

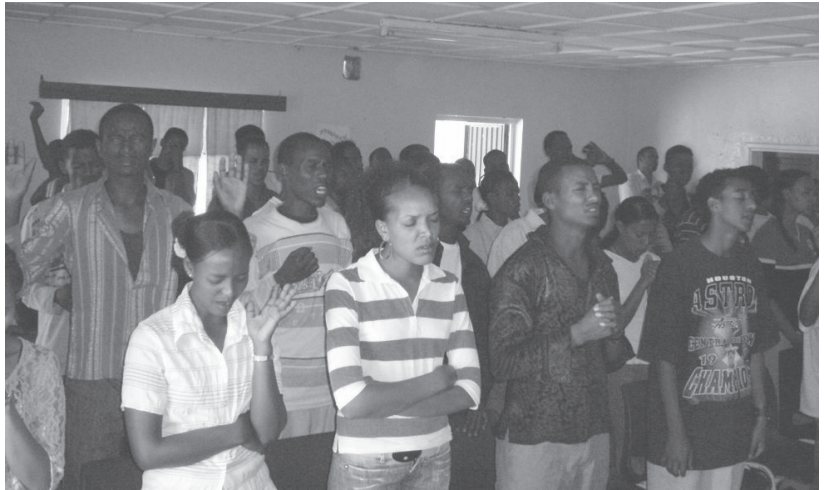
C is for Callings

Καλέω (kaleo). It's the word used in the New Testament to refer to those who are "called" according to God's purposes through the Holy Spirit.

We ought not take this working of the Spirit for granted, or faith for that matter. The work of the Spirit is like a *Platzregen*, a "local shower." As showers come and go, they rain on the land that is blessed to have it. But the Spirit can move on, like a rain cloud, and what may follow is a drought and a parched land.

In his final days among us, Bob Bertram would travel with me from his home to my office to meet with others and share from his wisdom. In one of our final journeys, he cited – as if sighing – the passage from Luke 18:8: "when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" That passage follows the story of a widow who made her case before a judge who "neither feared God nor had respect for people," having no respect for the widow or her cause. Yet he was so worn out by her constant appeals that he granted her request.

At times I wondered whether Bob had shared that because of his own daily cries in the midst of an interminable illness, cries for the faithful coming of his Lord. But I have come to believe that he was envisioning the signs of our times, when the sense of the promise in the face of crisis is what we most need – faith in the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus the Christ.



"In-spired" University Student Christian Growth Conference at Hawassa University, Ethiopia (see story on page 4)

Even in these days of tribulation in this parched land of our global village, we all see, and even term such times, as a time of "crisis" – an economic "crisis," an environmental "crisis," a pandemic "crisis." Yet we underestimate the judgmental depth of the word *krisis*. Do we grasp how deep the crisis goes? Can we get to its root, and see how it is that God is the one holding us accountable (as in the root word, *krima*, God holding court with us in the dock)? That there is that much "crisis" in us led Luther to assert, "by my own understanding or strength, I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him."

Yet here is precisely where the Holy Spirit enters by the promise of Christ's Word! The Holy-ing Spirit comes at this point of our deepest crisis to "call, gather, enlighten and make us holy" through the gospel. Notice how it is that without the holy-ing Spirit there would be no "calling" at all; at least no calling that would make that much difference, not only in our lives, but in the world. Oh, to be sure, there are decisions we will make every day, perhaps without even the slightest cognizance that the Wind "blows where it wills." But the most important decision is the one that God makes on our behalf through the "calling" of the Holy Spirit, the calling of the promise to us, for us: there is for you all the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life eternal!

The Holy Spirit calls us to the cross and resurrection of Christ – he who underwent the “crisis” for us all; he who is, for us all, the “widow” who cries out to the Judge for the just-ifying cause of our liberation and hope.

Faith grasps that even in crisis, when all things look hopeless – like a parched land – Christ is there through the Holy Spirit to render this as a time of hope. How we are “called” by faith, therefore, also shapes our sense of “calling” as “vocation” (*vocatio*). God has called and gifted us in life with a vocation of service to his world, equipping us with gifts for various roles and responsibilities. The same sense of “calling” applies to those spirited-messengers who serve in his church.

We are privileged to hear from two of those spirited-messengers of our time, those whom the Spirit has called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified, and whom the Spirit has gifted to bring a Word of promise in the midst of the crises of our time. Both are pastors, and they serve in different corners of the world where the Spirit sends the *Platzregen* of God’s promise. One of our spirited-contributors, Reverend Marian Marks, is a pastor of a small congregation in the United States; the other, Dinku Lamessa Bato, is a major player in the work of one of the fastest growing congregations in Ethiopia. Hope you find their stories in-spiring!

michael hoy

R is for *Remedy*

Pastor Marian is, by her own admission, a second-career pastor. She first served as a technician in a pathology lab. “Pathology” means, literally, “the study of disease.” After twenty years of working on one pathology, she made the transition in her new calling to another, deeper, pathology that merited her attention and her gifts: people suffering under the

theological dis-ease that comes from sin and its attendant judgment, needing the gifts of Word and Sacrament to bring remedy.

She completed her Master of Divinity degree at Yale Divinity School in 1994, and accepted a call to Grace Lutheran Church in Auburn, Maine. This has been her one and only call, and this September will mark Pr. Marion’s fifteenth year in ministry. Her husband,



She has a remedy: Marian Marks, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Auburn, Maine (pictured below)



Joe, is a retired conservation officer (game warden) for the state of Connecticut. Pr. Marian jokes that her marriage to Joe actually provided “great preparations for ministry.” People would call Joe at 10 o’clock at night and ask, “Where did you stock the fish?”

Now it is Pr. Marian who is stocking the fish, literally, with the Promise. My parents, my brother and his spouse are regular members of her parish who benefit from her feeding of the Word.

When asked about her joys and challenges, Pastor Marian began with the challenges. She chuckled with her spirited laugh. “Right now,” she said, “the greatest challenge seems to be finances.” To be sure, pastoring a small congregation with limited resources, even limited time and energy of

those who work with her in ministry, makes it all seem overwhelming. Yet it has not kept her or the good people of Grace from their working in the Spirit. In fact, as Pastor Marian would herself say, “Prosperity is more deadly to the Spirit.” I hope all in American churches – or even those infected with American “prosperity gospel” – are listening to these prophetic words.

So what gives people who are worried about finances the courage to face these days in the Spirit? “Faith,” she answers. “In the midst of crisis, you believe that God will provide.” As a subtle reminder of false faith, this good pastor pointed out how it is that many “put their faith in 401Ks.... Now they are forced to rethink what is trustworthy and what is not.”

O-S-S is for Opening the Source of the Spirit

What is trustworthy? The word “trustworthy” occurs ten times in the New Testament, mostly pointing to trustworthy words, sayings, and servants; but always referring, in each context, to the One *Who* is trustworthy, Jesus the Christ – the Word behind the words, sayings, and servants.

Pastor Marian knows that source, even in some of the darkest crises. She personally sees people every day, some of them in her own congregation, who are below the poverty line. She grieves how stock funds that could have been used for ministry evaporated when the global fiscal crisis hit the “foundations” (sic!) of churches. Pastors in her area are losing their jobs as pastors because churches have decided it to be expedient to cut the ministry rather than lose their buildings. “I think human beings, if they see something they are afraid of, work to prevent that and create a safe environment, and ironically their action does not create safety. Congregations are afraid that they will not survive, so they cut the one who is speaking the Word of God – the office that feeds the church – which leads to their eventual death.”

She recalls a recent winter in Maine when hit with a dangerous ice storm – “it underscored the fragility of our life. People were getting cranky with each other over all sorts of petty things,” she said. “And then,” she added, “there was the sudden evaporation of wealth – all of a sudden, it was not there. Life is changed in a way that people do not know what to do.”

And then comes Pastor Marian’s trustworthy saying. “But if you believe that God meets you in those circumstances, it’s not so scary.”

There she goes, with faith again.

She’s still going. And it’s an in-spiration to us all!

“Wherever and whenever people are looking only for things, they will be disappointed. But the Spirit has something else in mind.” What is that, Pastor? “Replacing our fragility with faith. Letting us know we will survive. Giving us the assurance that God will be there, no matter what.” In the interest of documenting our sources, let us consider The Source that is cited by the Spirit: look Him up on Golgotha’s cross, through the open tomb, and ascending to the right hand of God!



Picnicing members of Grace Lutheran Church, Auburn, Maine

One of Pastor Marian’s greatest inspirations comes when she recounts as she does, with bubbling joy, some of the greatest stories of the Spirit at work among her own people as they come together by faith. “Everyone knows everyone else”

in a small congregation, she exclaims; and that prompts a “genuine concern for one another.” She shared how it was that some came to Grace from Mt. Olivet, the largest ELCA congregation in Minneapolis – right in the heart of Lutheran country. “At Grace, we are obviously smaller; but they came to discover that in a smaller congregation it is not so much what the congregation can do for you, but what gifts you bring.” The joy of her excitement builds in the telling. “They came away liking the fact that people remembered when their daughter cut her first tooth, or when she had her first cold; they felt personally supported knowing that they were a part of the community.”

“Often people never talked about their possessions – those are not so important in the grand scheme of things,” Pastor Marian says. The gifts that people have to bear in the life of the Spirit is the real treasure to be found – “the mutual conversation and consolation” of the brothers and sisters, together with all the gifts of the Word.

She, this dear sister in Christ, is a gift in their midst to be reminding them so of the Spirit’s (Re-) Sourcefulness.

I is for *Internet*

What did we do before we had this worldwide web? How good it is to use even this resource for the Spirit's bidding, to be in touch with a dear brother-saint, Dinku Lamessa Bato, who lives on the other side of the globe and sends cheering news of the Spirit's work. Dinku is quite busy these days, in part because of his work as national coordinator for University Student Ministry in one of the largest growing segments of Christianity in Ethiopia. "I came back to office only today after almost nine days of visits to the south in the Great East African Rift Valley." In the midst of his busy schedule of travel, he composed some reflections on the establishment and growth of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Mekane Yesus means, literally, "the dwelling place of Jesus." What an apt description for the work of the Spirit!



*Dinku Lamessa Bato,
spirited evangelist*

N is for *New Beginnings*

We all know the story of the spirited work of the first-century deacon Philip when he encountered the Ethiopian on the chariot, opening the Scriptures and the fuller work of God's promises through baptism (Acts 8:26-40). Dinku credits the further work of missionaries that came from Europe and North America in the latter part of the nineteenth century, "proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in various parts of Ethiopia." First came the Swedes, the Germans, the Norwegians, and the Danes, all Lutheran, and making inroads to the various peoples of Ethiopia. The American Lutheran Church came later; and even the Presbyterians got into the act (Acts?!) of reaching into "the Western part of Ethiopia, with a vision to reach the Oromos and the peoples of the South Western parts of Ethiopia with the Gospel."

"Proclaiming the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the people full strength, the mission organizations also rendered development and social services to the people by building schools and clinics. This has been

referred to as 'the three-legged ministry.' Therefore, the legacy of the mission organizations was 'proclamation and service.' Indeed "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light, on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned' (Isa. 9:2)."

By the mid-1950's, the Spirit was leading the church through "the representatives of the various mission organizations and the indigenous evangelical members to think of forming one confessional Church." It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to them to name this confessing church "Mekane Yesus", "the dwelling place of Jesus," following the proposal of Reverend Badima Yalew, the first pastor of the Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus Congregation to be endorsed by the Founding Assembly, April 23-25, 1958 in Addis Ababa. Dr. Emmanuel Gebre-Silassie, who later became the first president of EECMY, addressed the gathered assembly with these words: "What we have accomplished today might seem too little, but time and history will reveal the greatness of the work accomplished today." Dinku adds, "Indeed, this 'prophecy' has come true with the help of the Almighty God, the owner of the work." Owner, indeed! In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

G is for *Growth,* *even in the midst of Persecution*

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, by the date of its established as a national church in January 1959, had approximately 20,000 baptized members in about 150 organized congregations. Today it has a membership of five million in more than 6,200 congregations organized in 20 synods nationwide. Dinku shares in humble adoration, "It is obvious that it is purely the work of the Holy Spirit that effected such growth in spite of all the difficulties the church had to pass all the way through."

The EECMY and the other Evangelical churches of Ethiopia carry a legacy of persecution. From the very beginning in Eritrea until the fall of the last emperor

there were very many incidents of persecution all over Ethiopia. All bear witness to harassment and resistance by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). The persecution during the reign of Mengistu Haile Mariam, however, both in extent and cruelty, far surpasses anything experienced in previous periods. As has been documented, the number of closed church buildings during the persecution by the communist regime amounts to at least 2,500, all of them belonging to the non-Orthodox denominations. Large number of church employees and lay members were imprisoned for long periods, and many of them suffered severely from torture and harassment. The most serious incident was the slaying of Reverend Gudina Tumsa, general secretary of the EECMY.

But this persecution did not stop the church from its spirited growth. On the contrary. As Dinku shares so powerfully, “it deepened the understanding of the meaning of the suffering of Christ, and led to a maturation of faith among the nucleus of the faithful. The closing of the churches and the deep emotional crisis created by revolution, hunger, civil war, etc. resulted in a tremendous search for spiritual meaning. The witness of the nucleus of the faithful in each congregation, who had dared to stand up against the pressure from the government, became a powerful demonstration of the depth and preciousness of the Evangelical faith.”

When the people were given freedom to worship, they therefore turned to the churches in great number. From the perspective of 1998 it seems that

the witness of the few during the Mengistu Haile Mariam persecution is the most important single reason for the tremendous growth in membership of the EECMY. The experience of persecution left its mark on the theology of the EECMY, a theology of the cross in the tradition of genuine Lutheran theology. These may prove most valuable for the church when faced with the extremes of the theology of glory of the charismatic movements.

S is for Spiritual-revival

Dinku also sees how these times of intense persecution have also brought about some charismatic renewal among the young adult members of Mekane Yesus. The gifts have seemed right out of the early New Testament in some cases: prophecies and visions, speaking in tongues, healings and exorcism. Dinku sees the real value in all spiritual renewal through the lens of the cross of Christ: the Holy Spirit is at work to “open their hearts for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” “Today the church enjoys the blessing of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as it carries out the God-given mission of ‘serving the whole person’ as its motto bears.”

Clearly, the Spirit is reviving the spirits of Marian and Dinku, and a whole host more where the wind is blowing – also in you, blest readers! Wherever the promise is extended, even in the midst of crisis and persecution, the Spirit is doing her holy-ing work. Come Holy Spirit, Creator blest!

michael hoy



*Above: University students mid week Christian Gathering in Addis Ababa
Below: Graduating students of Addis Ababa University after training in preparing for vocational life (June 2008)*



Speakers and Presentations: Conference, January 26-27, 2010

Jerome Burce "Let's Roll!" The Mission of Christ the Insurgent, AD 2010

Ed Schroeder and Fred Danker Not Missing the Mission in Luke

Jukka Kaariainen *Missio as Promissio*: Lutheran Missiology Confronts the Challenge of Religious Pluralism

Edward Schroeder Luther's Own Mission Theology – Contemporary Lutheranism's Best-Kept Secret

Frederick Niedner "Come over to M.I.T.—and Concordia—and help us:" Mission on the College Campus

Robert Kolb Luther's Thought as a Theology of Mission

Lori Cornell Preaching Christ Where No One Listens: Crossings in the Pacific Northwest

Carol Braun The Challenge of Christian Mission to Western Millennials

Steven Albertin Faith in the Workplace

Marcus Felde Could the Pauline Distinction **Unite** the Church?

Marcus Lohrmann Using the Crossings Six-Step Method Practically for Preaching

Panel: Connecting *Promissio*/mission to the post modern world that doesn't need Church

Round Table: Does Anybody, much less Everybody, out there really need to hear **Our** Good News?

Plus a few more, to be announced

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