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# THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

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*Daily Devotion at Zion + October 11, 2020 AD + **Pentecost Season***

## **This Week: Word and Image**

“The Word became flesh, and we have seen His glory.”

So writes John in his gospel (1:14), preaching to us about the God who became skin and bones, Jesus Christ. In Him, we see God truly, because He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). His death on the cross is no mere accident: it is the publication of God’s true self, as He undoes Himself, and does away with Himself, so that His creation might live and move and have its being (Acts 17:28). That merciful death, the whole purpose of His birth of the Virgin, is what made Jesus dazzle the disciples with the brightness of His appearance at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-6). He not only spoke the Gospel: He painted it in flesh and blood.

No wonder Martin Luther told Christians to paint their homes with Biblical scenes!

God’s law in the Old Testament prohibited idolatry, but permitted other images to be made, such as the cherubim on the ark, pomegranates in the temple, the beautiful garments of the priests. Those images pointed ahead to the Image, the Picture of God beyond all comparison, Jesus Christ. Because He became part of creation, devotion includes not only word, but also image! We now use creation to tell His story, employing drawings, paintings, mosaics, statuary, textile art, and more to tell the good news.

### **About the Cover Art**

*This week’s cover art is a detail of a painting by Dmitry Petrov, “Prayer of an Expectant Mother” (2005). The devout woman, her belly swollen with a growing child, sets a sharp contrast with the religious art around her. The people in the religious paintings are not alive, but they are brightly visible; the woman’s child is alive and growing, yet hidden in the womb. Nevertheless, the mute paintings speak to the woman in a way that the child cannot yet speak, comforting her with the promise of joy even as she prepares for the pain of delivery.*

## But Doesn't the Bible Say, "No Graven Images"?

People (and churches!) have sometimes thought that the Bible prohibits using images in worship and devotion. However, and as always, paying attention to Holy Scripture shows us the truth. God commanded Israel, "You shall not make *for yourself* any *graven image . . .*" (Exodus 20:4). The emphasis lies on "for yourself" and the creation of a "graven image," meaning the kind used for idolatry. In other words, Israel was not to choose its own art for the sake of setting up a false religion. Yet as mentioned earlier, God did command Israel to make the statues of the cherubim on the ark (Exodus 25:18-20) and golden pomegranates on the priestly garments (Exodus 28) and carved into the temple's pillars (1 Kings 7:18-20). We also know from history that the early Christians made drawing, paintings, and mosaics of Christ and the Scriptural scenes. So, in view of the Scriptural witness, and since Jesus alone is our righteousness, the Church is free to make images for the sake of teaching the Gospel and enjoy them.

### Daily Readings for the Week of Oct. 18 (Pentecost 20)

<b>S</b> Hosea 1:1—2:1 James 3:1-13 Matthew 13:44-52	<b>Th</b> Hosea 4:1-10 Acts 21:27-36 Luke 6:1-11
<b>M</b> Hosea 2:2-15 Acts 20:17-38 Luke 5:1-11	<b>F</b> Hosea 4:11-19 Acts 21:37—22:16 Luke 6:12-26
<b>T</b> Hosea 2:16-23 Acts 21:1-14 Luke 5:12-26	<b>Sa</b> Hosea 5:1-7 Acts 22:17-29 Luke 6:27-38
<b>W</b> Hosea 3:1-5 Acts 21:15-26 Luke 5:27-39	<i>These readings correspond to pages 968-1005 in Vol. IV of <u>For All the Saints</u>. To acquire <u>For All the Saints</u> or other devotionals, please contact the church office.</i>

## Using Images in Daily Devotion

It helps, first, to remember *how* images work in daily devotion.

A Lutheran artist living in Michigan, Ed Riojas (who painted Zion's triptych), remembers a conversation he once had with a Muslim immigrant to America. Mr. Riojas was standing next to an image of Christ crucified that he had made, exhibiting it with several other works at a public show. The Muslim man came to the display, paused, and looked at the image of Christ crucified for a long time. Then he turned to Mr. Riojas and said, "Who is that man, and why did he die that way?" Awed by the question, Mr. Riojas was too happy to answer.

So it goes: images and words work together. If we know nothing of the people and things depicted in artistic images, then they do not yet help us, except as an invitation to learn more. Images work *with* the Word, and only with the Word, and not against it.

The Lutheran Church therefore finds a double beauty in the art of the Church. It not only contains its own natural beauty, but it also bears the evangelical beauty of promise and preaching. Images teach, console, admonish, and remind us of the faith. Here are some ways to use images in your daily devotion (you may have better ways!):

- 1) **Keep Christ crucified close.** Christ on the cross is the proof of God's willingness to die rather than condemn you. Keep an image of that crucifixion near your bed, so that it's the first thing you see in the morning, and the last at night; or, keep its image in your pocket or near your heart.
- 2) **Keep the Lord's Supper by your supper.** Former generations often kept an image of the Last Supper in their dining spaces, reminding them of the feast that never ends.
- 3) **Be creative and match your devotion.** What Biblical stories do you love best? Why not find images of them and put them on your walls? Or why not share images of the holy Family with the neighborhood at Christmas? Let your mind follow your heart, and do what seems best to you.