



The Christian life is a journey.

*TrailNotes* speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the “landscape” we are passing through in this trail-laced wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. **TrailNotes** is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we’re learning and doing.

## ElderTalk: You Are Blessed!

ERIC BYROM

Have you ever been in complete darkness? Several years ago, my family went to Wind Cave in South Dakota, and part of the tour was in a room of the cave where the guide turned the lights off. It was completely dark except for one kid’s shoes, which were glow-in-the-dark. Even though those shoes did not have much light, they looked incredibly bright compared to the absolute darkness around us!

In Matthew 5:14-15 (ESV) Jesus said, *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.”*



He didn’t say in this, *“Try to be light.”* It was a given. I looked at the context of this statement and saw that before He said this, He also spoke of the disciples being salt of the earth. Before that statement are the famous statements known as the Beatitudes. It soon became apparent that if one is exhibiting the qualities of the Beatitudes, that is what makes a disciple salt and light in this world.

Jesus’ warning came in the form of not losing that saltiness or not hiding that light. So, in context, this means that we should focus upon not losing the qualities of the Beatitudes, and not hiding them from others.

As I looked at these Beatitudes, it also became apparent that the first four concern our relationship with God, and the second four concern our relationship with others. They seem to unpack the great commandment, which speaks of us loving God and loving others.

I also saw that there is a bit of a progression to the Beatitudes. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matt. 5:3 ESV) The point of entry is being bankrupt in spirit. Those who finally acknowledge and realize this are said to have the kingdom of heaven presently. Isn’t this what coming to Christ entails? Isn’t this what precedes our asking for salvation? It is a realization that we cannot, by any means, save ourselves, and that we are in need of mercy and grace. *(continued on page 2)*

## JULY 2023

- 2 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching: 2 Tim. 2:14-26.
  - 7 OWLs meet in the multi-purpose room at 8:30 am for a book study and prayer. Bring a sack breakfast.
  - 8 KDTS staff training 9 am-3 pm.
  - 9 Elder Jadaé Fox preaching: 2 Tim. 3:1-9. KDTS - 9-15. 
  - 13 Women of Grace Bible discovery and prayer: 6:30-8:00 pm, location TBA.
  - 15 Eric Byrom travels to India and Nepal for back-to-back globalLead Heart of the Leader Conferences. 15-29.
  - 16 Elder Matt Godsil preaching: 2 Tim. 3:10-17. Teen DTS: 16-22.
  - 21 OWLs meet in the multi-purpose room at 8:30 am for a book study and prayer. Bring a sack breakfast.
  - 23 Greg Frankenfield preaching: 2 Tim. 4:1-5. 
  - 23-29 Clear Fork High School band rents our entire facility for its day camp.
  - 30 Celebration Worship with potluck.
- AUGUST:**
- Friday-Sunday Aug. 4-6: FAMILY CAMPING at GFC.
- August 18-20: CHURCH-WIDE CONFERENCE with COMMUNITY CELEBRATION This will be a time of preparing our minds and spirits for the year ahead. Craig Heselton, retreat director with Columbus Vineyard Church, will be speaking.

## You Are Blessed *(continued from page 1)*

The second Beatitude is concerned with those who mourn. *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”* (Matt. 5:4) I always thought this was mourning someone dying, but in actuality, it is speaking of mourning our sin. The Bible speaks of godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Godly sorrow produces life while worldly sorrow produces death. I would say that the godly sorrow is mourning one’s disobedience, and worldly sorrow is mourning getting caught.

The third Beatitude is being meek. *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”* (Matt. 5: 5) This is seeing ourselves as God sees us. When we recognize that we are spiritually bankrupt and are sorry for our sins, it produces a humility in our lives.

The fourth Beatitude is starving and being desperately thirsty for righteousness. *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”* (Matt. 5:6) This is what leads us away from the continual cycle of sin and repentance. When we are seeking desperately after God and desperately dependent on the Holy Spirit in our lives, it leads to the transformation of our character.

Now we reach the second group of Beatitudes that deals with our relationship with others. First is those who show mercy.

*“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”* (Matt. 5:7) We cannot show mercy unless we ourselves have experienced mercy. This relates back to the first four Beatitudes.

*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* (Matt. 5:8) Being pure in heart is being pure in intention towards others. We are not people of guile who are seeking what’s best for *us*, but rather seeking to build *others* up. This comes out of being meek and humble.

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”* (Matt. 5:9) We are not peace fakers nor peace breakers, but peacemakers. This is hard work, because it results in our being persecuted for righteousness sake and also for Jesus’ namesake. This quality comes out of being hungry and thirsty for a right relationship with God and others.

It finally made sense to me why the last two Beatitudes are about persecution. If we are being salt and light and seeking to reconcile people to God and to each other, we will be attacked. Look at the world around you. Is anyone seeking to reconcile others together? Rather, we have broken up into tribes and



*“Bergpredigt im Schwarzwald” (“Sermon on the Mount in the Black Forest) by Rudolf Yelin der Alte, circa 1912 [Father of the artist who did the painting in the Laurentius Kirche in Schönaich, Germany, the subject of the article on page 3 of this issue].*

factions which are warring together constantly and trying to dominate each other!

Peacemakers are in short supply! Yet, this is ultimately what the Beatitudes lead towards. Our theme this year has been service, and the moniker we have used has been: *“Grow outward in service to God and others!”*

How best to do this is to let our lives be characterized by the Beatitudes. So, what do you do if these don’t characterize you or you struggle with one of them? Well, go back to the beginning. Recognize your lack or bankruptcy in that area and ask God to help! Desperately hunger and thirst for Him to help you to do what He has called you towards.

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who went before you.”* (Matt. 5:10-11)

We have a roadmap! Let’s follow it together and grow outwards in service to God and others! Let’s be salt that has not lost its savor and light that is not hidden by growing in the Beatitudes and living them out before a world in need of reconciliation with God.

### Grace Fellowship Church

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(A complete list of church functionaries will return next month)



I get the feeling that the Lord has been trying to tell me that I needed a refresher course on my “Trinitarian theology” since my days as a house church elder back in the 1970s. Early this year, there was a very readable book, *Simply Trinity*, by Matthew Barrett, and I just finished *The Mystery of the Trinity* by Vern S. Poythress, a more scholarly tome, in parts a bit over my head. Last of all was a recent visit by relatives from my ancestral home town of Schönaich, Germany, which resulted in my leafing through some books, in German of course, which I had brought back from the trip Donna and I had made there back in 2010, but I never had read from cover to cover. In one of those I discovered an analysis of some artwork, painted in 1954, over the altar of the Evangelische Laurentiuskirche (Laurentius Lutheran Church) in that city, written by one of the clergy in 1990, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the building of the present church structure. Can you guess the subject of that art work? The Trinity! What better excuse could I therefore have than to share this artwork and its analysis with you now. The article was translated first by an online translator and then “tweaked” here and there by me to make for easier reading. In most cases, however, the original long, run-on German sentences have been left as they were. Study the painting carefully as you read the article. I hope that it will stimulate you to go and get your own “refresher course” on the “God in three Persons, Blessed Trinity” that we worship.



### Rudolf Yelin's image of the Trinity – profound and problematic at the same time

by Reinhard Hauber

The first glance falls on God the Father. As Lord of the world, He sits on the globe. He wears a long, red robe and a white outer garment, which again characterizes Him as a ruler. God the Father is surrounded by a so-called “mandorla” (Italian for almond). This refers to the almond-shaped light that surrounds God the Father, Christ, or Mary in medieval works of art. The almond is a symbol for the fact that a distinction must be made between the external seeing of a figure and the inner perception of its secret, that is, that whoever sees Yelin's picture of the Trinity does not automatically gain access to the Triune God.

The mandorla is gold and surrounded by a blue ornate border. The head of God the Father is surrounded by a dark blue “halo.” Yelin chose this color as a contrast to the color of the mandorla and probably also to the color of the “halo” of Jesus. Blue here symbolizes the special divine light; this is also evident by noting how Yelin painted the hair of God the Father.

With his depiction of God the Father, Yelin violated the Old Testament prohibition against making an image of God (Exodus 20:4). He accepted this deficiency because He wanted to express an important theological concern.

## Some Trinitarian Insights *(cont. from p. 3)*

This concern becomes clear when one looks more closely at the Father's face.

His face is remarkable. The Father bears the same features as the Crucified. In particular, the same, pain-twisted mouth stands out. Yelin, thus, presents a deep theological insight that many theologians of earlier centuries have rejected and which has, actually, only been consistently thought through to the end in our century. When Jesus, the Son of God, suffers on the cross, God the Father does not remain unaffected by it, but rather suffers with the Son. The question asked by many people—“*How can God allow suffering?*”—finds its deepest answer in the insight that, in the man Jesus, God shared our life and our suffering, that He shared in the suffering of His Son, and that with the death of God the Son, a tear goes through the triune God Himself.

Looking at the crucified Christ, the golden “halo,” the emaciated upper body, the side wound, and the white loincloth catch the eye. The cross stands between the knees of God the Father. Its crossbar rests on the Father's thighs. The Father holds the ends of the crossbeam with His hands. Yelin wants to express that Jesus is safe with His Father even in suffering: that Jesus' body is embraced by the Father's lap and Jesus' hands by the Father's hands. However, the depiction seems strange to me. My first impression was as if the Father wanted to exhibit the suffering Son. Yelin has not been able to express his concern unequivocally because he does not let the Father look at the Son but at the viewer, and because he does not see the Father's hands with the face or the hands of the Son, but with the cross and thus with the instrument of torture. Yelin had two concerns: the Father's compassion for the Son and the suffering Son's comfort with the Father. Ultimately, the first concern was more important to him; so he accepted that his second concern was presented only imperfectly.

Yelin makes the togetherness of father and son clear with another detail. Between the head of the Father and that of the Son is the symbol of the Holy Spirit. A dove surrounded by a light blue “halo” flies from Father to Son. The Spirit strengthens the Son in His torment. Admittedly, the picture is also unsatisfactory at this point. The Father is represented as a human, while the Spirit is represented as an animal. The similarity and equal status of Father, Son and Spirit finds no visual expression. In addition, Yelin misses the opportunity to depict not only the Father but also the Holy Spirit with a face contorted in pain. For if it is true that Jesus' suffering was God's suffering, then not only the Father but also the Spirit suffered with Jesus. Paul speaks in an analogous

way of the Spirit joining in the groaning of creatures and Christians and bringing it before the Father (Romans 8:18-30). The Holy Spirit is indeed deeply moved and affected by suffering.

Father, Son and Spirit are surrounded by seven flying angels. Yelin has painted their robes and their wings in different colors and tinted their “haloes” dark. The angels are all men, just as God the Father was portrayed as a man. In making this decision, Yelin disregards the biblical record of both God the Father and the angels; it fits into a widespread patriarchal tradition that can be traced back over centuries.

Four angels fly on the left. They carry objects in their hands that symbolize the different stages of Jesus' passion: a palm branch, a chalice (which can be the chalice of the Lord's Supper, but also the chalice of divine judgment), Jesus' outer garment and His crown of thorns. When the angels hold the objects of Jesus' suffering in their hands, it is probably meant to express that God the Father has watched over it so that the individual portions of Jesus' Passion do not overwhelm Him, and that He has given His messengers the instructions to “take away” the respective portion from Jesus and to release Him from it. At the same time, Yelin's description probably wants to make it clear that Jesus' suffering is not simply “over,” but that God, insofar as it happened for the salvation of the world, permanently remembered it and that we too can come back to it again and again.

Yelin has presented a transitional situation. Jesus has almost completed His Passion. God will not leave Jesus in death; He will raise Him up and make Him the Lord of Glory. The three angels on the right hold in their hands the signs of future glory: a book containing the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, alpha and omega (cf. Revelation 1:8 and 21:6), the sword of the victor (cf. Revelation 1:16 and 19:15), and the crown of the world ruler (cf. Revelation 1:5 and 19:16). We New Covenant men who look back to the resurrection of Jesus know, of course, that both are true: Christ is the victor over evil and yet, He is not, but continues to fight against it; He is the Lord of all lords and yet has yet to assert Himself as such. Already and not yet—we Christians live in this tension. God has indeed exalted His Son and “*given Him the Name that is above all names.*” And yet, the completion and the goal are still pending. The completion consists in “*that all of them should bow to the name of Jesus, knees that are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” (Philippians 2:9-11)