

The Gospel covers the Greatest Sin (and which sin, pray tell, is that?)

Colleagues,

In last week's posting I mentioned responses to the previous week's ThTh #189 that I'd received from a number of women on the listserve. Even though I intended #189 to be my closure on the topic of homosexuality, these responses, as I told you a week ago, were "too good for me to try to summarize." I think they are also too good to keep from your eyes. So here they are: 4 of them. For next Thursday's posting—deo volente—the topic will change. At least, that's my intention.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

I. From Texas Besides the amusement and slight befuddlement I find from reading the various "for" and "against" arguments, I often get confused about what we are arguing "for" or "against." At first, it is like people arguing "is homosexuality a sin?" Well, Leviticus seems to say so. Then again, those great 10 suggestions from the hill (does sarcasm come over well on email?) seem to make me think that sin is unavoidable – it's that little "covet" clause in the bottom of the ninth, when you consider my thoughts with my actions, I'm downright screwed.

So, given that I have not yet found the great organized

and ranked list of sins that God uses to check off “sin” “bad sin” “really bad sin” and “not so bad sin,” I’m going to go by that age-old standard of Jesus being for all sinners. After all, if we were without sin, we wouldn’t need Jesus.

So, sorry to add on to your surely growing list of one of the great topics of conversation, but I thought you may have some extra time while trying to keep warm in New Haven. Coincidentally, I have begun working with the youth group at the church I have been attending (a non-denominational one, with a rock band and pastor in blue jeans – but the theology seems good so far, and the pastor is always up for discussions).

The youth pastor introduced me to some folks he knew last night, while chatting at the local Starbucks. “They’re gay,” he whispered to me a few minutes after they left. Trying to hold back my original response of “no – – – - !?” [expletive deleted], I just smiled and said, “I picked that up.” “I’ll minister to them, anyway,” he says – like he’s some sort of better Christian for considering the possibility of including them in God’s love. I saw my opportunity then – especially considering last week’s ThTh. We’re going to have lunch next week. We’ll talk.

II. From Mississippi All right, Ed. I’ve had enough. It’s time for the Mississippi armchair theologian to weigh in on this slyly contrived-to-be-polite discussion. There are plenty of daggers here, but cloaked in courtly language. Where did Christ instruct me to proclaim anything other than the Good News? Isn’t the sin we are dying of the refusal to admit our total unworthiness in any aspect? Can’t we trust God to deal with the hearts of all of us, to know our motivations and sort everything out in the

end? Why should we be putting together lists of minor sins, big sins, and REALLY BIG SINS? Didn't Christ summarize the law by saying "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and others as yourself"? Shouldn't we be concerned with structuring our earthly actions around those two precepts to please God (as best we can) ? Wouldn't that take care of everything else until we get to heaven and God sorts it all out? We spend so much time on this stuff that non-christians think we're in the Sin Business, not the Good News Business.

Honestly – LOL – there's my rant. I feel better now.

III. From MinnesotaGreetings from the north country where snow and real cold is expected today. Minnesota has been remarkably warm and free of snow, to the chagrin of the natives. It is the Thursday Theology of this last week (#189) which prompts me to write now. I had printed it, but just got to read it carefully last night. I've been unable to put it out of my mind since.

I admire your convictions, your strong faith, your courage to continue this debate which draws such loveless responses. I want to tell you to stop, to protect yourself. You have served your time in these kinds of wars. But I know there will be a whole new set of responses, and you will again feel led to protect those who suffer from such intolerance. So—I'm going to get my two cents in—from a less sophisticated and less educated perspective.

The issue of wiring seems to really unwire our clergy friends. What I wonder is if we accept the premise that homosexuality is sin, or at least that homosexual acts are sinful, isn't it strange that only this segment of the population is confronted with temptation to this sin? It seems that we are eager to feel good about resisting a sin

to which we've never been tempted or to judge those whose temptation we cannot understand.

If their stubborn clinging to this sin is cited, how am I any different? I have favorite sins, those I confess half-heartedly and continue whole-heartedly, in spite of my claim to be a new person in Jesus Christ. Judging me or reducing my whole-being to the name of any sin denies what Christ has done for me. I have to believe that it is my relationship with him that will change me, not the judgment, correctly or incorrectly, of the Law as pronounced by others. I'm not advocating calling homosexuality sin. I'm suggesting that it is a self-accusing way to go.

I wonder if any of these pastors has ever ministered to a homosexual person or met with the parents or spouse of a gay or lesbian. Have they any Gospel to offer? *[Ed: Or has any of them a gay son or lesbian daughter—as is the case for some pastors who have responded. “God compelled me to change my mind,” they say.]*

What distresses me most of all is the agape-less and personal tone of the remarks. They do elicit some sinful responses from me. Bless you for never responding in kind.

Thank you for your clear expression of the Gospel. God give you strength to continue.

IV. From OhioIn regard to the recent emphasis on homosexuality as a topic for ThTh, and within the ELCA: I am learning that when conflicts in families or congregations focus on one particular issue, often that issue is really just a lightning rod for a deeper more existential issue. I wonder if all the heat and smoke surrounding the question of ordination for practicing gays and lesbians and all the

fury over CCM [= ELCA agreement with US Episcopalians] are really just ways to release some of our energy and divert our attention from the real problem.

This is not to say that the conversations surrounding CCM and the issue of ordaining active gays and lesbians are not vital to the future of the ELCA. I think the manner in which we work through these conflicts is extremely important, I'm just not sure they are the heart of the problem.

What is the problem you ask? I must admit that I am not certain. Perhaps I lack the clarity or the courage to name the problem, however it seems that the pain and conflict at the heart of the church runs very, very deep. I suspect, finally, that it is a God-problem (to use Crossings language). I suspect it is the kind of problem for which the ELCA needs a Savior (i.e.- God's saving work through Jesus Christ) to resolve. This is the kind of "God work" that will end in reformation.

Meanwhile as we address these important "lightning rod" issues, I hope we do not lose sight of the deeper pain. I pray God may give us the wisdom and the courage to face our real situation, for it will be through facing the truth that Christ will set us free.