



# CROSSINGS Connection

WHERE THE GOSPEL MEETS OUR DAILY LIVES

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## Proclaiming the Gospel in a Culture of Fear

In September 2019, the Rev. Dr. Mary Hinkle Shore began her service as rector and dean at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (LTSS), Columbia, South Carolina. Her inaugural address was “Christ is Risen! Proclaiming the Gospel in a Culture of Fear.” In an era in which the gospel is defined in vague and general terms as love or generic good news, Shore begins with the assertion that the gospel—the news that is both new and good—is Christ risen and Christ showing mercy to sinners.

She uses Jesus’ encounter with Cleopas and his companion along the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35) as a metaphor for seminary education. In both instances, there is walking, talking, arguing, reading, eating, and proclaiming. Along the way she quotes an essay in a 1976 issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* by the founders of Crossings, Robert Bertram and Ed Schroeder.

She cites Bertram as an example of the talking and arguing aspect of theological education. Bertram says the theologian’s task is to press the question “why” until the reason is traced back to its source: namely, God’s reconciling the world to himself in Christ Jesus. The theologian’s task, Bertram says, is to necessitate Christ.

Shore uses Schroeder’s reading of both sons in the parable of the prodigal. Schroeder notes the elder brother is righteous until that righteousness turns on him, and then he withholds love from both God and neighbor. Both righteous and unrighteous sinners are in death. God’s mercy mission in Jesus has to contend with their deaths in the process of saving them.

Shore concludes, “God cannot simply get a really big hammer and set things right because there are not bad guys to smash and good guys to establish as the city set on a hill. ‘None is righteous, no, not one’ (Romans. 3:10). Neither does it work simply to show or tell us the shape of righteousness because we make even of righteousness an idol. Humanity did not and does not need only a model of the godly life. We need a way out of the grave.”

Shore offers a gentle but pointed critique of the ELCA motto “God’s work. Our hands.” She asks whether that motto reflects why we need a crucified and risen messiah. She says, “It is not that it is wrong to say Jesus is a model

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**The Rev. Dr. Mary Hinkle Shore is rector and dean of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina.**

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## Co-Executive Directors' Corner



**Sherman Lee**  
Co-Director

On the day I was to depart for India on a work trip, I was instead toiling away in my office cubicle. During the day, I counted 59 people on a campus that normally holds 5,000. After working remotely for two weeks, it was my turn to be the team's onsite contact for the day.

My team in India were shut out of their offices altogether, unable to connect to our systems for many days.

Realizing the impact of the global health crisis, the Crossings board of directors has decided to postpone our 2021 International Conference by a year.

Churches across the country have already made decisions about their activities, especially about gathering together in other ways now that they can't meet face to face. Recently, I was at MicroCenter, getting more gear to livestream church services for my church. We had hoped to reconvene by Easter, but now we're hoping for Pentecost.

Waiting in line at MicroCenter consisted of two parts: first, keeping six feet apart in the first line to give your name and mobile number and, second, waiting in your car or near the entrance until the welcome text message arrived. People kept a healthy distance from each other, and perhaps a healthier distance from me. That extra distance is something I'd experienced a few weeks before when I was returning from California and was in the airport men's room. One Caucasian guy carefully examined me as we both washed our hands because I'm Asian-American. I half-wanted to start fake coughing and sneezing, but imagining was sufficient amusement for me.

Not amusing to me are the stories of discrimination, violence, and racism. The shift from being "model minority" to "convenient scapegoat" is all too familiar to me. We "enemize" people who are not like us, who look different, talk differently. Those whose faces are different from our own become The Other. They are strange, foreign, even alien; they are strangers. It's safe to hate The Other. It's safe to hurt The Other. It's safe to want to kill The Other.

That's the worst part of our current plight: how it divides us, which is amazing in these already tremendously divisive times. We can barely agree on fact—let alone opinions—while trying to respond to COVID-19 without suspecting, politicizing, or worrying that your piece of the recovery pie is bigger than mine.

Actually, that's not the worst part. What is? It's how we've separated ourselves from God. Or even forgotten God in our lives. We have drawn lines between us and God. In God's eyes, we—each of us—are The Other.

God has a big problem with that because we're intended to be God's beloved children, and we've made ourselves strange, foreign, alien: The Other.

The good news is that God solves that problem by coming to our world, living and dying and rising again. For each of us and for all of us, absorbing the hurt and hatred and killing that we do, on the Cross. In rising again, God offers us new life in this "new normal" and whatever else the world cooks up.

That Easter story took place at a specific point in time, and it's a story for all of time. We celebrate it once a year, the highest and holiest service with special worship and liturgy.

But God's becoming "The Other" through Christ's dying and rising is something we celebrate in worship every Sunday. And we can celebrate that dying and rising with Christ at any time of any day in between.

So what to do during this Easter season—and Pentecost as well? Share that celebration virtually whenever and however we can. And what of celebrating "Easter" on a Sunday when life returns to "normal"? You know the answer...

# This Ferocious Moment

By Bruce K Modahl

In a story by Reynolds Price called “The Foreseeable Future,” a man named Whitley Wade lost a quart of his blood and had his bones shattered on World War II’s D-Day. The medics brought him back, at least as far back as medics can. Now, as the story unfolds, he is back home, back to his family, back at work, but far from back to life.

While traveling on business, he sits in a thanksgiving-for-victory worship service and studies a stained glass window, “a risen Christ, stepping out of the tomb. Christ’s hips were hardly covered with rags; his palms were outward, displaying their ruin. His side was bleeding and his lips were very nearly smiling. It came as a shock to Whit—that threat of a smile, the first he’d seen in a hundred pictures of this ferocious moment” (137).

Whitley calls the resurrection a “ferocious moment.” He is shocked that “the man looked glad.” He says, “What working man ever laid down to sleep and wanted to rise?”

I’ve always thought of Jesus’ death as ferocious, not his resurrection.

Jesus says, “Come to me all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.” Jesus goes on to offer us not a hammock for his promised rest. “Take my yoke upon you,” Jesus says. The yoke is an instrument of work—not rest. A yoke is a crossbar with two u-shaped pieces, placed around the necks of a pair of farm animals and hitched to a plow. They get rest when the yoke is removed. When the yoke is put on, weariness begins. The yoke is a heavy burden.

To what are we yoked? I have seen doctors and nurses wear their stethoscopes like a yoke. A book bag is a student’s yoke. Precious children are yoked to their parents’ chests with a child carrier. A ring yokes us to another for better and for worse. Many of us are yoked to our phones and the calendars embedded in them. My mother was yoked to an apron every day of her life. The pastor’s stole is a yoke. These are all good things. Yet these good things go awry when in our yearning to be

perfect we mistake ourselves for God.

One pastor friend told me that during hospital visits he finds himself envying those who are ill. He said he catches himself praying for an illness—not a fatal illness, mind you, just one requiring disability retirement. It was the only honorable way out he could think of. And like Whitley Wade in the story he had considered other ways out of the life he was in. The stole for him was a burden. How often people say about their jobs or some aspect of their lives, “This is killing me.”

Jesus offers rest for us in the work to which he was yoked. He was yoked to a cross. He offers us rest in his death. But his work does not end in the grave. He was yoked also to resurrection. Whit asked, “What working man ever laid down to rest and wanted to rise?” The work God the Father

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Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, stained glass window in church of Stockholm, Sweden.

PHOTO © JORISVO / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

# This Ferocious Moment

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entrusted to Jesus was to die and to rise. And so he rose for us. He came back for us.

We are yoked to Jesus in our baptism. Baptism is a down payment on the fulfillment of God's promises to us. By baptism the Holy Spirit joins us to Jesus' death and resurrection. In his death our sin and mistrust of God are put to death. We rise with him forgiven and freed.

The old fears resurface and threaten

to drown out the promise. So we daily take Christ's yoke upon us, returning daily to the baptismal font in confession. By confession we put our idolatries to death in Christ's death again and again. We rise from confession to new life, freed once again. We are yoked to Christ's work by a daily discipline in which we make use of the power of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus redeems all the things to which we are yoked to function as a part of God's new creation.



Bruce K. Modahl

# Proclaiming the Gospel in a Culture of Fear

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of the godly life. It is just not what the risen Jesus is teaching on the road to Emmaus. Jesus is saying, 'It would not have worked if I had modeled godly living for 40 more years and then died in my bed.' 'Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?'"

She spoke of the trajectory of theological education over the past several decades. As a student at Luther Seminary (St. Paul, Minnesota) in the mid-1980s, the emphasis was on the pastor as facilitator. She left for parish ministry and then a PhD in New Testament at Duke Divinity School. When she returned to teach at Luther in 1997, the emphasis had shifted from one-on-one interactions to leadership.

After leaving Luther Seminary, she served a church in the mountains of North Carolina. Now returning to seminary education at LTSS, she notes that, while leadership is still strongly emphasized, demographics and the Holy Spirit are leading us out of the buildings and into the neighborhoods we inhabit.

Shore seeks to equip students at LTSS to proclaim the gospel in a culture of fear. She says the church and its ministers and seminaries steward the witness to Christ crucified and raised. She concludes her lecture, "In a time characterized by fear at the losses we face and by deep divisions between ourselves and 'strangers,' and all the rest of what scares us to death, we have seen something more powerful than death. We have seen the Lord."

## 2021 Crossings Conference Postponed

The International Crossings Conference has been postponed to 2022 for health and safety reasons.

STAY TUNED. We're working on some creative alternatives for 2021.



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Connection

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

### PENTECOST 2020

Writer/Editor: Bruce Modahl

Executive Secretary: Cathy Lessmann

Co-Executive Director: Candice Wassell

Co-Executive Director: Sherman Lee

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