

Advent Midweek 2 – 2025
Will God Really Dwell on Earth?
(The Holy of Holies)
Ezekiel 37:24-28
Hebrews 9:1-15a

Schwärmerei is a German word. During the Reformation it was used as a pejorative against the opponents of Lutheranism. These opponents claimed direct revelation from God. They were also called “enthusiasts.” Theological enthusiasm and Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement all have similar characteristics, the most nefarious of which is that they elevate subjective feelings and private visions above the objective Word of God. Schwärmerei derives its meaning from a swarm of bees. These swarming theological fanatics disparaged God’s objective means of grace and instead focused on their “inner feelings” regarding the certainty of Christ’s work. The problem is two-fold. Trusting in inner feelings can lead to a crisis of faith when those feelings run dry. And isn’t it idolatrous? Doesn’t charismatic theology elevate the individual and their subjective feelings above the objective Word of God – His authoritative revelation of truth?

Theology is based on reality. The apostate world would have you believe otherwise, but biblical theology and reality are coterminous. Faith is not believing the unreal. Faith is knowing that God operates outside the realm of the empirical, that this world has spiritual truths that are beyond what man can prove with his slide rule and his compass and his microscope. Holiness is a reality that science can’t define. The law is written on your heart (Romans 2:14-15). God has imparted His fundamental will on the mind of man. It is inescapable. That too is a spiritual truth. Theology used to be known as the queen of sciences, the queen of disciplines, the apex of the pursuit of truth and meaning. Theology held this supreme status because it invaded every other academic pursuit, providing the framework to understand every other subject. Where has that gone?

The objectivity of theology has been under attack for generations. Luther was not one to put his tail between his legs when attacked by those with faulty allegiances. About the schwärmerei Luther wrote this: “Therefore, we must constantly maintain this point: God does not want to deal with us in any other way than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. Whatever is praised as from the Spirit – without the Word and Sacraments – is of the devil himself” (Smalcald Articles, Article VIII, 10). Holiness is anchored in the person of Jesus Christ. One can’t be holy apart from Him. It is a fool’s errand to believe that you can generate your own holiness. In the OT, God anchored His holiness in a particular place – the temple. By anchoring His holiness to the temple, He was teaching His ancient people about His Son who was to come into the world. Holiness was the environment created by God’s presence in the temple. God’s holiness at the temple was a bridgehead into this fallen world. There, and there alone, God shared His holiness with His people.

We believe in Sola Christus, Christ alone (it’s the same thing!). Jesus was emphatic. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Holiness is not an abstraction. Holiness is not an elusive, indecipherable phenomenon. God has revealed it, told us about it, declared how to receive it, and where it’s found. The question is,

how do you regard it? We know what the world thinks. If the world is given a choice between what is holy and what is profane it will choose what is profane every time and twice on Sunday just to spite us. The further away one gets from God, the more profane the environment (that's the unbelieving world). In the temple, the closer something came to God, the holier it became (that's us). Do you agree?

One of the great theologians of the 20th century wrote this: "Good things as well as bad, you know, are caught by a kind of infection. If you want to get warm you must stand near the fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them. They are not a sort of prize which God could, if He chose, hand out to anyone. They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very centre of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you: if you are not, you will remain dry. Once a man is united to God, how could he not live forever? Once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die" (Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis). God became man to make you holy. God made His dwelling on this earth to make you holy. God established the Word and the Sacraments as His means of grace to make you holy. And God is at work. This is God's desire, to make you holy, to draw you into His presence, to elevate your life.

You can despise this gift (many do). You can treat it shamefully, joke about it crassly, abuse it and teach others to abuse it, you can forget about it, casually discarding it like yesterday's gossip (many do). Lutherans are accustomed to reverencing the altar when they approach it, it's a gesture of respect, bowing, a physical gesture that reflects an awareness of the holy. Why? The altar is holy, an emblem of Christ's sacrifice. He died on the altar of the cross, a sacrifice to save sinners, and that's us. His love and His redemption and His holiness are still in this world, operative in the means that He has established. The altar is the locus for the body and blood of Christ to be distributed to His people. What is as holy as Christ's body and blood? In Him, in the Lord Christ, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell *bodily* (Colossians 1:19). What is holier than Christ's blood? The blood of Christ cleanses us of sin (John 1:7). Why? How? Because it's holy! Have we learned how to treat something that is holy in a way that captures reality, captures what God says about His holiness, captures what we believe?

There's an unbroken line of continuity between the Holy of Holies, the Body of Jesus Christ, and the Word and Sacrament. The intent is unmistakable – God gives you His holiness. Holiness is nothing less than His divine nature, His goodness, and His power as God. Holiness is a commodity that surpasses all gifts one can imagine. Holiness is derived only from Him and you need it. It is available only by contact with Him. Again, how will you treat it? Here's a warning from the book of Hebrews: "How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:29). Our faith prevents us from such ugly behavior. We will esteem God's holiness and teach others to esteem it. The church has been doing this for centuries. Christmas is holy. Like His love, His holiness doesn't run dry. Like His love, we know where to find His holiness. It is in Christ and the Lord is with us. In the Word and the Sacraments, the Lord is with us. It is objective, it is real, and it is glorious.