

The Crossings Matrix (Diagnosis/Prognosis) Keeps Moving

Colleagues,

The Crossings matrix (Diagnosis/Prognosis) keeps moving—to people and places that surprise me. Is it the “Platzregen” phenomenon, Luther’s thunder-shower metaphor for the Gospel’s own “free course . . . to the joy and edifying of Christ’s people on earth”? Why do I ask that? Two serendipity emails have come into my in-basket since the Fourth of July that elicit the image of a moving downpour coming “without warning.”

FIRST ONE on July 7 from Armencius Munthe in Medan, on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. Armencius, retired bishop and seminary professor from one of the Batak Lutheran churches, attended last year’s Crossings conference here in St. Louis. He got hooked on Bertram’s six-step diagnosis/prognosis scheme for studying Biblical texts, and spent an extra day talking it through with me before he headed back home. On July 7 he sends me this: “I was asked to do Bible Study for a conference of 500 Methodists here. I did diagnosis/prognosis with Philippians 2. Many were amazed at what they heard.”

SECOND ONE just a couple of days ago brings to my in-basket what I reprint below, a text-study along with a proposed crossing from that text to the ELCA’s current kerfuffle with sexuality. Peter Keyel is a member of our congregation here in St. Louis. He’s close to closure on the “post-doc” at Washington University’s Medical School that originally brought him to us. Later this year he will be heading elsewhere. Peter and I have talked briefly about the ELCA sexuality issue—and that just in

the past few months. He's never attended a Crossings course, workshop, or conference. I never told him any Crossings "secrets." What he knows about the diagnosis/prognosis matrix and—as you will see—the skill he's mastered in using it, he discovered on his own from the Crossings website. Like those Indonesian Methodists, I am amazed. You may be too. So read on.

[I asked Peter to introduce himself, which he does with excessive modesty in three sentences.]

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Dr Peter Keyel is a layman who works in immunology and was raised in the ELCA. He got more than he bargained for when he asked Ed about a Biblical justification of homosexuality and was instead given a Lutheran Law/Gospel lens for considering it. Pleased to be free of the Biblicism he'd fallen into, Peter is now trying to apply what he's learned more generally.

Luke 9:1-6

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ²and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. ³He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. ⁴Whatever house you enter, stay there and leave from there. ⁵Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." ⁶They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

D1 Demons and disease

We all suffer from sickness at some point in our life. We know it as a scourge that takes the health from us and our loved ones, sometimes with very little warning at all. We invest billions of dollars trying to find cures, and while we've come a long way in the field of medicine since Jesus' time, it still isn't enough. Millions still suffer and die from cancer, malaria, AIDS, and more. It's clear why Jesus would send his disciples out to cure the sick. These are still problems that face Jesus' disciples and His church today.

D2 Trusting the wrong authority

Slightly more confusing, though, is that the disciples are also being sent out to proclaim the kingdom of God. They're going out to God's Chosen People in the Promised Land. Why should there be any need to proclaim the kingdom at all in this place? The easy answer is that they have fallen away, or no longer believe. However, this is not the case. These are largely practicing Jews who have the Law and Scripture. They believe that they are serving God to the best of their ability. In fact, since knowing the Law is what is thought to please God, they've become legal experts. But in so doing, they have placed their trust in the Law, and not in the God who created that Law. Today, the issue has turned around. Paralyzed by fears that some in the ELCA will not be happy with decisions it makes, the ELCA tries to dodge decision-making. The condemnation preached by the Law is a hard pill to swallow, and so the ELCA avoids that as well. There are some in the ELCA who realize this, and try to push it back to the Law. Unfortunately, these efforts would return the ELCA to the legal expertise of the Pharisees.

D3 No Kingdom

The proclamation of God's kingdom must have come as a slap in the face to many people the disciples went to. Even the authority to cure the sick and drive out demons lays the

people's unbelief bare... for if they had the kingdom, wouldn't they also have the authority to heal their own? The Law and Scripture makes it very clear what the consequences are for turning down God. Even in the face of authority over demons and sickness, entire villages would reject the disciples. They have to in order to serve their system of Law. Unfortunately for them, that system leads to death for everyone. The ELCA is similarly headed on track for death. On one hand, we arrogantly demand God's grace as our right. After all, it's only natural that a God who loves us owes us the entire kingdom, right? In losing sight of the Law we have also lost the Gospel. And that leaves us condemned before God with no hope. Fearing this, a significant minority cries out for a complete return to the Law. In so doing, they would silence the witness of the Spirit active today in those they judge sinners-non-celibate homosexuals among others-because it does not conform to their understanding of the Law. Unfortunately, a return to the Law is a return to the system of death that leaves us condemned before God with no hope.

P4 Jesus brings the kingdom to us

However, Christ comes to us in our sin. Even more surprising, He takes our sins upon Himself, and suffers the penalty for them. The Law is fulfilled in Christ's death, and it leaves reconciliation open to all. The legal system of death that justly condemned us is replaced with the Kingdom. Likewise, the Gospel-God's promise to be merciful to sinners because of Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection-is the ELCA's only hope for survival. We must keep the Gospel at the forefront in all of our discussions, for only through the Gospel is the church justified. We must ever be mindful of the cost that God Himself paid for us on the cross.

P5 Christ gives us authority

That reconciliation cannot help but transform us, leaving us

both repentant before God, humbled before His glory and enthusiastic to walk with Him. Christ gathers us in, and gives us authority. Not the authority to set new rules, but to cast out demons, cure sicknesses and proclaim the kingdom. When the ELCA's Gospel is Christ's Gospel, it is no longer paralyzed. It is able and given the authority to cast out demons, cure sickness and proclaim the kingdom of God. It moves forward as a body united in Christ, confident that all are one in Him.

P6 Casting out demons and curing diseases everywhere

The Twelve are sent out into the world empowered by Christ to go to others who are undeserving, not with judgment, but with healing. They go to cast out demons, cure sickness, and proclaim God's kingdom. With Christ at their center, they do not need to worry about staff, bag, bread, money or clothing... Christ is sufficient. They may not succeed everywhere, but Christ tells them that they don't have to. Similarly, at the ELCA churchwide assembly, we will not solve all of our problems. But, united in Christ, we don't have to. We have to proclaim the kingdom of God, cast out demons and cure sicknesses. We do not need to worry about bag, bread, money or clothing. If one child proclaiming the Gospel is greater than all the popes, powers and principalities, just think of the potential an entire church body confessing Christ has. It's time for us to realize that potential.

Peter Keyel
St Louis, MO