

Images of Home

Colleagues,

With one eyepatch—as double-vision persists—I can peck at the computer keyboard, but not always at the right keys. Pastor Robin Morgan (presently interim at Peace ELCA, Washington MO) offered to give me a rest. So she sent something for this week's ThTh posting. Thank you, Robin. She and husband Hal have been providing home hospice care for Hal's father, who this past Sunday breathed his last. Peace to that household.

One more item. Cathy Lessmann, Crossings office honcho, says that several dozen registrations are now in for the January Honest-to-God-Gospel conference. Of course, she and the committee would like to see more. So would I. There's room for over 100. Prompts this item of whimsy from me. Just 10 days before OUR conference in January the ELCA is pulling together a consultation group of major leaguers to brainstorm a major study on Lutheran Hermeneutics for the national church. Imagine that! Even more, imagine this: One of the speakers for OUR conference is (mirabile dictu!) ALSO in that consultation—and (according to the grapevine) possibly one or two other Crossings law-and-promise types.

A big shortcut for the ELCA, of course, that would save beaucoup bucks too, would be for all these folks simply to come to our conference a few days later. There we could "show and tell" them what we've learned—lo, these many years—in appropriating and practicing the Augsburg Aha! of law/promise hermeneutics and alert them to our website piled high with more of the same.

But that's not going to happen, so we better not wait hat in hand. Yet YOU could be right there up front by participating in our get-together in January. Even more we'll be able to ask that

“double agent,” our conference speaker who will just have been there, to tell us what happened.

So if being with us in January is possible for you, send Cathy your registration. Now that I’m 3 days into my 77th year, that keynote I’m slotted to present might just be my swansong. “Two or three gathered” is the Gospel’s own specified adequate size for attendees. Yet even more coming to join in the law/promise festival would be even more fun—surely even more Gospelly. For full specs see our webpage <www.crossings.org> Click on the Conference 2007 box. Don’t miss the full program specs in this [Brochure](#). Y’all come.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

IMAGES OF HOME

The word “home” is one that invariably stirs our souls, one way or the other. Whether the word repels us or warms our hearts, home calls to each of us from the deepest longings of our being.

The artist Thomas Kinkade has developed a huge following (and no doubt made a fortune in the process) by tapping into this deep longing in his work. Most of his paintings, whether focused on the holidays or some other bit of Americana, center on home. Kinkade captures our desires for home in paintings of gauzily lit cottages covered with just the right amount of snow at the end of winding country lanes or Victorian mansions with perfectly landscaped lawns on cobblestone streets that draw the eye and compel the emotions to yearn for such perfection.

Whether in the city, the countryside, or the small town of our imaginations, he provides the illusion of home where everyone is loved and safe, where life is as it should be.

Are these oil and canvas replicas really representations of home? Many of us continue to hope that such perfection is out there and if we just work hard enough or protect what we have with sufficient dedication we will be able to create such a place for ourselves and those we love. Others of us have long since given up trying to find our way into these illusions of home. Either we hang the paintings on our walls with a wistful sigh or mock the very idea of caring about such naïve fantasies.

But the longing remains. Without belaboring the societal shifts in families and the mobility of our culture, we are a nation on the move and dreaming of home.

How does the Christian community address this longing? In the past, we welcomed people into our home, the congregation. Our stable, moral and well-structured communities offered solace and familiarity to new immigrants recently arrived from the same European countries our families had left behind. Be part of our congregation and find home again, here in the new world – that was the church’s most effective evangelism tool.

Today, that is no longer working. The immigrants who are crossing the borders today are from the south and across the Pacific rather than the Atlantic. Our version of home has little or nothing to do with whatever images of home these people are bringing to our country.

Our own progeny, raised in the world created by our forebears, have walked away from their ethnic heritage into the brave new world of melting pot America where “Friends,” “The Simpsons” and “American Idol” are the touchstones that inform their

lives. Yet the longing for home persists, otherwise Kinkade would not be so successful.

Does the Christian community have the resources to address this need within humanity?

One first place to look is in Psalm 84. "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise." (verses 1-4)

Of course, the psalmist goes on to talk about highways to Zion through the valley of Baca as any of us would when thinking of a specific place, a specific way of life that we call home, where God dwells. This, I believe, is part of the struggle we face in the church today. Those of us who grew up inside the structures of our own Zions where our families lived and God dwelt, have a hard time conceiving of God dwelling at the mall or among people who don't sing our songs or pray our liturgy. In my corner of the Christian world, I believe that the intellectual critique of unfamiliar music and prayers is as much about our need to keep our image of home intact as it is about theological improprieties.

What happens when we allow our institutional structures to take the place of the God the structures were built to serve? God is allowing our structures to crumble around us. Are we going to crumble along with the buildings?

Sometimes I feel silly, even sadistic, pointing out this painful reality again and again. Yet, it seems we need to hear these challenging words from a myriad of angles until they

break through our intellectual defenses. We have ourselves so well barricaded inside our mental structures that we hardly realize that we have been left homeless. The gaping God-sized hole in our souls is at the core of our being where the lost little boy or girl is crying and running, looking for the street leading home.

It is the Homeless One in Matthew 8, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head," who calls out to us, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." He knows what it's like to be without a home in the midst of his own people. He knows what it's like to be alone in the face of overwhelming societal pressure. He died a most humiliating death, not the death of a King, but the death of a criminal. He was raised to new life so that those of us who open our hearts to Him might have a new home in his arms wherever He may lead us.

Our forebears are written in the Book of Life, God will never forget them. It is time for us to take what they gave us and make it our own. It is time for us to move into the future, at home in Jesus' arms.

The Homeless One in Matthew 8 healed a leper, He healed the centurion's servant, He healed Peter's mother-in-law. He calmed the storm, cast demons out of two people and was run out of town because of it. Life with the Homeless One isn't easy, but it is what we were created for. Our meaning, our purpose, our true home is in his arms where the Father carefully and tenderly holds us all. Our destiny is laid out before us. Home awaits with open arms.

Robin J. Morgan