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From Death to Life – The Christological Crossing: A Homily for Heino O. Kadai

Dean O. Wenthe

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The text is the lesson from the Gospel of John read previously, especially chapter five, verse twenty-four: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

Members of the seminary family, fellow clergy, friends and family of Dr. Heino Kadai, and especially you, Lois.

Our seminary, in ways never experienced by large universities, is defined by its professors. The sheer size of an Indiana University or a Purdue University means that the departure or death of a professor is recognized by only a small portion of the community. It is not so with us.

A Lutheran seminary, in ways unique to its mission, is defined by its faculty. Our faculty is called to do more than simply lecture or impart information, more than construct syllabi and revise curriculum. We are called to form, to shape, to nurture in casual as well as confidential exchanges. Our professors are called to talk as well as to teach, to care as well as to conjugate, to confess as well as communicate.

So when a professor retires, or when one dies, we must pause and reflect. The very character of our community is affected at its center. Reflect for a moment on our recent losses – Dr. Robert Preus, Dr. Harold Buls, Dr. Donald Deffner, Dr. G. Waldemar Degner, Dr. Howard Tepker – and now Dr. Heino Kadai. How can we absorb such losses and continue with confidence unshaken?

Surely the answer is in what marked these men and still marks their heroic wives. It is what distinguishes them and us.

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It is what sets us off and makes us radical voices in our epoch. The story of these men, and specifically of Heino Kadai, is their participation in a radical reversal of what every fallen culture rehearses and recites.

Look about in our day. The plot and the paradigm are transparently evident—from the elderly to the unborn, from the grade school to the grad school. You can feel the fear, you can see the flight—the rush to play; the need to purchase; the push to squeeze the most from every moment and never to mention the end, the finale. For we live in a time that is robbed of richness and wholeness and holiness, all because it embraces and assumes that life is followed by death. Dark, deep, and forever—death swallows up all hope in a culture where the intellect is clouded and people are reduced to mere moments before endless silence.

Not so with us! Not so with Dr. Heino Kadai! His life and vocation were a celebration of the great reversal! Death will be followed by life.

Dr. Kadai experienced and entered that life when he was joined to Christ in the sacrament of holy baptism on December 26, 1931, at St. Peter Lutheran Church, Tartu, Estonia. At that moment, as St. John states, Dr. Kadai “passed from death to life.” It was a *Christological crossing*, for there is life in only one locus: not in an idea, not in a philosophy, not in a technology. Real life, the passage from death to life, occurs only in the person of Jesus Christ. The holy water of baptism seals the reversal. In this man, Dr. Heino Kadai, life will follow death; a full, free, innocent, and glorious life in Christ will be lived before the heavenly Father.

This life in Christ was affirmed and confessed by Dr. Kadai after his family had fled to Ölsnitz, Saxony, Germany, in 1944 and then to Augsburg in 1945. There, in Augsburg, on November 13, 1948, Dr. Kadai publicly participated in the Lord’s Supper in conjunction with his confirmation at St. Ulrich Church. The life of Christ to which he was joined in holy baptism was now confirmed and nurtured and nourished by his

participation in the very body and blood of Christ at the Lord's altar.

And for us the confession that Dr. Kadai was in Christ and had passed from death to life was again heard in his ordination and installation on September 11, 1960, at our seminary when it was in Springfield, Illinois. Just prior to the ordination and installation of Dr. Kadai, these hymn stanzas were sung:

Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus,
Can my heartfelt longing still.
Lo, I pledge myself to Jesus
What He wills alone to will.
For my heart, which He hath filled,
Ever cries, Lord, as Thou wilt.

One there is for whom I'm living,
Whom I love most tenderly;
Unto Jesus I am giving
What in love He gave to me.
Jesus' blood hides all my guilt;
Lord, oh, lead me as Thou wilt.

Lois and family, that is glorious comfort even in the heartbreak of sudden loss. In Christ death is followed by life – a life that was already enjoyed in font and altar and hearing the living voice of Jesus through His apostles and prophets.

We rejoice that the Lord led Heino to us and that for four decades he enriched our community by living the truth that death is swallowed up in the life of Jesus and that in the holy waters of baptism, in the holy eucharist, and in the holy word there is even now life that follows every dying moment and death itself.

As I reviewed Heino's ordination and installation service, I could not help but note the other faculty and staff who were newly appointed at the same service: Dr. Gerhard Aho, Dr. George Dolak, Dr. Eugene Klug, Dr. Allen Nauss, Dr. Raymond Surburg. Dr. Kadai has now joined Drs. Aho and Dolak, but

what binds us to them and forever unites us is the fact that we have been joined to Christ.

As our text so succinctly says it and the Lord so beautifully bestows: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; for he has crossed over from death to life." This is the great Christological crossing.