

In the Afterglow of Easter 2006

Colleagues:

ForewordAlthough the ThTh number above is “only” 412, there came 88 Sabbath Theology postings beforehand from the computer on this desk. Add them up and it’s 500. Five hundred postings choreographed around law-promise theology. As Luther might ask: What does this 500 mean? It’s you readers who can best answer that question, of course. But you’re not at this computer keyboard right now.

Every now and then some of you do bounce back with an answer to that question, more often than not affirmative and encouraging. However there are also some unhappy campers who tell me otherwise.

Number ONE of these 500 was the Crossings Community’s first venture into “internet theology.” We (better I) didn’t really know what we were doing. We didn’t try to replicate in cyberspace the two programs we had evolved. One of those was weekend workshops (250 of them) in congregations around the country and overseas from 1974 to 1994. Here the focus was on “crossing” the daily work of participants with the Sunday lectionary texts. We couldn’t figure out how to do that in cyberspace.

The second program was semester-long seminars with syllabus, readings, written papers and lots of discussion. A curriculum of 20 such seminars evolved. How to do that in cyberspace was also beyond us.

So our venture into cyberspace took one element present in both

of these programs and tried it on the internet. It was Crossings-style analysis of Biblical texts offered, so we thought, mostly to help Sunday morning preachers. After 88 of these from my hand, next-generation Crossings folks took over and have been doing well ever since. A short while after passing the baton I was bit by the internet-bug again and Thursday Theology postings began—411 Thursdays ago. So today is number 500.

The “Indy 500” automobile race is a big event coming up this month in our land. Prompts me to reflect on the finish line that these 500 postings—“the Windy(?) 500”—crosses today. Finish line? Probably not. But 500 more from yours truly is very improbable indeed. Nevertheless, one of these Thursdays

But for now the 500th posting, two items that found their way into my Easter basket this year.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

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1. From the Valparaiso University Chapel, Easter Sunday 2006[Walter Wangerin, known to many listserve receivers, was the preacher at the chapel of Valparaiso University for the Easter Sunday liturgy this year. Walt is currently undergoing “very aggressive treatments for inoperable metastasized lung cancer.” Fred Niedner, VU’s theology department chair, sent me this.]

You asked about Walt’s preaching at our Easter service. He preached a 45-minute masterpiece on Sunday. It was proclamation plus a lesson on how to read Mark’s Gospel

[=this year's lectionary text for Easter]. He said that we read Mark three times, or in three ways, in our lives as disciples. We read it naively as children, and when we get to the end, we swing around the Son the way NASA sling-shots satellites around the Sun, and head back into our lives, whereupon we read the story again a bit less naively and then, as Gordon Lathrop asserts, we see the risen Christ all through it (he's gone ahead of us to Galilee, right?). Then we sling-shot around the Son again at the end, and this time we read it as our own cross-bound story with a tomb at the end.

Into all this Walt wove the story of a time a group of children showed up early for an Evansville Easter service when he was doing his nervous, pre-service pacing. He decided to tell the children the story of Jesus, including the crucifixion. He left the part about the empty tomb for the sermon in the service, however. One little girl named Lorena had been so sad at the crucifixion part of the pre-service story, but after the service and sermon, she was happy again and came to stand by Walt as he shook hands afterwards. And Walt somehow ended up being the person who drove her home. She got out of his car and skipped up the walk and into her home.

Then he stopped and said, "I am Lorena. I've read and lived this story three times, at least, and I'm going home. I'm not afraid. I am ready to go."

It was mighty quiet in the Chapel at that point, and no one seemed to mind that the service, which began at 10:30 a.m., ended at 1 p.m. Sadly, however, the Chapel's new system of recording all sermons so as to "pod-cast" them on the Chapel web site failed to function normally and there is no recording of Walt's sermon. That one would be

precious to have.

2. A note from Dean Lueking on May 1 about his brother-in-law, Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, whose life is moving toward closure. [Pelikan was my teacher at three different schools—Valparaiso University and two Lutheran seminaries. During my undergrad years at VU he figured prominently (along with Dick Luecke and Bob Bertram) in bending me away from my pre-med program toward theology. I've never been the same since.] I talked with Jary's son, Martin, this evening and the report is that Jary is given several weeks at most before he dies. As some may not know, he was diagnosed with lung cancer about 15 months ago and has been fighting the good fight since. He is as comfortable as possible. Hospice folks have come in. Both sons are remaining with Sylvia and Jary till death comes. He is mostly quiet, though not comatose; it is a chore for him to engage in conversation. As his son quoted him saying recently: "...since Christ is risen, nothing else matters and if Christ be not risen nothing else matters." JP is JP right down to the goal line. We will let you know when we are informed about more. Meanwhile, what better can we do for our exceptional teacher, mentor, brother and friend than to keep him and his dear ones in prayer – and know with him that though under the law we are surrounded in life by death, yet under the Gospel we are in death surrounded by Life!

Dean