

Crossings Conference Our Lady of the Snow October 20 – 22, 2008

Who do you say “I am” Getting Honest about God Today

*Why Luther’s distinction of Law and Gospel matters more to the world today than ever.*

## **God and Pastoral Care**

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When I hear pastoral care, I think crisis, I hear cry! I probably shouldn’t, but I do. So this exercise is a way for me to refocus my thinking about pastoral care and in certain ways to consider the fragile ways that we as humans continue to think about , commune with, yell at and in general relate to God.

I know that Pastoral Care should not be evoked only when pain gives rise to the cry. I know that Pastoral Care is important to guide and interpret and celebrate God’s people in all those stages of life – birth, childhood, coming of age, marriage, work, grandparenthood, retirement. My congregation and others like it pride themselves on providing “life span” pastoral care. An example would be Faith Inkubator’s “Faith Stepping Stones”, where positive and intentional Pastoral Care is given to parents and children from Baptism through Sunday School to First Bible to First Communion into Confirmation instruction to Affirmation of Baptism to entry into High School and finally launches the child, now teenager with High School graduation. And yes, there is the delight of Pastoral Care in doing pre baptismal and pre marital conversations. But most often when I think about pastoral care I think “cry.” I think the cry and the response it evokes from Theresa whose 3<sup>rd</sup> marriage has just ended in a disillusionment, Theresa who cut my hair the first five years I was in Fairbanks. Betty for whom I provided premarital conversations for her and her 2<sup>nd</sup> husband. She has been in church once in the past six months. I shudder. When I think of Pastoral Care, I think Craig, the widower with three young daughters. I think of my own family and the tragedy that surrounds the death of my sister in law. When I think Pastoral Care, I think about Pat and Michael and Rudy and Delores and Bobbi and Jason and my brother Mark, with ages from 22 through 78, all in chemotherapy. When I think of Pastoral Care I think of David and Danielle, a couple I prepared for Christian marriage the week before Christmas this past year. They shared with me their intention of staying together in spite of David’s manslaughter conviction which carried a possible sentence of 7 to 10 years in prison. Sentenced to 7 years in February, David began serving time in March. When I think of Pastoral Care, I think of my visit with Matha, 80+ years old whose son moved her to Alaska two years ago. She is in the hospital with yet another bout of pneumonia. “Pastor,” she says with a twinkle in her eye, “you know I’m ready.” Her one desire is to die. It is Pastoral Care in this sense which I will attempt to be honest to God and about God in front of you, as I profess, as I say who I AM is. This is my attempt to be responsive to the conference theme – “Getting honest about God today.”

It may not be all bad that I still think of Pastoral Care as crisis. In fact, it may be the point of jumping into the topic of pastoral care, especially if from a Crossings perspective we

see crisis as the *Krisis* of the divine Critic who finally calls us/drives us to the cross in desperate repentance.

I should also think crisis when I hear the words Clinical Pastoral Education and Pastoral Counseling. Certainly the cottage industry, birthed in the 30's and 40's, that burgeoned in the 70's and 80's into full scale academic, institutional and clinical disciplines is in crisis. By sanctioning and supporting CPE and Pastoral Counseling as ministries in a clinical setting, the church (mostly main line denominations) provided a place for academics and clinicians to integrate the learnings from the human sciences into what had been the "cure of souls." For a variety of reasons, these disciplines in many instances lost their theological underpinnings and became secular mental health services with a light veneer of religiosity. Already in the late 80's Rodney Hunter, one of the then young luminaries of the movement was criticizing the movement as a whole, saying that God had been relegated to a bumper sticker that was slapped on the back of the bus as it was leaving the station. Although there has been much hand wringing about CPE and Pastoral Counseling's lack of a theological base, not much has been done to address that issue.

My own experience in this world began in 1975 with four quarters of CPE at the Georgia Mental Health Institute and continued with 10+ years of academics and clinical supervision in working through a Doctorate in Pastoral Counseling and certification as a Fellow in the American Association of Pastoral Counseling. As a Lutheran Pastor who preached and administered the sacraments on a weekly basis in a parish setting, the two settings for ministry, the clinical and the parish, were often complementary with one enriching the other. But at other times it was much like living in two different worlds. I have more or less successfully integrated these two worlds, but the theological tension between the two remains.

In the world of pastoral counseling, especially in regional and national meetings of AAPC, I tried out my professing voice as someone who "still believed". I found few encouragers, mostly I was heard with patronizing tolerance. Then I lost my voice and dropped out of regional and national meetings. I am certainly not comfortable admitting this. So the present paper is an effort to once again find my voice, hopefully in a more encouraging environment. I want to be honest about my understanding of God in Christ, an understanding that has always informed by those buzz words "Law and Gospel" and more recently by Bob Bertram's "one gospel and sacraments."

What I hope to do is share with you my own journey of the past 64 years, more specifically the last 33 years in the area Pastoral Care and Counseling. In the process, I want to profess for myself and for those under my care as a Pastor and as a Pastoral Counselor who the great "I AM" is. While I hope this presentation does not degenerate into a maudlin confessional, you will see that I have lived my little world in an almost perpetual state of crisis, for most of which I stand under divine critique. I hope that I can be honest about God today – with you!

It was in February that Bob Sugden irrupted in our Fairbanks Text Study. For almost 25 years now, a group of deacons, pastors and priests have met on Wednesday mornings at 9:00 AM to study the texts for the rising Sunday. It is an eclectic group – but for the most part leaning toward the left side of the American religious community. I say religious, because in my more grumpy moods I claim to be one of the few in the group that still believes in Jesus! Occasionally over the years, clergy from the more conservative side come, take a look, speak, then go silent and finally slip away. The exception has been Bob Sugden, a retired military guy in his late 40's, who is the preacher at Two Rivers Church of the Nazarene. Two Rivers is one of several old hippie communities that surround Fairbanks, its inhabitants being the quintessential APP (Alaskan Personality Profile): “leave me alone and I will do it my way, but by the way I want a triple share of my government entitlements”. Bob has been in the community for four years and has done wonders to tend, mend and grow the wounded and fragmented community that Two Rivers Church of The Nazareen was. Bob also attends the fundamentalist clergy prayer warrior group that meets at 10:30 on Wednesday morning. A year ago he shared with us that God had laid on his heart to be the bridge between these two disparate expressions of the Body of Christ in Fairbanks.

The irruption on that cold and bleary February morning caught my attention. Bob said, his cherry cheeks blazing with his squeaky Santa Claus voice strained in urgency, “Have you heard about The Shack?” Nobody had. He proceeded with a five minute synopsis of a book that left me spell bound. His normal hesitant speech was now a flow of eloquence and symmetry describing a riveting story line with mind boggling theological implications. That evening I went to Barnes and Noble and was surprised to find a large supply of the book. That week I read it, finding it dealt with a topic that I have spent the last 25 years exploring, both as a pastor and as a pastoral counselor – the topic of theodicy. My intuitive instinct was that it would become a break out best seller like other religious books that have had had huge cross over acceptance. Here I was thinking about Scott Peck's The Road Less Traveled, Rabbi Kushner's Why Bad Things Happen to Good People, The Left Behind Series, Wilkerson's The Prayer of Jabez, and most recently, Rick Warren's, The Purpose Driven Life.

I did not read it critically from a theological standpoint – I read it as the younger brother to Paula Hope, my sister who was still born in 1942. I was the child born to my parents 2 ½ years later, alive! I read it as the brother in law to Jeani, my wife's sister, who almost five years ago was beaten to death by her husband, my brother in law Jim, beaten to death with a baseball bat. I read it as the pastor of Craig, husband to Stacey and father of four daughters including toddler Hayden. Craig comes to church with his three surviving daughters. Weeping through most the service, he admit he struggles in his believing in God. Just over two years ago he was piloting a high powered jet boat on a family outing up the winding Cheena river less than a mile from where I live. Distracted for a moment the boat ran up on the steep bank and overturned trapping his wife and his 2 year old daughter Haydon. A fireman by profession and EMT by training, he was helpless to rescue his wife and daughter. They drowned.

When I read The Shack, I read as the pastor who less than two years before had preached a funeral sermon to a standing room only crowd of 500 + based on Hailey, the oldest sister's confirmation verse.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight Proverbs 3:5-6*

The Title of the Sermon: **Broken Paths.**

**The unthinkable has happened. And because of the world we live in, the unthinkable will continue to happen. That is why we have fire departments and EMTs. Even the best trained and the most careful are not immune to the unthinkable, and the unthinkable has happened. And our paths are broken. And yet our broken paths have led us to this place at this time to hear God's word. The unthinkable has happened; an innocent person died on a cross in a travesty of justice. The unthinkable has happened, God abandoned his son on the cross. The unthinkable has happened, Haydon, precious Haydon, and her dear, intense, committed hard working mother, Stacey, drowned in a terrible accident.**

**You will not hear that things are going to be OK. They will not be OK for a long time.**

**You will not hear that this is just one of those things. If we believe God is in charge, the death of these two precious people cannot be just one of those things.**

**You will not hear that this will make all of you better people. This may break you, ruin your lives.**

**You will not hear that you were chosen for this because God wanted to use you and your faith as an example for others. That is almost blasphemous. We don't know...**

**You will not hear God wanted them in heaven more than we wanted them on earth. You, nor I nor any person knows the mind of God or what he wants.**

**But this is what you will hear: You will hear Hailey's Confirmation Verse, and you will may even memorize it. You will hear that God does not abandon his children. You will hear that we grieve, oh do we grieve, but we grieve in hope. And You will hear that you have choices to make, because broken paths mean you have choices.**

My pastoral care with Craig and his family continues. Hailey is now a high school senior and works 20+ hours a week in our congregations child development center. The next oldest daughter is in my confirmation class. The "cry" of this father/husband and sisters and daughters ring in my ear every week. So when I read The Shack, I heard their cry echoes in the cry of Mack. As the husband to my wife Judy, the sister of Jeani, I read The Shack with my own family's cry. . Many things in the story touched me deeply. But it was the struggle of Mack who holds God accountable for the brutal rape and murder of his three year old daughter that riveted me to the pages.

For those of you not familiar with the book or the firestorm of criticism that it has stirred, you need to know a couple of facts. I was shocked early in July when I saw that The Shack was no. 1 on the NY Times Trade Paperback Best Seller List. By the end of July it had sold 1.2 million Copies. In the religious fiction market, if a title sells more than

10,000 it is considered a best seller. By the end of September, more than 2 million had been sold. When I checked its current listing the last week of Sept on the Amazon.Com selling list, it was No. 4. However this was telling. The No. one book had 70 some reviews, the No. 2 had 9 reviews, the No 3 had some 20 odd reviews, The Shack at No 4 had over 1500 reviews submitted. When I checked this past Saturday evening, it was No. 1 with 1606 reviews submitted.

I am not here to discuss the theological merits of the book, I present the book as an example of what I think is happening with God and Pastoral Care.

If I had to redo the title of this presentation, I would make one change, I would change the capital G to a small g on the word God. god and the gods have always been used in pastoral care, again small p and small c. Generic pastoral care happens all the time and the generic god or gods are called into existence. People are starved for pastoral care, and people will find pastoral care. But Pastoral Care, capital P, capital C is honest about God. Let me offer two definitions.

**First: pastoral care provides an audience and a vocabulary for the Cry that arises from the vicissitudes of life.**

**Second: Pastoral Care provides the community of Christ with its vocabulary of Law and Gospel (one gospel and sacraments) for the Cry that arises from the vicissitudes of life.**

That means there will be pastoral care and Pastoral Care. There are cries and there are Cries. While I respect and stand in awe at the power of words and relationships to provide a vocabulary and an audience for the cry, as a Lutheran pastor, I am not proud to say how little I have traveled down the road of integrating my clinical and academic experience into my Lutheran theology, especially the Law Gospel part of it. My wake up call to where I was headed in losing touch with my Lutheran heritage came at a Pastors Conference at Solid Rock Bible Camp in Soldotna, AK in the late 90's. At that time I was up on step in balancing Pastoral Counseling and Parish Pastor responsibilities. Our Samaritan Counseling Center in Fairbanks had a new competent and hungry director, an LCMS pastor, Dr. Fred Schramm. I was doing one day a week of pastoral counseling at the center with the blessing of my congregation, living out a "pre-acceptance agreement to the call" to continue my identity as a Pastoral Counselor. Ed Schroeder was our featured speaker, and because of our prior relationship, he felt that he had a right to put me and my pastoral counseling on the spot. I was more than pleased to oblige. The details of the encounter have long since faded, but the sting of humiliation of that encounter is still felt today. As only Ed can do, he pushed me into a pastoral counseling case that I felt very good about. I came out feeling that I was offering nothing in that case, to that couple, except psychological insight and support. My identity as a Lutheran Pastoral Care provider was missing. What was worse, was that I was lost, I had no vocabulary to describe what I was doing. I'm sure that my "deer in the headlights" response was noticeable to Ed, because he in his uniquely caring way suggested that I had some more thinking to do about my work, and moved on.

In retrospect, the encounter with Ed highlights the hard work of pastoral care even before it becomes Pastoral Care. 10 years before I had completed my doctoral project, In Defense of the Indefensible: Theodicy in Pastoral Counseling, in which I had developed my definition of pastoral care and counseling. The “cry” and the “response” was central in the case material that I presented. And in that work, I did present a reasonable Law – Gospel theological orientation that honored the theology of the cross, using Jurgen Moltmann’s theology as my taking off point. But the intense focus of a doctoral project soon becomes fuzzy and then dim, and in my case, very dim.

So when I read The Shack, I suddenly found myself in familiar territory. The book is a great example of living out the hard work of theodicy. It’s popularity reflects the hunger of many to hold God accountable. The book presents God as being physically present. God, in three persons, speaks to the “cry” and provides a response. “This is good stuff” I found myself thinking again and again.

Pastoral Care is hard work, because it takes God seriously. pastoral care does not take God seriously and removes the prophetic liability that goes with being Honest with God today. The time between my dissertation and that encounter with Ed, I had gotten sloppy with my Pastoral Counseling and it devolved into what Ed discovered – pastoral counseling. The same was true, I am certain, for my Pastoral Care which had devolved into pastoral care. And not only is Pastor Care hard work, because it of necessity carries with it the responsibility to provide God’s judgment, it provide a ready amount of risk. The risk is meeting the “old adam” that denies his need of repentance. That denial becomes reactive and is often is experienced as intimidating.

Let me give you a recent example of the risk that goes with Pastoral Care that is Honest to God Today. A week ago this past Saturday in Thursday Theology 539a, titled “Colleagues, I couldn’t Resist”, Ed brought his crossing critique to bear on President Bush’s address to the nation on Thursday of that week in which Bush said about the financial crisis “‘We can solve this crisis and we will, ’ The piece was a typical Ed Schroeder rant, similar to the one he wrote following the Va. Tech shooting last Spring, and more recently, on Rev. Wright, Barak Obama’s pastor. His critique of President Bush seemed so dead on.

The next day, in Sunday Morning Bible Class, a class on the early church fathers perspective on Baptism, ably led by Billy Raulston, a lay historian with a particular interest in the early church, I made what I thought was a relevant and innocent remark in response to the growing controversy between the African Church and the Italian Church as Augustine and Pelagian’s followers went at it. I said that I had trouble with President Bush’s statement that he/we could and he/we would solve this crisis. You would have thought I questioned the Virgin Birth. Flaming eyes appeared and three in the class gave emotional responses. Two of them defended President Bush’s confidence, saying that to do anything but that would simply fuel the panic and create more instability. One man, who I deeply respect, said that if he had a car that needed to be fixed he wouldn’t bring it to church but to the best mechanic who knew how to fix it. As you might expect, I spent

the rest of the Bible Class and not a small part of the sermon time in the next hour – my associate was preaching and it was the third time I was hearing his sermon – obsessing about what I had said and why it created such a reaction. All that and wondering why I felt compelled to say anything at all, because, really, I don't want to upset anybody. COME ON, PHILIP, GROW UP! Why am I so afraid to take the risk?

Pastoral Care, in which God is taken seriously and honestly is difficult because it puts the care provider in most cases in the position of theodicy, not just apologist. Being a theodicy is a high risk business. C. S. Lewis does this again and again. He is not afraid to bring God into the “dock” and listen. His famous quote, “God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks to us in our conscience and shouts to us in our pain. Pain is God’s megaphone to arouse a sleeping world,” illustrates this. This same theme is the premise of Paul Brand and Philip Yancey’s classic, The Gift of Pain. Is God active in his “critic” role in the events of the world and the vicissitudes of personal life? To suggest that God is, or even might be, exposes the dishonesty of the heart that has become sick with idolatry. To defend God’s action in the world as C. S. Lewis does so personally in A Grief Observed, is the result of trusting the promises.

Pastoral Care begins with a very personal view of God reflected in Genesis 2 – 12 and profoundly explicated in Exodus three. Being honest about God means that the great “I Am” who dramatically reveals his sacred name in Exodus 3, is that God who sees and hears Adam and Eve in the Garden, who confronts Cain, asks Noah to build his Ark with architectural plans, creates the confusion of languages in response to the chronic idolatrous pride of the human race and binds himself to Abraham in an irrevocable covenant. This God sees and hears the suffering of his people and responds with his personally chosen Pastoral Care provider for the children of Israel - Moses. We know that Moses, Like any Pastoral Care provider wants to do in sane moments when confronted with intractable evil, Moses wanted to run the other way. But God was patient – and if you count – God puts up with and tolerates quite patiently four excuses until God loses his temper and says – go and I will send with you Aaron.

In other words, Moses did not want to hear the cry, because if he did not hear the cry, he would not be moved to provide a response. People cry because they hope that someone is listening, that someone will provide a vocabulary and ultimately some meaning to their life.

Reality shows, talk shows and call in shows legitimate the cry. And most of the shows provide a response and an audience/community. Think for a moment of Rush Limbaugh and his community of Dittoheads, or of Dr Laura and her groupies, Oprah, her show and her magazine, and Dr. Phil. All of these personalities (spell with a capital P) are pastoral care providers. Listen to Dr Phil or Dr. Laura or Russ and in a week you will “get” their gospel, which in fact is no Gospel at all.

And while these radio and television shows are relatively recent, there have always been books. Up until the last century, many of the books have been religious in nature. Many

of these books have been the old form of “self help.” Books and literature for centuries provide stories and expressions of the cry and responses that “ring human true.” There is a reason that Eugene Peterson compared The Shack to Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress. They lie in that form of “self help” pastoral care, an OTC (over the counter), alternative pastoral care literature that meets the need for the “cry” to be heard.

The Road Less Traveled, Why Bad Things Happen to Good People, The Prayer of Jabez, the Left Behind Series and The Purpose Driven Life are examples of people seeking and finding self help pastoral care. The books are the theological equivalent of OTC (over the Counter) drugs and alternative medicines. The Shack is just the latest of these, and in each there is an explicit presentation of God, the exception being The Road Less Traveled. And The Shack is unique in the way that it presents the Trinitarian community, a la Moltmann, (but of course without attribution) as the audience and the source of the vocabulary that responds to the cry of Mac, the father of three year old Missy who was kidnapped from a remote campsite in the Cascade Mountains and brutally murdered by a serial rapist.

Most interesting are 12 step programs and recent efforts to replace the “higher power” of AA with Jesus. 12 step programs generically are certainly pastoral care. The question remains, does replacing the “higher power” with Jesus make them Pastoral Care. It may, and it may not. It has to do whether or not the one gospel is professed as the power of God. My congregation in Fairbanks was the first to bring Celebrate Recovery to Alaska. Overcomes Anonymous is a fundamental version of AA. I have some exciting theological work to do with Celebrate Recovery.

But people seek pastoral care and find pastor care outside of religious circles. Women, if socially adept, will use their friends and television personalities for pastoral care. Dr Phil, Dr Laura and Oprah are three of the better known alternative pastoral care specialists in the media. Joyce Meyers is probably the best known that comes with an expressly religious orientation.

Men, if socially inept, turn to porn. If it is true that 50% of men in the United States use internet pornography on a regular basis, the allure, thrill and fantasy of the masturbatory encounter provides an audience and a vocabulary for the cry that emanates from the frustrated sexual and relational needs of many men. It is pastoral care.

Married couples also have their alternative form of pastoral care. If it is true that 40% of intact marriages in the United States have survived either disclosed or undisclosed affairs, it means that both men and women seek pastoral care – an audience, a shared vocabulary for the cry that comes from the myriad of frustrations that go along with marriage – in the initial euphoria and lust that drives extra marital affairs.

But the “one gospel and sacrament” have so much to offer. They, the one gospel and the sacraments become the heart of Pastoral Care because finally there is the good news that transcends the unthinkable horrific. Finally there is someone who has the courage to

Speak those things that are "human true" because there is the One who absorbs the horrific with His cry. The "final diagnosis" (Eternal Problem) morphs into the "initial prognosis (Eternal Solution). In the community of those who carry His mark upon their brows, a common vocabulary is formed that finds both its etiology and its syntax from the one who speaks the Word that cleaves the darkness. That "someone" is one who sees the anger and hears the cry. What is often overlooked is something that is so obvious. The community that gathers around the one gospel and the sacraments in its very being transforms the life of the community into pastoral care prophylaxis.

### **Pastoral Care as Prophylaxis**

Charles Simic (recently poet laureate for the United States) in his review (NYRB, Oct 9, 2008) of Philip Roth's latest book Indignation begins with this Chekov quote.

**There ought to be behind the door of every happy, contented man some one standing with a hammer continually reminding him with a tap that there are unhappy people; that however happy he may be, life will show him her laws sooner or later, trouble will come for him - disease, poverty, losses, and no one will see or hear, just as now he neither sees nor hears others.** Anton Chekhov "Gooseberries" in *The Wife and Other Stories*.

Still in his introduction, Simic again quotes Chekhov, this time, reflecting on the present United States policy of banning images of dead soldiers' homecoming and burials. Simic: "What he (Chekhov) has to say on that subject was true of Russia of his day and is true of America today:

**"The happy man only feels at ease because the unhappy bear their burdens in silence, and without that silence happiness would be impossible."**

Medically, we have come to expect it; dental surgery, or surgery of any kind - get off your blood thinner. For certain patients, a regime of antibiotics before surgery, for other the donating of your own blood should it be needed. An important part of dental care is your semi annual Prophylaxis. And of course immunizations are so interesting – giving you a small bit of the disease so you can produce the anti bodies that will keep you from getting the real thing.

From a Pastoral Care standpoint – Prophylaxis comes with being part of a worshipping community. The worshipping community is God's guarantee that the cry will be heard. Anyone who has been in a worshipping community knows that the faithful are not "immune" to cancer, children with special needs, tragic deaths, suicides, and all those other vicissitudes of life that give birth to the "cry." These events that are lived through closely (I taught Sunday School with him last week) or at a distance (they went to the early service) are a solemn reminder that the cry goes up from the community. The faithful watch and listen. They watch whether or not the afflicted stays in the worshipping community or drops out. They listen to what their fellow members say and

they listen to the pastor. The community is the man with the hammer behind the door of every “happy” person reminding them that there are unhappy people – people who have just had their marriage fall apart, or worse, fear that their marriage may be falling apart, people who are in chemotherapy with their hair falling out. The faithful see and hear the cry and know that they are not immune. The faithful witness how a pastor responds when her husband comes out of the closet and declares himself gay. They witness how the couple who led the youth group when their children were teenagers deal with the break up of their marriage. Children hear prayers for those undergoing chemo and ask their parents what “chemo” is. The wise parent will introduce and not only clarify the cry – why we pray for Michael who is getting chemo and whose hair is gone – but also introduce the vocabulary of the response.

The role of the Pastor (lay or ordained) is critical at this point. It is the Pastor in preaching, in casual conversation, or in intense tending to a particular “cry” that must again and again hold up the one gospel and the sacraments as the place resolution/reconciliation/justification is experienced. In this sense, it is hard to imagine Pastoral Care as being only incarnational presence. Pastoral Care is the response in the vocabulary and the rites and rituals of the Christian tradition that of necessity includes proclamation of the one gospel which then also points to the sacraments.

Theologically, the cry in its primordial state arises from Cain! The Theological point of the unfair situation is found in God acting as the therapist/theodist/Pastoral Care provider to confront Cain with the death that is beginning to brew in his heart. This is the quintessential “Not Fair” situation. This is an interesting passage because there is a widespread theodical effort to get God off the hook. Even Hebrews get in on the act in which Able is commended for offering a better sacrifice than Cain. The test was not for Able, he was the gifted one – the test was for Cain, the slighted one. The argument goes like this: “Don’t blame God. Able brought the acceptable offering – the lamb, and Cain an unacceptable offering – produce from his fields.” This is blatant reading back into the text in order to get God “I am who I am” off the hook for choosing to accept Able’s gift and reject Cain’s. Class and race riots erupt when the inequality of the situation reaches a ignition temperature and there is a spark to set it off. The inherent inequity of the race situation in the United States over the past 200+ years gave rise to the riots in Watts and other cities when MLK was assassinated. The inherent inequity in the care of a special needs child as one parent assumes a primary role and the other gropes for a way to deal with the grief, leads to the break up of these extraordinarily stressed marriage. And in the sibling relationship, we have the quintessential rivalry temporarily resolved in the murder of Able.

I have used this text more than any other in my ministry as a pastor and as a pastoral counselor. I do so because I am Cain. My brothers are Able. A vivid childhood memory is my taking a broom stick and hitting my older brother Mark on the head while he sat unsuspecting on a Red Ryder wagon. I do not know why I was so angry but I know that there was always a residue of anger boiling beneath the surface, primarily because I was the youngest brother and the two older ones – one 11 years older the other 6 ½ years older – being the youngest was something I never accepted. They were off to St. John’s

in Winfield or off doing exciting things during the summer working the wheat harvest on the great plains. My parents, especially my mother lived for their visits home, hoarding the goodies of all kinds until the older brothers came home. And as I got older, the anger increased. My bother Richard was a gifted organist/musician/mechanic who it seems to me could do anything mechanically or musically. My brother Mark was a gifted athlete and a tow headed all American boy – everybody liked Mark. Then there was me, and oh did I try to compete – musically with Richard, athletically with Mark, and with both of them in importance with my parents. The mantra in the house, because of Dick’s blatantly open wild side and Mark’s compliant and hidden wild side was “Be like Mark, don’t be like Dick.”

Did I mention, they both went into the ministry.. and I followed. Not because I wanted to but because I had so little confidence in myself that I took the route of least resistance and went off to Concordia College in Austin, Texas. By that time, my oldest brother Richard was an established church planter in Houma and Morgan City, LA with the most beautiful woman in the world as his wife and mother of three daughters... and Mark was finishing his seminary education in St. Louis and married to the 2<sup>nd</sup> most beautiful woman in the world. Then it started all over again. As I graduated from seminary and a year of graduate school, with older brothers, successful, well liked pastors of growing churches – I was given as my first parish, Trinity Lutheran Church in the lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward of New Orleans, a struggling black parish still recovering from the disaster of Hurricane Betsy.

So God, the therapist, goes to Cain and says – Why are you angry? And before Cain can protest “I’m not angry” God asks – why is your face down? You can tell when someone is hurting. God extends pastoral care to Cain confronting him with his attitude and not letting him off the hook. The God question is always – “Why are you angry?” It is the caricatured portrait of the counselor, “so how do you feel about that?” Notice that God, the therapist, pushes deeper, asking for the deep inspection of the heart, “why are these feelings so powerful?” Usually in these instances a Genogram is a great help to uncover the generational roots, but in this case the biblical record provides no information for “family of origins” issues, except for this important one. The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. Cain’s parents had done the same thing. But God’s role in the two stories is different. God learned something, like the therapist in training, God may have realized that he intervened too late with Cain’s parents. Not wanting to do the same, when he sees anger in Cain’s face, he confronts him. With Cain’s parents, God, the Pastor Care provider intervenes only after they disappear. God goes after them and confronts them, asking them to be honest. What God gets is the classic blame game. Without further comment God launches into his judgment.

Back to Cain: “If you had done the right thing, you would be smiling.” TEV “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?” NIV. “If you do well you are accepted” NEB It is interesting to note that the TEV points in a different direction than the NIV and the NEB. The (TEV) looks at the past – “If you had done the right thing...” God asks Cain the incriminating question: Why did you give the offering in the first place? Cain was looking for a response, a return for his offering. – He saw what he got... but he also saw

what Able got. Able received the blessing – He did not receive the blessing ---- If you are older, you may remember your Sunday School leaflet picture where the smoke does not go up but rather curls down around the altar. “And Cain was very wrath.” It wasn’t fair. He brought produce – he was a farmer. Able brought fat portions from some of the first born. Technically Cain didn’t bring an offering, it was a deal. Here is how it might have gone: “I’ll bring what I can so that I can get at least the same response from God that my brother Able did.” The NEB and the NIV translations focus on his impending decisions - “If you [in the middle of this crisis and your raging reactivity} do well, you will be/are accepted.” If you Cain, handle your reactivity in a positive way, you can avoid disaster. Is the implication that God is testing him, warning him?

What follow supports God as critic. The divine therapist, using reality based therapy, having confronted the affect, confronts the nascent sin. The imagery will relate to anyone who has experienced a spontaneous mood swing. Sin is crouching at your door, its desire is to possess you, but YOU must overcome it. This is the engine that drives all recovery programs. You (!) must over come it. The affect is not the sin, but the affect can lead to sin or right behavior. In Cain’s case – there seems to be no stopping him. Behavior modification therapies are based on the premise that there is a decision point, no matter how small, in which a person makes a decision about her/his behavior. The higher the level of reactivity (anger/rage) the shorter that decision making time. Undeniable factors that affect the decision making process is the general level of stress, past history and the basic emotional wiring one inherited from forbears.

The emphasis on personal responsibility, “but you must overcome it” (TEV) is what has made 12 step programs unique and successful. Blaming and scapegoating are brought to an end. There is the rigid repentance track (“work the program”) that finds its basis in the biblical process of repentance and forgiveness. The Divine critic, at work through His deputies – Nathan with David, Paul with Peter, Paul with the churches in Corinth, Galatia, Thessalonica, etc. – names the sin. Jesus himself is the quintessential practitioner in case after case, e.g. with the woman at the well, numerous times with the disciples, with Peter and Thomas in separate incidents post resurrection. Not all sin will be dispelled – Cain murdered his brother. There is every indication that the murder of my sister in law was pre meditated – as was Cain’s murdering his brother. And to say the words with meaning – “forgive them for they know not what they do” – exhibits a faith that comes only from the far side of the cross.

But the story does not end there, nor dare the Pastoral Care encounter end with judgment. For indeed God’s judgment is always “more than I can bear.” (Cain’s complaint). As Harry Wendt in his *Crossways! Materials* points out, in the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Able, The Flood and the Tower of Babel, the sequence of Sin and Judgment always concludes with Grace. For Cain, it was the “mark.” Is this where the baptismal formula comes from? “Child of God you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever?”

**Which brings us finally so some observations about Pastoral Care in practice.**

Once the prescription is written and the glasses are fitted, we begin to see in scripture Pastoral Care in this “crossed” sense again and again. The pain is seen, the cry is heard and God responds. The temptation is to avoid, as I did for decades, the hard and prophetic work of proclaiming the one Gospel and framing the sacraments in a way that counterfeit gospels and the faux pastoral care, especially the OTC, “self help pastoral care” kind are exposed for what they are. But that needs to be done with care, as my example with one simple word about Bush’s comment about fixing the economy illustrates. The simple formula “Sin – Judgment – Grace” hangs together. Not one part of the formula, however, comes with protocol that fits more than one situation. Sure, sin is sin, but... Right, prescriptive Judgment is written but... Of course amazing Grace is undeserved love, but...

The hard work begins with the Pastoral Care provider addressing her/his own cry and allowing it to be heard in the Community of Christ. This is where the great gifts and contribution of CPE and any sort of clinical training become invaluable to the Pastoral Care practitioner. On a lay level, one is hard pressed to find fault with the Stephen Ministry program, because it has benefited immensely from the wisdom gained by the Kenneth Haugk’s unique background as a LCMS pastor and clinical psychologist. For professional church workers, the CPE experience is still invaluable. However, systems theory seminars (Peter Steinke’s work) that help care givers work through their own family of origin issues can provide great help in getting the personal and prejudicial to a manageable level.

The balance of Law and Gospel in application is predicated to a great degree on how that has been worked through on a deeply personal level. Henri Nouwen’s writings, especially his classic The Wounded Healer provides encouragement for that kind of introspection, as does The Road Less Traveled. Psychotherapy, with a therapist who has boundaries intact and is respectful of the religious experience can be immensely helpful.

Personal experiences sensitize the ear to hear the cry and the eye to see the pain. Active participation in a worshipping community where the entire drama of sin judgment grace is lived out and spoken and celebrated on a weekly basis is a non negotiable. While the last thing someone in the midst of the tragedy wants to hear is your tragedy of 30 years ago, as the relationship builds – the question will ultimately come back, “what about you...?” And if it doesn’t come, later as the process of Pastoral Care matures, permission may be asked to share your own story.

Walking in someone else’s shoes is not a pre requisite to provide Pastoral Care. What is necessary is one’s own crossing narrative, where the diagnoses and the prognoses have been lived out in the daily putting death the old man with all its sins and evil lusts and day after day putting on the new man to live before God (honestly) in righteousness and purity forever.

Pastoral Care is relational. The relational is diagnostic first. Sensitivity to the history of the cry becomes so important, for often the cry is generational. Wisdom to interpret the true cry is necessary for often the cry is disguised. Relations take time. They take time to build the trust that removes the veneers of denial. Pastoral Care takes its time to build a

shared vocabulary, a vocabulary that will echo the one gospel and the sacrament of the receiving community of faith. The community of faith provides the context.

Pastoral Care is contextual. The cry that comes from a LCMS middle aged man who was raised in a Lutheran home and went to a Lutheran elementary school who has lost his wife in an auto accident will be different from the cry that comes from a 20 something single woman who has just had her third child by a third father. The ability to hear a response will be different for a veteran of Iraq suffering from PTSD than for a professional church worker. Within the church/worshipping community, we never know what we are dealing with until the cry comes forth, is heard and placed in its originating context.

Pastoral Care for the faithful within the community is the tears and joys of harvest time. Hungry for the word, appreciative of God's creative activity in their lives and bodies, they celebrate the feast that is to come. The liturgy with its rites and language is there to be unleashed with the power of centuries old and breath taking new expressions of Sin, Judgment and Grace. All Saints' days, Lent – especially Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter are opportunities to celebrate the joy of victory of God acting in our midst – as the antiphon for Easter proclaimed ‘On this day the Lord has acted!’ And weekly “This is the feast of victory...” or any of the great variations of the Gloria.

Pastoral Care for the tangentially connected – and this is not a small group - presents the greatest challenge. These are the people, now more than ever, who were at one point connected to the worshipping community in some active way, but now are the “de-churched.” They are brought back crying. The megaphone of pain has awakened them. They are now the unhappy. Some want to wrestle with God. Others want the release of the cry. They remember, usually faintly and with not a little distortion, that there are promises for the broken. Psalm 23 may linger in their memory, or the Lord's Prayer. The connection is so fragile. They come to see if “they are still in business.” They come often not knowing why, except that there is a place and a person for them. With these, the development of the Pastoral Care relationship can be powerful and almost immediate. But for others, the brief promising encounter ends with the frustrating realization that a lasting connection was not made with the One who offers so much.

Finally, Pastoral Care for those who know not the One but know a lot of other ones, those who know and have tried many gospels but have never heard the One Gospel – Oh dear Lord, for this equip us and make us bold and courageous. For what ties us to them is the “cry.”

Several suggestions:

For reading and referral

[A Grief Observed](#) C. S. Lewis

[Disappointment with God, Three Questions No One Asks Aloud](#) Philip Yancey

[Mourning into Dancing](#) Walter Wangerin, Jr.

The Shack William P Young  
The Road Less Traveled M. Scott Peck

For those who have experience the loss of a loved one and have made the worshipping community their home, I have found nothing better than this:

Berthold Von Schenk (1895 – 1974)  
For all the Saints A prayer book for and by the Church IV

When we are bereft of dear ones, it is tremendous shock. For a time we are stunned. Not everyone can feel at once their continuing companionship. We should not for that reason despair. An adjustment must take place in our lives, reaching deep into our habits, emotions and thoughts. Some souls may make this adjustment quickly. For most of us it comes slowly and hard; many an hour is filled with loneliness and agonizing doubt.

By ourselves we can never make this adjustment. We must come to a sense of the continuing presence of our loved ones, and we can do this if we realize the presence of our Living Lord. As we seek and find our Risen Lord we shall find our dear departed. They are with Him, and we find the reality of their continued life through Him. They worship the Risen Christ face to face, while we worship the same Risen Christ under the veil of bread and wine at the Altar. At the Communion we are linked with Heaven, with the Communion of Saints, with our loved ones. Here at the Altar, focused to a point, we find our communion with the dead; for the Altar is the closest meeting place between us and our Lord. That place must be the place of closest meeting with our dead who are in His keepings. The Altar is the trysting place where we meet our beloved Lord. It must, therefore, also be the trysting place where we meet our loved ones, for they are with the Lord.

How pathetic it is to see men and women going out to the cemetery, kneeling at the mound, placing little sprays of flowers and wiping their tears from their eyes, and knowing nothing else. How hopeless they look. Oh, that we could take them by the hand, away from the grave, out through the cemetery gate, in through the door of the church, and up the nave to the very Altar itself, and there put them in touch, not with the dead body of their loved one, but with the living soul who is with Christ at the Altar. Our human nature needs more than the assurance that some day and in some way we shall again meet our loved ones “in heaven.” That is all gloriously true. But how does that help us now?

When we, then, view death in the light of the Communion of Saints and Holy Communion, there is no helpless bereavement. My loved one has just left me and has gone on a long journey. But I am in touch with her. I know that there is a place where we can meet. It is at the Altar. How it thrills me when I hear the words of the Liturgy, “Therefore with angles and archangels and all the company of Heaven,” for I know that she is there with that company of Heaven, the Communion of Saints, with the lord. The nearer I come to my lord in Holy Communion, the nearer I come to the saints, to my own loved ones. I am a member of the Body of Christ, I am the living cell in that spiritual

organisms, partaking of the life of the other cells, and sharing in the Body of Christ Himself.

There is nothing fanciful or unreal about this. Indeed, it is the most real thing in my life. Of course, I miss my loved one. I should miss her if she took a long holiday trip. But now, since she is what some people call dead, she is closer to me than ever. Of course, I miss her physical presence bitterly. I miss her voice and the sound of approaching footsteps. But I have not lost her. And when my sense of loss becomes too great, I can always go to my meeting place at the Altar where I receive the Body and Blood of my Lord that preserves my body and soul just as it has preserved her unto everlasting life. Do learn to love the Altar as the meeting place with your beloved who have passed within the veil. Here again the sacraments are the heart of our religion. The Blessed Sacrament links us not merely to Bethlehem and Calvary, but to the whole world beyond the grave as well, for at the Altar, the infinite is shrined in the finite; Heaven stoops down to earth; and the seen and the unseen meet.

“Oh, God the King of Saints, we praise and magnify Thy Holy Name for all Thy servants, who have finished their course in Thy faith and fear, for the Blessed Virgin Mary, for the Holy Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs, for all Thy other righteous servants; and we beseech Thee that, encouraged by their example, Strengthened by their fellowship, we may attain unto everlasting life, through the merits of Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

And for the place of the Sacrament in the ongoing life stream of Pastoral Care, this by  
Dom Gregory Dix  
Dom Gregory Dix (1901 – 1951)  
For All The Saints A prayer book for and by the Church IV

[Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper] told his friends to do this henceforward with the new meaning “for the *anamnesis*” [recalling or re-presenting] of Him, and they have done it always since.

Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacles of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dungeons of the earth. Men have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and bridegroom in a little country church; for the proclamation of a dogma or for a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the Parliament of a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the Parliament of a mighty nation or for a sick old woman afraid to die; for a schoolboy sitting an examination; for Columbus setting out to discover America; for the famine of whole provinces or for the dead soul of a lover; in thankfulness because my father did not die of pneumonia; for a village headman much tempted to return to fetish because the yams had failed; because the Turk was at the gates of Vienna; for the repentance of Margaret; for the settlement of a strike; for a son for a

barren woman; for Captain so-and-so, wounded and prisoner of war; while the lions roared in the nearby amphitheatre; on the beach at Dunkirk; while the hiss of scythes in the thick June grass came faintly through the windows of the church tremulously, by an old monk on the fiftieth anniversary of his vows; furtively, by an exiled bishop who had hewn timber all day in a prison camp near Murmansk; gorgeously for the canonization of S. Jon of Ac-one could fill many pages with the reasons why men have done this, and not tell a hundredth part of the. And vest of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully unfailingly, across all the parishes of Christendom, the pastors have done this jus to *make the plebs sancta Dei*- the holy common people of God.