

# **The Spirit-given Challenge of the Double-Life**

Keynote Address for the Sixth International Crossings Conference  
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by Jerome Burce

## **I. Gospel**

First: my own word of warm welcome to this Sixth International Conference of the Crossings Community, where we'll continue an exploration that began in 2007, at our first conference, when the topic was the Gospel itself—Honest-to-God Gospel, as we billed it that year. Honest-to-God as opposed to dishonest-to-God. Gospel so good, so strong so fresh—good news so deeply anchored in the apostolic witness to the impossible astonishment of God Almighty draped for our sake today in the crucified flesh of Jesus of Nazareth—that even the silliest of sinners, yours truly, for example, is suddenly free to laugh at himself, or to deplore himself, and even so to trust this God with a glad and cheerful heart in life and in death; and yes, he does this now without pretense—without succumbing, that is, to the sinner's standard folly of hanging one's hopes on the supposition, both arrogant and baseless, that God is really not so good and fierce and righteous and demanding as God claims to be. "He's sure to let me slide," the stupid sinner keeps saying, "if indeed he's even there to worry about at all."

Honest-to-God Gospel is the death of such drivel, thank God, who replaces the compulsion to spout it with the joy some shepherds celebrated one night in Bethlehem as they headed back to their fields, no longer fretting as they long had over the fact that they stank to high heaven the way shepherds are wont to do. Once there, of course, they knuckled down to the rest of the night's work and tended their smelly sheep, this being the first and best of ways to keep glorifying and praising God for the sweet aroma of that baby in the manger they had just been drenched in. Above them the skies still echoed absurdly with the sound of God's delight in them, and in us all—or so we dared in Christ to assume this past Christmas Eve.

## **II. Explorations Thus Far**

I hope you'll pardon me for the length and thickness of this opening salvo. For those of you new to Crossings, it's essential that I underscore what this little band of misfits is all about. Our passion is the Gospel, nothing less, nothing other. Our mission—self-appointed, some might say—is to think about the Gospel, and argue for the Gospel in the life of the Church, for the sake of the world, and especially for the consolation and encouragement of down-to-earth Christian people as they go about their days. That's why, among much else, we organize these conferences, inviting old friends and new ones alike to share our joy, and even better to increase it as they bring their gifts of faith and thought to bear on the conversation. Thank God for them; thank God tonight for each of you.

So looking back, in 2008 we explored the importance, for the sake of God's Gospel and the people it's meant for, of maintaining a sharp distinction between it and God's Law, that other great Word with its own set of tasks. Here, of course, we followed Luther and his colleagues, who all too rarely get the hearing they deserve these days.

In 2010 we tracked the implications of this Law/Gospel distinction for the mission of the Church. We did the same in 2012 around the hot-button topic of Christian discipleship. Two years ago, in 2014, we discussed the pluralistic assumptions of contemporary Western culture, and the challenges these pose both to the church's mission and to our calling as baptized people to keep trusting our Lord Jesus Christ day after day, this being what discipleship is finally all about.

I mention in passing that the key presentations at all these conferences are available on the Crossings website. Most all of them are well worth your time, and many offer insights that you won't find elsewhere. I encourage you to check them out, or to read them again, as the case may be.

### **III. The Topic This Year**

Meanwhile, and all too suddenly, it's 2016. Again we come together with God's Gospel as our focus and our passion, and again we aim to build on work we've done already. Again our playground, so to speak—the factory floor, if you prefer things serious—is a conundrum, one that the Gospel itself creates; and the overriding question for our work together between now and Wednesday noon is how to use the Gospel to address the very mess it thrusts us into every day of our lives.

Here's the conundrum: where anything properly called Christian is concerned, there isn't one, there are two. Not that all Christians recognize this, but we-all are Lutheran Christians, and so we do, this being the best gift we can offer to the conversation of the wider church.

So, for example, there isn't one creation we're all enmeshed in, there are two creations, the second launched on Easter Sunday, "when it was still dark," as St. John says in the first verse of chapter 20, where the allusion to Genesis 1 is beyond reasonable dispute.

There isn't one Word from God that defines, launches, shapes, and governs these two creations and requires our attention, there are two such Words from God, each asserting and exercising its distinct jurisdiction, each running its own kingdom to use the older language that no one understands anymore. In any case, here is Law. There is Gospel, as many of us heard again last night, from Marcus Felde—two words, not one.

Because of that there isn't one way of being righteous, there are two ways of being righteous. So says Paul in Romans 3, and he says it emphatically, with a big fat "but"

interposed between the two—in Greek, *alla*—so that we see each as an alternative to the other, not a supplement, an add-on for the other, as people keep wanting even so to treat them—thank you, John Calvin.

Again, there isn't one birth, but two births, not one me, one you, but two me's, two you's. I assume that Dr. Turnbull—Steve, as he'll want us to call him—will lay this out for us tomorrow, as he walks us through the consternation of Nicodemus, the first person in an endless stream of people who have found this idea befuddling, John 3.

So also in first-century Corinth there isn't one church to describe, but two churches, the one a rowdy pack of confused and quarrelsome people, the other a sacrosanct temple of God, 1 Corinthians 3. That this applies to churches today is something we'll also hear about tomorrow, or so I surmise, as we welcome first Dr. Schifrin and then Pastor Takamura to the podium.

And no, we're not done with this: because, as we saw in 2010, God charges baptized people not with one mission, but two missions; and when they get up in the morning and make the sign of the cross, they're reminded that their multiple callings—the fancy word here is "vocation"—are not of one sort, but two sorts, the first immediately and often sharply defined by the agents of God you're working for—your boss, your spouse, your kids, your customers, the clown ahead of you on the freeway who keeps tapping his brakes in the blithe expectation that you're paying attention and won't rear-end him. Alongside that is vocation of the other sort, this one defined ever so vaguely by the Son of God when he tells you to let the light of your confidence in Him shine brightly, so that others, seeing its consequences, will get excited about God too. But whatever does this mean in practice today—when in fact you're out there on the freeway, for example, or up to your eyeballs in the demands and duties of the several jobs you wake up to every morning? Drs. Braaten and Baumgaertner will help us think about this vocational juggling act beginning tomorrow evening, spilling into Wednesday; and also on Wednesday—whatever you do, do *not* miss Wednesday—we'll think more closely about how to keep the act going when the rules of the turf you're juggling on make it plain that excitement about God of any kind isn't wanted here at all. Dr. Saler in particular will be our mentor when we get to that point.

#### **IV. The Need for Conversation**

Now let me suggest that all these speakers are going to be exploring the phenomenon that St. Paul will touch on in this coming Sunday's second lesson, Revised Common Lectionary: "Now we see, as in a copper mirror, dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Or consider the photo that appeared last month in *The New York Times*, of a man all but lost in the brutal smog that had settled stubbornly on Beijing for a stretch of days. This strikes me too as a useful metaphor for the problem we're all here to think and talk about these next many hours.

I underscore the "all" in that last sentence. Yes, the caliber of the people we get to hear from is such that I, for one, would be more than happy to sit here mute tomorrow, merely soaking in the verbal bath of whatever they'll happen to gush with. Yet such is the problem, so grimy the smog, so tarnished the mirror, that soaking doesn't do these days. It never has. We need to scrub, each of us, God's two-edged Word serving as cleanser, and some back-and-forth conversation as the brush. The aim is for each of us to go home with a hard-earned thought or two as a gift for the people the Holy Spirit insists on sending us to. They're busy scrubbing as well, though often badly. Instead of polishing the mirror, they scratch it. Instead of thinning the haze, they thicken it. For their sake, please plan on asking, talking, poking, prodding, until you've grabbed hold of that useful thought—the sudden insight, perhaps—anchored in Christ crucified and nothing less, that you can pass along with confidence. And while you're at it, let the confidence include the bold thought that what you got here, you got from God. If others find that arrogant and unseemly, so be it.

Remember, after all, that St. Paul spent an entire apostolic career impressing others as arrogant and unseemly. That's what happens when you're so gripped in the Gospel that you run around insisting on all this infernal two-ness that characterizes our Christian experience; though if Paul himself were here and into English word play, he'd insist, I'm sure, that we call it a *supernal* two-ness. It's not, after all, as if he made it up, or got it from the devil; though lots of folks along the way have thought so.

Paul *spent* a career. Pay attention to the verb here. It's about to anchor one side of another two-ness that far too few of us baptized types have thought to pay attention to, even those of us in Lutheran dress. Or so I'm going to argue; and in that argument will be the main contribution I hope to make this very evening to the conversation we'll all be having.

## **V. The Holy Spirit, Poorly Discerned**

But first, back we step to dim mirrors and thick smogs.

As most of you know, Paul's comment about the mirror is a piece of his counsel to a congregation that's choking with dismay over a host of arguments. The one he's speaking to directly in chapter 13 has to do with the Holy Spirit, understood as the immediate presence and power of God, a power that enables a person or persons to do things that otherwise cannot be done.

I repeat this: "Holy Spirit" equals "the immediate presence and power of God enabling a person or persons to do things that otherwise cannot be done." I toss this out for our purposes here as an initial working definition. Had I the time, I'd go into it at length, but I don't, so I won't. We can talk about it later if you'd like.

In any case, the question at Corinth: who has the Spirit, and who does not? Of the haves, who has more, who has less, and how do you assess this? And finally, what

about the deadbeat "have-nots"? Once you've figured out who they are, how do you deal with them?

Really, has there ever been a moment in the life of the Church when this argument wasn't raging—somewhere, in some form? Since I don't imagine that my own baptized lifetime is a weird aberration from every other Christian lifetime, my answer is no. Who has the Spirit? Or to cloak the question in other terms, who's the real Christian, the serious Christian, the better, the wiser, the more faithful Christian, the true believer, the orthodox believer, the ortho-practical believer whose Spirit-given faith is proved in Spirit-given works—she gives a hand for the poor, you see, as those other deadbeats do not. Unlike them, she digs for root causes.

"We take the Bible seriously as the infallible, Spirit-breathed Word of God—you rascals don't." This too is a form of the Corinthian argument. When I was a first-year student at Concordia Seminary across the river, it tore my school apart. As for its several eruptions in the brief history of the ELCA, I'd rather not go there this evening—again, time forbids it, and for that my stomach is really quite grateful; though let me point out even so how each and every wrangle of the past 28 years has been punctuated—in some cases dominated—by loud and strident talk of the Spirit, the *Holy Spirit*, who either encourages representational quotas or abhors them, who either sees suddenly fit to authorize gay marriage or continues as ever to empower gay celibacy, not that he/she/it has ever made like the hand at Belshazzar's feast, inscribing his/her/its definitive opinion *for right now* on the screens at a churchwide assembly; though even then we'd haggle about it. We'd do that in part because it's so, so hard to trust each other, especially when it comes to matters of "the Spirit." "Which spirit is at work here?" we have to ask. We ask it because we all sense how the spirits at work in the world are legion, and how all but the One are *un-holy*, some vividly so; and how every sinner's mind and heart is riddled with them.

So the quarrels go on, and the factions multiply. Welcome to the history of the church—most all of which, by the way, will strike most baptized folk as more or less irrelevant as they step into their days. Their question, if they even think to ask it any more, is whether this Spirit they hear about—this presence and power of God enabling *them* to do what can't be done—has any role to play at all in their daily routines. Most, I'm guessing, are guessing not.

## **VI. God's Power in Two Forms (Type E, Type X)**

Though even as I say this, I need to clarify, or, as we Lutherans keep saying, to distinguish; to spot another two-ness in the ways of God with humankind, and point it out. Are people in the pews clamoring for signs of the power of God at work in their lives? Of course they are; though what they ache for—some so urgently that they'll muster cohorts of prayer warriors to beg for it—is a specific form of God's power, the one that works *on* me as *object*, and does so *especially* in the details of everyday life. So, for example, it kills the cancer. It averts the car wreck. It lands the promotion. It punches the numbers for the winning lottery ticket if I'm crass enough to play the

lottery. Perhaps it breaks my addiction to playing the numbers. For purposes here, let's call this Power, Type E, where "E" stands for "everyday."

Now this is *not* the power that the rubric "Holy Spirit" covers—or so I suggest, and with all my heart I invite you to test this with me later. Spirit-power works, not *on* me as object, but *through* me as agent. Again, it enables me to do what otherwise I could not do, with others as the beneficiaries of the doing that gets done. So in Luke's Gospel, for example, it empowers me to bear a child in my virginity, or to sing a Nunc Dimittis in my senescence, or to scatter nasty spirits, or to look you in the eye and forgive your sins with a straight face. It even stoops so low and small as to twist my criminal head in Jesus' direction and give me just enough breath to croak out, "Lord, remember me..."— and this, mind you, to the future comfort and edification of millions upon millions of other criminal sinners, the present assembly included.

Which brings us, of course, to the main point, the most important one of all: Spirit-power is inextricably intertwined in the apostolic witness with God's great doing for us all in Jesus Christ. So to keep *this* clear, and again for present purposes, let's call this God's Power Type X, where X signifies Christ and the cross we killed him on.

Type X power is *not* the power that the Lutheran people I know best are hankering and pining for right now as their days dribble by, at least not that I can tell. It's not the power they're praying for as they head to work or school on Monday morning, if indeed they're praying at all. You lay folk should know that there's not a preacher in this room who won't blanch when she confronts the text we're given to read this coming summer, 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Luke 11: "If," says Jesus, "you...who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit"—implication: *the* best gift ever—"to those who ask him!" Well, sure; and even now I see it, all those eyes staring blankly at me as people wonder how they could even start to want what Jesus touts here; and really, it's my job as preacher to get them thirsting for it? *Kyrie eleison*—or so I mutter as I plan a quick vacation and line up the sub.

All of which is simply to observe that we Lutherans are strangely lousy on this topic of the Spirit. To use a term that will surface again and again in our time together, we struggle to *discern* it. That's assuming, again, that we even to think to look for it; though when we do, as in seminaries or grave assemblies, how quick we are to rip ourselves to shreds, Corinthian style. People tend to do that when they're stumbling through a haze of thick confusion. Ergo this conference.

## **VII. Discerning the Spirit: The Essential *Satis Est***

Strangely lousy, I say; weirdly confused. Of all Christians, Lutherans have the least excuse to be murky and confused about the Holy Spirit, aka, God's Power Type X. After all, we've got St. Paul in our corner, don't we? And with him, of course, comes Luther, Melancthon tagging along.

We have some seminarians with us. Have you heard yet about the *satis est*? That's the label for one of the great assertions of the Augsburg Confession, so often ignored, also by Lutherans. Article VII: "It is enough—in Latin *satis est*—for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments."

Behind this, I submit, lies the original *satis est*, the one we got to hear this past Sunday as Paul took up the Spirit-specific questions that were seething at Corinth.

"No one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." That, says Paul, is the baseline test for God's Type X power, present and in action.

Really? But it sounds so simple, so trifling, so unworthy of divine majesty, so easy to do: three little words, anyone can say them, can't they? Answer: no, they can't. My old teacher, Ed Schroeder, has a great story about this. He got it from his colleague, Robert Bertram, the co-founder with him of this little Crossings outfit. Perhaps he'll tell it later, or if not, go ask him. Or even better, you can run your own test on the way home. Walk around the rest stop or the airport lounge, and ask everyone you meet to say it: "Jesus is Lord." Guess what: it will not happen, and I will cheerfully lay a bet on that. A big bet. Not that I have to. Even now you're all cringing as all Lutherans always do at the thought of even trying such a thing.

Still, among our own it sounds so easy, too easy: "Jesus is Lord." No, we say to each other, it isn't enough, *satis non est*. There has got to be more, so much, much more, to this faith and life that God the Holy Spirit uses Type X power to generate; and before you know it we've invented more, we've piled it on. Jesus-is-Lord plus. Plus Easter celebrated according to the correct calendar—that was way back when. Plus ministry organized in the right, the proper manner—a huge thing that's been for Lutherans in America. Jesus-is-Lord *plus* all doctrines correctly parsed and sufficiently choked down, Jesus-is-Lord *plus* all proper behavior that properly reflects a sanctified life, as we like to put it, and now let's go to war over which behaviors these are. Can you drink a glass of beer or not? Can a Christian vote Republican—or is that Democrat?

All of which reflects a couple of huge and stupid mistakes that all Christians should be mightily ashamed of, though Lutherans in particular.

Mistake number one: the moment I add "plus" to "Jesus-is-Lord" I've invented an oxymoron, insulting Jesus in the process. Jesus is *not* Lord if a simple confidence in him is not enough to be get us counted among the saints. At best he's Lord-lite, sharing his throne with whatever else we've ginned up and added on to anchor and define our Christian identity. That includes, by the way, those extra things we dig up from the Bible. Circumcision, say. Never getting a divorce, an add-on that some people here are old enough to remember vividly.

Mistake number two: to add a plus of any kind to "Jesus is Lord" is to show how clueless I am about the very thing I've just confessed. "All things are yours, whether Paul, Apollos, Cephas, life, death, the present, the future, all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." That's Paul in chapter 3 of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians spelling out what the Lordship of Jesus signifies for those folks at a point when they're still behaving very badly. Or again to the Ephesians, chapter 2: "God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"—made us, raised us, seated us, past tense, done deal. Or now Peter chiming in, 1<sup>st</sup> letter, chapter 2: "you *are* a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, proclaiming the mighty acts of him who called you of darkness," this as opposed to ginning up of heap of extras to prove that you belong.

Yes, and all this is wrapped up and encompassed in that tawdry little three word package, Jesus is Lord—but then we're Lutherans, aren't we? And isn't Luther the thinker who, more than any other, has followed Paul in recognizing how God delights in hiding his best stuff in the least appealing places—a manger, yes, encircled by stinking shepherds; or far, far worse, that awful, terrible cross, surrounded by sinners? And to that there's something I can add, or you?

But to spot this stuff; to credit this stuff, to sing with joy on its account; to turn around and *use* this stuff—that takes power, incredible power, God's power Type X, the first and greatest gift that the Holy Spirit gives. Without it, we are sunk.

### **VIII. Every Person's Essential First Question**

We are sunk because the power of God, Type E, the kind that people hanker for, is deadly. It stings, as Paul will say, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15. Even so it's familiar; and until we're stung, we tend to like it. We like it so well that we'll even prefer it to the new kind, Type X. Jesus points this out himself in Luke's version of the wineskin parable. "No one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good.'" That's in Luke 5, and only Luke 5. The Pharisees Luke talks about were deeply hooked on the taste of old wine. So are lots of Lutherans.

Quickly, let's recall. God's power Type E works *on* us, as *objects*. God gives. We get. God gives not. We get not. Were this the only thing to talk about this evening, we'd observe how this Power Type E is the engine that drives the world as we know it.

Thinking on, we might explore the oddity of people's expectations of Type E power: how they imagine, for example, that God being good is bound to give us stuff that we call good, forgetting that what's good for God is often really, really bad for the sinners that God in his goodness is trying to control.

Or we might talk at greater length about the way God's exercise of Type E power leads always, and without fail, to a great, irreparable dispute between God and every

sinner, sinners concluding that God has done them dirty, God for God's part refusing to put up with that nonsense. Some of you spent much of today exploring the Crossings method of unpacking a Biblical text. The one side, the diagnostic—that's where God's Type E power is at issue and in play, top to bottom.

Enter Christ Jesus, the Son of God, born of Mary, and now let's see how Type E power comes crashing down on him. For our sake, for our salvation, "God made him to be sin who knew no sin"—yet again St. Paul, still trying, trying, trying in chapter 5 of the Second Letter to wean the Corinthians off their fundamental folly, their absurd, insane addiction to a core precept of Type E power-in-operation: to get you've got to earn. To be right you've got to do right. And if something looks shabby, an apostle, for example—one Paul in particular, in case anyone is wondering—it probably is shabby, not blessed by God, as some at Corinth seem to be suggesting.

But isn't that how the world still works, the world we see that is? In this world I'm under the gun to be as righteous as can be, as good as I can manage; and this, that's true of me, is true of you as well, and of every other human being, be they baptized or not. It's true of the communities we form and the institutions we organize and run, including ones with labels like ELCA or NALC or Wartburg Seminary or Messiah Lutheran Church. I can't recall a day going by when I haven't had to ask the question: what must I/we do today. Those better organized than me, my wife, for example, make little lists that they carefully work through. What must we do to finish our work, to care for our families, to serve our customers, to keep sticky fingers out of the till, or, in my daily digs, bad guys from hurting little children at our school. What must we do to be better, more deserving, a tad more righteous? What must I do to keep, God forbid, from wasting this day—which, if I do, I'll hear about, God channeling his opinion, for sure, through someone else. The frowning boss. The weary spouse. That teacher, appointed by God, to mark my test with a C-. Or an A+, in which case I beam, don't I. Look, I say, the mark of a righteous student—and isn't that the aim, to come out righteous? Not, of course, that I'm altogether there yet, or anywhere close, for that matter.

But so long as I'm not there yet, the question persists. I cannot *stop* asking it. "What must I do?"

### **IX. The Baptized Person's Second Question—Greater, Unsettling**

Comes the dilemma, and with it a challenge.

Even as I live this life, the one my mother pushed me into, I live another life, the one that God the Holy Spirit either pushed or drowned me into, depending on which baptismal metaphor you want to play with.

This other life is Christ-life—or to stick more closely to Paul, life *in* Christ.

In this other life "What must I do" is a stupid question. It doesn't belong. It makes no sense. Remember, in Christ-life "all things are yours." A parenthetical question to talk about later: why wasn't this drummed into us when we were little baptized children? Why in my own case did it startle me so when I stumbled across it at age 28? Yet here it was, and is, and always will be, God's Gospel—nothing less, that is, than the Holy Spirit's declaration of present reality, anchored in Christ: *all things are yours*.

This being so, what *must* you do? The only sensible answer: "Nothing at all." Think about it. You wake up one morning with a billion dollars in your bank account, dropped there, no strings attached, by a mad and wondrous donor. What *must* you do? Answer: "Nothing at all." Addendum to that answer: "Stop babbling. Start exulting instead in the only questions that your new and sudden circumstance begs you to ask: "How *might* I spend this day?" 'How *might* I use the treasure I get to wallow in the whole day through?"

It occurs me to that most of us—working stiffs that we are, obsessed day in and day out with all those things we don't have yet and have got somehow to obtain—would have a tough and terrible time adjusting to this new circumstance. Suddenly gone are all those spiky, pressing obligations that shape and order our schedules. It's one thing to take a week's vacation, though even then there are things I've got to do. It's quite another to be on permanent vacation for the rest of my life, with not a care in the world, at least where I'm concerned. Would I not go crazy?

Welcome, then, to Type X-powered reality. In my seminary days a professor made some of us bog our way through a poor translation of Werner Elert's *The Christian Ethos*. It was thick and dense and magisterial—and ever so marvelous. With all my heart I recommend it to seminarians here if you're lucky enough to find a copy.

There were in that book a few lines that burned tracks in my brain. Here's one of them: "The person who has experienced liberation from nomological existence floats in empty space where he feels giddy." I kid you not, that's what it said—again, "The person who has experienced liberation from nomological existence floats in empty space where he feels giddy." Yes, that's bad translation from tough theological German, but still, the point comes through. Life in the Spirit, Type X powered life, is weird. The rules are gone. At first it's dim; it's murky; I'm not sure what to do. No doing is required, and I seriously dislike the feeling this creates. It's like stumbling through a haze.

And I dislike it all the more when I find myself stuck simultaneously in the old life, Type E powered, where the rules abound and I'm forced to earn my keep.

It's precisely here that the two-ness we've been speaking of gets unpleasant, and living with it becomes like walking through that Beijing smog. And I'm not at all surprised that Paul, the apostle of two-ness, continues to get the rough treatment he got in those churches he founded way back when.

How does a person or, even harder, a church of persons carry on in two God-given systems that ask us to operate on contrary assumptions? In the one, righteousness of a sort is the goal you're aiming at. In the other, righteousness of another astonishing sort is your jumping off point. In the one, rules are of the essence. In the other, rules are absurd. In the one you're a work in progress with heaps of work that has got to be done. In the other you're a finished product who is free to play the whole day long, and in the joy of that play, to spread the riches around.

Paul's point to his churches, especially at Corinth and Philippi, is that the second system takes precedence. It's the one that baptized people are called to pay attention to first and foremost, and to trust, and to practice, above all in their dealings with each other. To read his letters is to see how hard he has to work to make the point.

The challenge at this conference is to listen to Paul, or rather, to the Holy Spirit speaking through Paul, and to practice what the Spirit preaches.

I, for one, don't see the churches I know doing that very much at all. That too is something we can talk about later, if you'd like.

#### **X. Two Lives to Lead, Two Questions to Ask. Simultaneously.**

As for now, I wind things up by tossing out my own chief contribution to the conversation we're going to have.

Baptized people, at once saddled and blessed with two lives overlapping, two forms of God's power working either on them or through them, have two questions to ask. Not one, but two.

Question 1. What must I do/you do/we do. What must they do? Can we dodge this question? No. Does baptism relieve us of the imperative to ask it? Again, no. It's of the essence in the life we were *born* to live, and sooner or later to lose. It drags in its wake a couple of other questions: a) How do I get what I need/want, assuming I don't have it yet, and, once I think I have it, then b) how do I *keep* it.

Question 2 is a different creature altogether. It starts with an altogether different assumption, intrinsic to this second life-in-Christ that we were *baptized* to live. So it doesn't ask, "How do I get, how do I keep," but, to the contrary, "How can I spend?" How can I spend what I have already in such absurd, profuse abundance? How can we spend it together with joy and abandon? What holy prodigality shall we indulge in today to our Lord's beaming delight?

Or to clean that up and sharpen it some more, let me draw on our tradition, specifically Lutheran. Let this second question be, "How might we use Christ and his benefits—so great they are, so abounding, so utterly inexhaustible? How shall we use them in each and every circumstance we find ourselves in, whether as fellow saints

living and working and trusting together, or as the secret agents of new creation we become when God, exercising Type E power, wakes us up in the morning and shoves us out the door and into our daily routines?"

Christ and his benefits: how might we use them, how shall we spend them? (Not "must," but "shall.") We ask this question as an essential way of confessing that Jesus is our Lord. That's why it's also the focus of the second, prognostic leg of that Crossings method that some of you dug into today.

Of these two questions, 1) what must we do to get and keep, 2) how might we use Christ and spend his benefits, the second is by far the greater and more pressing. So says the Holy Spirit. How is it, then, that I've never heard it come up explicitly on the floor of a synod assembly, or be raised as a topic for a congregational Bible study? It's the first, the what-to-do question, that gets all the attention. But that too is something to chew on later if anyone is so inclined.

## **XI. Spending Tips**

For now I draw to things to a close with a few semi-random thoughts about using Christ and his benefits. Each of them is cursory in the extreme, nothing more than the précis of an essay that hasn't been written yet and couldn't be delivered here in any case. I pass them along even so to incite your own better and deeper thinking:

1. On using Christ: again, it's murky, a dim seeing in the poor mirror. So it calls for imagination and a dollop of nerve, of the kind the Holy Spirit gives. Hardly ever, if at all, is there only one, correct way to go about it. Remember that when the Master buzzes off and doles out the talents to the slaves, he doesn't tell them how to use them, only *that* they use them; and the only thing that can land you in hot water with the Master is not using them at all, because you were afraid, or too damn lazy with a laziness that does damn because it blows Christ off and leaves us on our own to deal with God in Type E mode. This Sunday Paul will equate "using the Master's talents" with the word "love." As far as I know, that word doesn't come with an instruction manual.
2. We use Christ and his benefits when, like the shepherds, we return to the stink of our daily routines without fretting that the stink will stick to our clothes and hair and whatever, causing God to wrinkle God's nose at us all over again. The first and greatest gift of Christ is the promise that God is past wrinkling God's nose where you and I are concerned. Still less will God do this when we sit with sinners as Christ keeps sitting with us.
3. Back to the "it's murky" department. People using Christ will sometimes make choices and adopt procedures that leave other Christ-users appalled. For example, this from an article that appeared in Valparaiso University's *The Cresset* in 1957, entitled "Legal Morality and the Two Kingdoms: "There is the case of the Nebraska judge who in the morning granted a divorce to a husband

and wife and in the evening, at a congregational meeting, had to condemn their divorce and, exercising the office of the keys, had to vote to bar them from the Lord's Supper." Notice, *had to* bar them. The Christ-user who wrote this, by the way, was one Robert W. Bertram in his late 50's version, which I suspect was somewhat different from the Bertram of the late '90s.

4. Christ-users will not blanch at rejoicing when people who don't know Christ behave better than they do. Nor will they flinch from admitting that this can and does happen. Righteousness of the kind that emerges in the old life, Type E powered, has never been an exclusively Christian property, nor is it now. Righteousness of the second kind, Type X powered, frees one to see this, and to honor it as one God's better passing gifts for life in this world.
5. Finally: Christ-users will practice, practice, practice at the great art of seeing Christ and honoring Christ in people they're simultaneously critiquing. That's what the Spirit keeps urging through St. Paul as he writes his letters. "If anyone is in Christ—new creation: look! Notice! The old has passed away, the new has come!" Let's practice looking for this right here, in and with each other, as we move into the rest of our time together.

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*For discussion around tables, by way of launching our conversation—*

- a. What do you hope to ask and explore in the course of our time together at this conference?
- b. How might you/we apply the benefits of Christ to the problem of Donald Trump?