

#787 An Exemplary Conversation (1)

Colleagues,

Three weeks ago we sent you [a brief essay](#) by Pr. Matt Metevelis of Las Vegas who used some interesting reflections on Aristotle's principles of rhetoric to critique poor preaching and push hard for the goal of preaching Christ. I should mention that Matt was trained at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, where he drank deeply from the wells of Gerhard Forde and the like. A week or so later we got a thoughtful response from Pr. Tim Hoyer of Jamestown, New York. Tim, a graduate of yesteryear's Seminex, had a few bones to pick with Matt, a few of them quite pointed. When we suggested that he bring them to Matt's attention before we published them here, he not only agreed, but also turned what he had sent us into the wonderfully gracious and thoughtful letter that you'll find below. A day or so later Matt responded to him in much the same spirit. We'll send you that next week, both posts coming to you, of course, with the authors' permission.

We want you to see Tim's and Matt's exchange for two reasons. First, it's substantive. You'll profit from reading it. As Tim pushes Matt to sharpen his thinking he'll likely do the same to you; and for all we know you'll say "Aha!" yourself when next week comes and you see how Matt responded.

The second and still better reason for sharing this is its nature as a conversation between a couple of theologically adept pastors who haven't lost sight of their prior calling as brothers in Christ, strangers though they be to each other. Would that this were the norm for such exchanges. It isn't. Pastors and theologians have as much of the old flesh hanging

around their necks as anybody (cf. *Large Catechism*, Sixth Petition), and it shows in the way they snap, snarl, strut, and do their best to score points on each other. More's the pity when the folks doing it are co-confessors of genuine Gospel. As if we aren't already beleaguered! Would that all of us might learn from Tim and Matt about co-confessing well, in such a way that the other is edified and built up, the Lord of both being honored not only in word, but in spirit too.

Peace and Joy,
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

Matt Metevelis,

You and I have in common Luther Seminary, for you got a degree there and so did I. However, I attended during the summer for four years while you attended fall, winter, and spring.

Your concern for using Jesus as the final goal of preaching is what all of us preachers need to be concerned about. With great dismay I read other sermons and find Jesus is not used as the goal of the sermon, if he is mentioned at all.

My seminary was Christ Seminary-Seminex where I had Professors Bertram and Schroeder, who are the two who taught about "Crossings." But they were taught by a preacher and professor named Richard Caemmerer, who, amazingly, was my professor for preaching classes. (He was about eighty years old when he taught me.) His outline for a sermon was "goal, malady, means." There was a goal a preacher wanted to get his listeners to. But there was a malady preventing the listeners from getting there. The means to get the listener from the malady to the goal was Jesus.

There were two goals—faith in Jesus and faith in Jesus working in love for others.

Crossings has its outline of Diagnosis/Prognosis, which is a more detailed outline of what happens in “goal, malady, means.” Bertram took Caemmerer’s outline and made the parts of those three steps more clear. Bertram took “malady” and made it three parts—external, internal, and eternal maladies. They were all what Caemmerer talked about, but they were not specifically described. The means is Step Four, or the first step of Prognosis, in that Jesus is the means by which our problem with God is overcome. Jesus is also the one we are given faith in (goal) and Jesus is the one who gives us love and his Spirit to deal with the situation or external problem we started with—a part of the malady.

In your [ThTh #784](#), I think you wanted Jesus to be the goal of preaching, for to use Jesus as a means to something else made Jesus only a means to an end, thus making him less important. From ThTh #784, “Preaching is the place where the crucified God comes to meet us. When the gospel is preached, God comes in the crucified Christ to dwell with the congregation. Hearing the sermon, they are reclaimed by Christ in faith. In the words of the preacher, He is bleeding and crucified for them.”

Is it enough to say that Jesus is crucified for me? People will ask, “Why was he crucified for me?” To answer the question why is to say Jesus died to do something for me. Jesus then becomes the means to do something for us.

But to make Jesus the goal is to take away any reason for why he is the goal. Why make Jesus the goal? What good is it for me if Jesus is the goal? Yes, that is a selfish concern to ask if Jesus is any good for me, but if Jesus is not good for me, then there is no love from Jesus to all of us.

The Lutheran Confessions—the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession—say that we are to use Christ

(glorify Christ, magnify Christ, honor Christ) and his death and resurrection (make Jesus the goal), and, here is the second part, use Jesus in a way that gives comfort to sinners (or consolation, as in the Summer 2013 Issue of the Crossings newsletter).

Jesus himself used himself as a means. In Luke 7, where Jesus has dinner with Simon the Pharisee and where a woman from the city, a sinner, washes Jesus' feet with her tears, dries them with her hair, kisses his feet, and anoints them with ointment, Jesus says to that woman, "Your sins are forgiven you." Jesus on the cross is not just there on the cross, but is on the cross for the purpose of making us good to God—forgiveness. Jesus did not just die, he died to do something for us. Then Jesus said to that woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." In his own words, Jesus is giving something to the woman, giving her faith in him instead of faith in the condemning words she heard from everyone else. And by that faith in him on a cross and risen from death (so that we too might have a new life), she can have peace in her heart, in her life, because she has peace with God.

So Jesus on a cross is not just an end, but the means by which Jesus gives us faith in him. Jesus on a cross is a promise to us, his promising to forgive us, to make us good, to give us faith in him.

To make Jesus the "means" of faith, of eternal life, of righteousness, does not make Jesus second best, as if less important than the result. Jesus is also the result—faith in Jesus, eternal life with Jesus, forgiveness by Jesus. It is faith in Jesus that "God will regard and reckon as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3.21-25 and 4.5" (Augsburg Confession, Article 4). That whole article also makes Jesus a "means," as it reads, "we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God [goal] by grace, for Christ's sake, through

faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake [means] our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us.”

So, as Jesus is the means to forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life, those means are given to us for Jesus’ sake. Thus making Jesus, the means, the most important.

Perhaps I misread you, for in ThTh #784, there is,

“Christ and his cross cannot just be a principle used to adorn bigger ideas. This is the core error of the teleological temptation. Proper law/gospel preaching seeks to counter the error of the teleological temptation by making sure that the law which works on our wills is always separate from the gospel which works on our inner being to make us new. The goal of a good law/gospel preacher will always be to keep Christ front and center. By the law properly preached, God calls us to awareness of our limitations even as we are encouraged to make do the best we can for our neighbor under the world’s fallen state. But in the gospel, given in its fullness, Jesus Christ becomes crucified for us in our hearing as the end and literally the death of our grief, sin, sorrow, accusations, fears, doubts, limitations, and worldly works.”

Here Jesus dies as the means of death for our grief, sin, sorrow, and so on.

When Jesus makes us a Promise (and his Promise is also called Gospel), he promises us we are forgiven by God, called good by God, and we have eternal life. A promise calls for trust, but trust in something that has been promised. We do not trust Jesus on a cross and that’s it. We trust Jesus on a cross to be our forgiveness. A promise is a means to give us trust in the one making the promise.

So maybe you are saying close to what Crossings says. It is essential that Jesus' Promise (the cross as "means") comforts us (gives us faith in him—a goal).

We give Jesus honor and glory when we make him the means. If we don't have a reason for why Jesus is on the cross ("means"), we take away his glory, the "for his sake." If Jesus is not the means, then our problem of not having faith in God is not dealt with, and our problem of God's law, judgment, and wrath are not dealt with. If we don't mention those problems of wrong faith and God's judgment in discussing why Jesus is on the cross, then we belittle why Jesus is on the cross—to give us faith in him as the way to overcome death and God's judgment.

To be the means is to be the most important. The goals of faith and faith acting in love are to have Christ as our life. Jesus is not a means to something greater than he is, but the means to what he does for us, the means to be with him because he is merciful, forgiving, loving, and makes us forgiven and loved by God his Father.

I learned of "goal, malady, means." So I react to a different evaluation of "means." But it is good to for us preachers to make sure and to remind ourselves to make Jesus necessary, needed. That way he is the one trusted, which is your goal and the goal of all preachers.

Peace to you.

Timothy Hoyer