

CROSSINGS

Pentecost 2015 | Vol. 118 | From the Crossings Community



C is for Clutter

Two weeks ago my office was a mess. My office has always been a mess.

Then I bought Marie Kondo's #1 New York Times Best Seller "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing." Hmm, Japanese? That in itself recommended the book to me as much as the two million copies sold. The most perfectly organized personal space I ever saw was the briefcase of a Japanese colleague. Going through security in a South African airport we opened our briefcases side by side in front of the officers; I was so ashamed I blushed.

My office is a different place now. I applied a few of her principles before I even reached the end of chapter one. I feel my life is changing for the better. No kidding. Magic!

I have not finished her book. Who ever reads whole books, anyway? The table of contents hints at delights to come. Here is a tiny sample: "Sort by category, not by location." "Make tidying a special event, not a daily chore." "Don't let your family see." "Clothing: place every item of clothing in the house on the floor." (Just as a first step!) "Unread books: 'sometime' means 'never.'" (What did I say about reading?) "Photos: cherish who you are now." "Follow your intuition and all will be well." "Being surrounded by things that spark joy makes you happy."



R is for "Real life"

Then I saw this—the last bit of the final chapter: "Your real life begins after putting your house in order." I skipped to that, since my real interest, after all, is life. Marie Kondo writes:



"Although I have spent this entire book talking about tidying, tidying is not actually necessary. You won't die if your house isn't tidy, and there are many people in the world who really don't care if they can't put their house in order. Such people, however, would never pick up this book. You, on the other hand, have been led by fate to read it, and that means you probably have a strong desire to change your current situation, to reset your life, to improve your lifestyle, to gain happiness, to shine. For this very reason, I can guarantee that you will be able to put your house in order. The moment you picked up this book with the intention of tidying, you took the first step. If you have read this far, you know what you need to do next.

"Human beings can only truly cherish a limited number of things at one time. As I am both lazy and forgetful, I can't take proper care of too many things. That is why I want to cherish properly the things I love, and that is why I have insisted on tidying for so much of my life. I believe, however, that it is best to tidy up quickly and get it over with. Why? Because tidying is not the purpose of life.

"If you think that tidying is something that must be done every day, if you think it is something that you will need to do all your life, it is time to wake up. I swear to you that tidying can be done thoroughly and quickly, all in

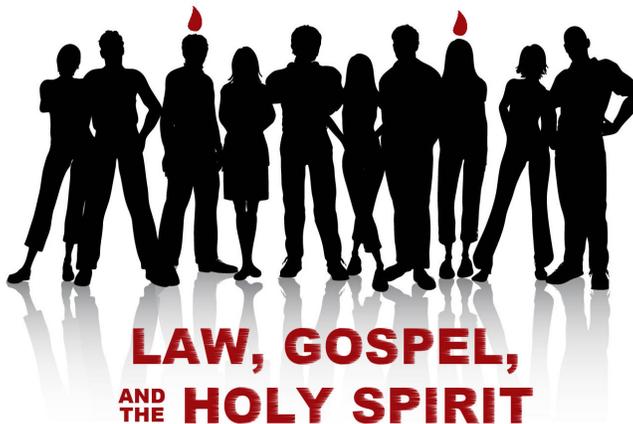
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PRE-CONFERENCE SCHEDULE (Sunday evening through Monday afternoon)

Sunday—January 24, 2016

Afternoon-6:00 pm Arrival and dinner on your own

7:00 pm **Marcus Felde**, “On the Importance of Distinguishing Law and Gospel”

TRACK ONE: What has the Church been saying about the Holy Spirit over the centuries?

9:00 am **Martin Lohrmann**, “The Holy Spirit in the Lutheran Confessions”

10:30 am **Edward Schroeder**, “The Holy Spirit in Elert’s Systematics”

1:30 pm **Steven Kuhl**, “The Holy Spirit in the Age of Pentecostalism”

3:30 pm **Gary Teske**, “The Holy Spirit and the Unholy Spirits: Reflections on Mission in PNG Context”

TRACK TWO: Introduction to the Crossings Method

9:00 to 4:45 **Steve Albertin**, **Chris Repp**, and other members of the Crossings writing staff

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE (Monday evening through Wednesday noon)

Monday—January 25

6:00 pm Conference begins with dinner

7:00 pm **Jerry Burce**, Keynote Address: “The Spirit-given Challenge of the Double Life”

Tuesday—January 26

8:45 am **Steve Turnbull**, “Launching the Double Life: Nicodemus and the Twice Born Person”

9:45 am **Amy Schifrin**, “Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of the Congregation/Church: The American Context: Reflections/Examples on Congregational Life and Mission”

1:45 pm **Toppo Takamura**, “Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of the Congregation/Church: The Japanese Context”

2:45 pm **Arndt Braaten**, “Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of Christian Vocation: Health Care for the Dying: Reflections/Examples of the Meaning and Challenge of Being a Christian and a Doctor today”

7:15 pm Holy Communion (**Lori Cornell**, Preacher)

Wednesday—January 27

8:45 am **Jill Baumgaertner**, “Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of Christian Vocation: Education that Doesn’t Puff Up: Reflections/Examples of the Meaning and Challenge of Being a Christian and a Teacher Today”

9:45 am **Rob Saler**, “The Double Life and the Publicly Engaged Church”

11:00 am Discussion/Roundtable with all panelists

12:00 noon Conference concludes



Lohff: “The Reformation was able to simplify the peculiarity of the Christian faith in an unprecedented, impressive, and penetrating manner.”

one go. The only tasks that you will need to continue for the rest of your life are those of choosing what to keep and what to discard and of caring for the things you decide to keep. You can put your house in order now, once and forever. The only ones who need to spend their lives, year in and year out, thinking about tidying are people like me who find joy in it and who are passionate about using tidying to make the world a better place. **As for you, pour your time and passion into what brings you the most joy, your mission in life.** (*Emphasis in the original.*) I am convinced that putting your house in order will help you find the mission that speaks to your heart. Life truly begins after you have put your house in order.”

Time for me to allude to Crossings, right? I’m getting there.



is for “Organize”

One thing that came to light during last week’s fit of tidying was an essay by Wenzel Lohff, “Justification and Anthropology,” which Ed Schroeder handed out in his introductory course in Christian theology back at the seminary. Perhaps because I am “lazy and forgetful” like Marie Kondo, I found Lohff’s premise appealing. I wouldn’t have to know everything about everything before becoming a pastor, I could get there by focusing intensely on the central thing, the point which connects the divine and the human. Everything else could be understood in relationship to that. Very efficient.

Such was the character of the Reformation, according to Wenzel Lohff:

“In comparison to the theological scholasticism which preceded it, the Reformation was able to **simplify the peculiarity of the Christian faith in an unprecedented, impressive, and penetrating manner.** The Reformation accomplished this, as the early confessional writings demonstrate, by concentrating on what they called “the doctrine of the gospel.” The “doctrine of the gospel” was understood and taught theologically as justification. . . . In any case,

the fundamental confessions of the Lutheran Reformation can be referred to as an example of such a method of correlating justification and anthropology.” (*emphasis added*)

By “anthropology” Lohff does not mean the social science discipline, but a theological understanding of humans/humanity/humanness, in particular that point at which we all stand in need of divine aid.

Verily, you may read Luther all day long and never be more than an arm’s length from the doctrine of the gospel. He was the Marie Kondo of the church. Get this church cleaned up, throw out what does not serve the gospel (“spark joy”), and “you will find the mission that speaks to your heart.”

But let’s go back to Marie Kondo, because I want you to be clear that she is no Martin Luther. She is all law except for the last couple paragraphs (quoted above) where she hints that real life is out there somewhere beyond tidying. “The law indeed came through Moses [and friends like Marie]; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17) “[T]idying is not the purpose of life,” she admits. Kind of like Jesus, Luke 12:23, “For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.” And “Life truly begins **after** you have put your house in order” (*emphasis mine*). Which brings to mind a parable of Jesus:

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but not finding any, it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ When it comes, it finds it **swept and put in order.** Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first.” (Luke 11:24-27)

So, I love Marie Kondo’s criticism of the way I live, I accept that I need to learn from her, I cannot dispute any of her principles, I think they are helpful, and yet . . . Life is elsewhere. One can do everything according to her system (the “KonMari”—from her last and first names—System), and yet not have life.

S **S** is for “Strain, Swallow”

One who strains at a gnat may swallow a camel. Or wash the outside of the cup and leave the inside filthy.

Theology is good when it keeps “things”—like Bible verses, commandments, stories in the Bible, ideas about how churches should run themselves, how to celebrate Communion—in proportion, and in proper relation to each other. That is not the Gospel, but it is the intellectual work which we must engage in if we want Gospel to be able to do its work free from foreign entanglements. Good theology is systematic; parts are not “just parts.” You can’t leave them lying around in heaps.

I thank God that Martin Luther and friends were able “to simplify the peculiarity of the Christian faith in an unprecedented, impressive, and penetrating manner . . . by concentrating on what they called ‘the doctrine of the gospel.’” (Wenzel Lohff) And I thank my friends and teachers of Crossings for helping me do exactly that. It’s an ongoing task. My life and ministry are still a bit of a mess, but I can testify that it has been of paramount importance in my ministry to be reminded frequently of the essential simplicity of the Word of God, and therefore of ministry and church.

So, what’s in your briefcase? If you are a preacher, do you make a brief case for the Good News every Sunday, when you open Scripture to the people of God? If

you are a Christian, do you get bogged down in the Bible?

Let Crossings help you learn what to strain at and what to swallow. We even have a system (just like Marie Kondo!) to help you organize what you run into in the Bible and in your life so that what you swallow doesn’t kill you but gives you life. The system is not just about Scripture; it helps us discern in everyday life, amid our quotidian concerns, the presence and the sting of the Law. Yes, the disorder in our homes and offices, reflecting our own internal conflicts, can overwhelm us and take away our life. But thanks be to God, who alone makes us good through the victory which is our faith. We will not die but live, thanks not to the “life-changing magic” of the law, but to the life-giving power of the Gospel.

Now, I’d better get back to doing my best—with joy—to clean up the rest of the mess.

Marcus Felde

A Note from Executive Director, Steve Kuhl:

The Easter Season came to an end with the celebration of Pentecost: the giving of the Holy Spirit. What that means is that God has now provided us with everything we need. But why is the Holy Spirit the capstone of God’s gifts?

We tend to talk a lot about Good Friday and Easter -- about what Christ has done for us -- but not so much about Pentecost and what the Holy Spirit does for us. We talk a lot about how God through Christ’s death has paved the way for the forgiveness of our sins and by his resurrection has conquered the curse of the law and power of death, making resurrection our promised future. But why do we need the Holy Spirit? Answer: Because, without the Holy Spirit, faith in Christ is impossible; and without faith in Christ, the works of Christ go unclaimed.

We heard all about this in the Gospel lesson on Pentecost Sunday. As Jesus says, the work of the Holy Spirit is to “take what is mine [the accomplishments of his death and resurrection] and declare it [give it] to you” (Jn 16:15). This the Spirit does by creating faith in Christ and what he promises. Without faith, the work of Christ goes to waste. Faith is making use of the forgiveness of sins every day. Faith is drawing comfort from the promise of the resurrection whenever we encounter the terrible reality of death. How is faith possible? Not by our own reasoning or strength, but by the work of the Holy Spirit who turns our hearts to trust in Christ when we hear the Gospel of Christ proclaimed.

But the Holy Spirit not only creates faith in us. It also gives us courage to testify to Christ -- to the faith that is in our hearts -- in word and deed (Jn 15:27). In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit also insures that the work of Christ gets published throughout the world. This the Spirit does by encouraging us in our testimony to Christ in the course of daily life. It is not by our own reason or strength, but by the power of the Holy Spirit that we live, move and have our being.

There are lots of ways in which the Holy Spirit publishes the Good News of Jesus Christ so that our faith may be strengthened and our testimony to the world clear. One way is through Crossings. Thank you for your continuing support of the work of Crossings. And don’t forget to mark your calendar for the upcoming January Conference where the theme will be the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian.

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