



**From the Pulpit: June 2, 2024**

Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**The Reverend Dr. William A. Evertsberg**

Mark 14:22–25; Romans 10:13–17

*God After...II: God after Gutenberg*

John Haught, professor of cosmology and evolutionary biology at Georgetown University, and he's written these books called *God After Darwin* and *God After Einstein*, and that sounded like a sermon series to Katie, Christine and me. We're looking at all these magnificent scientific and technological achievements that kind of morphed the church in the last 500 years.

From the Book of Mark:

*While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.*

From Paul to the Romans:

*For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.*

**T**he church across the street is the church across the street because Henry VIII wanted a son. American Episcopalians are offspring of the Church of England.

*"these 95  
bullet points  
all complained  
that the  
Mother  
Church was  
trying to buy  
salvation.  
With cash!"*

Kenilworth Union Church is Kenilworth Union Church because Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk at the time, was so intensely aggrieved by the Roman Catholic Church, the only option in Europe at the time, that on October 31, 1517—the Eve of All Saints Day, one of the biggest holidays of the church year—he nailed 95 bullet points to the door of the Church at Wittenberg, where he knew every brick mason, cobbler, and schoolteacher in Wittenberg would see them.

Oversimplifying a little bit—but not much—these 95 bullet points all complained that the Mother Church was trying to **buy** salvation.

With cash! Martin Luther said, "You

know what? I bet it doesn't work that way. I bet you can't bribe God! God doesn't take gold bars and Mercedes convertibles like Robert Menendez."

Within days of Halloween, 1517, Luther's lieges and loyalists had packaged these 95 bullet points into pamphlets and mailed them to every newspaper, university, and parish in Europe, including the Vatican, and—voilà!—you have the Protestant Reformation, whose devotees today number about a billion adherents.

And that almost instantaneous communication by junk-mail flier was only possible because 60 years before Halloween, 1517 a goldsmith from Mainz, Germany, had come up with a moveable-type printing press capable of mass-producing books and other written communication. Johannes Gutenberg's printing press enabled the Protestant Reformation.

Before Gutenberg, every single book in Europe was copied by hand. Hapless monks scribbling away in the dank stone scriptoria of medieval monasteries produced every single Bible, every single book by Homer, Plato, Aquinas, and Dante.

It would take a scrivener about a year to complete one copy of the Bible, which meant that they were precious, right? Before Gutenberg, a book would cost about three years' salary for a common plumber or nurse. What would that be by today's valuations—\$200,000? More than your car, a little less than your house or your kid's tuition at Michigan State.

You can see evidence of this in the personal notes scribes would jot in the margins of ancient manuscripts: "It's so cold in here I can't feel my fingers," they would complain.

Errors were made. You've heard about Brother Andrew, right? Brother Andrew was a middle-aged monk who'd spent his whole adult life in a monastery scriptorium making new copies of old books. One day he was copying an old manuscript when he got suspicious about something he was reading, so he dug around in the stacks to find the oldest version of that manuscript in the collection, as close to the original as he could get. And he sat down on the floor with his back against a pillar with the ancient manuscript in his lap weeping copiously. When another brother asked what was wrong, Brother Andrew said,

"It's CELEBRATE. With an 'R'!"

When books cost three years' salary, nobody reads them. Literacy rates in Europe were miniscule before Gutenberg; about 20% of Europeans could write their own names. Literacy in Europe skyrocketed when books became cheap. Gutenberg's impact on human thriving is immeasurable; today, 83% of the world's people can read.

*"Literacy in Europe skyrocketed when books became cheap. Gutenberg's impact on human thriving is immeasurable"*

Ironically the guy who made books cheap also produced the most expensive book in the world. Well after the US Constitution, the Magna Carta, and a few other valuable manuscripts.

Gutenberg printed 180 of his Bibles in 1455; 49 survive, so far as we know, including copies at the Library of Congress, the New York City Public Library, and the Widener Library at Harvard. Rare book sellers guess that the next time a Gutenberg Bible comes up for sale, it will go for \$35 million.

I read two Scripture texts this morning: a Catholic text and a Protestant text. The Catholic text is from the Gospel According to Saint Mark: "This is my body, broken for you.

This is the blood of the Covenant, shed for many."

In Roman Catholic theology, by the miracle of transubstantiation, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Literally. The apex of Catholic worship is that moment when the priest declares, "This is my body."

This was an ingenious way to communicate the faith in a long age when nobody could read. In order to encounter the Christ, you don't have to **read** anything, you don't have to **know** anything, you don't even have to **believe** anything; you just had to stroll to the altar and take a wafer from the priest.

Christians in the medieval church had no idea what was happening in Christian worship. They didn't speak Latin. When the priest declared *Hoc est corpus meum*—"This is my body"—they had no idea what the priest was saying. *Hoc est corpus meum. Hoc est corpus meum. Hoc est corpus meum.* It was all hocus pocus to them. That's where we get the phrase.

You know why every European cathedral has stained glass windows? One reason is that they are beautiful and transmit multi-hued light, but another is that they tell the story of God's history with God's people, Genesis to Revelation.

A medieval Christian might not be able to read Genesis, but she can look at an image of Adam and Eve and the serpent and get the point. Stained glass windows are a Bible for people who can't read. They're the poor man's Bible.

So much for the Catholic text. Now the Protestant text. St. Paul to the Church at Rome: "Faith comes through what is heard, and what is heard comes from the word of Christ." The **WORD** of Christ; the **WORD** written, and the **WORD** preached.

The apex of Protestant worship is not the eucharist; around here, that's practically an afterthought. The apex of Protestant worship is the sermon. I know that's terrible news for many Christians, but that's the way it is. The Protestant encounters Christ through the **WORD** and through the **EAR**.

For better and for worse, Protestants live and die by the word. We don't have any smells and bells, we don't have any icons, we don't have saints, we don't have the splendid vestments of the Catholic clergy. We just read and preach and talk.

It could be that our time has come and gone. For 1,500 years, the Church communicated Christ to a **preliterate** culture.

For the last 500, we've preached to a **literate** culture.

Now we are moving into a **postliterate** culture. In the age of Snapchat, Instagram, Netflix, and Spotify, we read fewer words and see more and more images.

In the twenty-first century, when it comes to Show and Tell, Show always wins.

If you want to change the spark plugs in your car or build a She-Shed in the backyard, you don't read the manual; you look it up on YouTube and watch somebody do it.

It could be that more kinetic and visual forms of Christian worship might again be in the ascendancy—the incense, the vestments, the icons, genuflection. It's something to think about.

In any case, we are Protestants because of Martin Luther, but no less also because of Johannes Gutenberg.

Around the year 2001, the turn of the **third** millennium, several media called Gutenberg's printing press the most important invention of the **second** millennium—1001-2000 AD.

Think about that: more important than the computer, the Internet, the automobile, and penicillin. It's because literacy leads inevitably to education, employment, productivity, invention, and even—get this—to bigger crops. Thanks be to God for these innovative geniuses who enabled life as we know it.

*“The **WORD**  
of Christ;  
the **WORD**  
written, and  
the **WORD**  
preached.”*

**—Prayers of the People—**  
**The Reverend Christine V. Hides**

God who stretched the heavens above us,  
And lit the sun and stars.  
God who set the beneath our feet,  
We are awestruck by the beauty of spring, especially  
The steady rains which bring forth the vibrant green tree  
leaves and lush foliage .

We are delighted to see the wild indigo, heartleaf alexanders, penstemon, and wild irises are blooming in the wild and untouched places.

We watch with anticipation the sun's increasing activity, daring to hope for another of your auroral displays.

We give you thanks for these and all your wonderful gifts as we bring our prayers to you, Almighty God.

In the intertwining and essential webs of your creation we ask you to show us the way to steward this world. Forgive us when we forget our interdependence with other creatures and our reliance on rich soil, clean air, and clean water. Let us live with a light touch, taking only what we need and leaving each place better than we found it.

We pray for the nations of this world, especially those where war is a constant threat. Bring hostages home safely. Let there be an end to civilian casualties. Make a way for the life-saving aid to arrive in time. Quiet the weapons and straighten the path for diplomacy that creates lasting peace.

As we pray for other nations, renew our gratitude for our own country where liberty and justice for all is our shared goal. Grant us the wisdom and courage needed to live as responsible citizens. Let our faith be our strength and guide as we seek to be mindful of our neighbors' needs and perspectives.

Bless, especially the graduates, today. Let there be room to celebrate their accomplishments and peace within the unfolding opportunities ahead. Walk with the parents who experience the bittersweet emotions of the season. Give them an extra measure of strength in the multitude of spirit days and celebrations.

Gather up the joys of those gathered here. Collect our sorrows. Hold close those in need of comfort, strength, and healing. For in Jesus Christ we know your love which welcomes the stranger, heals the sick, frees the captive, and transforms our lives so that we may participate in your promise of earth as it is in heaven.

*\*You may use these prayers and sermons for non-commercial purposes in any medium, provided you include a brief credit line with the author's name (if applicable) and a link to the original post.*

KENILWORTH UNION CHURCH  
211 Kenilworth Avenue, Kenilworth Illinois 60043  
847-251-4272 | [kuc.org](http://kuc.org)  
[facebook.com/kenilworthunionchurch](https://facebook.com/kenilworthunionchurch)