



Grace Church

The Rev. Dr. Matthew Calkins
Rector

Holy Communion

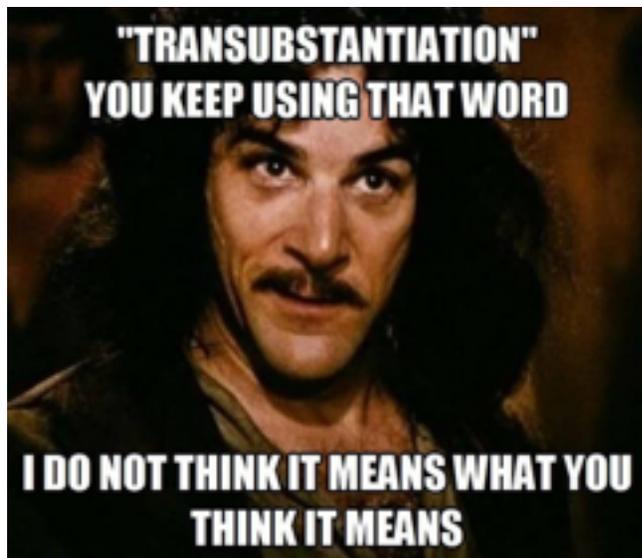
Sermon for 5 Lent, April 2, 2017

Readings: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45; Psalm 130

Sermon text: If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. Romans 8:11

This morning a number of our younger school-age children will join me behind the altar as we celebrate Holy Communion. They will get the view from my side of the table. They have been instructed in how to receive Holy Communion, as well as given some idea of what is happening when we receive the bread and wine, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Some idea. Of course, if we waited to give communion to those who really understand what Holy Communion is and means then we could wait a long time. I still am trying to figure it out. It is after all a famous mystery.



Remember the movie *The Princess Bride* and how the villainous Wallace Shawn character keeps using the word “inconceivable.” At one point the Mandy Patinkin character Inigo Montoya (“my name is Inigo Montoya, you killed my father, prepare to die”) replies, “Inconceivable. You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”

I recently stumbled across an “[Episcopal Church Memes](#)” facebook page (created by a lawyer having fun in his spare time) where you can find a picture of Inigo Montoya with a caption saying, “Transubstantiation” You keep using that word.....I do not think it means what you think it means.”

Well, let me give it a try. I think transubstantiation means that while the bread and wine of Holy Communion remain bread and wine in appearance (*species*), they are

they are transformed into the substance (*substantia*) or being of Jesus, his actual body and blood.

During the Reformation, this sort of Aristotelian/Thomistic sacred physics came under attack as clergy hocus pocus (from “*hoc est corpus meum*,” *this is my body* in Latin during the Mass).

Here is what the 28th article of the *39 Articles of Religion* that laid out the newly reformed Church of England’s position on contentious church doctrines has to say about this: “Transubstantiation (the change of the substance of the bread and wine) in the Supper of the Lord cannot be proved from holy Scripture, but is repugnant to the plain teaching of Scripture. It overthrows the nature of a sacrament and has given rise to many superstitions.” (You can look the 39 articles up in the back of the Prayer Book in the section titled “Historical Documents.”) Well. Take that.

The critique of *transubstantiation* boils down to this: it is a category mistake. “The body of Christ is given, taken and eaten in the Supper only in a heavenly and spiritual manner”—not an earthly and fleshly manner. You are not eating Jesus—how could this be what he mean when he gave the disciples bread and wine that night, saying it was his body broken for them, his blood poured out for them? He remained one body; the bread and wine they consumed another. Transubstantiation is too literal a reading of the mystery of Holy Communion.

Yet Christ *was and is* present in the bread and wine. Martin Luther refused to take the step his fellow reformation theologian Huldrych Zwingli took, in which he said the Eucharist was only a *memorial* of the Last Supper; citing Christ’s words, “Whenever you do this, remember me.”

Luther objected, also citing scripture: Jesus said “This is my body.” He meant it, and that settles it. There is a *real presence* of Christ somehow in, under and with the bread and wine. In a heavenly and spiritual manner. This remains the official position of the Anglican Church.

Neither transubstantiation: overly material and literal; nor memorial, overly symbolic and metaphoric. Real presence. The middle path. The sacramental way.

What is the sacramental way of understanding how God works in the world, as well as how Christ is really present in the Eucharist?

It begins with a bit of metaphysics: from *meta*, beyond and beneath, and *physis*, the way or stuff of the material universe. Just as beneath or behind or under the form of a table or apple are the molecules, atoms, quarks that buzz around energetically, so beneath or behind or under all the levels of physical reality—from the most micro-quantum level to the vast expanse of interstellar space—is the the being and energy of God the creator and sustainer. God’s very name is Being (YHWH: I Am).

And this Being with a capital B is also love—for God wills and moves this world into being through love, the uncreated energy of God. So, as St Paul writes, we live and move and have our being within the greater Being of God.

You may say, there is no meta-reality. No spiritual dimension, no heaven. Only earth, material nature, this stuff we can touch—and though it gets very weird at the very small and very large levels. at quantum physics and cosmology—well, it is hard to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, or had the power to restore life as with Lazarus.

It is hard. But the universe, as we increasingly realize, is strange and a full description must break out of the boxes of materialism. Metaphysics considers the conditions necessary for there to be anything at all. A full account of reality includes human consciousness and our apprehension of truth, beauty, justice. The vast majority of people in this as in every age bear witness to a persistent and undeniable intuition that there is more to this world than dreamed of in science textbooks that describe bare material reality.

Many profess faith in the metaphysical revelations of the Bible: that God is the creator of the universe, that creation has a purpose and direction, that humanity has a special role in creation; that Jesus shows us the ultimate fulfillment of humanity as the image of God; that death is not the end of life but only a gate into new life. Revelation explains several otherwise impossible questions to answer. Why is there something rather than nothing? What is the genesis of life and consciousness? What is truth and justice and beauty?

You cannot directly apprehend Reality. We are blind to its wavelength without faith. Just as light is the medium of vision, so faith is the medium for the vision of God. Faith is the way we get to taste and see that God is good. As the 28th article continues: “The means by which the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is faith.”

Faith is seeing with eyes of a poet as well as the mind of the metaphysician. Gerard Manly Hopkins wrote:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
...
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast & with ah! bright wings.

Faith is seeing with the eyes of children, for whom much of the world retains its wonder and mystery. The children who will join me behind the altar will see Holy Communion in a new way, and so will I, as I try to imagine it from their perspective. As we all join in sharing the life of Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

In Christ's name, Amen.

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