



photo credit: Katie Whitfield

Word & Sacrament

by Kevin Whitfield, Rector

Samuel, our oldest, has taken on the chore of bottle-feeding a Hereford calf morning and evening. I walk with him to the pasture on a Spring-like, February morning. The sun hasn't crested the mountain yet. The light is still hazy, and the robins are singing their "cheerio". I think about how long it is before the orioles return. They seem to come every May. I think about these words from a priest-poet: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."

Charged with the grandeur of God. Haven't you noticed this, even felt it, for at least a brief moment? Later the poet speaks to why the world is so charged: "Because the Holy Ghost over the bent world broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."

We are working as a leadership to clarify what is important to us, especially the values we list on the back of our worship guide each week. What does it mean that Word & Sacrament are a value to us? It means that they are essential. It means that without them, we could no longer be Church of the Lamb. It means that Word & Sacrament are tied together for us, just like they are in the road to Emmaus story in Luke 24. That story is a dramatic worship scene. Jesus, to an unsuspecting, unknowing couple, explains all the Scriptures in light of himself (Word), and he reveals himself in the breaking of bread. The breaking of bread, strangely and mysteriously, opens eyes that were blind (Sacrament). Word & Sacrament are united in God's story. They are two places charged with the grandeur of God.

What do we mean by Word & Sacrament? So much! Christ himself is the Word. He is the Word through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together (Jn, 1; Col. 1). He has also chosen to communicate through the scriptures, the Word: "All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for

teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). I could go on!

The word "sacrament" comes from the Greek word for "mystery". The early Christians used this word to describe the highly charged moments where Jesus promised to meet them by his Spirit—baptism and Eucharist. In both of these, Jesus takes part of the creation, water or bread, and does what he always intended: he makes the creation a channel of his love. Again, "The Holy Ghost over the bent world broods. . ."

This leads to a last question: Does Word & Sacrament only relate to what we do on Sundays? Absolutely not! Sunday is the day that starts our week. It is the day from which the rest of the week unfolds. What we do on Sundays is like a concentrated charge of God's grandeur, but it overflows into the week and into all creation. When you sit under the Word in prayer during the week, when you absorb it into your soul, you will catch a glimpse of the charged-ness of it. When you gather with other Christians over a meal, when you gather in a Parish Group, the charged-ness of the world might reveal itself to you. When you go on a walk, when you sit with a friend, when you interact with an animal, or work in your garden, look for the charged-ness of the world.

Word & Sacrament mean that we are staking our claim: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God." God is not a divine watchmaker who set the world going then removed himself. He is the Incarnate Lord Christ who came to restore us and his creation. In Jesus Christ, all things are being made new, starting with us and spreading out into the creation itself. This is why an abbey is a perfect setting to be the church: so that the charged-ness of it all can reveal itself to us again and again.

Sweeter Than Honey,
O Word of God

*take
eat*

manna
daily provision like dew

honey flakes
on the tongue

this for the freed one
homesick for bondage

this for the one
about to deny

*mybody
given for you*

-Kelly Ostergren

A Feast for the Soul

by Rachel Fletcher

There is no one on earth who needs the sacrament of Eucharist more than a mother on family service Sunday. It's all I can do not to lay someone out on my way to the table, a minor miracle that I don't walk right past my seat on the return journey and hop back in line for another taste.

I can hardly believe that until six months ago, when we first came to Lamb, I was perfectly content with a monthly communion service.

Like many of you, I grew up in a faith tradition that seemed to revere Word more than sacrament. And while I'm so thankful for the bedrock of faith that study and teaching gave me, I didn't know how much I'd hunger for sacrament until that first Sunday I sat in the barn and felt the whole axis of the worship service shift, our center of gravity tied not to a sermon but to Eucharist.

Often, we can tend to see these two tenants – Word & Sacrament – as two parallel pillars holding up the bedrock of our faith, working in tandem, but not necessarily intersecting. Recently, my husband, Taylor, shared a different visual – a continuous cycle, where Word & Sacrament bleed into each other, dynamic and intertwined.

I began to wonder, then, if Word and sacrament aren't separate tools for building a Christian life, but simply different embodiments of the person of Christ. We may learn how to think through studying, but we learn how to be through doing. Therefore, we must not only read the word but experience the Word.

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, John tells us. Christ is the Word incarnate, and the Word of God– scripture– is how we know Christ. Sacrament, on the other hand, is how we experience Christ.

Our Sunday sip from the cup of salvation isn't merely a "God Shot" we need for the week, checking a box until we next take a seat at the table. No, it whets our appetite for more.

As eager as I am for Eucharist each Sunday, as much as I crave the mystical, sacramental experience of Christ upon the altar each week, what provokes equal wonder is how that experience with Christ transforms me as I go into my week. How much more I crave his presence, now that I've remembered what it feels like. After the potency of Eucharist each Sunday, I chase that fragrance in all the days that follow.

I seek seclusion each day to read and pray not because it's part of my spiritual training regimen, but because I have experienced communion with God through the sacrament of Eucharist and

I want to go back to that place, where I am still and present with God, where my temporal mortality and his expansive eternity meet and I have thoughts that are not my thoughts, peace that is not my peace, strength that is not my strength, and love that is not my love.

Eucharist changes the patterns of my little life. It sweetens the high points and softens the low points.

It has me waking up early to hear God's voice until Abel, my four-year-old, pads out of his room with his customary two sneezes and request to snuggle.

It has me extending an olive branch to an abrasive coworker – again – asking him to tell me more about a topic he's passionate about when what I really want is to berate him for his ineffectual management style and inexplicable disdain for Kerrygold butter.

It has me crying out in a coat closet during the chaos of the dinner hour when the only prayer I can muster is, "God, be my strength. Christ, be my peace."

So much of this beautiful body of Christ has shaped my daily walk with our Lord Christ these last six months, but none more than Eucharist. I think of the words we speak together before coming to the table: *Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed . . . 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.*

As you come to this place each week to know God through the Word and experience Christ through sacrament, I pray that God would grant you the grace to also walk in his ways. He has been gracious to do so for me, albeit with stumbling, hesitant steps.

Rachel spends her days writing for a fintech company (when she's not writing for free). She's a homebody who loves snuggling her three babies and hosting dinner guests. She is the leader of the Keezletown Parish Group.



The Foundation of CGS

by Renee Velker,
Director of Children's Ministries

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) rests on two pillars: scripture and liturgy. We read the Bible together in our atria. We have materials for many different scripture passages including stories about Jesus' infancy, his parables, the Last Supper, and his resurrection. We look at prophecies and Psalm 23, reading and pondering his Word.

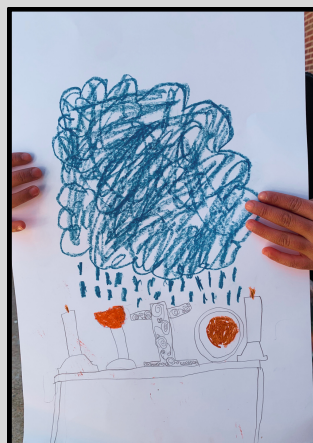
We participate in liturgy in our shared lives. We go to church as a community to celebrate the sacramental gifts of baptism and the Eucharist. In the Atrium we have the model altar and the gestures altar, the vestments of the priest and the liturgical calendar where the children can observe and interact with the different components.

However, scripture and liturgy are not separated realities. Instead, in the Atrium we explore how deeply intertwined they are. As Sofia Cavalletti says in *Religious Potential of the Child*, "There does not exist a Bible that we read and a liturgy that we live; there is a Bible that we live with the whole of our life and especially so in the liturgy" (RPC, 49).*

The Liturgy of the Eucharist forms the heart of the Atrium experience. The children set the model altar and enjoy the liturgical colors which are displayed by the chasubles of the priest. They ponder individual moments of the Eucharist, particularly the gestures or movements of the priest. At the same time, the Liturgy of the Word is encountered by the children as they come to know the Holy Bible as the Word of God, given to his people. They hear passages from the scriptures which introduce them to the Great Light and the tiny baby growing within Mary, announced by angels yet laid in a manger. The Good Shepherd parable is read, and they hear about the one who calls his sheep by name with such great love. The Good Shepherd, who gives all of himself for his sheep, calls them to the best food and best drink. His Body and Blood is concretized through an extension to the Good Shepherd material called "The Eucharistic Presence of the Good Shepherd." This presentation reveals the inseparability of scripture and liturgy. In Sofia's words, "[Here we establish] the bond between the biblical dimension (Good Shepherd parable) and the liturgical dimension (the Eucharist) in a visible way" (RPC, 51).

At Church of the Lamb we invite our children and youth into relationship with Jesus, our Good Shepherd through Word & Sacrament. Every Atrium has an area set aside where the child or youth is able to sit and consider his/her own baptism experience. Have you noticed that the baptism liturgy ends with the words, "Peace be with you. Greet one another in Peace?" This is yet another place in our church service where our children witness and embrace the unity of Word & Sacrament along with the whole church.

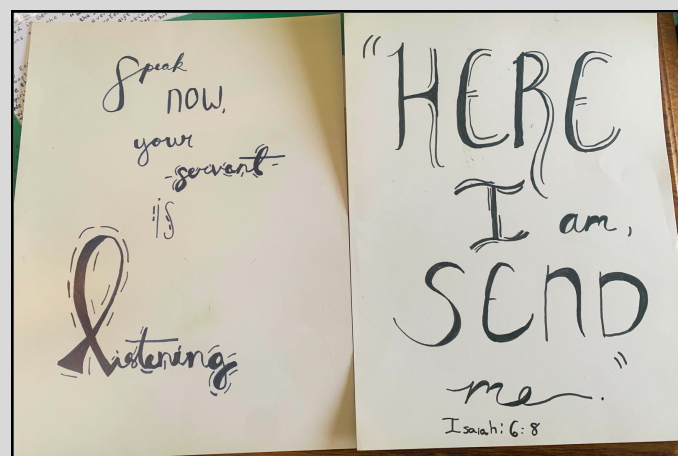
Peace be with YOU as you extend a hand to those around you this Lenten season, to both young and old.



Left: This five-year-old shared her illustration of the altar table that is being prepared for the Eucharist. This side of her artwork shows a rain cloud that comes down from heaven. Note that the wine is in the cup, the bread is on the paten, and the candles are lit.



Right: The child flipped the picture over and shared that this side is the rainbow which comes after the rain. "The rainbow is God's goodness to us." Note that there is no color on the altar. The wine and bread have been given out.



Youth Prayer Cards were created following a typology study and meditations on the prophet Isaiah.

*Cavalletti, Sofia. *Religious Potential of the Child: Experiencing Scripture and Liturgy With Young Children*. LiturgyTrainingPublications, 2020.

The Collapse of the Sacramental Worldview

by Daniel Zimmerman,
Director of the Abbey

The disenchanting, materialistic, secular world we inhabit was born because theologians in the 1200s modified Eucharistic doctrine, and in so doing, they shattered the worldview in which it seemed plausible that God intervened in our world regularly through his living Word and authorized liturgical rituals. The story goes like this.

When Christianity emerged, the church fathers had to sort out which Greco-Roman ideas were compatible with Christianity and which must be rejected. Simplifying to the extreme, they concluded that Plato – and not Aristotle – was predominantly correct. St. Augustine called himself a Platonist and praised the philosopher as the pagan “who comes nearest to us [Christians].” Christians agreed with Plato that there really was another world, the Real, eternal, changeless one, and that our world was a diminished shadow of that Ideal. Mysteriously, these two dimensions overlapped and interacted, so that what happened in one dimension could and did affect the events in the other dimension. (This is what the author of Hebrews is getting at when he says that Christ entered into the heavenly temple by means of his own blood, even though he was dying on a hillside outside Jerusalem. The same action, playing out in two different dimensions simultaneously.) At any rate, theologians call this integration of Platonic and Christian thought the “Neoplatonic Synthesis,” and it structured Christian theology for nearly a millennium.

But then two things happened. First, some theologians began to pry into the mechanics of the Eucharistic ritual. Before, Christians had insisted that Christ was, somehow, mysteriously, present in the Eucharist, but they declined to elaborate exactly HOW that occurred. It was an unexplainable miracle, a paradox. (This is why the Greek word for “sacrament” is *mysterion*!)

Second, Aristotle’s writings had been largely lost to Western philosophers. They were rediscovered by Western theologians in the writings of two medieval Islamic philosophers, Avicenna and Averroes. In the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the Church ruled decisively on the mechanics of the eucharistic ritual: using Aristotle’s vocabulary and metaphysics, the Council held that the “substance” of the bread transmuted into the “substance” of Christ when the priest uttered the words of consecration. “Transubstantiation” was born, and it remains the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist to this day.

Unfortunately, the Council’s efforts to clarify matters produced the opposite effect. It begged all sorts of secondary questions that broke the entire plausibility structure where things like miracles and sacraments make sense. Aristotle was right after all, theologians concluded. Material objects – these were truly real, and Plato’s “Forms” were just names for insubstantial mental categories. This is the view that prevails to this day. The Nominalist revolution, the scientific revolution, the Reformation, Capitalism, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, the modern nation-state, the sexual revolution, Derridean language games, postmodernism – all these are downstream from the collapse of the sacramental worldview in the 1200s. Aristotle’s ideas, whether we know it or not, have sunk into our bones, so much so that they feel self-evident.

But they aren’t. Modernity feels dead, disenchanting, busy, noisy, chaotic, cold, plastic, and unreal because Christians embraced a warped sacramental theology. By disenchanting the Eucharist, we disenchant the world. That’s why recovering a robust sacramental theology is at the heart of our project here at Church of the Lamb. Reenchanting the world must begin by reenchanting our worship. When Kevin or Travis breaks off a hunk of bread, looks in your eyes, and tells you, “This is the Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven,” they’re not kidding. When the chalice bearer says, “This is the blood of Christ, the cup of salvation,” he or she isn’t using symbolic language. It’s the real deal.

It’s like what Professor Kirke says to the Narnian children: “It’s all in Plato, all in Plato: bless me, what do they teach them at these schools!?”

If you’d like to read more about the collapse of the sacramental worldview, have a look at the following works:

- Boersma, Hans. *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Gregory, Brad S. *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Dupré, Louis K. *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.