

I-K Lutheran

Where God is doing new things

March 2019

*“How many times does a person have to be converted?”
“As many days as one lives,” was the immediate reply.*

Two pastors are in deep conversation in the novel, The Hammer of God, first published in 1941 by the Swedish Lutheran bishop, Bo Giertz. The younger, Torvik, is struggling with both his faith and his ministry. The elder pastor, Olle, probes Torvik’s spiritual life, especially his “conversion.”

“Let me tell you, Olle,” Torvik retorts, “I have been converted twice, and that should be enough. The first time was at college, the second as pastor here in Ödesjö. How many times does a person have to be converted?”

“As many days as one lives,” was the immediate reply.

The elder pastor is channeling Martin Luther’s reflection on baptism in the Small Catechism:

Baptism “signifies that the old person in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily sorrow for sin and through repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

Daily dying and rising with Christ, that’s the conversion to which we are called and to which the season of Lent beckons.

Unfortunately, our well-intentioned, sneakily insurgent tendency during Lent is to focus on ourselves: what we give up, what disciplines we engage, our failings, our sin, our spiritual gymnastics. These are important aspects of the Lenten sojourn, of course, but focus on ourselves cannot work the transformation, the conversion, that renders resurrection, the new, abundant, and lasting life that bursts from the tomb of Jesus. The gospel truth is that, try as we might, we cannot crucify ourselves or raise ourselves from the dead.

Lent and its disciplines are actually intended to turn our eyes not upon us, but upon Jesus, to borrow from an old hymn, to look full in his wonderful face. In the face of the crucified and risen Jesus, we see that God’s specialty, God’s chief work, is overcoming death with life, for us and for the world. This is why I love the counsel that the elder pastor, Olle, gives to Torvik, the younger, near the end of their conversation:

“Look in your Bible and see if the passages you have especially marked are not just those that speak of what you shall do. But you have not given half the attention to that which tells what Christ has done through his atonement.”
Torvik gave inward assent to that. It was true, completely true.
But he said nothing.

“We are in the midst of Lent, Brother,” said the rector. “Read God’s Word now as God’s Word, without skipping anything. Underline heavily everything about what our Savior has done for us. And if you like, write ‘For me’ in the margin. You need this yourself, and it is your duty to preach it to your congregation, as well.”

Now, there’s a Lenten discipline for all the baptized, pastors and people alike!

+ Bishop Bill Gafkjen



The National Lutheran Choir | February 28, 2019 | 8:00 p.m.
Bishop Gafjken will bring greetings from the Indiana-Kentucky Synod.



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Choir

Holy Spirit Mass

by Kim André Arnesen

February 28, 2019

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