

The ILS indicator and the Cross

By Charles C. Baldwin

Before I was a chaplain, I was a pilot. I flew the Super Constellation, EC-121 and the Super Jolly Green Giant, HH-53. The “Connie” was a big four-engine propeller-driven airplane that was used for Airborne Early Warning and Control when I was flying it in the 1970s. The “Jolly” was a big helicopter used to rescue downed aircrew members in Vietnam. One of the exciting parts of flying both airplanes was instrument flying — flying “in the clouds.” Whether flying a big, multi-engine airplane or a helicopter, a pilot had to learn to fly in IFR (Instrument Flight Rules) conditions.

It is a great metaphor for “walking by faith.” Let me try to explain.

Of course, one cannot “take off” or “land” in a cloud, so the start and the ending of the flight is “in the clear.” When one begins his or her walk with Christ, it must be “in the clear.” We must hear and believe the Gospel message. It is one reason I love the Christmas season so much. It is the perfect time to tell people of God’s great love for them. The entire Christmas message is about God’s amazing love for all mankind. Just like He promised long before the event, God sent His Son to be born of a virgin, celebrated by the shepherds, worshipped by kings and recognized in the Temple by Simeon and Anna. The Gospel message takes us from Christmas to Easter. It includes the message of the Cross of Christ. Jesus’s atoning sacrifice on the Cross paid the price of our sin and made “the Way” for us to be saved. It is not a “cloudy” message; it is very clear. Our faith in Christ is based on the very clear and powerful message that “the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.” (I John 4:14)

Every believer in the Lord Jesus knows this wonderful assurance that we have been “born again” through our faith in Christ. It is not “cloudy,” it is very “in the clear.”

Back to the flying metaphor. Our life with Christ is like flying an airplane. We are mostly flying in clear skies. Almighty God opens the gates of heaven to guide us in the journey. He gives us a purpose for living. He gives us His Holy Spirit to fill our lives with love, joy, peace — the gifts of the Spirit. He gives our lives direction, whether we are a carpenter, a soldier, an executive or any other profession that serves the needs of the world.



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I am with you.” Dr. David Jeremiah wrote in his study Bible: “Safety, however, is not the absence of trouble but rather, the presence of Jesus.” This is a great truth, especially when you are walking by faith, “in the clouds.”

How does a pilot fly in IFR conditions? He/she trusts in the instruments. If you takeoff “at minimums,” you have to transition to the instruments very quickly. You keep a close eye on the airspeed, the vertical climb rate and the direction of flight. You cannot fly in the weather by “feeling”; you must fly by faith in the instruments. It is critical to believe the information that is coming from the instruments. When you break through the cloud deck, you can realize that the instruments were telling you the truth.

Almighty God has given us an incredible “flight instruction” manual, His Holy Word, the Bible. I call it the “Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth.” The “short sermon” is when we are led by the Holy Spirit to follow Christ, we trust His Word to show us the way.

Let me close this “flight lesson” by getting us through the approach and landing. Every passenger on board hopes this part goes well.

Every pilot learns to put his/her trust in the instrument called the ILS (Instrument Landing System) indicator. In the classroom, it is easy. We learned about the

radio signals that tell the indicator if the plane is above or below the glide path and left or right of course. The ILS indicator is just two “floating lines” — one horizontal, one vertical. If the horizontal line drifts down, you are above the glide path. If the vertical line drifts left, you are right of course. The goal is to keep the lines centered in the middle of the instrument. Flying the ILS indicator in the simulator taught us a skill that was more about trust than about radio signals and floating lines.

But — not until you are actually flying in the storm when the ceiling at your destination is at minimums, can you say, “I trust the ILS indicator to bring me home.”

So, there I was, in the soup. I dialed in the frequency for the ILS approach. The Air Traffic Controller directed me to the approach course and said, “Cleared for an ILS approach; call runway in sight.” The lines start to center. Then I trust them. Horizontal line rises; “pull up.” Vertical line drifts right; “turn toward the line.” All the way down; keep the lines centered in the middle of the instrument. Trust the ILS indicator. If I say, “I feel like I’m OK” and take my eyes off the instrument, I am in trouble. Trust the lines. I hit minimums and call the tower, “Runway in sight.” The controller says, “Cleared to land.”

God has given us a gift that will bring us all the way home; it is the Cross of Christ. The Gospel is this: “Christ died for our sins, he was buried and that He rose again the third day.” When we believe in Him and trust Him as our Savior and Lord, He says, “James/Susan, (He calls our name) this is your Father. I read you loud and clear.” He says, “Follow Me.” He says, “Do not be afraid; I am with you always even to the end of the age.”

And then, as we keep the Cross “centered” in the middle of our lives, the Lord Jesus, like the lines on the ILS indicator, leads us through the storms of life. And then, one glorious day He will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant; cleared to land.”

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The sanctification of all things



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for God; myrrh for burial), are in the more ancient tradition, celebrated with Christmas day.

In the Eastern Christian celebration, January 6 is the Baptism of Jesus. With it comes the Great Blessing of Waters, in which the priest asks God to bring down “the blessing of Jordan” upon barrels and vats of

water in churches and upon outdoor waterways such as rivers, harbors and oceans around the world. (We’ll bless the Harbor on Saturday, January 21 — ask me about it; come and see!)

The Theophany — the “appearing of God” or “manifestation of God” in the person of Jesus, is both seen and heard. It is seen in His condescending baptism by his cousin, John. It is heard in the voice of the Father “this is my beloved son!” It is witnessed in the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him, in the visible form of a dove. But Jesus’ baptism is no ordinary baptism. According to the Scriptures, for what purpose is baptism a basic must for all Christians? “For the forgiveness of sins.” The baptismal waters are given to us for the cleaning not of the external bodily filth, but rather for the cleansing of the stains of the soul.

But Jesus was sinless. When He went into the waters,

the waters did not cleanse Him. What was to be cleansed in Him?

He cleansed the waters.

This is, according to the early Christian mindset, the beginning of the salvation of the *Kosmos*. Jesus’ public ministry begins by healing, sanctifying the waters. This is the first “holy water.” This water is cleansed for the healing of your soul and mine. This water is sanctified so as to be an agent of the restoration, the return of all material things to God for his blessing.

With these waters, we bless homes. Having externally cleaned the home (swept, vacuumed, put in order), the priest comes to each home with holy water and reconsecrates each fallen room to its intended state. What is a fallen bedroom, where laziness or sexual sin has taken over, the bedroom is reconsecrated for sanctified rest and the common union of man and wife. What is a fallen kitchen and pantry, where gluttony and selfishness has reigned, is re-consecrated to a room of communion. The fallen dining room to a place of hospitality — the welcoming of stranger. And so on and so on.

The Theophany of Jesus is the beginning of the renewal of God’s very creation, at His own humiliating request. It is the second of His divine condescensions. The first, His birth in human flesh. The second, His baptism. The final, the Cross.

The Theophany is a season of cleansing — both the outside and the inside of the cup. It is a festival of light! With the Nativity of Jesus only a few days before (with the Winter Solstice), Light is now increasing on the earth, as with the Sun, so with the Son. Theophany is the renewal not only of Man and Woman, but of every created creature. Come, enjoy the feast and the whole season associated with it.

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Finding peace in 2017

By Debbie Martinez

Looking at all the Facebook posts during the Christmas season and into the New Year, I noticed people wishing others “peace,” so I started asking my friends how they would find peace in 2017. Surprisingly, they weren’t sure.

Quite a number of my friends are divorced and still dealing with the aftermath of divorce, which invariably includes lack of “peace.” Some of the responses were being in nature or exercise related or creativity in some form or other but true peace comes not from external measures but from internal. The old adage of “soul searching” most definitely applies here. We read in Romans 8:6: “For to set the mind in the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

We have all fallen short in our lives and in our relationships and sadly, tend to carry those shortcomings with us through the years. In divorce, people have regrets they can’t reconcile, and they tend to see the demise of their marriage as a failure. But what if God’s plan is to use what has happened in your life to help others? Philipians 4:7 says, “And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

We don’t always understand why we have to walk the path we walk because we see it as only being about us, but what if God has a bigger story for us than the one we have written for ourselves? Let us turn to Romans 15:13:



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“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Take your regrets, own them and then use them to help others. Stop trying to change what can’t be changed or undone. Stop beating yourself up over the past and instead, take what you have learned to make the future better. Allow yourself the forgiveness you would will-

ingly give to others and use this situation to grow deeper in your faith knowing that God has a plan for you. Indeed, look to Isaiah 12:2: “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.”

You can rewrite your story at any time but in the process of rewriting it, share your old one so others can see God’s grace at work. Use your story to show how God changes lives, forgives and blesses us with second chances.

When we are troubled, we tend to look outward for relief, but the only way to get lasting peace is to turn inward to a God that will give us a peace beyond our own understanding. Remember John 14:27: “Peace I leave you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid.”

So, walk into the New Year with the realization that no matter your regrets or shortcomings, know that God is at work in your life and have peace in that knowing.

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