

A Lenten Devotional Booklet for 2005 on the Crossings Website

Colleagues,

For Lent 2005—A Series of Devotions on the Crossings website. Crossings office manager Cathy Lessmann and Crossings website guru Tom Law hope it will be up and ready before Ash Wednesday. What is it? Actually a re-run of a print-medium piece from a few years ago published by Creative Communications for the Parish, the St. Louis-based source of marvelous materials for congregational life, the brain-child of Dr. Larry Neeb. Larry asked me to write the series and now we have his permission to put it on our website. When Tom gets it done, GO to the Crossings homepage <www.crossings.org> and Click on “Works by EHS” under the “Library” listing at the left side of that page. Today’s ThTh posting gives you the outline and the first the first few meditations. They are correlated week-by-week with a masterpiece artwork “Christ’s Seven Last Words and His Resurrection” by the late Siegfried Reinhardt. In our last exchange Tom Law said it might be dicey to correlate soft-copy and this artwork on the website, but he’s going to try.

[In last week’s ThTh 346 posting I’d said I wanted to continue the “freedom” theme this week. But this Lenten project pre-empted. If possible, back to freedom next week.]

Peace & joy!
Ed Schroeder

A Forty-Day Journey through Lent – but Never Alone.

Lent's 40 days through the Prism of Siegfried Reinhardt's Art.

Our own Thorny Circle of Suffering and Christ's Breakthrough.

by Edward H. Schroeder

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[the thorn: our need for forgiveness]

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The Second Word: Remember me... Today you will be with me...

[the thorn: guilt]

First Sunday in Lent

5 Paradise comes to earth

6 Two equal sinners—but different as day and night

7 The thorn of justice

8 Saving yourself

9 Remembering how God remembers us

10 Living today in paradise

The Third Word: Son..., Mother...

[the thorn: human relationships]

Second Sunday in Lent

11 Life in relationships

12 The thorn of childhood: the child's side

13 The thorn of parenthood: the parent's side

- 14 Christ amid the thorns of our relationships
- 15 Christ amid the thorns of our relationship to ourselves
- 16 Christ amid the thorns of our relationship with God

The Fourth Word: My God, my God, why...?

[the thorn: God's own self]

Third Sunday in Lent

- 17 Why, God, why?
- 18 Why call God "my" God?
- 19 The thorn of our own forsakenness
- 20 The thorn of meaningless suffering
- 21 The thorn of God's own suffering
- 22 Why Jesus at all?

The Fifth Word: I thirst.

[the thorn: human needs]

Fourth Sunday in Lent

- 23 He's thirsty just like us
- 24 Water, water, everywhere\Nor any drop to drink.
- 25 And God sent dryness
- 26 Thirst-thorns that never go away
- 27 The vinegar of daily life
- 28 Christ our thirst-quencher

The Sixth Word: It is finished

[the thorn: finishing our lives and closing our case]

Fifth Sunday in Lent

- 29 It is finished. Is He finished?
- 30 "Case closed" against Jesus
- 31 "Case closed" against us
- 32 Are you running with me, Jesus?
- 33 Re-opening "closed" cases
- 34 Stories that seem never to finish.

The Seventh Word: Father, into thy hands...

[the thorn: handing over our lives]

Sixth Sunday in Lent (Palmarum – Passion Sunday)

35 Handing over our lives

36 Dying as stewardship

37 There are other ways to die

38 (Maundy Thursday) Handouts in the Lord's Supper

39 (Good Friday) Our lifelines written in our hands

40 (Holy Saturday) Sabbath rest

Out by Easter, Out for Easter – Encountering Our Last Enemy

Easter Sunday

An Easter meditation on the Risen Christ in Reinhardt's picture. Text: I

Cor. 15, "last enemy."

Christ's breaking the circle of thorns wide open, almost jumping right out of the picture (= our "old" creation), and not merely out of the grave, that "last enemy," that last thorn in the circle of suffering to be conquered—all he does for us. Our Lenten 40-day circle is complete, the circle of death is broken wide open.

The First Word from the Cross "Father, forgive."

Ash Wednesday: Our Thorns and Christ's Breakthrough

Reading: Mark 15:16-20

"After twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. . . Then they led him out to crucify him." (Mark15:17,20)

Artist Siegfried Reinhardt is our guide for our 40-day journey through Lent. He bids us use our eyes for reading images, not just words for the journey. Let your eyes play with his masterpiece. One long thorn bramble links all seven of Jesus'

last words. At Easter he explodes from the tomb. The thorn barrier is broken. It's all for us. Lent is about our thorns and Christ's breakthrough.

Lent is finally "Good News" and nothing morbid at all. It is the story of a cosmic change of subjects. See how Siegfried predicates our thorns of suffering to Jesus. His seven words of pain are the thorns of our daily lives. He is the subject undergoing them all.

The other side of the drama is that Christ's Easter life gets predicated to us. Jesus vaulting from the tomb is heading straight toward us who are viewing the picture. When Lent is over our thorn-encircled lives have open spaces for new futures.

Our Lenten journey is not really us accompanying Jesus on his way of sorrows. It's the other way around: He walks the brambled path of our way of sorrows—so that we might get to Easter. We accompany him in faith these 40 days so that it can happen to us—again.

Prayer: Energize us, LORD, for our 40 days—and 40 nights—through Lent. Since we know how the story ends, encourage us from Easter to face up to the thorns in our own lives and those we inflict on others. Amen

Thursday After Ash Wednesday: Forgiveness Is What It's All About.

Reading: Luke 23:32-38

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34.

Forgiveness is what it's all about. It's what Jesus is all about. It finally is what life—real life—is all about. But we'd never know that if we took our signals from the messages of daily life that surround us.

The recurring theme in daily life is something else. It's just the opposite: recompense. "There is no free lunch." "You get what you've got coming to you." Granted, that doesn't always work either. Some get cheated out of their fair shake. Some seem never to get a fair shake at all. Some get much more than their share—and even do so legally!

Nevertheless—recompense, fairness, debit-credit equity, is the melody of life's daily transactions. Suppose that recompense were God's only melody. What would happen? "The soul that sinneth it shall die." "The wages of sin is death." There would be no life that lasts.

But recompense is not God's last word. Jesus' first word from the cross is God's last word for sinners: forgiveness. Reinhardt's masterpiece shows us God working out the logistics of forgiveness. It doesn't come cheap. Yet when Christ reappears at Easter, forgiveness is a fact. We can count on it, live on it—in our transactions with God, and with one another.

Prayer: Forgive us our sins, Lord, as we forgive those who sin against us. In our life too, we often know not what we do. Sing into our ears the melody of your mercy. Tune our voices to sing the same song to those we know who seldom ever hear it. Amen.

Friday After Ash Wednesday: The Thorn of Our Own Enemies

Reading: Matthew 5:43-48

"But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who

persecute you.” Matthew 5:44

That’s what Jesus says. Our knee-jerk reaction is: “Jesus, you’ve got to be kidding. Look at those enemies in Siegfried’s first vignette. Look at their faces, especially their eyes, and those hands. How on earth can anyone, even you, love those guys?”

Don’t we have enemies just like that? Take the soldier in armor, the guy with the sword. He’s just doing his job, but he is out to kill me. Or the next guy, face half-covered yet full of hate, with hand reaching down to do me in.

Or the one next to him – he must be a professional burglar, eyes on the lookout, hammer ready for the next break-in, sack full of loot from his last job. Or the fourth one, yelling some obscenity at us. The finger, the face, the teeth, those eyes. Our enemies are just like that; how can we love them?

Love has become an emotion in our culture, warm fuzzies in the heart. Not so in the language of Jesus. When he says “love,” it is a concrete act of help for someone who needs it, regardless of our emotions. Thus “love your enemies” is not impossible. “Help ’em,” says Jesus, “even when you don’t, when you can’t, like ’em.”

Do these guys—our enemies too—need help? Absolutely. And especially at the deepest level, their relation to God. That’s the concrete help Jesus invokes for them—for us too. Not because they and we are so lovable, but because we need it. So Jesus’ word for enemies is: “Help ’em. I gave you concrete help (and how!) here on the cross. Trust me for that and then go and do likewise.”

Prayer: Forgive us, Lord, when our hands do harm instead of help, when fear chokes out our faith and trust in you. Lord,

*increase our faith in the crucified and risen Jesus, and
unclench our hands to give concrete help—even to our enemies.
Amen.*