

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



Volume XXIV, Number 8

September 2017



September 2017

This Month's Cover

Out cover this month is Salvador Dali's *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*, in recognition of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on September 14. It is based on a drawing by the Spanish mystic Juan de Yepes y Álvarez, known as Saint John of the Cross (1543-1591). He was a great thinker and writer, and an active figure in the Counter-Reformation. He had a vision in which he found himself suspended in the air looking down on the Crucifixion. He made a drawing of his vision that fascinated Dali. Dali had a dream in which he saw the Cross suspended above his homeland in northern Spain. Soon afterward he produced this painting based on Saint John's drawing. He wanted to emphasize Christ's beauty, so he depicted him without nails or the crown of thorns. Painted in 1951, it is oil on canvas, about 80"x45", and is displayed in the Kensingrove Gallery in Glasgow. It is generally considered one of Dali's greatest masterpieces.

In the fourth century AD the Roman emperor Constantine I sent his mother, Saint Helena, to Jerusalem to locate as many of the holy sites as she could. She discovered many, including the site of the Crucifixion. Some accuse her discoveries of being fanciful wishful thinking, but they may well have been for the most part quite accurate. There were many very faithful Christians in Jerusalem, and had been since Jesus' time three hundred years earlier. These sites and relics were precious to them, and they would have remembered where he was tried, crucified and buried. The sites could not be publicly revered during the era of persecution, but they were remembered and privately honored. Once Constantine ended the persecutions and legalized Christianity, recognition of the sites could become public. One of the relics that Saint Helena

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found was a large piece of wood that is claimed to have been a piece of the True Cross, the cross on which Jesus was crucified. It is reasonable that after the Resurrection his followers might have retrieved and revered as a holy relic at least a part of the cross-piece that he carried to Calvary.¹

Once Saint Helena had located the site of the tomb, Constantine built the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher there. It was dedicated on September 13, 335 and on the next day, the 14th, the Christians in Jerusalem publicly honored the fragment of the Cross in a solemn procession to the basilica.

Salvador Domingo Felipe Jacinto Dalí i Domènech, Marqués de Dalí de Púbol (1904-1989), known simply as Salvador Dali professionally, was a famous surrealist painter born in Catalonia in northern Spain. He is most commonly remembered for his paintings of melting watches. The early 20th century surrealist movement was made up mainly of atheists, who vehemently criticized Dali for his deep Christian faith. There is no doubt that he was quite sane, but many thought him to be mad, and he enjoyed doing bizarre things to encourage that image. Although his primary medium was oil on canvas, he was also an extremely competent sculptor, architect, photographer, writer and film director. His skills as a draftsman enabled him to paint our cover painting with its unusual perspective. He used complex mathematical formulas to work out the proportions for the painting. He called his combination of science, art and religious faith “Nuclear Mysticism.” Dali died in 1989 after a long degenerative illness.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Despite centuries of tradition, Jesus was most likely crucified on a T-shaped (Tau) cross, not the traditional so-called Latin cross. The Romans rarely used Latin crosses. They left an upright permanently secured in the ground, and the victim carried the cross-piece from his place of trial to the site of his execution. He was there either tied or nailed to the cross-piece, which was then hoisted up and dropped into a notch on the top of the upright. Then his feet were tied or nailed to the upright. Very few men would have been strong enough to carry the whole cross, especially after the brutal beating that usually preceded crucifixion.

A Word From the Editor

Jesus said, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged” (Matt. 7:1). Taken out of context this is pretty definitive—it clearly says do not judge—but put into context what he is saying is that we had better be careful, honest and just when we judge, because we will be judged by the same standard by which we judge. Do not condemn unless you are very, very sure that what you are condemning is condemnable. Also, be very, very sure that you have all the facts and the moral right to make that condemnation. In most cases, we do not.

We cannot live without making judgments. Decisions are judgments, and we make hundreds of decisions every day. These range from what to have for dinner to how to vote and whether to buy a house. Such judgments are necessary for the daily running of our lives. I do not like dill pickles and I am very fond of broccoli, so it is easy for me to decide not to choose the one and to eat the other. On the other hand, assuming that you are old enough and mentally competent to make your own judgments, I have no right to make them for you. I have no right to forbid you to eat dill pickles or to require you to eat broccoli. To a very limited extent government has the authority to make some judgments for us, but history shows that governments also tend to step well beyond their limits.

We are also often called upon to make judgments on a broader scale, such as whom to support for a political office, and with whom we want to associate. These are harder judgments to make, because it is so difficult, if even possible, to get all the facts about people and events. Sometimes we see evidence that we made a good choice, and sometimes we are disappointed. The most important thing, therefore, is to try to keep an open mind and get as much accurate information as we can before deciding anything important. That is a far easier thing to say than it is to do. Any lawyer can attest that five honest eyewitnesses to something will often give five different and sometimes conflicting accounts of what happened.

We are also often influenced by our own prejudices, sometimes without even being aware of it. Two famous crim-

inal trials come to mind—those of O. J. Simpson and Bill Cosby. In both cases there are those who, regardless of any evidence, are convinced that the accused is unquestionably guilty; and there are those on the other end of the spectrum who would never believe that such a person could ever have done what he is accused of, regardless of the evidence (which in their minds is either false or mistaken); and there are those who lean one way or the other, but are open to discussion; and of course, right in the middle are those who have no idea what is going on, and could not care less.

Ultimately, it all boils down to one simple process. Before making a judgment, first decide whether it is an important one. Whether to eat pickles is not, but whether to condemn a person or his actions is. If it is important, then get all the information you can before judging, and realize that no matter how much you have there is probably a great deal more. Then pray about it, remembering, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.” Finally, remember that we will be judged by the same standard by which we judge. Keeping all that in mind we might be wise in deciding, as our final judgment, that it was really none of our business in the first place.

Father Rick Losch

Evening Prayer and Supper

Our September service of Evening Prayer will be on Wednesday, September 20th, at 6:00 p.m. with a “Tail Gate Dinner” following in the parish house. Signup sheets for attendance, various food, other items and responsibilities are posted on the bulletin board in the narthex. You are invited to bring your favorite wine to share. Soft drinks will be furnished. Make your plans to attend, bring your friends, and wear your favorite school’s colors.

Hiram Patrenos

I can't understand why women are okay that JC Penny has an older women's clothing line called "Sag Harbor."

Sunday School Reminder

Our Adult Sunday School will begin on September 10th at 10:00 a.m. All are welcome.

Hiram Patrenos

Altar Flower Volunteers

Volunteers are needed to provide Altar Flowers through the season of Pentecost. A sign-up chart is located in the Sacristy. You may use flowers from your yard or if you wish, make arrangements with a florist to provide them. For more information, please speak with Carolyn Patrenos.

Hiram Patrenos

A Touch of Trivia

George Washington made one of his most brilliant decisions during the early days of the Revolution. Smallpox (variola) was a dreaded and often fatal disease that Washington had survived in his youth. It is highly infectious, and in crowded and dirty places such as military encampments it routinely killed about 17% of the population. Both Benedict Arnold and Benjamin Franklin had warned that smallpox might cost America the war. Although germ theory would not become accepted until almost a century later, it had been discovered in India that if a tiny bit of the pus from a smallpox lesion were introduced into a cut, the person would contract a very light and usually survivable case of smallpox, and was thereafter immune. We now know that the reason for this is that by the time the variola virus gets into the pus it is attenuated (greatly weakened), yet it still stimulates a normal immune reaction. In January 1777 Washington ordered his chief medical officer, Dr. William Shippen, Jr., to inoculate every soldier that came through Philadelphia. By this action Washington reduced smallpox deaths in his army from 17% to 1%.

Richard R. Losch+

I think it's cool how the Chinese made a language entirely out of tattoos.

Be Wordly Wise

Keeping Your Dux In a Row

The Latin verb *ducere*, to draw, bring or lead, is the source not only of several hundred English words, but also of a huge number of other Latin words that in turn produced English words. One of them is *dux*, leader, from which we get duke and duchess, as well as ducat (a gold coin bearing the leader's image), and duct (a channel for leading something away).

By adding prefixes, *ducere* gives us such obvious derivatives as reduce (draw back), educe (draw out), educate (lead out [of ignorance]), produce (draw forward), induce (lead into), subduce (draw under), adduce (lead toward), abduct (bring away from), seduce (lead apart [from duty or right]), traduce (lead across), and many more.

We also get some less obvious derivatives of *ducere* that came to us modified by Old and Middle French. Among these are conduit, endue, redoubt and subdue. Indeed, *ducere* is a leader among words.

Richard R. Losch+

Saint Paul and the Silence of Women

More than any other passage, 1 Cor. 14:34 is quoted as an argument that Saint Paul was a misogynist: "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says." There are several problems with this passage. In the first place, Paul was a very well educated Jew, and he knew full well that the Law says no such thing. There was such a Roman law, but by Jewish law women were free to speak in the synagogues and assemblies. Also, there are many passages in Paul's writings that affirm the public ministry of women.¹ To the Galatians he wrote, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, *nor is there male and female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). He ordered that women's heads should

¹ Rom. 16:3-4; 1 Cor. 16:19; cf. Acts 16:11-40; 18:26

be covered *when they are speaking in tongues or prophesying in a public assembly*. Why, then, would he make a statement like that in 1 Cor. 14:34? Perhaps he didn't.

First of all, we know that 1 Cor. was not Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, even though it is the first that still survives. There may have been several earlier letters, but we know that there was at least one (1 Cor. 5:9) and that the Corinthian leaders had written to him (1 Cor. 7:1). Greek society was very male dominated, even more so than the Romans, and they were also under the male-dominated Roman law. It is entirely possible—in fact probable—that the passage in question was not Paul's words, but that he was quoting the male Corinthian leaders from their earlier letter to him (he frequently did so). One of the problems with the church in Corinth was lack of discipline and order in their worship (cf. ch. 11), and unruly women were part of the cause of this. The Corinthian leaders may have proposed their silencer as a solution, and this would have been in accord with the Roman law under which they lived. The next verse sheds light on this: "Or did the word of God originate with you (masculine)? Or are you (masculine) the only people it has reached?" (1 Cor. 14:35). Paul quoted them, and then chastised them for what they had said. The all-male leadership in Corinth was not to forbid women to speak, but simply have them do it in an orderly fashion. They were also to follow the women's lead in speaking in tongues and prophesying. "Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid (women) speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor. 14:39f).

Saint Paul was not a misogynist. Quite to the contrary, he was far more amenable to the integration of women into the full activity of the Church than most of his contemporaries, Jew or Gentile.

Richard R. Losch+

I'm not saying we should kill stupid people. I'm just saying let's remove all the warning labels and let the problem work itself out.

Wandering In the Desert

The question is often asked, why did God leave the Israelites to wander forty years in the desert after they left Egypt, and who could survive that? The answer to the why of the question is simple. He did not let them enter the Promised Land until every single person who had left Egypt except two, Joshua and Caleb,¹ was dead. Life expectancy was much lower in those days, so those who entered Canaan were a whole new generation who had never seen Egypt. They were prepared to move forward, not look back to the good old days.² This was a time for re-education in order to prepare the Israelites for settlement and developing in the land of Canaan. After centuries of forced labor in Egypt, the people needed to learn to live in freedom and to provide for themselves. One of the first things that happened, only seven weeks after their exodus from Egypt, was that they were given the Law. Learning to understand and obey it was a long, slow process.

The Hebrew word that we translate desert is *midbar* (מדבר). There is no exact English equivalent, so the best we can use is either desert or wilderness, and translators use both. When we think of a desert the immediate image that comes to mind is a vast sandy wasteland like the Sahara. In Hebrew a parched wasteland like that is a *negeb* (נגב), from which the Negev desert in southern Palestine gets its name. The Sinai “desert,” however, is not like that. *Midbar* comes from a root meaning a place to graze sheep. It is relatively dry land and thus is not suitable for agriculture, yet through most of the year there is

¹ Joshua was Moses' second in command, and had remained totally loyal and faithful to both God and Moses from the beginning. When Moses sent twelve men into Canaan to scout out the possibilities of conquest, only Joshua and Caleb trusted that God would give them victory, while the others wanted to turn back, and tried to turn the people against Moses, saying that the Canaanites were too strong to defeat (Num. 13:1ff).

² We might ask who would have considered slavery to be the good old days, but even in the first few weeks in the desert many were grumbling that at least in Egypt they had homes and plenty of food (Num. 11:4f).

sufficient grass and low shrubbery to make it acceptable grazing land.¹ Most settled towns and villages were surrounded by *midbar*. “He brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the wilderness (*midbar*)” (Ps. 78:52).

Moses was thoroughly familiar with how to survive in the Sinai *midbar*. After he killed the Egyptian soldier and fled from Egypt, he wandered to the land of Midian in the Sinai, where he met Zipporah and married her (Ex. 2:15ff). She was the daughter of the Midianite priest Jethro, a descendent of Abraham, who taught him about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He also would have taught him the survival techniques that any nomad in the Sinai *midbar* would know—how to find food, water and shelter in a region where these are all scarce. When he returned to the Sinai as the leader of the Israelites, he was prepared to teach these skills to his people.

All too often we tend to be unnecessarily simplistic in our answers to questions. It is easy just to say that God performed miracles to take care of the people while they were in the wilderness. Yes, this is true, but how? God did not create the laws of nature just so that he could violate them every time he wants to accomplish something. Rather, he guides events so that everything falls into place in order to achieve his ends. The crossing of the Sea of Reeds (miscalled the Red Sea in most English Bibles) was not just a thunderbolt-from-heaven miracle. The Sea of Reeds is a salt marsh just north of the Red Sea that is known to divide when the conditions are just right. Napoleon crossed it when he invaded Egypt, not realizing the danger he faced in doing so. The miracle was not in its division, but in the timing—the Israelites were there just when the conditions were right for the waters to recede, and Pharaoh’s army was there just when the waters returned. That was God’s hand, not mere coincidence. Likewise, any nomad

¹ This is why in ancient Palestine there was rarely war between farmers and herdsman, such as we had in the old American West. There was sufficient *midbar* to satisfy the sheep, so they did not have to encroach on good agricultural areas.

in the Sinai knows how to find manna and quail and to strike a rock to get water, just as Jethro taught Moses to do. That does not take God out of the picture, however. All these things fell into place like the pieces of a picture puzzle, and the odds against that happening by chance are enormous.

Why, then, did God make the Israelites wander in the wilderness for forty years, and how did they survive? They went through a forty-year period of education and preparation to become a great nation; and they survived through the wisdom that God gave them through Moses, that had been handed down through many generations.

Richard R. Losch+

The Name of Moses

The Bible tells us that Pharaoh's daughter saw an infant floating in a basket in the Nile, rescued him, and "named him Moses (*Moshe*, משה), saying, 'I drew him out of the water'" (Ex. 2:10). Although this makes little sense in translation, in Hebrew it was a perfect name for him. She said, "Out of the water I drew him (*meshi-tihu*, משייתהו)." Here "drew" is *meshi*. In Hebrew the word *moshe* (which we translate Moses) is an active form of that verb, meaning "he draws out." While Pharaoh's daughter drew Moses out of the Nile, he was destined to draw the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery, and prepare them to become the people chosen to prepare the way for Christ, who would draw all mankind out of our slavery to sin.

Richard R. Losch+

"The Epistle" Is Online

The last four years' issues of *The Epistle* are online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the "Epistle" tab at the top, then click on the issue you want to see. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file.

Richard R. Losch+

A recent study has found that women who carry a little extra weight live longer than the men who mention it.

The Navel of the Universe

Every ancient culture had in its mythology a concept of the point of origin of the universe, the place where it all began. In scholarly terms this is called by a Greek name, the *Omphalos* (ὀμφαλος), the navel. Many ancient cultures identified the spot by placing there a large carved phallic stone, also called an *omphalos*. In Nordic mythology the navel of the universe was a great ash tree that is invisible to man, in which the gods live at the top, man's earth is in the middle, and all evil things are at its base. The Greeks identified it in several locations, but the most widely accepted in ancient times was the island of Delphos, in the cave of the Delphic Oracle.¹ The Romans believed that it was located in the center of Rome, at a spot near the Forum. It had a particularly strong symbolism to the Jews and later also to the Muslims, who believed that the center of the universe was a great limestone rock in the middle of Old Jerusalem called the *Eben HaShetiyah* (אֶבֶן הַשֵּׁטִיָּה), the Stone of the Foundation. According to very ancient Jewish tradition this was the first solid matter created by God, from which everything else emanated. It would later be called Mount Moriah, and was the spot where Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22). It was also sacred to the Canaanites, who built their city of Urusalim around it, using its flat surface as a threshing floor. Threshing was a religious act to the Canaanites, who believed that all food was a gift of the gods. When David captured Urusalim and changed its name to Jerusalem,² he wanted to build a temple to God. He was forbidden to do so, however, because he was a man of war. He erected a great tent-tabernacle on the threshing floor, brought the Ark of the



*Delphic
Omphalos*

¹ The Delphic Oracle was a seeress (actually a series of them, as they did not live long) who sat on a on a three-legged stool and spoke cryptic prophecies allegedly given to her by Apollo. Most historians believe that she was influenced by hallucinogenic volcanic gases in the cave.

² See *The Epistle*, July/August 2017, "Jerusalem."

Covenant to Jerusalem, and placed it in the tabernacle on the *Eben HaShetiyah*. Four decades later his son Solomon built the Temple on that spot, with the Holy of Holies (the most sacred spot in the Temple) located directly on that rock (1 Kg. 8). The Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70, and the *Eben HaShetiyah* lay in its rubble, ignored and forgotten for the next six centuries.

In Muslim tradition, although Muhammad never visited Jerusalem, he had a vision one night called the Night Journey. In it he rode from Medina to Jerusalem to the *Eben HaShetiyah*, from which he rode into heaven to confer with Allah. Because of that the rock became the third most sacred spot in Islam (behind only Mecca and Medina). In 691 the Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock over it, and that beautiful edifice still stands today as the center point of the Old City in Jerusalem.

Medieval Christians argued that since Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant promises, the place of his death and resurrection is the new spiritual and cosmological center of the universe. There is an *omphalos* in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem to symbolize that. Unlike most *omphaloi*, however, it is not a phallic symbol. Seen straight on it looks like a large ornate urn. Looked at from above, however, it looks like a stylized human navel.



Jerusalem
Omphalos

Modern science transcends ancient mythology, and there is little question today that the center of physical creation is the location of the Big Bang, billions of light-years from Earth. From a Christian point of view, however, arguing about where, when and how God created the universe is irrelevant. That is a question of his technique. The important matter is *that* he did it, not *how*. The Holy Bible sums it up succinctly in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God." Jesus Christ is the spiritual center of our universe, and that is God's purview. Leave the study of the physical cosmology to the scientists.

Richard R. Losch+

Where Did I Come From, Mommy?

Any college philosophy student is familiar with Aristotelian Causality (or should be), and if he has done his homework well he can explain the cause of almost anything in esoteric terms that the average person would not understand. Aristotle analyzed cause-and-effect through several levels, and came up with some amazing propositions. The study of the causes of things is called etiology, and it is a complex science. A college philosophy student is ready to tackle etiological questions (or should be), but a young child is not.

How, then, do we answer etiological questions asked by a little child? The answer is simple—we give simple answers. Those answers are often so simple that in many respects they are incomplete or not even true, but they suffice for the moment. As the child develops we can replace those simple answers with increasingly complex and more accurate ones. Despite what the modern “never-lie-to-a-child” ideologues may say, when a toddler asks where he came from he is not asking for a biology lesson. Storks and cabbage patches will be quite satisfactory to him, and if you tell him the truth his reaction will not be understanding, but a disgusted “Eewww!”

What is true of little children is also often true of primitive people who have minimal education and little breadth of life experience. Their questions are often etiological: “Why do we die?” “What are all those lights in the night sky?” “Why do people wear clothes?” And even, “Where did I come from?” Generally, if people ask questions like this they are not ready for fully accurate scientific answers; and they are usually asking people who may be wiser than they, but who also do not have fully accurate scientific answers. This is where myths come from. It is important to draw a distinction between myths and fairy tales. Fairy tales are pure fantasy, and are neither based on truth nor intended to convey truth. They may teach a moral principle (as do Aesop’s fables), but they are not allegories or parallels of truth. A myth, on the other hand, is intended to convey a truth or explain something truthfully,

even though it is not intended to be taken literally. Jesus' parables are myths. The parable of the Good Samaritan is not an account of a real historical event, but a story told to convey the concept of what true neighborliness is. A myth, then, is a story that relates a truth, put into simple terms understandable to simple people. Before we get too smug about our modern enlightened wisdom, we might reflect on the likelihood that sometime in the not so distant future people will look on many of our modern scientific "truths" as quaint myths.

The two creation stories in the first two chapters of Genesis are myths. This is not to say that they are fiction, even though their details are not scientifically or historically accurate. The six-day sequence of events in the first one is not all that far from the actual sequence of events in the divinely guided process of evolution over several billion years. The second is an excellent allegory of how man was innocent of sin (just as the animals are) until he reached a point of being able to understand right from wrong, and then often chose the wrong and damaged his relationship with God and the rest of creation. This is myth, not fairy tale. It is possible, even probable, that the writers of the Book of Genesis¹ never meant for these stories to be taken literally. They were writing down stories that had been an oral tradition for many centuries before they were ever written, and they knew that they were allegorical and had been embellished over many years of retelling. They sufficed quite well, however, to give spiritual answers to etiological questions to which, at the time, there were no scientific answers. "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor. 1:27). We are not as wise or strong as we think. The more we reflect on the strength of the truths in these myths, the more we come to understand that.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ There were at least four, and probably many more, writers of Genesis. There are those who believe that it was dictated word for word by God to Moses, but this is rejected by most scholars as simplistic and naïve.

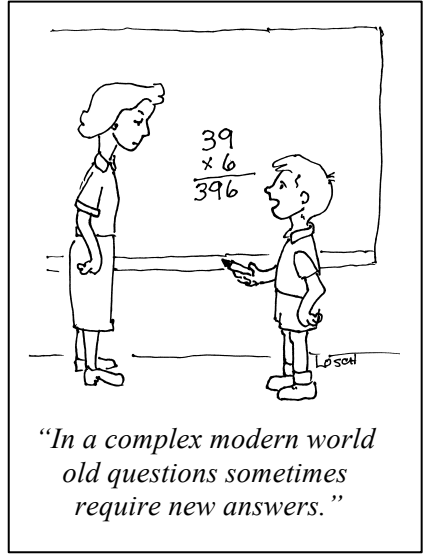
A Touch of Trivia

The Declaration of Independence was written on a laptop! Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the first draft of the Declaration, was an avid inventor. Among his many creations he had invented a writing desk that fit on his lap, so he could sit in his reading chair or on a bench and write as comfortably as if he were at his desk. Jefferson himself called it his laptop.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

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