

Outsiders and Insiders

Colleagues,

For this week's ThTh, two announcements and one piece of theology. The theological essay comes from a Crossings aficionada. She sent it to me earlier in the week as a "Monday Musing." It spoke to my muse. Let's see if it does to yours too.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

THE TWO ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. FYI. The number of you on the receiving end of this listserve has now come to 400. We've instructed our listserver—for a fee, of course—to raise our limit to 500. From the printout of that receivers-list we see that at least one of the receivers is itself a listserve address. Others of you have also told us that you pass it around. So the actual number of receivers, like the number of angels dancing on a medieval pin-head, is probably impossible to determine. 'Course we'll never know how many receivers actually read what goes out. So we live by faith . . . and hope . . . and love.
2. In less than two months, D.v., Marie and I will enplane for Indonesia for a three-month stint (July, Aug. Sept.) as mission volunteers with an English-language congregation there. I might as well say up front that the locale is Bali. Yes, I know.... But, as they say, "Someone has to do it!" In view of Indonesia's own turmoil these days, Bali (we're told) is presently less stressed than other places in the country. There are now 2 English-language congregations there. Working within Indonesia's current visa rubrics, the Balinese church has settled on a

pattern of having a new “invited guest-visitor” come every 90-days. So that amounts to 4 such folks each year. And the congregational life is thriving, we’re told. Is there a message here?The real point of this announcement is to alert THTH folks in AUSTRALIA, HONG KONG, NEW ZEALAND, and the PHILIPPINES that we hope to visit your locales on our way back to the US in November 1999. If we could make contact with ThTh-folks while we’re in those places, we’d count it all joy. E-mail addresses on the listserve printout don’t always tell us who is where. So help us out, please.

THE ONE PIECE OF THEOLOGY – A MONDAY MUSING

Belonging has always been an issue in my life. I’ve never felt like I fit in. However, I’ve discovered in the last few years that within the circles in which I move, no one else considers me an outsider. If anything, the opposite is true. I am an insider even while my outsider feelings remain.

No doubt any good psychologist could explain this phenomenon in terms of my past because I’ve also discovered as I’ve grown older that I am far from unique in terms of the experiences I’ve had and my reactions to those experiences. But I think something far deeper is at work within my life these days.

In Matthew 8 Jesus says, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” I wonder if the Lord wasn’t so much bemoaning the fact that he didn’t have a mortgage and a two car garage, but that his life in this world that he loved so much seemed to have little to do with the “normal” day-to-day activities of those around him. Just before this line he had healed Peter’s mother-in-law. Right after it he’s asleep in the boat with the disciples when the

storm comes up and they wake him because they're afraid they're going to die. He rebukes the wind and then turns and rebukes the disciples, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?"

Augustine said that our hearts are restless until we rest in God. I wonder if even after we rest in God or because we rest in God there is a restlessness born of having tasted the feast to come. We have glimpses, moments when life seems to click into place and we grasp, if only for an instant, what it's all about. Our relationships with each other are usually blown about by circumstances, feelings, misunderstandings, but occasionally, momentarily, we come together and experience the kind of eternal intimacy we all crave.

When my husband and I got married almost twenty-five years ago during our agnostic period, we had no Bible readings in our wedding ceremony, but we did have a reading from Anne Morrow Lindbergh's "A Gift from the Sea". I recently picked up her book again and read the passage that had so caught my attention as a callow bride:

"When you love someone you do not love them all the time, in exactly the same way, from moment to moment. It is an impossibility. It is even a lie to pretend to. And yet this is exactly what most of us demand. We have so little faith in the ebb and flow of life, of love, of relationships. We leap at the flow of the tide and resist in terror its ebb. We are afraid it will never return. We insist on permanency, on duration, on continuity; when the only continuity possible, in life as in love, is in growth, in fluidity – in freedom, in the sense that the dancers are free, barely touching as they pass, but partners in the same pattern."

Her worldly wisdom is admirable, coming from a life filled with many joys and many sorrows. If life is only what we sense, only

what we have right now, then the way to find peace is to accept what is. However, I have found in my life as a Christian that I have shot right through youthful restlessness, past this acceptance of what is to a new restlessness born of having tasted more. I am no longer willing to sing “que sera sera,” not because I have to have my own way necessarily (though that does still occasionally come into play), but because of a passion for the One who loved the world so much that he gave himself...for me.

Our connection with God through Christ links us to the universe in a new way. We are no longer just “dust in the wind” trying to make it through the day, we are intimately bound to the cosmic plan, even, or maybe most especially, when we have no idea how it is being played out around us.

There is a permanence in our lives that connects us, no matter what the circumstances, feelings or misunderstandings. Each time we eat the bread and drink the cup at the communion rail, our lives are bound together more intimately than we can bear to comprehend most of the time. We are not cast adrift, wandering aimlessly. We are part of the pattern, part of the dance, which started long before any of us was thought of and will continue long after we’re forgotten because the First Dancer will never forget us. Our part in the choreography is indelibly set in His mind and when he returns for us, his music will awaken us, his hand will clasp ours and nothing will ever separate us again.

Who wouldn’t be restless for this fulfillment? Who wouldn’t long to tell everyone about this wondrous life? Shout it from the rooftops! We do belong.