

A stylized, low-poly illustration of a classical building with a series of arches. The building is rendered in shades of grey and white, with some arches highlighted in a light orange. To the left of the building, there is a large, bushy green plant. The overall style is modern and graphic.

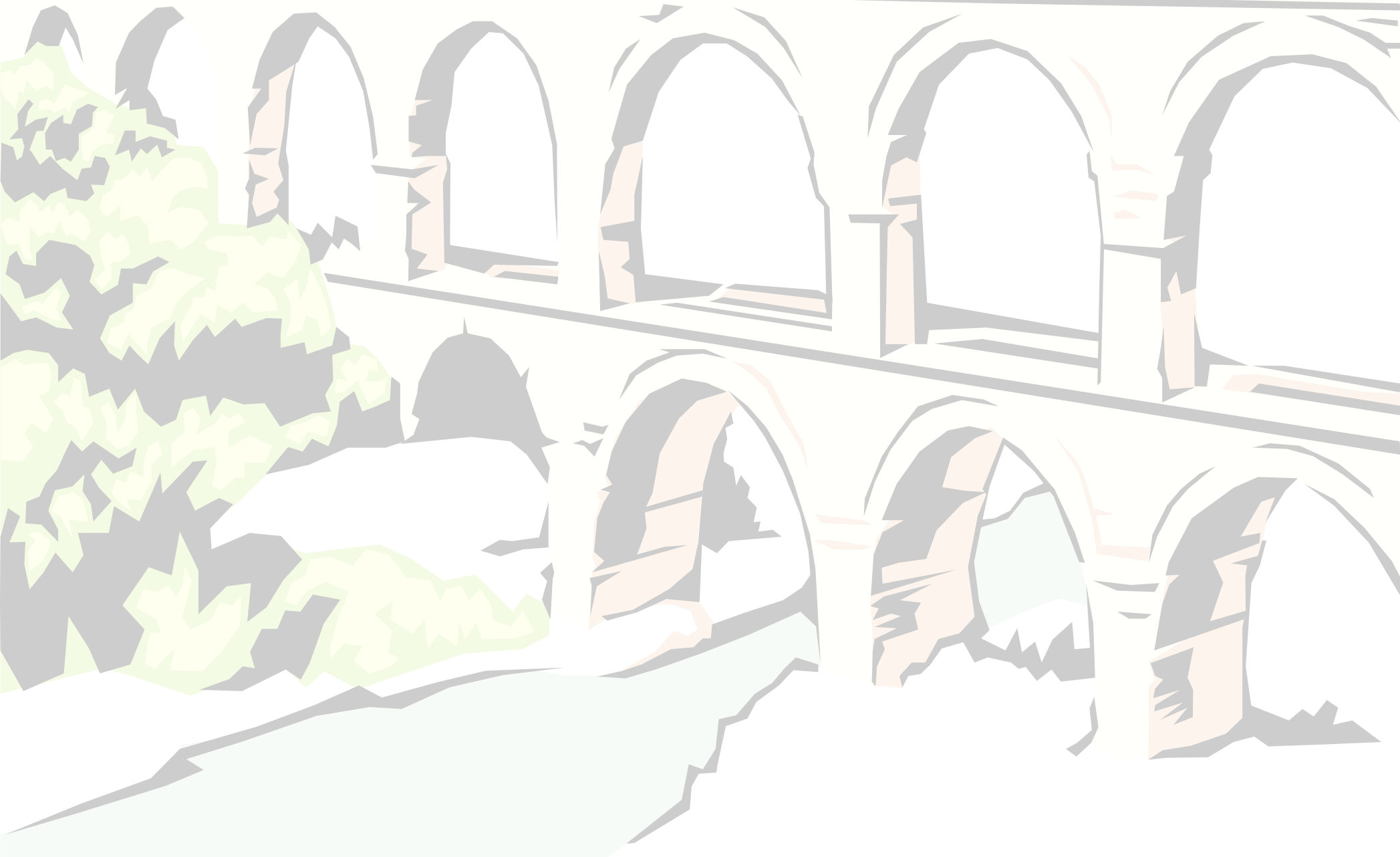
Colossians Remixed

Subverting the Empire: Session 5

St. John in the Wilderness

Opening Prayer: Our true home

(By Walter Brueggemann, *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth*, p. 21)



Brief Recap

- † **Our spiritual worldview is revealed most in how we live in this world**
 - ✦ **Our cars**
 - ✦ **What we consume**
 - ✦ **How we use our time**
- † **Not about new rules, but an attempt to see what the liberation of Christ might look like**

Keep in Mind

“This is a story of restored relationships, a love story that calls forth an alternative community characterized by compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace, gratitude and wisdom. This is a story of creational restoration, a renewal to full humanness, in the image of the Creator. This is a community in which the word of Christ dwells richly. This is a community that is shaped as a countercultural force through the subversive worship of a subversive Lord.” (p. 200)

Colossians Household Code: Col. 3:18-4:1

⚡ Initial reading of text

- ⚡ Seems to reinforce the hierarchical structure of the empire**
- ⚡ Seems to maintain the lower status of slaves, women and children**
- ⚡ End result of Jesus as Lord?**
- ⚡ Contradicts any impetus toward liberation found in the previous parts of Colossians**

⚡ Does Paul intend to undercut the subversive aspects of the rest of Colossians?

Household Structure in Antiquity

“For the male is by nature better fitted to command than the female...and the older and fully developed person than the younger and immature...All human beings that differ as widely as the soul does from the body...are by nature slaves for whom to be governed by this kind of authority is advantageous...For the free rule the slave, the male the female, the man the child in different ways; for the slave has not got the deliberative part at all, and the female has it but without full authority, while the child has it but in an undeveloped form.” (Aristotle, as quoted on p. 203)

Household Codes in Antiquity

The background features a stylized, low-poly illustration of a classical building with a series of arches. The building is rendered in shades of grey and white, with some arches filled with light green. To the left, there is a large, bushy green plant. The overall style is modern and graphic.

⚡ **Patriarchal structure the foundation of the empire**

⚡ **Other structures were inherently treasonous**

What is Paul Saying Here?

- ⚡ Notice that Paul does not simply address masters, husbands, and fathers
- ⚡ Slaves, wives, & children have the authority to respond as individuals in control of their own actions
- ⚡ Rights of the privileged (masters, husbands & fathers) are unique to Paul
 - ⚡ Masters are to “treat (their) slaves justly and fairly” (Col. 4:1)
 - ⚡ Husbands are to “love (their) wives and never treat them harshly” (Col. 3:18)
 - ⚡ Fathers are “not to provoke (their) children” (Col. 3:21)

Resonance with Hebrew Bible

- ✦ **Recall that one of the primary stories is the exodus**
 - ✦ **God liberates a group of slaves from another empire, Egypt**
 - ✦ **God instructs these liberated slaves to remember who they were prior to God's activity**
 - ✦ **God instructs these liberated slaves to translate this remembrance into an ethic of care for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the resident alien**

Resonance with the Story of Jesus

- ✚ **We are to forgive others as God has forgiven us**
- ✚ **Jesus initiates his ministry (in Luke's gospel) by reading a passage from Isaiah 61:1-2 & 58:6 (Luke 4:14-30)**
 - ✚ **Notice how this reinforces the resonance with the biblical theme of the exodus**
 - ✚ **It also echoes the theme of the year of jubilee**
 - ✚ **Slaves were freed**
 - ✚ **Prisoners were released**

Slaves Who Inherit

- ✦ **Inheritance and forgiveness are related in the biblical story**
 - ✦ **God speaks to the mountains of Israel in Ez. 36:8-12**
- ✦ **Slaves are to know that they “will receive the inheritance as (their) reward” (Col. 3:24)**
- ✦ **Masters “have a Master in heaven” (Col. 4:1)**
- ✦ **Paul here joins the major themes of Exodus (freeing slaves to inherit land) with themes of the jubilee that Jesus himself recalled at the start of his ministry**
- ✦ **Sabbath rest forms an undercurrent here – rest for everyone including slaves and animals (Ex. 20:10)**

Role Reversals for Masters and Slaves

✦ **Jesus uses this role reversal (Luke 12:35-38)**

✦ **Why isn't Paul explicit about this role change for the Colossians?**

✦ **Letters weren't necessarily private in the ancient world**

✦ **Dangerous and subversive themes had to be couched in language that appeared harmless, at least on the surface**

Paul on Women & Marriage

- ✚ **Wives are to “be subject to (their) husbands *as is fitting in the Lord*” (Col. 3:18)**
- ✚ **Who is the Lord of wives and husbands alike?**
 - ✚ **Note that even in Hebrew, the normal word for husband is baal or lord, master**
 - ✚ **Sabbath law applied to all, male and female**
 - ✚ **Early Christian communities often had females in leadership roles – the church at Laodicea met in Nympha’s house (Col. 4:15)**
 - ✚ **Compare Col. 3:11 with Gal. 3:28**
 - ✚ **Paul’s teachings encouraged early followers of Jesus to flout the Roman law requiring widowers and divorcees to remarry in a month while widows were to marry within a year after the death of their spouse (from the Leges Juliae)**

Slaves? What Slaves?

- ✦ **What if we heard Col. 3:22-4:1 like this:**
- ✦ **What would a Christian position on the economy look like?**
 - ✦ **What sort of labor conditions would reflect more closely the kingdom of God?**
 - ✦ **If laborers & employees generally were treated as those who bear the image of God, what would a workplace look like?**
 - ✦ **How would corporations live within the environment?**

Can We Expect Business To Work Like This?

- ✦ **Some management leaders have given thought to these issues**
- ✦ **Robert Greenleaf wrote Servant Leadership to explore very similar themes**
 - ✦ **Managers become the “first among equals” & work in cooperation with their teams**
 - ✦ **In order to lead the manager must be a servant**
- ✦ **Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) noted that Jesus Christ embodied servant leadership, best seen when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples**

Characteristics of Servant Leadership

✦ **Spears identified these qualities of leaders**

✦ **Listening**

✦ **Empathy**

✦ **Healing**

✦ **Awareness**

✦ **Persuasion**

✦ **Conceptualization**

✦ **Foresight**

✦ **Stewardship**

✦ **Commitment to the growth of people**

✦ **Building community**

Essentials of Colossians

⚡ The Image Poem--Col. 1:15-20

- ⚡ A recap of creation that points to the new creation in Christ**
- ⚡ Uses the images and terms of the wisdom tradition**
 - ⚡ God created through wisdom/Jesus**
- ⚡ Caesar's image was spoken of in terms of a mystery by the priests of the empire's cults**
- ⚡ Paul revealed the violence and oppression beneath the image of Caesar**
- ⚡ The Christian mystery is revealed in Jesus**

Essentials of the New Creation

✦ **New creation is accompanied by a new kingdom**

✦ **All are God's children**

✦ **Those in need receive care**

✦ **"Forgiveness & love are practiced" (p. 224)**

✦ **Peace of Christ permeates the land**

✦ **"No Lord but God" (p. 226)**

✦ **"Jesus is Lord"**

Christ is Embodied in the Church

- ✦ **The church is shaped by the reconciliation of Christ on the cross**
- ✦ **“This reconciliation travels the path that leads to a cross. It is therefore not surprising that to be a servant of this gospel, to proclaim this alternative sovereignty in a world of violence, would entail suffering. If the hope of Israel’s story is to be found in a suffering servant (Is 53) and Jesus is that suffering servant, it is not surprising that suffering is integral to the life of anyone who embraces this story as their own.”
(p. 226)**

A Curious Statement by Paul

- ✦ **Col. 1:24**
- ✦ **Christ was not the first or last to suffer**
- ✦ **Church as “body of Christ” implies an intimate relationship**
- ✦ **Paul uses “affliction” to speak of his suffering**
 - ✦ **Different from word used to speak of the suffering of Christ on cross**
- ✦ **Suggests that Paul is saying that as part of Christ’s body, the church will suffer, not that Jesus’ suffering on the cross was incomplete**
- ✦ **“As Christ did battle with the ‘principalities and powers’ at the cross, so also the church continues to bear the fury of these powers in anticipation of their final subjugation to Christ at his return.” (p. 229)**

A Question to Ponder

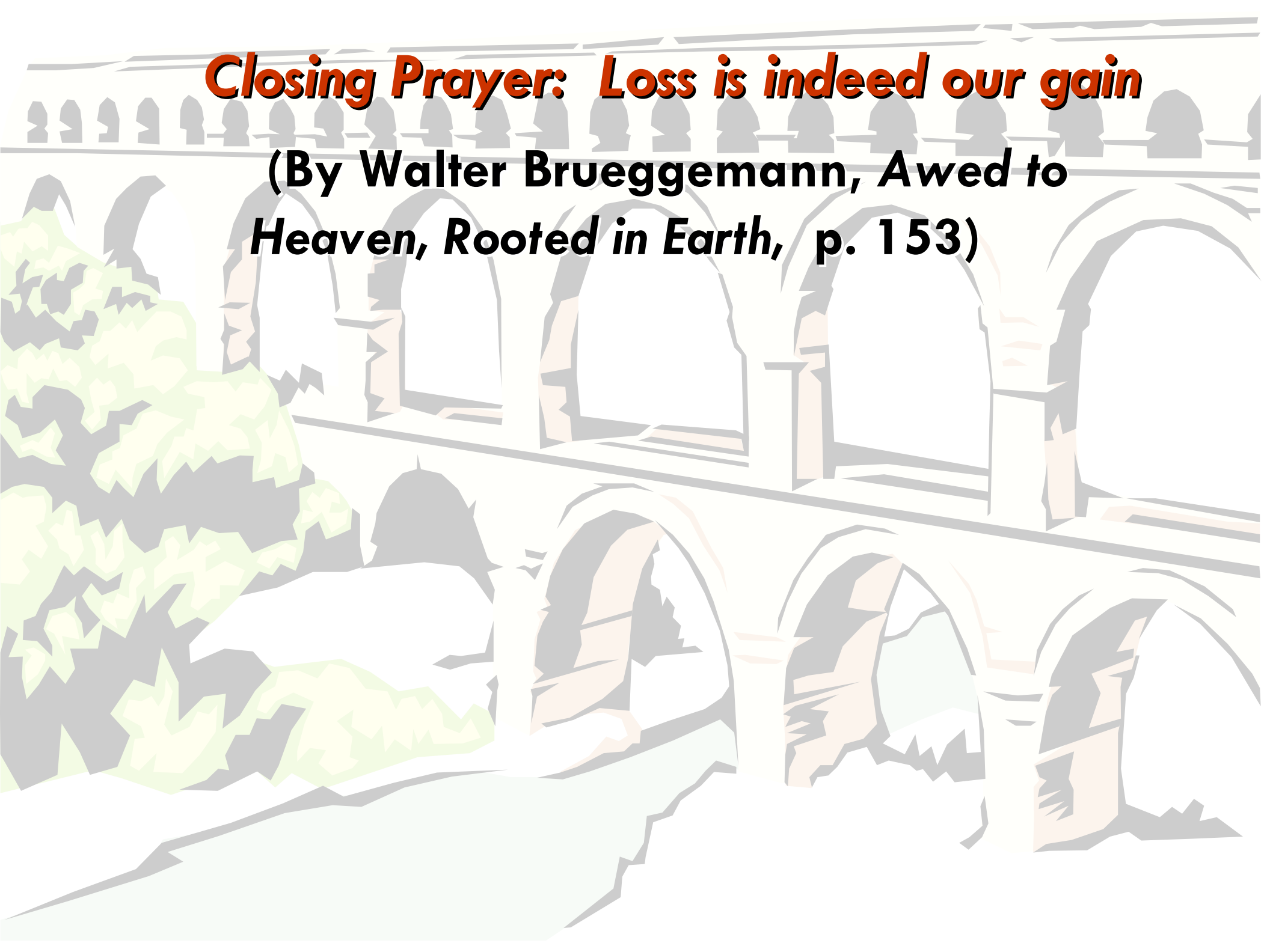
“If, as Paul asserts throughout his letters, we are called to share in the sufferings of Christ, and if such suffering is for the sake of the body of Christ, where does that leave a Christian community that seems to avoid any sort of suffering?” (p. 229)

The Challenge of the Gospel

“This gospel challenges the principalities and powers of our own age. This gospel proclaims that reconciliation and peace come not through the power of unilateral military force but through the blood of the cross.” (p. 232)

Closing Prayer: Loss is indeed our gain

(By Walter Brueggemann, *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth*, p. 153)



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