

A Sermon in Memory of Paul Edward Kretzmann

Psalm 112:6: The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance.

Following Scripture, a genuine Lutheran congregation will not give extraordinary exaltation to its departed members by eulogizing them at their funerals, for instance, or much worse, by praying to them for help, as in the Catholic church. Just the same, we do acknowledge that a proper honor and memory of them is God-pleasing. In the *Apology* [Defense] of the *Augsburg Confession*, one of our *Lutheran Confessions*, we hold that departed Christians could be remembered in several ways. "The first is thanksgiving. For we ought to give thanks to God because He has shown examples of mercy; because He has shown that He wishes to save men; because He has given teachers... to the Church.... Who have faithfully used these gifts.... The second service is the strengthening of our faith.... The third honor is the imitation, first, of faith, then of the other virtues, which everyone should imitate according to his calling" (Philip Melancthon, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," *Triglot Concordia*, editors W.H.T. Dau and F. Bente [Saint Louis: CPH, 1921], pages 343 & 345).

In regard to Paul Edward Kretzmann, we could and should recognize that he was a blessing to the Lutheran church, and that it would be proper and fitting to honor and to remember him in the ways in which the *Apology*

has indicated. In view of the fact that this Thursday (13 July) will mark the anniversary of his death, pause at this time to honor and to remember a former valued member of our blessed congregation -

Paul Edward Kretzmann

1. By thanking God for sending a gifted teacher to bless us.
2. By thanking God for strengthening the church's faith through him.
3. By imitating P. E. Kretzmann's faith and virtues.

1.

First of all, our congregation should give thanks to God for his mercy shown in saving P. E. Kretzmann's soul. As he so you also were born in original sin. You are as an unclean thing. As a result, you daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. To be sure, you would be sentenced to eternal doom if not for the great mercy of your loving Lord Jesus Christ who took your place, assumed your guilt, endured your damnation, paid off your debt, and offered you his righteousness to wear.

This astounding salvation was made yours when holy baptism washed your sins away, delivered you from death and the devil, removed your guilt, gave you a saving faith in the sin-conquering work of Christ, created in you a new nature, and brought you into God's family. Thanks be to God for showing you such great mercy!

Thanks be to God for showing the same mercy to P. E. Kretzmann at his baptism! He was born on the 24th of August, 1883, at Farmer's Retreat, Dearborn County, Indiana, the son of the Rev. Carl H. E. and Elizabeth (Polack) Kretzmann. He graduated from Concordia College, Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1902, studied at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, Missouri, 1902-1903, and continued his theological education by correspondence after moving to the State of Colorado for reasons of health.

He was ordained to the Lutheran ministry in 1906; was pastor of Saint Peter's Church at Shady Bend, Kansas, 1905-07, where he found his faithful wife, Louise Schroeder, with whom he was united in holy matrimony of 29 August, 1907; then at Emmaus Church, Denver, Colorado, 1907-1912.

P. E. K. then was called to a professorship in science and mathematics at Concordia College, Saint Paul, Minnesota, where he spent the years 1912-1919. He was brought to Saint Louis by the call of the Literary Board of the Missouri Synod to undertake the preparation of the great *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, on which he was at work in his office at Concordia Publishing House from 1919 to the spring of 1923.

Dr. Kretzmann next was called to Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, where he taught courses in New Testament interpretation and religious education from 1923 to 1946.

Besides his teaching activity the doctor also labored in the practical work of the church. While teaching in Saint Paul, he served as an assistant pastor in two churches. While preparing his monumental *Popular Commentary* and instructing in Saint Louis he was also assistant pastor of Immanuel Church, Saint Charles, Missouri, 1919-1938.

"His retirement from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, was occasioned by his opposition to the new and unscriptural trends which had begun to become evident in the faculty. But when called to the large St. John's Church at Forest Park, Illinois, he was both physically and spiritually ready to accept the responsibility of this exacting pastorate, and served here from 1946-1948. He was the first to see clearly the beginnings of the apostasy from its original position which has characterized the Missouri Synod theology, especially since the 'Statement of the Forty-four' (Chicago, 1945) and the acceptance of the 'Common Confession' by majority voice vote at the Milwaukee Convention of the Missouri Synod in 1950. When the congregation at Forest Park did not afford him the solid backing he had been led to expect in taking action against these trends he resigned from the pastorate. Thereafter he resided for a time in Cuba, Missouri, where he was active in literary work" (Wallace H. McLaughlin).

Think of it: if the Hebrews returning from the Babylonian captivity had remembered how glorious Solomon's Temple had been, and consequently cried

after a more plain structure was erected in its place (Ezra 3:12), how much more devastated would they have been to have witnessed the actual destruction of the Temple and its subsequent pile of rubble! Likewise how sad P. E. Kretzmann must have been upon seeing the Missouri Synod from the 1930's onward willingly embrace with energy ever more false doctrine and practice which the two previous generations had avoided like the plague! He had seen the Missouri Synod at its height, when so many fellow-laborers worked and prayed to enlarge the kingdom of God by many thousands of congregations across the country and in foreign lands, not misleading them or cheating them out of God's Word in any way, but by bringing them the full truth of God's pure Word in a golden age of orthodoxy. Yet he lived to see the third generation, which "knew not Joseph," turn its "ears away from the truth." It despised the priceless biblical heirlooms which it had inherited, and, consequently, discarded that birthright, as Esau had, for something pleasing to its flesh, implementing a precipitous fall from that golden age. From a height of glory to a depth of infamy: what a spiritual fall! What a waste! What an unnecessary loss! How this tragedy must have deeply saddened the heart of P. E. Kretzmann!

"After having previously renounced his personal membership in the Missouri Synod as the first of all his brethren in the ministry to take this step, he took part with... a number of other brethren in the organization of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference in September, 1951, of which he became the first Vice President (later President), was the author of its specific confessional

documents, and the first president of the Orthodox Lutheran Theological Seminary at Minneapolis (1952-1958)... After his retirement from the O.L.C. Seminary he was for a time a member of Grace Lutheran congregation, Fridley, Minnesota, from which he obtained a transfer of membership to Good Shepherd Lutheran Church of Golden Valley... an independent congregation of conservative Lutheran faith" (Wallace Herdon McLaughlin, P. E. K.'s final pastor and long-time friend who officiated at his funeral at Good Shepherd).

He departed this life on 13 July, 1965, at the age of 81 years, 10 months, and 19 days.

The *Apology* also has pointed out that we could remember and honor departed Christians by thanking God for raising them up as talented teachers for his beloved church, who faithfully used their gifts for the edification of the body of Christ. Dr. Kretzmann was indeed such a teacher. For instance, during his earlier teaching career both in Saint Paul and in Saint Louis he did post-graduate work and attained the following degrees (none of them honorary): An M. A. from the University of Minnesota in 1913; a Ph. D., in 1915; a B. D., Chicago Lutheran Seminary, 1920; a D. D., 1922; student (in Law) at La Salle University, Chicago; an Ed. D., in 1936, at Washington University, Saint Louis.

In addition to being a fully trained student of art and literature, P.E.K. was also a poet. His library contains sixteen volumes of original poetry. [Mr. Paul Darsow of Plymouth, Minnesota has his library.] Until

the year of his last illness he continued his daily reading of the Greek New Testament and Hebrew Old Testament, having read the former through more than a hundred times and also the entire Hebrew Bible many times. He was in the habit of reading through the *Triglot Concordia* yearly.

In volume 29 of *Who's Who in America*, 1956-1957, forty publications are attributed to him. What a prolific writer he was! Thank God for giving to the church such a gifted teacher! Especially thank him for the privilege of enjoying the edification of P.E.K. in our own local congregation!

Moreover, pause for a moment, and consider this: Dr. Kretzmann did not have to serve the church! With his remarkable talents he easily could have made fame and fortune in the secular world as an author, lecturer, or professor. However, he did not. He reverently bowed his head and humbly offered his talents to the gracious God who had been merciful to him, a sinner. Though his monumental *Popular Commentary of the Bible* has sold over 80,000 copies, he never received any royalties from it. Indeed, in his later years in Minneapolis, he was quite impoverished. Which of you would be willing to sacrifice as much for the Lord? "Not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (1st Corinthians 1:26). Yet what faithfulness P. E. Kretzmann showed in using his talents for the edification of the church!

2.

In the second place, according to our creed, the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, you could and should honor and remember one such as Dr. Kretzmann because of the part which he has played in strengthening your faith and the faith of the church. For example, as it was just mentioned, his *Popular Commentary* has sold over 80,000 copies, and was still being published after his death. Indeed, used copies are still available. Thus his efforts to edify the church saw fruit even after his death, not only through his *Commentary*, but through his other books as well.

Besides his published writings and all of the pupils which he taught, he also entered the pulpit. For instance, according to his own count, as of June, 1956, he had assembled over 3,795 sermons, though he preached additional sermons after that. It has been related from those who have heard him that his sermons were the preacher's ideal: they were to the point, easily understandable, delivered in simple language, always condescending (in the good sense) to the group he was addressing, and gave the hearer always one clear truth to take home with him.

Furthermore, P.E.K. helped by bringing souls into the church and into saving faith in their divine Deliverer. For example, the following anecdote has been related from two different sources. Dr. Kretzmann did not seem to waste any of his waking hours. While teaching he had the habit of starting out for class a bit early in order to canvass, that is, to knock on doors in the neighborhood

that were on his way in order to find the unchurched and lead them to Christ. Once he came across a person who was incensed at the interruption, and promptly declared, "Do not ever knock on my front door again!" With that P.E.K. left, went around to the back of the house, and meekly knocked on the back door. After the resident opened and saw who it was, his resistance sank, and Dr. K. was let in by him. Later that person became a faithful church member.

3.

In the third place, according to our excellent confession, the *Apology*, we should honor and remember those who have departed this life to be with Christ by imitating their trust and other virtues. Indeed, we would do well to comport ourselves as P.E.K. did. For instance, he was a kind Christian gentleman. He did not insist on having his own way. Whenever someone would have gone to him with a problem, he would respond, "What does Scripture say?" If Scripture would be silent on the matter he would then advise, "Decide it among yourselves." After every meal the Dr. would have a five or ten minute devotion even if guests would be present. Moreover, his immense learning did not get in the way of his child-like faith, even though some unregenerate scholars once chided him: "Why does a learned man like you believe such simple things?" The Dr. was a very calm person through any turmoil. Yet he would be scripturally intolerant when it would come to false preaching.

We should imitate P.E.K. also in that he would obey Scripture's directive to "test the spirits," that is, to "test the spirit of the religious teachers." We should check or authenticate what they would be teaching, "for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1st John 4:1); because the Lord occasionally permits false teachers to arise in the midst of his church in order to test his people whether they will continue in his Word (Deuteronomy 13:3; 1st Corinthians 11:19). The Dr. was not infected with synoditis, that is to say, with the attitude which would think: "My synod: right or wrong." He kept his ear to the ground (2nd Timothy 4:5), so to speak, and was alert after false teachers arose and began to proclaim sophistries in the Missouri Synod.

At the seminary in Saint Louis, after the Second World War, a new teaching method was introduced in which the students would give their views on a subject instead of having the professor simply lecture. In one of Dr. Kretzmann's classes the students would introduce novel ideas with the intention "to get his goat." Finally, one time after the students had succeeded in aggravating him, he replied, "There is a new thinking among you new students." Indeed, a new generation had arisen in the Missouri Synod that knew neither Walther nor Pieper. In fact, the seeds of this movement had begun among the clergy in New York City - the very pastoral conference which only years earlier faithfully had made a courageous assertive defense of biblical truth which, subsequently, became widely-publicized in the *New York Times* and in other dailies across the country (1st

Corinthians 10:12).¹ Thus, according to his typical method, the devil would get his revenge.

In the 1930's and the 1940's more and more pastors and professors of the Missouri Synod began to resent the priceless heirloom of orthodoxy that carefully had been handed down to them. They conspired, and "conspired" is not an uncharitable description, but an accurate one, to jettison the old fashioned *status quo* creed of their synod for a more fashionable creed, and in order to be in fellowship with the American Lutheran Church. This in turn created a climate for the spawning of even more errors (sophistries) in teaching and in practice, which, instead of being eradicated in the scriptural manner, were tolerated by sympathetic or intimidated synodical officials. Though in this age of public relations synods will handle false teachers irresolutely, and not as the cancer and the leaven (2nd Timothy 2:17; Galatians 5:9) that they actually are, Dr. Kretzmann would not waver. He would face the person and the error squarely, and would take scriptural action (Titus 1:11; 2nd Timothy 3:16). For example, he resigned from the Saint Louis seminary after he saw unscriptural and unreversed trends in that faculty. He accepted a call to a pastorate in Chicago (Forest Park) from which he hoped to continue his scriptural admonishment of the false brethren and of their spread of errors. In fact, the president of the Missouri Synod was a member of his congregation at the time. Just the same, P.E.K. fearlessly came out weekly

with a mimeographed, eight and one half by eleven inches sheet criticizing President Behnken and others for failing to discipline the errorists as it was their sworn duty to do.

However, after the doctrinally flawed *Common Confession* hastily was adopted a few years later at the 1950 convention of the Missouri Synod, not unanimously, as a doctrinal vote must be accepted (1st Corinthians 1:10), and there was no reversal of Missouri's liberalism in sight, P.E.K. and others were compelled to obey Romans 16:17 and 2nd Thessalonians 3:6 & 14, and to withdraw from fellowship.

Dr. Kretzmann took action. He listened to Scripture. He obeyed Romans 16:17 and did what former leaders and presidents of the Missouri Synod themselves had declared they would do. For instance, C.F.W. Walther declared in an Iowa District Convention essay in 1879: "Salvation by no means depends on us, nor also on the Missouri Synod. So, if it would no longer preach the pure Word of God, then it will be worthy of nothing but that one should forsake it." Professor Franz Pieper stated in 1890: "If it were shown us that even one pastor were preaching false doctrine and that even one periodical were in the service of false doctrine and we would not put a stop to this false doctrine, we would thereby have ceased to be an orthodox synod and would have become a unionistic fellowship." Thus you should not remain in fellowship with those who would reject the truth. You should obey our Lord, and avoid them.

¹ See W.H.T. Dau, *The Logical and Historical Inaccuracies of the Hon. Bourke Cockran* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1909), page 5.

Some of you at Good Shepherd, especially you elder members, did do this, and met up with the Dr. in the 1950's after he came to Minneapolis. You had a rare opportunity which the rest of us members did not have. May you have a blessed memory of Dr. Kretzmann, and honor and remember him by following his scriptural virtues! Our congregation was blessed highly by the presence of this faithful servant.

Indeed, you have been blessed. Yet to whom much is given much will be required (Luke 12:48). The pure Word and practice which P.E.K., Wallace H. McLaughlin, and others in this congregation handed down to you is a solemn responsibility. Will you treasure it with the same faithfulness and obedience? Few churches remain orthodox over a hundred years. If you or your children would not appreciate the pure gospel, then you, too, will become erroristic. As you would stand or fall, so will be the future of this congregation.

Pray to the Lord for the desire to continue to love his Word! Pray, too, that the Lord of the harvest may send more workers like P.E.K. to you!



P. E. Kretzmann in the year 1946 or before.