

# “Turning Our Faces to Heaven”

---

*Thomas Cogdell*  
*1 November 2017*

*[ LOGISTICAL ITEMS ]*

*[ INTRO VIDEOS ]*

*[ INTRODUCTIONS ]*

## **[ SLIDE 1 – Welcome in all languages ]**

I want you all to feel most welcome here, whether this is your sixth gathering, or your first. We have been praying for you. We have been asking our Father to bring just the ones that He wants, for His purposes, and for His glory. We believe that He has done this. Here we are!

## **[ SLIDE 2 – Why? ]**

But ... why are we here? We must begin with this question. What are we doing here? The theme of this gathering is John 17. So let's turn there together.

## **[ SLIDE – John 17:1 ]**

“After all these things, Jesus turned his face to heaven and prayed ...”

## **[ SLIDE – “All these things” ]**

Let's consider ... what is meant by “after all these things”?

Certainly this means what has happened that evening, in the upper room. Raise your hand if you are Protestant.

*[pause]*

What do Protestants love? We love the preaching of the Word! Well, here we have the Word, preaching! This sermon of unsurpassed beauty was one of “these things”.

Raise your hand if you are Catholic.

*[pause]*

What is the center of the Catholic mass? The Eucharist! Well, Jesus himself just shared the Last Supper with his disciples. The institution of the Eucharist was one of “these things.”

Raise your hand if you are Orthodox.

*[pause]*

What is perhaps the most recognizable practice in Eastern Orthodox spirituality? It is the place of icons in worship. A picture becomes a door into spiritual reality. Well, Jesus has just painted the picture of himself washing the feet of his disciples. Creating that image of servant leadership for us to gaze upon was one of “these things.”

Raise your hand if you are Anabaptist.

*[pause]*

What passage do Anabaptists seek to live out? The Sermon on the Mount. When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, that included Judas Iscariot. He loved and served his enemy. Jesus living out his own Sermon on the Mount was one of “these things.”

Raise your hand if you are a Messianic Jew.

[ *pause* ]

Well, of course as you read the upper room discourse, you are saying – Jesus, a Jew, is with his Jewish friends! Even more, the meal they celebrated together wasn't just any meal, it was the Passover! A profound fulfillment of Jesus' Jewishness was one of "these things."

So in the upper room, Jesus presents the very best that each of our streams strive for.

- For the Protestants – powerful preaching of the Word.
- For the Catholics – the institution of the Eucharist.
- For the Orthodox – Jesus depicting reality, not just speaking about it.
- For the Anabaptists – living out the Sermon on the Mount.
- For the Messianic Jews – a deeply Jewish event.

Isn't that enough? What could possibly be added to all these things?

**[ SLIDE – John 17:1 ]**

"After all these things, Jesus turned his face to heaven and prayed ..."

Wow! Jesus prayed! He approached the Father to converse with Him. He talked to Him about his life and the cross . He talked to the Father about his disciples. And he talked to his Father about you and me. He prayed for us!

Is there any verse that places a higher value on prayer, than this one? If Jesus prayed after all these things, who are we to come up with a better plan. Let's pray!

**[ SLIDE - John 17:1 modified ]**

“After all these things, we will turn our faces to heaven and pray ...”

What does “all these things” mean to you? Today’s activities? This marker year, 2017? The last 100 years, beginning with the battle for Beersheba and the Balfour Declaration in 1917? The last 500 years of division, violence and hostility?

“After all these things, we will turn our faces to heaven and pray ...”

For those of us in Wittenberg 2017, here is one way to look at “all these things” ...

**[ SLIDE 2000 ]**

In the year 2000, Amy and I were in Switzerland for our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Lord was drawing Amy into the Catholic church, and we were asking God about the implications of this action. I turned to Amy and said, “Wouldn’t it be appropriate for Christians from all streams of the body of Christ to gather in Wittenberg at the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and do 2 things:”

**[ SLIDE 3 - 2000 + Grieve Divisions ]**

- “Grieve our divisions”

**[ SLIDE 4 - 2000 + Pray John 17 ]**

- “Pray John 17 together”

## **[SLIDE 2003-2005 ]**

A few years later, when Wittenberg was still only in the back of our minds, the Lord confronted me with compulsions that were damaging Amy and threatening our marriage. I had to listen ... repent ... and become a different kind of person – a more Christlike person. And Amy had to forgive me. I firmly believe that if we had not done this work of reconciliation, we would not be here ... or someone else would be giving this talk!

## **[SLIDE 2008 ]**

In 2008, I was surprised to find myself at the Wittenberg exit on the A9. I thought I should turn off to reserve a room for the prayer meeting in 2017. I heard God say – “You can turn off, and it will be you. Or you can pass by, and let it be me.” I passed the exit by.

## **[SLIDE 2010 ]**

God fulfilled His promise and brought me to Wittenberg seven years ago, to the day. On the plane coming here, I wrote the first draft of the Wittenberg principles. Julia was my guide through Wittenberg, and we primarily prayed together. We also reserved a room for seven years later. We then returned to Berlin, where I asked George Miley, “What do we do with this room?” He said, “You’ll have to ask the German Lutherans! This can’t be an American initiative. It especially can’t be a Texas initiative!”

### **[ SLIDE 2011 ]**

So I asked the German Lutherans what to do with the room, and to my surprise they said: “Where are the Messianic Jews?” We did not understand this answer at that time. But, I want to honor Hans Wiedenmann and Hans Scholz, who both asked this question, by asking now ... in our midst, where are the Messianic Jews?

### **[ SLIDE 2012 ]**

In 2012, Hans-Peter & Verena Lang agreed to be the European coordinators. They organized our first gathering in Ottmaring. The group affirmed – this vision is from God ... and we must prepare in the right way.

### **[ SLIDE 2013 ]**

The next year we met in Volkenroda. Richard Harvey introduced us to the history of anti-Semitism, and we Protestants and Catholics united to repent. On the way back to Berlin, a group of five Texans stopped for dinner in Wittenberg, stood before the Judensau, and heard the Lord speak: “This has to go,” From that moment, several separate actions & initiatives have been birthed – from Sr. Joela, from Hans Scholz, from Richard Harvey, and most recently from Thomas Piehler. We are grateful to God that the work to call for the relocation of the Judensau is being carried forward by those who have spiritual authority to do so – namely Messianic Jews and German Lutherans!

## **[ SLIDE 2014 ]**

In 2014 we met in Trento, Italy – where the council of Trent was held. We grieved together the inability to share communion. Verena Lang honored Martin Luther as a prophet to her church, whose prophetic message – the 95 Theses – was rejected by Albrecht, the archbishop of Mainz. Franziskus Eisenbach, a former auxiliary bishop of Mainz, repented on behalf of his predecessor. His repentance was received by a Lutheran pastor, Burkhard Hotz.

## **[ SLIDE 2015 ]**

Then the Langs said, with fear and trembling: “We have to go to Rome.” In the heart of St. Peter’s, built with the proceeds from the very indulgences that Luther was protesting, the Catholics fell on their faces and began to cry out to God for forgiveness for putting money and buildings above the heart of the gospel. Lutheran pastors began to join them, saying – we do the same thing. Then Pentecostal pastors. Then we were all face down – we knew deeply that none of us could throw the first stone at the Catholics.

## **[ SLIDE 2016 ]**

Finally, our journey led us to Wittenberg. We were in this room 500 days ago. Fr. Peter spoke powerfully about the possibility of Catholics celebrating the surprises of the Holy Spirit during the Reformation, and all of us looking for new surprises of the Holy Spirit this year. Burkhard Hotz spoke of the battle for the heart of the Lutheran Church, and God confirmed this with a thunderbolt from heaven. And of course the Holy Spirit pierced all of our hearts through Richard’s Messianic Jewish perspective of the horrors of the Judensau.

**[ SLIDE - John 17:1 ]**

“After all these things, Jesus turned his face to heaven and prayed ...”

**[ SLIDE - John 17:1 modified ]**

“After all these things, we will turn our faces to heaven and pray ...”

*[ Introduce prayer teams, with Gaby's worship leader. German-only participants give their headsets to English only for the next talk. Bi-lingual gather around the prayer teams to pray for them as Henning comes to speak ]*