

Gospel Blazes in the Dark

Colleagues,

I told them not to do it, but they wouldn't listen. So Sunday last, November 6, the actual date of my 75th birthday, the Crossings folks confected a celebration. It started with a 3 p.m. "Festival Eucharist," so they called it, at our home congregation, Bethel Lutheran here in St. Louis. Up front were my ELCA bishop Jerry Mansholt presiding, Fred Niedner – Valparaiso University theology department chair, and one of the gospeliest proclaimers around these days – in the pulpit. For evidence of that "gospeliest" adjective see the ThTh posting of just one year ago, Fred's sermon at David Truemper's funeral, <https://crossings.org/thursday/Thur110404.htm>. There was even a new hymn (from Jerry Burce) cum new music (by David Gooding) for the occasion. In addition, special musical treats from Stephen Mager, Robert and Joan Bergt, Robert Souza, and the Bethel Chancel Choir. Niedner began his homily noting that the day was All Saints in our Lutheran calendar and the lessons plus the music in our liturgy might signal something funereal. As did his sermon title: Buried, Blessed and Edified. He was not going to deny that, so he started with the "buried," and proceeded to do his own "gospel-blazing" through all three passive participles—bury-ed, bless-ed, ed-ify-ed. The Crossings folks most likely have some plans for making Fred's sermon available, but I don't know the specs about that yet.

After the liturgy there came some less holy hoopla including a fresh-flowers-decorated art-nouveau cake with 75 tapers (product of cuisine-artist sister-in-law Linda Schroeder), verbal and posted kudos and finally a Festschrift presentation [=German tradition for aging profs, a volume of essays by colleagues for the occasion]. Eighteen writers contributed to the tome. Its

title is the opening line of Burce's hymn: "Gospel Blazes in the Dark." If interested, consult the Crossings office <info@crossings.org>

You dear readers probably don't need to be told that EHS is not usually speechless. But this time it came close. I did mumble something at the end, but it was not epic. And I'm still working on ingesting—and enjoying—it all.

For today's posting, I'll pass on the text of Jerry Burce's hymn. Any commentary would be gilding the lily. Sorry I can't (don't know how) to pass on to you David Gooding's marvelous music. Maybe there's some way and someone will tell me.

Peace & joy!

Ed Schroeder

Gospel Blazes in the Dark: A Poem

By Jerome E. Burce

Composed for a celebration of Edward H. Schroeder's 75th birthday, and, omitting stanza 2a, for such further use thereafter as any may wish to make of it.

*1. Gospel blazes in the dark
Flinty words supply the spark
Splendid teachers fan the flame
Of sudden hope in Jesus' name
For genuine salvation.*

*2. Thus are servants, called by God,
Sent with feet adorned and shod*

*With the winsome news of peace
In Christ who makes the warfare cease
That we 'gainst God keep waging.*

*2a. Note our joy, dear God, we pray
Take the thanks we sing today
For your gift of fiery Ed
By whom our bleary hearts were led
To see the Light astounding.*

*3. Holy Spirit ever praised,
By your lively breath be raised
Saints to bless each time and place
With lavish talk of honest grace
And deeds of Godly kindness.*

*4. Grant that all who dare to preach
Seeking glory grasp and reach
For the nettle, piercing cross,
That all but Christ they scorn as loss
Him crucified their treasure.*

*5. Let them rightly parse your Word
Law and Gospel clearly heard
Fools to beggar, slaves to free
From Adam's grim insanity
That we, divine, must save us.*

*6. God for us when all is lost
Mercy eating sin's deep cost
This your glory saints adore
For this creation's praise will soar
From age to age unending.*

*7. Christ the end of holy wrath
Christ for all the future's path,*

*Fuel your church, excite the spark,
That Gospel blazing in the dark
Will fill the world with gladness.*