

THE SANCTIFICATION OF TIME:
THE FORMATIVE POTENTIAL
OF THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

Dirk R. Ellis

Grace Chapel Church of the Nazarene

During the last two decades my primary vocation has been in pastoral ministry. Anyone who serves in this capacity understands both the blessings and challenges that such a calling holds. One current challenge concerns the extent to which the relationship between society and the church has deteriorated over the last several decades. My earliest childhood memories revolve around the church, and, in fact, I do not remember any part of life that was not touched by the church. My parents, like many Christian families of their era, planned their weekly and annual schedules around the church's calendar. As the old adage suggests, "when the doors of the church were open," our family was in attendance. I knew nothing else.

When I took my first pastoral assignment, it was not long before I realized how quickly times had changed. The days of the community abstaining from scheduling activities on Wednesday nights in deference to the church were long gone. People's schedules blossomed into a flurry of activities, which had the residual effect of eroding away at the time once reserved for God. As we enter 2013, the infringement of the civil calendar upon the church's calendar has become even more problematic, to the extent that now even Sundays are no longer considered sacred and reserved for the church. Schools and community organizations now fill their calendars with events that compete with time once reserved for worship on the Lord's Day.

An unfortunate consequence of this is that those within the church often find their lives structured, organized, and formed more by the civil calendar than the Christian calendar. It is now common to find even those within the church body capitulating to the world's breach into the church's ordering of both the weekly and annual calendar. As a result, clergy often find themselves frustrated by both the number of and frequency at which parishioners are willing to abandon Sunday worship for other more attractive options. Over the last few decades this trend has tempted church leaders and pastors to utilize methods that attract persons to Sunday worship, even when such methods may compromise the theological integrity of the liturgy.¹ In light of this reality, I find myself asking the question: Can *time* be reclaimed for God and made sacred once again?

This paper first examines the pragmatic approach of early Nazarene leaders to both holy days and the civil calendar. Second, it discusses the Nazarene calendar in the period following the inaugural era of the denomination. This includes an analysis of the problems that surfaced due to the pragmatic use of the calendar with the demise of revivalism and the emergence of the church-growth movement. Third, in response to this dilemma a theologically rooted corrective directed toward the re-sanctification of time is offered. Finally, set-forth is a practical example of how the celebration of sacred time might be fleshed out in a local worshipping community.

¹ Dirk R. Ellis, "The Relationship between Liturgical Practice and Spirituality in the Church of the Nazarene with Special Reference to John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2012), 44-53.

The aforementioned dilemma we currently encounter is marked by an irony of sorts, for when we examine our own ecclesial roots we discover that that our current way of marking time in the church is much different than the one conceived by the early pioneers of the Church of the Nazarene and other holiness groups born of American revivalism. Although their approach was often rigid, and at times legalistic, the seriousness with which the early holiness movement's leaders committed themselves to Sunday worship is clearly evident in their polity. Regulations in the Church of the Nazarene's *Manual* urging abstention from reading the Sunday paper and the prohibition against anything that would promote labor on the Lord's Day (such as using the train and other modes of public transportation) had as their primary purpose the preservation of the sanctity of Sunday.² In the denomination's formative years, Nazarene leaders used every opportunity to utilize certain accepted holy days³ as well as transform select civil celebrations into occasions to promote holiness. In doing so, they were attempting to sanctify time for God's use.

Although Bresee's Christmas love feast is perhaps the most widely documented of these efforts, it is only one of many examples on the part of Nazarene leaders to claim both Christian and civil days for God.⁴ Bresee inaugurated the Christmas love feast in 1887, while serving as a Methodist pastor in Pasadena, California.⁵ This became an annual event that followed Bresee when he founded the Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles. "The love feast on Christmas Day was unique in that it was more than a local event. Initially it had attracted members of the holiness movement from various congregations and denominations."⁶ Normally the love feast lasted two and one-half hours and ended by noon on Christmas day. Descriptions of the Christmas love feast in the *Nazarene Messenger* indicate that it was an experientially rich event that included "Scripture readings related to Christ's birth, prayer, songs, an offering, the sharing of bread and water, and as many testimonies as time permitted."⁷ According to Carl Bangs, in the latter years of the Christmas love feast it, "became almost exclusively Nazarene and died out within a year or so of Bresee's death."⁸

² *Manual [1908]* (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing Co., 1908), 32; W. E. Shepherd, "Sabbath Sins," *Nazarene Messenger*, June 7, 1900, 2.

³ The primary holy days celebrated by the Nazarene pioneers would be limited to Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. However, even the calendar for the celebration of these feasts would differ from that of churches in the prayer book tradition. In the prayer book tradition these celebrations encompass a season rather than being confined to one day.

⁴ Carl Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee: His Life in Methodism, The Holiness Movement, and the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1995), 152-53, 163; Timothy Lawrence Smith, *Called Unto Holiness: The Story of the Nazarenes* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), 118; E. A. Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: A Prince in Israel* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1982), 110-11, 140-41

⁵ Bangs, *Bresee*, 152-53.

⁶ Ellis, "Liturgical Practice and Spirituality," 353.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 354.

⁸ Bangs, *Bresee*, 224.

The practice of early Nazarene leaders in claiming every possible calendrical opportunity for the promotion of holiness is exemplified in a 1928 article by James B. Chapman which appeared in *The Preacher's Magazine*. Chapman's purpose in the article was to provide pastors ways to utilize both the civil and Christian calendars to their fullest possible potential in redeeming the lost and sanctifying believers:

There is nothing improper about making the "time and seasons" of the year help you in building the interest of your services. Christmas and New Year are past. But there are Washington's birthday, Easter, Decoration Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, etc., yet to come. And the wide-awake pastor will not fail to use every occasion possible to draw special attention to the services of his church, and he will not fail to use such occasions to drive home special doctrines, privileges and duties of his people.⁹

Chapman continues his argument by referencing a phenomenon that had occurred years earlier in a coal mining community where he was conducting revival meetings. The revival happened to occur during the first week of July. Chapman observed that while attendance was substantial on Sunday, it was rather sparse during the week. However, on the Fourth of July—a Monday—more than six hundred people attended the service. It was from this experience of witnessing the power of calendrical celebrations in drawing people that Chapman learned the importance of utilizing both the civil and Christian calendars for the promotion of holiness. Pragmatically speaking, adopting this practice was a matter of common sense.

Phineas Bresee also embraced this practice of transforming civil celebrations, with the goal of creating a mechanism that would enable the Spirit to work in the saving and sanctifying of souls through the preaching of the Word and the proclamation of the doctrine of Christian perfection. The *Nazarene Messenger* describes an event-filled 1902 Independence Day celebration lasting from sunrise until 10:00 p.m.:

As is our custom, an all-day meeting will be held in First Church on Friday, July 4th beginning with a sunrise prayer meeting at 4:57 a.m., to continue throughout the day. In former years we have witnessed some marvelous tides of salvation on this, our National Independence Day, and we shall pray and expect that this day shall be even more signally owned and blessed by God.¹⁰

The use of holidays within the civil calendar to promote holiness was, in effect, an effort by the early Nazarenes to sanctify time by taking holidays that the church perceived had become profane and secular celebrations and reclaiming them for God's use.¹¹ The hope and aim of these

⁹ James B. Chapman, "What of the Church Year?" *The Preacher's Magazine* 3, no. 1 (January 1928): 2.

¹⁰ "July 4th 1902," *Nazarene Messenger*, July 3, 1902, 6.; "July 4th 1902," *Nazarene Messenger*, July 10, 1902.

¹¹ This perception is exemplified in the following quote from a 1906 *Nazarene Messenger* editorial: "There is a great tendency in these days to Paganize every sacred and holy thing. This is especially true of our holidays and holy days. Out of every national holiday its

early leaders was to pull men and women out of the sin and vices of the world and into the holy life of the church using whatever means possible. For these Nazarenes, this meant the scheduling of event-filled holiness meetings that would provide opportunities for the Spirit of God to do his work through revivalism.

The appropriation of certain celebrations from either the Christian or civil calendars was not only practiced by Bresee and Chapman but was characteristic of the denomination during the first few generations of its existence.¹² The Fourth of July was not the only celebration adopted and transformed from the civil calendar; rather, “other national holidays also provided occasions for special services in Nazarene congregations, including Thanksgiving, Washington’s Birthday, Lincoln’s Birthday, Decoration Day (Memorial Day), and New Year’s Day.”¹³ Often the holiness meetings scheduled on these civil holidays were scheduled for the entire day, and in some instances these all-day holiness meetings were even scheduled to encompass Christmas day.¹⁴

In the early decades of the denomination, the typical feasts celebrated included Christmas, Pentecost, and Easter. According to Wiley, many of the other observances in the Christian calendar were avoided by holiness groups because of their connection to Roman Catholicism and other denominations of the prayer book tradition. He states,

There is both a value and a danger in the observance of special seasons in the church . . . as days and seasons are observed there develops gradually a *ritualistic attitude* of mind in which the form of the service is substituted for the spiritual realities.

. . . there is a certain value in the church calendar . . . but like other good things, its value was lost in overloading it with a multitude of observances. When these observances became formal, the result was a religious service of a ritualistic order.¹⁵

Due to the connection Nazarenes made between entire sanctification and the disciples’ experience of Spirit baptism in Acts chapter two, Pentecost was initially an important calendrical celebration. Often it was referred to as “V-Day.” “V” referring to the victory over sin made possible because of one’s experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit and entire sanctification. Three days were set apart for the celebration of Pentecost at Bresee’s Los Angeles church (i.e. Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday). As part of this three day celebration a 1900 edition of the *Nazarene Messenger* indicates the plans of Los Angeles First Church to conduct a Pentecostal love feast during the afternoon of Pentecost Sunday.¹⁶

sacred meaning is soon crushed by the profane and worldly spirit which tramples it under foot.” “Paganizing Christmas,” *Nazarene Messenger*, December 20, 1906, 6.

¹² It is important to note that while many of the civil celebrations were adopted and transformed, the liturgical calendar was for the most part avoided.

¹³ Ellis, “Liturgical Practice and Spirituality,” 273.

¹⁴ Nellie A. Reed, “South Manchester Conn.,” *Beulah Christian*, December 8, 1906, 12.

¹⁵ H. Orton Wiley, “The Value of Special Days,” *Herald of Holiness*, September 24, 1930, 3, italics mine.

¹⁶ “Anniversary of Pentecost,” *Nazarene Messenger*, May 31, 1900, 4.

A few years after the Church of the Nazarene had entered into its second generation of existence, H. Orton Wiley, in a 1932 *Herald of Holiness* editorial, indicated that he believed both the emphasis on entire sanctification and the celebration of Pentecost was beginning to dwindle when compared to the fervency that characterized the initial days of the denomination:

While the denominations generally observe Lent and make much of Easter, it seems appropriate that those whose chief doctrine centers in the gift of the Holy Ghost, should make much of Pentecost and events leading up to it. The Church of the Nazarene in its earlier beginnings celebrated Pentecost annually as “Victory day” and many are the times when the Spirit of God was poured out in new power and glory. It is admitted by Superintendents, pastors and people that the younger generation of Nazarenes . . . are not so thoroughly grounded in the doctrine as they should be.¹⁷

Eventually the diminished fervor for holiness, found in later generations of Nazarenes, combined with the growing intrusion of the civil calendar into the church, had ramifications for the celebration of Pentecost. This seems especially evident during those years when the Mother’s Day celebration, first introduced into the Methodist calendar in 1907, collided with Pentecost by occupying the same Sunday.¹⁸ D. Shelby Corlett exposed this problem in a 1940 *Herald of Holiness* article. He commented that the church faced an unfortunate dilemma during those years that Pentecost and Mother’s Day occurred on the same Sunday. However, his apparent unspoken assumption is that congregations will celebrate Mother’s Day and not Pentecost. “This year May 12 has the distinction of being both Pentecost Sunday and Mother’s Day. Perhaps it is unfortunate to have both of these features fall on the same day, but *why not at least* emphasize the feature of Pentecost in the evening service. Nothing is more important in the history of the Christian than Pentecost.”¹⁹

The virtual loss of Pentecost from the Nazarene calendar within a couple of generations of the denomination’s birth reveals a deeper problem, i.e., a pragmatism that permeated Nazarene thought and practice from the denomination’s inception, especially with respect to worship.²⁰ This *liturgical pragmatism* had significant implications for the church’s approach to the calendar as well as its liturgy. Decisions concerning the shape of the liturgy, including its calendrical observation, were often based upon the pragmatism characteristic of American revivalism, rather than upon a robust liturgical theology. The overwhelming concern regarding worship was to use every method possible to bring people into the church in order that

¹⁷ H. Orton Wiley, “From Easter to Pentecost,” *Herald of Holiness*, March 30, 1932, 2.

¹⁸ Mother’s Day was first celebrated at the “Grafton, West Virginia, Methodist Episcopal Church in May, 1907, to remember” the mother of Anna Jarvis; shortly thereafter it was adopted into Methodism and eventually gained national recognition. Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 52.

¹⁹ D. Shelby Corlett, “Pentecost Sunday,” *Herald of Holiness*, May 4, 1940, 4, italics mine.

²⁰ Ellis, “Liturgical Practice and Spirituality,” 204-06; “Fruitless Ministry,” *Beulah Christian*, July 10, 1909, 6.

they might hear the word and be saved and sanctified. However, the theological ramifications of those choices, such as the implications of choosing to celebrate Mother's Day in the context of worship and especially at the expense of Pentecost, was beyond the scope of understanding for denominational leaders and pastors. Questions concerning the nature and purpose of worship were not asked, because in the paradigm of the American holiness movement the major focus and purpose of worship was evangelism, not doxology.²¹ That is to say, many Nazarene leaders did not understand that some evangelistic methods and tactics could be in conflict with the glorification of God in worship. For them, the purpose of worship was pragmatic; worship was intended to be a mechanism for the salvation and sanctification of souls. This, for them, glorified God.

Following the demise of revivalism and the emergence of church-growth strategies in the late sixties, the infiltration of commemorative days, national holidays, and special days into the church's calendar and worship continued to accelerate.²² There was also an inconspicuous transition in the philosophical underpinnings and purpose of these days. During the time of Bresee and the early Nazarenes, both the civil and Christian calendars were utilized in order to conduct holiness meetings for the purpose of the salvation of the lost and the sanctification of believers. This was an attempt by the Nazarene pioneers to sanctify time by claiming it for God's use. However, revivalism was in a gradual but steady state of decline. While revivalism continued and still appeared vibrant for another two or three decades, the church was already transitioning into a new phase with the emergence of the church-growth movement in the late sixties. With this gradual transition in methods, from revivalism to church-growth, the initial intent of the Nazarene pioneers gradually and subtly transitioned from an emphasis upon numbers at the altar (i.e. a focus upon the number of souls at the altar for salvation and entire sanctification) to an emphasis on the numerical attendance of Sunday school and worship.

This is not to say that the church-growth movement and its proponents were not interested in people being saved and sanctified. There was, however, a definite shift from the early days continuing through the era of the church-growth movement into the present in terms of both expectation and experience. The number of people coming to the altar to experience conversion or entire sanctification was dwindling, resulting in a philosophical shift in the way success was measured. The pioneers of the denomination measured the success of their methods by the number of people at the altar who were converted or who experienced entire

²¹ This is exemplified in the utilitarian nature of worship in the American holiness movement. Rather than the sole purpose of worship focusing upon the glorification of God it served as a means to an end. Modeled after revivals and camp meetings worship became the venue for preaching and the altar call. These were the mechanisms utilized in bringing souls to the altar for conversion and entire sanctification. Marva Dawn argues that, "Worship ought not to be construed in a utilitarian way. Its purpose is not to gain numbers nor for our churches to be successful. Rather, the entire reason for our worship is that God deserves it." The purpose of worship is doxology. Marva Dawn, *A Royal Waste of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 1.

²² Ellis, "Liturgical Practice and Spirituality," 273-75.

sanctification. However, with the passing of time and with the decline of revivalism, it became necessary to assess success by counting the number of people coming through the church doors.

The effect of this shift meant that special days, commemorative days, national holidays, and some of the major Christian feasts were incorporated into the calendar not primarily for theological reasons, but for their ability to attract more people. These decisions were often made apart from thoroughly contemplating and/or understanding either the positive or adverse effects the celebration of these days (or the omission of certain holy days from the Christian calendar), including the manner in which they were celebrated, would have upon corporate and personal spirituality. Neither denominational leaders nor pastors were in possession of a robust liturgical theology to guide them.

Although in recent years there has been a budding interest by some Nazarene clergy and congregations to recover a liturgical and sacramental heritage grounded in Christian antiquity and Wesleyan liturgical thought, the number interested in such an approach is proportionately very small.²³ Current practice in the vast majority of Nazarene congregations reflects a minimalist approach to the Christian calendar, as well as confusion over the seasons of the Christian year. The absence of a sound and vibrant practical means of Christian year observance is evident throughout the yearly cycle.²⁴

The themes and meaning of Advent are often lost in the premature celebration of the Christmas season.²⁵ Rather than the Advent liturgy focusing upon the preparation and repentance necessary for both the second coming of Christ and an authentic appreciation for the Incarnation, worship is often saturated with cantatas, sermons, and children's programs that celebrate the good and joyous feelings we crave naturally during the Christmas season. Additionally, a failure to understand and proclaim the authentic themes of Advent means there is no voice to counter the consumerism which threatens to profane the celebration of Christmas within the church. Allowing Christmas to bleed into Advent dilutes the true gospel message by blurring the distinction in these seasons and the saving events they commemorate.

Due to its association with churches of the prayer book tradition (e.g. Anglican, Catholic, and Lutheran), the season of Lent is commonly looked upon with suspicion or ignored altogether.²⁶ During holy week, when historically in the early church the atmosphere was one of solemnity to encourage a spirit of penitent self-examination, Maundy Thursday is rarely, if ever, celebrated by nearly seventy-five percent of Nazarene congregations. Perhaps all the more telling is that even Good Friday has been abandoned by many in favor of the joyous themes of the

²³ A 2007 survey of Church of the Nazarene congregations in the United States suggested that only 7% of pastors surveyed were endeavoring to follow the liturgical and sacramental heritage of John and Charles Wesley and Christian antiquity. *Ibid.*, 403-41.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 271-83.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 280-82.

²⁶ Eighty-percent of Nazarene pastors indicated that they never celebrate Ash Wednesday. *Ibid.*, 415.

resurrection and Easter.²⁷ The celebration of Easter is only a day, rather than a season. Pentecost is often forgotten and/or replaced by Mother's Day or Memorial Day on those years that the Christian and civil calendars collide.²⁸

The intrusion of the civil calendar, in combination with the minimalization of the Christian calendar, has in effect corrupted time. That is to say in many cases both the feasts in the Christian calendar as well as the weekly worship celebration on the Lord's Day have lost their sanctity. Time is no longer a primary vehicle for *doxology*, reserved for the glorification of God; rather, our observation of time in the church has become utilitarian. It is important only to the extent that it serves our wants, needs, and desires. Time is no longer sacred. The question is, "Can time be made sacred once again, and if so, how?"

Although the early Nazarene pioneers were clearly attempting to sanctify time by claiming civil celebrations and utilizing them for the promotion of holiness I would suggest there is a more excellent way to sanctify time. No matter how noble any attempt may be at claiming civil celebrations for God, such a practice inherently lacks the ability to clearly communicate the Gospel. Such celebrations are often loaded with so much residual meaning that efforts to Christianize them results in nothing more than accommodation to the world. Therefore, rather than the church attempting to adopt and reconstruct celebrations from the civil calendar I am arguing that the Christian calendar provides the most potent means for the sanctification of time. Historically, the Christian calendar, through its daily, weekly, and yearly cycles, has afforded to the church an approach that both retells salvation history and offers the potential to both form and inform one spiritually.

Laurence Stookey reminds us that as Christians it is important to mark time in such a way that we do not become so preoccupied with ourselves and the living of our lives that we forget God and his work among us. He writes, "Time obscures the very eternity it is intended to reveal. For this reason Christians have found it helpful—even necessary—to keep track of time in special ways that call to remembrance God's work among us."²⁹ Therefore, marking time so as to remember, celebrate, and focus upon God and his activity among us in our daily, weekly, and annual calendars is necessary to our spiritual growth and development. The annual observances of the Christian year serve to retell the story of God's work among us through the various seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost.³⁰ Forgetting these seasons, and allowing other days that focus worship upon someone or something other than God, such as special days, commemorative days, or national holidays (like Friendship Sunday, Father's Day, and Independence Day) to govern the church's worship obstructs the doxological intent of worship and hinders our remembrance of God. This can lead to a human preoccupation with the self.

²⁷ Less the one-half of Nazarene pastors indicated that they hold Good Friday services annually. Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 278.

²⁹ Laurence Hull Stookey, *Calendar: Christ's Time for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 18.

³⁰ Ibid.

During the robust days of revivalism this problem of self-centeredness was repeatedly addressed by Nazarene evangelists in sermons that focused on the doctrines of salvation and entire sanctification. It was common for Nazarene congregations to conduct two revivals annually. In many congregations time was set aside both in the spring and fall by the church for a period of self-examination, repentance, and renewal. This was, in effect, sacred time. If one examines the Christian year it is noteworthy that woven into the fabric of the annual cycle are similar themes which occur in both the spring and fall. During Advent we are called to a period of self-examination in order that we are prepared for the second coming of our Lord. We cannot fully appreciate and celebrate the Incarnation apart from self-examination, confession, and restoration. During Lent there is also this period of reflection that challenges the human tendency to be preoccupied with the self. It provides the means to assist us in nurturing our relationship with God in order that we can fully celebrate and live in the power and presence of the resurrected Christ. The Christian year provides a therapeutic remedy which addresses the need for self-examination, repentance, and spiritual formation but which has largely disappeared in churches where revivalism is no longer the dominant paradigm with respect to worship.

Thomas Merton eloquently captures the potential of the Christian calendar as a means of healing and transforming grace:

The liturgical year renews the mysteries of our redemption . . . It teaches us the way of saints and renews our union with them in the charity of the Spirit. It is a year of *salvation*, but also a year of *enlightenment* and of *transformation*.

The mysteries of the liturgical cycle not only bring to our souls new outpourings of the salvific waters of grace: they also enlighten our minds with insights into the ways of God, ever ancient and ever new. They teach us more of Christ, they show us more of the meaning of our life in Him, they make us grow in Him, they transform us in Him. Indeed, the liturgy is the great school of Christian living and the great transforming force which reshapes our souls and our characters in the likeness of Christ.³¹

The rejection of the Christian calendar by the American holiness movement and the early Nazarenes was an unfortunate overreaction whereby all ritual and liturgical practices associated with the prayer book tradition were placed in the category of dead and empty ritual. Ironically, the cold and empty religion they believed was present in many mainline denominations was similar to the spiritual decay John Wesley encountered in the Anglicanism of his day. However, Wesley's response was not a wholesale rejection of the Anglican liturgy or the Christian calendar but rather a balanced incorporation of the various means and methods that would help Christians to avoid the dangers of formalism and enthusiasm. At the heart of this balance was an embrace of the *Book of Common Prayer* and a celebration of many of the feasts within the Christian calendar. Wesley's practice is in harmony with the words of Pope Pius XII who wrote, "the liturgical year . . . is not a cold and lifeless representation of the events of the past, or a bare and simple record of a former age; it is rather *Christ Himself who is ever living in His Church*."³²

³¹ Thomas Merton, "Time and Liturgy," *Worship* 31, no. 1 (December 1956): 5.

³² Pope Pius XII as quoted in Thomas Merton, "Time and Liturgy," *Worship* 31, no. 1 (December 1956): 9.

In summary, my contention is that the celebration of the Christian year is not incompatible with the call to live a holy life. In fact, I am appealing for its recovery among Wesleyan groups that have abandoned it due to fears of formalism and suggesting that a proper understanding and celebration of the Christian year can become a powerful, even necessary, means of grace in both corporate and personal spirituality. By setting aside certain days and seasons to worship and remember the redemptive activity of God in our world, we are reminded that all time belongs to God. Our life and our time on this earth are gifts for which we will one day be required to give account. However, as human beings we are prone to become so preoccupied with ourselves, our schedules, and the busyness of life in general that we forget God and what he has done. The celebration of both the weekly and annual cycles can serve as important means of grace in remembering not only what God has done but also in exhorting us to bear in mind our plight apart from his unmerited grace.

As one example of how the observance of the Christian year might be fleshed out in a local church setting, I offer the practice of our local church during holy week as a case in point. Due to space restrictions, a detailed description of the worship *ordo* and rubrics of the liturgy are not possible. Rather, I offer some of the highlights of this event-filled week.

Our Holy week celebration includes the observance of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter morning. Currently, we do not observe the Great Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. Prior to worship on Maundy Thursday, soup and sandwiches are served in order to offer a time of social interaction and fellowship, since there will be no opportunity for fellowship following worship on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. An atmosphere of silence pervades both Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. The services on the days of Holy week are not separate events, but, according to the tradition of the *Easter Triduum*, are a singular act of worship that occurs in three separate time periods.³³ There is no benediction. Therefore, when the congregation is dismissed in silence, at the close of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, it brings only a momentary pause to *Triduum* worship. Since we do not celebrate the Easter vigil, the worship of the *Triduum* culminates on the Day of the Resurrection.

On Maundy Thursday the practice at Grace Chapel is to celebrate the eucharist with a Tenebrae service or a service of shadows. There is no sermon. The people enter into a quiet and dimly lit sanctuary. Prior to the beginning of the Tenebrae service, the eucharist is served by intinction as people come forward to the altar rail.

The Tenebrae portion of the service involves the extinguishing of candles, Scripture readings depicting the last hours of Jesus' life, and hymns retelling the story of Christ's passion. At the conclusion of the hymns and Scripture readings, the last candle is extinguished and the sanctuary is completely darkened. The congregation sits for a few moments in silent darkness. Three times the silence is broken by a sound symbolizing that of the single blow of a hammer against a nail. The lights are then raised slightly and the service ends in silence while the pastor and a few assistants strip the church (i.e. the paraments, candlesticks, and other furnishings are removed) and sheathe the cross in black. The silence, darkness, extinguishing of the candles,

³³ Stookey, *Calendar*, 91.

Scripture, hymns, and stripping of the church powerfully and symbolically portray the death of Christ, and in doing so serve to remind us of our own dire predicament.

The worship on Good Friday is relatively simple. The sanctuary is quiet, dimly lit, and bare from the stripping on Maundy Thursday. The cross remains veiled in black. The service includes hymns, prayers, four Scripture lessons (Psalm, Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel), and a sermon. The music is minimal and the sermon is a brief ten minutes. The focus is upon the “purposeful humiliation of God through which redemption comes.”³⁴ Following the service (lasting approximately forty minutes), the congregation is dismissed in silence.

Worship on the First Sunday of Easter provides a stark contrast to the first two parts of the *Triduum*. The items removed from the stripping of the church on Maundy Thursday have been returned. White paraments witness to the joy of the season. Easter lilies surround the cross at the front of the sanctuary, visually depicting the resurrection. Following the prelude, worship begins with the unveiling of the cross and the proclamation, “Christ is Risen!” The congregation responds, “He is Risen Indeed!” The music celebrates Jesus’ resurrection and victory over death and the grave.

In summary, worship on Easter Sunday is festive and includes the sacraments of baptism³⁵ and the Lord’s supper, remembering and celebrating the response of divine grace to the human predicament. A full celebration of Holy week allows the congregation to journey through the entire gospel story. This complete journey becomes vital in both corporate and personal spirituality, since one cannot fully be thankful and know the joy of the resurrection without first remembering both the consequences of our sin and the gift that God has so graciously bestowed upon us.

Laurence Stookey notes that some may find it abnormal “that Christians should find it useful to observe the seasons, days, and hours in ways that make evident the eternal in our midst.”³⁶ Ironically, few doubt the value of keeping time in our daily lives. In fact, life would become virtually impossible without having a watch enabling us to arrive on time for appointments or a calendar to remember birthdays and important events. We would be lost without marking time.

The same can be said of our life in Christ. Without the marking of God’s activity in our world we can easily forget *who* and *whose* we are. Every Easter season I am reminded of the importance of marking time by celebrating the richness afforded by the Christian calendar. It is not unusual on Easter Sunday for someone new to our church who has taken the pilgrimage with us through Lent and Holy week to pull me aside after church and share with me how profoundly the celebration of Easter has affected them. I would suggest that what those individuals are beginning to experience is the meaning found in the sanctification of time, as God’s saving activity in history becomes a present reality through the routine of their daily lives.

³⁴ Ibid., 96.

³⁵ On those years when there are candidates for baptism.

³⁶ Stookey, *Calendar*, 19.

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