Communion
Pentecost 2009
A COLLECT FOR
CAROLINA GRACE

God of Grace and Glory, be present with us to guide and nurture, to comfort and instruct. May the words contained herein continue to feed us as they themselves have been the product of your sustaining presence in the lives of your faithful people. This we pray in the name of the author and finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect written by
the Reverend Canon J. Michael A. Wright
Rector, Grace Church, Charleston
Welcome to Carolina Grace! Carolina Grace: Gold for the Soul is a journal of writings by Episcopalians from within the Diocese of South Carolina. As the title suggests, it is our belief that we all should share the grace in our lives – not only the grace we extend toward others, but also the grace we ourselves are called to receive. This first issue explores the theme of Communion and Community, and how we live together as a Eucharistic people.

Carolina Grace is a journal in which we are free to explore our shared faith in Christ. It is a journal which is evolving in focus and scope.

Bishop William Alexander Guerry of South Carolina noted in 1914: “While there are great mysteries in Christianity and always will be, there are no mysteries which cannot be investigated.” Carolina Grace might also be considered a journal of sincere and perhaps even at-times humble offerings. “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, I give to you…” Freedom is an essential element in the exploration and increase of faith. As William Porcher DuBose wrote in 1908: “If you say that no one shall make mistakes…then you say that they shall not know the truth for themselves nor live a life that is their own…If there is no freedom of error within the Church, then there is no freedom of truth.”

The prophet Jeremiah exclaimed: “No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” says the Lord; “for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.”

We invite your submissions following the enclosed guidelines. Join us as we explore the wondrous mysteries of the Gospel and grow in our knowledge and love of the same Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Peace in Christ,
Callie
Grace has often been compared to grits for breakfast or rice for dinner. We don’t ask for it, it’s just always there – an offering that is sustaining, comforting, prepared with love, and freely given. It is simple in theory, yet complex in associations. And it draws each of us individually to a community gathered at the Table.

Welcome to Carolina Grace, an independent publication by Episcopalians of the Diocese of South Carolina designed to explore facets of life as a Christian people. It is our hope that this little journal will nourish the soul and cultivate the spirit with its offerings. No two stories of the Christian journey are alike; rather, each of us must work to arrive at the same destination with a slightly altered map. Carolina Grace is designed to give you a glimpse into the journeys of others, to share with you the ways God’s grace has been perceived by fellow companions along the road of our earthly pilgrimage. For while we must each make our own way, God provides for us a system of support and encouragement – a community of faithful – to keep us moving closer and closer to him.

Peace,
Will
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I’ve been heard to proclaim “I hate Easter Sunrise Services!” No, I don’t really. I just dislike the theology they sometimes imply. The Gospel texts are clear that Christ rises in the darkness of night and before the coming dawn. This gospel truth speaks volumes to us about who this risen Lord is for us and in us.

Where Jesus comes alive for me is not only in the light of each day but in the deepest darknesses that life can send our way: the darkness of sin and grief, the darkness of despair and doubt. In truth, this is where the risen Lord meets his witnesses that first Easter Day. It all begins in the dark.

My tune, by its very name, “Vigil,” reveals the liturgical event that I believe models best the victory present in the Easter Gospel. It is at the Great Vigil of Easter where the joy of the Easter Story is wondrously celebrated and proclaimed. In the great procession “the Light of Christ” is repeatedly proclaimed … from where? … the darkness.

As we endeavor to bring new life to our lives of faith and service, and as Carolina Grace is born, we do well to remember where we shall find this risen Lord as we embark on such good things. We shall find him where we least expect to find him. That is, in the darkness that we know all too well and in those “other” places that Christ dares to dwell within, places we have often been afraid He might never enter. This is the true miracle of Easter, that Christ is present wherever and whenever we dare to invite him in. Thanks be to God, no more hiding in the darkness from the one who ever seeks His beloved children.

Christ rises in the darkness
Amidst a darkened night.
On Easter morn that darkness,
A home for risen life.

Christ rises in the darkness
As blinded Mary weeps.
Apostles run to seek him,
Awake from darkest sleep.

Christ rises in the darkness,
Of constant human strife;
Enlighten, Lord, the evening
Of every cross-filled life.

Christ rises in the darkness,
Where doubt and hurts befriend.
Our dimming faith fast fading,
He calls our name again.

So on this Easter morning
Recall the tomb He burst.
At day before light’s dawning,
Christ rose in darkness first.

J.M.A. Wright © 2004

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark…. (John 20:1)

Michael Wright
Grace Church
Charleston
I’ve been a chalice bearer in my church for over twenty years. Roughly half the Sundays I’ll be on the far side of the Communion rail, and in appreciation of that fact, I make sure that I have on a clean shirt and scrub my well bitten finger nails with a nail brush.

So it came as a shock the other day, when a communicant remarked (with a laugh) that he always got an inward smile when I stepped in front of him with the cup and he was looking down at my “scuffed shoes.” Scuffed shoes? I’d been polishing them all these years. Or at least giving them a swat with the rag. He continued: “Your brother-law’s shoes always have that Citadel spit shine.” My brother-in-law is the other most regular cup bearer. He graduated from the Citadel and works there now. Then I was told: “You can almost see your face in the tips of his shoes.”

Now, there’s a moral here. (Humor me.) All these years of delivering the cup to people’s lips or lowering it for the communion wafer to be dipped in, has taught me more than a few things about dealing with my fellow Christians. Watch out for women with big hats and men with mustaches. Where are their lips in relation to the rim of the cup? Where is the level of wine in relation to the rim? Once a year or so, I’ll misjudge and spill a drop or two down someone’s front. The trick is to coax the hat wearer or mustached one to reach out with their own hand and guide the cup up. I’ve learned that.

And I’ve learned that communicants do often bring their pains and sorrows to the rail and judging by the expressions on their faces do go from the church refreshed. God sees the scuffiness of even our best effort and laughs it off – i.e., forgives our sins. And the traditions of the church are in place for a very good reason. The acting out of a communal meal is fundamental to our corporate notions of love. And while I say “the pain and sorrow” of the communicants, just as likely we are bringing anger and fear to that rail. In the old Rite One we began with an invitation to confess that contained the instructions “Ye who do earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways; draw near…” Though it’s an instruction to kneel for confes-
sion, I’ve always carried the line over to the complete act of approaching the altar rail. As I leave the pew, I try to leave behind that unchristian fear, anger, envy, greed, and all the rest. Leave them in the pew and go to be refreshed. And I believe I do. But if I can leave all that self imposed misery in the pew, why can’t I just leave it at the door of the church when I enter in the morning? Or why can’t I just leave it out in the car that I’ve parked in front of the church? For that matter, why can’t I leave it at the door of my own home? Why not just leave it behind when I get out of bed that morning? Or when I go to bed the night before? Why not imagine every action for the week that approaches communion as a step towards that Sunday morning rail? Why not trust in God and draw near with every breath? Good question.

William Baldwin

PURPOSE

What is our purpose here on earth? Believe it or not we share the same purpose, to influence others. Let us not lose connection with our brothers and sisters around us. As children of God, we all make up the body of Christ.

We must take care of this spiritual body as we would our own physical bodies. If part of your body is not well, you take medicine to heal it. When the injured part is left unattended for too long, the injured limb or organ will negatively affect the health of the remainder of the body. In some cases you may be able to take one pill and be cured of your ailment. In other cases, long term treatment may be in order before you can be completely healed. We must step outside of our comfort zone and offer medicine to the ailing parts of our body of Christ. I challenge you to look past the plastered smile of the woman who listlessly shakes your hand as you pass the peace. Follow your instinct; as instinct is the whispering voice of God. Something tells you that you should offer her a helping hand to the car; do it. She will probably thank you for the offer and decline your assistance; but as she walks away her heart will sing a song of joyfulness. Unbeknownst to you, she chokes back tears as she realizes that there is someone who cares enough to give five minutes of their time to help her. This thirty second interaction has renewed her dying spirit. The medicine you gave her saved the entire body.

Aprill Dawson
St. Andrew’s Mission
Charleston
Holy Cross Faith Memorial
Pawley’s Island
Together, Side by Side
The Community of Christ

South Carolinians are a delightfully complex lot. I think that might be one reason we enjoy joggling boards. Legend has it that during the nineteenth century a Mrs. Huger in Stateburg suffered from rheumatism. She wrote to her relatives in Scotland, who sent her a model for a joggling board. The folks in Stateburg are still making joggling boards to this day.

Complexity craves simplicity. A joggling board offers simple pleasures – even a little bit of simple exercise. A joggling board is also a device which encourages community. It is rare to see someone joggling on a joggling board alone. Yet a joggling board is anything but simplistic. When we begin at the poles – at the edges – and we begin to joggle together, we begin to move toward, and not away from one another. Joggling together on the same board brings us side-by-side. And the more people who joggle, the more profound is the bounce.

Pure joys, simple pleasures, a wonderful image of the community of Christ. We begin perhaps at very different places; yet we end up together. No talking necessary, just joy and laughter. Relationships begun, relationships renewed, relationships restored.

Amazing things can happen when we as the Body of Christ have the courage to keep it simple.

Meet me at the joggling board!

Calhoun Perkins
Grace Church

Anthony Toomer Porter on Communion

A heroic figure in the history of the Diocese of South Carolina, Anthony Toomer Porter’s life began in 1828 at the family plantation on the banks of the Sampit River in Georgetown. Porter’s father died while he was still an infant, and his mother followed less than 20 years later. Porter, as a young man, was led by the Spirit to give up the Lowcountry plantation life that he inherited and to prepare for the priesthood. After settling in Charleston he, as a layman, first began working with a congregation that was meeting at the United States Arsenal on Ashley Avenue that soon, under his leadership, became the Church of the Holy Communion. He was ordained in 1854 and began a ministry in the parish that was and is now at the corner
of Ashley Avenue and Cannon Street. He extended his ministry to the development of Christian centered education that flourishes even today in the Diocese.

Porter continuously ministered to all people in the community during the Civil War and acted as a chaplain to Confederate soldiers throughout the War. But it was his recognition of the need for the education of children in the wake and ravages of the War that led to his greatest contributions to us. His vision and leadership brought about the founding of The Holy Communion Church Institute that soon became Porter Military Academy and later Porter Gaud School. It began in 1867 with an enrollment of 550 students. At the same time Porter organized a school for African American children, the children of former slaves, that began classes with 1800 students. It later became the Jenkins Orphanage, which has been an important institution in the community since its founding.

Porter, in addition to the enduring contributions he made to all generations of Christians in this community as an educator, has given to us a deep understanding of the accessible and comfortable power of the Holy Eucharist. He teaches us that the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ should never be refused by anyone for any reason. But, he says, with God’s forgiveness that is always available, we should receive the sacrament and be assured of the grace and peace that is always bestowed by the emblems of the Savior’s love every time we go the altar. Porter’s profound understanding of the benefits bestowed by the sacrament came from his own experience when, at age nineteen, he refused to go to the altar because of his own wrongdoing. The incident, given to us in his autobiography, led him to a deep understanding of the true nature and purpose of the central act of worship in all of Christendom, the sacrificial feast of the body and blood of Jesus. His own experience produced a strong conviction that one should never decline forgiveness and turn away from the altar for any reason.

Porter did not, in the remaining 55 years of his life, ever again turn away from the altar without receiving the body and blood of Christ. His teaching, over 150 years ago, is confirmed for us now in the words of the Book of Common Prayer when we hear the priest say that the Communion we are about to receive promises solace, strength, pardon, and renewal. We pray in our time that we will be led on step by step walking to the altar and returning to the world strengthened and renewed.

Thomas Tisdale
Grace Church
Charleston

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2Book of Common Prayer, 1979, 372: “Deliver us from coming to this table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal.”
The rosemary bush that I grasp in my hand and pull on as I walk by...
(Then I smell its fragrance on my palm, close my eyes, and feel rejuvenated.)

The fresh salad with all sorts of greens and myriad colors that I crunch on...
(Then I feel nourished.)

The Gerber daisies that I place in the vase...
(Then I look at them each time I walk by and think, “That table looks so much better and this room is so much brighter and... I wonder how they grow so perfectly round?!”)

The vibrant dog who greets me at the door with unconditional love and a tail that wags like a propeller...
(Then I find myself smiling and slipping away from the worries of the day.)

The music that makes me tap my feet and hum along for a moment...
(Then I realize that I feel more alive.)

The moment, eye to eye, with a patient when an “aha” moment occurs...
(Then I am reminded that life is exciting and serendipitous.)

The warm tea with lemon on a breezy porch...
(Then I relax for a moment.)

The mockingbird at 4:30 a.m. who sings so many cheerful songs without sheet music...
(Then I think, how amazing that he can do that! – even though he woke me up.)

The voices of my friends and family...
(Then I remember that I am blessed.)

The baby who looks at me and laughs...
(Then some sort of joy fills my heart.)

The closest medicine to God. The medicine of God. Nature in all her forms.

As we commune with Nature and care for her and appreciate her, we are enjoying and honoring the gifts we have been given. We are honoring God. We are enriching ourselves. We are blessed to have the wonders and nourishment around us and the senses to take them in. The healing power of the seen and unseen. As we care for our Earth, she cares for us. As we simply live, our senses catch us off guard and bring us back to a healing place.

Catherine Jones, ND, MS, Lac
St. Philip’s
Charleston
COMMUNION OF LIGHT

In the darkness of Easter Eve
When Mary believed her son was dead
And all who saw him on the tree
Shared her hopeless heart of lead,
Brilliance blazed the tomb’s deep night
And He woke wrapped in a swath of white.

That surge of sun confined in a cave
Charges still all that His father has made –
Yet I inhabit my span of time
Heart dwelling on moments long left behind
My eyes cast on the ground ahead:
God’s text – context – I have not read.

When soul recognizes and heart’s cave opens,
World’s wounds we wanted to pray away
Become the bonds that make Christ our Brother,
Accepting as He, on His tortuous way
the terror of truly being alone.
Silent in vigil on Easter night
Each worshiper pictures the spirit’s flight
– but the flash of sun in the dark tomb’s keep
we have no worldly experience to see.
To believe is all we’re empowered to do:
To accept – and admit – the light of a tomb.

Erica Lesesne
The Cathedral of St. Luke and St. Paul
Charleston
Much has been said about real presence in the communion. I heard it best described in a testimonial on NPR. A nonbeliever attended an Episcopal church and was transformed at the Eucharist. She was captured by the real presence of Christ and led to deliver food from that altar on a regular basis to those in need. I like to think of Christ looking down from the altar with jubilation, if you like, flinging open the door to the tabernacle with thumbs up. I think the real presence is something we take from the rail as we part from our immediate faith community and head out. The real presence will be seen in our lives.

We bow to the altar, or genuflect when the host has been consecrated or the sanctuary candle is lit, reverently acknowledging Christ’s home. We bow our heads at the mention of his name. These are outward signs of his place in our life, of his reality. These mean very little to Christ but keep us focused on the commandment to love God and that commandment which is like unto it, and perhaps harder, to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Ecce Agnus Dei!

Charles C. Geer
The Church of the Holy Communion
Charleston

This week I shared in the communion of the saints at three funerals. The gatherings were poignant, but not sad. All whose lives were being remembered and celebrated were elderly and their deaths (as I see it) were their final blessings from God. The people gathered, heard the familiar words promising “rest from their labors” and we felt comfort in those words. One day was full of April’s sunshine and another April’s wind and rain. Shoulder to shoulder friends and family stood at the gravesides, all in communion and knowing the “fellowship of thy saints.”

But this year there have been other deaths, tragedies with death coming by accidents and illness to those much too young to die. There is no understanding and I wonder where is the communion with God in times like these? We share the immense pain, sadness and questions. There are no words that can comfort, so we just show up without words. Cheeks wet with tears touch other cheeks wet with tears as we embrace in our efforts to console and be consoled. There it is. We are in communion. At the very core of our human nature is love. The pain and loss is still there, but God-given love brings us together. And always there are our prayers for one another.

Ann Smith
Grace Church, Charleston
NOT JUST OUR OWN

They are each carrying
their own grief:
some in a beat-up galvanized bucket;
some in a tin pail with tiny fish
and clams and starfish
painted on it
in primary colors;
some in a worn basket that leaks,
leaving a trail of dark cinders and dust;
some in an old black pocketbook;
some in a glass chalice, or silver
made translucent by what may be
light; some in a cracked jelly jar
their mother threw out years ago.
But still we are all carrying
our own grief; but, still
if we are blessed
or lucky,
not just our own.

GRACE

You’re sitting there alone
on the bank of a rocky creek and God comes
and sits beside you,
takes off his shoes, dusty sandals really,
and sticks his feet in the cold, clear water.
Tiny fish swim around our toes,
silver and completely wild.
Somewhere nearby kids are lying in the sun
on the stone ledge of a waterfall,
eating watermelon, their hands sticky.
Suddenly butterflies in a cloud
surround them and land lightly
on their bright faces.

Capers Limehouse
Grace Church
Charleston
I love being an Episcopalian in my tiny mission church in Denmark, South Carolina. You have to be a dyed-in-the-wool Episcopalian to be a member, because it would be much easier to be anything else.

There are so few of us that we work very hard to make our church function. Just about everyone has served on the Mission Committee, so we all know what it takes to run things. We know each other so well that we know who will bring what to a covered dish dinner – our food is wonderful, and we can always feed an army. We know the names of everyone’s children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren. Most of us help with the altar and the flowers – even the men. We all work hard in the community because we want everyone to hear about our church. We are always inviting people in the community to come to our church because we are so proud of it. We try to go to all the diocesan functions to remind other Episcopalians that we do exist. Church as we know it is so special that I wish everyone could experience it. We have a wonderful new vicar who really has energized us. We may be one of the smallest churches in the diocese, but if you listen closely, you can hear our heart beating. We know the Lord does!

*Emily Guess*
Christ Church
Denmark
Recently, I spent a Saturday gathered with fellow church members for a day long retreat. It was the final activity to a series of gatherings in which we met for sharing and learning about our faith. We passed six hours listening to each other speak on prepared topics, sharing our opinions, our stories, our experiences. It was the kind of thing I greatly enjoy. And it was not unlike the kind of thing I have done in other communities: in the classrooms of high school and college, with clubs I involved in during college, in tennis team meetings after practice, during meal times with friends and/or family. During one moment, I became aware of the cars swiftly traveling by on the highway outside. I thought of how each of us had made a deliberate choice in being there that day. And how a person driving by was on their way to whatever their Saturday morning held in store for them, or even that they were there at all.

Our retreat ended with a simple Eucharist. After the bread and wine was consecrated, we stood and prepared to receive the sacrament. Again, I was drawn out of the present and into a moment of self-awareness. I thought, how strange we are! We have gathered here for hours today, talking, laughing, eating – none of these would seem so strange. But now we are doing this ritual. Now we are eating the body and drinking the blood of the being we recognize as God. And we are solemnly partaking in this sacrament with respect for the weight of its significance. If this were not so familiar to me, would it not seem bizarre? And as I think of it now, I ponder on this mystery: the mystery of our communion could have happened only in community. We did not consecrate the bread and wine individually. The Eucharist was not performed as a solo act. We shared it together. As I see it there is magic happening here. There is magic in the miracle of the sacrament. There is magic in the gathering of the people together. Something larger than just us was taking place. Indeed, something larger than us, God, was a presence in our midst.

Anna Boatwright
Grace Church
Charleston
UNITY

How does one describe the feeling of unity with Christ and our fellow human beings at the time of communion? The feeling of fellowship is strong as we kneel together and partake of the sacraments. Together we humble ourselves before the Lord, and together we are given the body and blood.

When can we feel more in community with others than when we share a meal with them? This sharing of the common bread and wine both draws us closer as a body and strengthens our bond with Christ. As we humble ourselves individually before Christ, we also join with others who are humbling themselves. The prayer says, “We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table. But thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy.” Even as we humble ourselves, Christ already shows mercy to us, both individually and as a community.

How can we respond to such generosity? As a community, we thank him for his favor and goodness towards us. We thank him that we are members incorporate in the mystical body of Christ. Again we humble ourselves and ask him to prepare the way in the paths he would have us walk. This prayer is a corporate one, using “we” and “us,” rather than “I” and “me.” God calls us to be a unified body, and Holy Communion is the manner in which he helps us achieve this end. Let us see Communion not only as an individual act of humility, but also a corporate act of fellowship.

Barbie Culbertson
Prince George Winyah
Georgetown
RECEIVING CHRIST AND COMMUNION

“He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood dwells continually in me, and I in like manner dwell in him”

(John 6:56, Amplified Bible)

Some thought Jesus was speaking of cannibalism, but he was speaking of the spiritual man. Just as the physical man receives life from the foods he eats, so the spiritual man receives life as he partakes of Jesus or the “Bread of Life.” Just as the life of a root is found in the soil, or a branch on the vine, or a fish in the sea, so the believers’ true life is found to be in union with Christ.

Christ himself instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We take Jesus’ very body and blood into ourselves so that Jesus is the center of our lives. This is symbolized through bread and wine. This is one of the reasons we consider Holy Communion to be a sacrament.

Jesus is in communion with us, being one with us. We have Holy Communion in which Jesus makes us one with one another. We become like Jesus.

Communion is one of God’s ways to nourish us in order to have strength for the journey—the journey of life and faith and discipleship. If we are willing to expand our understanding of communion and lift up all things that communion has to offer, then Holy Communion becomes a bigger and more central part of our everyday lives.

John 1:4; 10:10; 6:47-59

Rhett Smith
St. Michael’s
Charleston
O gracious and heavenly Father,
You have bestowed upon us many earthly blessings and many human chal-
lenges to show us the way.
Perhaps no blessings may compare to the sense of communion available to us
with our brothers and sisters, but also with you through the Holy Sacrament.
How blessed we are to catch a glimpse of the grace offered in everlasting life
by the gifts of our human existence.
Is there a greater gift to offer us than the communion between us as we emu-
late your son?
Yet, is it humanly possible to love my neighbor as Christ loves us?
Father, I feel so inadequate, so humiliated, so unworthy.
How can I expect, much less comprehend, the gracious gift of communion in
your heavenly kingdom, when I cannot even live in community with my
worldly neighbor?
I pass by a needy traveler…I don’t stop.
A neighbor needs help…I’m too busy.
My friend is hurting…I don’t have time.
My son has a ball game…I “have” to work.
The poor have no food and I am a glutton; no heat and I sit in my warm
home.
Many feel unloved…and I ignore them.
If Communion is the essence of a community experience within the kingdom,
with each other, and with God, then I feel like an outsider.
Forgive me for squandering my daily chances to build community and share
the gift of your grace.
I am just another sinner come to your table.
Help me, dear Lord, to learn to build community within the world in which I live.
Help me to be aware of the needs of others, so I may live in communion with
your children.
But, most of all, help me to be mindful of the love within my heart, planted by
you, to share with your mortal soldiers and all non-believers.
Your grace offers me the gift of everlasting communion with you.
I may never be worthy, but by building community in the knowledge of your
grace, may I at least increase the sinners at your table.
In his name,
Amen.

Rick Bruce
All Saints Episcopal Church
Pawleys Island
How we commune with one another outside church has undergone some dramatic, even unsettling, changes during the past few decades. Supper clubs, bowling leagues and civic organizations once were so much more prevalent and ranked among the most popular ways that people kept in touch outside work or church. Today, many of these types of traditional gatherings are fading or struggling to remain relevant. Instead, we are faced with unfamiliar new social networks like Facebook.com, play dates, and tweeting. New technology has given us exciting new ways to keep in touch, but something has been lost at the same time. An email, while so much easier, quicker and less expensive to send, will never carry the same impact as a handwritten note. This secular or cultural change only underscores the value of the way we commune within church. As we can get insecure about our ever-changing social networks and modern life, there is something timeless about Holy Communion. It keeps us grounded in what does not change because, at the end of the day, it remains what it has always been: a community of believers, bread and wine and the presence of Jesus Christ. While buildings, clothes, chalices and other cultural artifacts come and go, there is a reassuring timelessness in the Lord’s Supper that links us to our past as it prepares us for our lives to come.

Robert Behre
Grace Church
Charleston
When I left my home diocese for seminary, I left under a cloud. I was rejected for seminary education in that diocese. In effect, they rejected my call to the priesthood. However, because God is good and will even use painful and difficult situations for the good, I am, by the grace of God, a priest in Christ’s one holy, catholic and apostolic Church. But, my first year in seminary was difficult, without a diocese and seemingly without hope. I blamed most of that on the bishop of my home diocese. He could have countermanded the request of the commission on ministry. He could have gotten more involved in the discernment process in that diocese that I felt was corrupt and misguided. But, he did not get involved. I held a grudge beyond all passing... I might even venture to say that, in the very depths of my heart, I harbored intense dislike for the man.

About six months into my tenure at seminary, we had a special guest for worship at the seminary. I was completely unaware that my former bishop was going to be our celebrant at mid-week Eucharist. If I had known, I would not have even shown up for the service. But, here I was, smack dab in the middle of the pew, worshipping with this man I loathed. I sat though the whole service, wanting to leave but my feet were being held firmly in place by some supernatural, unwanted force. I struggled through the whole service, praying for God’s intervention in my emotions. And, as providence would have it, I was sitting on the side of the church where the good bishop was distributing the bread. I was either going to have to receive the bread, the consecrated Body of Christ, from this man, or refuse it. I struggled for some time, but finally came forward. And when I looked up to receive this bread I looked into the bishop’s eyes. It is hard for me to describe what happened at that moment. There was recognition in his face – he definitely knew who I was – but there was also deep, deep compassion. His eyes were deep and watered with compassion. In that moment the bishop acted as the high priest in our passage from Hebrews, “For every high priest taken from among mortals is appointed for things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.” [Heb 5:1-2]

I received the wafer from the bishop but I also received much more. At that very moment there was forgiveness, both on my part and on his – I felt it and I know he did too. There was reconciliation. And a great deal of healing began in that moment.
gesture, that obedience that both of showed – the bishop for being willing to give bread, and mine for being willing to receive it from him; both being willing to meet at the Lord’s table.

Afterwards the bishop and I talked of the diocese, my rector, my home and about the ordination process and its shortcomings, not as a means to cover all that had happened, but as a means of explanation and openness. Forgiveness. But, it was only possible because both the bishop and I had been willing to enter into a new covenant, a new way of living, a way pregnant with forgiveness. God’s way.

Each Sunday we have that opportunity...to enter into a new way of living. To heed the call to the altar, the Lord’s altar, the Lord’s table. To begin afresh a life of forgiveness and reconciliation with one another and with Christ Himself.

Greg Snyder  
St. John’s  
John’s Island

PARTAKERS

I am grateful to God for having given me Christian parents and grandparents who showed and taught me about God’s love. As a believer when I take communion I receive his forgiveness of my sins and believe his Spirit is alive in me enabling me to walk in his way. This has been very gradual for me. Since I was a child I have known the Lord Jesus was real. But I have been a terribly shy and selfish person. He has shown me so much love, in so many ways, through his people that finally, I do want to return his love.

Some of the many ways he has shown his love is by giving me such a wonderful husband and children who love the Lord Jesus. My church family at St. John’s has helped me all along. Through bible study and prayer time with friends, I’ve turned away from being so shy to enjoying their company and purpose for living—to show Christ’s love and tell of his salvation. As we draw nearer to him, he draws us out into helping others by caring for, serving, and praying for them.

While I’m unsure about my carrying out responsibilities, I do know that if I trust in him, he will make a way. We can be partakers of his divine nature because we are partakers of his Holy Communion. Peter writes of this in 2 Peter 1:3.

We aren’t to be “holier than thou.” We are here to show that only Jesus can make us whole. He promises so. Thanks be to God.

Emily Leland  
St. John’s  
John’s Island
The Communion of Togetherness

The congregation sits quietly in the pews, each immersed in personal prayers... a young mother pats her fretful baby. Ushers walk up the aisle, move forward, bow, and each returns to stand by the first row of pews.

Silently. Each person stands and moves to the aisle... one pauses momentarily to bow as she leaves the pew. At the rail, each kneels, hands outstretched in supplication. As the worship continues, there is one moment when all is quiet. Together, each communicant is silent in his own prayers. Slowly, the group rises. Although togetherness has become a pace apart, it remains a world combined as each follows another to pray and meditate in her own little world, which has become her universe and reaches out to all people led by God the Father Almighty.

Elizabeth LaRoche Bailey Oliveros  
St. John’s  
John’s Island

Meaning

To me, communion is the most meaningful time during our services. For the most part, our Episcopalian services are fairly structured. Communion, on the other hand, is a time where we are free to contemplate.

I like to take this time to reflect on what is going on in my life and how lucky I am to have a God who loves me so much that he sent his only son to die, so that I could be forgiven of my sins. This is why being a Christian is so incredible! There is nowhere on this earth that you can find a love like this. It is beyond our comprehension. God has accepted that we cannot be perfect and that at times we will sin. But through the death of Jesus Christ, we can be forgiven. So next time you are sitting in your pew after taking communion, think about the true meaning of the bread and wine that you just received... That is the love of Jesus Christ and the eternal life that we gained from the loss of his.

Jeb Benson  
Prince George Winyah  
Georgetown
BISHOP GUERRY’S VISION
ON THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY

William Alexander Guerry, born in 1861, received his early education at Dr. Porter’s Holy Communion Church Institute, later the Porter Military Academy and Porter Gaud School, and served as the bishop of the Diocese of South Carolina from 1907 to the time of his death in 1928. He had an illustrious career as a parish priest and bishop, and as Chaplin and Professor of Homiletics and Pastoral Theology at the University of the South where he had studied as an undergraduate and as a student of theology. It was during his time as a student of theology at Sewanee that, by his own reckoning, the pattern of his life and thought was molded by the great theologian, his teacher, William Porcher DuBose. Bishop Guerry says of Dr. DuBose “…he taught me to love the truth and to seek it with my whole heart. To him I owe the philosophical and intellectual foundations of my religious belief…”

The value and discernment of truth became a hallmark of Bishop Guerry’s ministry. A constant theme in his writing and teaching has been the precept that truth is not something finished and mechanical, but rather something organic and living like a tree on a river bank. And truth is something that we, as Christians, must fight for by struggling and by risking suffering to understand and spread to others as a central part of our faith. Bishop Guerry also recognized, as his teacher DuBose believed, that no one on earth has yet been given the whole truth but, by God’s grace, we all possess a part of it. It is within this framework of truth that he formed his vision of what a Christian community should be like.

In 1909, the second year of his episcopate, Bishop Guerry, addressing a meeting of provincial church leaders in Birmingham Alabama, explained his belief about the breadth and depth of the Christian community, “We should strive for unity, not uniformity. Uniformity is mechanical, barren, unfruitful, and unprofitable. Unity is organic, living, and capable of endless growth. If we are

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to be truly Catholic, as Christ himself is catholic, then we must have a Church broad enough to embrace within its communion... every living human soul.”

Bishop Guerry’s theology of the broadness of the Church led him to propose, in 1914, the election of a black Suffragan Bishop for South Carolina to be responsible for the ministry to black Episcopalians, and to insure that all people, regardless of race, were part of the community of Christ in the Diocese. The alternative, which unfortunately prevailed, was to separate the African American community into a “Missionary District for Negroes,” an arrangement that continued until the after the mid-20th century when that segment of the Christian community was finally given an equal place in the community. In those years, when black Episcopalians were separated from the Diocese, a priest designated Archdeacon for Colored Work was appointed to minister to those who were separated from the community. It took the passage of more than 50 years from the time of Bishop Guerry’s attempt to eradicate racial injustice for the community to finally be formed as one body.

The bishop’s life on earth ended in 1928 when on June 4th he was assassinated in his office at Saint Philip’s Church by a priest who had attacked the bishop’s position on advancing racial equality in South Carolina, and especially on his proposal to install a black Suffragan Bishop in the Diocese. The priest who shot the bishop had written that the bishop, given his way, would root out the principle of white supremacy in the south. So, overtaken by hatred, and perhaps other mental problems, he fired the shot that killed the bishop and then turned the gun on himself, taking his own life. Before he died four days later in Roper Hospital, the bishop said of his assailant, “Forgive him, Father, he knew not what he did.”

Bishop Guerry, a hero and martyr among us, is a beacon now for Christian unity and for the expansion of the community of all Christians.

Thomas Tisdale
Grace Church,

2Ibid, 145
In the most solemn act of consecrating the elements the gracious words of Christ are repeated: “This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.” Here both the symbolism of the wine and the act of the consecrating priest are joined with the words of Christ himself, in such a way as to express in the most eloquent and convincing manner possible the glorious truth to be conveyed, namely, that Christ’s blood was shed for our sins-- that he instituted this Sacrament as a perpetual memorial of that fact, and finally that he is spiritually and objectively present in the Eucharist to convey to the believer not only the assurance of forgiveness, but Himself, in all the fullness and power of his risen and glorified humanity. Christ desires to have us understand and grasp the unspeakably and important truth that he is the soul’s inner sustenance and principle of life. In fact, words quite fail us even in our attempt to interpret the fullness of the Gospel of Christ as summed up by the Holy Eucharist…

But, now, if sacraments are adapted, as we have been shown, to meet the spiritual needs of the individual soul in its efforts to grasp unseen and eternal realities, no less are they suited to express the social side which unites Christians to each other and to Christ…It is not enough to show that sacraments satisfy an inward craving and need of the individual soul…A sacrament is a social tie, as well as a spiritual gift. The two are inseparable…It is therefore clearly an abuse of a Sacrament to make it the instrument of an esoteric or individualistic pietism. When the Holy Eucharist was first instituted, its social aspect was unmistakable…

The unity of Christ’s family, the Church, and of the individual soul with Christ and through his Church, is the central doctrine of the New Testament…Christianity first made itself known to the world not as a new cult, or a new philosophy, nor even as a new body of doctrines, but as a new fellowship. What impressed the world outside was not so much the strangeness and startling originality of its beliefs, as the evidence that it gave to the world of holding [people] together in a single communion and fellowship. The most amazing evidence of its divine origin and truth was its power to break down race and class prejudice…

In other words, and I cannot impress this truth too strongly upon you, God seeks to save [people] not as separated individuals, but as members of a family, a society, a Kingdom of God…
“I believe in the communion of saints.” This line in the Apostles’ Creed is probably one of the least pondered and most neglected tenets of our faith, yet we give it a friendly nod every Sunday when we pray for the faithful departed. Perhaps the reason we pay it so little attention nowadays is that pondering the communion of saints would compel us to recognize our own mortality and to spend time with our dead in a way that the world would call morbid and unhealthy.

Put bluntly, belief in the communion of saints means that I can ask my grandparents (all of whom died some years ago) for their prayers and their help just as I can ask for those of my parents and my brother. When my much-loved grandmother died a few years ago, I found it quite impossible to stop praying for her; she had been in my prayers every night since I was a small child, and, while the love we feel for our dead does change, it does not go away. Of course, it also means that we are obliged to pray for those faithful departed whom we didn’t like much in this life!

If we really believe in the communion of saints, we allow ourselves to be formed by their lives in such a way that their influence extends far beyond their own time and place. Think of books which have shaped your spiritual growth; plays you have seen whose authors are long gone; a loved one’s recipe for Brunswick stew, which you make faithfully for your family; silver you polish and flowers you tend, because you loved the one to whom they belonged; graves you visit. And then think of how, someday, you will be one of “those whom we love but see no more,” for your grandchildren and their grandchildren and their grandparents. It will be our turn to be the ones whose lives are remembered for good or ill. The link between them and us, between us and our own forbears in the faith, is the love of Christ, working in all of us “better things than we can desire or pray for.”

George Eliot summed up the communion of saints in the last paragraph of Middlemarch:

“. . . for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to those who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.”

Emily Guerry
Grace Church
Charleston
For me the word “community” has the sense of a noun and the word “communion” the sense and force of a verb. Obviously they are from the same root, meaning “together in unity or oneness,” as in *ecce quam bonum.*

Community is the state we are in by virtue of our re-birth in Christ in baptism, our togetherness in the body of Christ that is the company of the redeemed, the community of the baptized, the fellowship in Christ. In that community we share a common faith and practice, everything which matters eternally and pertains to our life in the spirit of God, the company of the redeemed. We are, by virtue of that re-birth in baptism, brothers and sisters together a union that is deeper than ties of blood and that can never be broken.

Communion represents to me the action we engage in together as a result of our life together in community. This communion is essential and focused in the Holy Eucharist in which Jesus our Lord himself dwells bodily with us under the species of bread and wine. When we eat that bread and drink that wine, we each share in his body and blood, ingesting his very life into ourselves and thereby becoming ever more and more deeply one with him and with each other. That communion in sacrament, we then live out in mission, taking Christ into the world and making him known as Savior and King. It is through this ministry of evangelism that we bring Christ to others, and we also minister God's healing and nourishment to the world by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, bringing peace and reconciliation, and respecting the dignity of every human being. We are also stewards of the creation and, as Christ's body, care for all that God has made.

Community and communion very much define who we are as Christians and what we are called to do as a result of being in Christ.

* A. Charles Cannon
  formerly Curate of Grace Church
  Charleston

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COMMUNITY AND COMMUNION
A Tale of Two Trees

Once upon a time a very, very long time ago, there was a beautiful garden. In fact it was the very first garden, and it was perfect. There were many kinds of trees and plants, and they were all good.

But two of the trees were very special.

The first and larger tree was called the Tree of Life. It was planted by a beautiful, flowing river, and its branches were many and strong. The Tree of Life gave shelter to all manner of creatures.

Over in the center of the garden, just across the river, was another beautiful tree. In the beginning, this tree was much smaller, but it, too, was beautiful and quite special. It was the Tree of Knowledge, and it produced two kinds of fruit on the same tree. It was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

There were a few workers in the garden, and they were taught to care for the garden. The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge needed help from each other to grow and thrive. If Life were to be better, it needed Knowledge to help it grow; if Knowledge were to increase, there must be Life. But the Gardener explained: “You may eat the fruit of any of the shrubs and trees in the garden except the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. You must never taste of its fruit; you must only carry the fruit across the river to fertilize the Tree of Life.”

So, the workers built a bridge across the river and began taking Knowledge to the Tree of Life and bringing the fruits of Life back across the river to feed the Tree of Knowledge. Back and forth the workers went for many years.

The Tree of Life grew and grew, spreading its roots and branches far and wide, reaching almost across the river toward the center of the garden. And over in the center of the garden, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was also growing, producing more and more knowledge. The more Knowledge, the bigger and better Life; the more Life, the more Knowledge. The garden was perfect. The Gardener was pleased.

But wait. Some of the workers started eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Both kinds – the Good and the Evil.

Oh, my! They were not supposed to do that.

But, as they ate, many of the smarter workers learned to tell the difference between the fruitful (Good) knowledge and the seedy (Evil) knowledge.

It is now many years later, in this same old garden, and nearly all of the workers have tasted of the Knowledge tree. But the Knowledge tree is now huge. There is an amazing amount of Knowledge that has been added to the Tree of Life. There is the knowledge to cure and prevent deadly diseases, the knowledge to turn garbage into fuel, the knowledge...
to send information quietly across a room, across town, or to the moon with the click of a button!

But, alas, much evil Knowledge has been eaten, and some of the good Knowledge has been used for evil purposes. Some of the workers even began plucking the unopened blossoms from the Tree of Life before they could ripen and become more Life.

One day, some of the workers were eating many of the Evil fruits near the Tree of Life, dropping their seeds onto the fertile ground. Before long, the seeds began to sprout and grow into a thorny vine that began to prick the hands of the younger workers, and they came under the influence of Evil Knowledge. Many times, as the children grew and carried Good Knowledge to the Tree of Life, they were able to overcome their affliction. But the sad fact is that most of the children of the Evil-Knowledge-eaters also grew up to desire evil, and their children and their children's children became entangled in the Evil vine.

As years passed, the thorny Evil vine grew and grew and began to strangle some of the branches of the Tree of Life. These branches began to lose their leaves, turn brown, and become brittle. Parts of the Tree of Life no longer looked beautiful. The Garden was no longer perfect. The Gardener was quite sad.

But one day, the Gardener worked carefully, tending one of Life's low-hanging branches near the river. There on this one branch were seven perfectly formed white flower buds. The Gardener watched and smiled as the workers tried to smell them or tried to pry open these new buds for a look inside. But for a long time the buds stayed tightly closed, never letting anyone know their secret beauty. Their branch just swayed in the gentle breeze, and the buds grew full and round.

Then one day, the gentle breeze became a strong wind and began to blow all around the Tree of Life. The swirling wind was so strong it began to untangle the thorny Evil vine. As the vine unwrapped itself from the tree, seven of its thorns pricked the seven white flower buds. The buds very, very, very slowly began to open.

As the wind blew harder and harder, the dead, brittle, evil-infested branches were torn from the tree, along with the Evil vine. They were blown across the river and landed in an ugly pile beneath the Tree of Life. Many workers were gathered around the tree.

The thunder rumbled, and the workers who had tasted Good Knowledge and had given it to their children quickly ran across the bridge for Life's shelter from the storm.

Then lightning struck, and the bridge was destroyed.

The obedient workers who had never tasted Good or Evil, became frightened and called to the workers on the other side of the river. As lightening struck for the second time, a strong, living branch was broken from the Tree of Life, fell into the churning water, and carried the innocent workers safely across.

Many workers were still tasting
the Evil fruits and stayed near the Tree of Knowledge. As lightning struck for the third time, these workers, the Evil-vine, and all of Life's dead branches were consumed in a terrible fire. The fire was so hot, even the Tree of Knowledge Good and Evil was destroyed.

Then the wind changed, and the ashes from the fire were blown across the river to nourish the Tree of Life.

The seven white flower buds opened to become huge blooms whose fragrance filled the garden. But that's not all. These beautiful blooms, once pricked by the thorns of evil, began to produce fruits of Good Knowledge right there on the Tree of Life – good fruits like Love, Peace, Faith, Joy, Patience, Kindness, and Goodness.

ALL KNOWLEDGE WAS GOOD!

The Gardener is quite pleased, knowing someday the garden will be perfect again.

Elizabeth Allston Smoak
Yonge's Island

**WHEN WE ARE TOGETHER**

During the last days of his life, when Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples, he instructed them to continue to meet in this manner in remembrance of him.

We who follow his teachings today do this again and again in our churches when we celebrate Communion together.

It is important for each of us that we always be aware of the myriad ways in which communion can take place. Anytime and anyplace when we are together with others sharing our hopes, fears, concerns and love whether it be over a meal, a sandwich or even just a cup of coffee, we are doing what Jesus asked his followers to do. As we commit ourselves to each other we are accepting the responsibility of the sacrifice he made for us and, at that moment, he comes again through us, as he promised, giving us the strength to reach out and fulfill his commandment to love one another.

What a wonderful and simple act he asked us to do and how filled with joy it is when we know that he is with us as we share ourselves with love in communion and remembrance.

Peggy Stallings
Holy Cross Faith Memorial
Pawleys Island
Communion should be a relatively simple thing. We walk to the rail, take the bread and wine, smile at some of the nice people in line as we walk back to our pews, and then wait until we can all say the post-communion prayer together. But it’s not.

We take the bread and wine in the presence of Christ. He is there, whether we believe in transubstantiation or not, and we are actively engaged in an action that opens ourselves up to his presence working in us. And then, as if that is not enough, we pray that God will send us out of the beautiful haven that is our church building and into the world – the world that is full of people who are not like us, people who crave love and acceptance and an encounter with the divine yet who are not at a place in their lives, for whatever reason, to engage in a communion with God – and we are supposed to be examples of that engagement. We willingly ask to be his presence in the world. We ask God to turn us all loose, with all our frailties and propensities and insecurities, hoping that he will give us the fortitude and bravery we need to love him and to serve him. And the marvelous thing is that he does. Our acceptance, not only physically with ingesting the elements, but spiritually and intellectually, too, by engaging in an active relationship with Christ, makes communion anything but a casual conversation with an acquaintance. Christ is there – he is present, and he is with us.

The clincher, of course, is that his presence is not just with us, but actually in us, too, when we open ourselves up to him through true communion. And so, by extension, our own presence in the world becomes a vehicle for Christ’s presence. As Teresa of Avila wrote:

Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours;  
Yours are the eyes through which He looks compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Will Suggs  
Grace Church  
Charleston
There would be no United Way, Red Cross, Chamber of Commerce, or any of the thousands of other organizations that make America one of the most generous countries in the world if it were not for two or three or more gathered for a cause, and most of us believe that God has his hand in the midst of each of these communities of people. So is the church, a community of people, coming together to support each other and the greater cause of helping others in his name.

Why is Grace Church a special community? Well, maybe it has something to do with the way Grace Church started. Sixty people made a commitment to bring a new church to life. That’s vision — 60 people organizing a church to seat 600 people.

And in 1864 when a cannonball from Morris Island crushed one of the main columns in the church, cracked walls from the floor to the roof, tore out pews, and generally made a disaster of the interior, the congregation had visions of better things and cleaned up the mess, restored the supports, and began services again.

Only twenty-two years later, in 1886, the Great Earthquake caused so much damage that a group of government engineers said the church could not be repaired and should be taken down. The people of Grace had more vision and refused to tear it down but rather to rebuild from the ruins.

In 1956, Charleston was immersed in flight. Wentworth and King streets, all of downtown, were being abandoned. Buildings were vacated and boarded up. The College of Charleston was struggling to keep its doors open with a student body of one-third the usual size. The Bishop Smith House (now the College president’s house) was boarded up and in terrible shape. Churches were following the flight; St. Peter’s moved across the Ashley River, St. Luke’s closed and joined St. Paul’s, and other denominations went through the same kind of migration. The community of Grace Church decided to make a statement that we would not leave the city, but conversely, we would build new buildings and new programs to strengthen the inner city. A new parish hall was constructed, connecting to the old one with beautiful meeting rooms on the second floor for use by the Charleston community as well as the church. The vision to stay and stem the tide of urban flight and blight proved that the people of Grace care about this church and their community.

Is it any wonder that Grace Church decided in 1987 to face up to the problems of a deteriorating church building and plant equipment and lack of office, teaching, and music space, with a major campaign named “Vision 90.” Hurricane Hugo hit September 21, 1989, took off the slate roof of the church and plain ruined the interior. Two years later,
the Vision 90 addition to the rear of the church was completed, as was a total restoration of the church building.

As the church community grew and prospered, plans were drawn for a new parish hall, classrooms, and offices. A fund drive (Project GO – Grace’s Opportunities) was completed, a contractor hired, and engineering work done. The engineers found that the church steeple and walls were cracking and the foundation was sinking to such a degree that any new construction would put the church building in jeopardy. So, instead of building a new building, the people of Grace allowed their contributions to go to Saving Grace, a $12 million project underway to stabilize the steeple and the side walls and put a new foundation under the steeple.

So, the vision continues and the people of Grace church are a strong community within the Greater Charleston and Lowcountry community looking to the future with faith and hope—and charity to others.

Thomas Thornhill
Grace Church, Charleston

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**Connection**

It is no accident that the word communion can refer both to the Holy Eucharist in which we celebrate Our Lord’s sacrifice for us and a spirit of fellowship and unity with one another.

When we have been at the Lord’s Table, there arises a sense of kinship among the body of believers as we recognize one another as dear children of God. This oneness as members incorporate in the body of Christ is made more special as we all represent different parts of the body. C.S. Lewis wrote, “For every soul, seeing him in its own way, doubtless communicates that vision to all the rest.”

When we are in communion with one another as God’s children we can delight that we all reflect that light in a distinct way. I remember going to church with my family for the first time in months after returning home for the summer following my freshman year of college. As we went forward to receive communion, I had a realization of how the connections we had through blood were infinitely increased by our connection in Christ. Not only were we drawn closer to one another as a family, but unlike earthly kinship which can shut others out, union in Christ opens us up to the great multitude of believers who all stand before God’s throne together in communion.

Sam Gervais
St. John’s
John’s Island
Last flight home of the year. Loaded with bags from days on the road, I flag a taxi at 33rd and 9th, LaGuardia-bound. Soon after my arm waves the air, a yellow streak stops before me, trunk popped. The driver jumps out and helps load so he can reclaim space in the slow crawl out of Chelsea. “They come to see the tree,” the driver explains, as we settle inside. Pulsing his words along with gas pedal and brake, he tells me he is figuring how to get around the mass converging on the next decades of blocks. Two-plus hours before flight time just might not be enough to make the usually short commute—it’s mid-town at Christmas, after all. He winds his way to a street where the traffic flows, all the while relaying a story about taking two Russian teens to JFK in a race against the clock, and, announcing proudly “without using my horn even once!” I couldn’t decide whether to sit back and relax, or sit up and listen. As we entered the tunnel, he told me how he “just” came to America six years ago, from Pakistan, and learned his English by listening to the radio and his passengers. “I love my job. I work seven days a week but I have no stress. Even with this traffic. It’s because I see every day as learning. And at the end of the day I thank God for the new learning, and I pray for the passengers who teach me. Who needs a dictionary when people can tell you the meaning of a word? You have to be able to ask, and I do that.” Given the quality of his English, I was almost incredulous, but it seemed to ring true.

He went on to tell me about a man who entered his cab and put a gun to his head. “He told me ‘Give me all your money,’ and I did. I pulled out my money and said to him, ‘Here take all of my money, you must need it more than I do tonight. I have a cab and can make more money, but maybe you cannot, so take it.’ The man grabbed the money, then looked at me and hit his head again and again, three times, with the palm of his hand, and yelled to me, ‘You wake me up, you wake me up’ and he put the gun back in his pocket and threw the money on the seat. He took nothing.”

I suggested this was his ministry—that was a new word for him. “Your purpose on earth, how you serve others, in your cab,” I offered. “I am only a connection; we all are. You just need to open your heart. My religion says that you give what you have to anyone coming to your door, even if it is the other half of the apple you have eaten. So I give it, even my apple. Even those who are not good, once they get a taste of good, they will remember it.” Ah, his description was much richer than mine.

I asked him what religion he spoke of, and he answered, “Muslim.” Surprised a bit at how I assumed otherwise, he continued without my asking. “I have to make myself a magnet, pure, to attract. You know I am just renting this

CAROLINA GRACE

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body; it belongs to God. My religion says ‘Open your heart, close your hand, and hold on to your self,’” and then he described how those who act violently against themselves or others, in the name of God, are not “being true.”

He was impassioned now, and eagerly told two more stories of how he had been called. It was like he had to tell them, for me to bear witness before I got out of the cab. “A few years ago, it was night and a woman comes into my cab, heading home. After a few minutes, she screams and tells me something broke and she needed to go to hospital. She said something about baby. We rushed to hospital and she used my phone to call her husband. He met us there. I stayed with him until the baby was born a few hours later. The husband put the baby in my arms and it was the best feeling I ever had. I gave him my number in case he needed anything, and then left. Two days later, the man called me and said something about godfather. My English was not so good then. I said to him, ‘No, no, I am not a god, and I am not the father, you are the father,’ and hung up quickly. I was upset. I told this to a woman, my next passenger, and she explained me what the word godfather meant. I felt ashamed and called the man back and told him why I hung up, and thanked him for the ‘honor.’ That was another new word the woman taught me.”

The last story was as powerful as the others. He told of a homeless man he met. “One day I saw him on the street and told him to get in the cab, and he did. I told him, ‘we are going to a place to help you work, so you can feed yourself.’ I drove him to the wholesale street and bought a case of umbrellas for $20. I gave them to him and told him to sell them for $5 each, and dropped him off at a corner close to where he stayed. That afternoon, it rained. I saw him later that night and he said he sold all the umbrellas, and had money in his pocket. He gave me back my $20, and I did not take it. ‘You buy more things to sell,’ I told him. I talk to him, my brain to his brain, with the help of God. I tell him, ‘You pay me the $20 in the next world, but use it in this life. If I take back this money, you will go back to old ways. If you owe me, you will work.’ He is still on that corner, doing ok. And I still won’t take my $20 but he asks me to each time I see him.”

I was speechless.

We arrived at the departures terminal just as he finished the story. He unloaded my bags on the curb, and handed me a receipt. We stood for a bit, eyeball to eyeball, and took each other’s hands. I touched his cheek, and said, “God bless you.” “Merry Christmas,” he nodded and turned back to his cab. I watched as he pulled away and, with tears in my eyes, the words formed in my head, “and to all he will serve, a good night.”

Amy Webb
Holy Cross Faith Memorial
Pawleys Island
The space ship glided into one of the gentle depressions called Carolina Bays that were made by an unknown force many millennia ago. This Bay was in a region of Earth a little west of the northern coast of what ancient people called South Carolina on the continent of North America. It was near old cities that were called Conway and Myrtle Beach which are now covered by the dust of centuries. The space ship’s origin was a planet known as Gliese 581 d that orbits a sun in the constellation of Libra, about 20 light years away from Earth. The year was 5231 A.D. on the antiquated Gregorian calendar that was used by primitive Earth dwellers.

As soon as the engines of the space ship quieted, the pilot alighted from it and soon encountered an Earth dweller walking near the landing spot. Fluent in many of the languages of the Universe, the Space Traveler said to the Earth dweller, whose name was Aime, “We have been watching Earth for a long time and have been listening to the space chatter from it. In recent centuries we’ve noticed that there is a peacefulness here that is strange to us, and we can tell that peace has settled over this whole planet. So I came to see for myself how you achieved it.”

“Aime began, “Thousands of years ago, the Source of all creation sent his Son to live among our people to try to get us on the right track, but the listeners were few. The holocaust that engulfed Earth was what it took to bring people to their senses. After the holocaust, our ancestors had to go again to the Source to ask for guidance. The Source’s directions were clear: Get rid of the millions of
antiquated laws of man that have cropped up over the entire Earth. We abandoned them as the Source told us to do, and they were replaced by only three laws, the same three that the Son of the Source had prescribed during his first visit here, but which were rejected over time by the errant behavior of most Earth dwellers.

The three laws that we resurrected commanded all inhabitants of this planet: Love the Source without any conditions, love all people on Earth as the Son of the Source had shown that he loved us, and respect the dignity of every person. These three laws are now unalterable and mandatory on Earth, and they are the only laws of our community from which all life flows. By following these laws we finally have peace, and it is perfect peace.”

“Wow!” said the Space Traveler. “We need to do what you have done. But I have one last question for you before I leave for home. It is this: How can we get the Source to send his Son to us, and how can we instill these laws in our fellow Gliseans?”

Aime, responding to the Space Traveler’s question, said, “We will ask the Source to send his Son to visit your planet. We see the Son almost every day as he is here with us anytime two or three Earth dwellers break bread and drink wine in his Name. He listens to us, and we can count on him to help you. So, we will talk with him about the need for a visit to Gliese, and we will ask him to help you make the laws you need so that a peace like our peace can engulf your planet.”

“Finally,” Aime said to the Space Traveler, “once you adopt the laws of the Source on your planet, you will need to teach your fellow Gliseans the kind of behavior that is needed to insure that they are obeyed. I can tell you that here we rely on the teachings of a woman who lived on Earth thousands of years ago. Madeleine L’Engle taught us this: ‘We do not draw people to the teachings of the Son of the Source by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the Source of it.’ If you follow her direction, your new laws will be self enforcing.

“Go in peace, my brother, await a visit from the Son of the Source, and plan to dwell forever in lovely peaceful light.”

Thomas Tisdale
Grace Church
Charleston
SMILAX AND PLUFF MUD:
COMMUNION IN CAROLINA

Outside,
Through the window-pane
a bold green vine appearing –
Smilax – shooting upward toward the heavens
and stretching outward,
Entwining with others to form a way –
Free, and a tad wild,
Encumbrances lifted,
Daring to exude a spirit bright and lush,
Eluding any grasp.
Particularly after pruning, it grows,
In refreshment and fortitude returning,
Determination, to thrive –

Life is what is forever pressing
And, more especially,
The absolute end of searching and striving,
For answers delivering the clearness
Of nutrient-stripped, sterile pools of chlorine.

Instead, give me pluff mud:
The goo that holds the earth together,
Much like that wayward smilax,
A fitting vine for adorning
Altars – sacred tables of fellowship,
Communion – a risky capacity for jaunty connection,
For all the Church to gather together,
And be fed,
Out of the many – One,
In holy brokenness for true –
Strengthened to live and serve, in union everlasting,
With all the agony that togetherness breeds,
The waters of baptism are ever-fresh, though not always limpid.
In this religion there’s something about a Cross –
Forgiveness, and forbearance,
Love –
Even if we believe the other to be wrong,
Eucharist reveals the Body,
Our Lord in us, we in him,
The Vine, which connects –
No Communion, No Christ.
Risen Lord, be Known to us in the breaking of the Bread…

Calhoun Perkins
Grace Church
Charleston
Artwork by
Elizabeth Allston Smoak
If you are interested in subscribing to Carolina Grace, please contact Bunny Martin at bmartin@gracesc.org or (843) 723-4575.
As we approach the season of Advent, the editorial committee of Carolina Grace invites contributions for the next issue, the theme of which will be **FREEDOM**

Freedom and courage with respect to discipleship in our life in Christ. Our hope is to reveal with consistency the breadth and depth of our rich heritage as Anglicans.

Contributions should be uplifting in tone and reflective of God’s active presence in our lives. Submissions may be of any genre; they should not exceed 750 words. Electronic submissions should be in Microsoft Word format. The editorial committee reserves the right to make reasonable corrections to grammar and syntax and to determine whether or not a submission appropriately fits the theme of the issue and the direction of the journal.

Please mail submissions to Carolina Grace, 115 Wentworth Street, Charleston, SC 29401, or email submissions to wcsuggs3@yahoo.com, with “Carolina Grace submission” in the subject line.

We must receive submissions by October 15, 2009 for our November publication.

**FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO HELP DEFRAY PRINTING COSTS ARE GREATLY APPRECIATED.**

**THEY MAY BE SENT TO:**

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