

Hermann Weinlick
Thoughts on Serving
August 23, 2009

In July I found in Indianapolis for a meeting on the campus of Butler University. The morning of the meeting I was downtown looking for a place to have breakfast. At a traffic signal I walked up to a man, I would guess in his 40s, and asked where I could find a reasonably priced breakfast. It turned out he was a homeless person whom I ended up treating to breakfast.

Today's lesson from James speaks about faith and works and is often understood as faith vs. works. Martin Luther saw it this way and said James should not be in the Bible, it was a letter of straw. There is another way to read it. Friday I went to give blood. They took my pulse, my temperature, my blood pressure, all measures of my general health. In the same way, faith and works are measures of one's general spiritual health as a follower of Jesus. We cannot measure that only by one measure, any more than we can tell my health just from my temperature.

The portion read this morning is followed immediately by words about the tongue. The tongue is called a fire. It is like a well that produces brackish water, unfit to drink, or salt water. I would like to think this morning about the tongue more positively. The creation stories in Genesis tell us God said, "Let there be light!" and there was light. Jesus is called word, the logos, of God. Jesus speaks in stories. One way we serve, live out Christian lives, is in conversation.

I like to listen to the *Lehrer News Hour* on PBS at six o'clock. Sometimes however, supper preparation by Susan or me runs late and we do not eat before six. When that happens I do not watch Jim Lehrer, because I believe sitting down to supper is more important.

A few weeks ago I got an e-mail from a friend who graduated from Vanderbilt a few years ago. "You remember I was working at an administrative job at a law firm in Washington and was fairly unhappy with said job. The paycheck was nice, but So last year I quit my job and left DC behind in favor of the open road. I spent just under four months and just over 15,000 miles driving around this great country. . . . It was an enriching experience of self-discovery. While in hindsight quitting your job and road hopping around the country on

record gasoline prices and just before the biggest recession this country has seen in 70 years might seem a bit reckless and irresponsible, I like to think it only validated the timing of the trip. Had I waited until the economy dived, I might never have had the courage to leave. And I needed to leave. In fact, the seeds of this trip were planted by you, Hermann. I remember vividly a conversation we had in which you said that this was the age that we start to become the person we will be. Well I looked at myself and felt like I wasn't very much like the person I wanted to be. Thankfully I had the courage to change course."

I am not saying that is the course for everyone, just that conversations are important.

A few months ago I had lunch with one of the college students of the congregation. I asked him what he had learned from his time in college, He responded, "Nothing is simple, and everything's related." Not bad. We have some very gifted young adults in the congregation.

Friday I had lunch with an out-of-town delegate to the Lutheran national gathering. He is a retired doctor and we were talking about the nation's health care system. He is much more wary than I about changes in our health care system. But we had a long and good conversation.

We do our works, express our faith, in many ways, sometimes in something all of us engage in, simple conversation.