

Stained Glass Windows Interpretation

Sanctuary - Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

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In 1978, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church built a new church on the east end of New Prague. Shortly after the church was completed, it became evident that there was a problem. In an interview with Pastor Don Foltz, he recalled that as the sun rose in the eastern sky about the time services started, the sun would shine through the clear glass windows surrounding the sanctuary, and it would render Pastor Foltz blind to the congregation before him.

To remedy the problem, a plan was laid to change the clear glass to stained glass to mute the effects of the sun. This was not a cheap plan. The cost of such a project was going to run about \$12,000. Those funds were raised through the benevolence of 17 families who came forward to fund the project.

A well-known stained glass artist, [Richard Caemmerer Jr.](#), working as a commissioned artist for the Reinert's Studio of Winona, designed the stained glass panels to fit Holy Trinity's unique hexagon-shaped sanctuary. Based on Mr. Caemmerer's design, Reinert's constructed all six panels, and then stored them until funds were available, at which point Reinert's delivered and installed each panel.

Themes

The artist took the inspiration for the panels from the church's name, Trinity. Each of the six panels depicts how God surrounds us in the embodiment of the Triune God; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Placement of the Panels

Each element of the Triune God is represented by a pair of panels. As you enter the Sanctuary facing west, the two panels directly in front of you, above the altar, represent Jesus Christ, the Son of God. To your left and right are the panels that represent the Holy Spirit. Above the entrance to the sanctuary, facing to the east, are the two panels representing God, the Father.

Themes represented within the six panels

As stated earlier, the six panels represent the Holy Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Panels 1 and 2 at the front of the sanctuary (to the left and right of the altar), represent Jesus, the Son. The panels were placed above the altar to emphasize redemption. The artist's motif represents birth, death and the resurrection. Hidden in the abstract glass are forms representing the manger, the cross, the crown, and the story of the crucifixion.

Panel 6, on your left, and panel 3 on your right, represent the Holy Spirit, placed on the sides to represent life. Hidden in the abstract glass are forms that represent fire and wind, the typical embodiment of the Holy Spirit.

Panels 4 and 5 above the entrance to the sanctuary, were placed to the east and the rising sun, representing God, the Father, and were designed to emphasize the Creation. Hidden in the abstract glass are forms representing the sun, stars, moon, fish, trees, mountains and ocean.

The artist, Richard Caemmerer, never left an exact meaning for each glass panel. What is known about the designs was gleaned from notes left by the artist as he created each panel.

But this is where research causes the story to change. Realizing that there are many images in the glass that don't appear to portray a story, extensive research was conducted to provide some insight into the panels.

The Colors

Creating the vision with the use of color

Two important features have not been addressed that aided in answering the unknown depictions and symbolisms hidden in the glass. They include Mr. Caemmerer's use of color and shapes, and how colors enhance the use of those shapes.

First, let's talk about colors. In the world of stained glass, colors can tell their own story by how and where they are used. After reviewing several references to color in stained glass, here is a list of the known consistencies of meaning.

Black - Somewhat rare to see as the focus of color in a stained glass window as it represents death.

Red - Often symbolizes the blood of Christ. It indicates strong emotions such as love and hate. It serves as a reminder of Jesus' sacrifice and is often associated with the martyrdom of saints.

Blue - Symbolizes heaven, hope, sincerity, and piety, and is often associated with the Virgin Mary.

Green - Symbolizes spring, growth, rebirth, triumph of life over death, faith, charity, immortality, and contemplation. It is often used to represent grass and nature.

Violet - Symbolizes love, truth, passion, and suffering.

White - Often associated with God, it symbolizes chastity, and innocence of the soul.

Yellow - Although sometimes used to depict treachery, as in renderings of Judas, it is more widely used to indicate the halo of the saints, divinity, power, and glory.

Purple - Symbolizes royalty, and God, the Father. It is believed Jesus wore purple before his crucifixion, so the color has come to symbolize suffering and endurance.

Dark Purple - Symbolizes negativity, death and mourning

Gray - Symbolizes humility and mourning, and also represents the immortality of the spirit.

Brown - Symbolizes spiritual death and renunciation of worldly things.

Gold/Orange - Symbolizes God, divinity and the treasures of heaven.

Mauve - Creating a combination of the color purple, representing the royalty of God and red, representing the blood of Jesus. Together, the colors create mauve symbolizing the combined spirit of God in Jesus.

Applying the colors and meanings to the Stained Glass of Holy Trinity

As stated earlier, Mr. Caemmerer used the name of the church as the basis for the designs depicted in the windows. The Trinity is depicted by three pairs of panels. The two panels

facing east represent God. The four panels on the sides facing north and south, represent the Holy Spirit, and the two panels at the front of the church, facing west over the altar, represent Jesus.

East Panels - Representing God

Center panels - Panels of Yellow, white, orange (or gold) and clear glass, where all life begins. These panels represent God, in the beginning.

Genesis 1:1-5

"In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was the evening and there was the morning, the first day."

Panel showing conjoined water droplets.

Genesis 1:6-8

"And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome sky. And there was the evening and there was the morning, the second day."

Panels representing the ocean, mountains and vegetation.

Genesis 1:9-13

"And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together in one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And he saw that it was good. Then God said," Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on the earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit, with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day."

Panels representing the Sun, Moon and Stars.

Genesis 1:14-19

"And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made two great lights - the greater

light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was the evening and there was the morning, the fourth day."

Panels representing the creation of all living creatures (fish).

Genesis 1:20-23

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let the birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was the evening and there was the morning, the fifth day."

Side Panels - Representing the Holy Spirit

Prior to the birth of Christ, God could only convey his messages to man through the Holy Spirit, which embodied itself through the use of wind or fire. The stained glass panels on the sides of the sanctuary depict those elements of wind and fire which is represented in the Old Testament specifically in three biblical references.

Genesis 2:7 Wind

"Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

Exodus 3: 2 Fire

"And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire and the bush was not consumed."

Acts 2: 2-4 Wind and Fire

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound, like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

West Panels - Representing Jesus, the Son of God

In the panels over the altar, representing the story of Jesus, three familiar images stand out.

The Manger

Luke 2:7

“And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” (Note the color yellow at the head of the manger - symbolizes divinity, power and glory)

The Crown

There are many references to Jesus as “King of the Jews”.

At his birth,

Matthew 2:1-2

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.”

And at his death,

Matthew 27:37

“And over his head, they put the charge against him, which read, ‘This is Jesus the King of the Jews.’”

The Cross (representing the crucifixion)

John 19:16-18

“Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him and with him two others, one on either side with Jesus between them.”

The Four Vessels

The remaining panels did not seem to make any sense, four figures or vessels, split in the middle, each bearing distinctive colors. Extended research finally began to uncover the meaning and significance of the figures.

The four figures, or vessels, represent significant steps in the process of Christ's trial from beginning to the time of the crucifixion, often known as *"The Passion"*. The significance of the split figures with two colors indicate Christ's journey to the cross from both the physical side as well as the spiritual side. The upper half represents Christ's physical condition. The lower half represents his spiritual condition. To identify these conditions, one needs to go back to the use of color and the meaning depicted by the color.

First vessel

Physical and Spiritual Condition: Purple - the color of suffering, endurance, and the presence of the strength of God.

Jesus stands before Pilate in what is believed to be a purple robe mocking his claim of royalty.

John 18:33-37

"Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.'

(Jesus stands toe to toe with Pilate and does not back down. He maintains his place as King both physically and spiritually not cowering to Pilate's strength and position.)

Second vessel

Physical Condition: Red - represents the blood of Christ and suffering

Spiritual Condition: Dark Purple or Gray - represents negativity, mourning and humility.

John 19:1-3

"Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face."

Third vessel

Physical Condition: Red - represents the blood of Christ and suffering

Spiritual Condition: Violet - represents passion, suffering and penance

John 19:17-19

"So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

Fourth vessel

Physical Condition: Red - represents the blood of Christ and suffering

Spiritual Condition: Blue - represents heaven, hope, sincerity

John 19:28-30

After this, when Jesus knew that all was finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up the spirit.

Symbolism of the two-toned droplet

After the four vessels, there is a symbol that varies in shape from the other four. It looks more like a droplet of a liquid, but its significance bears close witness to the crucifixion. The droplet bears two colors, red and violet. The red represents Christ's blood; the violet represents love, truth, passion and suffering.

John 19:31-37

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath, especially because the Sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you may also believe. His testimony is true and he knows that he tells the truth.)

These things occurred so that scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

The Four Waves

On the windows bordering the Christ windows, there are four unusual bands or waves. Two occur at the beginning of Christ's life, and two at the end. The waves share a common color theme. The mauve color appears in all four waves. Although this color is uncommon in the windows of Holy Trinity, it does appear in each of these four waves or bands. These waves were difficult to decipher, because they are extremely abstract and because the depictions vary in shape from the depictions of the adjoining panels.

First Wave

The first wave represents **The Annunciation**. This is God bringing forth the concept of a son to the Virgin Mary through the words of the angel Gabriel. Prevalent in the band is the color mauve. This is a combination of the color purple representing God the Father and the color red, representing the blood of Christ. Together the color mauve symbolizes the spirit of God in Christ.

The Annunciation - Luke 1:30-32

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid Mary, you have found favor with God. And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David."

Second Wave

The second wave represents **The Immaculate Conception**. Although this is not celebrated by the Lutheran church, it is a step towards the birth of Christ celebrated by other religions. We know that Mr. Cammerer, the artist, was a very devout and spiritual man and may very well have celebrated the Immaculate Conception in his religious practices. The wave is largely white, representing chastity and purity, and represents the Immaculate Conception of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, but carries the mauve center band representing the combined spirit of Father and Son.

The Immaculate Conception - Luke 1:34-35

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; and he will be called the Son of God."

Third Wave

The third wave, at the end of Jesus' life, symbolizes **The Resurrection**. The resurrection wave, primarily white, but still maintaining the mauve band, represents the purity and innocence of the soul.

The Resurrection - John 20:11-17

“But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb: and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head, and the other at the feet. They said to her “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him. When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away. Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabun!” (which means teacher). Jesus said, “Do not hold me for I have not ascended to the Father.”

Fourth Wave

The fourth wave represents **The Ascension**. The center mauve colored band remains but is now surrounded by gray. Gray represents the immortality of the spirit, the emblem of Christ Risen. Gray is a blend of the Divine Light of Creation and the darkness of sin and death.

The Ascension - Luke 24:50-51

“Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.”

The White Band - Connecting Jesus' birth and death

When you look at the four waves, you will notice a white band, about 2 inches wide, beginning with the Immaculate Conception wave and ending at the Ascension wave. This band, color white, the color symbolizing God, represents God's presents throughout the life of Jesus Christ. God was with him from the time of conception until Christ returned to his father in Heaven.

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whosoever believes in him shall not parish but have everlasting life.”

There is only one break in the line representing God's love for his son Jesus. At the point of death, you will see that there is a break in the white line. Jesus made note of this break as he felt the loss of his heavenly father as he neared death on the cross.

Mark 15:34

"At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?", which means, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

This ends the story of the Stained Glass Windows of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. We hope this gives you a better understanding of the artist's attempt to explain, in his terms, the meaning hidden in the stained glass.

About the artist

Richard Caemmerer Jr. had a vision for the stained glass windows of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. His use and understanding of the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - created the vision that guided him through the design and creation of the stained glass panels. The basic symbols of the creation, the symbolism of the Holy Spirit, and many of the symbols of Christ's life, including the manger and the cross, were easy to understand. The remaining, and more abstract symbols relating to the Trinity, remained hidden for nearly 40 years. No notes were ever left behind explaining the intricate detail of the stained glass panels. The symbolism could only be deciphered when combined with the understanding of the artist's use of stained glass colors commonly used in religious depictions.

Mr. Cammerer was the founder and Director Emeritus of The Grunewald Guild, in Plain, Washington. Prior to that, he was Professor of Art at Valparaiso University from 1958 to 1980 and Chairman of the art Department from 1972 to 1980.

As a visual artist, Caemmerer had commissions in stained glass, sculpture, fresco and tapestry in 600 churches throughout the United States, Canada, Central America and Germany, Africa, and Yugoslavia, representing all denominations. This includes Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in New Prague in 1978.

Richard Cammerer Jr. died February 18, 2016, at the age of 82, from complications of Alzheimers.