

THE USE OF VISUAL PRESENTATION TECHNOLOGY IN SERMONS: HOW TO USE  
THIS TECHNOLOGY WISELY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MARCH 2014

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis paper is to explore the question of whether or not it is appropriate or wise to use visual presentation technology like PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi, etc., in sermons. In order to do this, there is a study conducted of the use of visual aids in the Bible. There is a specific emphasis on the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Jesus. There is also a study of preaching and teaching to make sure visual presentation technology is not forcing preaching out of the pulpit and substituting it with teaching. There is also research conducted on the pros and cons of using digital visual technology. Much of this research was done using books and articles already written on the topic. Finally, the last section provides advice on how to implement visual presentation technology into a church, how to use visual technology in the pulpit, and how to put together a team to support this technology. In summary, the use of visual aids is indeed supported in the Bible. Using PowerPoint and similar software does not have to substitute teaching for preaching in the pulpit. Every church's context determines the use of visual presentation technology.

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## **Introduction**

Worship leaders hotly debate the topic of the use of visual presentation technology (i.e., PowerPoint, Keynote or similar software) in worship and preaching. People on both sides of the issue hold strong opinions in the matter. Those against the use of this technology argue that it is a distraction and can turn into a crutch for the preacher. They say visual presentation technology leads to poorly written and poorly memorized sermons. Those who are for the use of this tool see the use of visual aids as an opportunity to enhance their message and keep people's attention. They say visual aids have been used for centuries and now software like PowerPoint and Keynote are simply a digital visual aid. So which side is correct? What is the role of visual presentation technology in worship, specifically during sermons?

This topic deserves serious consideration and thought. Many pastors across denominational lines have jumped into visual presentations without thinking it through completely in an attempt to remain relevant with culture. Others have completely dismissed the thought of using this technology without carefully thinking about how this software could be a benefit in the church. There is real danger if neither side has carefully thought about the pros and cons of using visual presentation technology. The purpose of this thesis paper is to explore this issue and the pros and cons to using this technology in sermons.

First, one must understand the history and use of visual aids in worship and preaching, especially in the Bible. The prophets used visual aids as commanded by God. Jesus preached visually to the disciples and Jews. After Bible times, Christians used visual aids in an era when literacy was not common among the masses. The history of visual aids in the Church should be studied when it comes to the debate over visual aids on computers and screens.

Secondly, everything in worship and preaching has significance and meaning. There can be no indifference in worship. There can be adiaphora, but there cannot be indifference. So what is the point of the PowerPoint and similar technologies? What are the intended effects and consequences of using a projector and screen with a sermon? Is it an attempt to fulfill a vain need to be relevant, or is it the advancement of visual aids historically used in the church? Is it used to teach, or is it used to preach? A preacher must know the intended use of his visual presentation and the message he is portraying when he uses it. He should know the significance and meaning of using slideware technology.

Thirdly, if preachers are going to use visual presentation technology on Sunday morning for their sermons, it needs to be done in the correct way. Everything in worship should be done with excellence. This technology can be an effective tool when it is done well, but it can also be abused and misused leading to distraction and confusion. This paper will set forth some basic guidelines on how to use digital visual presentations effectively.

Pastors across the country are going to continue to use this kind of technology. Pastors in the WELS have already started using it as well. This is not something that is going away anytime soon, and as technology advances, so will the use of digital visuals in church. This subject has received some attention in our synod, particularly by Pastor Jon Schroeder. But that work is over ten years old now, and with technology ever changing, a fresh perspective on this issue is helpful. This paper intends to be a resource for worship leaders and worship planners as they discuss the history of visual aids, the pros and cons of using PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi, etc., in worship and sermons, and how best to implement this technological tool. Slideware technology can be a useful tool in the proclamation of the gospel when it is done well in the correct context.

### **Literature Review**

The issue of using presentational technology in sermons has received attention in some Christian circles. As already mentioned, Pastor Jon Schroeder of the WELS did some work on this in the past. Pastors, worship leaders, and communicators from other denominations have also chimed in on the topic with books, articles, and interviews.

One of the best books on the subject of using technology in worship was written by Quentin Schultze. He is experienced in the use of presentational technologies and has a passion for it as well. He achieved a PhD from the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois, and he is currently a professor in communications at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI. His book entitled *High-Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely* is a helpful resource for any pastor who is interested in using technology in church whether for liturgy or for sermons. Schultze's book does not tackle the topic of whether it is biblically right to worship with PowerPoint or similar technology, but rather the practical questions and applications of using presentational technologies. Some of his topics include the context of the church, the type of pictures displayed on the worship screen, and how to

implement technology in the worship space. One of the most helpful parts of this book is that it encourages readers to take a hard look at the technology they are using and determine if it is enhancing worship or distracting from it. This book can also be used as a guide for ministry leaders who want to incorporate media and technology into their worship setting. Despite being written in 2003, the book is still relevant. The principles and guidelines that Schultze gives are still applicable to technology and worship today. Again, this book is an important resource for anyone interested in implementing media and technology into his church.

Why is this book so important? It's one of the few published books on technology and worship for one thing. Also, Schultze gives balanced thought and insight. He does not just blindly say that every church should be using technology in worship, but instead talks about the appropriateness of it and how different contexts change the use of this technology. Schultze states his thesis as this:

My thesis is that *liturgical* wisdom (i.e., wisdom about how to plan, order, and conduct worship) should direct how we employ presentation technologies. As stewards of worship who seek to express our love of God in praise and thanksgiving, we should *adapt* technology to authentic, meaningful, and God-glorifying worship. The love of the Lord is the foundation to all true worship<sup>1</sup> (John 4:23). Technology should nurture such love.<sup>2</sup>

There are two important things to learn about Schultze from his thesis. The first is that he has a great love and passion for the liturgy. That is expressed throughout his book. He stresses the importance of pastors and worship leaders learning more about the liturgy and teaching lay members about it.<sup>3</sup> The second is that Schultze believes technology should be adapted to meet the purposes of worship, not that worship should be adapted to meet technology. That is a key point that Schultze makes again and again.

Another great point that Schultze makes in his book is that technology is not the savior of bad worship. Simply adding some technology to a worship service cannot make it better. In fact, it can and probably will make it even worse. Schultze describes a church that wanted to add technology and in order to do so they put a screen over their large cross at the front of the church.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note that as Confessional Lutherans we recognize that God's love for us is the basis of our worship.

<sup>2</sup> Quentin Schultze, *High-Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Schultze, 98.

<sup>4</sup> Schultze, 13.

While noting the potential pitfalls of technology, Schultze also explains how technology can be used as a valuable tool. He writes: “Although we sometimes overestimate the value of new technologies in worship, we had better not underestimate their potential as well. Let the technically, artistically, and liturgically gifted all join together in planning and performing liturgy.”<sup>5</sup> In his work, Schultze talks about the potential that technology has and how to best harness this tool for worship and praise to God.

The topic of presentational technologies has also been addressed in many magazine, journal, and periodical articles. In the summer 2007 edition of *Leadership* journal, writers and contributors tackle this topic. The whole issue is devoted to the use of presentational technologies in church. This edition of the periodical is full of interesting polls and articles and is a helpful resource for those interested in further reading on this topic. One of the most interesting articles was written by Shane Higgs. Higgs is currently the teaching pastor at Mars Hill in Grand Rapids, MI, but he was not always a pastor. His first job was in advertising which led to his interest in using presentational technologies in worship. He has authored a couple of books on this subject: *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*, published in 2009 and *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church*, published in 2006. His most recent book, *Flickering Pixels*, does not just struggle with the content of the message, but also the media used to deliver the message. How the message is delivered says something about the message itself. He contends that in the past print led to a more rationalistic and systematic review of the Scriptures. He says that the current trend of using video and pictures to tell the story of the Bible is leading to an emphasis of the gospel as story and less of an emphasis on systematics. Higgs does not say whether technology is good or bad for worship, but he does offer tips on how to understand technology. His goal is for worship leaders to control technology instead of the other way around.

One of the most thought provoking ideas that Higgs writes about is that pictures are overtaking print. He writes:

In our current culture, we increasingly communicate with images and icons rather than phonetic words, and as a result Western culture has embraced elements of Eastern

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<sup>5</sup> Schultze, 103-104.

thought patterns and values, which has had a significant influence in shaping Western postmodern culture.”<sup>6</sup>

Hipps says that people are becoming more and more accustomed to communicating via images rather than words. While it does seem like society has more and more images, Hipps seems to go a little too far when he suggests that words will be replaced by images as the primary mode of communication. Again, for anyone who is interested in using technology in church, Hipps is a useful read because of his thought provoking ideas and concepts. While one may not agree with him all the time, he does offer some interesting insight to the world of images and symbols.

There are many other articles regarding presentational technologies. Some of them are forcefully in favor of this concept in worship and sermons. One of these articles was written by Richard Doebler. He is so in favor of using visuals in church that he even confesses to using an overhead projector in church before digital technology existed.<sup>7</sup> Another proponent for the use technology in worship and sermons is Richard Vosko. He really emphasizes the need for having the right architecture and design for multimedia presentations. According to Vosko’s website, he has worked throughout North America for forty years as an award winning sacred space planner for Catholic and Jewish congregations.<sup>8</sup> Andrew Root is a professor at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, MN who is also in favor of using digital technology. Like Hipps, he sees the world as moving more toward images rather than words.<sup>9</sup> Root also gives some good practical advice on what to do and what not to do in a visual presentation. One thing he speaks out against is just filling the screen with words during the sermon, “If you are simply going to fill slides with text, then you are better off passing out the outline to your sermon.”<sup>10</sup> All of these men speak passionately about the use of visual presentation technology in sermons and worship.

Others are adamant that this PowerPoint and similar software do not belong in the church. One of the articles written against using visual technology in sermons was written by

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<sup>6</sup> Shane Hipps, “But Now I See: Words Once Dominated Western Culture, but Now Images Are Changing Everything from Our Theology and Preaching to the Ways Our Brains Process Information,” *Leadership* 28, no. 3 (June 1, 2007): 22.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Doebler, “There’s PowerPoint in the Blood : I Can’t Imagine Preaching without My Electronic Research Assistant and Sermon Coach,” *Leadership* 21, no. 1 (December 1, 2000): 46.

<sup>8</sup> “Richard Vosko,” Richard Vosko, <http://www.rvosko.com/index.asp> (accessed February 15, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Root, “PowerPoint in Preaching? Yes...but!” *Word & World* 28, no. 4 (September 1, 2008): *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed August 28, 2013): 421.

<sup>10</sup> Root, 421.



Philip Quanbeck who is the chair of religion at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, MN. He offers a few reasons why he is against PowerPoint and similar slideware technology, but his biggest argument is this:

The final argument, however, is the most significant. Preaching is about the word, and PowerPoint is not. In using PowerPoint, or any display, the preacher is in competition with the image or the list. When given the option, the audience will look past the preacher to the image on the screen and will prefer looking over listening.<sup>11</sup>

Quanbeck does not see a harmony between the pastor and the visual aid, only a distraction.

Another antagonist of digital projection in sermons is the uniquely named Will Willimon.

Willimon is a theologian of the United Methodist Church and is currently a professor of practical ministry and Duke Divinity School in Chapel Hill, NC. His biggest argument against the use of presentation software is the temptation to use bullet points which leads to what he calls “bullet point preaching.”<sup>12</sup> There will be a longer discussion on this later in the paper.

This is a sampling of some of the best of what is out there right now on the use of digital projection in churches for worship and sermons. These articles were all reviewed by their peers and published. There are certainly more articles and blogs and opinions on this subject. Many of them can be read on the internet. But these articles were some of the most helpful for this thesis paper.

Another area of focus in this thesis is how to best use visual presentation technology in worship. In order to gather information on this topic, some research into the business world was necessary. What are the current trends in how businesses and companies use slideware technology? One of the books that stands above the rest is *Presentation zen: simple ideas on presentation design and delivery* by Garr Reynolds. He uses research and experience to give great ideas on how to present visually. He also makes use of other experts in the field of presentation and has their short articles sprinkled throughout his book. One downside is his focus and fascination with the Buddhist religion and its *zen* philosophy. But when read with a Lutheran filter, this book can be extremely helpful. Reynolds mostly offers theoretical ideas on how to use presentation technology well, but some of the articles written by others in his book give practical

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<sup>11</sup> Philip A. Quanbeck, II, “PowerPoint in Preaching?: No!” *Word & World* 28, no. 4 (September 1, 2008): *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed August 28, 2013): 422.

<sup>12</sup> Will Willimon, “Power Pointless: The Way We Distill the Gospel for Presentation Can Take the Life out of it.” *Leadership* 28. (Summer of 2007): 34.

advice on how to do this. Reynolds sees the need to speak and present well with technology as hugely important. He writes:

One reason that the ability to speak passionately, clearly, and visually is more important today than ever before is the fantastic reach our talks can have, largely thanks to the power of online video. What you say and what you present visually can now be captured easily and cheaply in HD video and broadcast around the world for anyone to see. The potential of your speech or presentation to change things – maybe even change the world – goes far beyond just the words spoken. Words are important; but if it was just about words, we could create a detailed document, disseminate it, and that would be that. An effective presentation allows us to amplify the meaning of our words.<sup>13</sup>

Reynolds sees a visual presentation as being able to “amplify the meaning of our words.” He is obviously coming at this from a secular point of view, but there is still a lot to be learned from his knowledge on presenting visually. Reynolds also says that now it is more important than ever to present well because of the ability to capture presentations on video and post them on the internet. In this way a well prepared sermon could be beneficial for more than just the gathered congregation on Sunday morning, but to anyone who views it online.

Reynolds not only gives advice on how to put together a good digital visual presentation, but also on presenting in general. He describes one of the best presentations he ever saw from a CEO and summarizes why it was so good:

(1) He knew his material inside and out, and he knew what he wanted to say. (2) He stood front and center and spoke in a real, down-to-earth language that was conversational yet passionate. (3) He did not let technical glitches get in his way. When they occurred, he moved forward without missing a beat, never losing his engagement with the audience. (4) He used real, sometimes humorous, anecdotes to illustrate his points, and all his stories were supremely poignant and relevant, supporting his core message.<sup>14</sup>

Reynolds basically describes some of the essentials of how a pastor should present the Word of God on a weekly basis. He should know his sermon extremely well after working on it all week and memorizing it. The pastor stands at the front of the church and whether he preaches from the pulpit or not, it does not matter because he is still the focus of people’s attention while he is preaching. And the language a pastor uses should be inviting for the people to listen while at the same time displaying the passion the pastor has for the message. Not every pastor uses technology so number three does not apply to everyone. But to pastors who do use technology

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<sup>13</sup> Garr Reynolds, *Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2012), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, 90.

that is exactly how to handle those annoying glitches. And finally, pastors should not just tell stories for the fun of it, but to make a point. So while Reynolds writes for the business world, a lot of what he says transfers to pastors and their visual presentations.

There are even more books, articles, and websites devoted on how to use technology like PowerPoint than there are on using PowerPoint in worship. When researching the best way to use digital technology in worship, it is important to use a discerning eye. One simply cannot trust the average blog or online article to give solid, researched advice. It is important to have a trusted source that has been reviewed well amongst other experts in the field. Garr Reynolds' book is one of those.

One void in the area of using visual presentation technology is that of the biblical examples of visual aids. That is one area this paper aims to explore and explain. Another void is how presentational technologies in church are not just merely teaching, but can also be proclamation. The difference between teaching and preaching is explored particularly in relation to digital presentations in sermons. Hopefully this paper will serve as a helpful tool for those interested in using presentational technologies in worship.

### **The Use of Visual Aids in the Old Testament**

When PowerPoint launched for the first time in May of 1990, it did not create the first use of visual aid in the art and science of public speaking. Speakers have used visual aids in their speeches for a long time. Pastors and teachers made use of overhead projectors before PowerPoint existed. Churches proclaimed the gospel through stained glass windows. Jesus used object lessons. In the Old Testament, God had his prophets use props and visual aids to help convey his messages. Visual aids and public speaking have a long and mostly successful relationship.

One prophetic book that is rich with visual aids is the prophecy of Jeremiah. First of all, consider the context of Jeremiah's preaching and his original audience. Jeremiah preached and taught in some of Judah's darkest days. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians, and Judah was like a ping pong ball being bounced back and forth between the Egyptians and the Babylonians. Jeremiah delivered his message over forty-one years of ministry. God's message through him was meant for many generations. Jeremiah's ministry spanned from

the last righteous and God-fearing king, Josiah, to the Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. Unfortunately, most of those years were spent preaching to an apostate nation, and a nation that would not listen.

In his popular commentary in the People's Bible Series, Professor David Gosdeck suggests five main purposes for the writing of Jeremiah:

1. To preach repentance to an ungodly nation in the hope that all who heard the message would repent.
2. To proclaim certain judgment if they did not repent.
3. To leave them without excuse so that in the future the survivors might repent.
4. To give the believers among them an understanding of what God was doing.
5. To comfort the believers with the sure promises of the Lord.<sup>15</sup>

There is no doubt that much of Jeremiah's preaching was law oriented. His audience needed to hear their sins and their desperate need for God. But even among these rebellious people, God had reserved for himself a remnant of faithful believers. Jeremiah preached both law and gospel as was needed. With a proper understanding of the time and context of Jeremiah, one can set out to understand the impact of God's message through Jeremiah, and more importantly for this paper, the impact made by the mode of delivery of Jeremiah's message.

Another important item to note about the book of Jeremiah is that the prophet Jeremiah is not the only one who uses visual aids in preaching his message. God employs visual aids to help teach Jeremiah how he is to preach to the people. God does not just send Jeremiah a textbook to learn how to be a prophet. There was no book entitled *Prophecy for Dummies* to teach Jeremiah. Nor did God just lecture Jeremiah to try to teach and motivate him. God made use of visions and pictures.

Early in the book of Jeremiah, readers see the rich use of visual aids and pictures. Right away at the start of the book, the reader learns about how God called Jeremiah to be his prophet. There is some debate as to whether Jeremiah's calling was a vision or actually happened in the physical realm, but either way the effect was the same for Jeremiah. There is no doubt that the impact on Jeremiah's psyche was real when God touched his lips.

Jeremiah needed reassurance and motivation from God to be his prophet. Concerning this special calling, C. H. Dyer says, "This visible manifestation of God was His object lesson to tell Jeremiah that the Lord Himself would **put His words in Jeremiah's mouth** (emphasis is the

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<sup>15</sup> David M. Gosdeck, *The People's Bible: Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1994), 2–3.

author's). Jeremiah need not worry what to say; God would provide the very words he would speak.”<sup>16</sup> Dyer underscores that this was a visible lesson; it went beyond the realm of auditory sense. The all-knowing God knew this visual lesson was exactly what his servant needed to see. A simple lecture would not have the same impact. Jeremiah needed to see, feel, and hear.

God's use of imagery and object lessons does not end there. In a continuation of Jeremiah's calling, God uses two visions to reach out to Jeremiah. In these two visions the Lord reveals to Jeremiah an almond branch and a boiling pot of water. The first vision is that of the almond branch. Here the picture truly speaks a thousand words. To many modern readers, this vision makes no sense, “The word of the LORD came to me: ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’ ‘I see the branch of an almond tree,’ I replied. The LORD said to me, ‘You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.’”<sup>17</sup> After God's reply, there is no more explanation given about the almond branch. What is the correlation between an almond branch and God's word being fulfilled? Gosdeck offers this explanation:

In the first vision Jeremiah saw an almond branch. The almond bush was the first to come to life in the spring. The blossoming of the pink flowers of the almond tree was a sure sign that spring was coming (the flowers came before the leaves). So the almond branch was a symbol of the coming fulfillment of the Lord's Word. The Lord was watching over his Word to carry it out. Jeremiah plays on words. The Hebrew word for “watch” in this text has a root that sounds like the word for “almond branch.” The Lord will carry out his Word without delay. The period of waiting, the period of warning, was almost over; the time of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem had come. The Lord would delay no longer; now he would surely act.<sup>18</sup>

In one hundred thirty-six words, Professor Gosdeck briefly explains the meaning of the picture God used. With one simple picture, God spoke to the fears of his servant Jeremiah and encouraged him toward service as a prophet. With one simple picture, God portrayed the urgency of Jeremiah's work. With one simple picture, God motivated Jeremiah's heart to action. Can the same thing be done in a sermon? It's certainly something to ponder and consider. Can one impactful image on a screen make a point that would take hundreds of words to explain?

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<sup>16</sup> C. H. Dyer, (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), Jeremiah 1:7–10.

<sup>17</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), Jeremiah 1:11–12. All of the Bible passages quoted in this work are taken from the NIV 1984, and the reference will follow the quote from now on.

<sup>18</sup> Gosdeck, 13.

The second vision God showed to Jeremiah on his day of ordination was that of a boiling cauldron of water. In this second vision, God shows Jeremiah what is going to happen to Judah. Again, God asks Jeremiah what he sees and Jeremiah responds, “‘I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north,’ I answered. The LORD said to me, ‘From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms’” (Jeremiah 1:13-15). Anyone who has sustained a burn from boiling water knows the pain and affliction that was about to fall upon Judah. With this simple picture, God portrayed to Jeremiah the disaster that he was going to send upon his people. This picture also conveys to Jeremiah the urgency with which he is to speak. If he does not preach, then this disaster will be far, far worse.

God deemed it necessary to not just call Jeremiah with a simple auditory call to action. Instead, God made use of vibrant pictures, images, and symbols to relate to the young man. When Jeremiah said he didn’t know how to speak, God showed him that he was with him and would put his words in Jeremiah’s mouth by physically touching his lips. When Jeremiah still had fears and reservations about his calling, God showed him an almond branch easing his fears and encouraging his heart. Now was the time to act. When Jeremiah wondered about the importance of his message, God showed him a boiling pot of water and the imminent destruction destined for Judah. Jeremiah learned from these lessons. Not only did these pictures encourage and uplift Jeremiah, but they also taught him an effective way to proclaim God’s word and message. These object and picture lessons used in chapter one would not be the last time God used these types of lessons with Jeremiah.

In chapter thirteen God uses the object lesson of a linen belt to teach Jeremiah and the people of Judah a lesson. God commands Jeremiah to buy a linen belt. “He probably bought the linen loincloth in public for all to see so that later his message and application would be all the more effective.”<sup>19</sup> This was something that the people in Judah would be aware of. After wearing the linen loincloth for some time, God commanded Jeremiah to hide the linen belt in a crevice in Perath. Many days later the Lord sent Jeremiah to retrieve the belt. It was completely ruined and useless. Gosdeck sums up the point of this object lesson:

The Lord now applied this lesson to Judah. The Lord had loved them and taken them to be close to him as no other people had been. He had caused his name to dwell among them and given them the grace of continuing fellowship through his covenant and the worship he instituted at the tabernacle and later at the temple. He had identified himself

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<sup>19</sup> Gosdeck, 83.

with them as he had done with no other people. The Lord had been merciful to them to show all nations what kind of God he is. Yet his chosen people had rejected him and followed false gods. They had frustrated his purpose for them. In their stubbornness they had turned from him. Now he would turn from them, and they would be ruined and worthless, for their value and worth came not from themselves but from him.<sup>20</sup>

With a vivid picture the Lord showed Jeremiah what was in store for Jerusalem and Judah because of their unfaithfulness to him. God easily could have just told Jeremiah to tell the people that they are like an old ruined and useless linen belt, but he did not do that. He wanted to use this picture to reinforce his point. God knew it would have greater impact if Jeremiah actually saw and felt the ruined belt. And the pictures do not end there.

Right after this episode, God commands Jeremiah to go to the leaders of Judah. Now God will use the picture of wineskins to show his judgment and wrath against Judah. God prophesied through Jeremiah that he would smash the leaders of Judah like stone jars holding wine. They will go about as if they were drunk because they will be so confused, out of control, and helpless. A full jar of wine or a full wineskin was a sign of prosperity and the good times in Judah. Now whenever those leaders looked at something that was once considered a token of good fortune and pleasurable living, they would be reminded of God's judgment against them. With this object lesson, God flipped the script on Judah's rulers. With a picture, he sent them a stern and serious warning.

God used many other object lessons in Jeremiah including the clay pot at the potter's house where God compared Judah to clay in the hands of a potter (Jeremiah 18:1-12). In the same way that a potter has control over the clay in his hands, God had control and power over Judah. God used the vision of jars of figs to describe how he would deal with people who trusted in God and those who did not (Jeremiah 24:1-10). The good jar of figs represented the good people, and the bad jar of figs represented the bad people in God's eyes. God used a picture of the cup of death to show the wrath and destruction he had planned for the nations (Jeremiah 25:15-38). God also used the picture of a yoke to show how Babylon would oppress Israel (Jeremiah 27:1-22). All of these lessons incorporated something more than just spoken words. They all had a visual element to them.

The last object lesson of the book comes in Jeremiah 43. The remnant of the Israelites left in Jerusalem decided to go against God's command and run to Egypt where they thought they

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<sup>20</sup> Gosdeck, 83-84.

would be safe from the Babylonian forces. God commanded Jeremiah to use an object lesson to send a message to the Israelites there. Jeremiah took some large stones and covered them in clay. He placed them before the entrance to the Pharaoh's palace. Imagine the scene this must have created! One cannot help but feel some curiosity when seeing someone else maneuvering some large stones and then taking them to the ruler's house. Jeremiah must have caused quite a stir with his actions. After Jeremiah had done all of this and he had the people's attention, he said:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will send for my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and I will set his throne over these stones I have buried here; he will spread his royal canopy above them. He will come and attack Egypt, bringing death to those destined for death, captivity to those destined for captivity, and the sword to those destined for the sword (Jeremiah 43:10-11)

In a very real and concrete way, God had Jeremiah show the people of Israel that they were not safe just because they had fled back to Egypt. Jeremiah points out the very spot where Nebuchadnezzar would establish his throne. When Nebuchadnezzar did come back and take over Egypt, those who saw Jeremiah's actions must have been chilled to the bone. What Jeremiah had predicted before their very eyes had become a reality.

By God's command, Jeremiah made use of many object lessons in his ministry. Gosdeck argues that this was because of the severe spiritual apathy and ineptitude of the Israelites at the time:

At this point in the Jews' history, because of the hardness of their hearts, the Lord often resorted to object lessons and dramatic measures to try to bring his message home to his people. These extreme methods are further evidence of just how thick and unfeeling and unreceptive their hearts had become.<sup>21</sup>

There is no denying that Jeremiah's main audience was apostate Israel. He lived and served in some of the worst of times in Judah. Because of his audience Jeremiah also preached with a sense of urgency. The Babylonian invasion was not something that was going to happen in the distant future; it would happen in Jeremiah's lifetime. Jeremiah was not just preaching about things that might happen, he was preaching about things that would certainly happen. The object lessons that he used added to this sense of urgency. His pictures and concrete illustrations made his preaching more vivid, more real. He had a message that everyone needed to hear and God used Jeremiah to make sure that everyone heard it and saw it. Jeremiah did not fear using

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<sup>21</sup> Gosdeck, 83.



unconventional methods of delivery because his message was so urgent and relevant he did not care how he got people's attention. Not only that, but these object lessons were directly commanded by God. These were not just some crazy ideas that Jeremiah brainstormed to better reach his audience; they are commands from God. God wanted to make sure Jeremiah was not only heard, but also seen. God saw fit to do that with visual object lessons.

Jeremiah was not the only prophet to utilize these kinds of tactics. The prophet Ezekiel also employed a great deal of imagery, pictures, and object lessons in his ministry. Jeremiah and Ezekiel could have just imagery and pictures with their words. They are called metaphors. Almost every pastor or public speaker uses them. However, Jeremiah and Ezekiel went beyond just metaphors. God commanded them to use real, physical pictures and symbols.

Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah, but they had two different ministries. Jeremiah stayed with the people in Jerusalem and Judah after the Babylonians started taking captives. Ezekiel was one of the captives and his ministry was to the people in captivity. So even though Ezekiel's audience was different, he still made use of symbols, images, and object lessons. In the People's Bible Commentary on Ezekiel, Keith Kuschel says in the introduction, "The outstanding characteristic of Ezekiel's prophecy is the living pictures it paints. Points are made not with direct statements, but with symbolic actions."<sup>22</sup> Not only did Ezekiel make use of visual aids in his preaching, but God also sent many visions to Ezekiel. Just like with the prophet Jeremiah, God utilized visuals to teach and encourage Ezekiel.

The first time that Ezekiel uses a visual to convey a message from God to the people of Israel is in chapter four. God commands Ezekiel to draw a picture of Jerusalem on a tablet. Then Ezekiel constructs siege works against the picture of Jerusalem. He then took an iron pan and placed it between himself and the drawn city of Jerusalem. In this scenario, Ezekiel played the role of God. The sins of the nation of Judah had separated the people from God. Another practical lesson portrayed in this powerful picture was that God was the one who was laying siege to Jerusalem. The nations who carried out the actual siege were just pawns. God was in control. This was God's judgment on the people who had turned their back to him.

It does not take too much imagination to realize the effect this must have had on the Israelite captives in Babylon. They would walk out of their houses in the morning to be met by the sight of this strange scene. A miniature replica of Jerusalem was drawn with elaborate siege

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<sup>22</sup> Kieth B. Kuschel, *The People's Bible: Ezekiel*, (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1986), 4-5.

works built up against it. The news of this phenomenon must have spread quickly among the Israelite captives! Many people must have questioned Ezekiel concerning the meaning of this. This illustration gave Ezekiel an audience that was seeking answers and explanation. Kuschel offers this as a possible explanation for how Ezekiel carried out his tasks assigned by God:

Ezekiel went out in front of his house first thing in the morning, when there was some traffic past his house. He lay down in the required direction near the model of the besieged city that he had built, with his arm ready for action, but tied up. He presented this object lesson to teach his fellow exiles what the Lord was planning for Jerusalem. When he thought most of the traffic for the day had ceased, he released himself and performed the other symbolic actions that he couldn't do while lying down and tied up. Then he went inside for the evening.<sup>23</sup>

Ezekiel took his work very seriously. God was preparing the captives for some dreadfully sad and sobering news: the destruction of Jerusalem. This would take a lot of patient preaching and teaching on the part of Ezekiel. There is no doubt these illustrations and action-parables that he used help portray the seriousness of his message.

Ezekiel's actions also helped to spread his message quickly. The Israelites living in exile simply could not ignore the action and drama going on every day in front of Ezekiel's house. God made sure that Ezekiel would not be ignored. God gave Ezekiel the command to act this way instead of just standing on his porch and speaking words. God wanted Ezekiel to show the people with actions, to engage as many of their senses as possible. When someone is acting out drama or scenarios, could it be that the the imagination is captured for longer? If someone uses pictures and diagrams, is perhaps then the mind more attentive? Not only do the people who see these actions and pictures played out firsthand want to stay and watch longer, but they also want to tell their friends about it. Kuschel explains:

Because the exiles were a tightly knit group, whether they lived in a ghetto or not, you can imagine how quickly the action-parables were passed along throughout the group. Someone who had seen Ezekiel might say, "You wouldn't believe what Ezekiel is doing now!" And so the message would be passed. The next group would go to see him and would say the same thing.<sup>24</sup>

So not only did Ezekiel's action parables serve the purpose of inviting a conversation, but they also served the crucial role of spreading that message.

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<sup>23</sup> Kuschel, 28.

<sup>24</sup> Kuschel, 27.

In another part of Ezekiel's action-parable of the siege of Jerusalem, the Lord commands Ezekiel to cut off his hair. God does not simply tell Ezekiel to cut off all his hair either, he commands Ezekiel to do it with a sharp sword. Imagine how strange it must have been to see Ezekiel, this grown man and known prophet of God, to take a deadly weapon and use it as a barber's razor to shave his head and his face. The pictures didn't end there either. The cut off hair symbolized the people of Israel. Some would burn in the destruction of Jerusalem, some would die as they fled Jerusalem, and still others would be scattered into exile. Ezekiel took the rest of the hair and tucked it into his belt. Then some of these he took and threw into the wind. Even those who thought they had escaped would come to ruin and destruction. In an exceptionally vivid and memorable way, Ezekiel relayed to the captives the message of God. Destruction was coming to Jerusalem. Prepare yourselves for the bitter news that is coming soon. Imagine how long people must have talked about Ezekiel cutting off his hair with a sword and then what he did with his hair. The message that went along with the image must have caused even more speculation and pondering in their hearts.

Ezekiel did not just perform action-parables in connection with his model of Jerusalem either. He used other pictures and object lessons as well. In chapter thirty-seven of his prophecy, right after the infamous valley of the dry bones section, God commands Ezekiel to use an object lesson. Ezekiel takes two different sticks. One stick is Judah's stick and the other is Ephraim's stick. Each stick represents the two different kingdoms in Israel. God has Ezekiel hold the sticks in one hand and join them together. Ezekiel's message has changed. He is no longer predicting and preparing the people for the destruction of Jerusalem. Now Ezekiel's message is one of restoration. God is going to bring together his people. He will restore them. They will be one people with one king and one God.

These object lessons were not just meant to be used in connection with destruction and judgment, but also with restoration and comfort. Ezekiel did not just predict the destruction of Jerusalem with his drawing and actions, he was also predicting the union of the nations with two pieces of wood joined as one. The point is that pictures and visual aids were not just used as law in the Old Testament, but also as gospel.

Visual aids were not just used by God and the prophets in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament as well. Jeremiah and Ezekiel effectively incorporated visuals into their worship. Jesus used visuals in his ministry as well.

## The Use of Visual Aids in the New Testament

There is no doubt that Jesus was the greatest preacher and teacher of all time. He caused more than just a stir while he lived on this earth. Just think of what the crowds said about Jesus after his sermon on the mount: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (Matthew 7:28-29). His teachings are still talked about and studied today, and not just by Christians.

Many of the things that Jesus did in his ministry are copied by pastors. Jesus preached law and gospel; Lutheran pastors preach law and gospel. Jesus made himself available to the common people; Lutheran pastors make themselves available to the common people. Jesus prayed for his disciples and believers; pastors pray for their congregations. Jesus was the ultimate pastor that many pastors strive to be like. So when discussing the use of PowerPoint and visuals in worship, it makes sense to study what Jesus did as well.

Jesus used a lot of different methods to reach out to people. Sometimes his preaching created faith in the heart of his listeners. Sometimes his preaching produced nothing besides scorn and scoffing. But still Jesus preached, and still Jesus used different methods in his teaching and preaching. Whether people listened to Jesus because they knew he was the Son of God or because they hated him and were trying to find any excuse to kill him, people still listened to him. Part of the reason for that was because Jesus was interested in the people to whom he ministered, and this is part of what made people so interested in him. Pastor Ed Schuppe writes in an essay on Jesus’ teaching methods:

Jesus was undoubtedly interesting to His pupils. We will see the “tools” He used later in this paper, when we examine His use of symbols, the concrete to explain the abstract, His use of stories and parables, His use of Scripture, etc. as well as His visual aids and “activity methods.”<sup>25</sup>

Part of what made Jesus so interesting was his variety of tools. He used stories. He told parables. He performed miracles. Jesus showed visual aids. All of these things helped keep people interested in him. Of particular interest for this paper, is Jesus’ use of visual aids.

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<sup>25</sup> Ed Schuppe, “The Practical Teaching Methods of Jesus Christ,” Seminary Essay File, <http://www.wlssays.net/files/SchuppeJesus.pdf> (Accessed September 24, 2013), 2.

Jesus was such a master preacher and teacher because he could explain the complex and confusing with the simple, everyday things of life. Think about Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. He uses salt and light to describe the relationship of Christians to the world. When Jesus is preaching about worry, he says in Matthew 6:26, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" The key here is the word, "look." Jesus wanted his listeners to see with their own eyes how happy the birds are and how well God takes care of them. Jesus wanted them to look and see and learn this valuable lesson about worrying.

In his commentary on Matthew, William Hendriksen mentions that Palestine was a crossroads for bird migration, meaning there would have been all kinds of different birds flying through the country where Jesus did his ministry. He says, "Was a thick swarm of winged travelers cleaving the air at the very moment when the Lord spoke the words of 6:26? It is entirely possible."<sup>26</sup> Now whenever any of those people saw a bird in the sky there was Jesus' sermon before them again. They could remember how well God takes care of the birds and how well God takes care of them. Of course, this methodology did not ensure that those people who heard Jesus' sermon about worry and the birds would never worry again or would be reminded not to worry when they saw birds. Human hearts are still sinful and stubborn and can ignore even the best preaching and teaching no matter what method is used to convey it.

Jesus doesn't stop there. He continues this lesson by saying, "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these" (Matthew 6:28-29). Jesus does not say "Think about the lilies" he says, "See how the lilies of the field grow." Again, Jesus is making use of what is around him to teach his followers a valuable lesson. If God cared enough about the flowers to make them look so beautiful, then those people did not need to worry about what they wore because God cared even more about them than those flowers. Jesus made use of simple every day things to explain trust in God. The pictures and the visual aids he used helped him do this.

After reading the Sermon on the Mount, one is struck with how often Jesus used metaphors and picture language in his preaching and teaching. Jesus used the picture of a wide

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<sup>26</sup> William, Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973, Reprint: 2007), 350.

and narrow gate to describe entrance to the kingdom of God. He used the picture of a tree and its fruit to explain how to recognize false prophets. Only good trees can bear good fruit, and only bad trees bear bad fruit. Again, Jesus uses a simple picture to explain a spiritual truth. Now whether or not Jesus had an actual, physical visual aid in all of these teachings is unclear, and truthfully, is rather doubtful. But that does not diminish the fact that Jesus used picture language, and he must have used it for a reason. Could that reason have been simply that humans could relate better with the spiritual truths Jesus was preaching about when they had a physical image in their mind? That seems like a logical reason why Jesus used so many images in his teaching. Whether a pastor or church uses projected images or not, it's important to remember this lesson from Jesus' teaching. Pictures and images are impactful on the human heart and mind. Otherwise, why would Jesus have used so many of them?

And finally, Jesus closed his Sermon on the Mount with another great picture. This time Jesus describes the man who listens to his words and puts them into practice as a wise builder making his foundation in the strength of rock. Even when the winds blow and the rains pour down on it, that house stands. And the person who doesn't put Jesus' words into practice is like a foolish builder setting his foundation in sand. The house collapses when any adversity arrives. Now it's doubtful that Jesus actually pointed out a house collapsing at this point, but with the concrete visual aids he had already used, he did not need to. People could picture exactly what Jesus was talking about because he was such a visual preacher who regularly used pictures in his preaching whether physical or not.

It is after this great sermon that people are amazed at Jesus. It is after Jesus' preaching with pictures that they say he preaches as one with authority. Hendriksen suggests that one of the reasons why the people were so astonished at his teaching is because, "He excited curiosity by making generous use of illustrations and concrete examples as the sermon shows from beginning to end."<sup>27</sup> Hendriksen then contrasts Jesus' sermon to that of the Pharisees and says, "Their (the Pharisee's) speeches were often dry as dust."<sup>28</sup> It is after this great sermon that Jesus' popularity increased. With this sermon Jesus showed the people he was not just another rabbi, but rather that he was *the* Rabbi. Jesus' teaching actually had nourishment for the people instead of the

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<sup>27</sup> Hendriksen, 383.

<sup>28</sup> Hendriksen, 383.

useless garbage they were getting from the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Jesus' use of visual aids is part of what helped these people see the nourishment Jesus had for them.

Another type of visual aid that Jesus used was his miracles. Obviously, pastors do not work miracles every Sunday in their preaching or in their teaching. God primarily works through his Word. But Jesus recognized the power of his miracles and the important visual lesson they taught. Think about how much more powerful of a lesson it was for Jesus to calm the storm rather than Jesus just saying, "I can calm storms." Think of the impact it made on believers when Jesus gave sight to the blind rather than just saying, "I can make the blind see." What is more powerful and memorable? Jesus saying he can raise the dead or Jesus actually raising Lazarus from the dead? The answer is obvious. When John the Baptist sent messengers to ask Jesus if he indeed was the Christ, Jesus responded, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (Matthew 11:4-5). This was not just a speaking ministry, this was a doing ministry. This wasn't just a ministry of words; this was a ministry of action, pictures, and miracles. Jesus made use of every tool in his arsenal to reach out to the lost sheep of Israel.

Pastors might not be able to perform miracles like Jesus, but they can show people the power of Jesus with pictures. For example, what is more powerful? Comparing the majesty of God to a mountain in a place like Florida where there are no mountains by just speaking, or by doing the same thing with a picture of a mountain range portrayed on a screen? Just like miracles reinforced the power of God, pictures reinforce the power of words. A pastor's ministry is not just about speaking about Jesus' love and deeds, it's about showing Jesus' love and deeds too. One simple way to do that is with visual aids and pictures.

Another time that Jesus uses a visual aid is in Matthew 18. The disciples were practicing one of their favorite pastimes: arguing over who was the greatest among them. Instead of yelling at the disciples or just simply explaining to the disciples how greatness works in his kingdom, Jesus took a little child on his lap. He told the disciples to become like a child. What a lesson for the disciples! Here they were arguing about greatness and Jesus tells them to become like a child. Jesus often taught in paradoxes, and he hammered this paradoxical lesson home with a visual aid of what it meant to be great. Again, Jesus' lesson to the disciples about greatness in his kingdom had an opportunity to be taught again whenever the disciples saw a little child. That's part of

what is so effective about teaching with visual aids. The lesson does not just end when the teacher stops talking because now there is a memory hook; the lesson is taught again whenever someone makes a connection with the visual to the words of the lesson.

Jesus did not stop teaching his disciples after the lesson on greatness. He kept going with the child on his lap. Jesus stressed the importance of children in his kingdom. He taught about how terrible of a thing it is to cause a little child to sin. It is interesting that Jesus does this in picturesque language as well. He does not say, “It’s bad news if you cause a child to sin.” Instead he says, “But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). The whole time that Jesus is talking about how important children are in his kingdom, he has this child on his lap. There is no doubt the way Jesus delivered this message left an impact on the disciples.

One of the most famous instances of Jesus using a visual aid or an object lesson came when the Pharisees were trying to trap him in his words. Not only did the Pharisees come to attack Jesus with this trick, but the Herodians also came with them. Now normally these two groups did not get along, but their hatred for Jesus was so intense that they were willing to be allies in this endeavor to trick Jesus. The Pharisees and Herodians came to Jesus with a trick question concerning the paying of taxes to Caesar. If Jesus said do not pay taxes to Caesar, then the Herodians could accuse him of insurrection against the Romans and bring him to the authorities. If Jesus answered that people should pay taxes to Caesar, the Pharisees would accuse him of being a Roman sympathizer and unpatriotic to the Jewish nation. Jesus knew their evil intent so he asked for a coin. Schuppe describes the turn of events this way:

Jesus’ method of taking known things and giving them a new spiritual significance was novel to His hearers, and so interest was aroused and maintained. When He was asked concerning the payment of taxes, He asked for a coin. We can imagine the intense interest at this novel turn of events and sense the hush as He asked for and received the coin.<sup>29</sup>

Here is Jesus surrounded by his enemies. The Pharisees and Herodians are breathing hatred for him. With the simple use of a visual aid, he completely stumps them and teaches them a valuable lesson. He took an everyday object that was inherently very simple and gave it a spiritual meaning. Jesus was the master at this type of thing.

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<sup>29</sup> Schuppe, 5.



Jesus' teaching and preaching is full of visual aids. He used a wide variety of things and objects to impress lessons upon his hearers. Schuppe sums up Jesus' use of visual aids this way:

There was no lack of visual aids in Jesus' teaching repertory. He used visual aids to impress His lesson on His students in very vivid fashion. He had amazing capacity to utilize the happening of the moment, or the background, or even people, as telling visual aids. He demonstrated the effective use of visual aids – not just as an interesting thing to look at, but as something very relevant to the lesson He was teaching.<sup>30</sup>

Jesus not only taught with his visual aids, but he also indirectly gives a lesson on how to make use of visual aids. They were a tool always at his disposal. He wasn't afraid to use them when the circumstances called for them, and when he did use them, he made the most of them. In an article about liturgical preaching, David Schmitt wrote this about Jesus, "In his hands, a blade of grass revealed the providence of heaven, a bird in flight the care of a heavenly Father, and a loaf of bread the kingdom come in a desert."<sup>31</sup> Jesus saw opportunities to use the everyday things of life to teach and preach. There is a valuable lesson in that alone.

### **Preaching Versus Teaching**

Since this is a thesis on using visual presentation technology in preaching, a distinction needs to be made between preaching and teaching. Just about everyone agrees that PowerPoint and visual presentations are useful tools in teaching. Just take a look at any college or high school classroom today and this is evident. Every room is outfitted with a screen, a projector or some other device for presentation. When someone is teaching, he is delivering a lot of information in a short class period. A visual of what is being taught helps reinforce the lesson. It highlights what is important. It helps produce a logical outline of the lesson. But preaching is not teaching. Those who rationalize their use of PowerPoint in the pulpit because it is used in the classroom should think carefully about the differences in preaching and teaching that are outlined below.

Is there a biblical difference between preaching and teaching? Matthew uses both verbs to describe Jesus' actions in chapter four of his Gospel. Matthew writes, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues, **preaching** the good news of the kingdom, and healing

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<sup>30</sup> Schuppe, 6.

<sup>31</sup> David Schmitt, (Eds. Paul J. Grime and Dean W. Nadasdy) "Law and Gospel in Sermon and Service", *Liturgical Preaching: Contemporary Essays*, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2001), 26.

every disease and sickness among the people” (Matthew 4:23). This verse is repeated nearly word for word later in Matthew.<sup>32</sup> The only other time the words “preach” and “teach” are used in the same verse in the Gospels is also in Matthew.<sup>33</sup> That verse has a very similar context to the previous two verses. Hendriksen suggests that there is in fact a difference between these two biblical activities. In his commentary on Matthew, he writes:

Between preaching and teaching there is a difference, though it is true that good preaching is also teaching. The emphasis, nevertheless, is not the same. The word used in the original for preaching means heralding, announcing, proclaiming.... Teaching, on the other hand, indicates imparting more detailed information regarding the announcement that was made.<sup>34</sup>

Hendriksen makes some valid points. The Greek word διδάσκω has more of the idea of instructing behind it. Like Hendriksen suggests, Jesus probably did this instructing after his preaching to further teach and explain his message. Meanwhile, the Greek word κηρύσσω has more the idea of announcing and proclaiming. With this in mind, there is a biblical difference between preaching and teaching.

So one thing needed is a working definition of what preaching is today. Reverend Robert Schaibley in an article written for the *Concordia Journal* describes preaching in this way:

The Lutheran sermon is not Bible Study, nor is it a lesson in the history of the church, though the faithful undoubtedly would benefit also from these. Lutheran preaching is a proclamation of the Word, more kerygmatic than didactic in flavor, so that the Gospel is given general predominance in the sermon, as Dr. Walther properly admonishes.<sup>35</sup>

Already in 1992, Schaibley saw a growing problem in Lutheran sermons. They were becoming more and more like Bible studies. Schaibley feared that sermons were becoming more didactic rather than kerygmatic in his own Missouri Synod.<sup>36</sup> There was more teaching than proclamation.

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<sup>32</sup> “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.” Matthew 9:35.

<sup>33</sup> “After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.” Matthew 11:1.

<sup>34</sup> Hendriksen, 249.

<sup>35</sup> Robert W. Schaibley, “Lutheran Preaching: Proclamation, Not Communication,” *Concordia Journal* (January 1992): 9, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Schaibley, 14.

Preaching and teaching are two different things and each one deserves its own separate place in the church. Preaching is for the pulpit and teaching is for the classroom. Now obviously teaching does take place from the pulpit, but it's not the primary goal of preaching. In the same way, preaching even happens while teaching, but again, it is not the primary goal of teaching. Gerhard Forde, in an article for the publication *Dialog*, explains what can happen when teaching overpowers preaching in the pulpit:

Teaching – even biblical teaching – can thus be the enemy of proclamation. Teaching is almost invariably past tense, third person. It doesn't proclaim, it informs, explains. It has, of course, its place. It is entirely necessary, indispensable. But it is not proclamation. And when it is mistaken for proclamation, disaster ensues.<sup>37</sup>

Proclamation does exactly what it sounds like, it proclaims. Teaching is not proclamation. As Forde says, teaching is about explaining concepts and informing the uninformed. In order to do this, teaching is not present tense and is not first person. That makes it distant. The disaster that ensues is that preaching loses its relevancy. It's no longer encouraging, transformational, and uplifting. It becomes a lecture.

Consider this example from Forde's article. A couple is having a conversation and the wife says to the husband, "I love you." She expects her husband to respond in similar fashion. She wants him to say, "I love you too." That would be proclamation. But consider if the husband took a more didactic approach to the issue. Instead of responding, "I love you too," the husband talked about all the great qualities of love. He talks about all the reasons why he has loved people in his life. At the end of his great discourse on love, his confused wife will ask him, "Okay... but do you love me too?" All she was looking for was a proclamation of his love for her. What she got instead was a distant response that was not completely relevant to her. The husband's didactic style only created confusion and did not clearly proclaim his love for his wife. There is a time and a place for the husband's discourse on love, but not in that moment.<sup>38</sup>

It is easy for pastors to have this same kind of problem. It is a lot easier for a pastor to talk about the law than it is to proclaim the law. It is easy to put the law into ten bullet points like the Ten Commandments and talk about them instead of proclaiming them like God intended. It is easy to put the law into categories like in Jesus' summary of the law. It is a lot harder to make

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<sup>37</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, "Proclamation: The Present Tense of the Gospel" *Dialog* 29 (1999): 169.

<sup>38</sup> Forde, 169.

the law personal, to proclaim the law to listeners in a relevant way that affects their everyday life. The same is true of the gospel. A pastor can talk all day long about the vicarious atonement. He can list the blessings of the gospel; he could even put them into bullet points on a screen if he wanted. But it is a lot harder to proclaim the gospel, to reveal the gospel as the healing balm it should be. The very nature of a PowerPoint could make this task even more difficult for pastors, especially if it is used the wrong way. PowerPoint used in the business, government, and military worlds takes complex theories and boils them down to a single bullet point. It takes big ideas and turns them into cheesy clipart.<sup>39</sup> Doing the same with the law and gospel robs them of their full power.

A pastor needs to proclaim law and gospel. He cannot just talk about them like he is talking about the weather with his neighbor. He cannot just present the law and gospel like a pie graph at a business meeting. They must be proclaimed! Instead of being a distant past tense, the gospel is present tense and of course future tense as well. Forde explains, “Proclamation is the present tense of the gospel.”<sup>40</sup> Forde sees the biggest difference between preaching and teaching to be that of tenses. Past tense is more teaching, present and future tenses are more proclamation and preaching. “The preacher should have the consciousness that he or she is now about to do in the living present what happened or was promised in the text.”<sup>41</sup>

Forde gives a good start to what preaching and proclamation are all about. His explanations for the differences between teaching and preaching are a good foundation. Schaibley adds his own thoughts on what preaching is, “Lutheran preaching is the spoken word in which the faithful are fed with the actual voice of God; it is a confessional theology of the Word of God which applies Law and Gospel in the context of the liturgical life of the church.”<sup>42</sup> The key aspect of Schaibley’s definition is that the faithful are fed with the word of God. Preaching cannot just inform God’s people about his word, it has to feed his people with that word.

In this sense, preaching then goes beyond just communication. Preaching is proclamation. Schaibley explains the difference:

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<sup>39</sup> Bob Parks, “Death to PowerPoint!,” Bloomberg Business Week, <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-08-30/death-to-powerpoint> (accessed January 30, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Forde, 168.

<sup>41</sup> Forde, 172.

<sup>42</sup> Schaibley, 12.

The work of communication is to engender *motivation*, whereas the work of proclamation is to engender *identification*. The communication model encourages one to *consent*; the proclamation model encourages one to *ponder*. The communication model brings the hearer to *learn*; the proclamation model brings the hearer to *unlearn*. Thus, the communication model is working well when the hearer is given to *memorize* what is said; the proclamation model is working well when the hearer is given to *realize* what is said.<sup>43</sup>

Schaibley cuts the line a little too close between communication and proclamation. For example, the work of proclamation can also be to motivate. Homiletics professors have long told their students that they should frame their sermons around the phrase, “I want my sermon to motivate my listeners to (fill in the blank).”<sup>44</sup> However, Schaibley’s words do provide some food for thought, particularly the last part. As mentioned above, PowerPoint is widely used in classrooms because it helps students remember key facts and points. But is the goal of a sermon really to get listeners to memorize the main points of it? Isn’t it more important for a sermon to leave a mark on its listeners by having them realize what is said is true for them and applies to them? The classic analogy of a meal is useful here. Not too many people can remember what they had for lunch the previous day. If they think about it long and hard enough, they can probably come up with it. It takes a lot effort to get there though. Even if someone cannot remember what they ate, does that mean the meal was not beneficial for them? Of course not! The food they ingested was still full of nutrients to help fuel them through their day. The same is true of a sermon. Not many people can remember what the pastor preached on Sunday for more than a day before they forget it. With some real thinking and remembering they can probably remember the theme, but even if they cannot, does that mean the sermon was not beneficial to them? Of course not! They were still fed with God’s word and led to the realization of some important biblical truth. In this regard, Schaibley is spot on. Sermons do not need to be perfectly remembered by listeners, but they should persuade the heart of the listener to realize what was said is true for them.

Therefore, preaching is indeed different from teaching. Preaching is presented differently. The use of first and second person pronouns should be more prevalent in preaching while the third person pronoun is used more often in teaching. Preaching uses the present tense and the future tense. Teaching mostly uses the past tense. Preaching transforms hearts and feeds people

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<sup>43</sup> Schaibley, 14.

<sup>44</sup> John Jeske, “Why are You Preaching this Sermon?” Preach the Word 1 (October 1997): 4.

with God's Word. Teaching makes people learn more about their faith and grow in their knowledge of the Scriptures.

With all that being said, preaching and teaching are not mutually exclusive. In fact, preaching depends on teaching. Forde says, "Now we must assert that teaching is indispensable for proclamation. Without it there will be no proper proclamation."<sup>45</sup> Imagine preaching to people who have no idea what the Bible says. They do not know about sin. They do not know about God's demands of perfection, and they do not know about their Savior. A pastor cannot properly proclaim to these people law and gospel because they have no concept of what law and gospel are. There has to be some teaching before proclamation can really do its job. The important thing is that most of this teaching is done outside of the pulpit in either Bible information class or in Bible Study. Will there be some teaching in preaching? Absolutely, one cannot escape that reality. But the pulpit is not the main platform for teaching. PowerPoint should not be used in the pulpit if all the preacher wants to do is teach because he has confused the purpose of preaching with that of teaching. He will deprive his congregation of proclamation. His congregation wants to know if God loves them. It is the preacher's job to make sure he proclaims the wonderful truth of God's love for his people.

So, does PowerPoint have a place in preaching if preaching is not the same thing as teaching? The short answer to that question is yes. First of all, consider the biblical examples mentioned earlier in the paper. To be fair, some people might consider those examples to be more teaching moments rather than preaching moments. And, to a certain extent, they would be correct. What is Jesus doing other than teaching when he asks for the coin and says in Matthew 22:21, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."? The same thing can be said of the lesson that Jesus taught his disciples about humility and the value of children in the Kingdom of God.

Something else needs to be kept in mind; Jesus' context was different from the context in which preachers live today. Jesus came into the world to make himself known as the Messiah, the Redeemer, and the Chosen One of God. In order to do this, he had to do a lot of teaching. But just because he was teaching, does not mean Jesus did not do any preaching. His mission required both gentle instruction and bold rebukes. A rebuke can certainly be a proclamation of

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<sup>45</sup> Forde, 172.

the law. The nature of his work required both teaching and preaching. He was didactic when he needed to be and kerygmatic when he needed to be. What is really interesting is that Jesus used visual aids in both his teaching and his preaching. And an especially important lesson learned from Jesus' ministry is the use of variety in his preaching and teaching.

Jesus did not just use the same style over and over again. He switched things up. He knew perfectly how to divide law and gospel, and he knew perfectly which teaching and preaching methods would work. He knew when to ask a question. Jesus could give a parable at exactly the right time. One cannot help but wonder if perhaps part of the reason why the people were so interested in Jesus was because of his great variety. It was not just a variety of different subjects that Jesus talked about; it was a variety of different presentation modes.

A second reason why visual presentation technology is useful during sermons is because it has historical precedent. Now some might be wondering how a 20<sup>th</sup> century invention could have any historical use. It's not that computers and projectors were used by the ancient church, but visual aids were certainly used. From stained glass windows to overhead projectors, preachers have used visual aids. From icons to glass lanterns, the church has made use of the technology of the day to present visual aids.

### **The Use of Visual Aids in the Christian Church**

Christian preaching has always tried to make use of the present day technology in their sermons. Preachers have the most important job on earth: spreading the good news about Jesus and encouraging the faithful throughout their lives. It makes sense that they would do or try whatever it takes to reach out to people and to feed their sheep. Some of the technological advances have been greatly influential and helpful to the preaching ministry and others not so much. As Robert Howard explains, it should not come as a surprise that preachers are using PowerPoint and other similar technologies in their sermons:

Preaching has always danced with contemporary technological innovations, and always interacted with visual imagery in the environment. The Reformation would have had none of the profound impact it did without the advent of Gutenberg's printing press, making sermons readily available to the reading public. Medieval sermons were preached in sanctuaries illuminated by stained glass images depicting stories of the faith. And the potential of innovations such as photography, illuminated projection, and motion pictures

to enhance verbal sermons was quickly exploited. So there is certainly nothing radically new about current attempts to integrate digital technology into the preaching event.<sup>46</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this paper to recount every visual aid that was used in a church between Jesus' ascension and the present time. There is simply too much data and information to research and not enough pages in this paper to recall it all. So a selective look at some of the ways the church has used visual aids will be taken. One of the earliest uses of visual aids in the church besides paintings and icons was stained glass windows. Stained glass windows gave visual aids a large scale platform. One of the most beautiful displays of stained glass in the world can be found at the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, France. Painted glass and light together illuminate the Bible. These stained glasses are more than just art to beautify a worship space; they are visual aids for the congregation and people. One of the primary uses of stained glass was to teach the laity and to inform them about the Bible. In his introduction to his book, *Stained Glass*, Lawrence Lee talks about the effect this stained glass must have had on Christians in the medieval church:

The effect must have been staggering. Going to church meant not only spiritual instruction and comfort, but entry into a magical self-contained world. At one level stained glass was the medieval equivalent of the cinema, at another it was the agent of a mystical experience that made man more receptive to God.<sup>47</sup>

It is certainly true that stained glass was the equivalent of the cinema. Nothing else could compare. Lee may believe that stained glass also "made man more receptive to God," but can anything besides God's Word and the Sacraments bring man to God? The words and works of Jesus were definitely displayed in the stained glass, but only the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace can bring a human dead in sin to life in Christ. The stained glass alone could not do this. Instruction about the stained glass and what it meant was needed.

Stained glass windows created opportunities to teach the laity about the Bible. A preacher could easily reference a window in his sermon and explain the significance of the window to his congregation.

The early Fathers were keenly aware of the effect of the beauty on worshippers and they wanted religious art to exploit the intrinsic seduction of stone, wood, gold, silver, enamel,

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<sup>46</sup> Robert R. Howard, "The electronic pulpit: a cautious cheer." *Encounter* 68, (June 1, 2007): 33-50. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed August 28, 2013), 33.

<sup>47</sup> Lawrence Lee, George Seddon, and Francis Stephens, *Stained glass*. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1976), 6, 7.



mosaic and glass. But, at the same time, they believed that works of art had to teach and the imagery had to be so designed that it was instantly recognizable, in accordance with iconographic tradition.<sup>48</sup>

These stained glass windows could not just be abstract meanderings of the artist's mind. They needed to be instructive. They needed to be recognizable. In this way, stained glass could serve as a visual aid for the early church.

Stained glass windows went beyond just teaching as well. There was even some proclamation through the windows. Lee brings up an interesting use of stained glass windows in his book. During the Viking raids, bishops in English churches would point out the pictures of deliverance portrayed by the stained glass windows. Of particular popularity were images from the Old Testament including Daniel in the lions' den and Isaac being delivered from the sacrifice. Preachers would point out how God delivered his people in miraculous and dramatic ways.<sup>49</sup> Parishioners could look at those stained glass windows and find comfort because of the connection their pastor had made. God's deliverance was proclaimed to them with the help of those windows.

Old Testament images were not the only ones useful for portraying biblical truths. Artists made use of New Testament images as well. Lee explains how and why artists would pick scenes from the New Testament:

The artist's choice of New Testament subjects was largely confined to those associated with the major church festivals, since one of the purposes of works of art, whether, stained glass, sculpture or painting, was to explain the significance of the festivals to the congregation.<sup>50</sup>

There are some interesting thoughts and ideas to glean from Lee's statement. The first is that these stained glass windows were not referenced every Sunday, but mostly found their use during the major festivals of the church year. At the same time, once the significance of the work of art was explained, the stained glass windows served as a constant reminder of that moment in the Bible. Another important thought is the purpose of stained glass windows to educate the laity on the significance of the different church festivals. There was something about having a visual representation that made it easier and more practical to reach the people.

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<sup>48</sup> Lee, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Lee, 24, 25.

<sup>50</sup> Lee, 25.

There is no denying the importance of stained glass windows in the history of the medieval church. It is through these beautiful works of art that many people came to learn about the life and works of Jesus. The important scenes these windows depicted served a dual purpose of teaching and proclamation. Lee summarizes the importance of stained glass windows nicely:

From the representation of Old Testament subjects to scenes from Christ's Passion, stained –glass (sic) windows were the visual teaching aids of Christendom, which was complete in its embrace of all the material means by which men could learn immaterial truth, profound in its theology, but expressed through symbols and allegory so that all who saw might understand.<sup>51</sup>

In a time without movie screens or television, stained glass windows opened up the imaginations of all who saw them. They offered detailed teaching moments and profound realizations of biblical truth. These visual aids were used in a multitude of ways for the benefit of the laity. Perhaps the reader can even remember a time when his or her own pastor made reference to the stained glass windows in their church. All the preacher was doing was making use of a visual aid that has been around for centuries. Consider this question: is PowerPoint the stained glass window visual aid of the twenty-first century?

Stained glass windows served as the visual aid of the church for a long, long time, over one thousand years. In many churches, stained glass windows still serve as a visual aid. As technology advanced, so did the opportunity to create different kinds of visual aids. One of the advancements made in the seventeenth century was the glass lantern slide, a very early forerunner to an overhead projector. In an article discussing the technological forerunners to PowerPoint, Christopher Anderson talks about the emergence of glass lantern slides. “Though humans have used light to project images for hundreds of years, the emergence of magic lanterns and glass slides during the seventeenth century brought these instruments of education and entertainment to the masses.”<sup>52</sup> This was just advancement in technology that allowed for mass instruction and entertainment.

A little bit later in his article, Anderson describes a religious use for these lanterns. “In order to keep up with evolving technologies, organizations such as the Epworth League of the Methodist Episcopal Church blended projected hymn slides and Bible verses alongside short

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<sup>51</sup> Lee, 27.

<sup>52</sup> Christopher J. Anderson, “Before PowerPoint: Glass Lantern Slides in Theological Collections,” *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 62, (January 1, 2008): 63-65. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 10, 2013), 63.

films on biblical characters.”<sup>53</sup> And perhaps the biggest religious use of this technology came during a mission festival in Columbus, Ohio:

In 1919, Methodists from around the world gathered in Columbus, Ohio to watch missionary slide shows and motion picture productions on a ten-story screen. Tens of thousands gathered at the state fairgrounds race track (converted to an arena for worship) to sing worship songs projected onscreen and to look upon photographs of people who had been converted to Christianity by Methodist missionaries.<sup>54</sup>

Anderson does not specifically mention these glass lantern slides being used in sermons, but they were clearly used for religious matters. It is also hard to tell what the motivation was for using this technology. Anderson only offers the brief line, “In order to keep up with evolving technologies.” Hopefully there was more to the motivation than just a desire to be up with the times. What is interesting to note, however, is that even this obscure invention and technology was used by churches for religious matters. Even if not every church made use of it, some did. They saw this technology as a way to reach out to their members.

One of the last technological advancements before the use of PowerPoint and other similar visual software was the overhead projector. Now admittedly, overhead projectors found their home mostly in the classroom. They were a great tool for teachers to use because they could write on a transparency and still face the class at the same time. No more back turned to the class while writing on the chalkboard. But some pastors made use of this technology in the church as well. One of those pastors was Richard Doebler. He admitted in an article for *Leadership* magazine that he made use of the overhead projector to display color transparencies of maps and sermon points.<sup>55</sup>

While glass lantern slides and overhead projectors may not have reached every church, they were still used by religious leaders and pastors. These technologies certainly had their limitations as well. The picture would not be of the best quality. Fuzzy and grainy images were hard to read and understand. They took too much time to use and disrupted the flow of the service and sermon. They also were an eyesore. No one wants to look at an overhead projector in the front of the church blocking the baptismal font. These difficulties kept glass lantern slides and overhead projectors out of most churches. Consider also the differences between them and

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<sup>53</sup> Anderson, Christopher, 64.

<sup>54</sup> Anderson, Christopher, 64.

<sup>55</sup> Doebler, 46.

stained glass windows. Stained glass windows are a work of art. They are incorporated into the architecture of the church building itself. Stained glass windows are a part of the identity of a church. It's no wonder why overhead projectors and glass slides never gained much momentum in the church.

With the invention of PowerPoint in the early 1990's, came a technology that had the potential to answer and correct many of the issues that plagued overhead projectors. A human being no longer had to physically change the projector transparencies. While the early computers and projectors were big and bulky, the technology has advanced. In today's world no longer is a big, bulky machine needed in the front of the church. Digital images could be worked seamlessly into the service and sermon. Those digital images could also be of a much higher quality. Even the earliest projectors offered an upgrade over transparencies. And with the advancements that have been made since the early 90's, a projector can light up a screen in a fully lit room and still have the bright and crisp images. PowerPoint and similar technology finally offered a way to incorporate visual aids that makes sense.

### **Arguments against Using Visual Presentation Technology**

Visual presentation technology does not answer every critic, however. There have been a few books and articles written about the disadvantages of using PowerPoint not just in a sermon or in church but in general as well. These authors raise some valid concerns about the use of PowerPoint that should be thought through carefully.

One of the biggest reasons people argue against the use of PowerPoint in sermons is because the very nature of PowerPoint is to reduce thoughts and ideas into quick, short summaries or points. There are some real dangers to this kind of preaching. Will Willimon talks a lot about these dangers in his article, "Power Pointless." He says, "Such preaching majors in minor, abstract, general propositions like, 'Five ways to get into God's Word.'"<sup>56</sup> This kind of preaching is not preaching at all. That is a topic for a midweek Bible study. Bullet point preaching is easy to do with PowerPoint. It is built right into the software. Garr Reynolds, a presentation guru, recognizes this danger:

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<sup>56</sup> Willimon, 34.

The problem with slideware applications – PowerPoint, in particular, because it’s been around longer and influenced a generation – is that they have, by default, guided users toward presenting in outline form with subject titles and bullet points grouped under each topic heading.<sup>57</sup>

This takes the worst thing about PowerPoint in sermons and makes it a focus.

In a 2008 article for the publication *Word and World*, Phillip Quanbeck wrote, “PowerPoint wants the user, you, to think in bulleted lists, it wants titles for slides, it offers the user an array of colorful, eye-catching, and ultimately distracting backgrounds.”<sup>58</sup> The default nature of PowerPoint focuses on what is eye-catching and turning things into bullet points. This can lead to what is called “self-help” or “bullet point preaching.” This kind of “bullet point preaching” completely ignores what PowerPoint should be used for: pictures and images. “Self-help preaching” downplays the true gospel and lets the law predominate. Sermons no longer focus on the words and works of Jesus, but rather on how to improve your financial life, your social life, your self-esteem, and so on and so forth. And it’s easy to put “the five things you need to do better” in a bulleted list on a screen.

This kind of preaching is more like teaching. The preacher who uses PowerPoint to create these kinds of lists does so with the intent that the listener memorizes the catchy phrases for regurgitation later on. Instead of preaching law and gospel, a pastor focuses on coming up with phrases fit for a bumper sticker.<sup>59</sup> Instead of bringing the pearls and gems from his exegesis into the pulpit, the preacher is more concerned about consolidating everything to make sure it fits on a screen. Robert Howard wrote about this danger in an article for *Encounter*, “Thinking can thus all too easily be reduced to slogans – the infamous ‘bulleted points’ – which are then constricted by the limits of horizontal space on the slide.”<sup>60</sup> Can a preacher really take his congregation through the text and from death to life again with bullet points?

Bullet points can easily lead to “self-help preaching.” What can happen when a church member who heard all about how to become more financially happy in five easy steps from his pastor on Sunday morning fails to follow the steps? That church member could feel like a failure. Or even worse, what if he follows the steps and does not become financially happy or sound?

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<sup>57</sup> Reynolds, 95.

<sup>58</sup> Quanbeck, 422.

<sup>59</sup> Willimon, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Howard, 35.

Then church has the potential of becoming a place of lies and false hope. The more often he hears about these easy to follow solutions for everyday problems on Sunday morning, the more he could feel like a failure because he cannot do it. How long will someone keep coming to church when it all it does is make them feel like a failure? A year? Maybe two years? Eventually he will leave. All he heard was law and no gospel. A preacher who uses bullet points to create “five easy steps to...” creates an impossible law to follow and minimizes the gospel until it is out of the picture. This is a very real danger in PowerPoint preaching.

Continuing this argument, people who are against using PowerPoint in church state that it makes church feel like a business. The PowerPoint becomes a way to market the church business. It is like churches are marketing their faith and the Bible. Willimon says this marketing is the reason why many churches do use PowerPoint. He writes, “This also appears to be the major motivation behind PowerPoint Preaching. The gospel is advocated on the basis of its utility in effecting desired outcomes and goods that are neither internal to nor promised by the gospel.”<sup>61</sup> Instead of preaching what the gospel really proclaims, pastors find ways to market the gospel, to make it into what they think people want to hear. This changes the very fabric of the Bible. Instead of being a book about God’s power and what God has done for us, it is a book about how to get happy or how to get what one wants. Willimon continues, “The vast cosmic claims of the gospel get reduced to an answer to a question that consumes contemporary North Americans, though it’s hardly ever treated in Scripture: What’s in it for me?”<sup>62</sup> If a preacher ever finds himself thinking this way for his people, he has some serious Scripture searching to do. This may be the way that many mainstream evangelicals preach today, but it is not how the Bible teaches or what it proclaims. Sadly, PowerPoint has made it easier for preachers to come up with these lists to teach and preach self-satisfaction and self-glorification. PowerPoint should not be used in this way.

Another danger of PowerPoint preaching comes from the switching of senses. Parishioners primarily use their sense of hearing on Sunday mornings. The hymns are sung out loud so that the timeless truths of God’s Word can be combined with music and be pleasing to the ears. The words of the confession and absolution are spoken out loud so that members can hear their confessions made aloud and their forgiveness spoken to them. Prayers are said out loud

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<sup>61</sup> Willimon, 34.

<sup>62</sup> Willimon, 34.

so that the people can hear their cries ringing out to God. The sermon is spoken for the ears so people can hear the unchanging grace and favor God has had on his people for centuries. With all of this auditory action, some argue that it is too hard for the brain to switch to visual. It takes too much time for the brain to switch processing modes. Howard argues that switching between visual and auditory too quickly can cause listeners to miss important parts of the sermon:

Furthermore, the sermon is burdened by the necessity to allow adequate time for the congregation to reorient its consciousness to the new sense, from aural to visual and back. It simply takes time for groups of human listeners to readjust their orientation. Switching sensory systems too swiftly will result in part of the sermon being lost to the hearers as they mentally adjust.<sup>63</sup>

Howard's point is valid and certainly deserves some consideration. One way to combat what Howard is concerned about here is to not use too many slides. If there are only a few slides then there will not be many instances of reorientation. That can reduce the chances of the sermon being lost and give time to listeners to adjust.

Many people have also argued that PowerPoint simply takes up too much time for it to be useful for a pastor. Without a worship or technology team, the work of creating the PowerPoint falls squarely on the shoulders of the pastor. That takes up valuable ministry time. Howard writes, "Furthermore, presenters now tend to lavish the majority of their time on what has come to be called the 'look-n-feel' of the presentation – the font, size, color, movement, associated graphics, and sounds – rather than the content itself."<sup>64</sup> If a preacher is spending more time on the PowerPoint presentation than on the content, the meat of the sermon, then that is a problem. PowerPoint is not supposed to be the sermon. It is simply there to enhance it.

Not only does a pastor's time get sucked up by "look-n-feel" of a PowerPoint presentation, but all the bells and whistles of PowerPoint can become distracting. There are so many options for transitions that are just plain annoying and distracting. It can look unprofessional and detract from the message. Quanbeck writes, "The point is that bells and whistles look cool for the moment, but raise the vulnerability and dependency level of the sermon without significantly enhancing the message—and may, in fact, detract from it."<sup>65</sup> No matter what way PowerPoint is used in worship, it should be done in a professional and

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<sup>63</sup> Howard, 35.

<sup>64</sup> Howard, 35.

<sup>65</sup> Quanbeck, 422.

reverential manner. All those bells and whistles only eat up time on a pastor's schedule and serve as a distraction to the congregation.

The final argument that people make against using visual presentation technology in sermons is that it puts the image in competition with the preacher. If a pastor uses a beautiful picture to illustrate a point on the screen, the danger is that the people will look right past the pastor and only at the picture on the screen. Quanbeck writes, "In using PowerPoint, or any display, the preacher is in competition with the image or the list. When given the option, the audience will look past the preacher to the image on the screen and will prefer looking over listening."<sup>66</sup> Quanbeck might be stating his case too strongly here though. People are used to watching and listening at the same time. This happens all the time with movies and television. People are capable of both listening and seeing and comprehending both at the same time.

Instead, there is a different kind of danger that is true not only for visual presentation technology, but also preaching without such devices. Many people can think of a time a pastor used an illustration and only remember the illustration and not the spiritual point being made. If a pastor uses digital pictures, the danger is that people will only remember the picture or visual aid. This is a real danger and can become a problem when using this kind of technology. The picture is no longer a help or an enhancement of the sermon, but rather a distraction and hindrance.

This is not a comprehensive list of all the dangers of using visual presentation technology in sermons or worship, but it does highlight some of the main arguments used against PowerPoint and similar software in preaching. Every pastor needs to wrestle with these arguments and find the correct balance of technology in worship. Each pastor who does use visual presentation technology should also continuously evaluate his congregation's response to that technology particularly concerning these valid arguments. This is something that has to be done on a church by church basis. There is no magic formula or one size fits all for this particular question. Pastors should also weigh these disadvantages of using visual presentation technology with the advantages of using this powerful tool.

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<sup>66</sup> Quanbeck, 422.



## Arguments for Using Visual Presentation Technology

One of the biggest arguments for using PowerPoint in sermons is that the world is shifting from a word based culture to an image based culture. According to the Nielson Company “State of the Media” report in 2010, the average American home contains 2.5 TVs. Americans spend 35.6 hours a week watching TV.<sup>67</sup> That is nearly the same as the typical 40 hour work week. Americans spend a ton of time digesting images. Andrew Root writes in an article for *Word and World*, “As hard as it might be for text-loving pastors and professors, the world no longer revolves around words, but images.”<sup>68</sup> People are constantly bombarded with images. Their senses have grown used to seeing things and hearing things at the same time. But an important question to ask is this: Is this really all that new? Garr Reynolds suggests that it is not:

Images are a powerful and natural way for humans to communicate. The key word here is *natural*. We are hardwired for understanding images and using them to communicate. Something inside of us – even from a very young age – seems to yearn to draw, paint, photograph, or otherwise show the ideas in our heads.<sup>69</sup>

Reynolds is using some broad strokes to paint humans, but to a certain extent what he says is very true. Children do not learn how to speak by reading first; they see an image and learn the name for it. In this way, every human is at first a visual learner.

Not only is every human born a visual learner, but pictures and images are also more memorable than text or oral messages for most humans. Using pictures in a sermon can help members remember the key points of the message. Reynolds goes on:

According to the picture superiority effect, pictures are remembered better than words – especially when people are casually exposed to the information and the exposure is for a very limited time... Visual imagery is a powerful mnemonic tool that helps learning and increases retention compared to, say, witnessing someone read words off a screen.<sup>70</sup>

Reynolds suggests with this quote that using pictures can help church members not only remember the sermon better, but also understand it better. Using pictures can also help with

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<sup>67</sup>The Nielson Company, “State of the Media 2010: U.S. Audiences and Devices,” Nielson, <http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/corporate/us/en/newswire/uploads/2011/01/nielsen-media-fact-sheet-jan-11.pdf> (accessed November 26, 2013).

<sup>68</sup> Root, 421.

<sup>69</sup> Reynolds, 144.

<sup>70</sup> Reynolds, 144.

learning and understanding. So while having members remember sermons may not at the top of every pastor's wish list, certainly having members understand the message is near the top. Reynolds suggests that using images helps with understanding. Using pictures and visuals is something that is natural to human beings. It is something that has been done since God created the world. It is the very first way that humans learn.

So how can pastors and church leaders expect their congregations to sit in a church for an hour once a week and practice something that is becoming more and more foreign to society and to the way their brains work? Sitting still and just listening is harder now than it was in the past because of the image saturated culture of today. But if a pastor can engage his congregation with not just the spoken words of his sermon, but also the use of visuals, he has a better chance at keeping their attention. As Richard Vosko writes:

As more young and older persons tether themselves to digital devices, their behavior is changing. The constant desire for instant communication about the weather, news, entertainment, and with friends is contagious. What goes on during worship could be tedious if the ritual action is not immediately engaging. This is the big difference between religions that stand firm in their traditional ways and the emerging churches. The former are quite predictable and potentially boring, while the latter are constantly changing with the tide, employing every possible method to touch people.<sup>71</sup>

There are many different ways that a church can make its liturgy, services, and sermons engaging. One way is with extremely well done music. Another is with interactive and authentic liturgical practices. And of course, the use of technology and visual software presentations can also be engaging.

When a church can become engaging in the way that Vosko is talking about, it sends ripple effects throughout the whole church dynamic. Church becomes a place where people are actively involved in worship. People want to engage in the worship and ritual and pay attention to the message. There is more social interaction between church members. Vosko says, "Captivating experiences in church can pull people together and prompt them to switch off their smart phones. This is why learning to use technology during worship is important."<sup>72</sup> If visual

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<sup>71</sup> Richard Vosko, "Liturgical technology, social media, and the green church," *Liturgical Ministry* [serial online], March 1, 2011; 20(2):87-9,. Available from: ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, Ipswich, MA. Accessed August 29, 2013, 88.

<sup>72</sup> Vosko, 89.

presentation technology helps congregants feel like they are more active and interactive in worship, then it might be wise for church leaders to consider using this tool.

If someone asked pastors whether they wanted more active participation by their congregation in worship or less participation in worship, what would pastors say? Most pastors would want more participation from their congregants. Now to be fair, there were no surveys conducted on this issue, so this is an assumption. But it's a fairly safe assumption. Part of the job of a pastor is to equip the saints, to train them for acts of service, to teach them how to glorify God. A great way to do that is with active participation in worship. Vosko agrees:

The intention is always to foster more participation by congregation members by engaging more of their senses. Realistically, this will mean that most churches will find ways to use technology to enhance what is going on and make people feel like they are dynamically, personally, and communally involved in the rituals they are celebrating.<sup>73</sup>

One of the purposes of using PowerPoint and similar technologies is to actively engage members in worship. Again, why not consider using visual presentation technology in a sermon if it means members will feel more involved and be more likely to listen because more of their senses are engaged?

A great visual presentation can serve as an attention grabber. In school pastors learn different types of rhetorical devices to help keep their congregations engaged. These rhetorical devices are not confused with the work of the Word, the law and gospel, or with the work of the Holy Spirit. The means of grace are the only effective way that the Holy Spirit works. But still these rhetorical devices are taught, practiced, and honed by preachers around the world. As Pastor Jonathan Schroeder wrote in his paper on worship and outreach, we have no control over the efficient and instrumental causes of salvation, but we do have control over the ministerial cause, which is the preacher.<sup>74</sup> In this visual age, a picture can serve the same purpose as rhetorical devices. It can keep the congregation actively involved in paying attention to the sermon message. Garr Reynolds who is an expert on giving presentations and using what he calls slideware technology has this to say about using visuals, "You put up a slide. It triggers an emotional reaction in the audience. They sit up and want to know what you're going to say that

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<sup>73</sup> Vosko, 89.

<sup>74</sup> Jonathan, Schroeder, "Worship and Outreach: a Lutheran Paradigm." Seminary Essay File. <http://www.wlssays.net/files/SchroederParadigm.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2014).

fits in with that image. Then, if you do it right, every time they think of what you said, they'll see the image (and vice versa)."<sup>75</sup> So Reynolds gives two reasons to use slideware technology. The first is to engage the audience and get an emotional reaction. This targets the heart. Then, if it's done in the right way, the image and message remain connected. It's like a link is created in the brain so that whenever someone sees that same image again, the message is recalled. When both the heart and the head are involved, it's a powerful tool.

Presentation software such as PowerPoint can also help communicate in a clear and concise fashion. This is what makes PowerPoint such a valuable tool in the classroom. These properties can transfer to the pulpit as well. Even if preaching is not teaching, a preacher still must be clear in order to present the truth of God's word. PowerPoint can help with this. Consider this example: a pastor is preaching on a thorny text from Scripture. He reads the text, but it's a really hard text to understand; especially only hearing it read once. Then the pastor goes on to try to explain that text. It's hard for most people to truly grasp what the preacher is saying because they still have not understood the text. But if the text is on the screen and people can read it for themselves, then they can keep it in front of them and understand it better. Leith Anderson presents his opinion on this matter:

Technology can certainly help when it comes to communicating the truth. I find, for example, that if the words of the Bible text are projected on a screen, people focus on them. They better engage with the actual words of the Bible. That's helpful when it comes to grasping the truth.<sup>76</sup>

There's that word again: engage. Putting the sermon text on the screen can help keep people engaged. Now some might argue that these words are also in the bulletin, or they can be found in the Bible. People can follow along that way. True, but putting it on the screen puts the text in front of everyone to see. There is no extra effort required to find the quote in the Bible or in the bulletin. The beauty of projecting the words on the screen is that the pastor can highlight a certain section from the text. And in that already highlighted text he can highlight a specific word or two. He can focus the congregation right onto the words he is talking about in his sermon. The congregation does not just hear the explanation, but they see it too.

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<sup>75</sup> Garr Reynolds, *Presentationzen: simple ideas on presentation design and delivery*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2012, 21.

<sup>76</sup> Leith Anderson, "Is PowerPoint Fading? While the Technology Is Ever-Present, Expectations Are Ever-Changing." *Leadership* 28, no. 3 (June 1, 2007): *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed August 28, 2013), 36.

One other reason why people support the use of presentation technology in sermons is because pictures and videos can portray things that words simply cannot. Consider the example used earlier in this paper. A wife asks her husband if he loves her. The husband proclaims that he does indeed love her. He does not explain love or the reasons for his love in a didactic manner, but simply proclaims his love for her. This is good; he's proclaimed love for her. But even better than this proclamation of love is the husband showing love to his wife in addition to the proclamation. There has to be more than just words of love between these two. There must be a showing of love. This is reaching out to the pathos, to the emotions. Anderson writes:

Likewise with 'pathos.' A video clip can be very effective in communicating passion, touching people's hearts, engaging the emotions. That emotion may be love, it may be fear, it can be just about anything in the range of emotional possibilities. But technology can deliver it in a way that often the individual speaker cannot.<sup>77</sup>

Now a picture or video is going to engage people in very different ways. Some might be extremely emotionally moved, and others hardly moved at all. That is totally fine. Not everyone has to have a strong emotional connection to the sermon every Sunday every week. But there are certain texts and certain times when a pastor really does want to draw out and probe the emotions of his congregation. Spoken words can be incredibly powerful for this. And when those carefully crafted and powerful words are combined with an equally powerful picture or video it connects with the people in the congregation in an extraordinary way. Consider Ezekiel's message and his means of proclaiming it. There is no doubt that his message to his fellow countrymen was made more poignant with the model of Jerusalem. Visually seeing the destruction was more powerful than just hearing about it from Ezekiel.

Another reason to support the use of visual presentation technology in sermons is the biblical precedent of using visual aids. As mentioned previously in this paper, there is a lot of evidence of visual aids in use in the Bible. Jeremiah's ministry incorporated visuals in many different ways. His message was so urgent that he not only wanted to be heard, but also seen. The message God has given to his Church today is just as urgent as Jeremiah's message was. Jesus left the disciples with the command to make more disciples. God has given his people the privilege of working in the harvest fields to share the life giving message of the gospel. If the message preached by pastors today is just as vital and important as Jeremiah's or Ezekiel's or

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<sup>77</sup> Anderson, Leith, 37.

Jesus' message, then shouldn't the church be making use of pictures and visual aids just like those in the Bible did?

Recall how Jesus used visual aids in his sermons and teaching. Perhaps the most valuable thing to learn from the way Jesus taught is how he used variety. He did not use visual aids all the time, nor did he just use his words all the time either. There was always a healthy balance of both. He knew what lessons would go well with a visual aid. He knew when it would be more effective to preach without them. Jesus just did whatever it took to make his point and to advance his ministry and kingdom. Has something changed in the last two thousand years to make variety ineffective and no longer a tool for preaching the gospel? Jesus made use of variety in proclaiming his message. There is more than one way to proclaim the grace of God and visual presentation technologies opens the door to more variety.

### **How to Use Visual Presentation Technology**

Earlier in this paper it was mentioned that society is becoming more and more visual. Some simple statistics from television viewership helped to back up this claim. So it seems like people in churches would naturally transition and get used to having images and visuals in church, but that is not always the case. A pastor who abruptly starts using visual presentation technology in worship without first preparing his congregation will likely face a lot of opposition. One of the first steps to using technology in worship is to prepare the congregation for the technology.

Part of the reason why congregations might be hesitant and questioning of this technology is because the visuals that society throws out are not always good. Not all the images are pure and lovely. Not all the images give honor and glory to God. Not all the images even make sense. Quentin Schultze writes, "Nevertheless, we face a major problem: we do not live in an *image-savvy* culture. We must contend with an *image-saturated* yet largely *image-ignorant* society."<sup>78</sup> The point Schultze makes is that many Americans do not even know the importance of the visual in their lives anymore. Images are so common and thrown about so often, that they have started to lose their impact and meaning. In order to correct this, time needs to be spent educating people about the importance of images and symbols especially in the church. If a

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<sup>78</sup> Schultze, 20.

pastor wants to make use of digital images and presentation software in his church, he has to prepare and educate his flock first. One way to prepare a congregation for this is to teach the rich history of the use of visuals and images in the church.

Part of the problem concerning the ignorance about Christian images and symbols is similar to the problem of biblical illiteracy. In a society where biblical literacy is virtually nonexistent, Christian images and symbols have also started to lose their purpose and meaning. No longer can church leaders take it for granted that their people will know what Christian images and symbols mean just because these images and symbols have been around for centuries. Baptisms are conducted in the church as a visual reminder of the new life Christians have in Christ and their rebirth through the water and the word. Holy Communion takes place at the front of church around the altar as a visual reminder of the forgiveness of sins purchased by Christ's body and blood. Burning incense visually reminds people of prayers rising up to God. The flames of candles show how Christ is the light of the world and how Christians are to be lights in the world. But how many Christians know this? The rich history of imagery in worship is still present, but the average Christian has no idea why it is present. Before a pastor can use PowerPoint or other similar technology, he needs to instruct and educate the flock on the role imagery and symbols have played in the Church since the very beginning. There's a chance that the common symbols found in just about every church building have become invisible to its members. One way to prepare a congregation for the implementation of visual projection technology is to teach them about these symbols and educate the congregation on the role images and symbols have played in the Church since the beginning.

Another potential obstacle in the implementation of visual presentation technology is the architecture of the church. Most churches were not built with the thought of large projection screens hanging from the front of the church somewhere. This can be a real problem, especially in older churches. Vosko gives some good, concrete examples of what those problems could be:

The incorporation of liturgical technology in older church buildings is more complicated. In either situation churches will do well to consider the following observations. The use of technology in church can detract from the very experience one is trying to enhance. Sounds that are too loud, digital projectors and screens that are not custom installed, control boards that are not discreet, and an endless stream of images are some of the glaring factors that can divert the attention of the assembly away from live ritual actions.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Vosko, 89.

If the technology is not employed well, it can end up being more of a distraction than an enhancement.

Here are some basic guidelines to follow when it comes to installing screens and projectors. First of all, never let a screen block the cross in the front of the church. Think of the kind of message that sends. It takes one of the most important Christian symbols and essentially throws it away. It could send the message that the means of portraying the message is more important than the message itself. The cross in the front cannot be blocked by the screen.

Second, ideally the screen should be able to go away. Not every service is going to have visual projection, so the screen should be able to hide easily. One practical way to do this is with a retractable screen that can be hidden with the push of a button. Otherwise, when the screen is not in use and people are in church, they could become distracted by it. People's eyes are naturally drawn to screens. If there is nothing on the screen, then people are confused by its purpose in the sanctuary. It can detract from the message of that day. So if it's not being used, put it away.

Third, make sure the screen fits the architecture of the rest of the church. This is one of the issues that Schultze talks about in his book.<sup>80</sup> If there are a lot of wood accents in the church, then put the screen in a wooden casing when it's not being used. Put borders on the screen that match the color of the wood. The point is to try and make it look like the screen belongs there, and it's not some alien object in the room.

Finally, place the screen up high enough so that it is visible to everyone in the church, but at the same time, make sure screens are not placed so high that people in the first few rows have to strain their necks to see them.<sup>81</sup> Visibility is important, but so is comfort in being able to see them. Visual aids are of no use when people cannot see them and when it causes neck strain to look at them. It would also be wise to put screens on both sides of the church if possible as well. That way, people have more than one option if their sightline is blocked.

Churches that want to incorporate visual presentation technology in their worship must be prepared to spend some money in order to do it well. Vosko explains:

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<sup>80</sup> Schultze, 68.

<sup>81</sup> Schultze, 68.



The best digital projectors are expensive but nevertheless a good investment for those congregations using projected images to complement liturgical prayer... The brightness and resolution of the image is important for clarity especially in brighter churches. Digital projectors with more lumens will result in brighter images in spaces with ambient light.<sup>82</sup>

High quality digital projectors are expensive. The prices vary depending on how bright the projection needs to be, the distance it needs to cover, and many other variables.<sup>83</sup> But no matter what, it's going to cost a lot of money to get the high quality projector that churches should be using. And if there are two worship screens, then two projectors will be needed. Add in the custom installation work as well, and it can be an extremely expensive project.<sup>84</sup>

Not only that, but it is important to plan where the projectors will be mounted.<sup>85</sup> They should not be in a space that is distracting, but should instead be in a place that is inconspicuous. Nor should projectors be heard. Most projectors made today hum so quietly they cannot be heard, but some older models can have a distracting sound. This noise can be disturbing during quiet times of meditation during services.

Those who are starting building projects have the unique advantage and opportunity to design technology into the church building. They can build audio/visual rooms into the plans. They can decide where they want to place projectors and screens and build it right into the architecture and design of the building. Vosko gives some interesting thoughts on how to design these new buildings with technology in mind:

Most churches that use liturgical technology are designed with a socio-petal seating plan, usually a circle or semicircle. The location of the projection screens in these places will allow everyone in the congregation to see the images clearly. The size of the image is important. Large built-in screens near the ritual action (over the font, the ambo, and altar table) will enable very large congregations to see what is going on. The projection of imagery or words and song lyrics all around a truly centralized seating plan could heighten the feeling of being connected with other worshipers while ritual actions are carried out in different parts of the space.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Vosko, 89.

<sup>83</sup> One extremely helpful website for determining the right projector for a particular worship space is [projectorcentral.com](http://projectorcentral.com). This site offers explanations on the different qualities that projectors possess and which one would be ideal for a specific space.

<sup>84</sup> Schultze, 69.

<sup>85</sup> Schultze, 68.

<sup>86</sup> Vosko, 90.

Vosko really emphasizes the importance of being able to see the screen or screens clearly. All these things should be taken into account when planning for visual technology in the church.

Some older churches simply may not have the space or an area to place a screen that makes sense. There really is not much that can be done in this situation unless a church wants to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars redesigning their worship space. Then this also becomes an issue of stewardship.<sup>87</sup> Is it really worth all the money and effort to try to modernize an old sanctuary that is full of tradition? Each church will have to wrestle with that decision on its own. Sometimes a worship screen simply does not make sense and would only serve as a distraction. In those churches, it is important to find other ways to actively engage the congregation during sermons and worship because in this type of context, visual presentation technology simply does not fit or make sense.

For those churches that do have the capability to project images and video that makes good sense with the architecture and design of the building, there is still the issue of designing the presentations that will be shown during sermons. This is something that needs to be done with a lot of thought and care. There are a lot of books out on the market that are written to help people give excellent, high-quality, professional looking visual presentations. Some are excellent resources; others are somewhat lacking. One should be careful and do his research before purchasing one of these books as a resource. One of the books that stands above the rest is the one mentioned earlier in the literature review section of this paper: *Presentation zen* by Garr Reynolds.

One of the first things that Reynolds emphasizes about giving presentations is to be careful of the templates built into programs like PowerPoint. He explains, “Software companies have oversold us on the idea of following templates and wizards, which while sometimes useful, often take us places we do not really want to go.”<sup>88</sup> Following those templates leads to the “bullet point preaching” mentioned earlier in this paper. While great for condensing a lot of information, it’s not particularly great for preaching. So do not start with a template; start with a blank slate. PowerPoint can truly be used as a blank canvass. One does not need to have a Microsoft designed template to make a presentation. High-quality pictures with text boxes original to the presentation are more effective when presenting visually than an overused and boring template.

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<sup>87</sup> Schultze, 69.

<sup>88</sup> Reynolds, 46.

In the initial stages of planning a visual presentation, Reynolds suggests getting away from the computer to stimulate creativity.<sup>89</sup> For a pastor, this might look like visualizing the sermon after completing all the parts of a text study. Sometimes the best thinking time happens in the absence of a computer. This helps stimulate ideas and creativity. Use a pen and paper to draw thoughts and ideas. Outline the sermon and find the best places to put in visuals and text.<sup>90</sup> Find the places to put the theme on the screen for everyone to see it. Decide when the screen will be blank so that the people just focus on the words of the pastor. Do all of this away from the computer.

Reynolds warns what could happen if this important creative time is spent in front of a screen, “Many of us spend too much time fidgeting with and worrying about bullets and images on slides during the preparation stage instead of thinking about how to craft the story that is the most effective, memorable, and appropriate for our audience.”<sup>91</sup> Do not waste time on those small things before the more important task of figuring out how to tell the story is completed. It is in this important design phase that Reynolds says two questions must be answered: “What is my point? And why does it matter?”<sup>92</sup> Pastors answer that question in their text study. Basically, it’s like figuring out the theme and why the congregation needs to hear that theme. Then decide the best way to present that theme to the congregation using visual presentation technology.

When a pastor is contemplating how to present visually, there are some key points he must realize. The first is that the visual presentation can be a striking way of communicating law and gospel and it does have the ability to change hearts. That being said, a preacher cannot allow the visual presentation to take the place of a solid text study, a well thought out theme, a logical outline, a well written sermon, a memorized sermon, and a strong delivery. Basically, the screen cannot become a crutch. Even Reynolds, whose book is aimed at the business use of visual presentations, recognizes this point, “The verbal content, the verbal proof, evidence and appeal/emotion come mostly from your spoken word.”<sup>93</sup> The projected visuals cannot become the sermon. Nor can the projected visuals not fit with the message the pastor is talking about.

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<sup>89</sup> Reynolds, 45.

<sup>90</sup> Root, 423.

<sup>91</sup> Reynolds, 61.

<sup>92</sup> Reynolds, 64.

<sup>93</sup> Reynolds, 70.

That causes distraction and confusion.<sup>94</sup> Instead, they “should be as visual as possible and support your points quickly, efficiently, and powerfully.”<sup>95</sup>

What exactly does that look like? There is no golden rule that can be applied to every presentation in every context. Some of the variables that every pastor will have to consider include the following: what is the makeup of the congregation? Is it mostly lifelong WELS members who know their Bible well and the Lutheran doctrine? Or is it a younger congregation with members who are brand new to WELS or maybe even brand new to Christianity? In that case, more teaching takes place from the pulpit which affects how a pastor would use visual presentation. Another variable is the sermon text. Is the text picturesque? Then what are the natural pictures already in the text that could easily be projected onto a screen to make it more concrete for the members? Or is the text lacking pictures? Then a pastor might consider not even using a visual presentation. Still another thing to consider is how many stories and illustrations the pastor is going to use in his sermon. Are there pictures that would help reinforce the illustration? And if so, how is that picture used powerfully? One simple idea is to have the portrait of someone who is quoted in the sermon or used in an illustration. Connecting a face to a name is a powerful and efficient way to use images.

One of the great advantages of using a visual presentation in a sermon is that it can enhance a pastor’s stories and illustrations. Stories and illustrations are a key part to the sermon process because it helps connect people. Great stories are relatable and reinforce the theme of a sermon. Reynolds writes about the importance of stories in presentations, especially visual presentation:

Humans are predisposed to remembering experiences in the narrative form; we learn best with a narrative structure. Humans have been sharing information aurally and visually far longer than we have been getting information by reading lists. A 2003 *Harvard Business Review* article on the power of story says storytelling is the key to leadership and communication in business: “Forget PowerPoint<sup>96</sup> and statistics, to involve people at the deepest level you need to tell stories.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Schultze, 66.

<sup>95</sup> Reynolds, 70.

<sup>96</sup> Here Reynolds means the type of PowerPoint that uses bullet points and many words.

<sup>97</sup> Reynolds, 84.

Stories are important to sermons. But one must be careful here. One cannot craft an excellent story with great visuals to support and enhance the story just for the sake of telling a really great and engaging story. The story must serve the theme of the sermon and help as a proof of the main point. Stories for the sake of stories are a bad homiletical practice. Likewise, using visual presentation for the sake of having visual presentation in church also is a bad decision. The visuals must serve the theme and help prove the main point.

With that caution in mind, stories with relevant and powerful visuals can really enhance a sermon. Reynolds quotes Dana Atchley in his book:

Digital storytelling combines the best of two worlds: the “new world” of digitized video, photography, and art, and the “old world” of telling stories. This means the “old world” of PowerPoint slides filled with bullet point statements will be replaced by a “new world” of examples via stories, accompanied by evocative images and sounds.”<sup>98</sup>

The use of visual technology opens the door for pastors to tell even greater stories that support the theme and message. Instead of using bullet points to tell the story, use pictures and images to reinforce the message.

A lot of the concepts written about so far in this paper concerning how to present visually during a sermon have been philosophical and theoretical. Mostly that is because each situation is different and something that works in northern Wisconsin might not work in South Florida. But there are some basic guidelines that can be applied to most visual presentations. The most important thing for any visually projected image or word is readability. If the congregation cannot read the text or see the image, then the visual presentation is a failure. Use fonts that are clear and easy to read. Most experts suggest using a sans serif font<sup>99</sup> for digitally projected words. Fonts like Arial or Verdana or Helvetica work nicely.

The font size is even more important than what font you use. Schultze says this is one of the biggest causes of distraction and awkwardness in churches during visual technology presentations.<sup>100</sup> If the font is so small that it can only be read from the first three pews, that is a problem. One way to test if the font is large enough is to stand at the very back of the church or in the balcony and see if the text is readable. Have a few people do this. Perhaps a younger child

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<sup>98</sup> Reynolds, 94.

<sup>99</sup> urbanfonts.com, “Serif vs Sans: The Final Battle,” Urban Fonts, <http://www.urbanfonts.com/blog/2013/02/serif-vs-sans-the-final-battle/> (accessed February 14, 2014).

<sup>100</sup> Schultze, 66.

with glasses and an older person would be good to test with. Remember, readability is the key. If people cannot see or read the visuals, then they are worthless.

Just like some font styles and sizes are easier to read on a screen, in a similar way specific pictures are easier to view. Use only high-quality photos. One can filter the size of the image when searching on Google. The typical size of a slide on a program like Microsoft's PowerPoint is 800x600. So limit the search of images to that size or larger when looking for images. It is wise not to use grainy images, but rather ones that are sharp, clear and look like they are in high-definition. The same thing is true of videos one might play during a sermon or service. It is worth it to pay the extra money to get high-definition. Seth Godin writes in an article in Reynold's book to never use cheesy or grainy photos, but to only get the high-quality images which might mean using a professional stock photo website.<sup>101</sup> This costs money, but sometimes one needs to pay a little bit for the perfect image that fits. However, most images can be searched for and found for free using an internet search engine.<sup>102</sup> These high-quality and high resolution pictures can then fill up the entire slide and the screen without becoming grainy or unclear.

It is also very important in a presentation of this kind to just keep things simple. The pastor wants people to see the images, not get distracted by transitions.<sup>103</sup> Godin says, "No dissolves, spins, or other transitions. Keep it simple."<sup>104</sup> To say to never use transitions might be going a bit too far, but in general it is a good rule to follow. Every now and then a very fast fade can be an effective transition so the presentation is not just jumping from slide to slide, but again, keep it simple. Reynolds offers a great definition of what it means to keep things simple:

It is difficult to give a definition of simplicity, but when I say we need to create messages and design visuals that are simple, I am not talking about taking shortcuts, ignoring complexities, or endorsing meaningless sound bites and shallow content. When I use the word *simple* (or *simplicity*), I am referring to the term as essentially synonymous with clarity, directness, subtlety, essentialness, and minimalism.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Reynolds, 20.

<sup>102</sup> Of course, one must be careful of copyright laws when searching for images to use from the internet.

<sup>103</sup> Schultze, 66.

<sup>104</sup> Reynolds, 20.

<sup>105</sup> Reynolds, 115.

The last five nouns of Reynold's quote are what every pastor should be striving for in his visual presentation to his congregation during his sermon.

Another question a pastor must ask is how he wants to display text during his sermon. There are a variety of ways to do this. Bullet points is the default way that programs like PowerPoint get text into a presentation, but that is not always the best method:

A good general guideline is to use bullet points very rarely and only after careful consideration of other options for displaying the information in a way that best supports your message. Do not let the default bulleted lists of the software template dictate your decision... I am not suggesting that you completely abandon the use of bullet points in multimedia presentations, but the usage should be a rare exception.<sup>106</sup>

The dangers of "bullet point preaching" have already been discussed in this paper. Here Reynolds also says that bullet points are not necessarily the best way of delivering text to an audience. Reynolds offers this solution instead:

While long bullet points are not very effective visually, displaying quotations in slides can be a very powerful technique. Depending on the presentation, I often use quite a few quotes from various fields to support my points. The trick is not to use them too much and to make sure they are short and legible.<sup>107</sup>

Here Reynolds gives some strong advice. He suggests that the only text in a presentation should be a quote. For a pastor that means any quote from Scripture or a quote in an illustration. The other thing Reynolds says is to keep it short. When displaying passages, a pastor might consider only displaying one verse per slide in his sermon. The words on the screen should be few and should serve a purpose.

Finally, all of this is going to take time and effort. It's tough to ask a pastor who is already putting in fifty plus hours a week to find some more time to make visual presentations for his sermons. Or even worse, taking away from his sermon preparation time because he's busy looking for the perfect pictures on Google image search. That is why Schultze suggests putting together a technology or multimedia team.<sup>108</sup> There are many benefits to having this team. First of all, it frees up the pastor from putting together all the nuts and bolts of the presentation. This can be very time consuming and tedious so it's good to split up that work. Also, it allows

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<sup>106</sup> Reynolds, 143.

<sup>107</sup> Reynolds, 153.

<sup>108</sup> Schultze, 89.

someone who is probably more technologically savvy than the pastor to do the tech work. This also gives members of a pastor's congregation a unique way to serve the body of Christ.

So who should be on this multimedia ministry team? Schultze offers some good advice on what kind of people to include. He says that there are essentially four different types of people who should be included on this team.<sup>109</sup> First of all, dreamers should be on the team. These are people who are creative and can see a vision of what the outcome should look like. They might not be the best people at putting together a presentation, but they can see what looks good and what the final product should look like. To supplement the dreamers, people with a lot of technological competence should also be on the team. These people might not be the best at seeing the final outcome, but they can work well with computers and know the ins and outs of computer software. They make the vision of the dreamers a reality. Along with the dreamers and the techies, there should be some film buffs. These people watch a lot of movies and television. They are familiar with the different techniques that directors use in their works. The film buffs can also help giving their opinion if the presentation looks professional or not. Finally, there should also be artists on the team. These people have a great sense of creativity. Having an artist who is a photographer is also very important. That person can take photos that cannot be found on the internet. All of these people would serve as great parts of multimedia team.

### **Conclusion**

There is so much to consider when a pastor weighs out whether or not to use visual presentation technology in his sermons. Does he have the right equipment? How will the congregation respond? Can he use the technology wisely? What should he put in his visual presentation? What message will he send if he uses presentation technology? What are his reasons for using presentation technology? There are many more questions. One question he can answer is that it is certainly not biblically wrong to use visual aids and presentation technology. Otherwise it would have been wrong for Jeremiah and the prophets to use visual aids. It would have been wrong for Jesus to do so. There certainly is precedent in church history of visual aid use as well. Stained glass windows and other religious art and symbols have served as visual

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<sup>109</sup> Schultze, 89.



reminders of biblical truths for a long time. A pastor can proclaim with visual aids too, but he needs to be sure that he is proclaiming and not just teaching.

Finally, this technology opens the door to many possibilities for a pastor. At a time when society and culture thrusts pictures and videos into every moment of every day, pastors have an opportunity to show pictures and videos that speak of God's Word and love. They can reach out to the lost like Jesus and Jeremiah did making use of everything around them to do so. They can unleash a tool that will enhance their preaching by adding more pathos and variety. Of course this technology can never replace well written sermons. Nor can technology save a pastor who is not in tune with his congregation. Technology cannot even create passion for a pastor. Those things will always be part of the human element of preaching. Anderson writes:

The best communicating is done by a person of good character, well spoken, telling the truth. If someone tells the truth but is not passionate about it, or if someone passionately says something true but lacks character, the message is undermined. All three ingredients are essential.<sup>110</sup>

Technology will never replace a pastor. But technology can enhance a message. Technology can help develop clearer communication. Technology can be a tool to reach out and touch the pathos of human beings. But only if it is used correctly. If a pastor is going to use PowerPoint, he has to make sure it is done well, just like everything else a pastor does.

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<sup>110</sup> Anderson, Leith, 37.

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