

Stephen C. Krueger In Memoriam

Colleagues,

I flew to Tampa last Friday for Steve Krueger's memorial service Saturday morning, January 9. His wife Wendy had asked me to take part in the service. Steve celebrated his 60th birthday on Sept 9, 2009. He died early January 5 a few minutes after midnight.

Before I left home I printed out hard copies of the ThTh posts that I could find that Steve had done for us over the years—nine of them. [I found two more when I got back home!] I took the nine along for Wendy and read them once more on my flight down to Tampa.

And besides those [now eleven] ThTh posts, Steve was Mike Hoy's "guest writer" for the second-last issue of our Crossings printed newsletter, Michaelmas 2009. In that newsletter Steve crosses the promising Gospel with his own dying. I took along a bunch of extra copies of that newsletter for Wendy to hand out to the family and the congregation. And then to my surprise, Pastor Jack Palzer (Seminex '79), who crafted the liturgy at the Kruegers' congregation (Calvary Lutheran, Apollo Beach FL), stopped just before the benediction and read the newsletter text, Steve's "last sermon," out loud to all of us.

That is a creme-de-la-creme homily. You might want to check it again on the Crossings website. [www.crossings.org Click on Newsletter. Click on Michaelmas 2009.] It's all about baptism, Steve's own, his joy in confessing "baptizatus sum," and appropriating its Good News for himself as he moves into the valley of the shadow of death. With his "big death" now trumped by Christ in that "baptizatus sum," he tells us what he sees as he faces his "little death" moving relentlessly toward him.

And besides all those publications, Steve has for this past year been doing a great good deed for the Crossings community by preparing abstracts for the 100-plus Bertram & Schroeder articles and essays in the Crossings website Library. For some of my stuff, his abstract is better than the original. We'll have to look far and wide to find someone to finish that task.

Back to those eleven ThTh offerings Steve gave us. Here's the list [and there may be more that I haven't yet found].

1. Thrusday Theology 96 The Promising Tradition For A Time To Confess (in the LCMS)
<https://crossings.org/thursday/2000/thur0413.shtml>
2. ThTh 292 "Lord, Bless This Mess, Please!" A Sermon at the Daystar Conference.
<https://crossings.org/thursday/2004/thur011504.shtml>
3. ThTh 296. Steve reviews Martin Marty's book on Martin Luther
<https://crossings.org/thursday/2004/thur021204.shtml>
4. ThTh 343 Tsunami Preaching in the 12 Days of Christmas
Steve's sermon to his San Diego CA congregation after the Indonesian catastrophe
<https://crossings.org/thursday/2005/thur010605.shtml>
5. ThTH 436 Hospice Reflections on John 11
Steve takes us on a stunning walk through the Lazarus text in John and crosses it over to his new pastoral calling as chaplain at LifePath Hospice in Florida. This is a one-of-a-kind brilliant essay, crossing current clinical pastoral care (or un-care) in the face of death with the Christian Gospel. Steve says: "This essay is about death as we experience dying in hospice care in America today and the Promise. Its thesis is that while hospice care offers an extraordinary set of medical, psychological and even spiritual supports to assist the dying to die, linking the

terminally ill and their care-givers to the Promise still is the needed ministry from the confessing Christian community. In recognizing that, hospice is important new ground for the church's mission but a ministry that can only be done with compassion, sensitivity, insight and care."<https://crossings.org/thursday/2006/thur101906.shtml>

6. ThTh 476 A review of John H. Tietjen's book, published posthumously, "The Gospel According to Jesus."
<https://crossings.org/thursday/2007/thur072607.shtml>

7. ThTh 492 A book review of "Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light."

Mother Teresa's self-revelation of her own faith struggles with Steve's gentle reminder of an item from Luther for coping with "Anfechtung" and despair.
<https://crossings.org/thursday/2007/thur111507.shtml>

8. ThTh 557 Jesus in the New Testament: Just How Real is He? Steve's review of Ernest Werner's book chronicling his struggle—from days at Concordia Seminary in the 1950s on into retirement—to find the truth about Jesus.
<https://crossings.org/thursday/2009/thur021209.shtml>

9. ThTh 559 Steve's review of a book on Pope Benedict XVI
<https://crossings.org/thursday/2009/thur022609.shtml>

10. ThTh 569 Testing Benedict XVI By the Company He Keeps
A follow-up on the item above in response to some responses Steve received on ThTh 559
<https://crossings.org/thursday/2009/thur050709.shtml>

11. ThTh 598. Primacy of Popes and the Promise.

On Thanksgiving Day 2009, a month before Steve himself enters hospice care, he reviews for us THE HISTORY OF THE POPES by John W. O'Malley, S.J. The very last words of that review were Steve's own mantra in every one of the items listed above: "first and foremost reorienting all things to the 'compass of the

Gospel.'” <https://crossings.org/thursday/2009/thur112609.shtml>

Not only was he a major player in the work of the Crossings community for a long time, but he had been doing Crossings-theology day in and day out in his pastoral work in the several different congregations where he served before moving to Florida to become a hospice chaplain in the very institution where he died.

My part in the memorial service was labelled Eulogy. I had something prepared, but when I walked into the sanctuary the centerpiece Jack Palzer had constructed up front and center (Wendy said it was his handiwork) compelled me to do a quick mental rewrite.

The baptismal font at Calvary Lutheran is located in front of the altar railing in the center aisle. It's configured with running water coming from a large shell flowing toward the congregation and caught up in a catch basin. Jack had placed the Christ candle up against the backside of the font and Steve's picture on a small table directly in front of it. It was the same photo that was in the Michaelmas newsletter.

This visual image said it all, all that Steve himself had written for that newsletter. The risen Christ of the Christ candle connected to Steve through the water of baptism – and the water was still flowing!

My revised opening line was to say that previous sentence, and then to follow with this: Wendy and Steve Krueger invited Marie and me into their family nearly 30 years ago when they asked us to be godparents for son number three, Matthew. Last evening at the family gathering Matthew asked me “what one word would you choose to describe my dad as you knew him?” I told him I

couldn't do that with just one word, at least not yet, for Steve Krueger impacted my life for almost 40 years. That's half of my life, two-thirds of his, and I told Matthew about some of that history. But his request for just one word stayed with me through the night and somewhere around 3:00 a word came to me. It was his own name, Stephen, the Greek word for "crown." So I'm going to walk quickly through the seven letters of his name with "crown" in mind at every one.

S is for seminarian.

Steve was a super student, although I'm sure if he heard me say this he would tell me No, Ed, S is for sinner – and then for saint.

T is for theologian.

Theo-logy is talk about God. Steve was able to talk about deep stuff and not only make it easy for us to understand but always when he was done to hear that his God-talk came out as good news for sinners like all of us.

E is for evangelist.

Evangel means good news, to talk about God and have it come out as something cheerful, joyful, for everybody.

P could be for prince, as in crown prince, but Steve would surely want me to say pastor.

In fact I want to say PP, pastor to pastors, and that he did in two internet communities, the Daystar group of mostly Missouri Synod folks and the Crossings community of mostly ELCA people. Steve had no qualms about playing both sides of the street, and he did so in crown prince fashion.

H is for human, human strengths and human weaknesses.

I know much more about the former, but I know there were the latter as well.

E is for eloquent.

Steve was gifted with language to be theologian, which means to talk about God, and to be an evangelist, to speak about the good news of Christ and have it come out sounding so marvelously good and refreshingly new. And all of that because of the next letter,

N is for Nazareth, Jesus of Nazareth,
the one whose resurrection candle stands there together with the baptismal water that started flowing for Steve 60 years ago and has not stopped.

Steve was hooked on Jesus of Nazareth. He was hooked by Jesus of Nazareth. And here with this candle, font, and photo we see Steve still hooked to Jesus of Nazareth.

That's what he tells us in his final sermon that Pastor Palzer will soon read to us. Stephen's name means crown, but he would be the first to tell each one of us that our baptismal connection to Christ puts crowns on our heads too.

One of Steve's teachers and my own teacher too, Bob Bertram, taught both of us that there are two different ways to die. One is to die without the Christ connection, with no connection to the one and only one who has conquered the big death. Bob called that "death, period!" For from that moment on, you are eternally dead. The other one is "death, comma." For when you die connected to Christ, there is one more chapter still to come for you. It's the same current chapter that Christ enjoys, namely, resurrection.

I'll never forget the candle, font and photo linked here before us. It's a vivid picture of "death, comma," and Steve would remind us if we forget everything that happened here this morning, that your and my connection to Christ assures us of another chapter coming. Steve would tell us to trust that, not

because he said so, but because the risen Christ says so. Anyone who lays down his life for you is someone you can surely trust.