

Lukan Easter Formation:

Living out the Resurrection

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We will discuss two types of Easter formation in the early church, with Acts and Luke as guides to our Easter mystagogy. The topic is in one sense natural for a New Testament scholar, since all writers of the New Testament begin theologically from the resurrected Christ, because a Christian's life-style (to use a modern shibboleth) is formed in the New Testament from the event of baptism, and because early Christian piety is essentially a realization of life under the Lordship of the Resurrected One. But it also brings some problems.

It is always dangerous to move outside one's own competence into an area in which many people have a highly specialized and sensitive interest. You would not be here if you did not have such an interest in spiritual formation or mystagogy, as some called it in the early church. But it is, I think, also necessary. Just as biblical interpretation is too important for the commitment of faith and the life of service in the church to allow it to become the property or prerogative of professional exegetes, so worship and spiritual formation are too important to leave to the experts in piety, liturgy, spiritual formation, and ethics too important to leave it to the catechists and ethicists among us. Worship and the Christian life belong to all of us--and are the responsibility of all of us.

Two Rejected Tendencies

While I do not claim expertise in either liturgy or the lectionary cycles that we hear in the liturgy each year, I do claim interest. I am a worshipper who hears the lessons read week after week in the liturgy. I survey them from my own peculiar headland (New Testament Interpretation), that is, from the vantage point of one committed to interpreting texts from the Bible read in the liturgy as what they in fact are, excerpts from longer documentary wholes. The meaning

these texts bear is determined now, as in the past, not by their liturgical context, but by their position and role in the documents in which they were handed down in the Church. Critical historical, literary, and theological analysis of these textual wholes is the proper method for understanding these lectionary texts, while the faith and worship of the Church is the context within which to practice that method. I say this as a form of protest against two tendencies or positions I have recently encountered.

The first I heard in a discussion of the new Inclusive Language Lectionary based on the Revised Standard Version. Some members of the committee stated that the lessons read in the liturgy are liturgical readings, but not Sacred Scripture. I found that a curious position that I can in no way share. I suspect it would be great surprise to most of the people setting in the pews to learn that they were not hearing the Scriptures read.

The second position argues that reading portions of Scripture in the worship of the Church provides a new context in which the meaning of these texts is expanded or changed. As a teacher of the Scriptures in the Church I protest that the context for interpreting the Bible is the literary wholes of which the lessons are a part, read within the milieu of the religious world of late antiquity (i.e. the Early Roman Empire). While the liturgy or the liturgical year provides a context for proclamation based on the texts, it does not provide a criterion for determining what the text means or says.

Three Exegetical Implications

I state this hermeneutical position openly because it entails some implications or biases. I make some of them clear at the outset, so that you can counterbalance what my foreshortened biblical vision may see with the wider scope of liturgical worship within the history and life of the Church.

1. Implication one arises out of my concern for New Testament metaphors and symbols. A New Testament scholar has a negative attitude to the term "mystagogy"; *μυσταγωγία* never occurs in the Greek Scriptures. When the term is used by NT scholarship, it always carries with it a negative connotation. Corinthian Christianity is the result of a

mystagogical interpretation of the Pauline Gospel. Paul, Cephas, and Apollos are the *μυσταγωγοί* who led the Corinthians through death to life via baptism, understood as the initiatory rite (*τὰ τέλη*) that brought them into possession of the arcane secrets of this newly proclaimed religion.¹ It led to rampant individualism, a stress on religious experience, and a feeling of superiority.

The terms *μυσταγωγία* and *μυσταγωγοί* arise late in the history of the Greek language.² They almost never occur as religious terms before the second century A.D. *Mystagogia* first shows up in a technical sense in Plutarch (*Alc.* 34), Vettius Valens (359.22) and Julian the Apostate (*Or.* 5.172d) to denote initiation into the secret doctrines of those mysteries (e.g. the Andanian Mysteries) that the Christian community regarded either as the greatest threat to faith or the greatest parody of Christian faith and life. *Mystagogia* comes into the Church meaning “divine worship”³ to my knowledge through Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, whose five *Mystagogical Catecheses* I reread almost every year in Easter week.⁴

What did Cyril of Jerusalem do when he gave his mystagogical lectures? He gave twenty-three lectures as catechetical preparation for baptism at the Easter vigil. The first was the *Protrepiticus* (*προτρέπτικός*), a term borrowed from Greek philosophy, an exhortation to take Christian

¹It is not surprising that Paul uses a series of terms that are at home in this milieu in 1 Cor 2:6-16: *σοφία, τέλειος, μυστήριον, τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ, πνευματικός*. Cf. Julius Schniewind, “Die Leugner der Auferstehung in Korinth,” in *Nachgelassene Reden und Aufsätze*, ed. Ernst Kähler (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1952) 110-139.

²LSJ, s.v.

³The testimonia for the early use of the term are easily found in G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) 890-891.

⁴The Greek text, with introduction and translation, are conveniently available in *St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments. The Procatechesis and the Five Mystagogical Catecheses*. Ed. F. L. Cross (London: SPCK, 1951).

belief (sc. philosophy) seriously, an exhortation needed by every catechetical class. The next seventeen lectures explained the creed of the Jerusalem church to the catechetes, much the way you and I would do it in catechetical instruction today.

Cyril gave the last five lectures, the *Mystagogical Catecheses*, in the first week of Easter, i.e. after baptizing the catechumens at the Easter vigil. Why did he call them mystagogical? Because in them he taught and explained three mysteries of the Christian faith. Three lectures (19-21) explained the significance of baptism, clarifying what had happened to the catechetes in the vigil service of Easter. Lecture 22 dealt with the significance of the Eucharist and 23 with the liturgy of the Eucharist. In those lectures they were taught and for the first time heard the Lord's Prayer and its meaning.

Excursus

I'm going to tilt an exegetical lance this morning. Have you noticed that people don't say the Lord's Prayer the way it is printed in the LBW? The Lord's Prayer, as given in Matthew 6, is beautifully constructed in two strophes, each consisting of three petitions (thus there are not seven petitions but six). The third petition, "Your will be done", is expanded by the addition of the colon "as in heaven so on earth." The seventh petition is a similar expansion of the sixth. It is indicated in Greek by the use of the conjunction *ἀλλὰ* (strong contrast).⁵ The two clauses are in antithetic parallelism and so should be said without a pause between them as a single request: "And do not bring us to the test, but deliver us from the evil one." Its sense is "Do not bring us to that great end-time trial (called the 'tribulation' elsewhere in the New Testament) that precedes the eschaton, rather rescue us from the Evil One." These are obverse and reverse of one and the same petition; if you don't say it that way, you may be

⁵The new common English translation unfortunately mistranslates the *ἀλλὰ* as "and," thereby ruining this carefully balanced construction.

praying a very pious prayer but not the one our Lord taught.

Cyril of Jerusalem's lectures were tied directly to the building in which the lectures were given.⁶ The first eighteen were given in that area of the Constantinian Basilica in which Golgotha was found. (Catechetes lived Passion Week at the appropriate Jerusalem locations in the process of the Catechesis.) The *Mystagogical Catecheses* were given at the empty tomb (the Martyrion) as part of the celebration of the resurrection. Georg Kretschmar, Professor of Church History in Munich, recently published what is now the best discussion of the Constantinian Church of the Resurrection in relationship to the ritual calendar and traditions of the early Christian church.⁷ If German does not threaten you, his essay is exciting reading.

My first bias is against the word mystagogy because it has the wrong overtones [pace Cyril and the tradition he begins]. We no longer initiate people into a secret Gospel and its arcane celebration. The Lord's Supper is not celebrated behind locked doors. Luther's "*Das Evangelium muß geschrieen werden*" (the Gospel must be shouted) correlates more with our Lord's word about it being spoken openly from the housetops and with our practice. What we do in

⁶This reconstruction is based on the incomplete travel account of the French or Spanish pilgrim Egeria, See *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land*, newly translated with supporting documents and notes by John Wilkinson. Rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Ariel; Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1981. Wilkinson has a masterful introduction, which includes an excellent isometric drawing of the Constantinian Basilica and Martyrion. Wilkinson gives an excellent short summary of the architectural history of the site and the church in *The Jerusalem Jesus Knew* (Nashville, Camden, New York: Thomas Nelson, 1983) 180-194.

⁷"Festkalender und Memorialstätten Jerusalems in altkirchlicher Zeit," pp. 29-115 in Heribert Busse and Georg Kretschmar, *Jerusalem Heiligtumstraditionen in altkirchlicher und frühislamischer Zeit*. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987).

“mystagogy,” in the post-Easter and Pentecost seasons of the Church year, is help people realize what the Gospel means for their continuing Christian life, that Gospel into which, through which, by which they have been baptized.

2. Implication number two. As a biblical scholar I am called to be critical of the lectionary. The lectionary is, in one sense, canon reductionism. Let me illustrate it directly out of the lectionary use of the two books we are going to talk about today. The three-year lectionary never goes beyond Acts 17! Only one lesson from Acts 15-28 is read in the entire three-year lectionary cycle.

Acts is practically restricted to the Easter cycle in the lectionary. All the lessons read in the ferial and festival seasons occur in the seven Sundays of Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost; the only lection from Acts 18-28 is read in services that recognize bishops and pastors, when one of the two appointed first lessons is the farewell to the Elders of Miletus (Acts 20:17-35). Do you realize that the only missionary trip of Paul reflected in the lectionary is the first one? In the lectionary Paul never gets to preach in Europe. Easter 7, Series C, has you read the call to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10); but you never read about his work in Philippi or Corinth. You do hear the sermon at Athens in Acts 17:22-31, but without the narrative of 17:16-21 (Easter 7, Series A). Amazing. One never reads the narrative about Philip's prophetic daughters,⁸ Paul's arrest and imprisonment in

⁸I notice that almost none of the passages that show women in the ministry of word are used in the lectionary: Luke 8:1-3; Acts 21:9; Rom 16:1-2 (Phoebe), 3-5 (Priska, with Aquila; cf. 1 Cor 16:19), 7 (Junia, with Andronicus, an apostle!), 12 (Tryphaina and Tryphosa); 1 Cor [1:11 (Chloe) is used], 11:2-16; Phil 4:2-4 (Euodia and Syntyche). The omission was probably unintentional, but its effect is to remove most passages that present women in ministry from the lectionary. And that is unfortunate!

On the other hand, Eph 5:21-31 (14 Pentecost B), is included. To be fair I add that the passages relating to women neutrally (1 Cor 7:1-28;32-39) or negatively (1 Cor 14:33b-36;

Jerusalem, the great sermons he preached in the temple, in response to Tertullus, to Felix and Festus, the travel narrative of Acts 27, or the triumphant arrival and work in Rome. Acts is underused in the lectionary, which leads to misunderstanding the book of Acts. One canon of literary criticism states that you must read a part of a literary text in relation to the whole, or you will misunderstand the part. One should read the book of Acts in the light of Acts 1:7-8, which states the goal of the book for the reader in its phrase “to the ends of the earth”; the end of the earth is Rome.⁹ If one never gets there in the book of Acts, one misses the triumphant note with which the narrative ends. If one does not read the whole of Acts in the light of those last Greek words--“preaching the royal rule of God and teaching the things about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unimpeded”--*μετὰ πάσης παρρησίας ἀκωλύτως*--you miss a significant accent in Luke’s message.¹⁰ The proclamation of the gospel goes on in triumphal march to Rome itself--and there it has free reign!

The three-year lectionary cycle has been a blessing to the church; regular worshippers hear more Scripture. But John does not get his due, an entire year like each of the Synoptics; it is read in bits and pieces throughout the lectionary cycle, primarily in the Easter season, in Series B Pentecost, and on some days of special observance. That gives me pause. Luther regarded John as the primary gospel among the four and was willing to lose the Synoptics if John was preserved. He regarded John, Romans, Ephesians and 1 Peter as the true core of the New Testament. I therefore find dismemberment of John in the lectionary difficult. So, if I cannot change the lectionary, I hope to change the preachers. Do not treat John as a collection of little cameos to be read liturgically; read John as it was written, as a coherent, highly theological

Col 3:18; 1 Tim 2:11-5; 5:3-8, 9-16; Tit 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-6) are also omitted.

⁹Cf. Ps Sol 8:15 describes Pompeius Magnus as *τὸν ἀπ’ ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς, τὸν παλοντα κραταιῶς* (“the one from the end of the earth, he who strikes mightily.”).

¹⁰Consult the tables in *Lutheran Book of Worship. Ministers Desk Edition*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg; Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978) 510.

interpretation of the message and significance of Jesus of Nazareth. I find the modern literary critical demand to read the Gospels as coherent wholes with their own world as framework a healthy corrective to lectionary dismemberment.

3. My third bias is the proper bias to have here, at Valparaiso University, in this week devoted to liturgical worship. There is nothing in the New Testament which is not useful for mystagogy; the entire New Testament is written across our Lord's open tomb. One does not use only passages written in a post-Easter context, that reflect the post-Easter situation of the church. The entire New Testament is open to mystagogical application. Thus the open tomb and the conviction that the Risen Lord was active and speaking via the Spirit to the church informed the writers of the Gospel narratives that recount events prior to Easter.

That lays my biases out before you: an inherent suspicion of the term "mystagogy," lectionary criticism, and the conviction that the entire New Testament is useful for post-Easter reflection on the meaning of discipleship. That should help you to listen to these remarks with proper critical thought, "plucking the flowers where they grow and shooting the birds where they fly."

Acts as Literary Text

When evaluated as a source for history, Acts is, as Ernst Käsemann once remarked, "a thirsty fragment." Consider it briefly in that respect. Luke¹¹ knows of the twelve apostles;

¹¹While Luke-Acts is, strictly speaking, an anonymous document, I will use Luke to represent the author. The ancient tradition, first reported in the so called "Oldest Gospel Prologues," says that Luke, a Syrian of Antioch and a doctor by training, was a disciple of the Apostles and later a follower of Paul until he was martyred, a slave to the Lord who could not be drawn aside, died in Boeotia, unmarried and without children at the age of 84, full of the Holy Spirit. He wrote his gospel for people in Asia. The Greek and Latin text is easily available in Kurt Aland, ed. *Synopsis quattuor evangeliorum*. (13. Aufl. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985) 533.

yet Acts pays attention only to Peter (though it does mention John). Seven Greeks are appointed to serve the needs of Greek speaking widows in Acts 6. Acts recounts only the death of Stephen and something of Philip's activity. The great hero of Acts 13-28 is Paul. But the narrative here also is spotty and raises major problems for the historian, e.g. in correlating Gal 2:1-10 with Acts 15 and the number of visits to Jerusalem. Luke never refers to a single Pauline letter, and the great themes of the law and justification, of Abraham, and the salvation of the Jews barely get mentioned in Paul's sermons in Acts. Acts names only a very few cities: Jerusalem, Joppa, Ashdod, Caesarea Maritima, Damascus (because of Paul's conversion) Antioch, the cities of Paul's missionary trips, and Rome.¹²

Acts is, in one sense, played out on a very wide geographic arena. Acts 1:8 prepares you to follow the witness to the resurrected Christ from Jerusalem (the navel of the earth) to Rome, the end of the earth. The description is written from a Jewish viewpoint. There are big gaps in the narrative, gaps you don't notice at first. There is no mention of the second city of the empire, Alexandria, though we know Christianity was present there by 41 C.E.¹³ There is no reference to any

¹²Acts 8:40 says that Philip evangelized all the cities from Azotos (Ashdod) to Caesarea without naming them. They would include Jappa and Apollonia, both primarily non-Jewish cities. Luke gives no details whatever of Philip's work there, since he reserved the extension of the gospel for Peter (Acts 10).

¹³The evidence, very tentative, comes from P. London 1912, a copy of the letter of the Emperor Claudius to the city of Alexandria. Claudius faults the Jews of Alexandria for sending two embassies to him. Lines 96-100 forbid the Jews from bringing in or admitting Jews from Syria. Claudius holds these Syrian Jews responsible for the unrest in the Alexandrian Jewish community. S. Reinach held these Syrian Jews to be Jewish Christian missionaries. P. London 1912 is document 212 in *Select Papyri* 2: Non-Literary Papyri: Public Documents. Edd. and Tr. A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar. Loeb Classical Library. London: Heinemann; Cambridge: Harvard, 1934: 78-89. H. Idris Bell, *Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman*

location east of Jerusalem, though Judaeo-Christianity was located there. Luke looks only to the west, to Asia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Rome. He gives no account of Paul's missionary activity in Galatia, and only mentions Bithynia in passing. Luke's interest in Rome is concentrated in Paul's story. The church already exists in Puteoli when Paul arrives there (Acts 28:14) and in Rome. But Luke nowhere relates who first missionized Rome. Acts leaves large and curious gaps in its story.

Unless, of course, you read it for what it is, a kind of historical monograph in which Luke lays out for you an interpretation of the significance of the resurrected Christ. What is it that Luke is concerned about? What parameters does he set for you as you read and preach one of those individual lessons? What implications from his story of the Easter proclamation arise out of his focussed story? Several unique Lukan emphases run through [Luke-] Acts that aid and determine our Easter mystagogy.¹⁴

1. Acts makes very clear that what happens after Easter is as much a part of the divine plan as what happens in the life of Jesus. It is no accident that Luke describes the careers of Peter, Stephen, and Paul in terms reminiscent of the career of Jesus. They parallel his career because in the book of Acts it

Egypt (Chicago: Ares, 1975 = Liverpool, 1954) 78-79, and V. Tcherikover, ed. *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1960) 2: 36-55, esp. 50-54 both reject Reinach's theory..

¹⁴What Luke does is called *ψυχαγωγία* (winning of the human spirit, persuasion) in ancient rhetoric and historiography. Polybius 31.29.5 uses it of the formation of young men's attitudes, while Eratosthenes in Strabo 1.1.10 contrasts it to *διδασκαλία*. Lucian of Samosata, *Quomodo histor. conscrib.* 12 opposes this by saying that the function of history is the "beneficial": *ἔν γὰρ ἔργον ἱστορίας καὶ τέλος, τὸ χρήσιμον, ὅπερ ἐκ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς μόνον συνάγεται* (the one function and goal of history, that which is useful, which is brought together only out of the true). P. Rabbow, *Seelenführung: Methoden der Exerziten in der Antike* (München: Kösel, 1954) examines psychagogia as a philosophic method of ethical formation by meditation.

is necessary that forgiveness and repentance be preached in his name throughout the NE Mediterranean world. Acts is not, so to speak, inevitable history but directed history. The role of the Spirit in Acts is to legitimate developments in that story, to guide and direct events so that "the word of the Lord will grow."

2. Luke has his own peculiar interpretation of the death of Jesus. The death of Jesus in the book of Acts is an unmitigated evil. There is nothing good about it. It is nowhere represented either in Luke or in Acts as a sacrifice for sin. It is an evil which is set right by the resurrection which is God's counter-thrust to the fact that those in Jerusalem killed the Lord of life.¹⁵ That is the burden of Peter's sermons in Acts 2 and 3, and of Stephen's address in Acts 7. "This Jesus God raised from the dead, of which we are all witnesses; exalted therefore to the right hand of God Let all the house of Israel, therefore, most certainly know that God appointed him Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." (2:32-33, and 36) Luke is a theologian of the resurrection, not of the crucifixion as atoning sacrifice. This explains the omission of Mark 10:45 ("the Son of Man came not to minister, but to give his life a ransom for many") at Luke 18:27. Sacrifice to remove sin is not a significant concept among Greeks as it is for Jews. Among Greeks one must expiate guilt personally; that conviction underlies all Greek tragedy, e.g. Sophokles' *Antigone* or *Oedipus Rex* and Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. Death is an evil to be defeated, not an act of substitutionary sacrifice for Greeks.

3. This understanding of Jesus' death affects Luke's interpretation of the Lord's Supper. There is not one certain reference the Lord's Supper in the whole book of Acts.¹⁶ In

¹⁵This also true in Paul's sermons in Acts, one of the major differences between the Lukan Paul and the Pauline epistles. Lutherans, shaped theologically by Luther's Augustinian Paulinism, often find this aspect of Luke strange at first. But Luke was not a Lutheran; we need to listen sympathetically to his theological stress.

¹⁶This interpretation of the Lord's Supper in Luke-Acts is my own. Many scholars would not share it. Ernst Haenchen,

Lukan theology the Lord's Supper is celebrated only twice in all history, first on Maundy Thursday (Luke 22:14-[20] 38), and the second time "when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of God." (22:18; cf. 22:16) Then the disciple community will "eat and drink at my [Jesus'] table in my Kingdom and will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:30)¹⁷ The Lord's Supper in Luke brackets the life of the Church chronologically. Before the eschaton the Church lives in the afterglow of the resurrection and celebrates the resurrection

The Acts of the Apostles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 191-192 and 584-586, for example, holds that "breaking of bread" in Acts 2:42 and 20:7 & 11 means the Eucharist. He also points out that in 27:35 "breaking bread" with thanksgiving refers to the blessing and meal. Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*. Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 23 is more careful in formulation: "When Luke speaks of the breaking of bread he does not only mean the rite at the beginning of the meal, but rather the meal itself (cf. 20:7). Do we have evidence here for a second type of Lord's Supper which is pre-Pauline (Lietzmann)? In considering this question it should be noted that Luke is thinking of the ordinary daily meal here, but he does not make a distinction between it and the Eucharist. The unity of the two is part of the ideal picture of the earliest church."

¹⁷Luke recounts this first institution of the Lord's Supper as part of a long conversation of Jesus with the disciples in the [rented] large upper room in an inn. Luke uses the same term, *κατάλυμα*, in Luke 22:11 that was used in Luke 2:7. Luke thinks of a larger group of disciples as present, perhaps even the 120 of Acts 1:15. See Quentin Quesnell, "The Women at Luke's Supper," pp. 59-79 in *Political Issues in Luke-Acts*, ed. Richard J. Cassidy and Philip J. Scharper (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983).

in community meals in which fellowship was affirmed and supported.¹⁸

4. Baptism, on the other hand, is everywhere in Acts. Baptism in Lukan theology personalizes the resurrection of our Lord and makes it immediately available to people. From Pentecost with its 3000, the Eunuch of Ethiopia via Philip, to the jailer at Philippi, from the Samaritans and Paul to the Ephesians who had been given the baptism of John, people entered the ekklesia by baptism. And baptism is, in the book of Acts, almost always immediately tied to the gift of the Spirit, though you can work out no schema for it. The Spirit can't be contained that easily. Either before or after baptism the Spirit approves the extension of the church and empowers those baptized, but never in spite of baptism.

5. Luke also has his own understanding of apostles. The apostles in the book of Acts are always, so to speak, in council (I'm using a late term, anachronistically, you understand, as in "council of bishops").¹⁹ No apostle ever does a single thing individually. The term apostle, in the book of Acts, is

¹⁸In Judaism every meal had a religious dimension because of the blessing of God attached to it. That underlay pious Jews' suspicion of Jesus for eating with tax-collectors and sinners. Cf. I. Abrahamson, "Publicans and Sinners," *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, First Series (New York: Ktav, 1967 = Cambridge, 1917) 55-57. It is not necessary, therefore, to argue that the Lord's Supper or Christian common meals must have been modelled on the Jewish Haburah, whose existence J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1973) 29-31 investigated.

Robert J. Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian. Luke's Passion Account as Literature*. Theological Inquiries. (New York, Mahwah, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1985) 47-78, examines perceptively "The Theme of Food" in Luke, but not Acts.

¹⁹I do not mean to imply that Luke has any understanding of orders of ministry as constitutive of the church. He is not, in any sense, a representative of early catholicism. See C. K. Barrett, *Luke the Historian in Recent Study* (London: Epworth, 1961) 70-76.

everywhere and always in the plural and always tied to the city of Jerusalem, without exception. Acts 8:1-3 provides a clue to their significance. Everyone in the Jerusalem church, says Luke, including Philip, scatters because of the persecution which breaks out on the death of Stephen--*except the apostles*. They are the tie to Jesus, to Jerusalem, to the Jewish-Christian original community of the Church. They represent continuity with the past. The condition under which Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias are candidates to replace the dead Judas is that they must have men who had been present with the twelve around Jesus from his baptism by John the Baptist to his ascension. (Acts 1:21-22) "The apostles" send Peter and John to Samaria to check out Philip's preaching to Simon Magus.

St. Paul is not an apostle in the book of Acts. The proper term for him is *προφήτης* or *διδάσκαλος* (prophet or teacher, Acts 13:1-2) or *εὐαγγελίστης* (evangelist). Paul claims the title apostle for himself in his own letters. And he gives the term his own specific definition: a missionary commissioned by the risen Christ.²⁰ Luke uses the apostles to underscore the significance of Jerusalem for the later church. There is a specific reason for that. The apostles in Jerusalem function as the starting point and a control model for the faith, life, and mission of the later, gentile Church. Apostles tie the present to the past and so affirm the activity of the present Church. It is that function which has led some scholars to speak of Luke as an "early catholic."

6. Jerusalem, therefore, is the visible symbol of unity in the Church, about which Luke is very much concerned. That is why Paul goes to Jerusalem at the end of every journey in Acts. Jerusalem checks out every one of those preposterous advances made by people in the book of Acts. Whether it is Philip preaching to Simon and other Samaritans (cf. Acts 1:8,

²⁰The key passages are Rom 1:1-7, Gal 1:13-2:21, 1 Cor 9:1, 15:8-10, 2 Cor 2:14-7:4, 10:1-13:4; note especially the role of the vision of the resurrected Christ in Gal 1:15-16. 1 Cor 9:1, 15:8 and the role of humility and suffering, revelations, and miracles as *τὰ σημεῖα τοῦ ἀποστόλου* in 2 Cor 12:11 after 11:16-12:10. For Paul to be an apostle was to be a missionary evangelist, a conception foreign to Acts.

8:14-25), Peter preaching to a Roman centurion, Cornelius, in the gentile city of Caesarea (cf. Acts 8:40, 11:1-18), crazy, unnamed Cypriots and Cyrenaics preaching to Syrian Greeks in the city of Antioch Acts 11:20, 22-24), or that non-Palestinian Jew from Tarsus preaching to gentiles in Cyprus, Pisidia, and Rough Syria (Acts 13:1-14-28, 15:1-33), Jerusalem always checks it out, recognizes it, and approves the actions of the Spirit.

Jerusalem is concerned with developing inclusivity, inclusivity that was scandalous to the earliest Church (I now speak as a historian). These self-appointed or non-Jerusalem authorized evangelists dared to preach to non-Jews, or even, far worse, to a Eunuch. Old Testament law excluded eunuchs from temple worship because they were less than whole human beings (Deut 23:1).²¹ The Eunuch's request, "Here is water, what prevents me from being baptized?" in 8:37, together with Philip's response removed the physiological test for humanity. The Spirit's powerful presence led Peter to ask who was able to prevent using water to baptize Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48). The Spirit removed racial prerequisites.

7. Luke presents Peter and Paul, his two great heroes, in similar fashion. Both give great speeches or sermons, one of the primary features of Acts. Both preach to Jew and Gentile, Peter as well as Paul. In fact, his preaching provides the first test case of gentile baptism. He is called to account by the apostles in Jerusalem. And approved. Paul preaches great sermons to Jews as well as Gentiles. In fact, the last sermon of Paul is preached to the Jewish community of Rome. Acts stresses the inclusive nature of the Christian church in terms of race and ethnicity, as Luke had stressed it in terms of women, tax collectors, and sinners.

With this background we turn to the Easter cycle lessons from Acts in Series B.

²¹There is no evidence to suggest that Luke knew the Jesuanic saying given in Matt 19:11-12, the passage Origen apparently took literally as the basis for self-castration.

Pentecost: Acts 2:1-21

Lectionaries do strange things. The last lesson from the book of Acts this year, the story of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-21, ought to be the first. The Pentecost story introduces all of the great themes of Acts in its narrative and Peter's sermon. Acts 2 is to the book of Acts what Jesus' preaching at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30) is to the book of Luke. These themes can be listed quickly. They are so many and so rich that no one Pentecost observance will exhaust them.

1. The story of Pentecost has one feature that can be found nowhere else in Acts. At Pentecost the Spirit descends upon the assembled disciples before they preach. Usually the Spirit confirms prior preaching.²² This is the only occasion on which the gift of the Spirit precedes proclamation in Acts. Amazing! What does that unique feature suggest about the meaning of this narrative? Luke makes a significant priority clear: God's action takes place before anything can be said.

2. One might trivialize this by thinking Luke means only that Jesus' teaching, ministry and death must precede proclamation, just as Luke's gospel precedes Acts as "the former treatise." Or one might reduce the priority of God's act to the resurrection of Christ. Luke means far more. The Spirit, the powerful presence of the resurrected Christ, initiates the Church. That is the significance of the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost. The Spirit creates the Church. Therefore the Church, whether one thinks theologically, sociologically, or historically, is at the disposal of the Spirit; the Church does not manage or control the Spirit. The Church is, to use the old Latin tags, *creatura verbi*, not *creator verbi*. Pentecost undergirds that theological reality.

²²The Spirit falls on Simon in Samaria when Peter and John come after Philip's initial preaching in Acts 8:17. The Spirit comes as Peter preaches to Cornelius (Acts 10:44). Much the same is true of the Pauline literature. The Galatians received the Spirit through Paul's preaching (Gal 3:1-5). The Spirit is therefore the power of life after baptism in Paul.

3. Pentecost makes clear that the proclamation of Jesus is tied to the sacred history of the past. Pentecost corresponds to the expectations of Joel (3:1-5), who foresaw the gift of the Spirit. Jesus' resurrection is therefore not contradiction of the past, but its fulfillment. It all happens according to God's plan and foreknowledge, *τῇ ὀρισμένη βούλῃ καὶ προγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ* (Acts 2:23). Jesus' resurrection is a *novum*, but not unanticipated, for it is in line with God's great acts in the past.

4. It is clear that without Jesus there would be no fulfillment. The auditors heard "the great deeds of God" in their own tongues (Acts 2:11). Peter's sermon unfolds those great *acta dei* as the resurrection of Jesus and his exaltation to Lordship and Messiahship (Acts 2:36). Pentecost reminds us that Jesus is more than he was, the Kosmokrator before whom all must bow.

5. All Christians are prophets in Acts, according to the story of Pentecost. Luke makes an insertion²³ in the citation of Joel 3: "Your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams, **and they shall prophesy**" (Acts 2:18). Visions and dreams equal prophetic utterance in intelligible speech, the sort that the company of disciples (the 120 of Acts 1:15 "they were all assembled," 2:1) gave on Pentecost in many tongues. Prophets are one of the forgotten groups in the New Testament. Agabus, one of the prophets who came to Antioch from Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-28), predicted a great famine. Barnabas, Simeon Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaes the childhood companion of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul [Paul] are all prophets (Acts 13:1). By revelation of the Holy Spirit (achieved by fasting) they commission Barnabas and Saul as missionaries. The Jerusalem council sent two prophets, Jude and Silas, to deliver the decision of the Jerusalem meeting and to establish the Church in Antioch (Acts 15:30-33). "All shall prophesy." There is no ordered clergy in Acts, no separate class of people set apart for some special task by ordination. Instead the entire Christian community are both prophets and

²³New Testament writers modify OT passages to fit the fulfillment. Check the citations in Matt 2:6, 3:3, and Eph 4:8 for good examples. There is a freedom in OT use that surprises our critical sense. In almost every case some crucial point is at stake for the NT writer.

witnesses, or at least are supposed to be.²⁴ Pentecost makes clear that anyone can be a prophet.

6. I like lists. One can learn much from catalogues of virtues and vices, from lists of spiritual gifts, from the catalog of ships in Homer, and the like. Acts 2 contains such a list with those unusual names over which so many lay lectors stumble (to leave unprepared pastors off my list): "Parthians and Medes, Elamites and those who inhabit Mesopotamia, Judaea and also Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and also Pamphilia, Egypt and the regions of Lybia over against Cyrene, and those Romans who live here, Jews and also proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we all hear them speaking the great deeds of God." (Acts 2:9-11) Get out a good Bible atlas, trace those names, and see where these people live. The names are in a sensible order. They encompass the entire eastern Mediterranean world, from Iran to Rome, North Africa to the far north regions of Asia Minor. The initial proclamation of the gospel is directed to everyone in that world. What happened in little Palestine has universal significance; it is to be proclaimed to all. Pentecost is a universal, not a local event. That is what glossalalia means on Pentecost: not individual experience, but universal proclamation. That is quite different from the different type of tongues Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 14.

Easter 2: Acts 3:13-26

Series B spreads one great Acts narrative over three Sundays: Easter 2-4. Acts 2-5 is a cycle of Peter stories which contain a series of speeches or sermons. Acts 3 recounts the healing of the lame beggar in the Stoa of Solomon in the Jerusalem temple.

Once again I have trouble with the lectionary makers. Last Sunday you read Acts 3:13-15 and 17-26. Were you curious enough to read what the lectionary omits, Acts 3:1-12 and v. 14, and try to guess why they omitted it? Acts 3:1-12 recounts

²⁴Ephesians 2:20 refers to NT prophets in "Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," not NT apostle and OT prophets in reverse order. Cf. Eph 4:11 and 1 Cor 12:28-29. Prophets precede pastors and evangelists in these lists.

the miracle and the rush of the temple crowd to the stoa to see what had happened. It gives the setting for Peter's speech. The omitted verse 16 refers back to the miracle. Such omissions contradict both good literary criticism and historical interpretation. They dehistoricize the text in a somewhat bloodless manner. Apparently the lectionary compilers are embarrassed by miracle, not Jesus' miracles, but miracles in the book of Acts. The lectionary omits the biblical material essential for understanding the very point at issue, "by what power (*δύναμις*) or form of piety (*εὐσέβεια*)" do Peter and John act? (3:12) That is the question. Peter gives the answer in Acts 3:16: "and his [Jesus'] name, based upon this fellow's faith in his [Jesus'] name, made this fellow whom you now see and hear strong; and the faith which came through Jesus gave him this wholeness right in front of all of you."

The question asked what authority gave these people the *chutzpah* to heal a beggar in the temple of all places. You know the answer. There is a power behind, before, and beyond everything that those speakers had to say. In responding to that challenge, Peter claims or demonstrates how the Name should be proclaimed to Jewish people. In one short sermon Peter calls Jesus the Servant of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:13), the holy and righteous one (3:14), the author of life (3:15). He is the one whom the Jerusalemites denied and killed; but God raised from the dead.

Now look back at the actual story of the marvellous cure in 3:1-10. In spite of 3:16 which states that faith was the ground of the cure, the narrative itself never says the lame beggar believed. That is a curious inconsistency between the narrative and Peter's sermon²⁵ which the lectionary simply "cures" by excision (if I am permitted the medical pun). The difference, in my opinion, reflects an early unreflected understanding of miracle and conversion in 3:1-12 and Luke's reinterpretation of the event in Peter's sermon.

²⁵Commentators call attention to the problem, e.g. Gottfried Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*. THKNT 5 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983) 128. David John Williams, *Acts. A Good News Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985) 48-49 tries to resolve the difficulty by suggesting that Peter could see his faith.

Ramsey MacMullen, great social historian of the Roman Empire at Yale University, has written a series of books important for understanding the early Church. In *Christianizing the Roman Empire* he describes how Christianity became the preeminent religion of the Roman Empire.²⁶ MacMullen carefully examines accounts of conversion to Christianity down to the time of Constantine to determine what converted people. The result is surprising: not preaching, but power expressed in miracle. The book deserves reading by anyone interested in early Christianity.

Miracle demonstrates that the God one proclaims is powerful. Some miracles show that one god is more powerful than another. Shades of the Old Testament and the ten plagues in Egypt. Recall the OT story of the ark of the covenant in the temple of the Philistine god Dagon. Dagon toppled off his pedestal at night and so was found worshipping Yahweh in the morning. Dagon recognized a greater power. Prior to Constantine, argues MacMullen, almost all conversions reported in the surviving texts happen because Christians showed that the resurrected Jesus had more power than Isis or Serapis or Apollo or the Ephesian Artemis or Aphrodite of Aphrodisias, or what have you.

The miracle story shows that Peter can call on power by using the name of the Lord Jesus. A god's [or demon's] name expresses what that being is. Naming the name gives access to a being's power. Peter invokes Jesus Christ's power by naming him. And that power is effective.²⁷ The narrative stresses that power in the two terms *dynamis* and *eusebeia* in 3:12. Peter says to the Jews, "Don't you realize that the name of Jesus is power. We didn't do this by ourselves. His power, named by us, made this man strong."

²⁶New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984. MacMullen does not discuss the New Testament, saying he is not competent to deal with it, since he is not a member of the believing community. It is a respectable position.

²⁷On the name as access to power see Hans Bietenhardt, *δνομα*, TDNT 5.242-281, esp. 250-252, 277-281.

The sermon, on the other hand, stresses the proper relationship of Jews to the resurrected Christ. They had denied and crucified Jesus, God's agent. (Note that the death of Jesus has no salvific power by itself!) God raised him from the dead (3:15), and therefore his name has power. The only proper reaction to this resurrected Jesus is faith (3:16). Now a new, Lukan motif comes in. The Jews are given a way out: they acted in ignorance (*κατ' ἀγνοίαν*). But the resurrection, powerfully witnessed to by the healing just seen, shows that their former view of Jesus was ignorance. Therefore they should change their minds and turn to God. Thus they will receive the blessing promised by the prophets, for God sent his servant to bless them by turning them from their wicked deeds (i.e. from their ignorant crucifying of the Lord of life).

Easter 2 provides preaching values in Easter because it confronts us with the powerful Lord who calls us to radical change. Resurrection is demonstrated by power. Acts calls all to a reversal of mind that results in a changed life. On Easter 2 I believe in "sinning against the lectionary" by reading all that Acts has to say. Otherwise Peter is made a vague preacher of a sermon without place and removed from time.

Easter 3: Acts 4:8-12

On Easter 3 we are present at scene two of this sequence. It is the next day. Now the religious authorities become involved. They are named in Acts 4:1-7: the priests, the commander of the temple guard, the Sadducees (4:1) arrest Peter and John and jail them (4:3); the rulers, the elders, the scribes, Hanna the High Priest, Caiaphas, Jochanan, Alexander, and others of the ruling priestly caste (4:5-6) assemble to ask them to account for the previous day's actions in the temple. "By what power, or by what name did you do this?"

In the temple Peter preached an evangelistic sermon in response to the people's amazement. Now Acts presents an example of an apologetic address, a response to an attack. (I don't know how you preach about this.) The Spirit inspires Peter (4:8) as he inspired the disciples on Pentecost (2:4). As the topographic list of Acts 2:9-11 implied universality, so here Peter claims universality for Jesus' power: "There is *σωτηρία* in no other, for there is no other name made public among people under heaven by which we must be saved"

(σωθῆναι, 4:12). Peter uses an ambiguous Greek word. It is the proper term to describe a medical cure (cf. the use in healing miracles, e.g. Mark 5:34), political rescue (Caesar is a “saviour” in many inscriptions), or religious deliverance. Christians today often hear “save” as an exclusively religious term. Peter’s speech uses wordplay²⁸ to suggest that Jesus does more than heal in a medical sense. He is also the healer in religion. That artistic play on the word σώζω disappears if you remove the cured lame beggar as the occasion for the speech; the lectionary makes Peter a preacher without place, without time, and destroys the literary artistry of Luke.

But a new note enters the book of Acts for the first time in this narrative. The lectionary omits the reaction of the listening rulers. They recognize, says Luke, that Peter speaks with *παρρησία*, “boldness,” an untranslatable word. In Athens it is the fitting term to describe the right of a free man (it was a sexist society) to say anything he pleased; a slave could not do that. Peter speaks with *παρρησία* to the authorities as he defends the temple healing, and they are amazed at such Galilean freedom of speech.²⁹

The apology has one other surprising feature. The sermon contains no appeal for repentance, faith in the Lord, and forgiveness, that is, it has no evangelistic appeal. It is a testimony (Acts 1:8), but one that accuses the leaders. Peter

²⁸Technically called reflexio, *ἀντανάκλασις*, repetition of a word in a different sense.

²⁹The term occurs earlier in Peter’s Pentecost address (2:29), recurs in 4:29 & 31, and in 28:31, the last verse of Acts. The pattern suggests that the concept of bold speech forms an inclusion around the sermons in Acts; it is a fitting quality in Christian proclamation. The verb *παρρησιάζομαι* occurs 7 times in Acts.

The term is also frequent in the Johannine corpus (9 times in John, 4 in 1 John), in Hebrews (4 times) and in Paul. Paul uses the related verb to describe his preaching in Thessalonica after the mistreatment in Philippi (1 Thes 2:2) and noun to characterize his apostolic speech (2 Cor 3:12, 7:4; Phil 1:20; Philem 8).

does not appear to do what his Lord had commanded. Our anticipations shatter on the framework of the sermons.

Now, how does one use this as Easter exhortation? Luke has something to say about the way in which the Church lives out its life. The Church is called to boldness of speech, even when there is no opportunity for evangelism. This is only the first story in Acts where rejection of witness leads to greater boldness and witness in another place. Easter 2 calls for bold proclamation in the face of rejection.

Easter 4: Acts 4:23-33.

We arrive at scene 3 in this sequence, the reaction of the community to opposition. Peter and John return to the disciple community (4:23) and report what happened. We are back in the upper room of the Lord's Supper, the resurrection appearance of Luke 24, the election of Matthias, and Pentecost. In reaction the community prays in praise of God for the speaking of Peter and John in the face of opposition. The prayer is powerful. Let me just read a few words: "And now Lord look upon their threats and give to your servants (they don't mean Peter and John as you'll hear) to speak your account of things³⁰ with all *παρρησία* (4:29). They ask (1) that the speech of all disciples present there might have the same boldness as that of Peter and John, and (2) that it might heal and produce signs and wonders, i.e. deeds like the healing in the temple, through the name of God's holy servant Jesus (4:29-30). "As they were praying the whole house shook in which they were assembled and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with *παρρησία*"(4:31).

We are back at Pentecost. All Christians are martyrs, witnesses; the first experience of opposition makes the entire community bold in its speech. Opposition leads to prayer, praise, and proclamation. Opposition gives a new shape to life. "Now the crowd of those that believed was one heart and one life. And not one of them said that anything that belonged to him was his own property, but everything was held in

³⁰*λόγος* implies speech that explains or accounts for its subject. In relation to Christ it implies telling who he is, what he has done, and the significance he has for all people.

partnership by all. And, with great power the apostles of the Lord kept giving (imperfect) their testimony to the resurrection of Jesus" (Acts 4:32-33).

Acts 4 describes the effect of opposition on the Church. Unnamed people in the Church grow bold, are led by the Spirit, and live in ways that were unimaginable before. Acts describes what happens when the word is witnessed to all sorts and conditions of men, both then and now. Easter should produce community that expresses its unity in life.

Easter 5: Acts 8:26-40.

The narrative for Easter 5 is so well known that it need not occupy us long. You all know the Ethiopian Eunuch. You understand the religious implications of castration in Judaism and recognize the freedom from regulations that Philip's actions imply. You know well the significance of Isaiah 53 for Christology and soteriology.³¹ The inclusive implications are clear. Philip, set apart to serve Greek-speaking widows, is an evangelist. He is doing what Easter 4 prayed for.

All that is clear. I wish to concentrate on one aspect of the story usually overlooked, the three place names in the account. An angel of the Lord told Philip, "Get up, go on a trip about noon, take the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza" (Acts 8:26). The events take place on the way to Gaza, one of the five Philistine cities of the Old Testament. Gaza is not a Jewish city in first century Palestine, but a Greek city. It was well known as a center of Greek culture. When the story is finished, Acts 8:40 says "Philip (grabbed by the Holy Spirit) was found in Azotos (Ashdod on the Sea) and he went around preaching the good news to all the cities until he came to Caesarea."

"Good news to all the cities," that is to the *πόλεις*. Can you name them? Azotos, Lydda, Apollonia, and Caesarea. Every one of those cities is a seacoast city inhabited primarily by

³¹Isaiah 53 is not cited as often in the NT as we might think, and sometimes not for purposes immediately clear to us. See Matt 8:17 and 1 Pet 2:22-25. The 1 Peter text is almost unique in its use of Isaiah 53 to interpret the death of Jesus.

non-Jews. They are the chief cities of regions, organized on the Greek model of urban life.³² Think about that for a second. Recall the Jewish objections to the introduction of Greek culture into Palestine in the books of Maccabees. Most of those cities are not named elsewhere in the New Testament. It is the only time Gaza and Azotos are mentioned. Why those curious names? There are now new boundaries for the work of the Church. Acts 8:40 anticipates the proclamation of Peter to Cornelius in Acts 10. Yet Luke does nothing with these names. He reserves for Peter the proclamation that raises the question of gentile membership in the Church.

Easter 6: Acts 11:19-30.

This is my favorite lesson from Acts in Easter B because it is a success story about the great unwashed, unnamed, unknown people in the Church. Look at Acts 11:19-20. The sequence of names jumps out at you. There was persecution after Stephen's death; the people of the Jerusalem church were scattered. Recall that Acts 8:1-3 says that everybody left Jerusalem except the apostles. They stayed there as apostles to symbolize the unity of the Church.

Where did they go? As far as Phoenicia (Azotos and Gaza, Philip's sphere of activity) and Cyprus (Barnabas' home) and Antioch, speaking the Gospel to nobody except Jews (11:19). They were still inhibited. But some of them, who came from Cyprus and Cyrene (North Africa), came to Antioch and spoke to the Greeks, proclaiming the Lord Jesus as good news (11:20). The hand of the Lord was with them. A big number who believed turned to the Lord. A report got to the ears of the Jerusalem church (11:22), which sent Barnabas all the way to Antioch. When he was present and saw the gift which had been gifted on them by God, he exhorted all of them to remain faithful to the Lord because he (that is, Barnabas) was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and faith. He recognized and

³²To discover what urban life means see Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 9-50, and John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in its Social Environment. Library of Early Christianity 2* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986): 107-137.

affirmed what had happened. There was added a large crowd to the Lord, implying that they were all Gentiles.

We don't know the name of a single one of the people who made this foray, the first one outside the boundaries of the land (Palestine), into the territory of the great oppressor of Daniel, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The very name, Antioch, recalls that story. Antioch was the capital of the Seleucid empire. It was the place from which the greatest threat to the faith of Judaism had come in the second century B.C. Antiochenes first hear the gospel from people whom we do not know and cannot name. All we can say is that they brought the Gospel outside the boundaries of Palestine.

These anonymous Christians stimulate Barnabas to go and get another odd character, Paul, still called Saul at this point. Barnabas goes to Tarsus and brings Saul to Antioch (11:25-26). In Antioch disciples were first called Christ-people, *Χριστιανοί*, Christians. Agabus the prophet came to the Antioch Christians and predicted a famine under Claudius. They took action, including sending Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem.

Martin Franzmann, my first teacher of New Testament and later my next-door neighbor, was one of my favorite preachers of all time. When he preached, he dripped poetry. His greatest contribution to the Church was not his New Testament scholarship but a series of hymns in the *LBW*, for example, "Thy Strong Word Did Cleave the Darkness." Martin Franzmann preached impressive sermons. I remember one he preached about Paul. He quoted this little bit of doggerel:

Into a basket, over the wall,
Heads up down there, here comes Paul!

He was making an important point. Without the people who hold the rope that lets down the basket, Paul could not have become the great missionary later. The people who hold the rope, unnamed and unknown, are responsible for the Christian church that was Paul's base for evangelizing the Gentiles. They were so active on behalf of Christ that they were called Christ-people. They earned the name that Christians have borne ever since--and we don't know any

name for them but Christian. What a lesson in mystagogy, in living the life that the Gospel gives.

Acts shows us a church living Easter's vivifying resurrection, witnessing its faith, calling people to discipleship, showing what the Lordship of Christ means for ordinary people in their daily lives. That's mystagogy as it should be.