

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



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October 2017

This Month's Cover

In recognition of the Feast of Saint Luke the Evangelist (October 18), our cover this month is *Saint Luke and the Madonna* by Hermen Rode (fl. c. 1468-c. 1504). It is an altarpiece painted for the Guild of St. Luke in Lübeck in northern Germany, Rode's home. It is tempera on wood, painted in 1494 in the late Gothic style, and is still on display in Lübeck. The Gothic style is noted for its rather stiff figures and extreme detail in the draping of cloth. This is generally considered Rode's finest work. It depicts Saint Luke at his writing desk, writing his gospel. Hovering over his arm is the dove representing the Holy Spirit, who guides his thoughts. On the desk is a winged ox, his symbol, with a banner bearing his name. On the shelves behind the desk is an assortment of medicine jars, signifying his profession as a physician, and beside them hangs a rosary. Behind him with her hand pointing to his work is the Blessed Virgin holding the infant Jesus. Traditionally she and Saint Luke were friends, and his gospel contains stories that he could have known only from her. This, like many medieval paintings, is anachronistic. The house, furniture and clothing are those of 15th century Germany, not 1st century Judea. Also, Saint Luke never met Jesus during his earthly life, and it is unlikely that he ever knew Mary or the Apostles until after Jesus' death and resurrection, so he would never have seen her with the infant Jesus. One item is missing from this painting that very often appears in depictions of Saint Luke: a portrait of the Blessed Virgin. Very ancient tradition says that he was an accomplished artist, and that he painted a now long-lost portrait of Mary.

We know very little about Hermen Rode. He lived and worked in Lübeck, and a surviving document indicates that he

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owned a house on the Johannesstrasse, an upscale neighborhood in the city. He was thus apparently prosperous and traveled in the higher social circles. Several altarpieces are attributed to him, but this *Saint Luke* is the only one bearing his signature. A number of what are surely his altarpieces are found in Sweden, and it appears that he had a thriving business exporting altarpieces and paintings to the Swedish market. He may have had a wealthy Swedish patron.

One reason that art critics are so certain in identifying his art is his unique style. His female faces all have prominent foreheads, soft receding chins and gentle half-closed eyes. Their bodies are described as boneless and retaining a forward-stepping stance. Until late in his career his colors seem thinly painted and rather dull. It would not be until the influence of the Italian Renaissance reached Germany that vibrant colors would become the norm.

Rode and his contemporary Bernt Notke were the two most important northern German painters of their time, and both were noted for exporting paintings throughout the Baltic states. His actual death date is unknown, but there is no indication of his being alive after 1504.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word From the Editor

One of the most familiar stories in the Old Testament is that of Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28:12). Jacob had led a life as a swindler, cheating among many others his brother Esau and his father Isaac, and he would thereafter cheat his uncle Laban in retribution for being cheated by him. He was fleeing from the wrath of his brother, and as night drew near he lay down near Luz. There he had a dream in which he saw "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven."¹ Angels were ascending and descending the ladder, and

¹ The New International Version (NIV) translates this "stairway," but since in ancient Palestine the access to upper stories was usually some form of ladder or ladder-like steps, "ladder" is a better translation.

above it he saw God, who repeated to him the promise that he had made to Jacob's grandfather Abraham, that he would be the father of a great nation and inherit the land of Canaan.

The question immediately comes to mind, why would God make such a promise to so flawed a man? In *God the Ingenious Alchemist* the late Fr. John Claypool said that God is the ultimate master at turning lead into gold—at turning weak, flawed men into spiritual and moral powerhouses. Jacob would go on to continue his life as a swindler until many years later, when he fled from the wrath of his uncle and prepared to face that of his brother. It was then that he wrestled with a man for a whole day until he prevailed and received a blessing, changing his name from Jacob to Israel. Some say he wrestled with an angel and others say that it was God, but the allegory is clear: he wrestled with his conscience, and his better side won. From that time on Jacob, although still with many weaknesses, became a paragon of leadership and morality, and his twelve sons went on to sire the tribes of Israel.

The story of the dream of the ladder has a powerful message to us. God does not lose faith in us despite our flaws, and he will give us all the strength we need to learn to overcome those flaws. And God is patient. It took at least fourteen years from the time Jacob had the dream of the ladder until he finally came to grips with himself and reformed. He was a very worldly man, but one word in the story tells us that in this life God does not take us out of the world, but rather ties our earthly life to the potential of heavenly perfection. We read that the ladder was “set up” on the earth. That word is *mutzav* (מצב), which is rooted in the word that means firm and unshakeable. The ladder, the tie between heaven and earth, is not just standing there, it is firmly fixed to the earth.

The ultimate ladder is Jesus Christ. The Son of God in his full divinity took upon himself full humanity, firmly rooted in this world, and thus gave us the means to ascend to God. The vision and promise of Jacob's ladder is fulfilled in him.

Father Rick Losch

Be Wordly Wise

Berserk

For several centuries the Vikings terrorized the British Isles, and from A.D. 995-1035 Knútr Inn Ríki (King Canute) ruled most of England, along with Denmark and Norway. These Vikings are called Norsemen (meaning men of the North), so most people think of them as being from Norway. In fact, almost all the Vikings were from the Scandinavian region we now call Denmark, and they spoke an early version of Danish. One of the legendary Viking heroes was known as *Bjørnserkr*. His real name is unknown, but the nickname *Bjørnserkr* means Bear Shirt. According to the legend, he wore a bearskin shirt with no armor. He was known as a fierce warrior who fought like a raging madman, mowing down all in his path. His name came into English as a noun, berserker, meaning someone who fights with uncontrolled ferocity. Through what linguists call back-formation the word berserker soon came to be used as an adjective, berserk.

Many Danish words came into English during that period. Interestingly, almost all of the most vulgar English “four-letter words” are of Danish origin. Two Scottish words that came from Danish are *cutty*, meaning short, and *sark*, from *serkr*, shirt. The fastest British clipper ship, the one that broke open the China trade, was named the Cutty Sark, the Short Shirt (it is also the brand name of a popular Scotch whisky).

Many Vikings settled in England and remained there. As a result a number of British surnames come from Danish. One of Canute's generals, more merciful than most Vikings, was known to give the order when his men raided a village, “*Børn nae kel*”¹ (“Don't kill the children”). He settled in northwestern England, came to be known by that name, and left many descendants. The name Barnicle (not Barnacle, as in the crustacean) is a well-known British surname today.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ The Scottish word *bairn*, child, comes from *børn*. *Børn* actually means cub, and is related to *bjørn*, bear.

Altar Flowers

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

Blessing of the Animals on October 1st

In honor of the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, we will have a service of the Blessing of the Animals on Sunday, October 1, 2017, at 2:00 p.m. in the courtyard. While altercations between animals are extremely rare at these services, we ask that your animals be leashed, tethered or caged. Please invite your friends and neighbors to this happy occasion.

Hiram Patrenos

ECW United Thank Offering

The United Thank Offering (UTO) is a ministry of the Episcopal Church for the mission of the whole church. Through the United Thank Offering, men, women and children nurture the habit of giving daily thanks to God. These prayers of thanksgiving start when we recognize and name our many daily blessings. Those who participate in UTO discover that thankfulness leads to generosity. The United Thank Offering is entrusted to promote thank offerings, to receive these offerings, and to distribute the UTO monies to support missions and ministries impacting the lives of women and children throughout the Episcopal Church and in invited Provinces of the Anglican Communion in the developing world.

The Episcopal Church Women's ingathering of the United Thank Offering will be on Sunday, October 8th. Envelopes for contributions are available on the table at the rear of the church and may be placed in the Alms Basins or given to Ethel Scott, UTO Coordinator. Checks should be payable to Episcopal Church Women or ECW

Hiram Patrenos

Very Clean, But Maybe Not So Much

The three cleanest peoples of ancient times were the Egyptians, the Romans and the Jews. The Egyptians and Romans bathed at least once a day and often even more frequently, because water was cheap and plentiful in most of the lands that they controlled. The Jews lived in an arid land and thus were not frequent bathers, but they were extremely clean with regard to their food preparation, sanitation, and hand washing. If we look a little more closely at the Romans, however, we find that they were not nearly as clean as we picture them, or even as clean as they thought themselves to be.

The most prominent symbol of Roman cleanliness was the public bath. This was the one place where all classes mixed. Only the extremely wealthy had their own private baths, but even they were more likely to go to the public ones, because they were social centers. Even the emperors used the public baths (although Hadrian was the last to do so), where they would share the bath with the common folk, and even with many slaves.¹ Most business deals, political machinations, and general socializing took place in the bathhouses. People who had the leisure to do so would often spend the whole afternoon in the baths, day after day. Women also used the public baths, although they had separate areas. Some of the baths were enormous. In the third century AD the emperor Caracalla built a bath that would accommodate 1600 bathers at a time, and 6000-8000 people a day would visit it. Caracalla did not use it himself, however. He was quite paranoid, and had a securely guarded private bath in the palace. It did him little good, however, as his own guards assassinated him.

This all sounds very clean and nice, but there were problems with it. The Romans knew about soap, but it was strong

¹ There was a class system even among slaves. Slaves such as teachers, musicians, physicians and stewards usually lived far better than the majority of middle class Roman freemen. Upper class slaves often went to the baths right alongside their masters. Hadrian would walk around the baths, personally receiving petitions from the common people.

and harsh, and they did not use it for personal hygiene. Instead, before bathing they would rub scented oil into their skin, and then scrape it off with a curved knife called a strigil, wiping the skin afterwards with a cloth. The rich had slaves to do this for them, while the poorer did it for themselves. Unfortunately, very few baths had any exchange of water, and as a result there was always an unsanitary oil slick on the surface. There is also little doubt that they had the same problem as modern swimming pools—that of people relieving themselves in the water—but they had no chemical treatments to purify it. Although germ theory was unknown at the time, Roman physicians often warned people who had open wounds not to go into the baths, in order to avoid infections.

There was another serious sanitation problem in most Roman cities. In the early period of Rome, before the aqueducts, the main source of water was the Tiber River, but that was also the sewer. The rich lived upriver where this was less of a problem, but it was still a problem even for them. Also, there was no system of sewage disposal. There were public privies all over the city that drained into the river, but only the rich had toilets in their houses, and most of these also drained into the river. The poor simply used pots that they emptied out the window onto the streets below. It was literally dangerous to walk the streets of Rome, especially early in the morning, because not only was there a rain of waste coming down from the *insulae* (tenements), but occasionally someone would accidentally drop the whole pot. There are several reports of people being injured or killed from being hit on the head by a falling chamber pot.¹ Slaves cleaned up the streets daily, but still it is hard to imagine what any Roman city must have smelled like on a hot summer day. This also meant, of course, that the city was constantly swarming with flies. There is little wonder that those who could afford it had villas out in the country where they usually spent the summer months.

¹ This was the standard method of sewage disposal throughout Europe until well into the Middle Ages.

The Romans favored white clothing, which again they saw as a symbol of cleanliness. The only problem with white clothing is that it has to be washed frequently, and even then it is hard to keep it from yellowing.¹ A thriving business in all Roman cities was the laundry business, called the fuller's (Mk. 9:3). All but the extremely rich sent their clothing to the fuller rather than having it done by their own slaves. First, the clothes were scrubbed with fuller's soap, which was much like old-fashioned lye soap.² The clothes would then be treated with ammonia to whiten them, and therein lies the problem. The only known source of ammonia was fermented urine. The poor would usually save their urine and sell it to the fullers for a little extra income. The emperor Vespasian levied a urine tax. When his son Titus objected, he replied, "Money never stinks." The Romans also used ammonia from the same source to whiten their teeth, and the elderly used it to take the yellow caste from their white hair. As a result most Romans always had a faint smell of urine, but considering the other smells of the city it was probably never noticed.

I used to think it would be exciting to live in ancient Rome, at least if I were rich. The next time I see a "toga opera" on TV, however, my reaction will be, "Not so much."

Richard R. Losch+

Let Me Go and Bury My Father

The gospels are full of things that we wish Jesus had never said. Most are so because they make us uncomfortable about ourselves, and force us to think about our personal shortcomings that we would rather not confront. Some, however, make us uncomfortable about Jesus. Our discomfort at these is not

¹ Colored clothing was popular in most ancient cultures, but it did not come into style among the Romans until well into the third century AD.

² A fuller's slave had a very short life expectancy. Not only did he usually end up with cracked and bleeding hands that would then get infected, but he also generally worked in enclosed areas breathing ammonia and the smoke from the fires that heated the water.

because of any shortcomings in Jesus, though, but results from our own ignorance about the social, cultural or theological background of the statements themselves. For example, the Prince of Peace said, "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Mt. 10:34). Taken out of context, he sounds like the warrior Messiah that the Zealots sought. In context, however, we realize that Jesus' purpose was not to bring dissension, but he knew that dissention would result from his teachings, because they upset the corrupt and worldly status quo.

One story that upsets many readers of the Bible is that of the man who said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go" (Lk. 9:57ff). Jesus then told him, "Follow me." The man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." On the surface this seems not only a rather harsh and compassionless reply, but also as if he were telling him to violate the fifth commandment and dishonor his father (Ex. 20:12). But if we look at the customs of the times we realize that it is nothing more than a declaration of the urgency of leaving one's old life behind and turning to the kingdom of God before it is too late.

The Jews had two burials. When a person died, he was buried if at all possible before sundown on the day he died (many Orthodox and Conservative Jews still practice this today). This was not a burial in the ground, however, as we think of burial today. Rather, the body was laid in a tomb, which was usually a cave carved out of the rock. Extended families often had their own family tombs, although there were also community tombs. There was room in them for several bodies. These had shelves in them where the bodies were laid out, having been washed and anointed with spices and wrapped in a shroud. They were left there until the flesh had rotted away from the bones and dried out. In the arid Palestinian climate, this usually took no more than a year. One year after the burial, the body was checked. If it were not yet ready it would lie there for another year, but usually one year was sufficient. When it was ready, the bones were collected

and placed in a small stone casket called an ossuary.¹ This was engraved with the person's name and other information, much like the modern practice of engraving a gravestone.² At this point the ossuary would be permanently buried in a family tomb or mausoleum, or in the ground. Historians believe that this method of burial developed among the Jews in Babylonia and Persia during and shortly after the Exile. The Jews dreamed of eventually returning to Palestine, and this would enable them to carry the remains of their loved ones back so they could be buried in the sacred ground of Judah.³ The custom survived until well after the Romans expelled the Jews from Palestine in A.D. 132, after which it faded out in most Jewish communities. It was the normal practice in Jesus' time. Jesus himself was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, whose ossuary probably would have been eventually taken back to Arimathea for permanent burial.

At a person's death the family would be present and take part in the washing and preparation of the body, usually staying with it right up to the time that the tomb was closed. On the other hand, preparation of the bones for the ossuary was not only an unpleasant job, but it was important that it be done right. It was very rare that a family would do it themselves. Instead, they hired professionals for the job and if they were even there, which normally they would not be, it would be just to watch and perhaps offer a prayer. More commonly they would remain at home and gather to say the *Kaddish*, the

¹ To this day many Jews have a special religious observance of a loved one's death one year later, and often annually. This is called by the German term *Jahrzeit* or the Yiddish *Yortzeit* (year time).

² A famous ossuary in Jerusalem is engraved "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." It is allegedly that of St. James of Jerusalem, "the brother of the Lord." It may be a forgery or a coincidence (James, Joseph and Jesus were very common names in first century Palestine), but archaeologists have not yet given a final determination of its authenticity.

³ Moses had the bones of Joseph taken with them when the Israelites escaped Egypt (Ex. 13:19). This was almost certainly the inspiration for the practice that later developed in Babylonia.

prayer for the dead.

Let's return to the man who wanted to follow Jesus. Jesus and the disciples were walking along the road in Samaria on their way to Jerusalem (Lk 9:52ff) when the man spoke to them. This tells us that he was not at home. If his father had just died, he would not have been on the road, but with the body. If he were accompanying the funeral procession to the tomb the story would certainly have mentioned such an important detail. This tells us that the burial he was speaking of was not the laying out of the body, but the burial of the ossuary a year later, which the family rarely took part in. When Jesus told him that preaching the Gospel was more important, it now no longer seems like a callous or heartless statement.

Richard R. Losch+

Reformation or Revolution

This month marks the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's nailing of the Ninety-five Theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517. In many people's minds this was the beginning of the so-called Protestant Reformation, even though most Protestant churches officially celebrate Reformation Day on January 1. There are so many legends and misunderstandings about this event and what followed it that it is impossible to cover them all. It is appropriate, however, to consider a few of them here.

The common image is that of Luther, in a courageous act of defiance, nailing his document to the church door with a series of resounding blows as his mighty hammer struck the nails. We can imagine the echoes reverberating through the huge church. This is a stirring image, but it is completely false. In all medieval cities the church door was the town bulletin board, where anyone was welcome to tack up notices for those who were educated enough to read them. It is likely that Luther did not drive any nails at all, because there were so many in any church door from previous notices that all one normally did was to punch his notice onto a nail that was al-

ready there. What Luther posted was not a defiant challenge to the Roman Catholic Church. It was a call to the local Church leaders to debate issues that he considered to be signs of corruption and abuse on the part of the Church. He listed 95 such issues. As a priest, Dominican friar, and professor at the University of Wittenberg, he wanted to launch a public debate in order to confront these issues. Johann Tetzel, a Vatican official, was raising funds in Wittenberg to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, so it was an ideal time for such a debate. Unfortunately his call was ignored, and for a strong-willed and impatient man like Luther that was intolerable. As time went on his ideas and his preaching became more and more radical, until he was finally called upon to answer for them before a synod at Augsburg in 1518. It was there that he called for the Church to reform herself and stop her abuses. He thereafter started calling for a revolution from within the Church, and in 1521 he was summoned before the Diet of Worms and excommunicated. It was there that he made his famous statement, "I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen." There is no record that he ever actually made the legendary statement, "Here I stand. I can do no other."

What Luther began was not a reformation, but a revolution—a complete repudiation of and breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church. However, he unwittingly did accomplish for the Church what he had originally set out to do. He brought about a true reformation. It is called the Council of Trent (1545-63), in which most of the abuses he had challenged were addressed and, for the most part, corrected by the Church herself. Unfortunately, he also set off an avalanche of schisms and dissention that ultimately resulted in over 43,000 different Protestant denominations today.

The American Revolution did not begin on July 4, 1776. It began with a resistance to British oppression and corruption at least 20 years earlier; the shooting began on April 19, 1775, and independence was not complete and defined until the ratification of the Constitution in 1789. We identify July 4, 1776,

the day that the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence, as the pivotal day of the American Revolution. Similarly, serious unrest in the Church began long before Luther was born, and the actual revolution that broke the Church apart and instigated a series of rebellions came about several years after he posted the Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg. Like July 4, however, October 31, 1517 is generally identified as the pivotal point of the series of events that is commonly called the Protestant Reformation.

There is no question that Martin Luther was a very courageous man. Defiance of the Church in the 16th century could be an extremely dangerous thing, and if he had not garnered the support of a few powerful German aristocrats he probably would not have survived. Before we apotheosize him, however, we must also look a little more carefully at the truth behind the legend of this allegedly brave and noble warrior for truth. In fact, he had some grave flaws. From all reports he was a singularly unpleasant man to be around (as can be sensed in many of his writings), although that can also be said of many of the saints. He was notoriously vulgar, publishing obscene scatological woodcuts insulting the papacy. He declared unshakeable loyalty to his original followers, most of whom were peasants. But when the Peasants' War began he sided with the nobility who protected and financially supported him, and thousands of peasants were brutally slaughtered.

More important, however, is that he was notably stubborn, and refused to listen to the advice of even his most ardent supporters. He seems to have missed Deuteronomy 4:2, "Do not add to what I command you, and do not subtract from it." When he translated the Holy Bible into German, there were seven books of the Old Testament that he did not feel belonged there, even though the Church had canonized them in Council 1200 years earlier. He simply refused to translate them, thus giving us what is known today as the "Protestant Bible." He also refused to translate the Epistle of Saint James and the second half of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans because they did not agree with his theology. Under extreme

pressure from almost all of his followers, however, he finally reluctantly did so. He disagreed with Saint Paul's doctrine of salvation by faith, so he added the word "alone" to it, thus saying that we are saved by "faith alone," denying the effect of good works. Unfortunately, this has become a pillar of much of Protestant theology, even though it is not what the Bible really says. He also promulgated the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, which says that the Bible is the sole source of all religious truth, despite the fact that the Bible never says that. The Church authorized the Bible, not *vice versa*.

A grave problem with Luther is that he was virulently anti-Semitic. Medieval anti-Semitism had significantly waned in Europe with the exception of Spain, where the Spanish Inquisition, although also waning, was still going on.¹ Luther reignited anti-Semitism and fanned it into full flame. In *About Jews and Their Lies* he advised that all synagogues and Jewish schools be burned, the Jews' property be confiscated and their homes destroyed, their young enslaved, and that ultimately every Jew be expelled from Europe. Hitler frequently quoted him in his attempts to enlist the support of Christians.

There is little wonder that as rebellions against the Roman Church erupted across Europe in the 16th century, including the Anglicans, Calvinists, Puritans and Anabaptists, many of their leaders (including Henry VIII) repudiated Luther. There is no doubt that his courage and open defiance inspired and encouraged many others, and thus he can be credited with unleashing the so-called Protestant Reformation. He was by no means its only leader, however, nor was he its originator.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ It must be pointed out that the Spanish Inquisition was a state-sponsored persecution of Muslims and Jews, not an ecclesiastical inquiry into heresy, as existed in the rest of Europe. It was started at the demand of the anti-Semitic and Islamophobic King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella (of Columbus fame), and at first the Church strongly opposed it. However, because Spain held the purse strings of most of Europe and of the Vatican, the corrupt Pope Sixtus IV (who built the Sistine Chapel) yielded to their pressure and authorized the Spanish Inquisition in 1478.

Fifth Sunday

Community Service

St. James' will host the Livingston Fifth Sunday Community Service this month on Sunday, October 29, 2017 at 11:00 a.m. Please make your plans to attend and support this Livingston tradition.

Hiram Patrenos

There is no evidence that the social media have enabled the deaf to hear or the blind to see, but they certainly have enabled the dumb to speak.

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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