

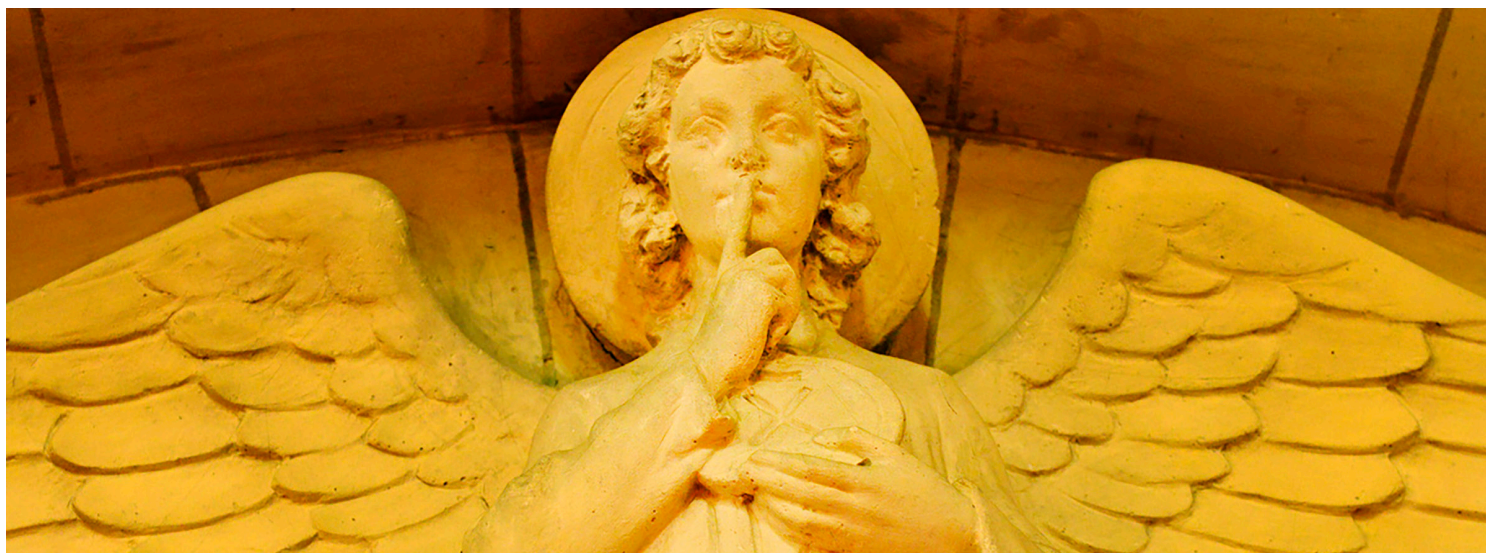


WHERE THE GOSPEL MEETS OUR DAILY LIVES

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Fred Niedner Keynotes 2019 Crossings Conference

“When God Is Silent”



By Bruce Modahl

The Crossings model of law/promise theology focuses on our sin as the cause of disruption with God and God’s judgment on us. But what if the disruption is not the result of our misdeeds and misplaced faith? Does the Crossings model apply when we are driven to the depths by the devastating illness of a child, or racial prejudice, or the forces of nature, the tsunami that took the lives of 300,000 people in southeast Asia, for example.

The applicability of the Crossings model of law/promise theology in situations such as these is the topic we take on at the next Crossings Conference entitled When God Is Silent. Among the keynote speakers is the Reverend Dr. Fred Niedner.

In the three-dozen-plus years Fred Niedner taught Intro to Theology courses at Valparaiso University, he said the righteousness of God is always at the forefront of student objections to God. We have heard it and said it all before. How does one square an all-powerful and loving God with suffering?

Niedner comes to the problem not only with the questions of college freshmen but a pastor’s deep involvement in the lives of others. He recounts the story of a child born to young friends, the father a former student. The newborn had a rare genetic abnormality that not only rendered her incurably vulnerable to deadly infection, it caused severe and ceaseless pain. She lived for eight weeks, all in the NICU, alternately sedated and

Continued on next page

When God Is Silent Continued from page 1
screaming in pain.

After listening to the father reflect on his daughter's ordeal, and his own as well as that of all the family and friends who surrounded them, Niedner is haunted by their experience and their questions. How do you address God in such a circumstance? For what should one pray? How could a parent pray for a child's death? As the days and weeks went on, this family had nothing left to say to God when they heard nothing in return save their child's cries.

Our problem with God goes beyond the question of how one squares an all-powerful and loving God with suffering but how one squares a loquacious God with the silent abyss into which parents, grandparents, pastors, and friends throw their prayers until they are spent.

God speaks the creation into being. God talks on through the prophets. God puts his Word into flesh and blood. Jesus preaches, teaches, and converses throughout his ministry. He gives us his Holy Spirit to continue the dialogue. By biblical accounts God is a talker; God is loquacious. And then, when we most need a word, God is silent.

When God is Silent is the theme for the 2019 Crossings Conference, January 27–30, Our Lady of the Snows Conference Center in Belleville, IL (near St. Louis). Check the website for details, www.crossings.org. Niedner is one of the keynote presenters. There will be more about the others in the next issue of the newsletter.

We have all heard stories like the one Niedner recounts or have our own experience with such suffering. Niedner says the topic of a just God comes up in most if not all the courses he teaches. Through the years he has heard stories of unspeakable suffering. He notes that it is in the throes of such suffering that people leave the faith.

Niedner promises no easy answers. He promises us rather a focus on “Christ the crucified, the one who comes out of hiding and joins us on our side of all that’s chaotic, deadly, and wrecked in the universe.” Niedner quotes Luther who often said when commenting on the meaning of Christ’s descent into God-forsakenness, “no matter how far I might sink, even there he is Lord for me.”

Niedner received his M.Div. and S.T.M. from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. He earned a Th.D. at Christ Seminary – Seminex where he served as a teaching assistant for Bob Bertram. With the late Dr. David Truemper he wrote Keeping the Faith: A Guide to the Christian Message.

Niedner’s text studies appear regularly in publications that serve the ministry of preaching, including Sundays and Seasons (Augsburg Fortress), Feasting on the Word and Feasting on the Gospels (Westminster John Knox) and The Christian Century. Since 1995 he has written a fortnightly op-ed column for the Chicago Tribune’s northwest Indiana edition.



SAVE THE DATE

THE 2019 INTERNATIONAL
CROSSINGS
CONFERENCE

JANUARY 27-30, 2019

“WHEN GOD IS SILENT”

THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF THE SNOWS
BELLEVILLE, ILLINOIS

FREE FOR SEMINARIANS!

CROSSINGS.ORG

A Crossings Love Story

By Bruce Modahl



Stefan and Cindy Munker

The Hallmark Channel would like to get its hands-on Stefan and Cindy Munker's love story for one of its movies. Stefan, a native of Fuerth, Germany, was a theology student at the University of Munich when he left to study for a year at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, PA (now United Seminary) as part of an exchange program sponsored by the Collegium Oecumenicum in Munich.

At Gettysburg, Stefan met Cindy Rasschaert, who was in her senior year. She grew up in Saint Clair Shores, a Detroit suburb. Upon graduation, she was called to Mt. Zion Lutheran Church in Oak Lawn, IL, a Chicago suburb. Stefan returned to Germany to complete his studies at the University of Munich. Here is where many a love story would end. Not so for these two.

They married in a civil service at the German equivalent of the courthouse. When he returned to the United States they had the church service to bless their marriage. Stefan enrolled at the Lutheran School of Theology—Chicago, served an internship and took classes to prepare for ministry in the American

context, classes such as U.S. church history, homiletics, and worship.

Stefan's first call was as an associate pastor at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Burbank, IL, a Chicago suburb. After seven years he accepted the call to be the pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Mt. Prospect, IL where he served for six years. A year ago, Stefan and Cindy moved away from the Chicago area. Stefan is now pastor

Continued on page 4

Greetings from Sherman and Candice!

We are delighted to bring you our first newsletter contribution as Crossings CoExecutive Directors. This will be a place for us to update you on our ongoing mission to share the Good News with an ever broadening audience, while staying true to our core foundation of Law and Gospel Theology.

These first months working toward this mission have flown by, an indication of the exciting work being done at Crossings. We have spent time learning the history of Crossings; connecting with our board members, writers, and contributors; and assessing resources.

We have found that one of our most valuable resources is you, our dear readers and supporters. Crossings is

above all a community of people passionate about sharing the Gospel. The depth of your experience, knowledge, and insights is our greatest asset. So we are turning to you first for ideas on how to widen our audience and appeal to a new generation of readers.

We want to hear what you are passionate about. We welcome your ideas and insights. Please share them with us in the coming weeks and months via email at ideas@crossings.org.

Thank you for sharing!
Sherman Lee and Candice Wassell
Co-Executive Directors
The Crossings Community

of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Hillsboro, IL. Cindy has a two-point charge, Mt. Zion and Trinity in Litchfield.



Stefan signed up for the Crossings Conference last January because of its title, “Up Weak Knees”. He came seeking to ground himself once again in God’s promises. He said, “Jesus brings us hope we cannot have on our own. We ask what God wants us to do at Hillsboro. The conference helped me see there is more to it than the programs we devise or our fear because St. Paul church isn’t what it used to be in terms of numbers. God is present in our everyday lives. God has purpose for us and our church far beyond our own doing.

“I was struck again by the significance of our tradition, these two parts of God addressing us, law and gospel. I appreciate the depths to which the Crossings method presses us, so we understand the true nature of our problem and the remarkable resolve God gives us in Jesus Christ. I keep the Ds and Ps in mind all week and every week as I prepare to preach.” (Editor’s note: If you are not familiar with the Ds and Ps, check out the website.)

When asked about the impact the conference had on him, Stefan began by saying, “I got to know new people who are passionate about working in the church and lay people passionate about living out their faith. As a new person, I was welcomed into the fellowship. I appreciated the time off from the regular routine to be exposed to new ideas. The presentations from Decolonize Lutheranism and Mockingbird Ministries, for example, illustrated Crossings. We received solid grounding in scripture and theology from others.”

Stefan continues, “Cindy and I follow God’s call in our life and vocation. It has taken us on many surprising and exciting journeys. In our current context of pastoring, we rely on the conviction that God addresses individuals and the world to show our need for Christ and that only Christ offers us all the freedom and motivation for crossing over to a transformed life and service.”

Stefan commends the Crossings conference and method to all who are seeking a biblically grounded and theologically sound way to understand, communicate and live out the message of Jesus, or: God’s (Hallmark) love story with the world.

On the Website

Pentecost is for Preaching: Part 2 *Preaching the Truth*

George Costanza told Jerry Seinfeld, “If I really believe it then it is not a lie.” He could as well have said, “If I really believe it then it is the truth.” In the last issue I raised the problem of preaching in an era in which the whole notion of truth is suspect. Diagnosis of the problem was the topic of last month’s article. This month I offer a prognosis.

To read the full article go to crossings.org

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