

Richard Lyon's Crossing – A Funeral Sermon

Colleagues,

Here's the sermon I preached at Richard L. Lyon's Funeral at First Presbyterian Church, Alton Illinois on Feb. 5, 2002. At 3 a.m. of the day of the funeral I woke up in our St.L. condo with the Easter hymn couplet going through my head: "We shall rise our Lord to meet, Treading death beneath our feet." Then I recalled the humongous Resurrection banner (8 feet tall) from Seminex days, featuring that verse, and rolled up in our closet.

It has the first clause of that couplet at the very top where the Risen Lord is portrayed, and the second one at the bottom where the dragon monster death is. Between these power figures are three Hallelujahing humans in the middle section. They are, of course, rising their Lord to meet treading death beneath their feet. The words OUR LORD directly under the Christ figure are gold, and the word DEATH silver.

So I decided to take it along to the funeral, set it up in the chancel for all to see. The sermon's preface was a few words about this banner, "a Seminex artifact," I called it, from the seminary which was Dick's alma mater. My summary axiom was "Gold trumps silver." That became a refrain later on in the sermon. I also pointed out that the eyes of DEATH are mirrors, so as we look into it we see ourselves. Later I mentioned that if we stood on our tippy-toes and looked into the eyes of OUR LORD, we'd find mirrors there too. So much for introduction.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

A bit more intro from me. If you'd like to see the banner and some of the other things Ed alluded to above, you can go to Sherman Lee's website that has photos from Richard's funeral. The address is <http://homepage.mac.com/sherman42/Crossings/PhotoAlbum5.html> The password into the site is peacejoy.

On a more painful note. The Rev. Dr. Sam Roth passed away yesterday from complications after bypass surgery. His funeral is Saturday at 11AM at Zion Lutheran Church in Ferguson, MO. RIP

Robin Morgan

Readings (chosen by RLL for his funeral liturgy):

Genesis 15:1-6 [TTOA] "Abraham believed God's promise and God reckoned it to him for righteousness."

Psalms 84 [TTOA] "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts...your courts...your house." And other images of habitation: "home, nest, tents." Blessed is everyone who trusts in this Lord.

Hebrews 11: 8-16 [TTOA] "By faith Abraham did such-and-so ... by faith ... by faith. The trademark of the ancient saints." Always "faith" that "considered him faithful who had promised." So as "strangers and pilgrims" they were exiles "not from the land that they had left behind [but] "a better country, a city" up ahead that God has prepared for them.

Luke 12:32-40 [TTOA] "Not to be afraid, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to GIVE you the kingdom." So mimic our give-away God—selling and giving away your possessions. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Be like the

wise householder: awake, ready, “for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Dick’s daughter Susan tells me that my words were the last ones her father heard. That’s rather bizarre for someone who was 2000 miles away from Texas when Dick Lyon died. Here’s what she told me. It was Wednesday early afternoon. The hospice nurse had called them to the bedside—“Something’s changing.” Dick’s breathing was slowing down, and while they were there it stopped. Just then my call came in. She told me with sobs: “He’s gone!” And as I gulped back in New Haven CT, she then said: “Do you want to talk to him?” I gulped again, and said: Sure. She put the phone to his ear. I confected a home-made viaticum, focusing on the promise of the Christ he confessed, and bidding him farewell. Susan later told me: “When you spoke to him, Ed, his lips were moving.” Hearing is the last thing to go.

Bizarre. But that word fits much of my relationship with Dick. Possibly the same word is true for many of you—even for you family members?

Dick was already 60 yrs old when I met him. Tip of the iceberg. He was our dentist. And from that later on I became his theology prof, involved in that equally bizarre slice of life that moved this life-long Presbyterian into becoming an ordained Lutheran pastor. Bizarre.

I was his patient. The word “patient” literally means “one acted upon by someone else,” one “suffering” the actions of someone else. Even allowing it.

I bet all of you can say the same thing, even if you never sat in the chair in Dick’s dental office. He was always the one doing the action. His lips were ALWAYS moving. We all were on

the receiving end—most of the time.

And after Dick and I got in cahoots about theology, he turned the tables—with glee. The dental chair was where I patiently suffered (?) his theological lectures back to me. With my mouth full of his tools, I was of course speechless. It was cruel and unusual punishment. Bizarre.

But he was a brilliant dentist, and “no surprise,” once he bit his own teeth into it, a brilliant theologian. Not brilliant as the academic theologians he knew he could never be, but brilliant in that once he got wind of what the Good News of Christ was really all about, and had started to cross it over into his own life, he was a genius for seeing connections. For seeing what was — to use his own words — The Rotary Club religion of much of America and the clear contrast in the Gospel of a crucified and risen Messiah.

And then, typically Richard, he kept on grinding teeth, but added on some new ventures: Preaching that Gospel he’d discovered (or had the Gospel discovered him?) wherever he found a vacant pulpit in this corner of Illinois — and even beyond. And then going organizational with new inventions. Not another new amalgam for dentistry (which probably made him a millionaire), but new metallurgy for Gospel-amalgams —

1. Order of Philippi — blending the Christian Good News into the lives of “people of means,” his fellow millionaires.
2. Sebring Seminar — a program for hustling Gospel and Crossings among the snowbirds and their pastors whom he and Dottie encountered in Florida.
3. And his most recent venture, Food for the Poor, the project for the kids in Haiti, which took him not only to Haiti but all over the USA hustling funds — as Norm would fly him in for Sunday preaching, often to Lake Wobegon

towns, where the Gospel's own dynamic and Dick's chutzpah would bring back bucks for the kiddos. Bizarre & Brilliant. And there may well be more that I don't know about.

Dick and I were simpatico. Both of us were country boys (he from SW MO, I from NW IL) who had gotten doctor's degrees. But city-sophisticated we were not. You know what they say about taking the boy away from the farm. . . . The place where you could see this best was when Dick preached at the country churches. The one that sticks in my memory was at Zion Lutheran Church in Farmersville, IL. Of all places: Farmersville!? And the address? 400 E. ELEVATOR Street.

Zion congregation was at that time without a pastor, so visiting clerics showed up on Sundays. Through some glitch three of us showed up to lead worship that Sunday, Dick, myself and David Heyen. So we divvied up the chores. Dick was the preacher. David did the liturgy, I the sacrament. Dick ignored the pulpit, walked out there among the folks, and crossed the Gospel into their lives, the Gospel of Christ's own cross—like an auctioneer at the cattle sale barn. In language they all understood because it was one of their own telling them about Jesus.

And he was really one of their own in another sense, a preacher, yes, yet not JUST a preacher, but a working man in the world of daily work just as they were. [Though his Mercedes parked outside was a cut above the cars they drove.] Bizarre and brilliant..

But Dick would be the first to criticize me if I didn't do as he did at Farmersville. Talk about Jesus with you folks, especially at this solemn occasion. And were he listening he'd check if I were doing it according to the Crossings paradigm. So I'll try. First "tracking" Richard in the realities of his own life (remember I knew him only after age 60.) and then "crossing"

this same Richard with the Gospel in those readings he selected for his own funeral. I propose to do that with the seven letters of Richard's own name, putting predicates to each letter. You can add your own, for I won't exhaust the list.

Tracking

R	reliable, rascal, realist, restless, raconteur
I	impatient, inventive (remember that tooth- filling amalgam he created), insightful, insistent, irascible, impossible!
C	colorful, competent, complex, a character, not always couth , creative, sometimes a cad.
H	hard (drove hard bargains) sometimes hell- raiser, husband, helper, bhealer
A	awful, articulate, avuncular, acerbic.
R	(for this second R, you fill in the blanks)
D	A dealer (operator: how many airplanes did he buy and sell?). A drinking buddy (though I was never in that group!), a dad, a Grand- dad, also dear. Now dead.
Some or all of that was Richard on his own. Now crossed by the gospel, we have the same Richard, but Richard with a difference.	
R	From the Genesis text: RIGHTEOUSNESS. Like Abraham, Richard trusted God's promise, specifically God's promise in Christ. For mixed-bag humans like Abraham and Richard, God reckons that as righteousness.

I	From the Psalm text full of habitation terms: dwelling place, courts, home, nest, house. INHABITANT. Being IN the right place. Which is the real meaning of the Hebrew term "Blessed."
C	From the Hebrews text: Moving to a better COUNTRY, a CITY up ahead. Better even than 76 Fairmount in Alton. Key for the direction you are moving while you are an inhabitant is trusting the promise as you move that way.
H	From the Luke text (all the remaining letters) HOUSEHOLDER, the wise householder when it comes to managing your stuff, and finally your life. Namely,
A	AWAKE
R	and READY
D	making DEALS (Dick was a chronic dealer) in a DIFFERENT way from the way you used to. Refocus your treasure ideas, and hang your heart there. Dick hooked on God's own "big deal" in the Sweet Swap whereby our sins go to Christ's account and his righteousness gets to ours—by faith alone. Gold trumps silver.

I remember the Christmas communion service in the Lyon house, the last time I saw Dick. Pastor Robin Morgan, Marie and me and the Lyon family gathered in the living room. Christmas tree on one side, Dick on the sofa on the opposite side, grown-ups in a circle from tree to sofa. Me the preacher sitting on the floor with the grandchildren. Dick and Robin con-celebrating, he not vested, but with a stole, the union card of his pastorate.

On the floor with the kids I preached about the image of the

sculpture we'd brought back from our Indonesia mission venture: The mother hen and chicks. Here it is for you to see. It's the image Jesus chose for his own ministry, gathering the chicks beneath his wings. There are 4 chicks tucked under their mother's wings with only their heads sticking out, and then there's this 5th one sitting on top of Mama, mimicking Mama as she turns her head on the lookout for more chicks. I asked the grandkids: Which chick is Grandpa? They quickly pointed to the one on top. Of course. But now at his funeral it is not Dick, the non-conformist, we remember, but Dick connected to Jesus, the mother hen.

Conclusion: That's still Dick the bizarre chick. But the point is: whose chick was he finally? His own claim—despite all the adjectives we've come up with for the letters of his name—was that he belonged to the one he was resting on, the one whose posture he was practicing: still looking out for others not yet under the wings of the mother hen. And now he's not up there any more. He's under the wings, completely under, not even a head peeking out. But under the wings and "asleep in Jesus" as the NT says. What counts is that the Mother hen knows where he is and She remembers him.

That is the message of the life of Richard L. Lyon, all 77 years. In its parts a very mixed bag, as is true of everyone of us here. But where does it wind up in the last chapter as the curtain falls? That's what counts.

It's all connections. This sculpture shows where Dick was connected when the curtain fell. I'll put this sculpture on the casket and as you walk by for the sacrament, take a look. His lips are now no longer moving, but the message of his life is what you see on the casket. And if his lips were moving, they'd say: Go and do likewise.