

#788 An Exemplary Conversation (2)

In [Thursday Theology #787](#), we presented a letter from Pr. Tim Hoyer to Pr. Matt Metevelis in response to Matt's [brief essay](#) on the preacher's task of presenting Jesus as the ultimate goal. Now, as promised, we bring you Matt's replies to Tim's letter.

Matt followed the e-mailer's stylistic mode of inserting his replies directly into the text of Tim's original letter. I've decided to preserve this format, putting the text of Tim's letter (from [ThTh #787](#)) in italics and square brackets, while putting Matt's (new) replies in boldface.

Again, we expect you'll find this exchange edifying, not only for its theological substance but also—perhaps more importantly—for the spirit of Christian brotherhood in which it is carried out.

Peace and Joy,
Carol Braun, for the editorial team

*[Matt Metevelis,
The benefits of Jesus—his peace and mercy—be with you.]*
And also with you.

[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.]
I think we met in the summer of '06. It is great to hear from you. DDiv student I think I recall?

[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.]

I recognize the Crossings method. Thanks for the refresher. It must have been amazing to sit in Caemmerer's classes. The admonition he often made to "preach the blood" which I heard from another one of his students has been ringing in my head for years.

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

While I agree with the first goal I am suspicious of the theological construction of the second. How is "faith in Jesus working love for others" different from the fides caritate formata, "faith made active in love," doctrine thrown about by the Counter-Reformation church? Can I be loving without being faithful to Christ? Does faith in Christ make my love better or purer? I work here in a hospice with some of the most loving people on earth, who are convinced Christianity is bunk. How is their love different from mine?

[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.]

Fair enough—there are plenty of things that Jesus overcomes for us. But he overcomes them by standing in their place. Our sins keep us from God; Jesus takes them to the cross to leave them there to hang (1 Pet 2) so that he can take their place in our hearts.

[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?]

Absolutely, the trick is sneaking the puck past the goalie of your old Adam so that you hear it.

[People will ask, "Why was he crucified for me?"]

And lately that's a good question. People are self-justifiers and don't see themselves as sinners for the most part. I've found that sin now has to be preached in terms of pain—physical, mental, and spiritual.

[To answer the question of why is to say Jesus died to do

something for me. Jesus then becomes the means to do something for us.]

Jesus is the PERSON who does something for us. When I was first dating my wife I dropped about \$100 on her birthday and filled her dorm room with flowers so that she would know how much I cared about her. So, sure, I was the means, but convincing her to have me as part of her life was the goal. Think “happy exchange,” Jesus does everything so that he can have us, not equip us for something else. He must be the “all in all.”

[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.]

Melanchthon argued that “to know Christ is to know his benefits.” What you are bringing up here are the benefits—as if I said, “Preachers should point to Christ on the cross as if it were a beautiful work of art that will somehow change them.” That you bring this up is understandable, because I think I was unclear on this point. To preach Christ’s benefits as the goal I think is completely acceptable under the confessions. That seems to be what you are concerned about: eternal life, peace with God, forgiveness of sins, etc. All these are the benefits of Christ which must be preached when he is preached. The benefits are the “means” by which Christ is understood, apprehended, and trusted. (Christ is still the goal.)

[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).]

Amen.

[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 #478, 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.]

You are powerfully articulating Lutheran theology here. Wish I could be as clear. What I was primarily objecting to is Christ preached in such a way that he provides benefits other than the ones you have brilliantly outlined. All the other benefits given by modern preachers work primarily on our wills in the ways Aristotle outlined in his rhetoric. My favorite example is social justice. In most preaching Christ either makes social justice possible, or condemns the old order in a way that calls us to act. In the latter case, it is up to us then to act in a way that makes social justice possible. These kinds of preachers give a benefit of Christ that is not complete. All the benefits

of Christ you have outlined are complete in themselves: they do not work on our fallen old will but, rather, they literally create a new heart and will within us. I see such benefits less as goals that Jesus was trying to get us to and more as benefits that we get from our lives being tied up together with his life by his act on the cross.

[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).]

Jesus dies so that we might have faith in him and not our works. That's my thesis. I was trying to illustrate the way I constantly see it smudged by the ELCA.

[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.]

To know Christ is to know his benefits. Not our own desires for spiritual perfection, social justice, or a more “missional church.” HIS benefits!

[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.]

So glad for the response. It really helped me clarify my ideas. All the best to your ministry.

[Peace to you.]

[Timothy Hoyer]

And to you.

Matt Metevelis

VDMA