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"He Interpreted to Them"

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FOREWORD

“He Interpreted To Them”

This phrase, “... he interpreted to them...” (*diermeneusen autois*) encapsulates Jesus’ activity as he joins the two disciples on the road between Jerusalem and Emmaus. So much had happened and is happening. An eloquent and charismatic prophet had been discredited by the religious authorities and crucified by the political authorities leaving the hopes of his friends and followers as dead as he himself was. Yet, the story does not end. The body cannot be found, some of the women disciples see a vision of angels and report that Jesus is risen, the perplexity of amazement and disbelief overwhelms them. There is much to talk about, but who understands any of this enigmatic perplexity?

Today, we as the disciples of Jesus are still talking. Our journeys from Jerusalem to Toronto, to Waterloo, to Thunder Bay, to Snow Lake, to Winnipeg, to Saskatoon, to Elbow, to Calgary, to Wainwright, to Yellowknife, to Kamloops, to Whitehorse, to Vancouver, to Port Alberni and back again to Montreal, to Lunenburg, and to Fredericton are overwhelmed with perplexity. What is the distinctiveness of Canadian Lutheranism? How do we address the context in which we as the followers of Jesus find ourselves? Are our creeds, our confessions, our worship practices and our sermons as empty as the tomb? Where is the living Christ that addresses us as living Word? This issue of *Consensus* does not purport to answer all these questions definitively, but it does move these questions into the area of hermeneutics, interpretation.

The Church as “Mundhaus” (mouth-house), as Luther called it, does not talk just for the sake of talking, but it witnesses, bears testimony, that is, it has something to say

about something. It is that “about something” which makes the hermeneutical consideration such a crucial enterprise. Not simply “*that we say*”, but “*what we say*”, “*how we say it*”, “*what it means*”, and “*the ways in which it is understood and appropriated in action*” are important, and the basis for hermeneutical reflection. Hermeneutics is an opening up in order that we might understand; for us as Christians, it is part of the task of “faith seeking understanding”. It is this “about something” which engages us in faithful discourse about what it means to be forgiven, justified by faith, proclaimers of the crucified and risen Christ, living a life of worship in relationship with the triune God. It is this “about something” which engages the authors of the articles in this issue to “interpret to us” and to reflect on interpretation regarding the meaning of the Nicene Creed and its Christology, of worship as a hermeneutical event, of the discernment of text and context in preaching, and of the Lutheran Confessions’ understanding of faith with regard to the practice of communing baptized infants.

Harry O. Maier, having recently received his Doctor of Philosophy degree in Patristics from Oxford, provides a hermeneutical perspective with which we can join the conversation regarding the confession and controversy that revolved around the Nicene Creed and evolved subsequent to it. We are asked to participate with Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria in “a conversation with tradition”, not, warns Dr. Maier, in an evaluation of “the deployment of scientific methods”. In this way as faithful transmitters of the tradition we are caught up in a “productive” conversation where we can “appropriate” the insights of Nicea and its interpretation for us in our distinctively contemporary situation. Hermeneutics does not fossilize church history but “makes tradition one’s own”.

Within this contemporary re-affirmation of our heritage, tradition, and identity stands the event of worship. Pamela Ann Moeller, Assistant Professor of Worship and Homiletics at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon, examines this “microcosmic event”, that is, those “concentrated experiences of relationship meant to empower the worship life of the whole and the whole worshipping life of individuals as well as the congregation.” Architecture, spatial arrangement, meeting times, hospitality, language, bulletins, the reading of scripture, hymnody, procession, and ritual all provide an integral

hermeneutic for “the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel” (AC VII.1). Indeed, “We are quite capable of making enough negative decisions on our own...,” Dr. Moeller reminds us; her plea for hermeneutical reflection is to keep the intentionality of our worship centered in the Gospel.

What a colossal task! It surely is, echoes Pastor Jon M. Temme of Ascension Lutheran Church, Edmonton. In fact, in considering the colossal task of preaching Pastor Temme uses the analogy of the Colossus at Rhodes, not to promote preachers as “ancient wonders”, but to indicate that the pastor as preacher must have both feet firmly planted, hermeneutically, upon both text and context. The “colossal preacher” aware of the hermeneutical challenges employs a hermeneutical approach that “involves interpretation of both the text’s and context’s languages, traditions, *Sitzen im Leben*, and trajectories.” Articulating a hermeneutic for the homiletical *context* receives particular attention, for often this is neglected and does not enable the word as preached to become living Word for us.

By now, if it was not so beforehand, it should be evident that the hermeneutical task involves diversity and sometimes difference as it accompanies us in our perplexity of saying something about something. One particular issue that brings this to our attention is the sacramental practice of communing baptized infants. Is this practice “un-Lutheran” and “anti-Confessional” asks Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, Robert A. Kelly, of Waterloo Lutheran Seminary? Professor Kelly’s hermeneutical approach to this question is not simply to examine the “saying something”—the community of baptized infants, but to reflect upon what that practice says “about something”—namely, the understanding which the Lutheran Confessions, and the Confessors, Luther and Melanchthon, have about faith. Here we see Dr. Kelly joining in the confessional conversation. For if we understand what “faith” might mean, then we can see how it is used in our understanding of the sacraments and, indeed, if the particular practice under question is an appropriate expression of what we mean when we, as Lutherans, say/practice something about faith.

Although a “buzz-word” for many scholars during the past three decades, “Hermeneutics” is not a fad or trend. As these

four essays indicate, it is integral to the faith and life of the Christian community. It appropriates our historic tradition, it brings intentionality to our worship, it enlivens our preaching, and it calls us to a faithful accounting of our communal practices. No wonder that Luke recalls that one of the remembrances which the risen Christ bestows upon his perplexed disciples is hermeneutics. For Christ the incarnate Word to be living Word, "he interpreted to them."

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