idea of weight; think about that wondrous invitation YHWH is calling the people to come forward with those weights that oppress the human spirit. Those loads that we attempt to ignore even as we become masters at the art of pretending. How often do we leave our burdens in the car before we step into the Sanctuary, we put our masks on, as we populate pews praying for the type of religious experience Robert Frost describes as: "A momentary stay against confusion."<sup>43</sup> The courageous German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer spent a large swath of his ministry thinking about those weights that weigh down the soul, his musings inspired him to write the hauntingly profound book *Life Together* where he states,

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<sup>41</sup> According to the company website the slogan was the brain child of the company's education director, Davis Ellis. Allstate lore tells that Ellis heard the ubiquitous phrase uttered by a physician as he was treating the executive's daughter. Betsy Glenn, "The Story Behind Allstate's Good hands", Accessed on November 8, 2022. <https://www.allstatecorporation.com/stories/good-hands-logo-slogan.aspx>

<sup>42</sup> I John 1:9, New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>43</sup> See John T. Napier, "A Momentary Stay Against Confusion", *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 33, no. 3 (1957), 378-394

"If a Christian is in the fellowship of confession with a brother he will never be alone again, anywhere."<sup>44</sup>

Bonhoeffer seems to hint at the same reality described in Exodus, and that is that confession is a corporate exercise; let us be honest for a moment and admit that this is a nerve wrecking prospect. The tinge of fear that tingles down our spine, is a result that often faith communities take confessions and weaponize them. The tired and trite discourse that equates a church with a family, collides against the experienced reality of so many of us who have been burned by the church. Adventism as many other faith families, continues to operate amidst a crippling trust deficit that prevents us from coming to one another and recognizing that we are all beautifully broken, but alas, we are in good hands. Ellen White, that foundational figure in our movement, wrote a poignant statement that illustrates the point: "The law of God enshrined within the ark, was the great rule of righteousness and judgment. The law pronounced death upon the transgressor, but above the law was the mercy seat upon which the presence of God was revealed and from which by virtue of the atonement pardon was granted to the repentant sinner. Thus, in the work of Christ for our redemption symbolized by the sanctuary service, "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."<sup>45</sup> Do you see? Sin is not what we do, it is who we are, it is like a virus that has incubated in every cell of our being. We know intuitively that the only way to correct an internal problem is to participate in an internal transformation. Christians like you and me have believed for centuries that it is the Spirit who facilitates this internal shift, but you and I continue to misunderstand the work of the Spirit. We think it is about condemnation, when it has always been about conviction. A gospel focused doctrine of the Sanctuary proposes that whatever is going on in heaven at this moment is happening because God wants to convict, not to condemn. This is why the Mercy Seat towers above all other furniture in the Sanctuary; this needs to become foundational to Adventism, a sermon that is preached from every pulpit, that YHWH's response to our mistakes is mercy and grace evermore.

Do you believe this? If as you read this, you are shaking your head and saying yes, then I want to ask you to step out on a ledge with me. Turn to however is next to you, look deeply and longingly into their eyes, peer into someone else's soul, and say these life affirming words: "YOU ARE NOT PERFECT!" Now before you start enjoying this too much, let me share the second part: "YOU ARE NOT PERFECT! THAT IS OK, YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE."

Confession is a corporate exercise, which leads us to our third question:

1. What do we do when we make a mistake? We Confess
2. How do we confess? Corporately

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<sup>44</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, (San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1954), 113

<sup>45</sup> Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, (Nampa, Pacific Press Publishers, 1958), 349

### 3. Where do we confess? We do it at the foot of the cross.

The reason why we have not been able to master the discipline of confession, is that we still have not understood the Gospel. Let me share a short summary of what we often hear, "Human beings are bad, broken, dysfunctional and disobedient; this enraged God, and created a cosmic conflict. Someone needed to take the brunt of divine wrath, to balance out the universal scales and so Jesus took upon himself the sin of the world." If you have ever heard this from a pastor, preacher or pulpit, I am sorry to say you have heard a heresy. The belief that Christ clung to the cross because the Father was enraged is heretical, for it was not anger that held Jesus on that tree. God got up on Golgotha because he was in love, it was His relentless desire to forgive that made Him give up His life.

The Spirit is about conviction, and it is conviction that leads to transformation. Sure, we may often get nervous when it comes to confession, after all, what we say is so often used against us. The practice of confession is not about the emotional unburdening that fulfills our grotesque curiosity as we revel in each other's shortcomings; confession is to engage in the process of spiritual maturation that leads to transformation. Bonhoeffer again proves particularly helpful when he writes that, "Only the Christian that has experienced the cross can hear his/her brother or sister's confession."<sup>46</sup> Bonhoeffer understood long ago what just dawned on me now, there is no confession without cross. We can journey with Israel, following them from exodus to exile, witnessing how they carry those shekels, trying to relieve themselves of those ever-oppressive burdens. We can continue the trek with them all the way to the gospels, thumb through the pages of our Bibles until we land on Matthew chapter 17. There we find Jesus talking to his disciples about the cross. Those former fishermen however, have still not grasped it, they have understood the what, the how, but not the where. They listen nervous as their master speaks about confession; painting images of judgment intertwined with mercy seats.

Peter is then met in Capernaum by temple tax collectors, they are requiring Peter pay the same shekel Exodus speaks of, they ask: "Does your teacher not pay the temple tax?"<sup>47</sup> Without much thought Peter replies, "Yes, he does" after all that temple tax was a sign of national pride and Jewish identity. Sure, they had some debates that you may consider trivial. The Pharisees believed that everyone needed to pay the tax, whereas the Sadducees allowed more discretion, and the Essenes considered payment to be a once in a lifetime occurrence. What strikes me is that in retrospect, these debates all seem rather trivial, much like the discussions that occupy our conversations about faith today. I wonder if we would be less guarded, less inclined towards the trivial, if we had the courage to converse at the foot of the cross; the place where God's grace meets our confession.

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<sup>46</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, (San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1954), 113

<sup>47</sup> Mathew 17:24, New Revised Standard Version.

Peter goes back to Jesus, and the Messiah knowing what is in our heart asks “Peter, do kings collect taxes from their children?” In other words, does the Christian who has understood the power of confession continue to carry those unmentionable burdens? The answer is apparent, but I love the fact that Jesus sends Peter to fish. The disciple will open the mouth of the fish and in it he will find the exact amount needed to pay the tax. The beauty of that moment cannot escape us, for Jesus is trying to communicate to Peter that God has already made provision for us. That even the temple tax is placed now under God’s authority, for Matthew, Jesus’ faith will move mountains and his love sets lakes in motion. This is what the Sanctuary was about, provision, a blood sprinkled, mercy seat that would cover our shortcomings. I am often heartbroken, because I have come to realize that the torrent of salacious scandals that afflicts Christianity continues to cascade because people have chosen to believe in two lies: My sin is not big enough and so I must justify it, or we think my sin is too great, confessing it would damage the church, so I must hide it. American writer Gretchen Ronnevik, reflecting on the well documented failures of modern Christianity writes, “Church scandals are so heartbreaking because it isn’t just about the ugliness of the sin. It’s the complete abandonment of either the need for the gospel or of the proclamation of the power of the gospel.”<sup>48</sup>

We often misunderstand what sin is, that leads us to misinterpret the gospel, which in turn leads us to misconstrue what the church is supposed to be. We often believe that the church is intended to be a fraternity of saints, I happen to believe that the church is more akin to a fellowship of sinners. Why you may ask? Well, simply stated if you believe that the church is a fellowship of sinners, then, you must consider the possibility that there is no sin that we can confess that will not be met with understanding. This idea of church allows for compassionate accountability, which reminds me of a story that occurred in a time not unlike this and in a context very similar than the one I pastor.

A hospital attached to a university campus, a medical institution on the cutting edge of care, it performed around 170 surgeries every week and saw about 250,000 patients every year. Hannah walked into that hospital feeling reassured and confident, after all, Beth-Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston Massachusetts was a teaching hospital for Harvard Medical School. Hannah checked in for her routine procedure, she was wheeled into the operating room without a care in the world. When she woke up, she noticed that the wrong side of her body was bandaged. Horrified she slowly started to realize that the physicians had operated on the wrong side of the body. Nancy Berlinger, an ethicist specializing in medical malpractice captures how these conversations often go, Berlinger notes: “Observing more senior physicians, students soon learn that their mentors believe in, practice, and reward the concealment of errors. They talk about unanticipated outcomes

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<sup>48</sup> Gretchen Ronnevik, *Ragged: Spiritual Disciplines for the Spiritually Exhausted*, (1517 Publishing, Kindle ed.), 166



until mistakes morph into complications."<sup>49</sup> Berlinger proposes that there is a culture of secrecy which pervades the medical field. Admittedly, some mistakes may make you feel mortified, others might want to make you eat your shoes, but there are some errors that harm people in profound ways. The estimates are that around 750,000 experience medical malpractice in America, and tragically around 100,000 people perish as a result of medical error. This makes malpractice the eighth-leading cause of death in our country; so that morning as Nancy emerges from her brain fog, she readies herself for the soliloquy of unanticipated consequences and complications. Instead, the physician looked at her and said "I am truly sorry for this mistake. The doctor was able to do this because Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center had recently implemented a disclose and apologize policy. Risky perhaps, after all, the threat of litigation loomed large. But consider the lesson learned in 1987 from a Veterans hospital in Lexington, Kentucky that adopted a similar policy. Since its implementation, the hospital has faced litigation only three times, and the figure for malpractice settlements is a mere \$16,000, compared to the national average which pays out around \$98,000 per suit.

The story of Beth Israel and Lexington's veteran hospital lead me to affirm that there is power in the practice of confession. These two health providers decided that transparency was the best policy for themselves and their patients. Fellow Adventists, if a hospital linked to Harvard University can reach that realization, I wonder if a church, birthed by the health message might do the same. That openness and confession represent best available practices for this body of believers. It is a scary proposition, because to be honest, I do not know what will happen, I am terrified that total dependance on God will be mistaken for weakness, that my confession will make you lose confidence in me; the truth is that we cannot see the path ahead, but the Gospel has given us enough light to take the next step.

Today that next step maybe to confess, so I am going to ask you to join with me in this simple prayer of confession:

### **Reader**

Have mercy on us, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out our transgressions.  
Wash away all our iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.

### **Congregation**

For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.

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<sup>49</sup> See Nancy Berlinger, *After Harm; Medical Error and the Ethics of Forgiveness*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005)

Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight.

### Reader

Cleanse us with hyssop, and I will be clean;  
wash us, and we will be whiter than snow...  
Congregation  
Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

### ALL

Most merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have left undone.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
have mercy on us and forgive us;  
that we may delight in your will,  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your Name.  
Amen

## The Laver

Isaac Israel Hayes imagined there ought to be more; I can almost picture him in his late twenties, thin, trim, a tidy mustache above his lip, and a receding hairline on his brow, overwhelmed by a sense of dissatisfaction that dulled the senses. A physician in the low green hills of Quaker country Pennsylvania, Hayes had grown weary of the routine and predictable rhythms that oscillated between a birth here, fever there, and farming accidents everywhere. Alas, the only respite he found from the monotony of humanity was escaping to another world, the one atop this one. Hayes would read obsessively about the Arctic, enamored by the tales of expeditions and explorers seeking to tame the world, to trailblaze the tundra, to escape. Buttressed by dreams of a grander life, he left his country practice behind and enlisted to serve as surgeon onboard a boat bound for the ice; an audacious expedition led by captain Elijah Kent Caine. Caine dreamt of an inlet ocean, a sea of glass amidst unforgiving glaciers but sadly, the expedition would take a disastrous turn when captain and crew were forced to abandon their ship to embark on an 83-day tortuous journey back to civilization. The unflinching doctor would only lose one patient on the trek, and when he returned to Manhattan, he was greeted as a hero; The dock swayed with a serenade of lyrics and

limericks welcoming those exhausted explorers. The young physician had arrived like those men he had once envied while on his rounds in a previous life, a previous time.<sup>50</sup>

After captain Caine died, doctor Hayes took up the mantle as the next great polar explorer. He spent four years gearing up for the next voyage, traversing the country, regaling crowds with tales of toil and triumph. Until finally, in the summer of 1860, doctor Hayes left Boston Harbor, bound North; again, he was sent off by the songs of longshoremen and whimsical smiles of women waving handkerchiefs. The first stop was Greenland, then a treacherous trek sailing north into the ice, Hayes had prepared for every eventuality, crates of food lined the bow, every bullet, every blanket, every tool needed to tame the tundra; driven by the dream of discovery, novel routes for trade, and new creatures to bear their name. Day after day, they pressed on into an unforgiving landscape buttressed by that feverish drive that afflicts those who dare to dream beyond their station in life. Thus, the expedition forged on, until the frozen ground made it impossible to bury the bodies of those who had perished. Then, Hayes heard it; impossible as it was to know if it was day or night but the sound was unmistakable, waves lapping against the rocks. He had arrived, he could not see the shore on the other side, he could not cross, nor sketch out the contours of the continent ahead, that would be left to other men, a new generation of delusional and driven explorers. Languid, weary, muscles tingling with tension, he turned and started back. A fire burning in his belly at the realization that upon his return he would be greeted as a hero. Hayes returned in the fall of 1862 to a changed world; I can see him, wind and weather beaten, covered in pelts and polar skins. This time however, there are no songs sung by longshoremen, no handkerchiefs waved by women, because now; those same women, mothers, daughters, sisters and wives, clasp crisply, folded Union flags. The South had seceded, the battle of Bull Run had been fought, Lincoln was on his second commander. The country at war, newspapers had no time to indulge in the stories of former physicians turned adventurers. The numbing hum drumming of home forced Hayes to recognize that he now inhabited an alien landscape, destined to live caught between memory and reality, wedged between past and present, forever at sea even on land.<sup>51</sup>

I find it striking that any of us who has accepted the invitation to follow the carpenter from Nazareth can relate to Hayes' story. After all, we too are caught between two worlds; inhabiting a sliver of space that exists between the not yet and the evermore. Adventist's are particularly fluent in the verbiage of feverish expectation that leads to societal alienation, the theological flow that is Adventism is filled by the tears of our disappointment. A novella that fuses hope and heartache written by men and women living in a gilded age, pioneers buoyed by the promise of the *Parousia* and emboldened through cornfield visions, which provided them with the courage to escape the

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<sup>50</sup> Douglas W. Wamsley, *Polar Hayes; The Life and Contributions of Isaac Israel Hayes M.D.* (Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 2009)

<sup>51</sup> See Nate DiMeo, host. "A Strange Land." Produced by Radiotopia. *The Memory Palace*, April, 20, 2020. Podcast, MP3 Audio, 17:00

confines of New England parochialism in order to establish a worldwide movement. There is undoubtedly much to be proud of, to those who may think that I write in order to stray away from our tradition, or that I would sacrifice our identity at the altar of ecumenical expediency permit me to say this: I am an Adventist, a child of America's second great awakening and heir to a theological legacy that is both infuriating and inspiring. I write however, because I quiver at the thought that we have somehow mistaken that midnight cry "behold the bridegroom cometh" for a command that would have us flee to the mountains, when there is still mourning in the valley.

An ecclesiology, which equates asceticism and holiness, more often than not leads to irrelevant, myopic, and uncritical congregations happy to dwell in our cloisters, instead of in His creation. Tragically, the world has changed, political polarization, intolerance, economic disparity, war, environmental shifts, sexism, hate speech have all become part and parcel of our daily discourse. People are no longer interested in what we shall answer when the roll is called up yonder, they are more invested in how we will respond to the challenges of the here and now. Discouraged, we come back to Sinai where we have set up camp in the cracks and crevasses of the mountain in order to hear a word from YHWH, and would you believe it, He still speaks: "You shall make a bronze basin with a bronze stand for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it"<sup>52</sup> These instructions formulaic as they seem are devoid of the rich prose present in the earlier sections of Exodus; the pragmatic reader of Scripture may be tempted to skim through the passage and dismiss it as a relic of Israel's cultic history, she/he does so without realizing that the pericope is not about the location of the laver. Exodus has already shown us that in the hands of a skilled writer, geography often becomes theology. A journey intended to imbue mundane places with a mystical quality; these then, are not formulaic instructions, this is Israel's formula for holiness.

I once thought holiness to be a property that a person or place could possess. I believed that God's call to be holy in the way He is holy could be answered by a people that kept the commandments and possessed the faith of Jesus. Holiness was a goal to be achieved, the status symbol of the remnant who endured persecution and privation and overcame through principled living and the proper theology of a last generation of saints. Unfortunately, too often this pursuit of holiness (worthy as it may be), results in Christ becoming a mere piece of furniture in our belief system, rather than the whole embodiment of the Sanctuary. I now realize that holiness is not something to achieve, it is something we live; it is not an inherent property to possess, it is a call to an incarnational life; this is what it means to live in contact with the Sanctuary.

Famed American theologian Bruce Epperly astutely notes: "Only dead religions stand still, limiting truth to centuries old teachings."<sup>53</sup> My pulse quickens as I think about our community, building

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<sup>52</sup> Exodus 30:18, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>53</sup> Bruce Epperly, *The Elephant is Running: Process and Open and Relational Theologies and Religious Pluralism*, (Sage Press, Kindle Edition), 9

programs, meaningful worship services, life affirming small groups, and countless opportunities for service. I wonder if Epperly would see us today and quibble about stagnation; after all there is growth everywhere. In an era where churches complain of diminishing attendance, dwindling resources, and shameful scandals, we press ahead, unflinchingly carving a path through the icy glaciers of post-Christian America. But before we start congratulating each-other and give in to triumphalism, perhaps we ought to redefine stagnation.

Herod's temple was an iconic symbol of the ancient world, maintained by an army of priests and Levites, the temple served as the epicenter of Jerusalem politics and financial hub for Judea. Church consultants driven to measure efficacy and impact by a set of measurable metrics might be tempted to laud first century Judaism as a paragon of success. The pomp and pretense are soon interrupted by a piercing voice echoing from the temple mound, "let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" <sup>54</sup> John's gospel sets this powerful statement against the backdrop of the feast of tabernacles, a yearly reminder of Israel's Exodus experience. On the final day of the feast the High Priest would pour water from a golden pitcher onto the altar, a visual representation of YHWH's care in the wilderness. Jesus utilizes this opportunity to state that His Spirit is poured out for us, and that the locale for thirst quenching libations is not the Sanctuary but the believer's heart. Gail O'Day and Susan Hylen, two of the most respected Johannine scholars in America note that this experience is one that we are called to both wait for and participate in: "The future gift of the Spirit underscores the way in which the Spirit will become known in the life of the church after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus." <sup>55</sup> Israel's religion had perished, a result of a paradigm that views holiness as a commodity to be achieved, pursued, and maintained. The autopsy report at the feast of *Sukkot* could read: symbol focused repetition leads to rituals devoid of righteousness; stagnation then, could be redefined as growth devoid of purpose.

Jesus possessed a clear understanding of His purpose. He spoke boldly often blurring the line between orthodoxy and heresy. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>56</sup> First century Judaism viewed the destruction of the temple as a cataclysmic event that heralded the end of the age. Christ's subversive statement is intended to evoke the possibility of new beginning, echoing YHWH's covenantal command to Israel "You shall make a bronze basin with a bronze stand for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it."

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<sup>54</sup> John 7:37-38, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>55</sup> Gail O'Day & Susan Hylen, *John Westminster Bible Companion* (Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, Kindle Edition), 135

<sup>56</sup> John 2:19

Perceived distinctions between sacred and profane, public and private, body and soul, individual and communal, dissipate as the Spirit invades every aspect of our existence. Scholars note that the purpose of the laver was to be more than a mere symbol of purity, for it was intended to link the corporal to the corporate. Martin Noth, professor of Old Testament crystalizes this sentiment as he writes: "Instructions have been added for a bronze laver for cultic ablutions, external body purity is connected to cultic purity and is most probably a part of it."<sup>57</sup> Enamored by our puritanical notions of the individual, we tend to forget that holiness is often a communal experience. The pursuit for Holy Spirit driven purpose, ought then to be a corporate practice; thus, congregations that are alive and adept to the demands of this new world shift the focus from me to we, driven by the question: What is God calling us to do? Richard Foster reminds us of this reality when he writes; "God led the children of Israel out of bondage as a people. Everyone saw the cloud and fiery pillar. They were not a gathering of individuals who happened to be going in the same direction; they were a people under the theocratic rule of God. His brooding presence covered them with an amazing immediacy."<sup>58</sup> The Sanctuary then, was an early exercise in incarnation, a parallel representation to the disclosure of God found in Jesus. Purpose and purification have never been about a place, because holiness only resides in a person. Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod drives that point home by noting the analogy that exists between the tent and temple and the incarnation. Wyschogrod notes, "The God of Israel is a God who enters the world of humanity and in so doing does not shun the parameters of human existence that include spatiality. Indeed, when God assumes residence in the Tabernacle, he so ties his personal identity to that building, that praise of the building can come close to praise of God himself."<sup>59</sup>

Adventism has a lengthy hermeneutical tradition linking Christ and the Sanctuary, "The laver represents the washing of our sins through faith in the blood of Christ."<sup>60</sup> Purification is more than our meager and often misplaced attempts at perfection, it is an act ordained by the Father, performed by the Son, and facilitated through the Spirit. A life oriented towards the holy is one that trusts in the slow work of the Spirit. We might do well to remember that the feeble, fearful, rag tag band of believers did not leap from ground zero to the apex of Spirit led living in a single bound; Zealots, fishermen, tax collectors and tent makers found the path of holiness through slow, steady purposeful steps, at times they moved forward, at others they regressed. Then Pentecost came, and when the Spirit descended, the upper room housed a holy nation, a priestly kingdom, a chosen

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<sup>57</sup> Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1962), 236

<sup>58</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline; Special Anniversary Edition*, (Harper Collins, Kindle Edition), 175

<sup>59</sup> Michael Wyschogrod, quoted in "To See Where God Dwells: The Liturgical Meaning of the Tabernacle", *Sacred Architecture*, by Gary A. Anderson, Issue 41 (2022), 20-25

<sup>60</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume I*, Francis D. Nichol, ed. (Washington, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953), 659.

people. If we are then to become a prepared people, we must practice patience; composure that comes from a concise understanding of what it means to be a people administrated by the Holy Spirit. Richard Foster probably puts it best when he cautions against thoughtless zeal: "one of the most destructive things we can do is to say, "Sounds wonderful. Beginning tomorrow I'll live that way!" Such zealotry only succeeds in making life miserable for ourselves and everyone around us."<sup>61</sup>

The story is oft told of a rabbi who asked his students a puzzling question: "Can you tell me when you know that darkness ends and dawn breaks?" The pupils paused, though for a moment, brimming with confidence a student replied: "You know that it is light when you can distinguish the difference between the palm tree and the date tree from afar." "No!" The rabbi responded, immediately another hand shot up, "You can tell darkness is nigh, when you no longer can confuse a sheep and a dog." "Not quite" muttered the teacher. "Then when is it?" asked the students. The rabbi sighed, shook his head and said solemnly, "It is when you look into the face of any human creature and see your brother or your sister there. Until then, night is still with us."<sup>62</sup> Laver language challenges us to the type of learning that can only occur when we listen; after all, how can we hope to hear the Holy Spirit, if we do not learn to hear one another.

Perhaps you are wondering where this leaves us, if holiness is an incarnational experience designed to imbue our life with purpose, then how do I find God's call for our life as I straddle the space that exists between dry dessert and glassy sea? Permit me propose that our purpose exists in the space where our divinely instilled passion intersects with an experienced need in the world. Remember Pentecost is here, but the knowledge of the direct, active, immediate leading of the Spirit is not sufficient. Individual guidance must yield to corporate guidance. So, as a holy community, called to purification made possible by His incarnation, let us take a moment for discernment, to discover our purpose:

Spirit, you have moved in my heart and instilled a passion for \_\_\_\_\_

today the world needs \_\_\_\_\_

So, you have called us to \_\_\_\_\_

## The Anointing Oil

The quiet, quaint southern California town I live in has received its fair share of attention over the past few years; reporters, film makers, students, and patients arrive camera over the shoulder,

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<sup>61</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline; Special Anniversary Edition*, (Harper Collins, Kindle Edition), 179

<sup>62</sup> See Dorothee Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak; Towards a Christian Feminist Identity*, (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1984)

recording equipment in hand; they smile politely, and ask their questions. A tinge of trepidation always in their voice, after all, the line between quirky community, and scandalous sect is tenuous and thin. Our visitors begin to relax when they see a slew of octogenarians meticulously tending to their gardens, or when they encounter a cadre of nonagenarians briskly walking during their morning constitutional. These sights and sounds have become familiar to me, after all I was raised in Loma Linda, but I understand why the prospect of a place where longevity and wellness are the norm results appealing. So, they come always asking the same thing: "Why is it that residents of Loma Linda live longer?" New York Times best-selling author Dan Buettner was the first to attempt to answer that query.<sup>63</sup> But he certainly was not the last, just last year a member of our congregation quipped that he had three interviews scheduled for that month, I half-jokingly told him, "Well perhaps it's time you get an agent." To which he responded: "Already have one."

I have however, always found it interesting that no one has yet to ask about the glaring contradiction at the heart of this mecca of health. I am of course referring to that atrocious restaurant that serves delightfully decadent meals, devoid of any nutritional quality. You know, the one who has been blamed for single handedly causing America's obesity epidemic. That restaurant with the golden arches which serves as the ultimate paradox for American excess and expansion. This establishment has no place amidst the paradise of kale and quinoa that is Loma Linda, and yet, day after day, I stare longingly at the red and yellow sign, seduced by the siren song of sodium, MSG, and high fructose corn syrup.

I choose to believe that this is a safe place, so permit me to unburden my conscience and share what happened but a few days ago. The hour had grown late, and all of my favorite health-conscious eateries had closed for the evening. Ravenous, I prowled around the empty streets of Loma Linda as a roaring lion looking for something to devour. I must have had an out of body experience, because without knowing how, when, or why, I found myself at that restaurant that seemed so out of place. The voice from the intercom at the drive through asked for my order, and in a moment of weakness I said: "May I please have 4 apple pies." Because if I am to be a sinner, I shall sin boldly. I experienced a strange mix of emotions oscillating from embarrassment to ecstasy as I tore into the bag. Frantic and full of feverish expectation I paused for a moment to gaze at the boxes neatly arranged on my dashboard, then I saw a sign. A symbol of the litigious times we are in, when fast food restaurants feel compelled to warn us of the obvious. Before I bit into those deep-fried apple pies, I read, "Caution: Contents may be hot." What looks like a soft, greasy guilt, inducing treat could scald your trusting tongue.

Preachers and pastors often find illustrations in the most unexpected places. God may speak to us through the notes of a classical concerto, the laughter of an unharried Sunday afternoon or in my

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<sup>63</sup> Dan Buettner conducted a study on longevity, which was published in his book, *The Blue Zones; 9 Lessons on Living Longer from the People who've Lived the Longest*. (Washington, National Geographic Publishing, 2012)



case, in a dark fast food parking lot at the heart of health-conscious Loma Linda. The realization flooded my senses: "Caution contents maybe hot", it was as if God was saying: "Miguel those familiar treats are not harmless. They may bite you back." I wonder if I have not spent so much time exposed to, and espousing religious language that I have become inoculated to its transformational power. That feel good religion scheduled to occupy a slice of time diligently set aside to encounter the divine were familiarity breeds contentment and contentment spawns carelessness. Scripture too often coopted and reduced to a series of trite statements and platitudes. Those familiar words however, are not harmless; they may bite back, for only they have the power to offer comfort to the afflicted, while afflicting the comfortable.

Let us then for a moment swap the terrain of sleepy, health driven southern California for Sinai's arid and unforgiving landscape. We feel at ease as we find ourselves treading upon familiar territory. Once again, we hear the formula, that phrase that calls our attention back to the Sanctuary, "the Lord spoke to Moses: Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, two hundred and fifty, and two hundred and fifty of aromatic cane, and five hundred of cassia—measured by the sanctuary shekel—and a hin of olive oil; and you shall make of these a sacred anointing-oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing-oil." <sup>64</sup>

Our English translations cannot capture the exquisite detail woven into the original language. The opening lines of the passage begin with the instruction *וְאַתָּה קַח-לָךָ*, <sup>65</sup> which most of our versions render as "take". I would like to linger over a more literal translation of the text which would read "gather for yourself" or "take for yourself". With this as our initial framework, permit me to propose that what follows in the next 10 verses is done for the benefit of the people. Now, I may not be able to provide a concise description of Jesus' location in the heavenly Sanctuary, I cannot claim to know what is happening behind the veil of those holy apartments, nor do I possess a chart that can accurately determine when probation will close and Christ's heavenly ministry will conclude. I do however know this; the Sanctuary is built for your benefit. Let me restate that, the Sanctuary exists for your benefit. I cannot say if there are some cosmic scales designed to balance your ethical worthiness, but if there are, I can confidently say that those scales are weighted in your favor.

The admonition to accumulate myrrh should also jump off the pages of the passage before us, this lavish liquid is intended to inundate not only the Tabernacle, but the whole of the encampment. Eugene Peterson's wonderful translation of this section, gives us an idea of how this would have been heard by the original audience. Peterson writes, "That it may be soaked in holiness so that

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<sup>64</sup> Exodus 30:22-25, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>65</sup> See Exodus 30:23, New Revised Standard Version

anyone who so much as touches them will become holy.”<sup>66</sup> These are not a set of haphazard instructions intended to imbue Israel’s cultic life with a mythology. YHWH provides intentional instructions so that holiness may transcend the confines of the Tabernacle and soak the very terrain upon which we tread. If this is true, then I can assert that this day you shall be inundated with holiness, not on the basis of the efficacy of my writing, but because it is impossible to encounter YHWH and not be transformed.

How I yearn to be surprised by the opulence of grace, this is why we gather in worship. We do not come together to be inspired by entertaining messages, or to listen to rousing music. We worship because we believe that week after week grace has overwhelmed us in the person of the risen Jesus. If you believe this, then at this very moment heaven is invading your world, holiness is overflowing, and it does not matter how fast we try and outrun it, God is in this place. This however does not mean that we should be haphazard in what we do.

Every Tuesday the leadership team at our church comes together in order to craft a worship experience that will recognize the reality that is God with us. My colleagues and I spend time in prayer seeking wisdom as we select messages that our congregation will find relevant, we painstakingly curate musical pieces that will invite our parishioners to participate in both reflection and adoration. We also must be aware that there is an ever-present temptation to reduce worship to program and equate adoration with performance.

Liturgy is the term often used to describe the different elements that comprise a worship service. The word itself however literally means, “the work of the people”; so, as I typically do, I would ask that you indulge me by considering a simple question, what is the work of this people, our people, Adventist people? As I stated in the last chapter, the work of the people is to become holy. Thus, liturgy is intended to elicit holiness not by retreating to, but by coming in contact with. Religious people often have the bad habit of prioritizing purity. Think about the pharisees as they come time and again accusing Christ of uncleanness. God however, has always been more interested in holiness. What is the difference you may ask? Purity requires time and effort, it necessitates immersion, water, and fire. Holiness on the other hand, is an act of grace immediately imputed through contact. I wish I could convince you that forms and rituals do not produce worship, we may craft the best possible liturgy but we have not worshipped God until His Spirit touches our spirit, that is the only way transformation occurs.

To worship is to change; there is no other way that I can explain that transformation that caused Peter and John to leave their encounter with the Sanhedrin, with blood on their backs and praise on their lips. Do we dare discount Paul and Silas as they fill a Philippian prison with praise? I am not proud to admit that most of my ministry has been driven by a misnomer, I believed in the primacy of preaching as it pertained to our church experience. Homiletical heroes were women

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<sup>66</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, Exodus 30:26-29 (Colorado Springs, Nav Press Publishing, 2005)

and men capable of wowing and wooing audiences with their diction, cadence, and command of the sacred text, oblivious to the shrieks of hungry babies or to the shenanigans of restless children. Today, shrieks and shenanigans have become my favorite part of preaching, because sometimes those noises are the only reminders that my congregation is still alive.

Listen to the words of a true prince of pulpiteers, a pastor par excellence, "Preaching that is without divine unction falls like a frost on worship."<sup>67</sup> Mercy! But what then is the preacher to do with all her/his knowledge and preparation? Foster continues: Heart preaching enflames the spirit of worship; head preaching smothers the glowing embers."<sup>68</sup> Foster is trying to remind us that what happens in the pulpit is not nearly as important as what occurs in the pew.

I want to invite us to bask in the reality, to acknowledge and celebrate the extravagance of YHWH's gift. Drowning as we are in a deluge of grace, we turn to the text to read: "You shall say to the Israelites, 'This shall be my holy anointing-oil throughout your generations.'"<sup>69</sup> Salvific, salvaging oil poured out both on the borders of Canaan and the valleys of California. Compelling us to participate in the work of the people, calling us back to worship, and shaping us into a people after His own heart. This is why YHWH gifted Israel with two institutions: The Torah and the Tabernacle, instituted to provide some shape to our lives, for they provide ethical shape and liturgical shape.

The term Torah means teaching and is intimately connected with the notion of direction; thus, the Pentateuch is intended to point us towards the path we are to tread upon. The Tabernacle is intimately linked to the Torah in that its liturgy provides experiential way markers along our track through the desert. I recognized this reality a few years ago when I rented a car to travel through the Oregon coast, I had never been in that part of the country and as luck would have it, the rental company provided an upgrade. I stood mesmerized looking at this vehicle equipped with plush leather seats, satellite radio, and turn by turn navigation. Confidently I typed the address to the hotel I had reserved on the coast. I spent the first few hours of the trip mesmerized by music and coddled in comfort until I began to wonder if the automated navigation had made a mistake; concerned, I pulled over as rain started to fall. The trickle soon became a torrent that made visibility difficult. I quickly lost faith in the navigation system, as I meandered aimlessly down a two-lane mountain highway; then I saw it, a sign flashing brightly amidst the storm, "Cannon Beach, 8 miles" and I knew I was on the right path. The purpose of worship as a way marker is to remind you that even amidst our individual and corporate storms, we are still heading in the right direction.

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<sup>67</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline; Special Anniversary Edition*, (Harper Collins, Kindle Ed.), 166

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Exodus 30:31, New Revised Standard Version

An apocryphal story oft told about the old Jewish rabbis might provide some clarity as to the importance of worship as a way marker. Like most rabbinical tales, this one begins with a question that caused a debate between the sages. The quandary pertained to the most succinct sentence to describe YHWH's Torah. The venerable rabbi Hillel answered "What is hateful to you do not do to others. The rest is commentary, now go and do likewise." Simeon ben Zoma, a brilliant pupil shifted uncomfortably in his seat and then blurted out, "We find a more all-embracing verse, namely, "Hear O Israel." Rabbi Ben Nanas immediately recognized the Deuteronomistic *shema*, nonetheless, he too had to venture an opinion. Ben Nanas thought for a moment and said, "There is a yet more all-embracing verse, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". They forged ahead, passionately debating the merits of their selected passages, when alas rabbi Ben Pazzi opened his mouth and cited the most unexpected verse, "there is a more embracing verse still he said:" "Prepare one lamb in the morning and the other towards evening". The debate ceased for a moment as an old sage stood, tears in his eyes, he declared: "the law is in accordance with Ben Pazzi." The first two views are certainly predictable. The *shema* "Hear O Israel" is the greatest one-verse summary of Jewish faith. "Love your neighbor as yourself" is the briefest summary of Jewish ethics. But "Prepare one lamb in the morning and the other towards evening.", a verse seemingly devoid of theological gravitas and ethical impetus, a text that simply specifies the daily morning and evening sacrifices. This not a text many would choose as epitomizing the whole of Judaism. The story however, is intended to assert that without the daily service of God, there would be neither Jewish faith nor Jewish ethics.

The foundation of everything else is based on our inspiring, moving and often unremarkable liturgical offerings. We often feel driven to justify the place that the Sanctuary doctrine should have in our doctrinal confessions. We then move from the theoretical to the experiential, we dissect worship often reducing it to a matter of individual, cultural, or generational preference. What if we have been asking the wrong question all along, what if the question is not about liturgical propriety, perhaps a more appropriate question would be: what type of people are being formed through our liturgy?

"Gather for yourselves" commands the voice coming from the tent. The instruction sneaks up on us burning our claims of liturgical correctness, and theological complexity, and in an instant, we grasp that worship is not a performance provided for His benefit, it is an experience intended to bless us. The process through which we are formed into a holy people, overwhelmed by grace, anointed, and transformed.

As I write this, I cannot help but think of Jesus, sitting at the edge of Jacob's well, a place dripping with meaning; Jacob the man who has wrestled with God near a body of water, and a well like the one where Rebekah was betrothed to Isaac; and where Jacob met Rachel. The day has grown hot, and the people have long since retreated into the comfort of their homes, there is but a lonely figure walking down the road, John tells us the time of day because he seeks to compare and contrast this Samaritan woman, with Nicodemus who comes to Jesus by night. She stands there and rather rapidly recognizes that Jesus is no ordinary Jew, the Nazarene rabbi has thrown caution and convention to the wind and so she will ask a bold question: "The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see

that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem"<sup>70</sup> We often misread the conversation, we think that she recognizes Jesus' prophetic gift because he has recounted her sexual escapades. John however is doing something much more nuanced; he is reminding his readers what Israel has often forgotten; namely, that the role of the prophet is to reorient us to proper worship. This is why the woman posits a liturgical question. Jesus, ever committed to transformation retorts, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him."<sup>71</sup>

New Testament Scholar Jaime Clark-Soles drives this point home when she writes "American Protestants will be familiar with this battleground. Contemporary worship? Blended worship? Traditional worship? In a traditional building with a steeple? The local pub? A strip mall? Samaritans revered Mount Gerizim, Jews Mount Zion. Same stuff, different century. We agree that ultimately, we are to worship God in spirit and truth. But we keep fighting about the details."<sup>72</sup> I am tired of fighting about details, I would much rather worship with you; I would prefer to be inundated by grace. Worship as a way maker, is the moment where you feel the presence of YHWH amidst the storm.

This week, I want you to consider three question that will shift you from details to devotion.

1. Where are you being invited by God?
2. Where are you feeling God's absence?
3. Where are you feeling God's presence?

## The Incense

I would like to commence by sharing a statement that may sound strange, especially since we live in these tense times, "You are contagious"; now, before you start thinking about facemasks, social distancing, and contagion curves, allow me to explain. Vanessa Van Edwards is a social scientist who specializes in the study of charisma and non-verbal cues, Van Edwards decided to focus her research on TED Talks, those insanely popular presentations that often force us to adjust our

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<sup>70</sup> John 4:19-20, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>71</sup> John 4:21-23

<sup>72</sup> Jaime Clark-Soles, *Reading John for Dear Life: A Spiritual Walk with the Fourth Gospel* (Westminster John Know Press, Kindle Edition), 40

ideological frames of reference. Vanessa was curious about the factors that elevate some TED Talks to iconic status, while others are relegated to the ash heap of history. She focused on a myriad of factors related to the presenters; things like diction, cadence, gender, age, geographical location, culture, modulation, attire, and even footwear choices. In the end there was one primary predictor for the popularity of a presentation: hand gestures; yes! Hand gestures! Research showed that the most popular TED Talkers employed an average of 475 mannerisms, compare that to the 270 utilized by the least popular presentations. Van Edwards posited that, seamless synergy between words and gestures conveys that the presenter is so comfortable with the source material that she/he can simultaneously communicate with the audience on two tracks.

Conversely, the lack of hand gestures tends to promote a tinge of anxiety in the listeners as they are trying to determine if the speaker is a friend or foe.<sup>73</sup> Simply stated confidence is contagious, and if this is the case, could it be that other emotions are also contagious? A riveting and revolting study conducted at Stony Brook University might shed some light on this question. Researchers gathered sweat pads from people running on a treadmill, while a separate group gathered pads from people who were about to go skydiving for the first time; they then asked a poor group of unsuspecting souls, otherwise known as a control group to smell the sweat pads while connected to an fMRI machine. That was the revolting piece, here is the riveting part: the participants that smelled the skydiving pads had all of the areas in the brain associated with fear light up.<sup>74</sup> Think about that for a moment, participants in the control group did not know what they were smelling or who the pads belonged to, yet there was contagion. So, both fear and confidence are contagious, with this in mind we come to the fifth section in our series on the Sanctuary.

The prime hypothesis for this reflection is that sanctification can also be contagious. Now in order for you to buy into this hypothesis we need to go back to Scripture; so let us once again look at the text together, "The Lord said to Moses: Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (an equal part of each), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy; and you shall beat some of it into powder, and put part of it before the covenant in the tent of meeting where I shall meet you; it shall be for you most holy."<sup>75</sup> The concoction that Moses is called to create possesses three main characteristics: It is pure, it is holy, and it is salty. It is impossible to see a scriptural reference to salt, without thinking of the call Christ extends for us to become salt of the earth, the reminder to remain salty has been echoed through the lips of preachers who inspire us to go into the world and act as agents of preservation whilst adding a sense of moral flavor to it. The idea of salt however, is a bit different

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<sup>73</sup> See Vanessa Van Edwards, *Cues; Small Signals, Incredible Impact*, (New York, Penguin Random House, 2022)

<sup>74</sup> Lilianne R. Mujica-Parodi, Helmut H. Strey *et al.* "Chemosensory Cues to Conspecific Emotional Stress Activate Amygdala in Humans" *PLOS ONE Journal*, (July 29, 2009)

<sup>75</sup> Exodus 30:34-36, New Revised Standard Bible

within the context of the Sanctuary, we know that salt was commonly used to influence and enhance burning in the religious rites of the ancient Near East.

The Babylonian Talmud, which served as a commentary on Scripture notes: "One may place a clump of salt in the lamp to make light and burn brighter."<sup>76</sup> American author Annie Dillard alerts us lest we forget that the Sanctuary goes beyond our interpretative idiosyncrasies. To those of us who have replaced the burning yearning of the Spirit for an obsession with doctrinal distinctives Dillard will say: "Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? . . . It is madness to wear ladies' hats and velvet hats in church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should latch us to our pews . . . "<sup>77</sup>

The beauty of contagious sanctification is that it is democratic, I look out at my congregation and I see a body comprised of every gender, ethnicity, age, ideology, and preference, yet somehow YHWH has brought us to this place that we may experience his presence by mixing us together. Mark Branson and Juan Martinez are pastors and cultural chameleons, who believe in diversity as a core component of religious revival. Their views stand in stark contrast with ideas like *The Homogeneous Unit Principle*, which proposes that people respond most effectively to the gospel in ethnically specific congregations; while I do not want to devalue the importance of connecting Christ to culture, I would suggest that scarcity in heterogeneity, produces congregations where conversations occur in echo chambers. Uniformity often inoculates churches to the differences needed to promote Spiritual contagion. Thus, formational communities operate in a cycle constantly oscillating between action and reflection, and this in turn prepares them to, "work together to commend, nourish each other's gifts, gain new perspectives and abilities, and discover a social imaginary that is specific and allows them to engage in the redemptive life of the gospel."<sup>78</sup> Sanctification is a formational pursuit toward Christlikeness; unfortunately, we are so preoccupied with the process, that we forget that Christlikeness is an invitation to participate in what God is doing in the world. I would then venture to say sanctification is both doctrine and discovery.

"Make an incense blended as by the perfumer"<sup>79</sup> Ancient perfumers served as artists entrusted to mix and meld ingredients together to create new aromas. Diversity then, is not about cultural correctness; it is a work of art. Our heavenly perfumer has brought us together, fused us with one another that we may burn brighter. God is saying that sanctification is a partnership intended to

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<sup>76</sup> Victor Hurowitz, "Salted Incense; Exodus 30-35", *Biblica*, Vol. 68, No.2 (1987), 178-194

<sup>77</sup> Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk; Expeditions and Encounters*, (New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1982), 40

<sup>78</sup> Mark Branson, Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership*, (Intervarsity Press, Kindle Edition), 57

<sup>79</sup> Exodus 30:35, New Revised Standard Version

expand light amidst darkness. The act itself demands more than mere theological propriety, for wonder, imagination, and artistry are also required.

Sanctification is a creative enterprise and as such it should never be coercive, that is often were we hit a speedbump because we are enamored with control. I have been married for over 15 years to a delightfully deft and dexterous driver. However, I still press down desperately on an imaginary brake pedal the moment that I feel she is tailgating someone; she will look lovingly at me and say, "babe there is no pedal there", and I will respond, "I know, I just need to be in control." YHWH however is prodding us to enter into a space that elicits creativity. This is nothing new, God has done this from the beginning. The divine hands sink into the ground and form a creature out of clay, those same hands that hold the cosmos in their palms, now plunge into flesh and extract a rib to foster relationships. Adam, Eve, Moses, you and me, we are all works of art; but YHWH acknowledges that we are also artisans at work, so He will bring animals to us to see what we will name them, the Creator will call us to mix aromas to create incense, and will inspire us to meld our stories in order to weave a wonderful tapestry of faith.

Creation fosters sanctification, which in turn facilitates contagion between us and the Divine. "And you shall beat some of it into powder, and put part of it before the covenant in the tent of meeting where I shall meet you; it shall be for you most holy."<sup>80</sup> YHWH has promised to meet us in the midst of the creative act we call worship, and this indeed is joyous news; perhaps that is what compels the prophet Isaiah to write, "Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."<sup>81</sup> When was the last time you heard an Adventist congregation shouting for joy? The Sanctuary gives you permission to shout out joyously, to ecstatically cry out. I wonder then, what precludes our religious experience from becoming more joy-filled? Is it a desire for control that restricts creativity, exchanging it for expectations of uniformity and compliance? Partially; but the truth is that we are also deeply uncomfortable with silence. We think that sanctification is something we can obtain like we would a vaccine, and it is something we can maintain through a weekly booster dose administered at church. That however is not how it works.

Brother Lawrence, a Carmelite monk thinking about the issue of sanctification developed a unique way of thinking about the presence of God; he stated that if he could experience the presence of God in the kitchen, he knew he would meet God in the mass.<sup>82</sup> We all like to pontificate about revolution, but if you have ever been to the Mendez' household you will quickly realize that while we all chat about revolt, no one wants to do the dishes. That Carmelite monk is trying to remind us that sanctification occurs when holy imagination inspires you to infuse the presence of God into the

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<sup>80</sup> Exodus 30:36, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>81</sup> Isaiah 12:6, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>82</sup> Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, (Mansfield CT, Martino Publishing, 2016)



everyday rhythm of your life; those instances that you may otherwise dismiss as mundane and quotidian.

How then can we live sanctified lives defined by God's presence, where grace serves as a constant companion? As I said before, we are not only enamored by control, we are also vexed by silence. I can see him in my mind's eye, a distraught disciple thinking about failure, pondering sanctification and how once again he has fallen short. Peter is trying to experience Jesus in the everyday, but that is challenging. How can you go back to a boat and a net after you have been called to fish for men? So, he pens an epistle, let the words of the rough and rugged apostle wash over you: "Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed."<sup>83</sup> Focus with me on that oft ignored word, that common conjunction. Our Bibles use "Therefore" to convey the sense of the Greek *διό*, a part of speech that links the author's argument to the preceding pericope. Thus, in order to understand what Peter is trying to say, we need to look at the previous 12 verses where he is attempting to remind his audience of what Christ has already done. American author W. James Booth coined the term "communities of memory" to illustrate the power of the past in creating our present identity.<sup>84</sup> Adventist identity has had a long and sometimes tumultuous relationship with the concept of sanctification. Divine inspiration, and holy imagination are necessary if we are to create a new future without jettisoning our past.

"Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"<sup>85</sup> Adventism, this tradition that remains foundational to my identity, might do well to follow in the admonition from the fisherman turned shepherd. Peter commences his pastoral missive by connecting the church to Christ's redemptive work, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy, he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."<sup>86</sup> Strikingly he grounds his congregation's understanding of soteriology and eschatology in the incarnation. With their identity and destiny firmly entrenched in Jesus, he will stealthily shift from what God has done to how the body of believers responds. Worship is then nothing more than a meager response intended to remind us that we are not just conferred a new status, we are called to be a new people. What if it is not about dates, charts, lifestyle, knowledge, or judgment? What if sanctification is about catching

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<sup>83</sup> I Peter 1:13, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>84</sup> See W. James Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2006)

<sup>85</sup> I Peter, 1:14-16, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>86</sup> I Peter 1:3, New Revised Standard Version

a virus that makes us contagious as we find creative ways to live out our sanctuary reality, in a world that desperately needs hope, laughter, and beauty.

This is my prayer, a plea that like incense will burn bright and find its way to the throne of grace. May YHWH assure us when we are afraid, may He bind us up when we are broken, may He lift us through our loneliness, and may he sanctify us when we sin. Throughout this reflection I have tried to make two primary points:

1. Sanctification is contagious
2. Sanctification is a creative process

I believe this because when confronted with the love that German theologian Karl Barth describes as: "A love that will go to the far country", surrender is the only rational response.<sup>87</sup> Theology is nothing more than our attempt to codify those responses; to enlist our limited linguistic arsenal in an attempt to describe the transcendent.

Linda asked me once, when did I know that she was the woman I would marry? Surely, that question has been asked around the world by star struck lovers, calculating partners, hopeless romantics, and cynical spouses. I assume that query could be answered in many different ways; neuroscientists could reduce love to a chemical release of oxytocin and dopamine, anthropologists might focus on the contractual aspect of marriage, economists may choose to enumerate the financial benefits of the relationship, and psychologists would be hard pressed to analyze the relationship and link it to some unresolved childhood issue. When Linda asked me that question, I knew that none of those answers would do, because in her, I had found my counterpoint in the universe.

Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann presses the need for theology as art form when he writes, "poets have no advice to give people. They only want people to see differently, to re-vision life. They are not coercive. They only try to stimulate, hint, give nuance, not more. They cannot do more, because they are making available a world that does not exist beyond their imagination."<sup>88</sup> Today as we stand together in the shadow of the sanctuary, sweet incense scent surrounding us I yearn for us to be more poets than prophets as we dare and envision a world not yet here. This week I would invite you to participate in the edifying and sanctifying process of creation. Mary Oliver is one of my favorite prophets and poets; so, I want to leave you with her attempt to find a sanctuary amidst the busyness of life.

## **The Old Poets of China**

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<sup>87</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics Volume IV; The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, (London, T&T Clark, 2010), 150

<sup>88</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination; Prophetic Voices in Exile*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1986), 23

"Wherever I am, the world comes after me.  
It offers me its busyness. It does not believe  
that I do not want it. Now I understand  
why the old poets of China went so far and high  
into the mountains, then crept into the pale mist."<sup>89</sup>

You may be intimidated by the creative process; one of the most terrifying sites I can conjure, is a blank page contentiously staring back at me. If you can relate, then perhaps I can invite you to create your own poem in the form of a haiku. A haiku, is a short poem comprised of 17 syllables arranged in a 5-7-5 pattern. The following is my terse attempt at a haiku, but I am sure you can do much better.

We creatures of clay  
who frolicked in mossy meadows  
Now wearily weep

## The Skilled Craftsmen

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world<sup>90</sup>

-William Butler Yeats

Dust sparkled in the slant light, shining through the thin curtains, when Mary saw the stranger coming up the road. He was a young man, dressed and neatly pressed with a shiny lanyard that read: "Works Progress Administration." Franklyn Delano Roosevelt had instituted The *New Deal*, even as America was ablaze with war and rumors of war. The newly minted bureaucrat was polite enough, as he sat silently in the kitchen of the farmhouse on the North Dakota plains, and by the time the shadow had grown long, Mary had poured her heart out to the government worker.

She must have been 11 or 12 when she got married; she had never met her fiancé before the ceremony, but he turned out to be kind and in turn of the century Iran, kindness was the best you could expect. There was a party, dancing, laughter, sumptuous cuisine, tears, and a new life on a plot of land from which she would have to eke out an existence. There was never enough rain, food, or land and so a few years later, there would be another celebration with dancing, sumptuous meals, and salt-filled tears. Mary and her husband would sell their land, they would travel to

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<sup>89</sup> Mary Oliver, *Why I Wake Early*, (Beacon Press, Kindle Edition), 50

<sup>90</sup> William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming", *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, (New York, Simon & Shuster, 1996), 187

America, to a place called North Dakota, where driven by the promise that if you worked the ground and if you would improve the land, it would be yours.

They traveled to America 200 dollars in their pockets, and limitless dreams in their bags. They bought a horse and wagon and traveled through the prairie like the settlers of pioneer days. She saw moss, mountain lions, and strange places with strange names like Nebraska; she danced with the mist on the Cuyahoga, the promise ringing in her ears that if she would work the land, it would be hers. They made that patch of ground a home, had children, and people came looking for a piece of land to call their own. They built a mosque, fasted during Ramadan and feasted during Hajj. The community came together when Mary's husband died, they sent their sons to war, in another strange land called Normandy. Mary worked the land; she improved the land and without realizing it she; was home.<sup>91</sup>

The Midwest and Middle East are both lands that ooze mystique. The stanza "Breathes there a man with soul so dead who never to himself hath said this is my own my native land"<sup>92</sup> composed by the Scottish novelist Sir Walter Scott, kept creeping in my mind as I read Mary's account of adventurous resiliency, of a desire that coincides with Israel's deepest dreams; namely, a strip of soil to call home. The tale of the Torah is one of longing for land. Old Testament theology is rooted in the ground, where God's faithfulness is made manifest in the jagged mountains and lush meadows that comprise Canaan. Soteriology is often geography, linked to the terrain, and to the crops. Old Testament scholar Terence Fretheim notes this point when he writes: "For Israel the act of salvation is not simply to be removed from the oppressive situation. It is also the gift of land, a new place for life and blessing. God's redemptive act in Exodus leads to a new creation, a land which is good and broad."<sup>93</sup>

The opening scene of the Exodus drama commences by alerting the reader to a shocking reality, where divine salvation invites our collaboration. "The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 'When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.' But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So, the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?' The midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like

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<sup>91</sup> See Edward E. Curtis IV ed. *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2009)

<sup>92</sup> Walter Scott, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, (Paris, Ulan Books, 2012)

<sup>93</sup> Terrence Fretheim, *Exodus; Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Westminster, John Knox Press, Kindle Edition), 58

the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.' So, God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong."<sup>94</sup>

From the outset, Exodus alerts us to the reality that YHWH's action is often responsive; Israel cries out and God sees the tears brought upon by her taskmasters. God participates in human history embodied in two lowly women called to carry out a holy purpose. Ironically, resistance from the margins is often the most effective against dehumanizing, and ruthless forms of power. Incarnational salvation is a paradoxical proposition for it risks being misunderstood, while possessing the promise of sublime surprise. Old Testament scholar Terrence Fretheim punctuates this point when he writes: "Choosing such human vehicles means that God works in unobtrusive, unlikely and vulnerable ways."<sup>95</sup>

We continue our season of reflection on the sanctuary by considering two pairs of people; two midwives and a pair of craftsmen become incarnational instruments utilized to protect life and liturgy. Shiphrah and Puah are archetypes for resistance against structures that promote state sanctioned abuse. Artisans Bezalel and Oholiab on the other hand, serve as paradigms for creative collaboration. This foursome of unknown and unsung heroes injects a new reality into Israel's Exodus account; namely, salvation is a space for divine and human interaction. I type those words with a tinge of trepidation, for it is possible for them to be misunderstood, or misappropriated. One of my homiletical heroes often said, "A mist in the pulpit can often become a fog in the pew." Allow me then, to clarify and prevent any potential misunderstanding; as a practicing Protestant, I assent to the *five Solae* that spurred the Reformation. We are saved by grace alone but practical faith is punctuated by the journey, as we trek through the desert, we have seen YHWH's hand in the splitting of the sea, we have been refreshed by water pouring from stones, and have witnessed the ground swell and shake as we are called to covenant.

The Exodus account introduces us to the paradox of participation, where people are granted freedom by an external cause, but those same people must sustain that freedom by their own effort. God will grant relief from Egyptian oppression. Israel must work diligently in order to maintain her liberty, even as Amalek threatens to throw on a new yoke. Experience exchanges "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians."<sup>96</sup> for, "Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose some men for us and go out; fight with Amalek.'"<sup>97</sup> The dichotomy juxtaposing grace and works should give

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<sup>94</sup> Exodus 1:15-20, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>95</sup> Terrence Fretheim, *Exodus; Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Westminster, John Knox Press, Kindle Edition), 58

<sup>96</sup> Exodus 3:7-8, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>97</sup> Exodus 17:9, New Revised Standard Version.

way to a new hermeneutical reality, which operates under the maxim that grace is not at odds with effort, it is however averse to earning.

The Genesis narrative with its idealized view of creation grounds the garden narrative in a cycle of life affirming labor. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it."<sup>98</sup> The Fall does not introduce work as punishment; rather, it changes our relationship to it. Furthermore, the command to rest on Sabbath is devoid of its theological, ethical, and social significance if it is divorced from the notion of "six days you shall labor and do all your work." Creation draws meaning from work, and the absence of labor sanctifies Sabbath. Thus, we come again to the sixth speech uttered by YHWH concerning the sanctuary. As I noted in the first reflection, there are clear connections between the creation account of Genesis and the construction account in Exodus. Those connections become impossible to ignore as we turn our attention to the builders, images of Adam and Eve at work, flood the imagination as Bezalel and Oholiab spring onto the scene.

"The Lord spoke to Moses: See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with divine spirit, with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. Moreover, I have appointed with him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have given skill to all the skillful, so that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, and the ark of the covenant, and the mercy-seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt-offering with all its utensils, and the basin with its stand, and the finely worked vestments, the holy vestments for the priest Aaron and the vestments of his sons, for their service as priests, and the anointing-oil and the fragrant incense for the holy place. They shall do just as I have commanded you."<sup>99</sup> The passage commences with the now familiar phrase *וַיִּדְבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר*. A word should be said about the Hebrew concept of words; my children oft remind me that the old adage "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt" is a misnomer; for as they like to say, words have power. Israel's sages would have agreed with my boys; for to speak, was to participate in forging a new reality. When YHWH speaks, the words are not mere commands or precepts, they are creative agents attempting to bring forth something new. Astute readers of Scripture ought then to engage in the work of teasing out what God is attempting to do. In the case of this passage, it appears that YHWH is attempting to ensure two things: First, human giftedness is an expression of divine grace; this realization ought to deeply impact the way we view our talents and perceive our work. Second, the Sanctuary is a divinely inspired creation; the implication then, is that human beings cannot codify its meaning beyond the basic notion that it is to be a dwelling place for the divine. This may be difficult to accept particularly for those of us for whom the discernment of God's will has become an overly intellectual

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<sup>98</sup> Genesis 2:15, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>99</sup> Exodus 31:1-11, New Revised Standard Version

exercise. Richard Foster the father of modern spiritual formation alerts us to the need for balance by reminding us of Caleb Colton's words "He that studies only men, will get the body of knowledge without the soul; and he that studies only books, the soul without the body."<sup>100</sup>

Adventist tradition has long upheld the primacy of grace in the economy of salvation, this concept has often become overly intellectualized, robbing it of its mystical and transformative quality. A response to the perceived shift to an overtly emotional spirituality, Adventism has often been both perceived and practiced as a belief system that prioritizes reason. This approach has somewhat curtailed emotive extremism and forged a systematic approach to hermeneutics that privileges the pursuit of knowledge. I would caution against interpretative approaches where exegesis is devoid of emotion, for it is *pathos* that distinguishes YHWH from the philosophical constructs of God that populate the cold conversation of academia. Augustine of Hippo, one of the most renowned systematic theologians the church has produced often wrote of theology *caritatis*, which anchors meaning in a hermeneutic of love and charity.

Students of Scripture, hard at work mining the text for spiritual treasure, would do well to remember that hermeneutics must not be about achieving mastery over the text; rather, it ought to be a humbling exercise in submission where we work to submit to the text as it was given to us. Interpretation is both communal and collaborative, like the craftsmen of old, we come to the text at YHWH's behest, desiring to erect an exegetical edifice that may house the divine. This would be a perilous enterprise were it not for the gift of grace. Eugene Peterson describes exegesis as *caritas* when he writes: "Exegesis is the furthest thing from pedantry; exegesis is an act of love. It loves the one who speaks the words enough to want to get the words right. Exegesis then is loving God long enough to stop and listen to what he says."<sup>101</sup>

Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel pleads with us to curb our penchant for production amidst our consumeristic culture; He reminds us that we are not mere beasts of burden, and that our value is not contingent on what we produce. The temptation then, is to push the pendulum to other side, where countless Christians have adopted a narrative that would have us reject the workaday world. This modern ascetic trend focuses on the ills of contemporary culture; believers withdraw rejecting musical genres, entertainment, art, advocacy, and civic responsibility. While I do not doubt that this approach possesses some merit, particularly as a case study in how the church can counterbalance culture, it is incapable of equipping the saints for the work of ministry, and instead creates consumers of a niche culture that tends to be monochromatic.

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<sup>100</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline, Special Anniversary Edition*, (Harper Collins, Kindle Edition), 62

<sup>101</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book; A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*, (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 55

Craftsmen called to build a sanctuary are invited to bear witness to YHWH's salvation, mediated through His ongoing presence in the life of the community. Millennia ago, the author of Exodus noted that both suffering and salvation demand faithful witness. Faithful witness is less about crafting doctrines that substantiate our remnant status, it is about constructing a refuge capable of holding our angst and aches. A charitable hermeneutic is an act of remembrance, it is a song not unlike the one sung by Lizz Wright "I don't know how my mother walked her trouble down, I don't know how my father stood his ground, I don't know how my people survive slavery, I do remember, that's why I believe." Craftsmen cannot be mere compassionate observers, they are incarnational artisans actively invested in working to create spaces where we may encounter God. This is the primary difference between observational faith, and active praxis derived from a hermeneutic of love, we often observe suffering, but pain is not always seen or heard.

Martin Buber puts it best when he writes, "We are often encased in an armor whose task is to ward off events in which we find ourselves addressed"<sup>102</sup> As I write this, my state has been victimized by two mass shootings in the span of 48 hours, my heart sinks as I try to muster empathy for events that have become so commonplace that they threaten to desensitize us. Empathy soon turns to frustration as I find myself launched into the same tired tropes, thoughts and prayers, followed by debates that have been politicized, and choreographed outrage designed to attract ratings. God however, has called craftspeople to step into the fray and construct spaces that may provide healing in those moments when we are confronted by events with armor-piercing strength. A theology *caritatis* calls craftspeople to build sanctuaries where tired tropes are replaced by a call to covenantal action that rings out from Sinai saying: You! Say something, Do something!

The challenge however, is that craftspeople require focus and patience. I on the other hand, crave novelty and stimulation, and I suspect that I am not alone. A fascinating and somewhat disturbing study out of the University of Virginia, showed that given the choice, many preferred undergoing electric shock, to sitting alone with their thoughts. Study participants were exposed to a mild shock, which they all reported they didn't like and would pay money not to undergo again. But when left alone in an empty room with a "shocker" button for up to fifteen minutes, removed from all distractions, unable to check their phones or listen to music, two-thirds of men and one-fourth of women in the study chose to voluntarily shock themselves, rather than sit in silence. Tim Wilson, the architect of the study, explained the results by stating: "I think this could be why, for many of us, external activities are so appealing, even at the level of the ubiquitous cell phone that so many of us keep consulting. . . The mind is so prone to want to engage with the world it will take any opportunity to do so."<sup>103</sup> Think about that, we often choose pain over patience, and in so doing, we numb ourselves to the work that God has called us to.

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<sup>102</sup> Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, (New York, MacMillan Press, 1948), 10-11

<sup>103</sup> Tish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, (Intervarsity Press, Kindle Edition), 33



My mentor, professor of Spiritual Formation Mary Kate Morse believes that communal life is the most important task YHWH has gifted us. Morse writes, "Knowing and loving God is humanities chief aim."<sup>104</sup> The question that ought to concern us is: what does it look like to know and love God in this time and place? Perhaps the lessons bequeathed to us by Shiphrah, Puah, Bezalel and Oholiab are that advocacy, care, and compassion serve as the brick and mortar to build a Sanctuary. Perhaps Mary Juma's call to till the soil, to improve the land, to make it our home should extend to us as we become holy craftspeople who work for what we hope for. How shall we respond, how do we operate out of a hermeneutic of love, how do we build a sanctuary amidst desolation? We may not be able to forge a lampstand, laver, garments, and furnishings, but we may be able to share a simple act of charity with someone who needs to find refuge today, someone for whom the center still needs to hold.

I would invite you then to extend charity to someone this week and journal your experience on this page...

## The Sabbath

Summer has always been my favorite season of the year, the sand, beaches, barbecues, big franks, baseball, pool parties, and potato salad; above all, our children are home, whether it is on a break from college, a vacation to reconnect, or the laughter of tikes trying to fight boredom. Now, if like me you have school age kids running around the house, come August you have undoubtedly run out of things to do. Your bank account depleted, you are exhausted, sun burnt to a crisp, your skin cannot tolerate another field trip or family outing. I will confess that there is a lot of movie marathons during those last precious weeks of summer in my home. Linda and I will cave, curl up on the couch with our boys, as they introduce us to a different type of tale; one that follows a rather formulaic plot. See if it sounds familiar to you: two strangers meet, he is rebellious without being rude, she is both bookish and beautiful, they soon fall in love, get married in a castle and live happily ever after.

No other entertainment company has mastered the art of storytelling quite like Disney; they have become the second most profitable entertainment company in the world, with a net worth of 97 billion dollars. The magic of that enchanting mouse not only entices kids, it also appeals to adults who dream about their own happily ever after, their slice of the fairytale. A wedding ceremony in front Cinderella's castle can be yours for a measly \$180,000, and should you want to wear your wedding gown inside the amusement park the price tag for that is \$75,000. With those prices perhaps Disney no longer appeals to you, after all, you are a practical person with no time for magic or mystique; that however would not be quite fair, let me take you back to May of 2018 when Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex married the commoner Meghan Markle. That ceremony was viewed by 1.8 billion people around the world; men, women, children and even pets who deeply desired to believe that if you wish upon a star, fairy tales do come true.

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<sup>104</sup> Mary Kate Morse, *Lifelong Leadership*, (Nav Press, Kindle Edition), 68

Bells ringing through the air and thoughts of princesses wedding paupers in our minds, we come to the last of our reflections on the Sanctuary. We have spent our time focusing on seven speeches God delivers to His people as an invitation to craft spaces for connection. The previous reflection taught us about skilled craftsmen and the link between their injunction to toil and the invitation extended to our first parent to till the garden. So, if we focused the last chapter on labor; then you already know what follows; my dear friend, Sabbath is coming.

God's temple in time that forces us to avert our eyes from Sinai's Edenic summit, as we make our way to the plains below; those slopes that exist in the shadow of the Sanctuary. But before we relax, kick off our shoes, and stretch out, we should feel a dash of danger, a tinge of trepidation, because if Sabbath and Sinai are YHWH's attempts at recreating Eden, then danger is afoot; for even amidst the presence of God, serpents slither and trees tempt. I say this because no sooner has YHWH stopped speaking, that Israel has started building. They are not however busy building a Sanctuary, instead they have decided to construct a calf. Exodus 32 is another failure, a fall, a sad reminder of Genesis 3; the last in a long list of rebellious acts carried out by a creation dissatisfied with the designs God has ordained. The good news however, is that Sabbath is coming, because even as we are tempted by fruit desirable for knowledge and a calf erected for assurance, we find a powerful lesson in our text.

Old Testament scholar Terrence Fretheim astutely points out that Israel's story of apostasy in Exodus is enclosed by two Sabbath references.<sup>105</sup> The golden calf debacle is surrounded by the Sabbath, almost as if YHWH is attempting to extend rest and respite even in the midst of our sin. The implication then cannot be missed; Sabbath is coming, which means that the story of salvation can be picked up right where we left off. I feel a great deal of empathy for those wayward Israelites, their bodies may be free, but their spirit is still in Egypt. They have not yet been able to cast off that heavy yoke, which is why they will take off their gold and cast it into the fire. So, God will have to patiently move them from the theoretical to the practical, from blue prints to bolts and boning rods. YHWH knows that if He wants to form a group with a new ethos, He must first have them build something together.

British poet John Ruskin perhaps best explains the relationship between identity and work when he writes, "The highest reward for man's toil is not what he gets for it, but what he becomes by it."<sup>106</sup> It is almost as if Sabbath and Sanctuary serve as a surety of sanctity- "Say to the Israelites, 'You must

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<sup>105</sup> Terrence Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation; A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Westminster, John Knox Press, Kindle Edition), 313

<sup>106</sup> W.G Collingwood, *The Life and Work of John Ruskin*, (Cambridge, Riverside Press, 1893)

observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you and for the generations to come, so that you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.”<sup>107</sup>

Sabbath is coming, take cheer we know this story. Remember Genesis, when Sabbath was the seventh day from God’s perspective, but the first day from our point of view? A sanctuary in time, an ellipsis of intimacy that lies on both sides of sin. We know where we are going because we have Sabbath, our weekly dress rehearsal for what is to come. YHWH would have us become a people, and not just any people, we are His prized possession.

Now, as I was languishing on my couch, watching film after film with princesses, talking animals, and catchy songs, I learned something; the first thing Disney taught me this week is, “Heigh-Ho, Heigh-Ho, it’s home from work we go.” The Sanctuary, that edifice that we have been thinking about through these reflections, was not about holiness, it was about coming home; it was not about construction, it was about community. Here is the difficult part; the painful thing to hear, anytime a doctrine is utilized to divide the community of Christ, to tear the people of God asunder that doctrine needs to be revised.

Just as I begin to feel warm and fuzzy with the concept of community, I realize what you already know; namely, that often our communities are a mess. Moses and Joshua come down from Sinai to chaos and cacophony. Joshua the soldier, thinks that war has broken out in the camp, but Moses knows the sound is not distress, it’s debauchery. In a moment, his body is taken over by that righteous indignation and holy fury that is so intoxicating to us religious types; he breaks the tablets and it seems at least for a moment that covenant is broken. But we know better, because Sabbath is coming; and for the believer who has understood that the value of the sanctuary is in the builders, not the building; indignation always gives way to intercession. “So, Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘Alas, this people have sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written.’”<sup>108</sup> That is a bold prayer, one not often prayed by those of us that overtaken by righteous indignation are more prone to be concerned with who gets left out of the book.

The second thing Disney taught me this week is, “*Ohana* means family, and family means no one gets left behind.” The Bible is not our book about God; rather it is God’s book about us. Today the invitation for the church that has decided to retreat into the building, is to go out and pray intercessory prayers; bold prayers, sanctuary prayers. Adventism in Loma Linda can be known for many things, haystacks, blue zones and baby Fae, but what would it look like if we were to become a community, so committed to intercession that we could pray: forgive the world but if it is not possible then blot us out of the book. This is also part of our denominational legacy, woven into our theological DNA; listen to the words of a woman that has too often been weaponized instead of

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<sup>107</sup> Exodus 31:13, New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>108</sup> Exodus 32:31-32, New Revised Standard Version

listened to, "In the prayer of Moses our minds are directed to the heavenly records in which the names of all men are inscribed, and their deeds, whether good or evil, are faithfully registered.

The book of life contains the names of all who have ever entered the service of God. If any of these depart from Him, and by stubborn persistence in sin become finally hardened against the influences of His Holy Spirit, their names will in the judgment be blotted from the book of life; and they themselves will be devoted to destruction. Moses realized how dreadful would be the fate of the sinner; yet if the people of Israel were to be rejected by the Lord, he desired his name to be blotted out with theirs. He could not endure to see the judgments of God fall upon those who had been so graciously delivered."<sup>109</sup> Dear dwellers of the Sanctuary, Sabbath keepers, we need more grace; because rest is synonymous with grace, for we cannot achieve it by force; we can only accept it through grace. Come to think about it, Jesus is also synonymous with Sabbath for it is only when we find him, that we find rest. What was it that he said? "Come unto me all you who are heavy laden and I will give you Sabbath".

Linda and I have vastly different approaches to sleep. I am a night owl that has struggled for years with insomnia. I often find it difficult to shut off my brain; as a result, I have developed a precise and detailed routine before bed. Prayer, music, and mindfulness are all part of my nighttime liturgy. Linda's approach on the other hand, consists of two steps- Step one: lie down, step two: fall asleep- that's it. She tells me she sleeps so soundly because she has a clean conscience. When she wakes up, I will often ask her how she slept? She will answer by quoting the words of the Psalmist, "Unless the LORD builds the house the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves" <sup>110</sup> Linda has taught me that we don't have to complete rest, earn rest, or achieve rest, instead we only celebrate rest and Sabbath is coming.

There is however the small matter of me, because I want to produce more, to earn more, to try harder. This is the plague of our time, the temptation of the Golden Calf of life outside the sanctuary; the curse of societies who often mistake price for value. Take the ad campaign that Sprint ran in 2013 to promote their data package, it's slogan was "I need-to- Have the right to be unlimited." But Sabbath is coming and it reminds us that before God shows us something new, he requests that we cease what we are doing. For we are more than mere beasts of burden, beings who spend six days trying to master our environment, only to forget that the Sabbath is an invitation to master ourselves. American poet and activist Wendell Berry cautions of the dangers of a life without celebration and Sabbath, he writes "It is easy to imagine that the next division of the world will be

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<sup>109</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, (Nampa, Pacific Press, 2002) pp 326

<sup>110</sup> Psalm 127:1-2, New International Version

between people who wish to live as creatures and people who wish to live as machines"<sup>111</sup> We Adventists often think that we come to church on Sabbath because we want to be theologically correct, I want to tell you that we ought to come to church on Sabbath because we get to experience a foretaste of eternity. What can we do except praise and fill this space that invites us to rest with sanctuary prayers. Prayers like the one Moses uttered on that dark day. Perhaps you are wondering what do intercessory petitions look like? Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has often moved me to tears with this plea: "Almighty God, look upon this people with favor, because what is now their greatest vice will one day be their most heroic virtue. They are indeed an obstinate people. When they have everything to thank You for, they complain. Mere weeks after hearing Your voice they make a Golden Calf. But just as now they are stiff-necked in their disobedience, so may they one day they will be equally stiff-necked in their loyalty."<sup>112</sup>

I share with you then, the third thing I learned from Disney this week. I would love for you to say it out loud, *Hakuna Matata*; it means no worries. Sabbath after all was made for you; it is not a litmus test for the remnant, it is a life-a resurrected life. Because on this side of resurrection's morning it has to be about more than a break from work, it has to be a fairy tale our very own happily ever after because our work has been completed in Christ. How heartbreaking is it that instead of singing and celebrating in the sanctuary, we have decided to cram this day with committees. Eugene Peterson provides a scathing critique for those of us who forget that this day is about Jesus playing in the Sanctuary, "Much doing and much talking displace Sabbath quietness and stillness. Typically, congregational leaders, knowing that they have these people all to themselves for a few hours on just one day a week, conspire to get them involved in anything and everything they think will be good for their should and good for the church. Well-intentioned but dead wrong. All the leaders do is get them so busy for the Lord that they have no time for the Lord, pour in so much information about God that they never have a chance to listen to God."<sup>113</sup>

More than anything I want us to have the courage to listen to God, because if we do, we just may realize that today, two choices are set before us. We can continue trekking through life as beasts of burden, celebrating the interlude, a brief respite amidst the business of our lives. A physical oasis that may recharge our batteries that we may go out and be more productive. We can choose to engage with Sabbath in this manner, but to do so would be to fall prey to the desire to melt and mold idols in our image. Adventism does not celebrate a day; we celebrate a person; a person that

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<sup>111</sup> Wendell Berry, *The Art of The Commonplace; The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, (Berkley, Counterpoint Press, 2002), 222

<sup>112</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Exodus: The Book of Redemption*, (Covenant & Conversations), 254, Kindle Edition

<sup>113</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008)

has told us "You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you and for the generations to come, so that you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy."

Let me then conclude then by asking one final question, what makes you holy? Is it your denomination, your lifestyle, theological sophistication, or is it Him? That wondrous God who continues to dwell among us. On Sabbath, we do not celebrate the completion of our work, we rejoice because He continues to complete a work in us. What was it that He said as he hung on that tree, muscles tense, and lips parched? Oh yes! I remember now "It is finished", that is your own happily ever after; your very own fairytale ending. I have tried to end this reflection by providing you with an opportunity to participate in your own Sanctuary practice, I have spent several weeks mulling over what a Sabbath space may look like. The truth is that I had virtually no idea until I came across a quote in a book gifted to me by one of my parishioners; the brilliant Tish Harrison Warren wrote, "Sleep is not only a confession of our limits it is also a joyful confession of God's limitless care for us."<sup>114</sup>

So, if it is well with you soul Sabbath, stretch and slumber, for Sabbath has come.

Sweet Dreams.

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<sup>114</sup> Tish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary; Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*, (Downers Grove, Intervarsity Press, 2016), 147

# Project Launch Plan

## Doctoral Project Description

The final project represents hours of thoughtful research, and conversations amidst a religious context that has been formative. Theological thought should be best understood as broken; consequently, anything we say about God is part heresy, for it is impossible to utilize a limited construct such as language to describe something both limitless and transcendent. This project then, represents an aspiration to know in part in the hope that the day shall come when we shall know, even as we have been known. The project arises from a recognition that traversing transformation often requires us to move from what we know, to what we hope to discover. Thus, this project has utilized the long-held Adventist doctrine of the Sanctuary and melded it with a hermeneutic oriented towards Spiritual Formation.

Preaching continues to reign supreme in the economy of the Adventist congregationalist experience, as such this project has been arranged as a series of seven reflections that approach the Sanctuary from a formational perspective. These reflections can be either delivered as sermons, or they can serve as personal or group devotions complete with formational exercises. The pericope that serves as the Biblical foundation for these reflections comprises chapters 25 to 31 of the book of Exodus, and consists of seven exchanges that occur between YHWH and Moses focused on the sanctuary.

## Audience

The call and vocation are as much a part of my identity as my family of origin, ethnicity, or gender. Because I am and will always be a local pastor; this project was created with local churches in mind. The hope is that some of the hermeneutical approaches can enrich the life of congregations that do not enjoy the same level of scholarship and resources my church possesses. Adventism has long distinguished itself from the sisterhood of Protestant churches for adhering to five unique doctrines, which can be outlined as follows:

1. Sabbath
2. Soul Sleep (Annihilationism)
3. Spirit of Prophecy
4. Second Coming
5. Sanctuary

That last doctrine has proved particularly thorny for our denomination as debates on Jesus' priestly role in the heavenly sanctuary have led to schisms, controversy, and denominational mistrust. This project also has those realities in mind as it considers its primary audience.



## Development Plan

This part of the project has since shifted, originally it was intended merely to be delivered as a series of sermons for our summer series. Our series would be a continuation of conversations I have had with church leadership pertaining to systemic change, spiritual formation, and hermeneutics. The series was slated to run for seven weeks spanning from June to July, a questionnaire would be passed out during our first message to garner some information on our congregation's feelings toward both the Sanctuary doctrine and spiritual formation. The same questionnaire would be passed out at the end of the series to measure if our parishioner's perspectives had shifted. Marketing materials would be created and announcements made after the graduation season. Roundtable discussions and seminars would run during August and September focusing on diverse hermeneutical approaches to the book of Revelation and Adventist eschatology. There is however a new wrinkle added as the publishing company for our denomination has requested the manuscript and is pondering releasing it as a study/devotional book. This new development has me flying out to Nampa Idaho where Pacific Press is housed in April to explore added uses for the manuscript.

## Development Process

The beauty of experiencing life with a congregation is that you can notice shifts even if those changes are difficult to quantify. Evaluation requires I take a vow of stability in my congregation during this season. I am committed to listening well, I will also process the results from the questionnaires in order to determine other instances where formational practices can be incorporated into Adventist lingo.

# Appendix A- Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

## Personal Research Manifesto

I commit to approach my research experience with the exuberance of an explorer, to combat cynicism with a second naïveté birthed by His presence, and to engage diverse conversation partners as I strive to exchange dogmatic tribalism with grace-oriented empathy.

## NPO Statement

A church constructed through a hermeneutic of diversity with inclusion as its primary practice, will cease to inhabit echo chambers in order to become an incarnational community.

## NPO Scope and Constraints

American author and activist Christina Baldwin once wrote, “Words are how we think, stories are how we link.”<sup>115</sup> Baldwin brilliantly recognized the inherent power of stories, as they empower individuals and craft a communal ethos. The scope of research during this doctoral program will seek to diversify the stories that faith communities chose to tell. The desired outcome is: to empower parishioners who remain voiceless by employing a hermeneutic that prioritizes sensitivity and diversity. At this point it is complicated to define the exact scope and cost associated with the final product. The boundaries, extent, and scope will be evaluated as the information becomes more available.

## NPO Context

The context for my particular NPO is a mainline protestant congregation situated in the heart of a university campus and medical center. Said congregation is located in an upper middle-class town in Southern California. The initial audience will consist of the 15 members of the pastoral staff as well as the lay leadership of the church. These groups are comprised of a multicultural group of middle to upper class individuals, ranging in ages from early 30's to early 80's.

## Root Causes

The primary root cause for my NPO is: that in a *post-Gadamerian* world that has become more cognizant of the constructs that help define our theology and religious praxis, the church struggles to frame its narrative in ways that are relevant and sympathetic to those living on the margins. The rise of social and religious conservatism and the politicization of religious language have resulted in an appropriation of the Sacred Text as a mechanism to maintain the status quo. A story centered hermeneutic that values the tales and experiences of the disposed may yet rescue Scripture and return that prophetic mystique that seeks to comfort the afflicted while afflicting the comfortable.

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<sup>115</sup> Christina Baldwin, *Story Catcher; Making Sense of our Lives Through the Power and Practice of Story*, (Novato, New World Library, 2005)

## Discovery Workshop Stakeholders

The stakeholders in my discovery session included a millennial worship minister, a hospital chaplain, a discipleship pastor, a church administrator, and the leader of a non-profit ministry.

## One-on-One Interviews

The one-on-one interviews included the senior pastor/university administrator, a theologian/professor of New Testament studies, and a pastor/professor/activist.

## 3-5 Key Biblical Texts

The Scriptural themes I will explore, center around the idea of exodus and exile, as expressed in the Mosaic and prophetic traditions of the Old Testament, as well as sections of the Johannine narrative.

## Academic Resources

The primary conversation partners I shall enlist during my research stem from the field of social-scientific criticism. Voices like that of Gustavo Gutierrez, liberation theologian; James Cone, black theologian; Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Mujerista theologian; Phyllis Trible, feminist theologian; Kwok Pui Lan, post-colonial theologian; and Alice Walker, womanist theologian among others. Other areas of research include homiletics, liturgical practices, and church structure.

## Discovery Workshop Description

The discovery session was held on October 30, 2020 in an outdoor terrace at Loma Linda University Church, from 8:30 m-12:00pm. The following stakeholders were in attendance:

- Worship minister
- Hospital chaplain
- Discipleship pastor
- Church administrator
- Non-profit ministry leader

These people attended in person as the outdoor space allowed for social distancing. The session followed the format as delineated in the DMIN 750 syllabus assignment. Bagels, pastries, fruit cups, coffee, orange juice and water were individually pre-packed and made available. The question they came ready to discuss was, "How open is our church to hear from, and be led by stories from the margins?"

## Discovery Statement

The packets, post it notes, and pens were all assembled prior to the stakeholder's arrival. I began the session by inviting the group to consider the story of the re-discovery of the law as described in Nehemiah chapter 8, our devotional concluded with an invitation to engage in the enterprise of priestly listening; we spent some time together in prayer. I then outlined the process, schedule,

flow, and desired outcome for our time together. We then began to chart the audience and examined the NPO. We discussed our desired outcomes and agreed to the following Discovery Statement:

Considering local and denominational leadership,  
We've discovered that leadership has not found an effective way of weaving  
together and engaging with the stories of a large swath of our members,  
Which is caused by a lack of focus.  
If solved it would mean church wide engagement.

After agreeing on the Discovery statement, I asked them to help me highlight some potential blind spots. The group agreed that renewed focus on becoming more diverse in our exegesis would improve our service, but that some work needed to be done in constructing a framework that intentionally highlighted and leveraged our congregational diversity.

### **Critical Insights from Discovery Workshop**

The team settled on church leadership (both local and denominational) as the primary audience. The stakeholders circled back to the apathy and apparent lack of connection of a sector of the congregation. Said sector comprises individuals from a different cultural and socioeconomic stratum. The symptoms included congregational apathy, disengagement, lack of communal connections and stagnation. Caused by a myopic focus on programs, a lack of engagement from the leaders towards the parishioners, and lack of missional clarity. The group agreed that both symptoms and causes are the result of structural tension between stated values and prioritization. Our penchant for prioritizing programs has created a culture of consumers, which in turn makes it very difficult to engage in the task of priestly listening and prophetic shifting.

The most surprising nugget to emerge from the conversation was the recognition that even though our congregation appears to be culturally and economically diverse, we remain fairly uniform in the way we chose to interpret and engage with Scripture's meta narrative. The group felt that intentionally engaging in intergenerational, and cross-cultural conversations will enrich the liturgical practice of the church.

### **One-on-One Interview Discoveries**

The interviewees were engaged and engaging; they provided feedback that was not only enlightening but also affirming. All of the interviewees agreed with the Discovery Synopsis provided prior to our conversations.

- The senior pastor/university administrator remarked that preaching itself is the practice of storytelling. To preach is to birth a reality that moves seamlessly from the world of the text to the one inhabited by the audience. Effective preaching is grounded in the experiences of the congregation as a whole.
- The New Testament professor noted that Scripture itself is a book from the margins to the marginalized. Thus, the marginalized can bring beautiful nuance to the story. The narrative

of the “woman with an issue of blood” comes to life if interpreted through the lens of the AIDS epidemic in the eighties.

- Lastly the pastor/theologian/activist noted the importance of training congregations to hear an octave higher. Redemption occurs when the priestly establishment recognizes the need for prophets that evict the congregation from the elegant mansions of the mind in order to force them to dwell in the slums. For it is by moving to the slums that we begin to grasp faith in a new way.

## Synthesis

The insights uncovered during both the workshop session and the one-on-one interviews proved to be remarkably similar. The stakeholders and interviewees agreed that congregations that are program oriented are driven by a consumer culture that does not prioritize diversity. The themes that emerged are as follows:

- A myopic approach to programs promotes a uniformity
- Diversity in both hermeneutics and practice requires intentionality, time, and a framework.
- Conversational spaces where leadership is engaged and approachable are the first steps in priestly listening.

Addressing these issues amidst a deeply polarized and divisive climate is an enterprise fraught with peril. The solution requires an approach that seeks to train parishioners to hear Scripture in new ways, while at the same time equipping and empowering previously silent groups that they may find their voice at the theological table. Priestly listening is needed as leadership seeks to restore a sense of pride and belonging to congregations that previously valued assimilation and uniformity. Prophetic shifting is also needed as leadership seeks to craft language that aligns with, reflects, and celebrates the ideals of inclusion, grace, and diversity as hermeneutical best practices. Lastly, a framework must also be created so that the priorities and practices of the church align closely with the stated value of inclusivity.

## Next Steps

Further areas of research include but are not limited to: Examination of the congregational history so as to ascertain some of the challenges associated with liturgical, programmatic, or homiletical shifts.

## Discovery Workshop Documentation

On October 30, 2020, I met with 5 individuals to discuss the question:

*“How open is our church to hear from and be led by stories from the margins?”*

This was the initial question posed by my Need/Problem/Opportunity for my DMin project at Portland Seminary. During our time together we examined the audience, symptoms, causes, and hopes in order to craft a more concise NPO statement.

The audience which would benefit the most from possible solutions is local and denominational leadership, as they have the capacity to empower, highlight, and advocate for groups that remain silent. The congregation as a whole was considered as a possible audience but it was decided that the implementation of solutions for such a large group would be cumbersome.

Symptoms experienced: apathy, disengagement, lack of communal connections, and denominational stagnation.

**Causes of these symptoms included:**

- A myopic focus on programs
- Lack of engagement from leadership towards parishioners
- Missional drift

**Hopes the group would like to see the following achieved:**

- People and the stories are prioritized
- Congregation feels connected and valued
- Atmosphere of communication and engagement
- Empathy is experienced through finding commonality in our stories

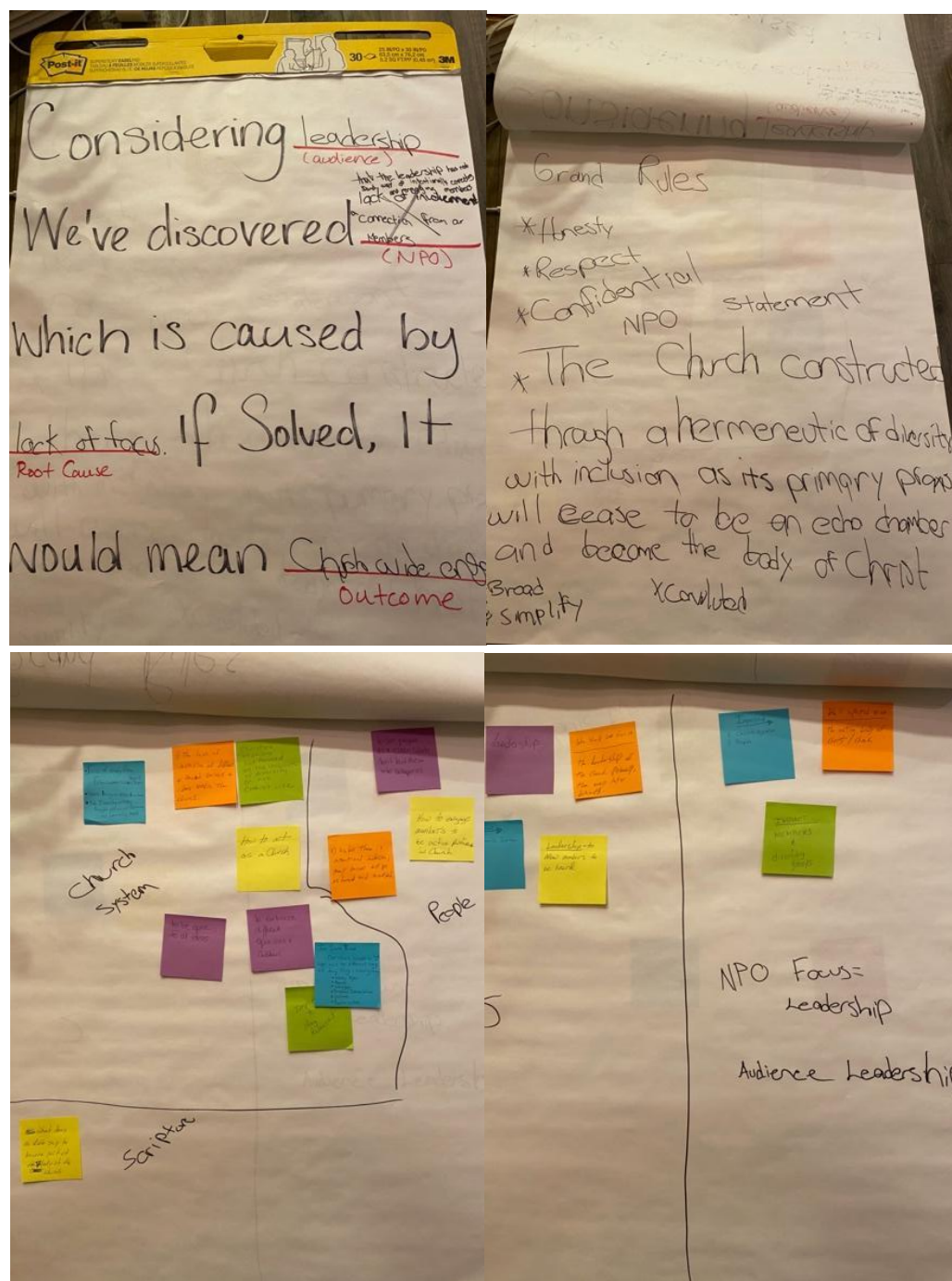
**There were two primary NPO themes that emerged:**

- A hermeneutic of diversity enriches the services and practices of the church
- Leadership must create a framework that highlights and seeks to leverage diversity

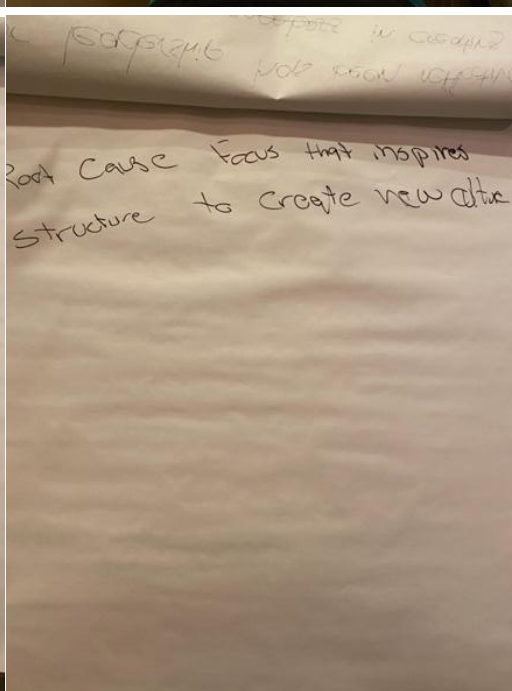
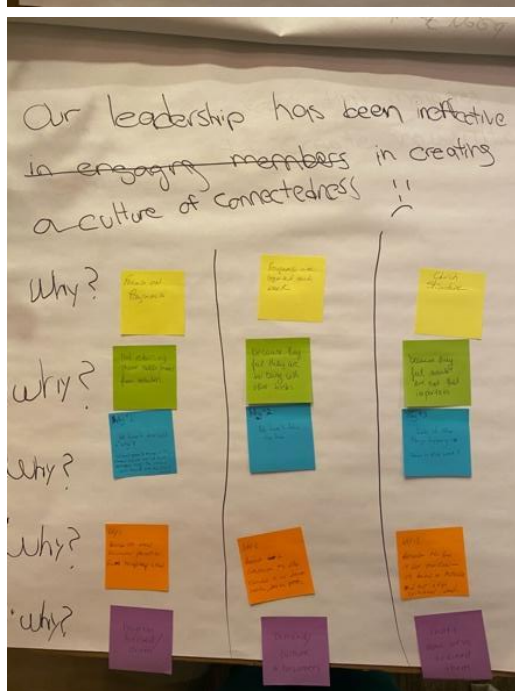
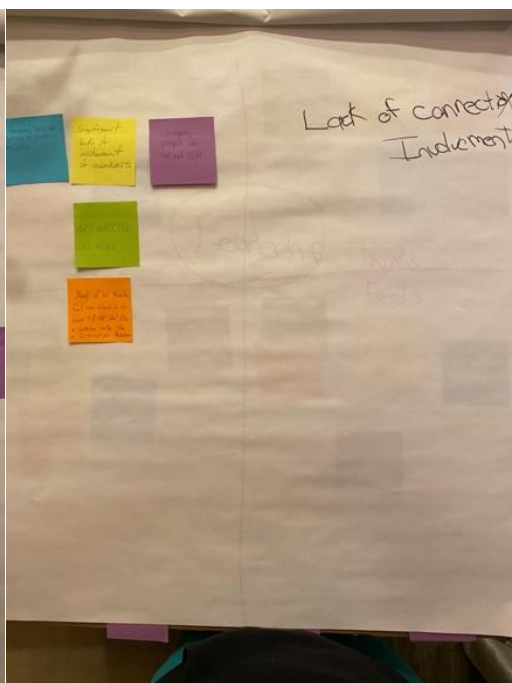
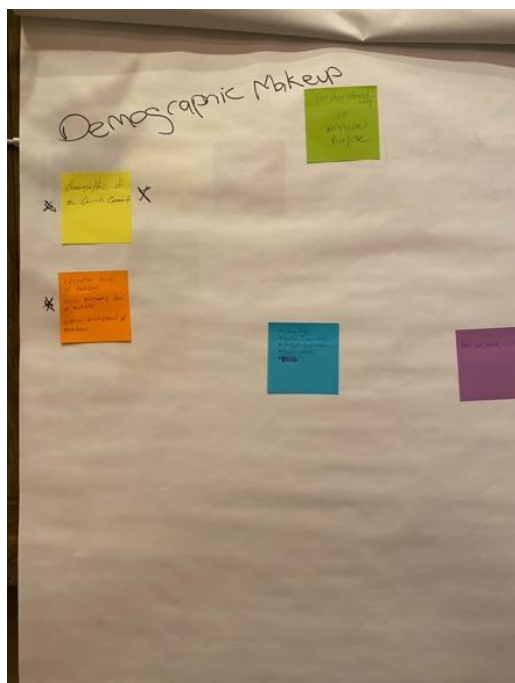
**The group developed the following statement:**

Considering local and denominational leadership,  
We've discovered that leadership has not found an effective way of weaving  
together and engaging with the stories of a large swath of our membership,  
Which is caused by a lack of focus.  
If solved it would mean church wide engagement.

Edited NPO: How do we inspire leadership to expand its hermeneutical approach so as to value stories from the margins?







## One-Page Post-Workshop Message to Stakeholders

Esteemed stakeholder, permit me to offer my most sincere gratitude for your participation in our Discovery Workshop, your contribution has been invaluable as I continue this research process. During our time together, we came to the consensus that the only solution to the perceived apathy of our community of faith is to engage and to inspire leadership. The task ahead is to create spaces where people are prioritized, empathy is practiced and connections are valued. The NPO we worked on together found that while a hermeneutic of diversity will enrich our service, these changes are insubstantial if they are not buttressed by a commitment from leadership that prioritizes diversity everywhere.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at [mmendez16@georgefox.edu](mailto:mmendez16@georgefox.edu) should you have any questions, feedback or corrections. Once again, I would like to thank you for your willingness to help and your commitment to our congregation.

May God Continue to Richly Bless you.

Miguel Mendez

## One-on-One Interview Documentation

Interviewee A-senior pastor, university administrator

- Preaching is the art of connecting the world of with the audience's reality
- Scripture is timely and timeless
- The preacher who desires to be effective must by a character in the stories of his parishioners, he/she must inhabit those tales.
- Incarnational ministry requires empathy and openness
- Being present provides for the pulse of a congregation

Interviewee B-New Testament professor/theologian

- Scripture is a book that emerges from the margins penned to the marginalized
- Whose voice are you not hearing, what insights may those voices provided
- Prophecy is the language God lends to silent agony; it is our responsibility to give voice to those cries
- Theology provides the space for timeless truths and situational applications

Interviewee C-pastor/professor/activist

- The poor, the widow, the orphan, and the resident alien- these are the groups that remain central to the covenantal notions of Torah.
- The text is a construct that is making decisions, who will we focus on, who will speak, what will be said. Liturgy is the enterprise of deciding how to interpret those constructs.

- The truth is that God speaks in surround sound, there never is only one thing you hear. The church would do well to do likewise.

# Appendix B- Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

## Story as Scripture's Serpentine Song

Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote, "Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of imagination."<sup>116</sup> Wittgenstein understood the power of narrative as a vehicle to convey our deepest fears and a tool to disclose our highest expectations. History, culture, primacy, and power find their ultimate expression in the ambiguity and splendor of the stories we choose to tell. Those metanarratives, both frame our hermeneutical approaches, and form our communal ethos.

Jewish theologian, and activist Abraham Joshua Heschel defined prophecy as, "The voice that God has lent to the silent agony."<sup>117</sup> The drama that is the Hebrew Bible casts the prophet as a character that is both totem and taboo. A storyteller equal parts master raconteur, and divine artisan crafting narratives that exist in the space between dream and neurosis. Modern day readers might mistake the convoluted tales of the *nabi* with the feverish rants of a madman, for the plot of prophetic parlance shifts erratically between symphonic hope and cacophonic horror. How can the reader of the Hebrew Bible make sense of a narrative, which juxtaposes pastoral predictions of peace "He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"<sup>118</sup> with utterances that are both bombastic and bellicose "Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it; and let the LORD God be a witness against you, the LORD from his holy temple. For lo, the LORD is coming out of His place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. Then the mountains will melt under him and the valleys will burst open, like wax near the fire, like waters poured down a steep place."<sup>119</sup> The rhythm of the prophet's ambiguous aria is constantly in tension; for in it YHWH can only enact peace if He goes to war against his people. Prophecy is the plight of those who hear an octave to high intended for an audience who will constantly complain that the ballad possesses "too many notes." From Hosea to Heschel, the song of the prophet demands to be sung even when the music is imperceptible. This paper will attempt to focus on prophetic storytelling and priestly listening as the building blocks for a hermeneutic based in empathy and oriented towards inclusion.

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<sup>116</sup>As quoted in *The Literary Wittgenstein* by John Gibson (New York, Routledge, 2004) p. 24

<sup>117</sup>Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*, (New York, Harper Collins, 2001) p. 5

<sup>118</sup>Unless otherwise specified all references to Scripture are taken from: The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version. ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York, Oxford University Press, 2010) Micah 4:3

<sup>119</sup> Micah 1:2-4

## Remembering: Inclusion and Exodus

Robert Bellah, the brilliant Harvard trained sociologist and anthropologist coined the term “communities of memory”<sup>120</sup> to describe the shared identity of cadres and cohorts clinging to their tales. Bellah masterfully noted that our individual recollections are always embedded in a collective history. A responsible hermeneutic of remembrance must discard the comfort and familiarity of our myopic worldviews as it seeks to enable and empower voices long held silent. Voices like that of Berniece Reagan whose refusal to stay silent is captured by the haunting lyrics of her song, *I Remember I Believe*:

I don't know how my mother walked her trouble down  
I don't know how my father stood his ground  
I don't know how my people survive slavery  
I do remember, that's why I believe.<sup>121</sup>

The Old Testament is an exercise in the art of remembrance by a marginalized and insignificant community desperate to find its voice amidst the military machinations, and political ploys of the ancient Near East. The Torah represents a new type of story, a dynamic tale of transformation enacted by Divine election. YHWH, God of the voiceless becomes the protagonist of the story, as His election reshapes the corporate consciousness of Israel.

Movement is at the heart of the Exodus story as we shift and sway from slavery to worship, from bondage to Egypt, to bonding with YHWH; from the production of brick and mortar for Pharaoh, to the glad and obedient construction of a sanctuary for the Creator. At the outset of Israel's desert dwelling experience God seems almost removed; the book however, builds in a crescendo until God engulfs the scene at the completion of the tabernacle. Just as Pharaoh will attempt to subjugate a nation by destroying its future on the banks of the Nile, YHWH will liberate a people on the shores of the Red Sea. Chaotic oppression is replaced by gleeful liberation, as the created order bends and buckles to the will of the God who makes all things new. The concept of liberation supersedes the religious or political ethos of a particular people, for the purpose of Exodus is to return the whole cosmos to a point where God's mission can once again be taken up. Thus, the deliverance of Israel is for the sake of all creation, Abraham's descendants are called out from all nations to partake in a task on behalf of God's Earth. As priestly kingdom and holy nation, Israel will be called to stand in the breach and bridge the “oughtness” of YHWH's kingdom with the “isness” of the kingdoms of man.

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<sup>120</sup> Robert Bellah et al. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2017)

<sup>121</sup> Mama Amira Millicent Davis, *Jalimusa; An Epic Tale of Black Motherhood*, (Waterloo, BaHar Publishing, 2019) p.269

The call to empowerment begins with a theophany described in the third chapter of Exodus, here the God of the oppressed is not the unmoved mover of Thomistic thought, or the dispassionate observer championed by Greek philosophy. The burning bush births a new story, one that forces us to interpret reality through the incarnational hermeneutic of the God that tabernacles with mortals. "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings."<sup>122</sup> This simple statement could easily be described as both the semantic and syntax of the Pentateuch. The Hebrew text uses the verb יָדַע, which the New Revised Standard Version renders as "I know." YHWH's knowledge however, is not merely academic, the *qal* construction indicates that God has seen the plight of His people and is moved to action; divine witness leads to intimate empathy that prompts deliverance. The act of salvation supersedes liberation for it is also a gift of land, the hope for a new future and a space to experience YHWH's blessing. Old Testament scholar Terence Fretheim reminds us that, "God's redemptive act leads to a new creation, the invitation to inhabit a land which is good and broad." Incarnational congregations, driven by a hermeneutic that prioritizes empathy, share a commitment to oppose systems and structures that promote misery, even as they engage in birthing a new path forward. As economic disparity, police brutality, and racial inequality continue to plague those who dwell in Egypt, the church is called to shield and shepherd those who yearn for the land of milk and honey. Thus, Scripture calls and compels us to not only witness suffering, but to empathize with those who continue to cry out to YHWH. We are, says Martin Buber, "encased in an armor whose task is to ward off signs that may call us to action."<sup>123</sup> But sometimes events happen that have armor-piercing strength, and we feel ourselves directly addressed. A voice will call out from the bush on the mountain or from the boulevard in Minnesota saying, "You! Say something—do something."

Exodus is no simplistic story of good vs. evil; rather, it is a critique of the politics of power. An invitation to recognize that we struggle with both principalities and powers as well as kingdoms of flesh and blood. Israel must become comfortable with inhabiting the paradox, indeed the sea shall part and providence will grant them freedom, but as they cross over into Rephidim they will have to fight to sustain that freedom. Today Christ's bride and body must continue to hear and identify with those who struggle at Rephidim even as we wait for providence to part the murky waters and deliver us to the shore beyond yonder.

## Restoring: Neo-Liturgy and Nehemiah

American laureate Audre Lorde once said, "What is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood."<sup>124</sup> Both poetry and

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<sup>122</sup>Exodus 3:7

<sup>123</sup>Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1948), 10–11.

<sup>124</sup> Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York, The Crossing Press, 2007)

narrative possess inherent risks, while also providing poet and storyteller with the tantalizing opportunity to find her/his voice. The eighth chapter of the book of Nehemiah recounts Israel's rediscovery of a section of the Torah. Scholars conclude that the portion discovered was some form of the book of Deuteronomy.<sup>125</sup> What remains particularly interesting is that the hermeneutic that populates Israel's Deuteronomistic history would seem far removed from the reality of postexilic Jerusalem. The audience that gathers to hear the book of the Law has developed a new cosmology, which aptly reflects the experience of exile in Babylon and Persia.

The pericope comprising verses one through twelve, of the eighth-chapter centers around the concept of covenant renewal and communal restoration. The author, however, must find a way to bridge the promise of the Abrahamic covenant with the political, economic, religious, and social devastation of the Jewish state. "All the people gathered together into the square that was before the Water Gate. They asked the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel."<sup>126</sup> The text seems to imply that Ezra and Nehemiah are responding to the desires of the congregation, for it is the people who initiate the restorative process. Thus, priestly listening seeks to alleviate the perceived needs of the whole body of Christ. From the outset, the narrative makes some shifts in praxis to respond to the challenge of ministering to a new generation. It should be noted that the people are gathered before the Water Gate. Scholars contend that the Water Gate was likely located in the vicinity of the spring of Gihon, at the east end of the city. This locale, outside the confines of the temple permits the interplay of lay people and clergy as participants.<sup>127</sup>

The religious renewal experienced by the returned exiles, hinges on their ability to hear and comprehend the word of God. The passage emphasizes this notion by beginning and concluding the account with the Hebrew root *יָדַע* (to make sense or understand verse 2 and 12). "And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, both men women and all that could hear with discernment."<sup>128</sup> Thus, the author makes the theological assertion that ritual devoid of discernment is meaningless. Relevant ministry seeks to provide meaning to the religious experience by contextualizing ritual. Nehemiah's postexilic narrative creates a space for contextualization "And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform which they had made for the occasion." The word used

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<sup>125</sup> See Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra and Nehemiah* (Society of Biblical Literature Series, January 1, 1988)

<sup>126</sup>Nehemiah 8:1

<sup>127</sup> Note Nehemiah 8:4 "And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform which they had made for the occasion. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pediah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanad, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand."

<sup>128</sup>Nehemiah 8:2



to describe the place from which Ezra delivers his message is *לְדָבָר*, which is commonly associated with the Word of YHWH. The narrative presents the creation of a space from which Torah is heard in new ways. Relevant pulpits are bridges between the world of scripture and our world; pertinent preaching is then an exercise in the hermeneutic of contextualization.

The next section of the pericope presents a powerful picture "And Jeshua, Bani, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Peliah, the Levites helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places."<sup>129</sup> This verse introduces the role that Levites are to play in the new Jewish religious paradigm. Once again, the Hebrew root *בִּין* is used in conjunction with the work of the Levites. The professional clergy is depicted as moving around from group to group, making sure that this new generation of Jews understands what is being read.

The author of Nehemiah proposes that reading with explanation leads to understanding, understanding prompts action, and action produces joy. "So, they read from the book, from the law of God with interpretation. They gave sense, so that the people understood the reading."<sup>130</sup> The Hebrew word commonly translated as "to give sense" is *מִפְּתָח*. Most commentaries would argue that this word depicts the Levites providing a paragraph-by-paragraph exegesis of what is being read. However, *מִפְּתָח* can also be translated as interpreted. If this translation is preferred, then the Levites did more than just exegete, they offered a worship service that was sensitive to the generational and linguistic realities that might have been used to justify the marginalization of a group.

Orientalist H.H Schaefer lends credence to the notion of Levites as translators by astutely noting that Aramaic Targums were used in Synagogue services.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, Old Testament scholar Ulrich Kellermann argues that the Nehemiah passage offers the etiological basis for synagogue services. He notes that the pericope in Nehemiah presents several elements of a service in rabbinic Judaism such as: assembly, procession, recital, the opening of the books, the people stand, blessing, double amen, explanation of the sacred reading, and dismissal.<sup>132</sup> Perhaps Lorde was right, maybe thorns and thistles will remain the only fruits of our discourse, but the task of priestly listening is to create liturgies that bind up the bruised and broken hearted by contextualizing their pain.

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<sup>129</sup>Nehemiah 8:7

<sup>130</sup>Nehemiah 8:8

<sup>131</sup> H.H Schaefer, *Esra der Schreiber*, Tübingen: Beitr\_ge zur Historischen Theologie, 5, 1930) 53-53

<sup>132</sup> Ulrich Kellermann, *Nehemiah, Quellen Überlieferung und Geschilthe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967) 29-30.

## Reframing: Matthew and Kingdom Ethics

Matthew opens his narrative by conjuring up echoes from a different era, “An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”<sup>133</sup> The language is intended to tickle the reader’s imagination, as she/he is transported in time and space to the primeval chaos, which sets the stage for YHWH’s creative activity in the Genesis account. The Gospel does not list a mind-numbing group of names as an exercise in historiography; rather, the story is interested in interpreting history in order to construct a hermeneutical framework for the kingdom that Christ has come to establish. YHWH is once again engaged in creating something new, the baby from Bethlehem will cry and coo and with that a new world will be birthed. A kingdom of conscience that will challenge the maxim of might makes right, and supplant it with a golden rule enacted to empower the voiceless.

A cursory look at the names that comprise the census of the new kingdom in the first chapter of the Gospel reveals many of the usual suspects. The list of titans from Israel’s history link Jesus and the Davidic line, while drawing a sharp contrast between this Messiah and Herod, the puppet king with no royal blood. The fourteen generations that mark the three epochs of Israel’s metanarrative from call to kingdom and later collapse are intended to further cement the connection between Christ and David, for in Jewish gematria the number fourteen is interchangeable with the name of Israel’s greatest king.

New Testament theologian Eugene Boring aptly notes that Jesus represents both the continuation and culmination of Israel’s *heilsgeschichte*, Boring writes, “The Messiah does not wander onto the stage of history as an impressive newcomer to the drama, but in continuity with God’s saving history in the past.”<sup>134</sup> The truly remarkable thing about the Matthean narrative pertains to who is invited to partake of this salvation history, to be sure Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must be included but Matthew chooses to give space to the stories of women like Tamar, of foreigners and immigrants like Ruth and of scandalous sinners like Uriah’s wife. Christ’s kingdom will be built upon a hermeneutic of scandalous grace, and the salacious stories enmeshed in Jesus family tree serve as a reminder that this Messiah has come not only to save his people from sin but also to level the barriers that would keep us from one another. The Christian *koinonia* is one where the walls between saint and sinner, Jew and gentile, male and female are sacrificed for the sense of oneness in Christ. American poet Edwin Markham probably puts it best in his masterful work entitled: Outwitted, Markham writes,

He drew a circle that shut me out –  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But Love and I had the wit to win:

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<sup>133</sup> Matthew 1: 1

<sup>134</sup> Eugene Boring, *The New Interpreters Bible*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2015) 8:131

We drew a circle that took him in!<sup>135</sup>

Matthew cautions us to resist the temptation of triumphalism, to be sure the incarnation is good news and yet even as we marvel at manger scenes with a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, vitriol and violence are never far removed. The second chapter of the Gospel will force us to hear the defining sounds of parents bitterly crying over their slaughtered infants. The voices of powerless people are often forgotten, neglected, or suppressed in historiography. Their cries turn into silence in the realm of history. Matthew grants them the chance to be heard by inviting that long dead matriarch to wail for the murder of the innocent and vulnerable. The imaginary character depicted by Jeremiah as vicariously weeping for the exiles, now comes and weeps again for those anonymous infants slain in Bethlehem.

The body of Christ cannot abscond from its call to comfort, for if we listen hard enough, we can still hear Rachel as she weeps in Auschwitz, Dachau, Rwanda, Kosovo, East Jerusalem, and Flint Michigan. She still wails unconsolably as her sons are gunned down on the streets, and her daughters, scorned and silenced continue to suffer abuse and harassment. Thus, a hermeneutic of incarnation inhabits the space where priestly listening prompts us to prophetic action.

## Story as Reactionary Reality

Garches, a small and sleepy commune seven miles west of Paris is home to the *Paroisse Saint Louis*, a breath-taking church and cemetery which boasts famed jazz musician Sydney Bechet as its most famous tenant. The suburb also has the distinction of housing the *Hôpital Raymond-Poincaré*, one of the premier trauma centers in France. Every year 450 deceased people pass through its drab and dreary morgue; that is until 2002, when Michel Durigon, the hospital's chief pathologist decided to create a *Salle des Departs*. A liminal threshold that exists between the soon and very soon and the not yet. Italian artist Ettore Spalletti was tasked with crafting the space, hues of blue dance in the mausoleum playfully mixing light and shadows in an existential dance between life and death. American musician David Lang was commissioned to compose a musical sound scape. The requiem aptly titled "*Departs*" is an eighteen-minute score set to cellos and an unending vocal part intended to provide some solace, as mourners grapple with grief. Disc jockey Dick Clark once stated that "music was the soundtrack to life", if Clark is correct then existence itself is framed by a meter and a metric structure. The instances we interpret and the stories we participate in all possess a rhythm and rhyme, from crib to crypt and manger to morgue, we all swing and sway to our hermeneutical soundtracks.

The first movement in the interpretative concerto, otherwise known as Biblical hermeneutics, begins with a distraught and disoriented group of former fishermen huddled in a room trying to incorporate the reality of the cross, into their salvation stories and narratives of deliverance. Thomas Kuhn, the upstart and irreverent American philosopher, posits that every so often a theoretical novelty upsets our epistemological frameworks. When confronted by this informational anomaly

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<sup>135</sup> Edwin Markham, Anthology; Selected Works, Vol. 1-6

our old hermeneutical structures must give way to something new, a paradigm shift.<sup>136</sup> The early Christian church was forced to reinterpret concepts of covenant and chosenness in light of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Isaiah's young woman "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."<sup>137</sup> was coopted by Matthew's Gospel to buttress the concept of the virgin birth "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel"<sup>138</sup> Likewise, the Song of the Suffering Servant, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."<sup>139</sup> is adopted by gospel writers to describe Christ's immolation as the perfect sacrifice.

Early Christian communities were able to forge a new form for exegesis by using the Incarnation as their primary hermeneutical tool. Church councils and conclaves were convened in order to define orthodoxy and condemn heresy. The parties gathered at Nicea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon may have differed on their notions of Christology, but throughout the tumult of those early years the one unifying factor was a shared commitment to the authority of Scripture.

The age of enlightenment introduced the second move in the hermeneutical symphony, as the industrial revolution and humanism promised an economic and ideological paradise, the church held hostage by fundamentalism was forced to retreat to the cloister. Tertullian's old adage "What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens", was reborn as denominations drew a sharp line between faith and science. Courageous biblical scholars attempted to enter the ideological arena by adopting and applying the tools of historical critical analysis to sacred literature. This quixotic quest promised a new type of exegesis that would garner the original meaning of the text. Sadly, the hopes of a hermeneutic devoid of bias were dashed with the advent of postmodernism.

The third stanza of the interpretive song commences in the fertile valley on the shore of the river Lahn. The picturesque town of Marburg was home to philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, the son of a chemistry professor and devout protestant. Gadamer challenged the notion that one could approach any field of study as a Lockean tabula rasa. His seminal book titled *Truth and Method* introduced the concept of hermeneutic theory, which proposes that inquiry is the dialectical process where the preconceptions of the subject meld with the theoretical presuppositions

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<sup>136</sup> See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1996)

<sup>137</sup> Isaiah 7:14

<sup>138</sup> Matthew 1:23

<sup>139</sup> Isaiah 53:7

inherent in the object.<sup>140</sup> Gadamerian hermeneutics posits that individuals come to the interpretative table with biases and questions that frame intellectual dialogue. The violence and excesses of the twentieth century dispelled the idea of a neutral reading of the text, birthing a new hermeneutical framework that sought to recognize the ills of capitalism, colonialism, racism, sexism and theological paternalism in order to invite a new set of voices to the hermeneutical table.

## Heschel and the Shoah

Abraham Joshua Heschel was born in Warsaw in 1907, he completed a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Berlin in 1933; the year Hitler came to power. He was forced to grapple with the grief of the *shoah* as an exile in America. Unable to escape the past, he never returned to Poland "If I should go to Poland or Germany, every stone, every tree would remind me of contempt, hatred, murder of children killed, of mothers burned alive, of human beings asphyxiated."<sup>141</sup> Survivor's guilt serves as grammar for Heschel's theological language, "My destination was New York, it would have been Auschwitz or Treblinka. I am a brand plucked from the fire, in which my people were burned to death. I am a brand plucked from the fire of an altar of Satan on which millions of human lives were exterminated to evil's greater glory."<sup>142</sup> The horror of the holocaust shook the foundations of the Jewish theological paradigm,<sup>143</sup> responses emphasized the relationship of God to the community of faith and varied from Richard Rubenstein's "God is Dead"; to Elie Wiesel's notion that "God is imprisoned"; to Emil Fackenheim's richly rabbinic concept of a theodicy of protest; Rav Dessler's punitive approach; to Irving Greenberg's proposition of "moment faiths" depicting a God who is both present and not present; and Eliezer Berkovits orthodox opinion of *Deus Absconditus*.<sup>144</sup> Heschel however chose to emphasize the dialectic nature of theology and its relation to historiography. Thus, Judaism ought not to be understood as a set of doctrinal propositions but as communal participation in the continuation of the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Near Eastern Studies scholar Reuven Kimelman describes Heschel's methodology as an attempt to "integrate biblical, rabbinic, and kabalistic sources into a unified vision of God's

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<sup>140</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (New York, Crossroad Publishing, 1982)

<sup>141</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969) p.113

<sup>142</sup> *No Religion is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Harold Kasimow & Byron L. Sherwin, (Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 1991) p. 235

<sup>143</sup> See David Weiss Halivni, *Breaking the Tablets; Jewish Theology After the Shoah*, (Lanham, Rowan & Littlefield Publishing, 2007)

<sup>144</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Theology after the Shoah: The Transformation of the Core Paradigm" *Modern Judaism* 26, no. 3 (Oct., 2006), 213-239

continuing dialogue with the people of Israel. Heschel's theology seeks to reconstruct the dialogue of the Jewish people with God."<sup>145</sup>

Moises Maimonides, the great Jewish philosopher was foundational in framing the conversation on Jewish theology. Maimonides, and much of Judaism viewed God as both absolutely transcendent and independent from humanity. The *shoah* forced Heschel to attempt to free Jewish theology from the constraints of divine transcendence and independence by focusing on divine pathos; that is, a God who is both in need of and searching for humankind. Paul Tillich speaks about religion in terms of ultimate concern "Man is ultimately concerned about what determines his ultimate destiny beyond all preliminary necessities and accidents."<sup>146</sup> Jewish hermeneutics after the holocaust force us to go beyond Tillich's definition and suggest that through the symbiosis between symbol and story, religion enables us to speak meaningfully about being. "To be or not to be" is still the question, and the answer is not found in mathematical formulas, chemical reactions, or theoretical physics; it is found in mythical narratives.

The capacity to listen and allocate space for all stories is of paramount importance in the economy of Heschel's hermeneutic, prophetic congregations are keenly aware of their corporate responsibility to advocate for those long held silent. "It has become clear to me that when cruelties are committed in the name of a few in society, some are guilty while all are responsible"<sup>147</sup> Christian communities owe a debt of gratitude to our Jewish brethren who have stared into the abyss and crafted a theology that affirms God, while calling us to remain cognizant of those voices we are tempted to ignore. Ellie Wiesel captures the tension in his nightmarish expose on human nature titled "Night"; Wiesel will recount a cold and gloomy day as several voiceless cadavers hang on the gallows, their tongues blue tinged, their eyes glassed over, the limp body of a boy clings to life on those gallows prompting an inner dialogue as Wiesel asks where is God? Is he a mere absentee landlord, a no show in the drama of human history? suddenly Wiesel's inner conversation is interrupted as he hears the answer, "God is here, He is there hanging on the gallows." Heschel would remind Christ followers that the protagonist of our narrative is the One who hung on a tree.

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<sup>145</sup> Reuven Kimelman, "Abraham Joshua Heschel's Theology of Judaism and the Rewriting of Jewish Intellectual History", *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 17 no. 2 (Jan., 2009), 207-238

<sup>146</sup> Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1959) p. 7-8.

<sup>147</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Reasons for my involvement in the Peace Movement; Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, (New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996)

## Her Story: John and Gender

"You already know enough. So, do I. It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions."<sup>148</sup> This scalding statement serves as the opening salvo for Sven Lindqvist's scathing critique of the historical narrative pervading Western culture. Lindqvist argues with the passion of a modern-day prophet that the city on a hill that is American exceptionalism has been built through a foreign policy of dispossession, displacement, and genocide. The voices of twelve million displaced slaves and countless natives to the American continent have been lost to history, relegated to footnotes in a story that does not belong to them. New Testament theologian Leticia Guardiola Saenz notes the role of exegetical diversity as a tool to construct a holistic view of history, because cultural texts do not merely reflect historical reality, they also frame history and define praxis. Thus, Saenz would invite us to engage in "hermeneutics from the borderland"<sup>149</sup>, this invitation would force congregations to confront the reality that the text gifted to us comes from the perspective of the voiceless. The New Testament is penned by a people struggling against Roman imperialism and colonization, Jesus enters the cultural milieu of his time by identifying, siding, and voicing the concerns of those who exist on the perilous borderland between gender, empire, and culture.

The eighth chapter of the Gospel of John presents a prime example of Messiah's borderland hermeneutic; the Jews have brought a woman caught in adultery before Christ, they attempt to trap Jesus by pinning him in the uncomfortable space forged when religion and politics collide. Exegetes have spent much ink debating the merits of Mosaic Law and Roman jurisprudence but until recently very little has been said of the woman. New Testament scholar Hisako Kinukawa points out that as the scene plays out in the women's court of the temple two hermeneutical systems clash. On the one hand, you have the Pharisees and Sadducees who argue for a framework that equated women with property and defined them as seductive, shameful, and sinful; on the other, you have the Johannine Jesus, the anti-patriarchal borderland dweller who advocates overcoming hierarchies.<sup>150</sup>

Mosaic Law clearly prescribed the punishment for both adulterous parties "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the

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<sup>148</sup> Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate all the Brutes*, (New York, The New Press, 1997) p.1

<sup>149</sup> Leticia Áida Guardiola-Sáenz, *Jesus the Borderlander: Hybridity as Survival Strategy and Model for Political Change; A Cultural Representation from the Gospel of John*. (PhD Dissertation Vanderbilt University, 2009) Accessed April, 14, 2021.

<sup>150</sup> See Hisako Kinukawa, "On John 7:53-8:11: A Well-Cherished but Much-Clouded Story" *Reading from This Place: Volume 2* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress): 82-96.

adulteress are to be put to death.”<sup>151</sup> The adulterous man however remains absent from the scene in John chapter 8; individual empathy quickly morphs into bloodlust as the mob circles around the Nazarene rabbi. Jesus ignores the religious leaders and their self-righteous pleas for justice and instead turns to the woman. The sinless Lamb of God stands with the woman, and takes the place of the adulterous man prompting the accusers to want to stone both of them. Christ calmly turns to the crowd, the divine finger that drew the contours of Adam’s face, now draws in the ground and with that He is redrawing borders. Do we possess the courage to go out and do likewise?

## **Gutierrez, Cone and the Thickening of the Gospel**

The European enterprise of expansionism into the new world was built upon the twin foundations of Scripture and the sword. Religious language was utilized to justify the dehumanization and displacement of the original inhabitants of the Americas. Take the sermon preached on September 1, 1689, by Cotton Mather, a Puritan minister and pamphleteer. The message entitled, “Souldiers Counsell’d and Comforted” served as a charge to members of the armed forces engaged in the ongoing battles with the Native inhabitants of New England. The Bible has come alive to the people gathered at the Old North Meeting House, Boston, through the words of a preacher who skillfully combines traditional phrases and ancient imagery to describe the perceptions of current realities. The cadence of religious sermonizing speaks to the listeners narrative, as they have now become Israel in the wilderness confronted by “the other”. The Amalekites encroaching on their land deserve of vengeance and total destruction. Violence against the new “Amalek” is justified on the grounds that they are an indigenous population who must be disinherited by divine decision, to make way for the new Israel.

The same ideology and religious lingo spurred on Europeans as they attempted to justify their crusading wars against the Saracens. The pernicious tradition of identification between contemporary situations and the warring scenes of the Old Testament is a burden that we must bear. Along with the lofty ideals of freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the use of scripture to justify xenophobia, racism, and sexism is part of the Christian story. Gustavo Gutierrez, a Maryknoll priest and activist artfully argues that this tale is facilitated through an unholy trinity forged between the religious structure, wealthy land owners, and political systems. Witnessing the excesses of the Church in the Peruvian highlands, Gutierrez calls for a new kind of hermeneutical reflection that is faithful to the God who is always on the side of the oppressed. “The pastoral activity of the Church does not flow as a conclusion from theological premises. Theology does not produce pastoral activity; rather it reflects upon it.”<sup>152</sup> Thus, Gutierrez would invite us to consider the wondrous possibility, that if sin is tantamount to oppression, then the Church can be an agent of salvation by advocating liberation.

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<sup>151</sup> Leviticus 20:10

<sup>152</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, (New York, Orbis Books, 1973), 11



The first step in developing a hermeneutic that is both incarnational in its approach and diverse in its exegesis is the recognition that our ecclesiology must coincide with our dreams for diversity. Theologian James Cone writes, "Theological concepts have meaning only as they are translated into theological praxis, that is the church living in the world on the basis of what it proclaims."<sup>153</sup> An ecclesiology that is sensitive to the needs of the voiceless should begin with the recognition that theology must also be done from the margins. Ethicist, Glen Stassen defines this process as "a thickening of Jesus"<sup>154</sup>, which occurs when the community of faith moves beyond compartmentalizing Christ into religious rituals and events. If the Church is to minister to those who have been silenced in a meaningful way, then the first step is to begin to develop Christological confessions that reflect a "thickening of Jesus."

Seeing Christ through different eyes leads to different ways of understanding Scripture, and different praxis implemented in faithfulness to Jesus.<sup>155</sup> Thus, the first step in developing an inclusive model for ministry is the application of hermeneutic of diversity born in borderlands; said hermeneutic recognizes that Jesus is born homeless, grows up as an undocumented migrant in Egypt, comes from the ethnically and culturally diverse area of Galilee, and is perceived as being of mixed race.<sup>156</sup> While this hermeneutic cannot encompass the breath of our communal Christological confessions, it does provide the marginalized with a place at the theological table.

## Story as Synthesis

Scholars who would have us respond to a call for contextualized hermeneutic recognize that ecclesiology must become more dynamic. The desire to participate in meaningful ministry ought to move every believer from a world of five-dollar *lattes*, eco-friendly cars, and Sunday sermonizing, to the land of shadows, where justice is elusive and hope sparse. For it is in the margins that the disciple is called to incarnate the gospel by realizing that we follow the God who comes. Disciples are prompted to embark on a journey that pushes them out of the cloister and into the world.

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<sup>153</sup> James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York, Orbis Books, 1997)

<sup>154</sup> Glen Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus; Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2012)

<sup>155</sup> I am indebted to Miguel A de la Torre and his essay entitled "A Thick Hispanic Jesus" (*Perspectives in Religious Studies* 40 (2012) 131-142)

<sup>156</sup> John 8:41 "You are indeed doing what your father does. They said to him, we are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself." There is textual evidence that demonstrates that Jesus was accused of being the bastard child of Mary the Jew and Panthera the Roman soldier. In fact, several old rabbinical texts, according to the early Christian apologist Origen in *Contra Celsum*, refer to Jesus as Jesus ben Panthera (Jesus the son of Panthera).

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer contends that discipleship is an exercise in communal engagement "Following Christ is not exclusive to the cloister rather it is a divine command for all Christians. Luther had to leave the cloister and go back to the world not because the world was good and holy but because even the cloister was only a part of the world. The only way to follow Jesus is to live in the world."<sup>157</sup> To follow Christ is not to join him in an "other worldly kingdom" where the price of admission is an impeccable social, ethnic or personal ethic. This is cheap grace which Bonhoeffer would categorize as "the bitterest rival of discipleship."<sup>158</sup> Contextualization entails partnership with God in the creation of a world that will faithfully reflect the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, priestly listening and prophetic action necessitates that all members of the Body of Christ lend their experiences, language, and culture to the enterprise of Kingdom building.

The challenge now is to develop a methodology for transforming this rich panoply of possibilities into a reality in ecclesiastical praxis. There remains the question, if the Church as a structure has the exegetical courage and hermeneutical capacity to rebaptize texts used to justify subjugation and imperialism in order to engage in the painful process of reading from the margins. This is a perilous task, which would have us relinquish the comfort of our self-created siloes and engage the world in a broader conversation, one that would supplant the virulent and divisive language that has become part and parcel of our time and instead supplant it with grammar of grace. The voices and literary contribution of cultural, theological, and literary critics have done a masterful job pointing out the blind spots in Biblical studies; however, precious little has been done in the area of practical preparation for churches to engage in dialogue. Ron Heifetz, professor at Harvard University defines leadership as: "The art of disappointing people at a rate they can absorb."<sup>159</sup> If Heifetz is correct, then more must be done in the area of congregational care. How do we prepare the Church to engage in a dialogue that demands communal confession, and a commitment to intentional advocacy? How do we balance the disappointment that congregations can absorb, with the cry of the voiceless huddled under the altar pleading, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?"<sup>160</sup>

The tension between the call to priestly care and the commitment to prophetic action rests with leaders keenly aware that as theological reflection collides with cultural preferences, and a different set of *sitz im leben* new sounds begin to populate the faith concerto. The ancient songs of exile and exodus are heard anew when interpreted through hermeneutical lens of asylum and immigration.

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<sup>157</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, Collier Books, 1963) p.42

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> See Ron Heifetz & Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change*. (Boston, Harvard Business Press, 2017)

<sup>160</sup> Revelation 6:10

Melodies that seek to romanticize America's reconstruction period are challenged when heard through muffled harmonies uttered by former slaves.

In the Old South, after the emancipation, former slaves had nowhere to go. Unable to free themselves from the yoke of economic disparity, they went to work for some new landowner. Plantation owners quickly devised a new system of indentured servitude called "sharecropping." Workers were loaned a piece of land, some tools, and the seed, all with interest to be paid later. During the months that they waited for the crops to come in, they were given basic foodstuffs at the little store out behind the "Big House," on interest. When the crops finally came in, and the debts were settled, the money was never enough to pay off all that was owed. So, the workers had to stay for another year and do it all over again. The former slaves became chained to the land and the system. As the song "Sixteen Tons" (lyricist unknown) says, "Saint Peter, don't ya call me, cause I can't go. I owe my soul to the company store." Today, a new chorus alerts us to the crippling debt experienced by so many; the Church must be ready to reinterpret its understanding as we hear the tales of the uninsured and the underinsured that our society has deemed expendable. In cities across this great land, people hunger and thirst for righteousness, yearning for the day when they will partake in the great supper of the lamb. Until that day comes, the Church must continue to create spaces where men and women will not be judged by the color of their skin; but rather, by the content of their character. The arch of equity may be long but if we are courageous enough, it will bend towards inclusion. God grant us the capacity to listen, the courage to act, and the compassion to engage.

# Appendix C-Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

## NPO Statement

Churches committed to priestly listening, practice a hermeneutic of diversity, prioritize inclusiveness, and pursue ideals that are both prophetic and incarnational.

## NPO Scope and Constraints

The focus of the NPO is a congregation's capacity to diversify the narratives that inform its hermeneutical paradigm. The adage that states that people do not fear change; rather, they fear loss has direct bearing on a congregation's tolerance for and adaptability to a diversified interpretive paradigm. The researcher will analyze how Spiritual formation urges congregations to prioritize inclusion and diversity as hermeneutical tools, the research will also grapple with potential pitfalls in the life of the church as a result of this intentional commitment.

## NPO Context

The context for this NPO is the Loma Linda University Church, a multi-ethnic, middle class, highly educated, and upwardly mobile Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Southern California. While at first, I thought that the initial audience would consist of the 15 members of the pastoral staff, and the church board, the workshop allowed me to realize that said focus was too narrow, as it would ignore the very voices the NPO seeks to include. Thus, the audience has been broadened to include a cross section of new members, students, former members, as well as regular attendees. The hope is that these voices might provide a more accurate representation of how the congregation is viewed.

## Root Causes

The root cause remains grounded in the idea that in a *post-Gadamerian* world, individuals and communities must become cognizant of the constructs that define theology and religious praxis. The church in the west must acknowledge its position of privilege in order to reframe its narratives in ways that are relevant and sympathetic to those living on the margins. The politization of Christianity and the cooption of the Sacred text has resulted in a framework that seeks to maintain the status quo. Thus, the call remains for narrative-based hermeneutics that seek to restore Scripture's prophetic voice as it comforts the afflicted while afflicting the comfortable.

## Definition of Done

The hope for the NPO is that it may enrich the congregation's understanding of Scripture, while empowering those who remain on the communal margins. The weaving together of stories might help orient the church toward becoming a discipleship beachhead.

## Three Big Ideas

1. Areopagus weekend
2. The longest table
3. Intersection Spaces

## Concept Pitches

The Areopagus weekend provides an opportunity for a collaborative approach to hermeneutics. The intended audience would be the leadership of the church; this idea seeks to expose the church's leadership to the wealth of approaches, and the depth of discussion available when different perspectives are applied toward any given passage. This approach seeks to incorporate reader response approaches to the text within a homiletical framework; thus, merging Jerusalem and Athens. The risk is that the idea might be viewed as a conference, a blimp on an otherwise full ecclesial calendar. Success can be gauged by the staying power and conversations that stem from the weekend.

The Longest table is an initiative that seeks to leverage the unique location of Loma Linda University Church. Our congregation sits at the heart of a medical campus and university, the links between those institutions however, remain tenuous. Forty percent of our student body has no connection to a faith community, the church ought to integrate itself into the rhythm of the academic year by offering a meal during the first weekend of every term. This would allow for the intersection of students, medical professionals, and members of the community. The practice of eating together as the preamble to sharing our stories continues to elicit deep emotional responses. The meal then, is designed to produce a space for different generations to converse, to begin to trust, and understand that the generational divide is not as wide as one would believe. Success would be measured by a renewed interest in forging intergenerational partnerships.

Intersection Spaces, this idea would attempt to guide the congregation through a summer sermon series focusing on the intersection of art, theology, sociology, psychology, history, economy and science. The idea behind this is to embark on a path that attempts to prepare the congregation as we seek to become more aware of some inherent biases. Introducing the concept of Scripture as meta narrative, and weaving together different perspectives would provide the congregation the requisite tools needed to engage in the act of priestly listening. This is to say, we listen to each other; we celebrate our inherent dignity, we strive to engage in intercession, we practice radical acceptance, and we pursue advocacy. The inherent risk is that we will not be able to get past the polarization, the vitriol, and the tribalism that defines our age. The possibility is that intersections will allow us to see one another as complex characters, not caricatures.

## Stakeholders

1. Disenfranchised student, a millennial who attends but is not invested
2. Church board chair
3. University Provost
4. Head of the office of Diversity in the Medical Center
5. Recent transplant from the Middle-East
6. Pastor of Outreach department and Faith & Health community liaison for the University

## One-On-One Interviews

1. Story and Experience Executive for a Health Care System on the West Coast

2. Female pastor, theologian, and university professor, primary area of interest is reader response approaches to Scripture
3. Old Testament professor at Divinity School, primary area of emphasis is prophetic literature.

## Additional Resources

Als, Hilton. *White Girls*. San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2014.

Deft critique of the cultural conventions. Als forces us to consider perspectives long ago held silent. Blackness, queerness, misogyny as lenses that provide a different historical account. The aids epidemic, race theory, fashion, and musical theory, are mediums that Als utilizes to forces us to grapple with our preconceptions.

Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2011.

Kahneman takes the reader on a tour of the mind as he invites us to consider the two systems that drive the way we think. System one is emotional, fast, and intuitive; while system two is deliberate, and logical. Kahneman suggests that cognitive bias, and overconfidence produce mental glitches that get us into trouble.

Kim, Sehyun. *The Kingship of Jesus in the Gospel of John*. Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2018

Kim argues that John's Gospel serves as resistance literature to a multicultural audience attempting to find their place in a world ruled by Rome. The Gospel emphasizes Christ's kingship as a better alternative to the rulers of this world. Thus, belief is the key to overcoming pain, violence, division, and rancor of our post-colonial world.

## Description

The design workshop was conducted on Friday, November 5<sup>th</sup> 2021 in the discipleship conference room of the Loma Linda University Church. The room was flanked by a white chart, pens, paper, and an assortment of snacks as well as bagels, and other refreshments. The workshop began promptly at 8:00 am as the facilitator thanked the participants for their support. I noted a bit more hesitancy, and weariness from this group of stakeholders; as a result, I invited the stakeholders to open our time with a quick round of two truths and a lie. After we covered several ground rules, chief among them, was a commitment towards mutual respect. In order to facilitate the free flow of ideas we returned to the NPO.

The stakeholders found it a bit difficult to track with the original NPO, this provided one of the most important insights of the workshop, several participants noted that in order to practice inclusive hermeneutics the community or congregation needed to first prioritize a commitment to listening. It was also noted that actionable steps needed to follow the task of priestly listening, we decided to coin the term prophetic action to define said steps. We closed the first session, returning to the "5 Whys", where it was noted that the core issue was fear of loss, and uncertainty.

## Documentation

After a brief break, we returned to the NPO and pursued the idea of the Anti-Problem; the group spent a bit of time discussing what coercion and control looked like in the denominational setting. The image that we returned to time and time again was that of mass media. The concept of information being leveraged to create entertainment also resounded; the group then proposed that controlling the narrative amounted to seeing themselves as the editorial board of the congregation tasked with pursuing a hermeneutical approach intended to further a preset agenda.

The team then moved on to the idea section, several proposals were placed on the board and we chose three through the process of dot voting, the highest ideas were the following:

1. Areopagus weekend
2. Longest Table
3. Intersections program

The stakeholders then pitched these three ideas as helpful to the overall NPO, as they take into consideration the variables of trust, congeniality and conversation. As the workshop concluded, I effusively thanked the stakeholders and provided gift cards as a token of appreciation.

## Message To Stakeholders

Dear...., I cannot begin to express how meaningful our time together was, I was both encouraged and challenged by our conversation. As you may remember, we concluded our time together with a new NPO statement and several ideas to implement. Said ideas are as follows:

Areopagus weekend  
Longest Table  
Intersection Spaces

I am grateful for our definition of "done" which borrows from Willard's concept of churches as beachheads and reads as follows, "The hope for the NPO is that it may enrich the congregation's understanding of Scripture, while empowering those who remain on the communal margins. The weaving together of stories might help orient the church toward becoming a discipleship beachhead." I continue to process what implementation and success will look like as we pursue these initiatives. Again, thank you for your commitment, your thoughtfulness, and your ideas, please know that I am eager and open to discuss any further thoughts you may have.

Sincerely,  
Miguel Mendez, MA., MTS.  
Pastor for Research and Spiritual Development.



## One-On-One Interviews

The first interview conducted was via phone with an executive for story and experience at a health care consortium on the West Coast. The first few minutes of the interview were spent reconnecting as he stated that he had served as a minister and now was attempting to manage the intersection between church work and health care. I asked about his position and he mentioned that they have noticed that amidst the ever-increasing competition in the marketplace that is healthcare, stories matter. His latest project was to commission a series of pictures depicting the experiences of several former patients. I asked why? To which he responded that people don't follow statistics, or satisfaction reports. "There is something though when they see a picture, they see themselves on a wall, they see hope, they believe that they will make it through."

The second interview was conducted after a pastor's meeting with a former pastor and professor of New Testament. She noted that her area of interest is Pauline writings, I asked what drew her there, was she perhaps attempting to grasp the exegetical framework utilized by complementarians? She laughed and said that her focus is on the radical nature of Pauline writings. She said that home churches might not have attracted the ire of the Roman populace, after all many trade guilds had meetings in which they toasted their gods. What was truly unique about the Christian movement was that it represented a radical cross section of the Roman world. "The story of Scriptures is a story intended for the margins, read from the margins. If the church is to be faithful, then we must recover our capacity to listen to the marginalized."

The third interview was conducted in the offices of a Divinity School in Southern California. The subject of the interview holds a Ph.D. in Old Testament studies from Claremont Graduate University. The interview centered around the idea of prophetic literature, "The covenant is intended to serve as a safety net. YHWH knows when covenant is being kept, we need only look at the welfare of four groups: the orphan, the widow, the poor, the resident alien. Their stories inform the rest of us about the practical reality of covenantal life. The question that our congregation must ask as they minister in what is still a Christian nation is simple; is covenant occurring? The way to answer that question is to look and listen to those same four groups."

# Appendix D-Milestone 4 Prototype Iteration Report

## Introduction

The Shepherd stands alone in the milieu of writings by British poet, painter, and printmaker William Blake. The bucolic work manages to imbue the pedestrian with a prosaic quality, as the shepherd is depicted as a soteriological presence. "How sweet is the Shepherd's sweet lot, from the morn to the evening he strays: He shall follow his sheep all the day and his tongue shall be filled with praise. For he hears the lamb's innocent call, and he hears the ewes tender reply, He is watchful while they are in peace, for they know when their Shepherd is nigh."<sup>161</sup>

These past two years have represented a personal pilgrimage as I attempt to discover how to pastor better. I have trained myself to be ever more attune to needs, problems, and opportunities; workshops have made me keenly aware of the need for communal wisdom, and prototype conversations have created a space of solace amidst the pressures of academia. Karl Barth aptly described theology as broken thought.<sup>162</sup> Nonetheless, stewards of communities of faith must step into the fray and join a dialogue that has retreated into academia, what does the liturgy have to do with the lecture, or the classroom with the cloister? This is but a broken attempt to ask the question of pulpit and parish as part of theological discourse.

## Prototype

The question of a hermeneutic of inclusion, contextual exegesis, and a *theologia viatorum* as efficacious tools for congregation formation must be answered by first considering the theological identity, missiological bent, and ecclesiological ethos of the congregation. Thus, this particular prototype has a multiethnic, intergenerational, institutional church as its foci. The process is also sensitive to the nature of change and will attempt to manage distress by disappointing the congregation at a rate it can withstand.<sup>163</sup> Consequently, the design research process targeted the leadership structure of the church. I had the opportunity to conduct a session with the fifteen members of our pastoral team, during said time we engaged in congregational analysis, coalesced around our core commitments, conversed about the potential of mission drift, and grappled with our commitment to the call. I commenced by asking the question of theology, and we conceded that if we define theology in its broadest terms: as the act of engaging in *God talk*; then all of us are to some degree theologians. The task is to equip a congregation to practice the act of responsible theology.

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<sup>161</sup> William Blake, *The Complete Poetry & Prose*, David V. Erdman ed. (New York, Anchor Books, 1988), 7

<sup>162</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, G.W. Bromiley & T.F. Torrance eds. (New York, T & T Clark, 2009) III.3.293

<sup>163</sup> See Ron Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994)

The community of faith that frames my contextual reality could best be described as one that operates under the premise of *prima scriptura*, the theological identity of said congregation is an interesting mix of its Anabaptist heritage, Wesleyan tradition, and Reformed bent. The stated congregational mission is “*Growing Disciples*”, the *loci* of its missional activity remain nebulous as the community straddles the line between serving our healthcare professionals and students, or concentrating our efforts on the economically depressed city that lies a stone throw away from us. The ecclesiological climate can best be defined as demanding excellence and oriented towards programing. Thus, we decided to experiment on the margins and conduct a theological praxis conference geared toward the lay leadership of our church as part of our equipping process for new leaders.

## **NPO Statement**

Churches committed to priestly listening, practice a hermeneutic of diversity, prioritize inclusiveness, and pursue ideals that are both prophetic and incarnational.

## **Research Question**

Are questions of exegesis and hermeneutics relevant for local parishes, do such reflections impact a church’s theological praxis, and do said queries contribute to congregational formation?

## **Assessment Benchmarks**

The lay leadership team of the Loma Linda University Church is preparing to enter a new term, the benchmark is represented by leader involvement in the conference, and their willingness to engage in the conversation.

## **Participant Description**

The NPO project seeks to shift the culture of an institutional church with over six thousand members; as such, the report required the participation of the fifteen members of our pastoral staff. Our team is both multicultural and intergenerational. The lay leaders called to participate in the second phase of the prototype represent influential 120 lay leaders of ages ranging from 17-94, we have attempted to reflect the diversity (gender, economic, ethnic, ideological) that has become a hallmark of our congregation.

## **Summary**

Attendees expressed a need for more theological training, there was challenge communicating concisely as there appeared to be a lack of uniformity and clarity with some terms. The participants felt that perhaps the NPO was too broad, as they expressed a keen desire for measurable markers.

## **THEOLOGIA VIATORUM; A RESPONSE TO THE CALL**

Jesus’ earthly ministry is punctuated by a theme that emerges throughout the Gospels. The synoptics particularly possess a cadence that shifts effortlessly from calling to commissioning. The Markan account commences in the arid sands of the Judean wilderness, a voice cries out from the

desert and the reader is disoriented as she is transported from the transcendent to the terrestrial. Mark understands that geography is not about location; rather, it is about expectation and the dreary landscape is pregnant with overtones of eschatological deliverance. New Testament scholar Eugene Boring buttresses this notion when he writes, "Mark's emphasis on the wilderness as the setting for his opening scenes signifies the new beginning, the inauguration of the new age by the act of God the Creator."<sup>164</sup> The narrative then shifts to the salty Galilean seashore where Jesus calls a group of fishermen to become theological practitioners, "As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him."<sup>165</sup> Messiah's legacy is not ornate monuments or bureaucratic institutions, it is a cadre of fallible disciples. Christendom's birth right is an invitation to follow on the way that He must journey through.

Christ's bleak command to come and die is however accompanied by a promise, an invitation to participate in the inbreaking of His Kingdom into our time and space. Jesus' summons to serve as disciples is not extended to those in the synagogue translating Torah, the call is not heard by those engaged in Sanhedrin soliloquies. Christ compels us amidst the quotidian, and purpose is found in the pedestrian, as Boring again notes, "The followers of Jesus are not a voluntaristic society for promoting good, but those whose business-as-usual lives have been disrupted by a draft notice."<sup>166</sup> Might it be possible that today the same invitation is extended to those who have grown cloistered in the church and passive in the pew? We huddle and strain as we witness a metamorphosis where people become the prize; our throats are parched as we survey an arid cultural landscape populated by contempt. The salt scent still lingers as we survey the desolation left behind by keyboard crusaders who only seek to polarize. If we dare and believe that the local church is still the hope of the world; then a praxis rich in theological roots must become our assent as we cast our lot with Jesus on the journey to Jerusalem.

### **A THEOLOGY OF *EXOUSIA*; THE GIFT OF COMMISSIONING**

The Apostle is a 1997 drama starring Robert Duvall as the charismatic Euliss F. "Sonny" Dewey, a Pentecostal preacher seeking redemption. Duvall's character describes himself as, "A genuine, Holy Ghost, Jesus-filled preaching machine." I wonder, would Luke have used the same language

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<sup>164</sup> Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary; The New Testament Library*, (Louisville, Presbyterian Publishing, 2006), 93

<sup>165</sup> Mark 1:16-20, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>166</sup> Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary; The New Testament Library*, (Louisville, Presbyterian Publishing, 2006), 117

when attempting to describe the Disciples? The Lukan account has alerted us to the fact that to be an apostle, is to be sent. The opening lines in the ninth chapter of the Gospel depict Jesus calling them once again in order to send them out, "Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal."<sup>167</sup>

Emissaries of the King and ambassadors of the Kingdom are not sent empty handed, they are imbued with power and authority. The word *exousia* commonly translated as authority, is deeply linked to Jesus' deeds and ministry, "They were all amazed and kept saying to one another, "What kind of utterance is this? For with *exousia* and power He commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!" Christ's commission empowers the church to operate as an incarnational community in the midst of shadowy valleys, where children sob and demons shriek.

New Testament scholar Justo Gonzales invites us to consider the wondrous possibility of a partnership between Christ and the church, "Now this power is given to the Twelve, so that their proclamation of the kingdom and their healing ministry may be an extension and a continuation of Jesus' work."<sup>168</sup> The temptation is always present for the church to baptize theology into triumphalist dogmatism. The old adage that power corrupts those who wield it, and absolute power corrupts, absolutely rings true as exclusive theology leads to oppressive praxis. The church then must be ever watchful lest we use our power in a manner that is not consonant with the ministry of Jesus.

Leadership theorist Ron Heifetz notes that systems operate at the mercy of their blind spots.<sup>169</sup> If this is the case, then healthy faith systems must renew their commitment to build theological frameworks that protect and prioritize disenfranchised voices. The gracious gift that is *exousia* must be humbly exercised by communities cognizant of an incarnational age, made possible by Christ's life, death, resurrection, and second coming. Fred Craddock, the American prince of pulpiteers cautions the church against the penchant to build a kingdom for this age. Craddock notes, "As Jesus commissioned them to do, the Twelve go without the trappings of security, "just in case." Had they gone with money and extra provisions, their witness would have been undercut by such an evident lack of faith in God and trust in the hospitality of the people. How many of the church's sermons are contradicted by budgets and programs of self-protection and security!"<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Luke 4:36, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>168</sup> Justo L. Gonzales, *Luke; Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, (Westminster, John Knox Press, Kindle Edition) loc.2130

<sup>169</sup> Ron Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994)

<sup>170</sup> Fred Craddock, *Luke; Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching*, (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2009)

Responsible *exousia* recognizes the theological paradox of power, and leverages it as a paradigm for formational praxis; that we too may become genuine, Holy Ghost, Jesus-filled preaching machines.

## **SEEDS AND STUMPS; TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF SURRENDER AND AN ECCLESIOLOGY OF MISSION**

The sixth chapter of the book of Isaiah presents a beautiful memoir amidst the Syro-Ephramite crisis. Scholars contend that this section represents a construct edited in order to solidify Isaiah's prophetic call.<sup>171</sup> The chapter attempts to provide both a response and respite to the disorientating reality heralded by the Assyrian devastation of the Northern Kingdom. Two primary call narratives emerge throughout the Hebrew Bible. The first deals with a theology of listening as individuals are called to recognize the voice of God; the second forges a theology of glory ever responsive to YHWH's act. Isaiah six opens with a theophany; thus, grounding the prophetic call as a response to YHWH's action in and for the world. There is a quixotic quality to Isaiah's ministry, his preaching leads only to heavy ears and closed eyes. American theologian Christopher Seitz notes that it is Isaiah's ill-fated attempt at renewal and restoration that imbue a heroic hallmark to the prophetic mission. Seitz writes, "Chapter 6 establishes the prophet as cleansed and set apart from a nation of unclean lips. His guilt is taken away and his sin forgiven. As such he is free to step forward and respond when God calls—something the nation is forbidden. He can hear and see; they can do neither."<sup>172</sup>

The church now faces a similar quixotic quest, as it is forced to retreat from the marketplace of ideas to languish on the margins. Ancient church father Tertullian once asked "What indeed hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?" The query betrays the ever-broadening gap between the academy and the church; sadly, not much has changed as today one may ask what does Princeton have to do with the parish. Practical theology must seek to hear a new song of solace and devise ecumenical paths that may bring us back from the brink. The move toward a theology of surrender commences with a corporate response, a prayer that might mimic the words uttered by the *navi*, "Here am I, LORD, send me". This missiological mantra is comprised of three movements, a collective confession that precedes any attempt to engage in parish practical theology and will serve as our starting point:

1. "Here Am I"- Know

### **Invocation**

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<sup>171</sup> Odil H. Steck, *The Prophetic Books and their Theological Witness*, (Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 1996)

<sup>172</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39; Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching*, (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 55

Jesus, in this moment we stand fully before you, we acknowledge your presence and hold this sacred space that you would abide in us and us in you. We desire to know you, so that we may know ourselves in the way you have intended us to be.

### **Petition**

We pray that you grant us the courage to fully surrender to you. Christ that calmed the stormy seas, today we give you our troubles, fears, hopes, aspirations, dreams, and disappointments. We offer ourselves as living sacrifices, praying that you may empty us of self, in order to fill us with your everlasting love.

### **Confession**

We confess that often we spend time trying to control our circumstances, today we yield control over to you. That you may work in and through us, we pray...

### **Thanksgiving**

Thank you for accepting us as we are, for viewing us as what we could become. Continue with us as we are molded into Christlikeness

### *2. "LORD"-Grow*

### **Invocation**

Creator that forged the world into existence, loving LORD who sustains us through your word and crafted us from clay. Today we want to confess that you are both king of kings and divine artisan.

### **Petition**

We ask that you gift us the capacity for consistency, so that we may come to you daily. May we find nourishment in the study of your word, not as a mere intellectual pursuit but as a soul saving practice. Allow us revel in the mystery that is You, grow us that we may be able to find comfort in the paradoxes of thorny crowns and selfless service.

### **Confession**

We confess that too often we try to cast you in our image, forgive us our sins of idolatry, and allow us to grow in humility that we may recognize your favor, we pray...

### **Thanksgiving**

Today we are grateful to you, Divine Gardner for we know that you will continue to grow the good work that you have already started in us.



### 3. "Send me"-Go

#### **Invocation**

Spirit that breathed new life into the church at Pentecost, we ask that you may breathe on us once again. That the church may once again go out into a hurting world and remind it that there is still a Balm in Gilead.

#### **Petition**

We come boldly so that you may convict and empower us that we may go and share the story of salvation with every nation, kindred tongue and people. Amidst the polarization of our time, move us toward a Spirit of unity, allow us to recognize that our diversity is a strength and that which unites us, will always be greater than anything that would tear us asunder.

#### **Confession**

We readily recognize that we often become invested in building our own kingdoms, forgive us our infatuation with siloes, that we may go out as one body committed to one God, one faith, and one baptism.

#### **Thanksgiving**

We are overjoyed with grace that you would choose to partner with us as emissaries of salvation and ambassadors of your kingdom. Thank you for continuing to work in our world, sometimes in spite of us.

### **Most Viable Prototype**

These ideas represent the start for a prototype that seeks to coalesce my desire to write a dissertation style final project on the need for hermeneutical and exegetical diversity in a congregational setting as tools for spiritual formation. I have tried to commence to craft a response to the question if the project possesses any viability and fills a need felt in a parish setting. The project's viability stems from my contextual reality as I have just shifted to function as a co-teaching and discipleship pastor in my congregation; said responsibilities require that I map out and implement educational programs in our church that can aid in Theological education and serve as an ideological basis for shifts in praxis and focus. The first actionable step for my project is a leadership and prayer conference. I am slated to lead our leadership through some of these exercises and thus will be able to further gauge both the viability and relevance of my project. I have attached some documentation I have produced in preparation for the conference, said documentation will appear in the appendix.

# Appendix E-Documentation

Consumers → Participants

# MISSION Growing Disciples

How? Values

Worship  
Study  
Prayer  
Community  
Service

## Areas to improve on:

WHAT? ④ Instruction/Teaching

HOW? ② Training/Equipping

WHERE? ③ Create Necessity

shorter series - quicker follow-up

- Unprofessional (5 weeks)
- Gifted (6 weeks)
- Fruitful (9 weeks)

When your WORSHIP TIME ENDS...  
Your service to the world begins!

# GROW

↓

# GO (send)

## CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

- ① Leading to CHRIST
- ② Leaders don't have followers / we have people entrusted to our care
- ③ Stewardship
- ④ Facilitators / servant Leader
- ⑤ Accountable Grace
- ⑥ Transformation

\* ① Innovation (inspire)

② Two by two

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU!

UOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY CHURCH

# DISCIPLESHIP LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE 2022

HERE as LORD send Me

## schedule

Sabbath	Wednesday	Friday
Sept 11-12	Sept 14-15	Sept 16-17
8:00 AM - 9:00 AM	8:00 AM - 9:00 AM	8:00 AM - 9:00 AM
9:00 AM - 10:00 AM	9:00 AM - 10:00 AM	9:00 AM - 10:00 AM
10:00 AM - 11:00 AM	10:00 AM - 11:00 AM	10:00 AM - 11:00 AM
11:00 AM - 12:00 PM	11:00 AM - 12:00 PM	11:00 AM - 12:00 PM
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM	12:00 PM - 1:00 PM	12:00 PM - 1:00 PM
1:00 PM - 2:00 PM	1:00 PM - 2:00 PM	1:00 PM - 2:00 PM
2:00 PM - 3:00 PM	2:00 PM - 3:00 PM	2:00 PM - 3:00 PM
3:00 PM - 4:00 PM	3:00 PM - 4:00 PM	3:00 PM - 4:00 PM
4:00 PM - 5:00 PM	4:00 PM - 5:00 PM	4:00 PM - 5:00 PM
5:00 PM - 6:00 PM	5:00 PM - 6:00 PM	5:00 PM - 6:00 PM
6:00 PM - 7:00 PM	6:00 PM - 7:00 PM	6:00 PM - 7:00 PM
7:00 PM - 8:00 PM	7:00 PM - 8:00 PM	7:00 PM - 8:00 PM
8:00 PM - 9:00 PM	8:00 PM - 9:00 PM	8:00 PM - 9:00 PM
9:00 PM - 10:00 PM	9:00 PM - 10:00 PM	9:00 PM - 10:00 PM
10:00 PM - 11:00 PM	10:00 PM - 11:00 PM	10:00 PM - 11:00 PM
11:00 PM - 12:00 AM	11:00 PM - 12:00 AM	11:00 PM - 12:00 AM



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