



# CROSSINGS Connection

WHERE THE GOSPEL MEETS OUR DAILY LIVES

EASTER 2023 | Vol. 149 | From the Crossings Community, Inc

*Matthew 25:31-46*

## The Coming of the Kingdom

By the Rev. Dr. Bruce K. Modahl

This passage is a challenge to those who believe we are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In this passage the ones welcomed into the kingdom of heaven are those who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, and visited prisoners. Jesus says it was him they cared for. Likewise, those who refused care were refusing it to Jesus. These will go away into eternal punishment.

This confirms what we thought all along. We are judged by God, as we judge ourselves, and as others judge us: by our merits. It seems impossible to do enough to satisfy what is demanded of us. Do we give money to every panhandler? Is it enough to support one food pantry or do we have to volunteer our time as well? We already give all our cast-off clothing to Goodwill. And prison ministry isn't for everyone. How many needy people must we serve?

I have heard some clever

workarounds of the demands this text lays upon us. A very satisfying one points out what we already know. No one person can do all of this. But all of us can do some of it. And collectively we do it all. And so, collectively, we are righteous by our merits, imitating Jesus just short of the cross.

A second workaround employs some fancy footwork with verses 40 and 45. The judgment depends on what was done for "the least of these who are members of my family."

In Matthew 12:46-50, Jesus defines his family as "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven." So, we believers in Christ are not judged. Rather, everybody else is judged based on how they treat us.

Both interpretations strike me as examples of the self-justification that comes naturally to us.

Another way to understand this text is by taking it in context. Matthew 25:31-46 is the culmination of a theme that began in chapter 8. There Jesus introduces us to the threat of the

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The Last Judgment, mosaic from the 13th century inside the octagonal dome in the Battistero di San Giovanni (Florence Baptistery) in Florence, Italy. Azoor Photo/Alamy Stock Photo

January 22-25, Belleville, Illinois

# 2023 Conference Highlights

The Rev. Dr. Jerry Burce, president of the Crossings board; the Rev. Nancy Quartier, a first-time conference attendee; and Steve Hitchcock, who attended the conference by Zoom, were asked to provide key takeaways from the 2023 Crossings Conference. The conference theme was “The Promising Community.” Here is a lightly edited version of what they wrote.

## Jerry Burce offered these comments:

- Bishop Eaton encouraged us for the work Crossings is doing. We had the chance to

thank her for her passion for the gospel.

- Mary Shore impressed us with her thoughtfulness, especially by her concern to use the Gospel in a way that provides an alternative to the futile conservative/progressive debates.
- We had solid offerings from our younger and first-time presenters: Matt Metevelis gave us new insights to the Beatitudes; Robin Lütjohann reminded us of the *fuzzy edges* of our congregations and communities and the imperative of serving with that in mind; Nathan Hall

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## Message from the Executive Director

# Thank You!

Our community of faith and learning has had a remarkable beginning to 2023. Thanks to an outpouring of gifts from you and many others, Crossings began the new year with the resources to carry out its longest and largest conference ever. Our weekly online postings of text studies and Thursday Theology haven't missed a beat. We've also begun work on a major new project to keep the Gospel's Promise at the heart of preaching.

I'm especially grateful to Jerry Burce and the other board members for their leadership and hard work that made the January conference possible. I take particular pride in the superb online offering that allowed dozens of people to participate virtually. Ron Coulter's technical expertise—and unflappability—allowed us to use our virtual connection to enhance the experience for in-person participants as well. Bethany Dreher's management skills were evident as she brought forward messages and questions from the Zoom chat feature.

Bruce Modahl, editor of this newsletter, served as moderator for all four days. Before and during the conference, Bruce helped keep the conference theme—“The Promising Community: Can I Get a Witness?”—as a unifying focus for all presentations and discussions. This connectivity enabled us to make last-minute adjustments in the schedule, and it encouraged our speakers to interact with each other and the participants.

Thank you for your interest and involvement in Crossings during these promising days. May your Easter season be a time of rejoicing.



CONFERENCE PHOTOS © BETHANY DREHER

The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, presiding bishop of the ELCA, and Sherman Lee, Crossings executive director, at the 2023 Crossings conference in Belleville, Illinois.

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clearly and with good-natured fun outlined the Crossings method for Bible study and sermon preparation.

- Gratitude for those coming to the conference for the first time and hearing nice surprises about how they found out about the conference and decided to come.
- The packed meaty schedule, the unanimity of our joy in Christ, and the reminder that we are not alone in our commitment to the Promise and the theology that makes it shine.

**The Rev. Nancy Quartier** is a 2010 graduate of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. She has served the Rosholt Lutheran Parish, Bethanial Trondhjem in Rosholt, South Dakota, since August of 2010.

- Mailings work! I received an invitation to attend via a flyer that was mailed to me. I am grateful to have been welcomed into the new-to-me group of people.
- Mary Hinkle Shore never disappoints. In fact, none of the speakers disappointed in their presentations. The speakers served as *spiritual chiropractors* to me, realigning my proclamation of God with honesty and integrity to the promises of God.
- One presenter said, “What good is the work of the most talented chef, if the delicious food is not delivered to the person waiting to receive it?” Our proclamation matters.
- The Crossings method is new to me, and it’s already given me new energy for exegesis and proclamation.



• The Holy Spirit is working through this group of people to touch the lives of everyone who believes in Jesus and the call to witness to him. I am refreshed and grateful for the introduction to the work of Crossings.

**The Rev. Dr. Chris Repp** preaching at the conference Eucharist service in Christ the King Chapel.



The January 2023 conference attracted both those new to Crossings as well as repeat participants. Pictured in the foreground are the Rev. Ella Moehlman (left), Chris Newmann, Dr. Carol Braun, and Susan Mitchell.

**Steve Hitchcock** retired in 2020 from Bread for the World. He has been in-person to four previous Crossings conferences, and helped with efforts to publicize and promote this year’s conference.

- The online option was a plus for everyone. I was impressed that as many as two dozen people stayed on Zoom as active participants. The Zoom chat box was very active. Crossings staff deserve kudos for the high quality of the online presentation. Repeated reminders to the speakers and those asking questions to speak into microphones meant that everyone could follow along.
- All of the presentations addressed the conference theme in an interconnected way. The Rev. Dr. Kit Kleinhans has spoken at several previous conferences. Having her presentation on the first full day served as a helpful touch stone for the entire conference.
- Mary Hinkle Shore brought both depth and breadth to her presentation. Her organized and insightful progression through key biblical texts embodied the Crossings tradition of scholarship that emboldens and enhances the proclamation of the Promise.
- Bishop Eaton, Kit, and Mary all mentioned the challenge of helping seminary students in understanding the church’s primary mission as the proclamation of the Gospel as gift and promise. I hope this matter gets lots more attention.

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## 2023 Conference Highlights

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- Even though I wasn't there in person, I felt as though Crossings has set a new standard for conferences—especially in terms of inviting and welcoming those who are new to Crossings.

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This was the 11th Crossings conference. The first one took place in 2007. Conferences were held every other year until 2018, which was the first of three conferences in a row. We paused for Covid in 2021 and 2022.

Presentations from previous conferences can be found at [Crossings.org/library](https://crossings.org/library).



At the January 2023 conference, the Rev. Penny Holste listens to the presentation by Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. Pictured in the background (left to right) are the Rev. Nathan Hall, Dr. Carol Braun, and the Rev. Brad Haugen.

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## The Coming of the Kingdom

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outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. We hear it again as Jesus explains the parable of the weeds to his disciples, and a few verses later with the parable of fish gathered into a net. The trash fish are thrown out. So, it will be at the end of the age. Angels will come and throw the evil ones into the fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The theme intensifies by the end of chapter 24. The slave who eats and drinks with drunkards will be cut in pieces and put with the hypocrites where the teeth gnashing continues. The bridesmaids who ran out of oil are locked out of the wedding banquet, and thereby consigned to the outer darkness. The servant who failed to provide a return on the one talent entrusted to him, well, you know what happened to him. All this weeping and gnashing of teeth crescendos with Jesus' words about the final judgment. But it is not the climax.

The climax begins with Jesus at the supper table in the home of Simon the leper. A woman

broke open a jar of ointment and anointed Jesus. What a waste. The price of it could have fed many hungry people. Jesus is arrested in the darkness. He was declared guilty, as guilty as all those teeth gnashers Matthew has paraded before us.

Jesus was cast out of the gates of the holy city. There was no lack of weeping along the way. They hung him between two bandits. Darkness covered the land. From the cross Jesus announced the final judgment he was receiving. God abandoned him to join all of us in the grave's darkness.

On the third day, God raised him from the dead. Because Jesus bore the judgment announced against us, God lifts the condemnation from us.

Jesus is the first born from the tomb, who leads all who follow him into the kingdom of God. Following along in this procession, we see all the needs Jesus points out in Matthew 25. We view them not as things we must do to enter the kingdom of heaven, but as things we get to do. These are things we get to do all the way to the grave, which is transformed now as the portal to heaven.



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Connection

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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