

ADAPTING AN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN HOMILETICAL APPROACH TO  
COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY IN A PAKISTANI CULTURAL SETTING

BY

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## ABSTRACT

There have been many studies on an honor/shame culture in the fields of missiology, theology, and hermeneutics. Scholars have diligently labored to research how to apply biblical hermeneutics and methodology in an honor/shame culture. Those studies serve as scaffolding for this thesis because the methodology of interpreting biblical texts is vital. After we have established the methodology and doctrine, i.e., looking at the scriptures with a Christo-centric attitude, how do we properly communicate that in an honor/shame culture such as we find in Pakistan? That is where the rubber hits the road. My research is focused on the homiletical method that is used in Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and WELS as it is currently being applied in Pakistan. Little research has been done on an evangelical Lutheran homiletical methodology for an honor/shame culture, so the purpose of this study is to see how it may be applied to improve the preaching style among WELS mission churches in Pakistan.

## 1- INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2014, I started my academic career at Martin Luther College pursuing pastoral studies. It was also the first time I got to experience American Lutheran preaching. I went to two Lutheran churches in New Ulm for the first six months and listened to online sermons. I also had the privilege of listening to the morning chapel messages five days a week while studying at Martin Luther College.

The content of these sermons was great. It was textual, precise, and doctrinally heavy. The ethos and the pathos of the preachers were present, but there was something that just did not sound right. The next few months, as I worshipped, a question lingered in my mind, "I love the Gospel, and I am hearing it being preached to the best of the abilities of the preacher, so why is it that I am failing to connect well with the message?"

The more I worshipped, the question became like a pebble in my shoe. I sought to explore this question. A few things that I realized were that I am in a culture that is new to me. The worship style was different, which I was slowly getting used to, but there was still something missing as I listened. Yet the Word of God is universal for all people, so why could I not connect with it properly?

On a sunny afternoon, I pondered this question while lunching at the cafeteria. A professor introduced me to another international student, Karim. Karim was a Syrian student who was a few years older than me and was also pursuing pastoral studies. Later that evening, he joined me for the evening chapel. As we shared our experiences of being international students, I shared my concern about not being able to connect entirely with the message, and he said something that stuck with me, "The Gospel sounds too sweet in America." This was an eye-opening statement for me. What he meant is that the way we interacted in our lives with Gospel

was radically different as we grew up in Islamic third-world countries. It made me realize that although the Gospel is universal and does not change, it needs to be communicated efficiently to people of different languages and cultures. Therefore, the manner or method of communicating God's Word, Law and Gospel, may also need to be varied when preaching and teaching in these cultures.

In this paper I intend to study the cultural differences between Pakistani and American churches. After identifying the differences, I will discuss why it is important to build a bridge between the two in communication. To do that, it is important to have a good understanding of the basic principles of communication, especially when preaching the Word of God to others. I want to see how this applies to the evangelical Lutheran homiletical models in Pakistan and in America. To make this study specific, I will be analyzing two sermons on the same text but in the two different cultures to identify their respective rhetoric styles. Finally, I will propose different ways in which the typical homiletical structure that is used in American Lutheran churches may be effectively adapted for use in the WELS-founded Pakistani church.

## 2- LITERATURE REVIEW

The research for this paper can be broken down into three categories that concern the sociological framework, communication, and homiletics. In this literature review, I intend to highlight the resources that stood out in these three areas.

### **Sociological Framework**

The pastoral ministry is a rich call that comes with many responsibilities. As one prepares themselves for a cross cultural ministry, it is important to know who the audience is, and what is the sociological construct they operate in.

The *3D Gospel* by Jayson George is a great introductory tool for understanding the different sociological frameworks that exist in the world. Treading into a new cultural environment can be intimidating. But George's work is encouraging in the sense that it firstly reminds the reader of the fact that the books of Bible were written in various cultural settings indicating that there are multiple dimensions to the God's Word. This means the way God convicts people with his Law and has revealed the Gospel to people has always been tailored for all cultural settings to make it applicable. It is vital for a pastor to understand these dimensions because it will enrich his preaching.

Secondly, as George expounds on how one can categorize cultures, he cautions against stereotyping a culture and explains that it is important to use the insights that point one in the direction of honor-shame, fear-power, and guilt-innocence polarities as possible frames or perspectives, but not necessarily as the foundations of different cultures. For instance, such stereotyping can lead a preacher to focus on only one aspect of his community, making the preaching monotonous and shallow. George states, "More significantly, a one-dimensional

gospel threatens the veracity and integrity of the Bible. . .” As we grasp all dimensions of the gospel, we can more effectively know God and make him known.”<sup>1</sup> It takes time for a pastor to observantly spend time in a culture to learn about it.

### **Exploring Communication**

The second phase of my research consists of exploring communication. To learn about different theories of communication, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* was a tremendous resource. David J. Hesselgrave, who is a professional missiologist, uses traditional models of communication to point out places for basic consideration of improvement. Whereas *3D Gospel* is a helpful introductory tool, Hesselgrave in his textbook dives deeper into the issues of how one can use the new science of communication skills cross-culturally and adapt them to his ministry. He draws from all related disciplines, and his work is reliable and compelling. In addition, his textbook touches about a few Middle Eastern cultures and India that have the collectivistic-dependency traits, i.e., people work together in a group towards one goal, which was helpful as Pakistan shares some of those same traits. Hesselgrave dives deep into Hinduism and Indian culture, and his take on communicating Christ to institutionalists caught my eye as he posed an important question: “How then can we communicate Christ to those who give high priority to the kind of thinking that has been variously labeled psychological, psychical, intuitional, or mystical whether it be found among the old mystics of India or Japan or the new mystics of the West?”<sup>2</sup> As he poses this question and leads the reader to ponder upon the concept of missiology, he points out a few mistakes that missionaries have made over the years. The first one is over

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<sup>1</sup> Jayson George. *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures* (Timē Press, 2017), 74.

<sup>2</sup> David J. Hesselgrave. *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* 2nd ed. (Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 316.

intellectualizing. Hesselgrave contends that since Indian philosophy is subtle and an average Indian is more informed in it than the average westerner, a missionary might be tempted to dive deep into philosophy and overintellectualize the Gospel. This means that a missionary might present Christianity as a philosophical system since philosophy in Hinduism appeals to its followers. A missionary might think of it as building a bridge, but if the person he is trying to reach is an Indian informed in Hindu philosophy, he will likely not be impressed by philosophy.

Hesselgrave states,

The missionary should be prepared to state the Christian case clearly and logically, but that will not be enough. He should remember that Christianity was not thought of as a philosophical system for at least a century after its birth. Only gradually in the second to fourth centuries did it identify itself as a system of philosophy. In the beginning it was a way of salvation. And this primary identification must be made in the Indian context today. Millions of Indians are on a search for that which they have little hope of attaining through many reincarnations. Christ is the Way.<sup>3</sup>

At first glance, this quote seems to be irrelevant as this paper is addressing homiletical practice in a Pakistani context. Hesselgrave focuses on Hinduism, but most of the Pakistani population consists of Muslims. However, the principle can also be applied to Sufism, an ascetic branch of Islam that treasures philosophy and strives to seek higher intellect and enlightenment.

Another mistake that Hesselgrave points out is oversimplification. He states: “Nothing could be so inappropriate to the Indian mind as the presentation of faith as the logical and inescapable conclusion of several simple premises. Such a God is indeed too small to be given credence, and such a faith is too inconsequential to be given consideration. In the final analysis, oversimplification is but another form of over intellectualization.”<sup>4</sup> Oftentimes when missionaries get involved in deeper apologetical debates, they are tempted to lay down the facts

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3. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 318.

4. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 318.

of the Scripture expecting people to immediately understand the principles behind the facts. This kind of intellectual approach should be avoided at all costs because it seems like the missionary is slamming shut the door to any conversation.

Communication is complex to say the least even in one's own culture. There are pastors who are naturally gifted at communication, and some must work on this skill set. That is where Hesselgrave's textbook is an informative resource for anyone who is looking to be more cognizant of communication. But ministry is not just about head knowledge of different theories. A pastor needs to know how to put these into practice.

Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, who is the main author of the book *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, writes on the tension and conflict that missionaries and pastors experience when they attempt to work with people who come from different backgrounds. He states: "Culture, then, is the conceptual design, the definitions by which people order their lives, interpret their experience and evaluate the behavior of others."<sup>5</sup> Using similar models that are presented by Hesselgrave, Lingenfelter uses past experiences of pastors to give the reader a practical idea of how to communicate effectively. Some of the applied aspects of this book, as pointed out in the next chapter, help the reader gain a deeper understanding of themselves and people with whom they live.

### **Homiletics**

The purpose of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is to equip their graduate pastors for churches and cultural groups within its confessional fellowship. The way the seminary curriculum is designed is to prepare men by providing them the spiritual, theological, and professional training needed

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5. Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally An Incarnation Model for Personal Relationships*, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI 1986). 18.

to enter that ministry. There are many aspects of training, but this thesis is focused on one area, which is how to achieve homiletical precision in an honor-shame culture like Pakistan. *Preach the Gospel*, by Joel Gerlach and Richard Balge has been key the textbook for homiletics in Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for numerous years. It is intended for to prepare students for the pulpit ministry and to aid students in reinforcing the fundamentals of Lutheran sermonizing. Some of the key features of sermonizing that the book focuses on are: 1) studying the Biblical text, 2) doing a proper text analysis, 3) working on expanded outlines, and finally 4) using these principles to craft a sermon. Later in the thesis as I intend to analyze sermons to demonstrate some of the main differences between Eastern and Western homiletics, the homiletical model presented in the book will serve as the guide.

A person studying homiletics in a seminary quickly realizes that although homiletical and hermeneutical precision is important, it does not necessarily make captivating sermons for each audience. If one uses different oratorical skills and techniques, it can help to engage congregations better. For this purpose, two books that stand out are *Preaching that Connects* by Mark Galli and *Preaching that Grabs the Heart* by Ernst Wendland. Galli uses different techniques from journalism and public speaking that can aid a pastor to present his sermon better. Wendland's book *Preaching that Grabs the Heart* is more of a study of the rhetorical and stylistic survey of the Chichewa revival sermons of Shadrack Wame. Wendland presents some of the oratorical tools that Evangelist Wame uses in his sermons, for example, evocative descriptions, dramatic delivery, traditional allusions, and verbal intensification. Although, not all of them are similar to an indigenous Pakistani homiletical style, quite a few of them are applicable, the most important ones being the rhetorical use of repetition, which will be demonstrated in the Sermon A that I will analyze in a later chapter.

In conclusion, there are several other sources that I have used for this paper that provide background information, for example, *The Homiletic Window: A Model for Reflective Preaching Praxis* by Myles MacBean and *Preaching to Aliens and Strangers: Preaching the New Testament as Minority Group Rhetoric* by Tim MacBride, but the ones listed above are the primary resources that have facilitated my research and inspired the framework of this paper.

### 3- PAKISTAN: AN HONOR, SHAME, AND FEAR CULTURE

#### **Culture in a Broad Sense**

Culture can be divided into two broad categories: personal culture and shared culture. Everyone is unique in their own way. God has given people different talents, abilities, and personalities. This is what defines one's personal culture. Yet human behavior occurs in a socially defined context. This socially defined context consists of shared values, priorities, and standards of conduct. In any society these beliefs are not just shared, but people either deliberately or involuntarily reinforce them on one another, which is what then becomes the way of life in that cultural setting. An example of beliefs being reinforced in the context of Pakistan, an Islamic country, would be the roles of men and women, which are defined in a distinctive way that determines how one interprets a certain situation. For instance, the sexes are generally kept separate. Women interact primarily with women. If a man is sitting next to a woman, most people seeing them will interpret that they are husband or wife or are engaged. This shared cultural perspective then becomes the foundation of reality and survival. It is something that people use to find order in their lives, interpret their experiences, and evaluate the behavior of others.<sup>6</sup>

But this is only the tip of the iceberg. These designs not only influence society on the surface, but they become intertwined with one's core beliefs and personal culture. And in the context of this paper, they become intertwined with religious beliefs. On the one hand, it can be said that this is common throughout the world, but on the other, anthropological studies show that it is more pronounced in collectivist cultures like Pakistan.

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6. Lingenfelter and Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 18.

## Understanding Pakistani Culture

### Culture on a Spectrum

In a socio-religious Christian context, according to Jayson George, who is citing Eugene Nida:

Christian missiologists identify three responses to sin in the human culture. Eugene Nida said, "We have to reckon with three different reactions to transgressions of religiously sanctioned codes: fear, shame, and guilt." These three moral emotions have become the foundation for three types of culture: (1) *guilt-innocence cultures* are individualistic societies (mostly Western) ... (2) *Shame-honor cultures* describes collectivistic cultures (common in the East), where people are shamed for fulfilling group expectations seek to restore their honor before the community and (3) *fear-power cultures* refers to animistic context (typically tribal), where people are afraid of evil and harm pursue power over the spirit world through magical rituals.<sup>7</sup>

Anthropologists used to study these cultures individually, but cultures overlap in today's globalized world. In the case of Pakistan, that is especially true. As a third-world country, i.e., a less developed country with unstable and inconsistent economy and an out-of-date governmental framework, it is divided into 3 major groups.

1. Tribal: These people live in remote areas of Pakistan, such as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Hunza, and parts of Baluchistan. This group also contains people living in slums and nomadic herders. These people have significant elements of fear-power, which means that they believe that spiritual powers define acceptable human behavior. The leaders in this context are generally religious or spiritual and believe that via ritual practices they can change the course of history.
2. Rural People: This group includes low-income classes of people: generally, farmers, cleaning services, street vendors, etc. Being illiterate, they have elements of fear-power, but as they interact with urban society, they also have an element of honor-shame in their

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7. George, *3D Gospel*, 11.

lifestyle. This means that on one hand they believe in spiritual powers. On the other hand, at a young age, children learn that they are expected to act as representatives who uphold the collective group honor. So an individual who lives in this group aims to avoid bringing shame upon their family and village.

3. Urban society: This consist of various subclasses depending on personal income. This is important as it determines what kind of education the people acquire. For instance, the low-income class to lower-middle class will have a local public-school education, which then shapes their thinking differently from an upper-middle class family, who can get western education and are more acclimated with western culture. Generally, this group leans more towards an honor-shame culture.

This is where one begins to dig beneath the surface of the communal mass that constitutes the cultural iceberg and starts to understand how important it is to recognize the diverse social structure of Pakistan and to perceive the design that dictates the thinking and the norms of its people. Also, we must recognize that cultural structures are not rigid but operate on a spectrum. As one thinks about preaching the Gospel, it is crucial to know these things so that communication can be made more effective. For instance, if one is sharing the account of Jesus' suffering on the cross, then descending into hell, and finally ascending into heaven, in a fear-power culture one might focus more on how when Jesus descended into hell, he proclaimed victory over all the evil forces of Satan. However, in an honor-shame culture one might focus on how through the suffering of Jesus, on the day of judgement, a believer can stand tall in God's assembly without any shame from his sins as Jesus has paid for it. These are simplified examples that demonstrate how one has to be culturally sensitive, but more importantly they also reveal

how the Scriptures offer something to every culture and nation. This will be illustrated further and more specifically in the two sermons that are analyzed in chapter 6.

#### 4- INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

David P. Strucely, in his thesis on cross-cultural evangelism, states how cross-cultural evangelism comes with many locked doors, which means that when a person tries to communicate it can be overwhelming to the point where the cultural differences seem to create a great hurdle. The same can be said about cross-cultural communication. People unfamiliar with another culture may use their own key, i.e., their background, to open the cultural door and establish a common ground, but the key does not fit, and the door remains locked.<sup>8</sup> For instance, when the first WELS missionaries came to Pakistan, my parents were hosting them. The missionaries brought Hershey chocolate bars for my family. Since Pakistan is a culture of rich hospitality, if that were presented as a gift to a regular host in Pakistan, the host would have taken offense as it would seem too modest of a token of appreciation. But my family were somewhat aware of American culture and knew that in American culture this would be something common for them to do for their own people, so they accepted the chocolates happily.

This cultural disparity revealed itself in the reverse direction too. As the missionaries were staying with us, one day my father told a missionary that he was gaining weight. To an American, that would be very rude as one would think that he is being called fat, lazy, or a slouch. In reality, my father was complimenting him as being healthy. It is a sign of goodwill in Pakistani culture, and what it means is that you have been well taken care of also in Pakistan.

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8. Strucely, David P. "Honor Y Verguenza: Understanding Honor and Shame in Latin America," 2018. 1.

Understanding culture plays a vital role in communication. Preaching is communicating God's truth, which makes it essential for a pastor not just to proclaim God's truth but to be educated in a culture so that he can use the right language key to open the door.

### **Hurdles of Intercultural communication**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, before Pakistan gained independence from India, the Subcontinent was a British colony. Colonization was also an opportunity for the British people to evangelize. They built Anglican and Presbyterian churches, some of which still stand in Pakistan, but those churches lost leadership when the British left. After independence, continued efforts of evangelism were made by Anglicans and Presbyterian missionaries who came to Pakistan. They built theological institutions, but due to the political and religious climate they too had to leave. And as soon as they left, once again, either the theological institutes were left empty, or the natives that took the initiative of leadership began to teach in their own ways, using their personal interpretation of the Bible. So, then what happened? So many efforts were made, but why did they seem to go in vain?

It must have been the great gulf that divides the Eastern and Western ways of thinking that Rudyard Kipling had in mind when he wrote:

*East is East and West is West*

*And never the twain shall meet.*<sup>9</sup>

Even though we have overcome geographical barriers today, the cultural barriers are getting greater and greater. One of the many reasons British missionaries failed in certain areas of evangelism was their failure to recognize the thinking patterns of different cultures. In other

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9. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 297.

words, bringing a people under submission may work in conquering and ruling a nation, but not in spreading the Gospel. As anthropologists explore culture in the 21st century, they have found two main ways in which people think. There are dichotomistic thinkers and holistic thinkers.<sup>10</sup> The West is more dichotomistic, whereas the East is holistic. Certain traits of dichotomistic thinking are the following:

1. Judgments are black/white, right/wrong – specific criteria are uniformly applied in the evaluation of others.
2. Security comes from feeling right and fitting within a particular societal role or category.
3. Information and experiences are systematically organized; details are sorted and ordered to form a clear pattern and organization.

On the other hand, Eastern holistic thinking shares the following traits:

1. Judgments are open-ended. The whole person in community and all circumstances are taken into consideration.
2. Security comes from multiple social interactions – one is insecure if confined to specific roles or categories.
3. Information and experiences are seemingly disorganized. Details such as narratives, events, portraits, and independent points are complete. This means that details of stories can be all over the place if each time the same story is being told there is a different point the person wants to focus on.<sup>11</sup>

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10. Charles H. Karft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, (Orbis Books Maryknoll, New York, 1996), 7.

11. G. Lingenfelter, Sherwood, and Marvin K. Mayers. *Ministering Cross-Culturally an Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, 56..

The way these differences kept the East and West divided is that, as the Western churches made efforts to evangelize, they were very task-oriented in their procedures. Their methods included donating money for building churches, traveling for 7-14 day seminars on theology, and preaching sermons in English while a native translated them. Resources were expended, and time was spent, but if one is planting the seed in the wrong soil, he is setting himself up for failure.

Many missionaries and pastors have fallen into the trap of judging these issues of culture in spiritual terms. What often happens is that after being patient for a long period of time and hoping that their message will get through, missionaries burn out when there seems to be little or no positive outcomes. That leads to them citing Scripture to justify their own point of view, asserting that it is how things should be done. This leads to the two parties that are engaging with each other to talk past each other. The sad result is that local people begin closing their ears and hearts towards the missionaries and all their good intentions.

By the grace of God, the WELS mission is flourishing in Pakistan. However, as new pastors are trained for the churches in Pakistan, there is a dire need to develop a more contextual homiletical discipline since the Pakistani preachers are used to the homiletical approach of Presbyterian and Anglican churches. Since the British left before properly developing their homiletical principles, Pakistani churches are left with a weak homiletical background. This presents an opportunity for the WELS missionaries to strategize and envision what a contextualized homiletics should look like in Pakistan. One does not need to reinvent the wheel, but the method needs to be adapted to fit the Pakistani cultural setting. Homiletics is about communicating God's Word both accurately and clearly to the people. For developing a methodology, initially one must study communication and explore some theories and methods of communication to see how they can complement homiletics.

## Theories and Methods of Communication

As a pastor preaches, it might seem like it is a one-sided communication, but communication is not completed unless the meaning has been passed on from one party to another and there is a common understanding about the meaning between two parties. There should also be some sort of positive response, whether mental or physical, i.e., a change in thinking or behaving.<sup>12</sup>

Keeping that thought in mind, two specific methods of communication that stood out after my research are these: *The Aristotelian Triad* and *The Shannon-Weaver Model*.

### The Aristotelian Triad

The Aristotelian Triad has been useful in the field of homiletics for many years. Merrill R. Abbey, in his analysis of the Aristotelian Triad, states; “It suggests that attention can be fixed on the speech itself in order to study its parts, its organization, its deriving and handling of information, its illustration, its motivating factors, and many other characteristics. At other times it fixes attention on the audience, and by the audience, analysis helps the speaker to find his target. Yet again, it studies the speaker himself.”<sup>13</sup>

Regarding public preaching, the Triad consists of three key elements, the speaker, in this case, a pastor, the message (sermon), and the receiver (congregation). As the speaker attempts to communicate his message, he needs to establish trust through which he can further show that his message is for the benefit of the receiver. As he presents his ideas, there should be a sense of persuasion. This is the difficult part. In relation to homiletics, we know that persuasion does not mean that the preacher is going to convince the receiver and produce faith in him. Only God,

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12. Merrill R. Abbey, *Communication in Pulpit and Parish* 1st ed., (Westminster Press, 1973), 25.

13. Abbey, *Communication in Pulpit and Parish*, 27.

through his means of grace and the Holy Spirit, can produce faith and can open the eyes of people toward the truth of his Word. Persuasion, in this context, means that as the speaker introduces new ideas, they should operate within the sociological framework of the receiver. Here is where a lack of understanding may prevent persuasion, that is, as the speaker is striving to communicate the message and the receiver is trying to make sense of it. We will focus on this as we get into the Shannon-Weaver Model below, which expounds on how the message is received.

The Aristotelian Triad focuses more on the message that is communicated. It demonstrates how the same message can be shared using with using different illustrations and innovative ways so that the message itself stays fresh for the receiver. It helps the receiver to build the necessary trust and goodwill. When the speaker communicates the message in keeping with the receiver's context, then the receiver observes that the speaker shares similar sociological and cultural thinking. However, if the idea is completely foreign or is presented in an inappropriate way, it will lead the receiver to a vulnerable environment where his initial instinct will be to reject the idea, go to his sociocultural safe place, and not trust the message or the messenger. The receiver then might feel disrespected in some cases, which can lead to him trusting more in his own methods of communication, even if they could be improved. The Aristotelian Triad does explore some aspects of communication but has its limitations because it does not take into consideration all aspects of a dynamic preaching event, for example, the social setting and physical context in which the message is delivered.

#### The Shannon-Weaver Model.

The Shannon-Weaver model is another model that is popular in communication. This model was created by Claude Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver in 1949. Shannon was an American

mathematician and electrical engineer who wanted to create a mathematical communication model. Weaver has been widely recognized as one of the pioneers of machine translation and as an important figure in creating support for science in the United States. This model is a step up from the Aristotelian Triad as it addresses communication in a wider context. This model has five different elements: the sender (the information source), the encoder (the machine converts the ideas into signals), the channel (the infrastructure that gets the information through), the decoder (that processes the information), and the destination (receiver).<sup>14</sup> Adapting this model for a homiletical setting would look like this:

1. The information Source: The Word of God
2. Encoder: The pastor who takes the message from the Scriptures with proper hermeneutics and exegesis and enriches it with his way of perceiving the world, way of thinking, linguistic form, and artistic expression
3. Signal: The sermon text
4. Decoder: The congregation, with their worldviews, cognitive processes, social structures, and behavioral patterns, who attempt to interpret this message
5. Destination: the heart and mind of the congregation (i.e., does this message convince and persuade them?)

Observing these five elements of the Shannon-Weaver Model, one can see that communication is an active process right from the beginning. The Word of God is the information source, which is the foundation that the pastor must communicate. This means that the pastor has the responsibility to package it in a sermon in a way that effectively bridges the gap between the people and the Scriptures. Being the signal, the sermon should communicate the

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14. Abbey, *Communication in Pulpit and Parish*, 28-9.

integrity of the text, i.e., the correct meaning derived by exegesis from the text. The sermon is also the signal that resides in two very different realms; it dwells in the context of the original listeners and the present-day listeners. The preacher must therefore be cautious as he is communicating the truths of the Scripture so that he does not communicate in such a way that focuses on only one context and not the other. This is often challenging in Old Testament texts that are rich in ancient Jewish tradition, ritual, and practice; in a limited time the preacher must bring out God's truths, staying true to the text and then conveying a message that is relatable to his audience.

As one ponders these theories and methods, they serve as an important starting point for considering cross-cultural communication. They teach how important it is to be sensitive to cultures as there are many levels of cultural perception and application. If one is not cautious, a lot of what a preacher wants to communicate will be lost in the noise of irrelevance or confusion, rather than being readily received and correctly understood by the congregation.

What this means in context to Pakistan is that, as a preacher is preparing to sermonize, he needs to recognize that there are three cultures: 1) biblical culture, 2) preacher's culture, 3) audience's culture. The preacher should use the biblical culture to build and enrich the theme of the sermon and the type or season of the worship service and the sermon. Setting goals from the sermon text will help him interpret the text properly and help him contextualize the message. It is also important for the preacher that he should be self-aware of his own culture, i.e., the communication style and approach he uses. For instance, does he use an inductive style of preaching in which he includes his own life history within a sermon to build a relationship with his people? Is he an expressive preacher who uses a more dramatic delivery, like many politicians do in Pakistan, using different intonational overlays to appeal to the affections of his

audience?<sup>15</sup> In other words, what kind of rhetorical style should he use to interact appropriately with his audience so that they can be engaged mentally, emotionally, and intuitively. This is a skill that a preacher needs to polish overtime as he carefully studies his audience's culture and observes how they respond to his different styles. He then gradually learns the situational, social, institutional, political, cultural, and historical context of his people and then uses the specific styles that he is familiar with. By building up his preaching method slowly with reference to his audience's needs and the worship setting, he can reduce the intrusive noise that can detract from the effectiveness of his sermon. We will discuss different preaching styles in the next chapter.

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15. Wendland, *Preaching that Grabs the heart*, 104.

## 5- HOMILETICAL METHOD

The last two chapters have laid the groundwork for understanding different cultural nuances that a pastor should be sensitive towards as he preaches in an honor-shame culture like Pakistan. I have also examined several theories of communication that can aid a pastor in effective communication. Building on that knowledge, this chapter aims 1) to give an overview of the homiletical method taught at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2) to provide insight on the popular styles of sermons that are utilized by WELS pastors in America, and 3) to discuss the current homiletical situation in the WELS church in Pakistan.

### **Homiletical Method at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary**

*Preach the Gospel* by Joel Gerlach and Richard Balge is the textbook that is intended to help prepare the students of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for the pulpit ministry. It is the primary resource that is used in the homiletical curriculum at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, thus setting the framework for the different steps one has to go through in sermon writing. As the authors present the methodology of sermon writing, they state: “We have seen that sermon writing differs from other literary works as to its nature and its purpose. It should not surprise us then, that the homiletician’s methods also differ from those used in other literary work.”<sup>16</sup>

*Preach the Gospel’s* approach to homiletical methodology is an organized, step-by-step process that pastors can follow as they learn to craft their sermons. This step-by-step process reflects a well-formed, disciplined approach to sermon writing. Now I will present each step individually and illustrate how they work together in the formulation of a sermon.

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<sup>16</sup> Gerlach and Balge, *PTG*, 10.

### Studying the Sermon Text

As a pastor meditates on the specific text he must preach on, it is important for him to know what the text means. Gerlach and Balge in *Preach the Gospel* (PTG)<sup>17</sup> state: “The natural thing to do when you have determined what the text will be is to read it in English first. Certain truths in the text and interesting aspects of the text will immediately catch your attention.”<sup>18</sup> As a pastor reads the text in his native tongue and jots down a few truths and aspects of the text, it is important now to ask the questions concerning what the text meant to the original writer and readers. This is when it is important to study the text in its original language because sometimes the Bible translations present only a gloss of the word. As the pastor wrestles with the etymological use and the way the word is intended to be used in its context, he starts moving closer to his goal of hermeneutical precision. That brings him to the next step of the text study, which is to compare different translations. This helps him answer the question, “What has this text meant to believers through the ages?” All these thoughts can lead the pastor in many different directions so that is why it is important then to funnel these thoughts by focusing on the words and grammatical constructions. Seeing if the same ideas have been presented elsewhere in the Scripture is also important, thus allowing the Scripture to support the current sermon text, which helps to develop the main ideas. As Gerlach and Balge in PTG state,

Since the sermon is intended to proclaim God’s Word of salvation to sinners and to edify the saints it must be based on and drawn from God’s Word. Only then can the preacher say with authority: “Thus Says the Lord.” Only then can he preach with confidence in the effectiveness of his message . . . Then he can be confident that his hearers will grow in understanding and conviction so that they can say “God’s Word says,” rather than, “Our pastor says.”<sup>19</sup>

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17. From here onwards I will refer to *Preach the Gospel* as PTG throughout this Chapter.

18. Gerlach and Balge, *PTG*, 18.

19. Gerlach and Balge, *PTG*, 17.

It is important for the pastor to investigate and interpret any part of the Scripture he is preaching on with sound hermeneutics so that the ideas found in the biblical text can shine through in the sermon.

### Text Analysis and Designing an Outline

After the pastor has gone through the preliminary step of studying the text and jotted down ideas, it is the time to as PTG states, “reduce the text to its essence.”<sup>20</sup> Now the pastors’ primary goal is to identify the thoughts he wants to use in the sermon and come up with a basic outline. For that it is important to categorize thoughts into coordinates, which are major thematic thoughts, and subordinates, the minor, supportive thoughts.

Coordinate thoughts as mentioned above are the main thoughts. Generally, a text can have coordinate thoughts that complement each other. Occasionally, the text has coordinate thoughts that do not overlap and are mutually exclusive. The coordinate thoughts might serve as the general theme of the sermon. In case they do not overlap, then it is the time for the pastor to decide whether he is going to preach on all of them as major themes of his sermon, or if it is a better idea to focus on one or two main ideas and leave rest for another sermon. Once the pastor has discerned the main ideas, the subordinate thoughts in the text can be used to complement the main themes. However, sometimes the subordinate thoughts can be homiletically insignificant and should not be used in the sermon.

After the pastor chooses his main themes, now it is the time to formulate a propositional statement. PTG states, “The propositional statement is a statement out of which the sermon

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20. Gerlach and Balge, *PTG*, 24.

theme eventually evolves. Obviously, a careful formulation of the propositional statement is of crucial importance.”<sup>21</sup> To formulate a propositional statement one must envision the proper aim and goal of his sermon. That is called a telic note. Regarding this, PTG states: “Your own thorough study of the text has its primary purpose to discover that telic note. ... “What does the Holy Spirit intend to accomplish through this Word of God in the hearts and the lives of his people on this occasion?”<sup>22</sup>

When one discovers the telic note, he should think about what he must say that is original to the text. What is the specific sin or problem that the text addresses? How does the text convict the people with God’s Law? That is the malady of the text, i.e., the specific sin which sermon will expose. After he finds the malady, the preacher must find God’s cure, which is the counterpart, the corresponding spiritual virtue. To expound on the malady will bring the congregation to stop and see what the problem is, and then the virtue or cure is the Gospel that will lead them to move forward from that problem pointing them towards their Savior and his work on their behalf. To summarize this process, PTG sums it up perfectly as it states: “The propositional statement attempts to express the central thought or the main thrust of the text in terms of its telic note. It accents what the inspired writer accents. It subordinates what he subordinates. It is not a sermon theme, though on occasion it may be. The sermon theme is embryonic within the propositional statement and emerges from it.”<sup>23</sup>

The next step in the sermon process is to devise a theme and parts. The theme tells the listener what the pastor intends to preach about, and the major divisions of the theme indicate

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21. Gerlach and Balge, *PTG*, 25.

22. Gerlach and Balge, *PTG*, 26.

23. Gerlach and Balge, *PTG*, 27.

how the pastor intends to cover the subject. Finding the theme of the sermon involves going back to the propositional statement since the theme evolves out of it.<sup>24</sup> PTG suggests two main methods of formulating the theme. The first one is using the propositional statement and the telic note as explained above. The second method is using the coordinate ideas of the text. If the text is straightforward, the pastor can allow the main idea to serve as the theme. If not, then a pastor can either choose some of the coordinate thoughts from the text and leave the rest for another sermon or combine the thoughts. But in combining the thoughts, it is important that the thoughts are kept in unity with one another. Finally, as the themes and parts are developed, a pastor can build a full outline which will serve him in writing a well-structured sermon. This homiletical methodology when used properly not only aids a pastor to write effective sermons, but it can also be incorporated in different styles of sermons whether they are inductive, deductive, sermon series, or narrative sermons.

### **Different Styles of Sermons**

The major sermon styles that I have found common are inductive and deductive. Narrational preaching is a style that has been popularized in these postmodern times. It is often used in Reformed and evangelical circles of America. But this is a style that in my experience has been used rarely in the WELS. It is a style that later I will briefly discuss since it can be useful in Pakistan. However, I do not have sufficient data about it and will therefore need to research it more fully in the future. Below I will briefly discuss a few key features of the deductive and inductive sermon styles.

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24. Gerlach and Balge, *PTG*, 52.

## Deductive and Inductive Sermons

As one looks at the homiletical methodology presented in PTG, even though it can be adapted according to one's preaching style, it primarily encourages one to write a deductive sermon. The main feature of a deductive style of preaching is that the pastor gives the principal declarative statement up front and then supports it with secondary points in a logical order. Deductive sermons typically begin with an introduction with the propositional statement. Often the theme and parts are laid out in the first introductory paragraph. The body of sermon then expands and explains the main preaching point with sub points. As the pastor expounds on the main theme, he often restates the theme and parts or the propositional statement to unfold the different parts of his exegesis to the congregation.

In the conclusion, the propositional statement is revised, and the pastor reaches a specific conclusion along with applications that demonstrate the accuracy of the case he has presented. Therefore, the flow of thought in deductive sermons is strictly linear. The sentences in every paragraph have internal unity and there is an overall organizational element to this kind of sermon writing. A few homiletical benefits of deductive preaching are the following:

1. For the pastor, the delivery is generally smoother since all the transitions in the sermon are working towards a single point.
2. Its linear progression helps to prevent the preacher from repetition and digression.
3. It is easy for the congregation to follow along as they have a clear idea of the destination of this sermonic journey along with the steps along the way.

While deductive style of sermon writing is linear, the inductive method is quite the opposite. In contrast to deductive sermon writing, inductive sermons present the congregation with the question in the introduction which is slowly explored from different perspectives

throughout the sermon. The introduction normally introduces an obvious problem or tension, which can be captivating for the congregation since it may be unsettling or provoke personal questions. The preacher's job then is to help the congregation in understanding this tension and/or to answer the questions based on God's Word. This is where the preacher can also present the main malady of the text in an indirect way. It is important for him to solve this tension or answer the questions raised by his theme, which is where he can proceed to expound on the virtue or the cure, namely, the Gospel, thus leaving the people in peace since the tension that was created has been relieved. This leads the preacher to his application which is basically how one avoids this tension or malady in the future. A few homiletical benefits of inductive preaching are:

1. Instead of it seeming like a lecture, the congregation can feel like they also are a part of the sermonic journey.
2. It illustrates the point through many life-related examples, rather than just stating it.
3. It promotes personal reflection, and if the ambiguity and indirect speech is used properly, it can be engaging and much appreciated.

In the assessment of inductive preaching Wendland states,

Thus while considerable attention is devoted to the content of the biblical message and its contemporary application, the necessary psychological or experiential engagement of the audience with this Scriptural *logos* is encouraged through a strong appeal to their individual and collective recollection, imagination and feelings (*pathos*) along with an effort to assure them that the preacher is himself one of them (*ethos*) in terms of interests, needs, values, aspirations and spiritual problems in this life.<sup>25</sup>

These are the two main styles of preaching which have also been used in the WELS Mission in Pakistan.

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25. Wendland, *Preaching that Grabs the Heart*, 225.

### **The Homiletical Situation in the WELS Church in Pakistan**

2004 was the first time when WELS missionaries came to Pakistan. At that time, Pakistan was a young mission field that consisted of a handful of Sunday schools. WELS held workshops for the teachers in Sunday schools. This helped in identifying the young leaders in the community that were moved by the Gospel message to serve. By God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, the mission grew, and a Bible correspondence and teaching school was created, reaching out to approximately 20,000 people out of which 9,000 were enrolled in February 2006. As the program grew, in 2010 the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church (CELC) of Pakistan was born. The two pastors that serve in the church are Pastor Ashraf John and Pastor Zain Rahab. Initially the pastors had been trained in the Gujranwala Theological Seminary that trains pastors and ministers for the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan and the Church of Pakistan.<sup>26</sup> As mentioned earlier, Britishers left before completely developing the homiletical method in Pakistan, which means that pastors through their own studies of public speaking and homiletics strive to find what works for them.

Nevertheless, the CELC Pastors in Pakistan were not brought into ministry without training because they were 1) provided a deep education in Confessional Lutheran theology, 2) were confirmed in Lutheran faith, and 3) were trained in WELS homiletical methodology. This was carried out by professors from the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The PSI aims to train and encourage independent, confessional, evangelical pastors and teachers. Their curriculum is designed to provide a solid scriptural pre-seminary and seminary training to people around the world.

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26. The Presbyterian Church of Pakistan has its roots from 17<sup>th</sup> Century under the British rule. The Church of Pakistan is a united Protestant Church in Pakistan which is part of the Anglican Communion and a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council.

Despite all the great work that has been accomplished, there are some homiletical hurdles that CELC pastors face. The following are the major challenges they face:

1. Text Study: Unlike the pastors trained in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the CELC pastors in Pakistan do not know biblical Greek and Hebrew that are the languages of the Scriptures. Additionally, they have a limited understanding of the English language, which makes it difficult for them to compare Bible translations to catch the subtlety of word usage or to do a deep study in the commentaries that WELS pastors in America are so familiar with. This also means that they have to operate with limited resources such as an Urdu Bible and Luther's Catechisms and the PSI course material that they have gone through.
2. Sermonic delivery: The pastors have been used to their own rhetorical style that is a mix of a Reformed style of preaching and their own personal study or preference. In the past they used to preach sermons that were one and a half hours long. These mostly consisted of narrative (if the text was based on the Old Testament), and social or political issues that Pakistani Christians are faced with. Depending on the setting, if they were preaching in villages, they had to address local issues such as superstitions, curses, and similar topics that were culturally engraved in the minds and hearts of the people. After being trained in the WELS methodology, they have had to shorten the length of their sermons to the norm of twenty minutes. This has been a great challenge for the pastors, and it is something they are still getting used to. It is a great challenge because it is difficult to give the necessary background to the biblical texts, which is often necessary since the rural population is mostly illiterate and they

learn the Scripture mostly by just hearing it. Precision is also a challenge, but that is something that the pastors are going to learn only through more experience.

These are some of the major concerns that have been challenging the Pakistani pastors. Because it is not just the pastors that are adapting, but also the congregation must adapt to this new style of preaching and worship. At the same time, the pastors are eager to learn. They have the heart to preach the Gospel in its fullness, and that is why they strive every single day to develop their rhetoric to achieve better precision in sharing the Gospel. Now having gone through some of the major hurdles of homiletics in Pakistan, in the next chapter I will be analyzing two sermons both of which are based on the same sermon text, Luke 3:1-6, but one preacher being from Pakistan and the other an American.

## 6- ANALYSIS OF SPECIFIC SERMONS

In this chapter I will present two sermons. Sermon A is a sermon from Pastor Zain Rahab, pastor at a CELC church in Pakistan, and Sermon B is from Pastor Noah Hermann who served in Calvary Lutheran Church, Bellevue, Washington. Both sermons are based on the Gospel of Luke 3:1-6. The sermons have been recorded in the Appendix A as they were preached. Since Sermon A has been preached in Urdu, there are some parts that have been translated in a way to capture the essence of Urdu idioms. Thus, at first glance they might not make perfect sense to an English reader. After providing the biblical text in Greek and English, the two sermons will be evaluated in three categories: analyzing the text, rhetorical design, and problematic areas.

### Greek Text Analysis

SBL Greek text <sup>27</sup>	English Standard Version <sup>28</sup>
<p><u>1</u> Ἐν ἔτει δὲ πεντεκαίδεκάτῳ τῆς ἡγεμονίας Τιβερίου Καίσαρος, ἡγεμονεύοντος Ποντίου Πιλάτου τῆς Ἰουδαίας, καὶ τετρααρχοῦντος τῆς Γαλιλαίας Ἡρώδου, Φιλίππου δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ τετρααρχοῦντος τῆς Ἰτουραίας καὶ Τραχωνίτιδος χώρας, καὶ Λυσανίου τῆς Ἀβιληνῆς τετρααρχοῦντος,</p> <p><u>2</u> ἐπὶ ἀρχιερέως Ἄννα καὶ Καϊάφα, ἐγένετο ῥῆμα θεοῦ ἐπὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν Ζαχαρίου υἱὸν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ.</p>	<p><u>1</u> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene,</p> <p><u>2</u> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.</p>

27. This text was made available at: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/sblg/luke/3.html>.

28. This text was made available at: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/esv/luke/3.html>.

<p>καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς πᾶσαν περίχωρον τοῦ Ἰορδάνου κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας, ὡς γέγραπται ἐν βίβλῳ λόγων Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου · Φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ · Ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ.</p> <p>πᾶσα φάραγξ πληρωθήσεται καὶ πᾶν ὄρος καὶ βουνὸς ταπεινωθήσεται, καὶ ἔσται τὰ σκολιὰ εἰς εὐθείαν καὶ αἱ τραχεῖαι εἰς ὁδοὺς λείας ·</p> <p>καὶ ὄψεται πᾶσα σὰρξ τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ.</p>	<p><u>3</u> And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.</p> <p><u>4</u> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.</p> <p><u>5</u> Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways,</p> <p><u>6</u> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."</p>
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Luke 3:1-2 sets a historical background for the ministry of John the Baptist. It is interesting that all the people mentioned by Luke in these first two verses are of great importance. They are the people who are even remembered to this day as they have made great impact in history. And yet we see that God chooses the most unlikely people. and that is a pattern that we see throughout the Scriptures. For instance, it was odd of God to choose Abraham from Ur of Mesopotamia. It was odd of him to choose David, who was just a young boy whose father did not even include him among the sons whom he presented to Samuel for consideration. Coming to the New Testament to Jesus's narrative we see that God chooses Mary a young unmarried girl living in Nazareth (not Jerusalem), and now he chooses John who was living in a wilderness area. It's fascinating to think about the fact that God chooses whoever he wants to choose, even the ungodly and Christ's enemies, King Herod, and the Jewish High priests. And once he gives his word to the servants that he chooses, they are empowered to do great things in his name.

Luke 3:3 then tells us about the mission that God had in mind for John. We find him in the region around the Jordan preaching (κηρύσσων) a baptism (βάπτισμα) of repentance (μετανοίας) to the forgiveness of sins (εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν). This is the first use of *to preach* (κηρύσσων) in Luke's Gospel. It signifies the proclamation or declaration that a new era of salvation is present and active through John the Baptist (3:3), Jesus (4:18-19, 44; 8:1), or the disciples (9:2; 12:3; 24:47).<sup>29</sup> The Jews were familiar to the idea of baptism but in a different way as they would often give this baptism to the gentiles who would want to become believers to cleanse their sins. However, John's baptism was not a proselyte baptism to win followers for himself. It required everyone, whether a Jew, a gentile to repent of their sins before a holy God. Arthur A. Just Jr. in his *Commentary on Luke* states, "John's baptism is an abandonment of the old way of life and a conversion that includes faith that the eschatological era of salvation is dawning. Luke frames the story of John and Jesus with John's preaching of repentance (3:3) and Jesus' commission to the disciples to preach this repentance of all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (24:47)."<sup>30</sup> This is a concept that if we think about it would be foreign to the Jews since they spent their time mostly in the Law in which they are trying to fulfill its ethical and moral requirements.

*Repentance* (μετανοίας) is a word that Luke often uses in genitive form. Throughout the Gospel of Luke and Acts, using the word *repentance* (μετανοίας) Luke focuses on a comprehensive spiritual change that a believer goes through in the process of repentance. A change that includes sorrow for sin and conversion that takes place (sanctification in which the new man cooperates with the Holy Spirit) to a new way of life in Christ. *To the forgiveness of*

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29. Just Jr., Arthur A. *Concordia Commentary on Luke 1:1-9:50*, Concordia Publishing House, 1996, 149.

30. Just Jr., *Concordia Commentary on Luke 1:1-9:50*, 149.

*sins* (εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν) is the prepositional phrase attached to *repentance*, and that is what clarifies the purpose and result of John's repentance baptism. So, the text here calls for repentance, that is, a sorrow for one's sins and trust in God for forgiveness. But repentance from what and in whom is this repentance fulfilled? In other words, who is the one who is going to forgive the people when they come to repentance?

That is what Luke 3:4-6, a quotation from Isaiah 40:3-5, points towards. The words from Isaiah *prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight* (ετοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ) present a vivid expression of the spiritual state of the world. This figurative road is the one that was made crooked by brokenness and sin.<sup>31</sup> Now it must be made straight through a preaching that calls for repentance so that people can turn away from sin and prepare themselves for the Messiah who is coming to Jerusalem to deal with the brokenness of the world. These words point hearers toward the Messiah who is coming. He is the one who will bring God's salvation to all the people, Jews as well as Gentiles. Verse 5 talks about how the mountains and the hills will be brought low, the crooked paths will become straight, the rough ways smooth. This is figurative language that is talking about how God forgives as he brings a person to repentance and starts transforming their lives by faith. That is the God who called John the Baptist to prepare the way to make the path of repentance straight. But the greater focus of this passage is to predict the Messiah that is going to come to make repentance and salvation possible as it concludes in verse 6, *and all flesh shall see the salvation of God* (καὶ ὄψεται πᾶσα σὰρξ τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ). This Messiah's salvation is for *all flesh* (πᾶσα σὰρξ) to see, which means it is for people of every tribe, nation, and race, not just the Jews but the whole world as emphasized above.

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31. Just Jr., *Concordia Commentary on Luke 1:1-9:50*, 151.

### **Sermon Comparison**

Sermon A (see Appendix) begins with an emphasis on Advent preparation. Pastor Rahab focuses on the several ways that people prepare themselves. As he introduces this theme of preparation, in lines 3-9 he focuses on the different outwardly ways where Christians prepare themselves for Jesus's arrival. In line 6 he states, “. . . Nowadays, we see lights, decorations, and many different things that we prepare for the Christmas season.” The preacher is primarily focused on the outwardly preparation so that he can pose the question in line 8, “but do we prepare ourselves only through this worldly way, or is there more to preparation?” This sets the stage for him to present his topic which he does in line 9 stating, “today, we will focus on this topic: Preparation for the coming of Christ.”

Now that the topic has been introduced and the preacher has clarified it for the audience that it is a dynamic topic, he focuses on his first point, divine preparation. God's hand was involved in the important events of history— “His Story” about the coming Messiah. Collapsing history and working in the chronological space of 4000 years he was preparing the way for Christ's ministry on earth. That is his focus from line 10 to line 24.

In lines 24 to 26 the pastor states, “The second point is that when God made sure that this was all recorded, whom did he send in the time of Christ? Today we read about him, John the Baptist, whom God sent as a witness to his work. God brought good news to Zechariah in a time when Zechariah could not bear the thought of having a child.. That couple had no hope of bearing a child!” Notice how he breaks down the story: 1) God brought Zechariah good news of a son, 2) now God was preparing hopeless Zechariah by giving him a son and showing that he is a powerful God, finally, 3) he was preparing John his son for his ministry that will consequently bring him to a point of prophecy where he will use the words of Isaiah and prophesy about

Christ. After presenting his second point of how God himself was preparing the family of Zechariah, in the second half of line 30 pastor states, “. . . This is God’s preparation.”. He does this to conclude his second point so that the congregation can easily follow him and understand that he is transitioning to the next aspect of God’s preparation. Up to this point, Pastor Rahab has focused on God preparing his people by divine provision, now he turns his focus to God preparing the heavenly beings as he commanded them to bring his word to Mary (line 34) and to Joseph who was not sure about this marriage. This is his third subpoint under his theme of God’s preparation. Until now, one can say that Pastor Rahab has presented one theme being *God’s preparation* with three parts, 1) historical preparation, 2) preparation in the context of Jesus of people like John the Baptist and his family, 3) preparation through angels of Jesus’ parents and their social and political context. He explores the three parts of his theme till line 44. In line 45 he states, “So my friends, this is all the preparation that God had done before coming into the world.” Note that his transition into the next part in line 45 is like line 30.

In line 47 Pastor Rahab dives into his second part of the sermon which focuses more on application and appropriation by stating, “Are we also prepared today? And if so, what kind of preparation do we have? Up to line 60, the pastor emphasizes on the importance of preparation and different aspects of preparation one can focus on in their spiritual life. The aspects of preparation he focuses on are on 1) making time for the Lord (line 49), 2) avoiding laziness (line 53), and 3) using our resources properly (line 57). In the last few lines, he applies that concept of preparation to the whole congregation. Finally, he explains how this preparation is not about the outwardly things, which are also important, but the more significant preparation is about welcoming Jesus in the spiritual way.

Sermon B begins with an introduction that is focused on how this text is often used in Advent. The pastor does not get into the details of preparation; rather, he focuses on the ministry of John the Baptist. Pastor Hermann explains how John the Baptist fades into the background (line 6) and becomes more of an echo pointing towards Jesus. In line 11 Pastor Hermann states, “A message that was direct and simple; “prepare the way of the Lord.” One can see that Pastor Hermann’s theme is also *Prepare the Way*. Line 11 directs one to the first part of his theme, i.e., preparing the way by making the path straight. As he presents his first part, he emphasizes that it was important to prepare the way in the historical setting because Jesus was arriving. Line 12 states: “all will see God’s salvation and the voice called out to prepare people for the arrival of Jesus’s public ministry.” For the next few lines till line 28 Pastor Hermann mentions what Jesus’s ministry was going to entail and he preaches law. In line 31 he uses the law to convict the congregation as he says, “We recognize the fact that our hearts are deceitful.” After preaching specific law, he uses the law in a broad sense. He directs one to the fact that it is the tendency of people being crooked because that is the world’s condition under sin. He expounds on what sin is and the challenges a sinful nature presents from lines 20 to 25:

Though he came preaching a baptism of repentance, he came so that people would recognize the mountains of sin in their lives; to see a great valley in their void of righteousness that stands before God; to acknowledge the crookedness of their ways that all had to change because sin is—only and ever—an obstacle between us and the Lord; an obstacle that must be removed for the Lord’s coming. For God is holy and perfect in his presence. Neither sin nor Sinner can abide.

In line 45, he turns to the definition of repentance and what it should look like in a believer's life. After explaining that, he turns to the gospel message of salvation which in line 59 he says is the core of the message, “the forgiveness of sins. He explains that the message of John the Baptists seems to be law focused as John uses imperatives like “prepare” and “make”. It seems law focused when a person is focused on themselves and what they should be doing. But

if one sees the bigger picture, that God is going to bring salvation, then one realizes that it is all pointing towards the Gospel, pointing towards Christ. This can be demonstrated in lines 59 to 64:

In fact, as we think about that being the core of his message—the forgiveness of sins—perhaps what first reads as Law in these verses, suddenly takes on a Gospel flavor. For if you look in verse five, we read this: “Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be made low. The crooked will become straight, and the rough ways smooth.” You’ll notice in those verses, particularly in the verbs, a change from verse 4. In verse 4, we had a command to prepare the way for the Lord. As we thought about that command just a few moments ago, we recognized, that’s something that we simply can’t do on our own. And yet here in verse 5, we see that these things will happen. Because they happened through faith in Christ, every sinner receives the righteousness of God that fills that valley, through faith in Christ. Every sinner receives the forgiveness of sins that levels those mountains and hills and removes them through faith in Christ; every believer finds the strength to change his crooked and rough ways.

After he is done expounding the Gospel, Pastor Hermann begins his application and appropriation. He explains the fact that today people should not expect a new Christ to come. Rather, everyone is pointed towards the same Christ and the same fullness of forgiveness (line 65). He then focuses on the fact that God’s voice calls present day believers by 1) words of absolution, 2) as one reads Scripture, and 3) taking sacrament in which the believer receives the body and blood of Christ (lines 69 to 71). Pastor Hermann concludes with an encouragement to trust in God’s providence (Line 72): “And thus will the Lord’s way be prepared so you will be ready to see the salvation of God when Christ returns in glory. Amen.”

The preceding text analysis shows that there is a difference between Sermon A and Sermon B in terms of their respective content emphasis and arrangement. Sermon A’s focus is on the concept preparation while sermon B’s focus is on salvation that comes from Christ. Sermon A focuses on the holistic picture of God’s providence and how God made sure that everything will work towards Christ’s arrival. Sermon B focuses on the importance of sinners recognizing that forgiveness of sins comes through Christ and their salvation can be found in Christ. These

are the major themes that the pastors chose to emphasize. Now we will focus on the rhetorical style and see how the pastors tie these biblical themes together for the cultures they preach in.

### **Rhetorical Design**

As Pastor Rahab is preaching in a rural church in Pakistan, he uses our more traditional narrative style of preaching. It is important for him to do so because most of the people in the church are not very familiar with the stories of the Bible. He explains the narrative from an Old Testament point of view before bringing his sermon to the New Testament. As Pastor Rahab, continues there are times where he uses questions. The examples are line 8, 10, 13, 22, 23 and 56. This is a common oratorical tool that he uses. He uses his questions to create clarity in different aspects. In line 10 he asks the congregation, “What is the topic for today?” He asks this question to make sure that congregation is clear in what topic he is going to discuss with them. In line 13 uses a question to make sure that people start thinking about the topic that he is about to unveil for them. In line 22 uses concrete questions that need to be answered in his sermon. But as he is using an inductive style of preaching, he has to keep a little mystery to keep the people interested in his message. For example, as his theme focuses on preparation, he raises a question that is begins a dramatic sequence in line 8 and introduces a complication: “But do we prepare ourselves only through this worldly way or is there more to preparation?” He leaves this question unanswered through the first part of his sermon and comes back to it at the very end, creating suspense, and then in application part from line 49 to 56 providing the resolution stating:

So first of all, we need to remember that we need to make place in our lives and in our families. We need to be ready in these days. And Revelation tells us that, “see I stand at the door knocking, the one who opens it I will dine with him.” We are people of faith, the faith that he has given us and through that faith we need to open the gates of our heart, the doors of our house, the doors of our families so that he can become part of our visible and invisible both preparations. So that in faith we can say that Lord, my family, and I are here for you. In

these days, leave laziness behind. Remember that in those days there was no room when he came to the world. But houses were full. It would be a great tragedy if our houses are full today, with lights, decoration, meals, and family and they do not have Jesus. So how should we prepare for him? By putting our trust, our hope, our joy in the feet of Jesus.

Another rhetorical feature of his sermon is that he often repeats his sentences. For this reason, inductive sermons are often difficult to follow. But such repetition is important since most people do not have Bibles to read the text, so the preacher makes sure that people can follow him. One might notice he does not use the exact words sin, law, and gospel that we have in English. The idea of law is reflected in words like responsibilities, jobs, roles, and positions. Pastor Rahab does not expound on the gospel proper at first, but the idea of gospel is found in references to the providence and the preparation of God and the joy that people can find in that. In Line 61 he brings out the gospel proper by stating, “We need to remember that we have the crown of salvation on our heads because of our Lord.” However, it is interesting that he gets to the gospel only at the very end of his message.

Pastor Rahab uses one story to connect with the people. In lines 58 to 60 he mentions a story of Queen Victoria:

Once queen Victoria was in an Advent service, and the pastor was preaching how Jesus is about to come. After the worship service Queen Victoria said, I want Jesus to come today. The preacher asked why, and she replied so today I can take my crown off and put it at his feet because he is the king of the kings.

Some might glance over it and think of it as an embellishment for the sermon. But there is more there than what meets the eye. Since Pakistan is an honor-shame culture that is very status oriented, the preacher makes sure to use an example of a person of the highest status lowering herself before Jesus, thus making it imperative for all the social classes to follow this example.

In conclusion, Pastor Rehab’s rhetoric it is quite different from western rhetoric. He uses oratorical tools such as dramatic delivery and an affective appeal to emotionally involve people.

This works well in keeping with his inductive style of preaching in which he withholds a main question as demonstrated above and creates suspense, finally revealing the answer and bringing the sermon to resolution. Since he is focusing on many different aspects of preparation, he lets the audience participate by asking them questions like “what is the topic for today? (line 10)” and “So, have you learned this first point? (line 23),” in this way making sure that they are also following him closely. The words have a different sound and implication in a printed text. The concept of law and gospel are also presented using different terms from what one will hear in an American WELS congregation.

In contrast in Sermon B, Pastor Hermann begins his sermon by explaining that the congregation has heard these stories many times already during the Advent season. Right away in the first paragraph one can see the difference in the two congregational settings. Pastor Hermann takes a direct and deductive approach to his sermon. He has a clear introduction that leads into the idea of how these words that John the Baptist has said are more important than John the Baptist the person because he is just a called messenger of God. Following line 7, Pastor Hermann expounds the key ideas presented in the words of John the Baptist. In line 14, he indicates how the words of John have both law and gospel present in them. First, he focuses on the law starting line 17 to 24. He explains the metaphor of mountains and valleys in line 18 as he states, “those mountains and valleys, the crooked and rough paths that are mentioned in these verses quoted from Isaiah, that’s a picture of sin.” For further clarification of this metaphor, he states in line 19, “. . . John didn’t come standing at the Jordan river handing out axes, spades, and picks so that they could get to work on a literal highway.”

Next Pastor Hermann talks about God's standard of perfection and uses the word “sin” to convict people through the law. The use of the word “sin” can be seen in line 25 and 29 as he's

convicting people by use of the law. In line 25 he indicates God's attributes: God is "holy" and "perfect" contrasting him with a sin and a sinner. There is a great deal of familiar Lutheran terminology that he uses; for instance, he uses such words as righteousness, justice, catechism, savior, gospel, law.

After a preaching of the law and convicting people of it, Pastor Herrmann presents the gospel as the cure as he points people towards God's salvation in line 49: "Because it (the proclamation of the gospel and the forgiveness of sins) has as its goal that all mankind will see God's salvation." His message includes a clean transition that clearly shows a person the theme and parts of his sermon. In conclusion, one can see that Pastor Hermann's message is very text focused, direct and has distinct parts. He emphasizes the concept of sin and repentance, tying it to salvation that comes through Christ. The main oratorical tools he uses are exemplification along with a clear exposition of the different concepts of his sermon's theme and parts.

### **Problematic Areas**

Since the emphasis of this paper is on modeling the homiletical structure for Pakistan, in this part I will primarily focus on Sermon A. Every sermon text has different angles that can be explored by the preacher. Pastor Rahab focuses on the idea of preparation and repentance. Initially, he does a good job at explaining how this idea would have been considered in Jesus' time. All the preparation was done through the expanse of time itself by God himself, and therefore we should prepare ourselves for the arrival of God's salvation. But it can be noted that he takes this idea rather far away from the text since he fails to explicitly connect this idea to the salvation brought by the birth and life of Jesus. Hermeneutically he focuses more on what people should do rather than what God has done for us. This leads the sermon into legalistic territory. Another problem related to salvation is that Pastor Rahab focuses on the providence of the Lord

but does not emphasize enough the key role that Jesus plays in God's plan of providence for his people.

Now focusing on rhetoric, Pastor Rahab uses many questions. A good sermon consists of using different tools, but if one starts using the same tool too much it can be repetitive and may lose its influence. And so, one can see the questioning technique to be too repetitive thus losing its strength in his sermon. In Eastern cultures, people like to speak using metaphors and big ideas, and we see that in Sermon A as well, as the pastor talks about the Roman government, angels singing, the wise man bringing gifts to Jesus. Pastor Rahab uses numerous illustrations. But one can only use so many illustrations and explain each one during a short 20 minute sermon. It would have been better to use only one or two illustrations and explain them fully rather than using so many and not painting the full picture. He mentions repentance but does not expound on the concept of repentance, which is very important to the text as John the Baptist is proclaiming the baptism of repentance (κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας). He builds on the concept of preparation, using different illustrations but he fails to use the textual imagery of mountains and crooked paths. After using so many stories, he must bring the sermon to a conclusion, but it seems that he touches too lightly on proper application and appropriation. The applications seem scattered and not textual enough since he does not mention, like Pastor Hermann, the need to heed to God's voice to prepare to receive the Savior. Instead, in line 49 he states, ". . . we need to make place in our lives and in our families (for God)," but he never expounds on this idea about how should we make a place for God through faith in his promises. Or to get more technical, is it really us who make space in our lives, or is God the one who chooses us, and gives us faith so that he can dwell in us? To sum it up, this sermon demonstrates that Pastor Rahab has an arsenal of oratory techniques, but by using many of them in a single

sermon, leads the sermon away from the biblical text and makes it difficult to follow its central theme of repentance in preparation to receive the forgiveness of sins through God's promised Messiah.

## 7- CONCLUSION

### **Summary of the Results of This Study**

Since the Lutheran church in Pakistan is in its early stages, there are many things that need to be better arranged so that the preaching and teaching of God's Word can be carried out more effectively and biblically. One of these is the need to find a balance in homiletical structure and style. Balance is important especially when one implements different homiletical techniques in Pakistan where one does not want to push a foreign culture and way of doing things onto the believers there. In other words, as the church grows in Pakistan, it must find its own roots that are firmly planted in Scripture not in tradition that is being imposed by a foreign culture. It needs to strive towards greater homiletical and hermeneutical clarity, but that pursuit needs to be organic and developed locally with God's Word as the guide. We need to provide Pakistani congregations with the pastoral tools that they then can adapt to make their own.

Among many components of a culture's rhetoric, a key feature is the oratory tools a person uses to influence people. My pursuit in studying the culture and methodology of preaching in the West and East has opened a door into a field where one needs to tread carefully, cautiously, and sensitively. The result of my studies has simply shown me some of the differences that have come about because of different social and cultural structures. They have not led me to a final solution but rather raise questions that will take years, conversations, and experiences to explore in more detail in the light of God's Word. The questions that I have raised at this stage don't seem to necessarily solve the problems but are simply a step in the right direction.

### **Suggestions for future research and study**

At this point in my studies, the root of homiletics in Pakistan needs to be studied further. What are the benefits of narrative and inductive preaching, and how can this be applied in Pakistan and an honor-shame culture? What can be learned from WELS missions in other non-western countries, especially those in Asia? What will future well trained Pakistani pastors and professors teach us? Cultural studies are never ending as culture is always evolving. In the beginning of this paper, I stated that culture is like an iceberg. There is the tip that normally the people see, but soon one studying it realize that there is a whole mountain underneath it. As I have researched it in this paper, the pursuit of understanding a culture seems like hiking a mountain with no end in sight. Yet on that necessary journey, if one has the proper attitude guided by the Holy Scriptures and God's Spirit, one can only grow in one's faith and the ability to better serve God's people faithfully.

## APPENDIX 1

Sermons

This appendix is intended to provide the translations of the sermons that I am using in the thesis. There are two sermons I am using in this project. They will be referred as Sermon A and Sermon B. Sermon A was originally preached in the Urdu language of Pakistan in the CELC church in Pakistan by WELS Pastor Zain Rahab. Sermon B was preached in English by Pastor Noah Hermann who is an American pastor and serves in Calvary Lutheran Church Bellevue, Washington. Both sermons are being preached on the same sermon text Luke 3:1-6. Notice some of the phrases in Sermon A might be unclear as it is a literal translation from Urdu to bring out the cultural nuances of the original language.

*Sermon A*

1. Grace and peace be with you in the name of the Father and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
2. For a few moments, we will focus our attention on the Word of God.
3. In these days, we rejoice in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in this world, and we prepare ourselves for his coming.
4. And we prepare ourselves in several ways. Sometimes we use old traditions that we see year by year.
5. As time passes, there are some things that are new that we add to our traditions.
6. But in this world, the expression of celebrating Christmas is also changing. Nowadays, we see lights, decorations, and many different things that prepare us for the Christmas season.
7. So, we prepare ourselves in many ways, and it is good to prepare ourselves because we are celebrating Jesus' birth and so it is vital to prepare ourselves.
8. But do we prepare ourselves only through this worldly way, or is there more to preparation?
9. Today, we will focus on this topic: Preparation for the coming of Jesus.
10. What is the topic for today? *The congregation replies, preparation for the coming of Jesus.*
11. Firstly, we will see that when Jesus Christ came into this world, what kind of preparations were being made in the Bible for his coming.
12. First, the father made preparations to send his son into this world.
13. What kind of preparation was that? We will focus on that.
14. Because Christ's coming into this world was not abrupt and not unplanned.
15. It took years, ages; approximately 4000 years for God who was preparing the way for Christ.
16. Before sending his son, God sent his Word. What was prepared before sending his son? The Word in written on clay tablets, and leather in form of scrolls.
17. He rose prophets so that before the Son comes, prophecy about him.
18. And this was God's first preparation for sending his son into the World.
19. He sent prophets who recorded a lot about Jesus so that when Jesus comes, people can recognize who is this Scripture written about.

20. And Jesus testifies this truth as he talks to his disciples that the Torah and the Psalms are written about me.
21. So, what did God do? He revealed his Word to the prophets so that they could write it and prophesy about Jesus, and this was God's preparation.
22. Who will be born? What would his existence look like? What will he do? The Lord was already preparing this.
23. So, have you learned this first point?
24. The Second point is that when God made sure that this was all recorded, then who did he send in the time of Christ?
25. Today we read about him, John the Baptist, whom God sent as a witness to his work.
26. God brought good news to Zechariah, which with today's expectations, was hopeless. That couple in this age was hopeless! (big pause)
27. But remember that when Christ comes, he brings hope with him.
28. So, he gave Zechariah hope that this child will walk in front of the Lord, he will prepare the way for the Lord.
29. This man will be the Lord's messenger and we study this in the Gospel of John that he himself was not the light, but he had come to give testimony of the one true light.
30. So, he was prepared by God. This is God's preparation.
31. Then we read in the Word that God prepared the angels so that they can sing songs and bring good news to the people that Jesus is coming.
32. And angels are obedient to the Lord, whatever he says they do it.
33. God prepared them by telling them where to go, and whom to give this message to.
34. When did they have delivered this message, they have to go to Joseph, they have to go to Mary, they have to sing great song also.
35. This was not their message but God's message.
36. Then we see that Lord prepared the virgin and Joseph.
37. And this is also the Lord's preparation that he chose Mary and through her the prophecy was fulfilled that.
38. And my friends remember that couple became ready with joy. And God gave them a lot of responsibilities.
39. He chose them so that they can give Jesus an earthly name and identity.
40. After this the Lord made sure that Roman government was ready so that where will Jesus be born? (Asking the crowd) Bethlehem where he was registered.
41. So you see that people do not know what is happening, but God is moving and morphing history, angels, kings so that his Son can dwell among the people.
42. Then he made sure that there were witnesses. Who were the witnesses? Many. The angel was sent to the shepherd with the good news.
43. Then we see that there is a star. That is also his creation. He ordered it when it has to move in a way so that the wise men will follow it.
44. And these wise men also came prepared as they brought gifts for the Jesus. Gold, Myrrh and frankincense. Gifts that represented what the future will bring for Jesus.
45. So, my friends, this is all the preparation that God had done before coming into the world.
46. My friends, before Jesus was coming God prepared the world. The people were prepared.
47. Are we also prepared today? And if so what kind of preparation do have have?

48. We are not in that time but today we are preparing ourselves to celebrate the birth of Jesus.
49. So first of all, we need to remember, we need to make place in our lives and in our families.
50. We need to be ready in these days. And Revelation tells us that, “see I stand at the door knocking, the one who opens it I will dine with him.”
51. We are people of faith, the faith that he has given us and through that faith we need to open the gates of our heart, the doors of our house, the doors of our families so that he can become part of our visible and invisible both preparations.
52. So that in faith we can say that Lord, my family and I are here for you.
53. In these days, leave laziness behind.
54. Remember that in those days there was no room when he came to the world. But houses were full.
55. It would be a great tragedy if our houses are full today, with lights, decoration, meals, and family and they do not have Jesus.
56. So how should we prepare for him? By putting our trust, our hope, our joy in the feet of Jesus.
57. In faith by putting our resources, the sense of control that we have in his feet.
58. Once queen Victoria was in an advent service, and the pastor was preaching how Jesus is about to come.
59. After the worship service Queen Victoria said, I want Jesus to come today.
60. The preacher asked why? And she replied so today I can take my crown off and put it in his feet. Because he is the king of the kings.
61. So, in these days, we need to remember that we have the crown of salvation on our heads because of our Lord.
62. And remembering that we need to remember that there are many responsibilities. Someone is a father, or a mother, someone works difficult jobs. These are our inheritance because God has put in these positions.
63. So, what do we need to do? We need to put these in the feet of our Lord, so that he can prepare us for the coming of Jesus.
64. So that he can give us wisdom to play our roles in the grand scheme of his plan according to his will.
65. This is the kind of preparation we need, so that our pride, our greed, our ego we can throw them away.
66. So that we can bow down in the feet of our Lord, knowing that every good thing comes from him. Amen

### Sermon B

Spoken English is always different than written. There might be some parts which the reader may find challenging to understand. So, I have suggested words in brackets, to clarify the sermon for the reader. There are places where the pastor has made significant pauses to emphasize a point, therefore I have indicated those pauses in brackets as well.

1. Every year during advent, we hear about John the Baptist.

2. We hear very many things about him, and in a way, he almost seems to tower over the advent season.
3. We know exactly when he came preaching the good news. We know what his weird diet was like. We hear about the different attire that he wore. We hear about the forceful way that he proclaimed the Word.
4. Later on in the Gospel of Luke, we'll even hear Jesus refer to him with these words 'Among those born of women, there is none greater than John' (big pause).
5. And yet, as we read these six verses today—when we reached that cut off at verse six—we see that something important has taken place.
6. As Luke begins to record the ministry of John, his person fades into the background, and he becomes just a voice.
7. His message comes to the with good reason too because John is just the messenger.
8. It is the message that is of supreme importance, and so technically speaking, we might say that the prophecy from Isaiah and Malachi finds its fulfillment not specifically in John (pastor pauses) but in his voice.
9. A voice that calls out in the wilderness surrounding the Jordan river.
10. For with that voice, God had an important message to declare to the people who heard.
11. A message that was direct and simple; "prepare the way of the Lord."
12. All will see God's salvation and the voice called out to prepare people for the arrival of Jesus's public ministry.
13. As we'll see in next week's Gospel lesson and the people that interact with John there were many who were unprepared (pause) even those who were waiting for the Christ to come.
14. So as a true preacher, John prepared them as he proclaimed both Law and Gospel so that they would be ready.
15. His voice which sounded in the wilderness all those years ago, is one that still calls out today.
16. For now, as then, the Law and Gospel are proclaimed so that all will be ready to see the salvation of God.
17. So, heed the voice calling in the wilderness; heed the voice that calls you to repentance.
18. Those mountains and valleys, the crooked and rough paths that are mentioned in these verses quoted from Isaiah, that's a picture of our sin.
19. That much should be rather obvious from the fact that John didn't come standing at the Jordan river handing out axes, spades, and picks so that they could get to work on a literal highway.
20. No he came preaching a baptism of repentance, (pause) he came so that people would recognize the mountains of sin in their lives;
21. to see a great valley in their void of righteousness that stands before God;
22. to acknowledge the crookedness of their ways that had all had to change.
23. Had to change because sin is—only and ever—an obstacle between us and the Lord;
24. an obstacle that must be removed for the Lord's coming.
25. For God is holy and perfect in his presence. Neither sin nor Sinner can abide (emphatically says this statement).
26. So, if we are to be prepared, something must be done, and yet the very language here suggests that it is beyond our ability: leveling mountains, filling in valleys.
27. It's beyond an individual effort and individual might.

28. It will take real power that is found only in the Word of God.
29. For only the Lord can make this way smooth and level as he convicts our hearts of sin through the proclamation of his Law. Through that voice calling out.
30. Only his Word can cut through the deceitfulness of our own hearts and show us the truth of our condition.
31. We recognize the fact that our hearts are deceitful.
32. We recognize it quite readily in many other matters.
33. How often have you asked a question like one of these, “Am I off base here, or is this really the case? Is it just me?”
34. We ask questions like this because, at certain points we realize ‘maybe my judgment isn't quite correct here’.
35. And if we do that in matters that are purely temporal, how much more so ought we do it
36. when it comes to what God expects of us, to heed the voice calling in the wilderness and trust that he is right, that we need to repent?
37. And even though this messenger has changed throughout the ages, the voice still calls for preparation.
38. It was not a one-time thing for the people of John’s day;
39. simply, they (got) get ready for Christ’s first coming.
40. And you'll notice that—particularly in our first lesson this morning with the words that Malachi uses and even more so next week—as we see more about John's message.
41. (the) Wording there really focuses on Christ’s second coming;
42. to be prepared for the day when he comes with that refiner’s fire.
43. That means that we too are called to repentance, and this(that) also it is not a once-and-done thing; we repent once and then go on our merry way for the rest of our life.
44. No, it's an ongoing act. For daily we sin much.
45. Therefore, the repentance that we are called to is a daily repentance. As the catechism teaches, baptism means that daily the sinful nature be drowned by sorrow and contrition.
46. And that daily a new man arrives to live a God-pleasing life.
47. But the voice doesn't leave us there broken and leveled from the preaching of the Law, hoping on our own to perhaps, maybe, do better someday.
48. No, the message continues also with that beautiful Gospel, the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins.
49. Because it has as its goal that all mankind will see God's salvation.
50. That all see Christ coming again as Savior and, so again, we heed the call (of) that voice in the wilderness.
51. Because it doesn't just call us to confess our sins, it calls out with the promise of forgiveness.
52. It's interesting to note—as we'll see next week when John's message is summarized by the gospel writers—they always refer to it as good news.
53. That's an important thing to note because if you were to keep a word count of the record we have of John's preaching, the Law would completely outweigh what we would consider Gospel.
54. And certainly that proclamation of Law, for example when he calls certain people a brood of vipers, we wouldn't necessarily call that good news.
55. So we must understand then, that that final summary in verse 6 was elaborated on by John as he preached to the people;

56. that all mankind will see the salvation of God. He certainly would have declared to his audience 'what is meant by that?', that is, that the Christ was coming to offer that once-for-all sacrifice for sin.
57. This is clear from the most well-known statement we have from John, "Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."
58. That is the message of John the Baptist. Repent, for the one is coming who will take your sins away.
59. In fact, as we think about that being the core of his message—the forgiveness of sins—perhaps what first reads as Law in these verses, suddenly takes on a Gospel flavor.
60. For if you look in verse five we read this: "Every valley will be filled and every mountain and hill will be made low.
61. The crooked will become straight, and the rough ways smooth."
62. You'll notice in those verses, particularly in the verbs, a change from verse 4.
63. In verse 4, we had a command to prepare the way for the Lord. As we thought about that command just a few moments ago, we recognized, that's something that we simply can't do on our own. And yet here in verse 5, we see that these things will happen.
64. Because they happened through faith in Christ, every sinner receives the righteousness of God that fills that valley, through faith in Christ. Every sinner receives the forgiveness of sins that levels those mountains and hills and removes them through faith in Christ; every believer finds the strength to change his crooked and rough ways.
65. Yes, as we think of the verse five now, we see that John's message is indeed good news. And it is good news that it's proclaimed to you. For just as his call to repentance was not a one-time thing for the people of his day, so also that proclamation of forgiveness was not exclusive to them either.
66. You are not waiting for a new and different Christ to come. You are pointed to the same Christ and the same fullness of forgiveness.
67. And that forgiveness that is proclaimed to you is also not a once-and-done thing that applies, perhaps, only to the sins that you committed before the first time you heard it.
68. No, the voice continues calling out.
69. It calls to you in the words of absolution that you heard earlier this morning
70. It calls you each time you read about what your Savior has done for you in God's Word.
71. It calls out to you in the Lord's supper when you hear that his body and blood were given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. So heed that voice and know that your sins have been forgiven.
72. And thus (so) will the Lord's way be prepared. Thus (so), you will be ready to see the salvation of God when Christ returns in glory. Amen.

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