“Christ—The Sacrament in You”

A Communion Meditation based on Ephesians 3:7-21

©Dennis J. Hughes

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[The magazine appears to have ceased publication in the 1970s; I searched but could not find any contact information so I am printing this on my own copyright. The sermon was preached at Silver Bay on Lake George at the June, 1971, meeting of the Presbytery of Albany, NY; hence reference to Ballston, Corinth, and Schenectady]

“Of this gospel I was made a minister. . . “

Eph. 3:7a, Revised Standard Version

Of this gospel I was made a minister

Which proves both that God has a sense of humor,

And that things can’t be as bad as they seem.

Or that God can use the foolish to confound

the wise

Or that a confounded earthy preacher

Can plague those so heavenly minded

they’re no earthly good.

Of this gospel I was made a minister

Against my better judgment

But loving the approval of little old ladies

who thought it so nice

That one of their “own”

had found God’s favor.

I didn’t think it so nice when I counted the cost.

I knew that God’s favor is not an unmixed blessing.

Think of what God’s favor did

for God’s favorite

Son.

Jesus knew God’s favor

But it didn’t help him savor

The dry bread that stuck in his throat.

Who wouldn’t gag

Knowing that the body so crunchingly broken

for you

is me?

And who wouldn’t bend on calloused

Knees in a garden

Three times running

Begging his Father to pass the cup

Three times knowing

the cup stops here?

Of this gospel I was made a minister

Wondering why God is so foolish as to think

That I know anything of God that I’d dare

to say in public.

Or, having said it,

Having told it like it is,

Knowing I’d never know

what is

or isn’t;

Just knowing I must go on telling

The only good news I’ve ever heard

That somebody down here loves me

And that I’m free

to be

myself.

Now, according to the unexpurgated

version of the Bible,

Which is banned in Ballston, and Corinth,

and Schenectady

Because it talks too much of love,

freedom, and peace,

Paul thought himself the least of all

the saints—

A curious affliction of the mind

To which I have never fallen prey.

“Charity begins at home,”

People keep reminding me,

As if it were gospel truth

(Which it isn’t—gospel or truth.)

But I have been, of all men,

Most charitable to myself,

A veritable proof of God’s grace

Nonetheless,

That God can use a stumbling block

To make people fall

into God’s lap.

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father—

well, my head anyway—

Because I have an idea of the riches of

God’s glory

And I have known, once or twice,

The breadth and length and height and depth

Of the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge

And it scared me

to find myself so mysteriously free

to be me.

Something of the love that surpasses

knowledge

I have received from Christ-in-you,

the hope of glory.

You are the Body of Christ,

broken for me,

Letting me discover that there is life

after birth

And that it’s worth giving.

And what you see is not what you get

Things worth having are not seen

But felt and held and known.

Then,

Entrusted to the memory

For future resurrections

of hopes

and recollections

that are all the fullness of God

that we can know.

Of this gospel I was make a minister

(God in God’s infinite wisdom

Knowing that I needed to be in church

more than most)

And I’m convinced that all the fullness of God

Can fill me

If you’ll do the honors and pour

What you have of Christ

on me.

You see, what God gives

God gives sacramentally.

“A visible sign of an invisible grace”

Said John Calvin, unoriginally,

Though he surpassed St. Augustine once

When he talked about “instrumentality.”

“Instrumentality”—a two-bit word for the way God

Who has trouble with direct communication

Because an ocean is not contained in a teacup

or a chalice—

A two-bit word for the way God lets us in on

who God is.

Of this gospel I was made a minister

Because somehow God saw what is not evident to me:

An instrument

Having no music in itself

But capable of carrying God’s melodies

To people who have forgotten

how to dance.

Of this gospel I was made a minister

Or better yet,

A “Sacrament”

Like the bread and wine

Because a Sacrament has one function only

According to old John C., who claimed to know:

“A Sacrament sets God’s promises

before our eyes

to be looked upon.”

Is there any better definition of our ministry

Than “setting God’s promises before one another

and the world?”

You are Sacrament for me

And I for you

So long as it is God’s tune that is played

through us.

You are the Bread of Life for me

And I for you

When God’s love flows rhythmically

Through you to me

to you

to God again.

You are the Cup of the New Covenant

For me

And I for you

When your cup of Christ runs over

on my emptiness

And I become giddy with freedom

to be myself

And to live for you.

*Amen*.