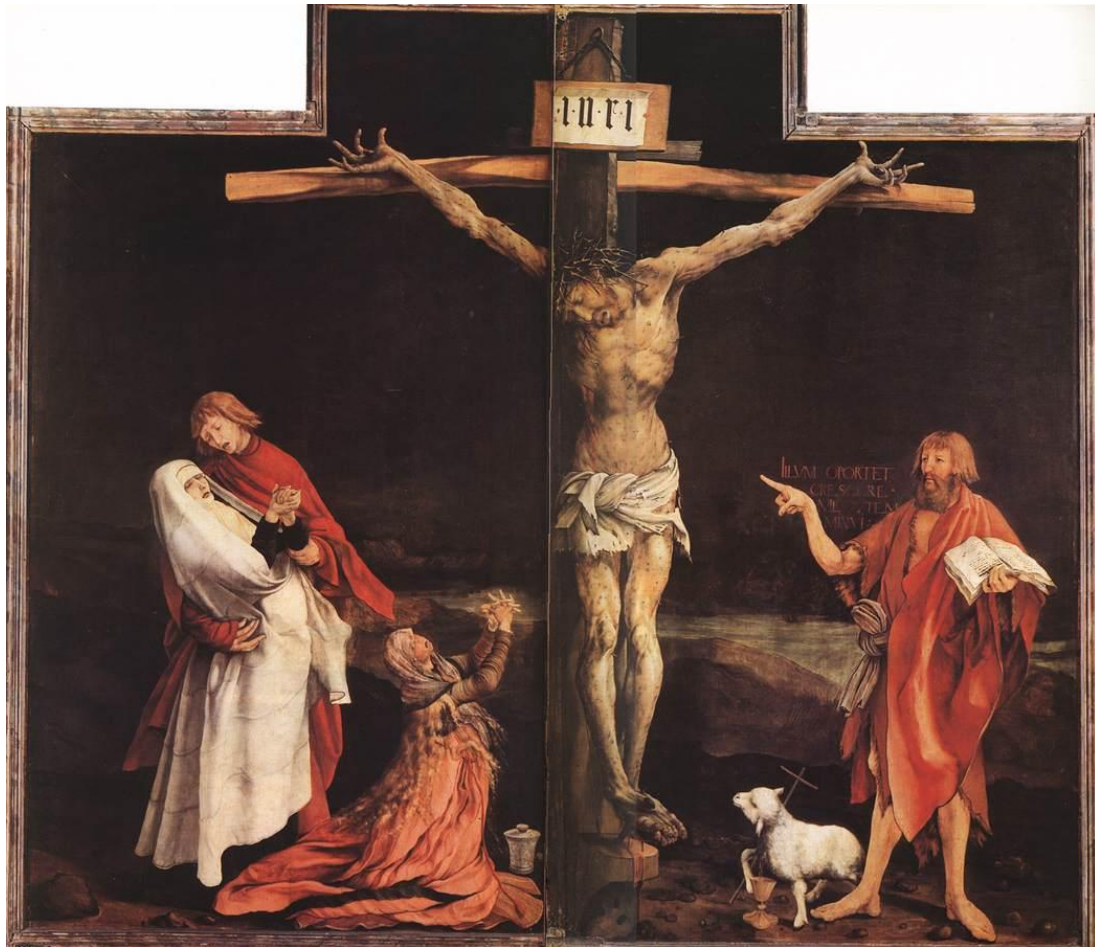


Truth That Appears

Drama, Presence, and the Christian Imagination

*"We shall not cease from exploration,
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."*

— T. S. Eliot



Matthias Grünewald — Isenheim Altarpiece

The Crucifixion (1512–1516)

Week Three — The Office of Host

"He must increase, but I must decrease."
— John 3:30

Our Question

How do we make room for truth to appear?

Week One asked us to learn to see. Week Two asked us to recognize truth embodied in action. This week we ask about the people who prepare the encounter. Who opens the door? Who introduces the guest? Who helps us know where to look?

Every drama involves someone making room for it. A host prepares the conditions under which truth may be received. Whether painter, teacher, pastor, dancer, director, conductor, interviewer, or commentator, the host practices the art of self-forgetting hospitality.

Look at John the Baptist in Grünewald's altarpiece. His presence is unmistakable. His gesture directs our attention toward Christ. He is doing something: pointing, witnessing, making another present to us.

The host's work matters precisely because someone or something beyond the host matters.

Hamilton: The Room Where It Happens

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_FWUW6SnDo&list=RDe_FWUW6SnDo&start_radio=1

At 1:50, Thomas Jefferson explains his hosting of an event which changed the course of American history....

A Central Claim

A host prepares an encounter in which another person, a work, or a truth may become present to witnesses.

Hosting takes skill, judgment, and attention. It also takes, perhaps paradoxically, confidence and humility. Someone chooses the space, arranges the sequence, introduces the guest, listens for what needs to be heard, and knows when to speak—and when to leave room for silence.

Again, the paradox: the host must be present enough to guide the encounter and self-forgetful enough to let the encounter unfold.

The host does not disappear. The host becomes transparent to the encounter. The host elevates everything, everyone including the host. But eventually the host decreases in relation to the increase of the Event.

Scripture for Reflection

Read slowly this week, paying attention to welcome, preparation, and the direction of attention.

Genesis 18:1–15 — Abraham welcomes the visitors

John 1:19–37 — John the Baptist bears witness and points toward Jesus

John 3:22–30 — the friend of the bridegroom rejoices

Luke 10:38–42 — Martha welcomes Jesus and Mary listens

Luke 24:28–35 — a welcome, a meal, and recognition

1 Corinthians 3:5–9 — one plants, another waters, and God gives the growth

As you read, ask: Who makes room for whom? What does the welcome make possible? When does the host need to act, and when does the host need to attend?

Works We Will Encounter

You are invited to encounter these works as your time and interests allow. You do not need to become an expert. Pay attention to what the host makes possible—and to where your attention goes. And consider: how many hosts are present in the encounter? (Hint: it may not just be one....).

Matthias Grünewald — Isenheim Altarpiece — The Crucifixion

Return to the opening image. Follow John the Baptist's pointing finger. How does a figure who is so visibly present direct us beyond himself?

Peter Brook — Short Interview

Consider the discipline of removing what distracts from an encounter. How can a director's preparation allow an action to become more fully present?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sx2qHHFS5Yk>

Mr. Rogers — Full Episode

Watch the welcome itself: the pace, the voice, the familiar gestures, and the attention given to the viewer. What becomes possible when someone (perhaps, especially, a child) first feels welcome?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CT2W4VNvX-U>

Ed Young — Classic Sermon

Consider the preacher as a host of Biblical truth and congregational attention. Notice how voice, pacing, story, and gesture direct listeners toward the subject of the sermon.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHIWH-h5vm8>

Gordon Solie — Highlight Reel

A commentator helps us recognize what is happening. What does Solie help the witness see? When does an explanation deepen the action rather than crowd it out?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00OJcRTolCs>

Johnny Carson — Interview with the Oldest Farmer in Illinois

Watch how Carson receives his guest's timing and speech. The interviewer's skill makes the guest unforgettable. What does he know to ask—and what does he know to leave alone?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DeESr05iT0&t=538s>

The Anti-Host — *The Office* — Dinner Party

Michael and Jan give us the opposite of good hosting (and that's an understatement). Guests become captives of the hosts' needs and conflicts. They overshare, drink too much, fight, etc. Their hosting is the handbook to anti-hosting.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEdnETjxd1k&t=180s>

Note: there is some vulgarity in that video.

Igor Stravinsky (music) and Heinz Spoerli (choreo) – *Ballet Pulcinella*

One art makes room for another. An inherited musical tradition becomes the guest of a new composition, and the music, in turn, becomes the guest of the dance. Listen and watch for how familiar forms are welcomed, rearranged, and made newly present. How does an artist's own distinctive voice help us encounter what has been received from others?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShIYpjSYoZI&list=RDSHlYpjSYoZI&start_radio=1&t=1891s

A good host makes the Event accessible.

George Jones — The Grand Tour

The singer invites us to walk through a house. Rooms and ordinary objects begin to carry a life and an absence. A host does not always tell you what to see. Sometimes he walks you into the room and lets the room tell you.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=up0ql8YXxP0&list=RDup0ql8YXxP0&start_radio=1

Leonard Bernstein — Conductor and Soloist

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart — *Piano Concerto No. 17 in G Major, K. 453* — I. Allegro. Bernstein plays and conducts. How does a performer with such a visible role also listen, coordinate, and make room for the orchestra? And, make room, for the Event?

Leonard Bernstein — Educator — The Unanswered Question

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MB7ZOdp_gQ&list=PLFjonLo8gYHIXC35K4UjrBU6XHChNDCv9

Knowledge can enlarge the listener's attention. Consider how a teacher might increase intelligibility while preserving the wonder of the work. When does an explanation help us hear more?

Note that this is a lecture series. You need not watch all of them, or even one of them in its entirety. With just a few minutes, you will see how Bernstein is a master teacher and host.

Hosting and Attention

An encounter has a form. Space, rhythm, silence, lighting, and sequence affect what we are able to receive. The host's choices are already interpretations: they direct attention and make some things easier to notice than others. (Remember Thomas Jefferson?).

This is true in a classroom, a theatre, a concert, a home, and a church. A teacher forms habits of seeing, hearing, waiting, and remembering. A pastor helps a congregation attend to Scripture, prayer, and one another. A director prepares the conditions in which a dramatic action can live before witnesses.

The host therefore exercises responsibility. Guidance can become manipulation. An invitation can become pressure. A carefully prepared space can welcome the guest—or make the guest serve the host's self-image.

How can we invite without coercing? How can we help someone attend without deciding every response in advance?

For Christian worship, this includes a further distinction. The forms we prepare can serve the reception of revealed truth. We can prepare, proclaim, and bear witness; God's gracious action is not something we manufacture.

Questions for Discussion

Who—or what—is hosting this encounter?

Where is my attention being directed?

What has been prepared for me, and what has been left free?

How does a host know when to speak and when to be silent?

Can a performer be both the center of attention and a host of something beyond himself or herself?

When does guidance become manipulation?

What distinguishes self-forgetting from simply withdrawing?

Can I help another person see without telling that person what must be seen?

How might welcoming another person change what I am able to see?

What does “He must increase, but I must decrease” ask of a Christian teacher, artist, or pastor?

Reading — Optional, But Encouraged 😊

Simone Weil — “*Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God*”

Attention is a disciplined openness to reality, neighbor, and God. Consider the relationship between learning to attend and learning to love.

<https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/christianity/Weil-Reflections.pdf>

Henri J. M. Nouwen — *Reaching Out*

The movement from hostility to hospitality. Hospitality makes a free space in which the stranger may enter and become more fully himself rather than an object to be controlled.

A Thought to Carry Into the Week

Week One invited us to learn to see. Week Two invited us to recognize truth in action. Week Three asks us to make room for others to encounter it.

“He must increase, but I must decrease.”

What have you made possible for someone else to see?

Have you even been an anti-host? (Just a question for private reflection, not condemnation 😊).