

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
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This Month's Cover

In honor of the Feast of the Ascension (May 26), our cover is *The Ascension of Christ* by Gebhard Fugel (1863-1939). Completed in 1894, it is a fresco (tempera on plaster) in the Church of St. Ulrich in Obereschach, Württemberg, Germany. We could not find its size, but since most of the frescoes in that church are about life-sized, we presume that this is also. Fortunately, the church survived both World Wars relatively unscathed. The painting depicts Christ ascending into heaven, with Mary standing on the right and the eleven Apostles on the left (eleven because Judas was dead and Matthias was not yet chosen). The white-bearded one probably represents Peter, and the other two standing are James and John. It is likely that Peter was actually about Jesus' age (33 when he ascended), but he is usually depicted as a wise-looking elderly man. Conversely, Mary is usually depicted as a beautiful young woman, but here she appears her true age (probably close to 50 at the time).

Gebhard Fugel was born in Swabia in 1863, and in his early days studied under a number of noted German artists. His formal training was in the *Kunstschule* (art school) in Stuttgart. He was strongly influenced by the Nazarene Movement, an early 19th century movement of German artists in the Romantic style who emphasized religious themes. Fugel specialized in Christian art the rest of his life. In 1885, when he was 21, his painting *Christ Healing the Sick* was exhibited at the Munich *Kunstverein* and received rave reviews. His fame spread rapidly thereafter. In 1890 he moved to Munich, where he remained the rest of his life. There he executed a number of highly acclaimed paintings and frescoes, many of which were destroyed in WWII. Altötting is a town near Munich that for

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centuries has been a pilgrimage site to a shrine of the Virgin Mary. In 1902 a special building was erected there to house a 12,270 ft² mural of the Passion of Christ called the Crucifixion Panorama. Fugel and the architect financed the project, and he was the leading artist on the team. For all of his magnificent paintings, he is best known for his Altötting work. In 1905 the Kaiser named him a Royal Professor, an honor equivalent to a Laureate. In his later years Fugel created 136 religious school murals as teaching tools. Many were reproduced in classrooms throughout Europe, and are still used in textbooks and other publications. Many of the originals were destroyed in WWII, but many have survived. Fugel died in Munich in 1939 at the age of 75. Streets have been named for him in several German cities, and in 1976 his grandson, Gebhard Streicher, established the Gebhard Fugel Art Prize, a large monetary prize that is awarded triennially by the German Art Institute.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

Modern “Woke” culture, along with its many other fabrications, seems to have invented a new sin—the sin of privilege. We hear not only of racial privilege, but also of social, economic, ethnic, educational, and just about any other form of privilege that can be dreamed up. Privilege has come to be something to be abhorred, and something of which we should be ashamed. I heartily disagree. Privilege is a blessing. Like any other blessing, however, it carries with it great responsibility. When God gives us a blessing he expects us to use it—to use it not just for our own benefit, but primarily for the benefit of others. Like a talent, a privilege is to be exercised, not put aside or buried. While many of the privileges decried by the “Woke” culture are more imaginary than real, there is no doubt that privilege does exist. Some are more privileged than others in many ways. There is no question, for example, that regardless of race, a middle-class child in suburbia has far more opportunities for a good education and a prosperous future than

an impoverished child in an inner-city slum. That is privilege, but there is no reason to be ashamed of it. The only cause for shame is if it is selfishly exploited at the expense of others. The sin is not in having privilege or in using it, but in the abuse of it. There is a responsibility that goes with privilege. It is our responsibility to take advantage of whatever privilege we have in order to better ourselves, so that we are then enabled to share it with others, extend it to them, and raise them to the same level of privilege. That is what blessings are all about.

Father Rick Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

Mondegreen

This is a word that is hardly essential to a good vocabulary, yet can be fun to drop under the right circumstances. A mondegreen is a misinterpretation or mishearing of the lyrics of a song or poem. It usually results from someone hearing it performed, but mishearing the lyrics, and thus unintentionally substituting what he thought he heard. A classic example is in Jimi Hendrix's *Purple Haze*, "Scuse me while I kiss the sky," which many people thought was "Scuse me while I kiss this guy." When I was a little boy first learning the Pledge of Allegiance, we said it every morning in school. I had to stand for it, so I thought it said, "...and to the Republic, for Richard stands." One of my favorite mondegreens is in the Beatles' *Lucy In the Sky With Diamonds*, "The girl with colitis goes by" for "The girl with kaleidoscope eyes." Then, of course, there is the Christian hymn, "Gladly, the Cross-eyed Bear." The word mondegreen was coined in 1954 by the writer Sylvia Wright when she remembered her childhood misinterpretation of a line in the Scottish folk ballad *The Bonny Earl of Murray*. The line says, "They hae slaine the Earl of Murray and hae laid him on the green." She misheard it as "They hae slaine the Earl of Murray and the Lady Mondegreen." The word mondegreen was included in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2002.

Richard R. Losch+

Animals In the Bible

If you were asked to name a book that mentions large numbers of animals, probably the first thing that would come to mind is *Dr. Doolittle* or Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*. In fact, the Bible would also be a worthy candidate. Again, thinking of the Bible, you would probably think first of the story of Noah's Ark. While that story talks a good bit about animals in general, it actually names only two: the raven and the dove (Gen. 8:7f). Notwithstanding, throughout the pages of the Bible we find a huge number of animals named. With a few exceptions, although it names a great many animals, it names only those that lived in the area around Israel at the time. You will find no penguins, polar bears or iguanas in the Bible. On the other hand, there are many that might surprise you. There are references to lions, bears, cheetahs, hippopotami, gazelles, hartebeest and crocodiles. Although these are no longer found there, they were common in ancient times. There are over 150 references to lions, although while lions were common, some of these references may actually be to other large feline predators such as cheetahs. There are also references to exotic non-native animals such as peacocks and apes, which were imported from India to grace the gardens of the super-rich (1 Kg. 10:22). Another favorite gift from one ancient plutocrat to another was the giraffe (Deut. 14:5), which was implored from Africa. Conversely, many animals that are common in the wild in Israel today were not found there in biblical times, including mynah birds, nutria and brown rats. Since Israel is at a convergence point of Africa, Europe and western Asia, many different species have migrated there over the ages.

There are about a hundred different mammals, reptiles and birds mentioned in the Bible. It is difficult to give an accurate list, however, because there are several Hebrew words for animals that are used so rarely that in some cases we are not sure if they are synonyms or even refer to a particular species. Translations of the Bible, even very early ones, have further confused the issue. In Israel the gazelle (*zvi*, צִבִי) was common,

but in western Europe it was unknown, so they translated it as deer. Samson captured 300 *shu'alim* (שועלים) and tied torches to their tails to set fire to the Philistines' grain fields (Jdg. 15:4). In Europe *shu'alim* was incorrectly translated foxes, causing Voltaire to ridicule the story. He said the fox is such a rare, intelligent, solitary and elusive animal that even the likes of Samson could not have captured 300 of them. In fact, *shu'alim* are not foxes, but jackals. The jackal, a relative of the fox, was unknown in western Europe, but in ancient times jackals roamed in huge packs throughout Israel. Notwithstanding, to this day most Bibles versions translate *shu'alim* as foxes.

Climate change is nothing new. It has been going on forever, and it had a significant effect on the ancient Middle East. When the Israelites first arrived in Canaan in 1200 BC, much of it was lush with forests, rich meadowlands and swamps, providing a habitat for a vast variety of mammal, reptile and bird species. Over the millennia, partly because of ancient climate change and partly because of centuries of neglect and abuse, large areas became arid wasteland. The expulsion of the Jews, the collapse of Roman control, centuries of warfare including the Crusades, and centuries of neglect under the Ottomans devastated the land. Much of it was abandoned altogether, leaving little or no human habitation. As the land dried up, many animal species moved out, and a few became extinct. In the late 19th century, European Jews fleeing persecution immigrated and settled on the abandoned land that had been their ancient homeland. It was so inhospitable that no one else wanted it. Their efforts, followed by the massive environmental restoration programs of modern Israel, have returned much of the land to its original verdancy. It is again becoming a green land teeming with wild animals and birds.

Richard R. Losch+

Some things seem never to change. Adolf Hitler wrote that as a boy he asked his father, a customs officer, about a political matter. When his father gave his opinion, Hitler asked him to think about it. He replied, "My son, I have no need to think. I am a public official."

The Ascension of Christ

Sad to say, in modern times the Feast of the Ascension of Christ seems to have faded from the attention of many Christians. Saint Luke tells us that forty days after the Resurrection (Lk. 1:3) Jesus “led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. It happened, while he blessed them, that he withdrew from them, and was carried up into heaven” (Lk. 24:50f). The expression “forty days” is a Hebrew idiom meaning a long time, and need not be taken literally.¹ Nonetheless, since the 4th century the Church has celebrated the Ascension on the fortieth day after Easter (May 26 this year). One reason that it often goes unnoticed is that since Easter is always Sunday, Ascension always falls on Thursday.

There are many reasons that the Ascension is important. One of them is that it is the last incident in what is theologically known as the Christ Event, which is Christ’s physical human presence on earth as Jesus of Nazareth. This began with his miraculous conception at the Annunciation, and went through his life, death and Resurrection. It concluded with his Ascension, after which he is no longer physically present in the world except in the form of his Body and Blood under the veil of the consecrated bread and wine in the Blessed Sacrament. Of course, he is the Son of God, and is always spiritually present in the world, but he will not be physically present again until his Second Coming at the end times. The Ascension is therefore what psychologists call a “closure” of the Christ Event.

A second reason for the importance of the Ascension is that it was in our human minds the restoration of Christ to his heavenly glory. The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity was never reduced in glory during his earthly ministry in the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. Nonetheless, with the exception of the Transfiguration, humans never saw his divine glory. The

¹ Forty days (or forty years) means a very long time, and forty days and forty nights means an extremely long time. It is an idiom not intended to be taken literally, but rather a metaphorical exaggeration tantamount to our saying, “I’ve told you a thousand times ...”

Ascension drives home to us the fact that while Christ is human because God chose to take humanity upon himself, he is also fully divine. The Ascension reminds us of that.

Thirdly, the physical passing of Jesus from this world into the heavenly realm assures us that he did not abandon his humanity at the end of his earthly mission, but carries it with him eternally. Because of this it is possible that we can, as we say in so many prayers, “dwell in him and he in us.” By uniting our humanity with his divinity, he also united his divinity with our humanity. Because of this, we can ultimately be perfected through him.

Finally, the Ascension is the beginning of Christ’s work as the eternal Atoning High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16) and as the Mediator of the New Covenant (Heb. 9:15). Christ’s redemption and salvation involved much more than just his death and Resurrection in human history. While that event accomplished his earthly mission (John 19:30), it was actually the beginning of the eternal act of redemption.

The Ascension prepared the way for the Holy Spirit to come upon the Apostles ten days later on the Feast of Pentecost (the Jewish Feast of Shavuoth). This was the birth of the Church, which was invested by the Holy Spirit with the knowledge, wisdom and understanding to continue Christ’s earthly ministry by teaching the Christian Faith to all the world. This will continue until he returns at the last days.

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

In 1916 Woodrow Wilson ran for his second term on an Anti-War platform, claiming that he had kept us out of the European war that had been going on for three years. He said that he would never send “our boys” overseas. He won by a hair, and was inaugurated on March 5, 1917. On April 4th, after several American ships had been sunk by the Germans, he declared war on Germany and we entered World War I.

Richard R. Losch+

Mercy and Motherhood

In Hebrew, the word we translate as mercy is *rachamim* (רחמים). While it is used as a singular noun, the suffix *-im* (ים-) is actually a plural form. We find this in many Hebrew words such as water (*mayim*, מים), light (*urim*, אורים), truth (*thumim*, תומים) and even one of the Names of God, *Elohim* (אלהים). In the Hebrew idiom, using a plural form as a singular denotes that the thing indicated has no recognizable or controllable limits. We can see this thinking in the words mentioned above. The word for face (*panim*, פנים) is also such a word. In English usage the face is just the physical appearance, but in Hebrew it represents the whole spirit, personality and individuality of the person, and therefore has no recognizable limits. These stand as more examples of the difficulties confronted in translating from one language to another. Delicate nuances are often lost.¹

Hebrew is also rich in the number of what seem to be quite unrelated words that come from a common root. While the word for mercy (*rachamim*, רחמים) is plural, its singular form (*recham*, רחם) means womb. On the surface there might seem to be no connection between mercy and the womb, but if we think about it, the relationship becomes more apparent. In ancient times it was believed that a woman's becoming pregnant and carrying the child to term was a sign of God's mercy. In an age when a large percentage of pregnancies failed and childbirth was life-threatening for both mother and child, this thinking is quite rational. Also, many of God's attributes are traditionally categorized as being either masculine or feminine. Mercy is considered a feminine attribute, so its association with motherhood, especially the womb, is also reasonable.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ In English, a verb is a word denoting an action, and a noun is a word denoting a person, place or thing—nothing more. In Hebrew it is not so simple. A verb not only denotes an action, but also points to who or what performs that action; a noun denotes a person place or thing, and also points to an action performed by it or on it. E.g., the verb to rule indicates who or what is ruling; a king is not just the top man, but is he who rules.

Saint Phoebe of Cenchreae

Saint Phoebe of Cenchreae,¹ who apparently brought to Rome Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans in advance of his first visit there, is a very important woman in the early development of the Christian Church. The Bible mentions her only once (Rom. 16:1-2), yet if we look carefully at those verses, they reveal a great deal about her:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a minister of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

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She was obviously raised a pagan, since her name is one of the names of the Greek goddess Artemis.² She lived in Cenchreae, a small Greek port city about five miles east of Corinth. While Corinth faces west on the Ionian Sea toward Rome, Cenchreae faces east on the Mediterranean toward Asia. The fact that Phoebe had money that she apparently had the right to spend indicates that she was probably a businesswoman, likely trading with Asia. Although it was rare for a woman to be in business, it was not unique. Lydia of Thyatira was a dealer in purple cloth (Acts 16:14). We are told nothing about Phoebe's age, ethnicity, marital status, or how she obtained her money, but considering that she was a businesswoman we can assume that she had no living husband, father, brother or son. The very fact that Paul calls Phoebe sister, minister and benefactor tells us that she was an unusual and remarkable woman.

The common impression is that in ancient times Greek and Roman women were treated as second-class citizens, with no power or authority, and with little respect. To some extent this may have been true, especially in Greece, but in the overall picture it is a false image. Although the majority of women

¹ Its ancient pronunciation was *ken'-kree-eye*, but the accepted pronunciation today is *sen'-kree-ay*.

² Phoebe Artemis, the sister of Phoebus Apollo, was the Olympian goddess of the hunt. She is the Greek equivalent of the Roman goddess Diana.

may have been content to be “shrinking violets,” there were many who were strong and influential. Women had no vote, could not hold public office, were subject to the men in their families, and with some exceptions were not allowed to own property. On the other hand, with the exception of notably disreputable women, they were treated with a degree of honor and respect that bordered on reverence. They often had a strong influence on the men in their families, even those who were themselves strong and powerful men.¹

Phoebe appears to have been such a woman. From the way Paul refers to her we can see that he sees her as an equal, and acknowledges that she has money and is one of his supporters. This passage, along with many others in his letters, belies the myth that he was a misogynist. He calls her his sister, a minister, and his benefactor, and he commends her to be received as such when she arrives in Rome. By calling her “our sister,” Paul acknowledges her as family in the same sense that today we say that we call a non-relative dear friend a part of our family. In ancient times this was significant, as family was a hugely important thing to ancient people. To call a non-relative a brother or sister meant that you afforded him all the rights of a family member, including protection, support, and the right of blood-vengeance if someone harmed him. Paul also calls Apphia his sister (Philem. 2) and Timothy (1 Thes. 3:2), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25) and Philemon (Philem. 7) his brothers.

Paul calls Phoebe a minister (*diakonos*, διακονος). While this is often translated as servant or deacon, this can be misleading. The Greek *doulos* (δουλος), hired servant or slave, is what is usually translated servant. The service of a *diakonos* would be more that of one who serves voluntarily as a kindness or as a means of helping. When the Bible refers to a deacon it simply means someone who serves the Christian community in

¹ Augustus's wife Livia was the second most powerful person in Rome, behind only Augustus himself. While she technically had no authority outside her household, she was his chief counselor, and served as his regent when he was away from Rome. She even had the use of his imperial seal.

some capacity. This service could be anything from organizing or leading worship, to bringing food to the poor. Some Protestant denominations today use the word deacon in this way. The term *diakonos* is also applied to Jesus and to Paul. It is misleading to translate this as deacon, because the sacerdotal office of ordained deacon did not develop until the 4th century. The best translation is minister, and this is appropriate for what seems to be Phoebe's role in the church in Cenchreae. It appears that she served that church in the way that most Protestant churches use the word minister today. Although she was not ordained, she was a lay leader of that church, and was not limited to the duties that were normally reserved for women. *The Complete Jewish Bible* calls Phoebe the *shammash* (שׁמַשׁ) of the congregation in Cenchreae. The *shammash* (or *shamash*) in a synagogue is the leader of the formal worship services.

In Greek the word *diakonos* also meant letter-carrier. Tertius, who wrote down Paul's dictation (Rom. 16:22) may well have been Phoebe's scribe. As such, he would unquestionably have been a slave. There was no postal or wire service in those days, so letters had to be carried by hand from the writer to the recipient. Very important letters were often written in several copies and sent separately to ensure that at least one copy arrived safely. It was also common for the courier to memorize the letter in case the physical copy was lost or destroyed. It is completely reasonable that when Phoebe presented Paul's letter to the church in Rome she recited it, and we can imagine her stopping from time to time to clarify or comment on some point in it. She also would have given the Romans the latest news about the churches in Corinth and Cenchreae.

The third word Paul uses to describe Phoebe is *prostatis* (προστατις), patron or benefactor.¹ This means that she was a

¹ This is the only time that *prostatis* is used in the New Testament, It is a *hapax legomenon*, which is a word that is used only once in an entire body of literature. However, in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, it is used several times, always referring to leadership, responsibility, or financial administration.

financial supporter of his ministry. By Roman law women could have money, but they normally had no say over how it was used. That was the prerogative of her husband. If she had no husband then her father controlled her money, and if she had no father the authority went to her adult brothers in order of age, and then to her adult sons in order of age. Only if she had no husband, father, brothers or sons did she have the power to spend her own money as she saw fit. This tells us that Phoebe was such a woman. Jesus had several such women supporters, including Mary Magdalene, Susanna and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza (Lk., 8:3). Joanna could not have done this without Chuza's permission (she would have been in very serious trouble if she did), and the fact that he is identified indicates that he approved. The lack of any mention of Phoebe's husband indicates that she was either unmarried or a widow.

Paul and Phoebe are actually benefactors and patrons of each other. He commends her to the Romans as his ambassador, and as a woman to be respected, heeded, supported, and treated as an equal. In return, Phoebe, who was obviously a woman who on her own had a lot of influence, was his supporter socially, ecclesiastically and financially. She in effect introduced Paul to the Romans in advance of his visit, giving them a personal contact with a man of whom they would have heard, but did not actually know.

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last nine years of *The Epistle* are online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the "Epistle" tab at the top, then select the issue you want to read. On a mobile device, click on the blue menu at the top right and select the "Epistle" page. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file. This is an easy way to share articles with others.

Richard R. Losch+

The best sermons are lived, not preached.

Trivial Update

In last month's "Touch of Trivia" we said that Nubuo Fujita presented the city of Brookings, OR, which he had tried to destroy during World War II, with a samurai sword that had been in his family for 400 years. When the city invited him to visit in 1962, he did not know whether he would be received with warmth or hostility. He brought the sword so that if his reception were hostile, he could offer his atonement to the city and restore his family's honor by committing *Seppuku* (*Hara-kiri*)¹ with the ancient sword. When he found his reception to be friendly, he presented the sword to the city. It is still on display in the Brookings library. Japanese tradition is strong.

Richard R. Losch+

A Drink Fit for a King

We have long known that wine in ancient times was very expensive, and that the favored drink of the common people was beer. In fact, beer was probably the first fermented drink known. Beer in antiquity was much stronger than the normal beers and ales of today. It was more like the powerful dark ale known as *Geordie Brown* that is still drunk by coal miners in England today. It can send one into oblivion after a very few glasses of it. When the Bible speaks of "strong drink" (Prov. 20:1 et al.) it is speaking of beer. Distilled liquors were not discovered until medieval times. At any rate, in the ancient world wine was the preferred drink of royalty and the rich, and was used by the common people only on special occasions.

We know that the Roman rich drank all kinds of flavored wines. Wine sweetened with honey was very popular. They also used a concentrated grape juice known as *sapa* that was

¹ *Seppuku* (切腹), "cutting the belly," and *hara-kiri* (腹切), "belly cutting" are synonymous in Japanese. In writing, *seppuku* is used, and when spoken, *hara-kiri* (or *harawo-kiri*) is used. Notice that in *kanji* (the system of writing Japanese in modified Chinese ideograms), when writing the two words, the ideograms for cutting (切) and for belly (腹) are reversed.

made in lead pots. The lead acetate that leached into the *sapa* made it much sweeter, but also contributed to widespread lead poisoning. They would often infuse their wine with spices and herbs. This practice was uncommon in pre-Roman times, however, especially in the Middle East. Before the Babylonian destruction of Judah (587 BC), wine in the Middle East was drunk mainly by the rich, and with some minor exceptions it was not sweetened or flavored. At least so we thought until a new discovery presented a very different picture.

In two recent excavations in the City of David (the oldest part of Jerusalem), a number of large wine jars was discovered in the cellars of two buildings that were clearly royal office buildings of the time of Zedekiah (r. 597-587). He was the last king of Judah before the Babylonians destroyed it. The quality of the jars and the seals on them show that they belonged to the king, and that they contained the best wine, although some may have contained top quality olive oil. Out of sheer curiosity, the archaeologists decided to do chemical tests on the jars despite their confidence that they had held either wine or oil. As they suspected, they held wine, but to their amazement, they found that the wine had been heavily infused with vanilla. It was known that sometimes the royal wine had a touch of cinnamon or honey, but vanilla has never been found before. Vanilla did not grow in the Middle East, and had to have been imported from India or tropical Africa. It was very expensive, and so pleased the palate of only the very rich. We do not yet know whether vanilla wine was a particular favorite only of Zedekiah, or graced the tables of his royal ancestors as well.

Previously, molecular testing of things like wine and oil jars has been rare, except when there had been doubt as to what jars held. As a result of this discovery, however, archaeologists are likely to use it much more often.

Richard R. Losch+

*If aviators aviate, why
don't alligators alligate?*

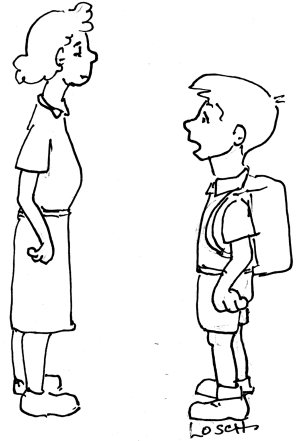
A Touch of Trivia

Did you ever wonder why the Old Farmer's Almanac has a hole in the upper left corner? It started in 1919 as a courtesy to its readers. At the end of the year when the new edition came out, they could run a string through the hole in the old one and hang it on a nail in the out-house for toilet paper. Commercial toilet paper was invented in 1857, but it did not become popular until indoor plumbing became common, requiring a more flushable product that would not clog the drainpipes.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



*"I made a new friend today
at the Principal's office.
He's just like me."*



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