



# CROSSINGS Connection

WHERE THE GOSPEL MEETS OUR DAILY LIVES

EASTER 2021 | Vol. 141 | From the Crossings Community, Inc

## One Final Promise – Mark 16:1-8

By Bruce K. Modahl

The Gospel reading we hear on Easter Sunday ends with the concluding words to Mark's Gospel, "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." This is no way to end a story.

Donald Juel, in his book *The Gospel of Mark*, wrote that one of his students performed the Gospel of Mark for the seminary community. He memorized the text. His props amounted to a chair and a table. He relied on pauses, changes in the tone of his voice, and different postures and positions on the stage.

He spoke the last verse, "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." And he could not figure out how to get off the stage. It needed an ending. After a pause he said, "Amen." And the place erupted in applause and smiles and a cheer or two from his friends.

For the second performance he decided to end the gospel the way it ends, "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." He paused and walked off the stage. This time there was only silence, an uncomfortable silence, according to Juel.

Some preachers are criticized for not being able to end their sermons. They are like the pilot of a jumbo jet as they circle the text. After a long flight, these preachers sound as though they are bringing the plane in for a landing. Everyone perks up at the promise of an Amen. But at the last moment, the preacher pulls up and circles the text yet again. These are the same preachers who need a long runway to get the sermon off the ground. Not Mark. His is a one-verse take off. He flies at breakneck speed, and then he parachutes out leaving the rest of us to call out, "Does anyone know how to land this thing?"

People have tried. Our Bibles include alternate endings tacked on early in the history of the church. Everyone is looking for closure. People seek closure so they can get on with their lives.

Mark, however, does not give us closure. There is no getting on with our lives the way they were before. Jesus made too many promises for  
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## Executive Director's Corner

The end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021 included enough events to fill several history books. Violence and discord have marked too many of these events. The deadly virus has overwhelmed us with grief. Yet we took hope from many inspiring speeches and acts of human kindness.

I'm grateful that Jerry Burce and others — in several Thursday Theology postings — have provided helpful perspectives on God's words of judgment and hope during these chaotic and troubling days.

The past six months have also been a time when Crossings has been blessed with an outpouring of generous gifts. As Crossings celebrated its 35th anniversary, more people than ever have provided financial support to sustain this community of faith and learning. Thank you!

That generosity has helped support a flurry of activities. More people in more places are learning about and exploring law-gospel theology. The Crossings film series is finding new audiences and creative uses. The weekly text studies are helping both authors and readers meet the challenge of virtual worship services and Bible studies.

The first four Table Talks have sparked lively discussions about seminal essays by Crossings Founders, Bob Bertram and Ed Schroeder. An impressive line-up has led these discussions: Fred Niedner, a team of Steve Albertin, Chris Repp, and Robin Lutjohann, Kathryn Kleinhans, and Steven Kuhl. Be sure to sign up for future Table Talks at [crossings.org/talks](https://crossings.org/talks).

In this Lenten season, when the way of the cross is so vividly portrayed, Crossings — thanks to your generosity and your involvement — is boldly proclaiming the Gospel that inspires us and others to trust the Promise of the Easter-life.

Blessings,  
Sherman Lee, Executive Director



**Sherman Lee**  
Executive Director

## Your Plans for 2021 and Beyond

Crossings received lots of generous gifts in the final months of 2020 and in the early days of 2021. This outpouring of support reflects a deep commitment to our shared mission of crossing the Gospel with daily life.

This is a time of year when many individuals review their finances and long-term plans. Revisiting your will or living trust is good stewardship. You may wish to change the primary or secondary beneficiaries of retirement accounts and insurance policies. In some cases, setting up a charitable gift

annuity or a donor advised fund may provide tax savings or even increase your retirement income.

Those who are 70 ½ years or older may find that charitable distributions from an IRA can be an effective way to support Crossings and other organizations.

As you make your own plans, thank you for keeping Crossings in mind — and for continuing your financial support of our efforts to keep the Promise bold.

## A Profile of Cathy Lessmann

# Crossings' Faithful Steward

Since 1994 Cathy Lessmann has served as executive secretary of Crossings, managing every aspect of the organization's operations. She volunteered for the position to keep the movement alive. The Rev. Dr. Ed Schroeder, who founded Crossings along with the Rev. Dr. Bob Bertram, announced in a 1994 newsletter that this would be the final newsletter. Crossings was coming to an end.

Cathy approached Bob Bertram and offered to run the Crossings office out of her home and take on all the administrative tasks of the organization. With gratitude, Bob and Ed accepted her offer. Cathy kept the books, deposited and issued the checks, wrote thank-you notes for contributions, and handled all other correspondence.

Until 2015 Cathy formatted the newsletter and gathered volunteers to assemble it for mailing. To have Ed and Bob's writings available on the web site, Cathy recruited people to type all their writings into Word documents. With gracious hospitality, Cathy hosts the annual in-person meeting of the Crossings board of directors at her home.

The first Crossings conference was in 2007. Working with a planning committee, Cathy took on the details of arranging the conference site and handling registrations, room assignments, receptions, meals, airport transportation, and more.

Cathy became acquainted with Crossings in 1982, when Ed came to lead a class and preach at her home congregation, Holy Cross Lutheran Church in suburban St. Louis. From that point on, she took all the Crossings classes Ed and Bob offered. With classes at Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago (LSTC) and courses Bob taught in St. Louis that LSTC accredited, Cathy earned a master's degree in theology.

Cathy describes herself as a missionary kid. Her parents, the Rev. Arnold and Ruth (Tjernagel) Strohschein served in the Philippines as missionaries of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Cathy was born and raised there, returning to the States to attend Valparaiso University. She sang in the choir with Gary Lessmann.

While she was in college, Cathy's parents took a new assignment in the Panama Canal Zone. After graduation, she went there and began work for the U.S. military special services at Ft. Gulick where she ran the teen club.

Gary had enrolled in medical school, joining the Navy to help pay for his education. Gary came to visit Cathy in Panama and convinced her to return to the States and marry him. Their first child, Rachel, was born while Gary was in medical school at St. Louis University.

After medical school, Gary and Cathy moved to Jacksonville, Florida, where Gary was assigned to the hospital at Jacksonville Naval Air Station. Two more children, Ryan and Kevin, were born there.

Gary completed his six-year commitment to the Navy. In 1982 they moved to St. Louis, and Gary joined a family practice with two other doctors. Their youngest child, Marty, was born in St. Louis.

Cathy says she made the move to St. Louis reluctantly, but came to see it as the best decision ever because she met Bob and Ed.

Crossings president, the Rev. Jerry Burce, said of her, "She is the glue holding us together. Cathy pushes us forward with a dogged determination that Crossings is a gift which must be shared with the wider church." Marie Schroeder commented, "Cathy's stewardship of Crossing has been absolutely marvelous."

Cathy's commitment to the mission of Crossings led her to recruit two extraordinary young people — the Rev. Candice Wassell and Sherman Lee — to serve as part-time co-executive directors. Candice became senior pastor of a congregation in Illinois, so she had to set aside her Crossings' work. But with leadership from Sherman and Cathy's continued involvement, Crossings has a promising future.



Cathy and Gary Lessmann



# One Final Promise – Mark 16:1-8

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that to happen. Numerous times Jesus told of his suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection. From the promises of Jesus, we learn a different algebra for counting winners and losers.

Jesus promised the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. He made good on his promise by sending the demons on the run, healing the lame, giving sight to the blind, and providing for the hungry a feast on the mountainside, just like Isaiah said he would.

He extended the promise of sins forgiven. Jesus promised that the power of Herod, Caesar, and their kind does not have the final word. God overturned their death verdict by raising Jesus from the grave. Far too many promises have been fulfilled for life to go back to the way it was before.

Yet demon violence still rages. Foul and evil things continue to take hold of peoples' lives. He promised the kingdom of God, but there is scant evidence of swords refashioned into plows. He promised the forgiveness of sins, yet day in and day out our consciences accuse us. He promised his death would bring an end to death. Yet, death tracks us down.

There is one final promise we hear at the end of Mark's Gospel. As the women stepped inside the open tomb, "they saw a young man dressed in a white robe." He told them Jesus "has been raised; he is not here. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, that he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him."

There is no closure in Mark's Gospel, but there is a future to Jesus' story, a future for a deserter like Peter and sinners like us. Mark strips away all supports other than Jesus. We won't be able to rely on the testimony of the women. In Mark no one grasps the feet of the risen Christ. No one is invited to finger his wounds. With Mark we do not share breakfast on the beach with Jesus. We do not encounter him on the Emmaus Road.

What we are left with are some questions: Will we trust the one whom God raised from the dead? Will we trust him to fulfill his promises? Do we see the work of God continuing among us through the one whom the grave could not hold?



The Hill of Crosses in Lithuania has been a pilgrimage site for the faithful since early in the 19th century. People come to the Hill of Crosses and add to the thousands of crosses already there to commemorate births, baptisms, marriages, anniversaries, deaths, and to pray for peace. During the Soviet era, the hill was bulldozed three times and the road leading to the site was torn up. Still the people came.

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