

Seminex at Thirty-Five.

Colleagues,

For the Seminex 35th birthday party—you had to have been there. Well over 200 of us, they said, gathered at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. Three days concluding on June 25, the 479th anniversary of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession. Some of you on this listserve were there. For those who weren't, but might have wished you were, here's what I brought back home from the celebration.

Sure there was lots of nostalgia, "Auld Lang Syne" stuff, but that wasn't all. For me it began in the first seconds of the hymn for the opening worship. The singing! The singing!

With those four words I'm actually quoting a voice from an earlier time for confessing, namely, Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's seminary student, eventual in-law and later biographer. Here's where he said it. On the 50th anniversary of the Barmen Confession from the days of the *Kirchenkampf* in Hitler's Germany, a celebration was held in Seattle USA. That was 1984. [Bob Bertram and Gary Simpson were there and told me this.] Bethge was on the program speaking about his student days at the exile seminary of the Confessing Church (*Finkenwalde*) under Bonhoeffer's leadership. Someone in the Seattle audience asked him: "Have you ever had any experience similar to those days in *Finkenwalde*?" "Yes," he said, "Once. I visited Seminex. The singing! The singing!"

For our birthday party too, one thick golden thread was "The singing! The singing!"

I won't reprint the program. Lots of stuff. Besides the five (I think) liturgies, major presentations from alumni and profs,

reminiscing and looking forward. Also some significant outsiders invited in to tell us how they saw us way back then and also now. Seminex's ancient student comics showing that they hadn't lost their stuff. Panel presentations. Class pictures, of course, and input from Seminex profs' "kids" and Seminex spouses. For more details of all that happened GO to http://www.lstc.edu/alums_friends/seminexreunion.html

The main item for this ThTh post is the sermon that blessed us at the closing Holy Communion celebration. But before that, just a few highlights.

- ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS with dozens of dear ones—catching up on their stories, with them also reminding me of things I did/said that I have long forgotten. Some of them even “nice.”
- FINAL KEYNOTER, the presiding bishop of the ELCA, Mark Hanson. To answer his own question “Where is the Seminex legacy now?” he mentioned the hundreds of alums in ELCA pastorates, the five now ELCA bishops, the two seminary presidents. Somewhere along the way he held up a Crossings newsletter (February 2009) and quoted from it. [I kid you not. No, I hadn't paid him. I was stunned.] He claimed to see the legacy there. But then he put icing on the cake as he came to closure. He held up Bob Bertram's recently-published book, “A Time for Confessing,” quoted from it and added his own call to “those of you who have lived deeply with this theological tradition” to new times for confessing—also in the ELCA.
- SOME STATISTICS
 - Memorialized—name by name—were the 21 profs, nearly one-half of the original exiled faculty, who have died since Seminex's birth in 1974. Of the 25 survivors not yet gone to glory, 15 were present for the celebration.

- Total graduates of Seminex (1974-83) 750
- Rostered in ELCA 372
- Rostered in LCMS 110
- Rostered in Other Denominations 13
- Percent currently rostered 66%
- Unknown 243
- Deceased 12
- MY SPOT ON THE PROGRAM

I was one of five goldie-oldies granted 10 minutes each on a panel under the rubric: "How my mind has changed." As you probably guessed, mine hadn't. But—also no surprise—I did fill up my 10-minute allotment.
- AGAIN AND AGAIN— The singing! The singing!

NOW to the homily for the closing worship on Augsburg Confession Day, June 25, 2009. Proclaimers were alumnae Pastor Donna Herzfeldt-Kamprath [hereafter DHK] and Pastor Joan (Lundgren) Beck [JLB] in a parallel pas-de-deux offering. Each of them now serves a parish in Oregon.

Biblical text was the appointed second lesson, 1 Corinthians 3:11-23.

11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. 16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? 17 If anyone

destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; 20 and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." 21 So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, 23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

DHK

One evening during the 1971 LCMS Milwaukee Convention, Doc Caemmerer said to John and Ernestine Tietjen and Arthur C. Repp, "The two views about Lutheranism that are in contention right now are as different as a box is different from a platform. The Preus people think of Lutheranism as a box. You have to be in the box to be a Lutheran. The box tells you what you can believe and what you can't believe. If you don't agree on the truth in the box, you have to get out. But Lutheranism is really a platform on which to stand. The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions that witness to what they teach are the ground of our life together. They are the platform on which we stand to witness to what we believe. As rule and norm the Scriptures help us make sure that we speak the Word of God when we witness. The Confessions free us up to witness to what is the heart of our faith – Jesus Christ – and the good news that we are justified by faith in him." (MEMOIRS IN EXILE, Tietjen, p. 72)

JLB

The Lord be with you. AND ALSO WITH YOU. Let us pray. Builder God, we marvel at your plan from of old. We commend our lives, our work, our church, our world into your wise design. Let your Spirit speak, and inspire hearing of this word. Amen.

DHK

This invitation to preach is like an invitation to “touch home base.” I was one of those in the field when Seminex deployed in 1983. My internship year was spent in Evansville, Indiana. I was engaged to Tim, who was serving in his first year in southern Manitoba in a 2-point LCA parish as a pastor/intern. This sermon feels a little like a fourth-year project for the year I never got to complete with all of you! In that sense, Seminex has always been “out there” for me, like an elusive “Camelot”—a memory, a dream, a hope that still exists, and can never die.

I remember being in high school in the early 1970s, listening to the sound track of “Camelot” over and over again. The story of King Arthur and the knights, Queen Guinevere and the round table is so romantic. The ending is so poignant. After all the love and struggle, betrayals and high hopes, the time comes for the reality to change and fade away, and the work of telling the story to begin. King Arthur—in the midst of the battle that finally brings down the court he has built up—calls to the young boy page and commissions him to go and tell:

*Ask ev'ry person if he's heard the story,
And tell it strong and clear if he has not,
That once there was a fleeting wisp of glory
Called Camelot... Don't let it be forgot
That once there was a spot
For one brief shining moment that was known
As Camelot.*

In 1974 I was a sophomore at Northwestern University. I had been

invited to the Lutheran Campus Ministry Center where an LCMS congregation shared a home with an ALC/LCA congregation, each with their own pastor, membership, worship, and activities. Who would have thought there were other Lutherans out there?! Not a young LCMS girl from Sheboygan, Wisconsin! And conflict in the church? What was that all about?!

Well, we had visitors who came and told us what it was all about. Young, energetic seminary students on Operation Outreach, who were in the thick of the conflict, and passionate about what God was doing in the church, came to tell the story. I don't remember a lot about what they said, but I remember the story was told with fervor, and that this story was having real consequences in some of my new friends' families (such as the Krentz family).

When the time came for me to discern my call into ordained ministry in the late 1970s, Seminex had been operating in St. Louis for about 5 years. It was my first choice for the seminary I wanted to attend. Deep inside I believe I wanted to be a part of the passion, the calling to proclaim the true Gospel word, the "fleeting wisp of glory." Oops, did I say "glory"?

OK, maybe a little bit of glory ... walking in the footsteps of Dr. Tietjen and other great leaders who had braved the battles and shown the Lutheran church a new path! I wanted to find my place at that "round table" where I imagined women and men shared equally in ministry, where people coming from other careers instead of through "the system" were fully respected, where laying down one's life for those who were poor and victimized in this world was expected. I entered Camelot—I mean, Seminex—in 1980.

JLB

Already in 1974, the glory of Camelot had faded for me. I did

three of my four years of seminary with you, through my internship. I was on campus for the death of Arthur Carl Piepkorn, the suspension of Dr. Tietjen, the moratorium, the walkout. I remember getting fired up by Operation Outreach. I headed to Iowa, eager to tell the story, too. The public story emitted an energy that people wanted to gather around; but my personal story with the seminary was dying down. It didn't take long before I felt like an ember that somehow got kicked away from the fire and would soon lose its spark. There was harassment from other students. There was the time when a black pastor and a white pastor together at my field work congregation refused to let me help with communion because I was a woman—and "help with communion" meant holding the silver tray where people put their empty glasses. When the district president eventually learned that I was doing field work, he called me in for a meeting, telling me that as a woman in ministry I was in violation of scripture, and the ministry was surely going down the toilet. I was really burned! Yet in that moment, face to face with that critique, I touched the foundation. The Spirit ignited me, and boldly I proclaimed, "I have a call from God to preach the gospel." Which made the district president sit up, sit back, and fall silent. In 1976, after vicarage, I found myself heading out of the Seminex camp to finish my training at Luther Seminary in St. Paul.

In these days [here at the reunion] many stories have been expressed, not all easy to hear or receive. And we know there are many other stories out there—maybe as many as 243 stories—that we don't even know how to get to. Expressions of pain make us uncomfortable; our indiscretions burn bridges between us; our emptiness snuffs out light and life. As James Wind said, "What we did those days was very human."

DHK

Camelot in crisis. What happens when the castle crashes, and the

round table is cracked, and the human frailties break bonds of friendship and trust inside the walls we've constructed to protect ourselves and to identify ourselves in the world? We've been talking about breakdown and conflict and brokenness in the LCMS on this 35th anniversary—as if we were standing around a bonfire, enjoying the warmth and stories. But what if instead of throwing more LCMS logs on the fire, we admit, we acknowledge, we confess that there are logs of our own conflict, breakdown and brokenness that need to be thrown on the fire, too? God requires, invites, demands a day to disclose the quality of our work, to reveal it with fire. Do you want the whole story, or will we be satisfied with fleeting glimpses of glory?

JLB

Speakers in these days have challenged us to look over the walls and out of the turrets to understand what materials from the culture of the sixties and seventies may have contributed to the building of Seminex. Some were sturdy; some were precious; some have already disintegrated. Is there a foundation there? One which will hold what we now have to build for the 21st century church? A few years ago I heard Justo Gonzalez speaking as a prophet, saying, "The Spirit is preparing the churches for the collapse of Western capitalism. Where will you be then?" We cannot see and know what is coming. When the people of Corinth were scrambling to build on foundations of courageous leaders, wise doctrine, or worldly power, Paul warned them of fire. Fire that would test, and fire that would reward. But only One could use that fire properly; only One could control that fire. The Day of disclosure will come for every one, and every institution. Fire and smoke.

DHK

Fire and smoke and fear. The story is played out every fire season, particularly across the dry, dry West. A few years ago the Biscuit Fire took hold in southwest Oregon, eating its way

through thousands and thousands of acres of forest and wilderness. The fire had to do its work, even though humans tried to manage it. One of the places engulfed in smoke and debris during this fire was the small town of Cave Junction. Our cluster colleague, Pastor Peg, and the people were fatigued. Smoke was in their eyes and lungs. They were living moment to moment, on the edge of life and death. Peg prepared, along with the congregation and community folks, to be ready to evacuate at any moment. In all her ministry, she had never done this before, but she told us that she had put in the trunk of her car the bread and the cup, the cross and the Bible, ready to go whenever the fire dictated, and wherever the people would go. These were the things she trusted and knew would draw the people together in the face of the fire, and sustain them even if homes and businesses and church building and all the structures of the community were destroyed. The people and the Word and the Sacraments. The church.

JLB

When is fire Good News for the people of God, and for our world? God, the one true Builder, knows the durability of the foundation, for this Builder has laid it from the very beginning. This One knows what fire will cleanse, what fire will clear away and reveal, what fire will test, mold, and transform. Fire in the toolkit of this Builder is good and necessary. Fire is good news when it reveals the true foundation—"that foundation is Jesus Christ." Christ, who chose to suffer loss for our sake, who burned with love that would be attacked, betrayed, abandoned, smothered, and snuffed out. But rekindled by God on the third day and never again extinguished. Christ, who holds out for us to drink the cup of his own baptism with fire. Will you take? Will you drink? Will you be consumed with this burning love?

DHK

The walls, table, and community of Camelot were destroyed; what came through the firestorm were the story and the song, carried out into the world in the voices and lives of people, people telling the WHOLE STORY. Paul says the whole story of God belongs to you, shapes and informs your whole life: "... whether the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God."

JLB

We are a people who have learned to evacuate before, who have survived all kinds of fire and storms, and who trust in the Builder of all firm foundations. We can evacuate now. We can help the church around us let go of structures and systems when their inferior quality is revealed. Respect the power of the fire, fear the One who yields the fire, but follow the One who knows the way through the fire! Come, Holy Spirit, come!

And wonder of wonders, we have the foundation to take with us! Doesn't that sound more than a little foolish?! Look! This foundation is portable; he can walk and run and float and swim and fly. He can move on:

- rising up from the water to meet our toes dangling in dangerous depths!
- spreading out as the tablecloth on the ground to serve the meal that sustains us in the midst of our enemies!
- connecting believers on a common network of texts and tweets that rally them for faithful action!
- carried in our arms, unfolded and laid out on any gymnasium floor or open space, in a labyrinth pattern inviting youth and children and adults to wander and pray, guided by the Spirit!

DHK

This space has been ringing and alive with the voices, stories,

and songs of Seminex. We are grateful for the hospitality of LSTC, our Chicago brothers and sisters, and one another. WHENever your story may have begun with Seminex, and WHATEver stories we have yet to discover and share, we know that this time together is a temporary structure for the life we have lived and celebrated. Think of it as a platform or launching pad for the lives and ministries we are called to build up, remodel, and portray in the world.

For a 1981 Advent prayer book prepared by Seminex students, John Tietjen wrote these words that now send us out:

*You still need messengers, don't you, Lord,
to speak your truth to the world
to prepare the way for your Christ.
You still use strange people, too!
Why should we find it strange
that you should choose to use us?In the desert of our lives,
Lord,
stiffen our backs
breathe life into our bones
to speak your truth
to point to your Christ
no matter what the cost.*