

# **Lutheran Preaching In A Contemporary World**

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## **LUTHERAN PREACHING IN A CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

### **Lecture#1**

Why a pastors' institute on preaching? We all have had basic courses in homiletics. We all have had plenty of practice, at least once a week and often much more than that. So what's to learn? Several more questions ought to make the answer obvious. Who has the greater need to review and to rehearse the basic techniques of piano playing, a once-in-a-while dabbler like me or the accomplished concert pianist who practices eight hours a day? Who is going to receive the most benefit from the basic reminder, "Keep your head down when you address the ball," the professional golfer who practices everyday or me with my 200+ handicap? It is the professional, the accomplished player who is most in danger of taking his craft for granted and who has the most to lose when he does so. The moment we begin taking the basics for granted, we are in trouble. It is true that, "practice makes perfect," but it also can cause bad habits to become ingrained. If preaching continues to be a proclamation of the Word of God and if the pulpit-pew connection still is the place where we met most of our people most of the time, we can ill afford to have God's work through his Word compromised by obstacles that we place in the way.

Now that I have justified my reason for standing before you, let me also make some acknowledgments. The last series of lectures on homiletics at a pastors' institute was delivered in 1976 by Pastor Joel Gerlach, then on the seminary faculty. Most of the material which he presented there found its way into the seminary's textbook on homiletics, *Preach the Gospel*: which he co-authored. That book was published in 1982. Despite the fact that his material is already in print, I have borrowed many of his valuable insights, and those of his co-author, Professor Balge. It also should be mentioned that Professor Jeske conducted a summer quarter course on effective law and gospel preaching two summers ago. I have used material that he graciously shared with me. If anyone here took that course, I hope that any repetition benefits rather than bores you.

The general title for these lectures, "Lutheran Preaching in a Contemporary World," makes it sound as though you are going to hear about many new things to proclaim and novel ways to present them. Please do not be disappointed to hear me say that the problem still is sin and the solution still is the grace of God in Christ. Law and Gospel remain the same, but we are applying these changeless truths in ever-changing circumstances. Each generation adopts new versions of old and favorite sins. Moreover, the kinds of communication that our people are used to receiving have changed radically. All of this together with the desire to remove any obstacles in ourselves that may hinder the effectiveness of God's Word is reason enough to address the subject.

The five lectures will divide the subject matter as follows:

## **LUTHERAN PREACHING IN A CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

### **I. Its Source (Text and Context)**

### **II. Its Purpose (From the Word, for the People)**

### **III. Its Content (Law and Gospel)**

### **IV. Its Setting (Worship Service and Church Year)**

### **V. Its Delivery (Written and Oral Communication)**

**I. It's Source (Text and Context)**  
**A. "Preach the Word!" (2 Tim. 4:2)**

This is rather obvious, WELS preachers and their hearers. Our sermons always come directly from the Bible. That is the way our people and we want it. Generally, this may well be true; but there are circumstances in this world and practices in our pulpits that may frustrate what God demands and we desire. The encouragement of St. Paul to Timothy is still timely, "Preach the Word."

Consider first of all the society that our parishioners live in. It is a society that hates and often opposes authority. The word, "obey" has become a dirty word. It is true that authority is often abused. Political and military leaders may be corrupt. Doctors and clergy may use their positions of influence for immoral purposes. Husbands and parents may become abusive. This, however, is not an excuse for throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The overriding consideration in America today is "individual rights." "Don't you or anybody else tell me what I must do," is heard over and over again.

Then there is the thread of relativism that weaves its way throughout society's thinking. "That's your interpretation," or "That's just what you think," are some of the ways relativism finds popular expression. The words of Pilate, "What is truth," haunt both truth itself and the ability to communicate the truth.

The idea that truth is relative or that truth is what is existentially true to me pervades our society. One time a couple of decades ago I was asked to make a presentation of the teachings of Bible-believing Lutherans to a group of Roman Catholic teenagers. As I went through some basic points in *This We Believe*, I tried to show how we differed from liberal Lutheranism since an LCA pastor had addressed them earlier. After the discussion a nun approached me and said, "I'm glad you told us that all Lutherans don't believe the same thing and that there are other ways of looking at these things." I didn't say that, but that is how she chose to understand the comparisons I made between liberal and Bible-believing theology. She was taking refuge from the truth in relativism. Other ways of looking at Scripture's testimony which explain away the clear truth are supposed to be as valid as the historical grammatical approach. Scripture is like a ball of mud that the interpreter can validly mold into any shape he/she desires. The confident proclamation of the psalmist (Ps. 119:105), "Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light for my path," is denied.

Communication is also viewed relatively in some circles. During the last year I spent in Madison in the Semitics department several professors made the point that ideas never can be communicated perfectly, especially if the writer is no longer around to explain himself or if the circumstances in which he wrote, his ancient society, no longer exists. In addition the hearers are carrying their own existential and cultural baggage when they receive messages which further messes up the ability to communicate. Their conclusion: What we think a message means is just as important, maybe more important, than what the original writer of the message meant to convey in the first place. There certainly is a kernel of truth to all of this. However, when such thinking is applied to the Word of God, the existence of absolute, divinely revealed truth and the ability to adequately communicate it is effectively denied.

But our people aren't affected by such thinking, are they? Go back to some of your recent counseling experiences when you have been trying to show a young couple about to be married what God says will be the respective roles of husband and wife in their marriage, or when you have been attempting to apply God's clear law to the sinful lifestyle of a member. Remember some of the answers you received? "Well, pastor, there are other ways of interpreting the Bible, you know. Not everybody agrees with you, and I have a right to my own understanding." Relativism and antiauthoritarianism have had their way with our people as well. All too often Pharaoh's approach has won the day, "Who is the Lord that I should obey him?"

In resisting such ancient unbelief in modern dress the preacher should do what God equips him to do best and that is to proclaim the truth. God does not need us to defend him and the authority of his word in our sermons. We are not on solid ground when we enter the arena of carefully developed argumentation against the unbelieving scholar or the rationalizing sinner. Like the prophets of old who received the absolute truth from God, we who proclaim that truth are to say, not arrogantly, but boldly, "Thus says the Lord." Preach the Word! Let God do the work of defending and convincing.

### **B. Using a text**

As long as the preacher does justice to the message of Scripture and proclaims it faithfully, nobody can insist that he do it in any specific way. There is as much art to sermon making, as there is science and method. There will ever be room for the preacher's preferences and personality. It is always possible to begin not with a text, but with a topic of interest and importance that will be the subject for one or a series of Sunday sermons. This topic, of course, should be one on which the Scriptures speak at least indirectly. The Preacher might select individual aspects of that topic which he wishes to emphasize and then look for verses in Scripture to support his message. He will quote them at appropriate places throughout the sermon. This is topical preaching in the strict sense of the word. The topic with its various aspects governs both the focus and arrangement of material. There is no text as such. The Scriptures serve to verify the preacher's message. Preaching certainly can be done this way.

Let us also say that there is more than one way of using a text. The preacher may be following a pericope series that he has chosen. Then again he may decide to prepare a homily or running commentary on a larger portion of Scripture, say an entire chapter, and mix in application at selected points as he moves along. He continues to do this as he moves through an entire book of the Bible. Perhaps the preacher has selected a topic like stewardship or a series like the Ten Commandments, and he then seeks for texts that carry out the train of thought that he desires. In contrast to purely topical preaching, however, the chosen texts will determine the focus and development of the sermon. All of these methods are useful, and the Spirit will do his work through the Word. We may all use them at one time or another.

How will we normally want to preach? Two things ought to be kept in mind when answering this question. First of all, the sermon is oral proclamation. The preacher is serving as a herald of the message that the Lord has prepared. This makes the method of using a text(s) even one that the preacher has chosen for a special occasion preferable to purely topical preaching. It's more possible for the preacher to say, "Thus says the Lord," not "thus say I and the Lord backs me up." Secondly, with a text the preacher has the best opportunity to make a single point and make it strongly. With supporting evidence from the text, coupled either in parallel or in series, the preacher is empowered to drive home and apply the single point he is emphasizing. Such a sermon will make a lasting impression on the mind and heart of those who have listened, and that impression will be the central thought, the theme of the sermon. For such sermonizing using a text is the most effective. It allows the preacher to dig deeply and pointedly into the central thought of the text without rambling all over the place on a general theme. The sermon becomes six inches wide and a mile deep.

The homiletics department here at the seminary is convinced that normally the method that employs preaching a text is the most desirable one. The following reasons are offered in *Preach the Gospel*:

1. A text offers a manageable part of the whole. [A text is defined as "a term denoting a sentence, verse, or portion of Scripture which by itself constitutes a complete line of thought."] (The text offers not only manageable, but also a focused portion of Scripture. Jesus used a text in the synagogue at Nazareth [Luke 4]; the apostles used one or several texts an

various occasions: Acts 2:14-36, 3:11-26, 7:2-53, 8:26-35, 10:34-43, 13:16-41, 15:13-21 and 17:22-31.)

2. A text injects discipline into the homiletical process. (The preacher must develop his line of thought parallel to that of the text, rather than finding portions of Scripture that match his outline. Textual preaching as opposed to topical preaching also strengthens the emphasis on “Thus says the Lord,” rather than, “thus says the preacher.”)
3. A systematic series of texts provides material for presenting more of God’s instruction and encouragement than random selection according to the preacher’s personal preferences can afford. (More on this point and how these texts are chosen in session 4.)
4. A variety of texts helps to insure freshness in preaching. (e.g. the many ways in which Scripture speaks of forgiveness and Justification prevent the preacher from reverting to his favorite, stereotyped ways of dealing with them. [*Preach the Gospel*, pp. 133. Comments in () are mine.]

### **C. Text, not Pretext**

The preacher who desires confidently to proclaim, “Thus says the Lord,” will make every effort to avoid using his text as a pretext. A pretext, instead of governing both the shape and content of the sermon, is a starting point, a springboard for the preacher to go a direction he has determined. There are several different forms of pretext that we might mention here.

I have heard people complain, “All our pastor ever does from the pulpit is tell stories.” if the criticism is valid, although they don’t use the actual words, I “think they are speaking of one kind of pretext. Perhaps the text suggests the direction of this man’s story telling, but he uses that text only to jog his memory. He is like the person who after reading a newspaper’s headline says, “Now that reminds me of a good story.” The text itself is virtually ignored.

Then there is the sermonizer who wishes to preach on a certain subject, and he wishes to say certain things. It has happened to all of us. We lie in bed thinking about a sermon, dealing perhaps with a special occasion. We have all sorts of neat things to say. We outline the sermon in our heads. The only problem is that we haven’t picked a text as yet. Now where are we going to find one that will allow us to say what we have already decided to say? We usually end up picking a small text, maybe just part of a verse that speaks to our subject matter. After reading this text, we ignore it for the rest of the sermon, following instead our bedtime outline. The astute listener might ask, “Did God really say all of that up there?”

Perhaps a less obvious form of pretext is the one that uses stereotyped sentences or whole paragraphs in set form. The text itself perhaps suggests a certain narrative such as part of Christ’s passion history, or a doctrine to be expounded such as justification. Then the preacher turns to his mental computer and plugs in the right prefabricated paragraph. It is a paragraph he has used a hundred times for all sorts of texts. His regular churchgoers can almost recite it from memory with him. Of such preachers it is sometimes said, “It doesn’t matter what his text is, his sermon always comes out sounding the same.” The unique qualities of the text is ignored. There is, of course, no secret to avoiding the trap of pretext. The solution is simply to preach textual sermons. And the steps for doing that are easy to follow. Serious study will help us ascend them.

1. Choose a text, a real, unit of Scripture. On a normal Sunday that may already be done for you in a pericope series. If you are preparing for a special occasion, choose more than just the single verse that many books on sermon texts have in their lists for such times. Choose enough verses to give a setting and flow of thought to your text.
2. After studying the text in its original language, analyze the flow of thought. Pick out the main thought (the big idea, the propositional statement), and the subordinate thoughts that support it. The main thought probably will form the basis for the eventual theme of the sermon. It

ought to be equal in scope to the thought that the text presents. For instances in the opening verses of Luke 11 Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray and what to pray for. To say that the propositional statement should read, “Jesus teaches us about prayer,” is much broader than the text allows. The same advice about scope can also be given for the subordinate thoughts.

3. Look for word-pictures and unique ways of expressing familiar truths that the text itself uses.

In this way the sermon will take its shape from the text. The content will be expressed, not only in a way which is scriptural correct, but in a way which the text itself suggests. In such a sermon the preacher may confidently say, “Thus says the Lord,” and his hearers will nod in agreement.

“To read a text before preaching and to announce that a sermon will be based on that portion of God’s Word is to make a promise. It is to say, ‘I will tell you what this means and what it means for you.’ One cannot keep that promise until one has learned what the text means. It is not for the preacher to decide that, but to discover it. That requires reverent, careful, honest study.” (Preach the Gospel, p.17) It also requires a faithful communication of what we have discovered.

#### **D. Text and Context**

Have you ever been quoted out of context? It’s irritating isn’t it? The person who quotes out of context can make anybody say anything, often the exact opposite of what the original speaker meant when he spoke. That is bad enough when the original speaker is another human being. When that speaker is the Lord in his revealed truth, the situation is intolerable.

There are many contexts to a particular text waiting to be discovered by the preacher. There may be an internal context, one which is right in the verses of the text itself, providing the whole unit that makes up the is included in the portion on which the sermon is based. At first glance Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan seems to be encouraging sanctification. However if the text includes verses 25-29 of Luke 10, and not just verses 30-37, we see something different. The internal context now reveals that Jesus spoke his parable as a mirror-preaching of the law to prick the balloon of the self-righteousness held by a man who wanted to justify his attitudes and his actions or lack of them.

There is also what might be called an immediate external context. If a text is taken from the latter chapters of one of Paul’s epistles and deals with the sanctified life in Christ, it must always be remembered that many verses on justification have preceded. These must be called to mind if the text is to be put into its proper setting. The word’s, “Jesus warned them, not to tell anyone about him,” don’t sound very mission-minded in Mark 3:3C. But the context reminds us that the Savior’s mission was not complete as yet. He had not suffered, died and, risen victoriously, so the fact that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, could have been and was easily misunderstood. Later a risen Savior about to ascend to his Father with his mission complete would tell his disciples to take the gospel of salvation to the world.

Finally, there is the context of the entire Scriptures and it must be remembered that every text in the Bible is set in that context. Not everybody agrees what that context is. Many preachers (not necessarily Lutheran, cf. Session 3) want to see the bible as a rulebook, a “How-to” guide for Christian living. Certainly there is much guidance in Scripture for the Christian dealing with how he ought to live. 1 Peter 1:21 even sets up Christ as an example for us to follow: “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.” Other people of God similarly can serve as examples. But this is not the context, the primary proclamation of the Scriptures, which serves as an umbrella over all texts we might choose.

That context is “redemption history.” Primarily the Bible from beginning to end is “*Heilsgeschichte*,” “the proclamation that in Christ God has reconciled the world unto himself, rescuing it from the clutches of sin and the depths of eternal death. He was planning this rescue before the world began. He prepared for it throughout the centuries of Old Testament history. He made it a reality in the active and passive obedience of Jesus Christ; and he will bring it to complete fruition when Christ comes again. All texts on which we preach fall somewhere on that timeline of divine grace.

This is not an arbitrary approach to the Bible, or one possible approach among many. Two passages supply the greater context of the entire Old Testament. They are the first Gospel proclamation in Ge 3:15 and the underlying reason for all Israelite history stated in Ge 12:1-3 (esp., “...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”) Those are passages that look ahead to redemption history still to come. Jesus looks back and proclaims in John 5:39, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.” St. Paul adds his testimony when he says in Romans 15:4, “For everything that written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement if the Scriptures we might have hope.” The Evangelist John closes his gospel with a similar thought (John 20:31): “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

This redemption history forms the one grand theme, and unifying mortar that binds the whole house of God together. We may look into house through different windows in different places in the structure; but the contents will always be the same: God has saved all sinners through Christ.

What a difference this of the Bible’s grand theme will make in the way we preach, especially from the Old Testament. Abraham praying for Sodom and Gomorrah in Ge 18 (ILCW, Series C, Pent. 10) is not just an example of how God’s people ought to pray. He is the ancestor of the Savior praying for the heathen in the same way that Jesus would pray for the Gentiles from the cross and in his high priestly prayer. Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers in Ge 50 (ILCW, Series A, Pent. 17) is not just a model displaying how God’s children forgive each other. Joseph sees the preservation of God’s chosen people as all-important more so than his own comfort and fair treatment. This Israel becomes the bearer of the human nature of the Christ who would give himself for the sins of all people, willingly forgiving any mistreatment to himself. The prayer of Solomon at the beginning of his reign recorded in 1 Ki 3 (ILCW, Series A, Pent. 10) becomes the prayer of a type of Christ, instructive in the way he prefigures and the way he falls short of great David’s greater son. The list could go on and on, but let these serve to make the point.

In this way our sermons will be truly Christ-centered. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not an ugly lean-to tacked on to the beautiful structure of our sermon where it doesn’t belong. It is the foundation beneath the text on which our sermon is based. It doesn’t have to be dragged in someplace where it does not fit. It has been there all along. We only have to recognize it. With every sermon you write ask yourself the question, “Could I go to the nearest synagogue (or the neighboring ELCA church) and preach this sermon without it raising a fuss?” If the answer is “Yes,” then the Christ-centered, redemption-history context undergirding your text has been ignored.

There is one more point in the nature of a footnote that could be added here. Part of the overall context of the Bible is the dignity and reverence that its themes deserve. God is not a “shoemaker’s apprentice” (Luther) and we ought not to speak of him in our sermon themes and sermons themselves as though he were. The old country western song, “Drop kick me, Jesus, through the goalposts of life,” never really struck me as living up to the dignity of the Gospel. The following theme and parts for an Easter sermon on Mark 1:1-7, doesn’t particularly do so either:

## WINNERS IN EASTER RACE

- I. The gospel racetrack
- II. The right car
- III. Jesus the master mechanic

### **E. The Preacher Speaks (An intermediate source)**

The preacher may not be the source of the message he is speaking. He is as St. Paul calls him in 2 Co 5, an ambassador of Christ. And yet the words that are emanating from that pulpit are coming from the preacher's mouth, and Jesus himself says, (Luke 10:16) "He who listens to you listens to me." The Word of God comes to God's people through the preacher and of course, the preacher is the one who has created the sermon.

Now we all are in agreement that the Holy Spirit can work through his Gospel even if it is being proclaimed by an unbelieving, or indifferent, or hypocritical preacher. God can and, I'm afraid we all must admit, sometimes does work in spite of the preacher. But we do not want him to have to work in spite of us. We don't want to be obstacles getting in the way of the Spirit's work. That means that first of all the devout preacher applies the text he is working with and the sermon he creates to himself. The Law should first of all convict him of his sin. His faith should increase through the promises of the Gospel; and his resolve to rededicate himself to the life in Christ should have been formed and put into practice. In Session 5 we will see what effect that has on the style and ability of the pastor. Here we only want to note that it makes him the kind of instrument that the Lord will use with good result.

## **LUTHERAN PREACHING IN A CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

### **Lecture#2**

"He who takes aim at nothing will be sure to hit it." This little truism brings home to us what we already know: Nothing is worse than aimlessness. People who can see no reason or purpose for their lives can fall into the depths of despair or worse. Preachers who ramble around aimlessly in their sermons can make the same happen to themselves and those who are listening to them. There must be both general and specific purposes in our minds and goals that we wish to accomplish that govern the writing of our sermons and their delivery. If those purposes are not clear to us and if we do not communicate them clearly to our hearers, both of us are going to feel as though we are wasting our time.

Jay Adams has the following to say on purpose in sermons;

For years now I have told my students that on Sunday morning if I were to awaken them at 3 o'clock and ask, "What is the general purpose of your sermon today?" and at 3:15 a.m. I were to ask, "what is your specific purpose?" they ought to know the answers so well that they could spit them out in a crisp, one-sentence response ("My general purpose is to inform"; "My specific purpose is to inform the congregation about the facts of death and resurrection listed in 1 Thessalonians 4") and roll over and go back to sleep.

"You're kidding!" you say. "Is purpose all that important?" You'd better believe it.

Unless a preacher knows the purpose of his sermon, all is lost, and the sermon would be better if it were lost. (Adams, *Essays on Biblical Preaching*, p. 9)

If purpose in preaching is so important it is worthy of a section of our discussion. So today let us consider Lutheran Preaching in a Contemporary World:

### **II. Its Purpose (From the Word, For the People)**

Before we begin we should emphasize that any purposes that we determine for our preaching ought not to be those that we have manufactured for ourselves. Our purposes in preaching come from the Holy Spirit through the very word that we proclaim. Our attitude when

we approach sermon preparation and preaching itself will be that of David when he prays, “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.” (Ps. 51:15)

In the introduction to today’s lecture we mentioned both general and specific purposes for any particular sermon. Since specific purposes are determined by the text on which the sermon is based, we will leave the discussion of them to some brief examples later on. Now we would like to review some general purposes for our preaching. We divide them into two major categories: 1.) Those that describe why the word of God is proclaimed and what the Spirit wishes to accomplish through it, and 2.) Those that describe the kind of people to whom the Word is proclaimed.

### **A. Purposes for the Word**

How should the Word be used by preachers? St. Paul answers the question in 2 Ti 3-16, “All Scripture is God-breathed (*theopneustos*) and is useful (*ophelimos*) for teaching (*didaskalian*), rebuking (*elegmon*) correcting (*epanorthosin*) and training in righteousness (*paideian ten en dikaiosune*). The apostle lays out for us the practical implications of verbal inspiration. If the scriptures (here the Old Testament Scriptures) were simply the words of men, even men with admittedly deep religious insight such as Isaiah or Jeremiah, preachers and teachers of the Scriptures could never use them the way they do. They certainly could not say, “Thus says the Lord!” Rather the law recorded in the Old Testament would simply be the opinions of one society conditioned by its peculiar circumstances and thought system. The promises embedded in the Word would raise more doubt than certainty. What is said here about the Old Testament certainly applies to the New Testament as well. But the Scriptures are God-breathed. His Spirit moved holy men of God to write the way they did. The Scriptures are not just inspiring to those who use them, they are inspired by the Spirit who authored them. As instruments of the Spirit’s inspiration the prophets and apostles may well have given their own tone quality (vocabulary, style etc.) to their writings, but the Spirit named the tune to be played (the message, yes, the very words). This truth so very much out of style in our world today allows the Bible-believing Lutheran preacher to sound very different than his contemporaries in pulpits throughout the world. To the liberal, historical-critical preacher the Scriptures may be a body of national Israelite literature or the *kerygma* of an ancient church that can provide some useful spiritual insight. To the confessional Lutheran preacher they are the very word of God and therefore “useful” in accomplishing God’s purposes. Let us look at those purposes.

#### **1. Teaching (*didaskalia*)**

Is it really necessary for the teaching function of the Scripture to come out in our sermons? Again St. Paul supplies the answer. “Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law,” the apostle confesses in Ro 7:7. “For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’” Unconverted man does not know and the Christian must constantly be reminded of the real depths to which sin has invaded and pervaded the human nature. Only if we teach in our sermons the way Jesus did in his Sermon on the Mount will a clear knowledge of sin be known. Only then will our hearers realize the way God’s holy law pursues their guilt and condemns it in the most secret chambers of their hearts.

But this is only half of the story. Quoting the prophet Isaiah in 1 Co 2: 9-10, St. Paul says, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.” What a potential for worldwide, eternal tragedy man’s spiritual ignorance provides. The gracious Heavenly Father wants every man, woman, and child to spend eternity with him. The Lamb of God has prepared an everlasting, heavenly feast for every person in this world. All is ready. What a shame if nobody came.

Our sermons will always have teaching as one of their primary purposes, especially in this day and age when knowledge of the Scriptures is at a very low ebb. Unfortunately many of the individuals sitting before us on a Sunday morning have their only weekly (or monthly) exposure



to Biblical teaching in the readings and sermon text that they hear that day. Natural ignorance, nonspiritual priorities and indifference all conspire to make the pastor's job of teaching difficult. Often he feels that if he doesn't get it done in the short time available to him for preaching on a Sunday morning, it isn't going to get done. He may be right. Sermons that teach are an absolute necessity in the parish ministry of the 1990s. The pastor with this thought in mind certainly desires to assure his congregation in the words of St. Paul that through his sermons, "...I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God." (Acts 20:27)

Important as teaching is in our sermons, the warning is also in place:

(Sermons) will be didactic sermons without being dogmatic dissertations... Caution is in order, however, so that a preacher does not intellectualize this type of preaching. Such preaching may leave the impression that his goal is merely to insure that his people are "straight" on doctrine. If people complain occasionally that sermons are dry and dull, that may be part of the reason. The wise preacher will know how to distinguish between preaching doctrine and lecturing on dogmatics. The first is a legitimate part of teaching; the second is out of place in the pulpit. (*Preach the Gospel*, p.5)

Doctrine will never be preached for doctrine's sake, but in order that it might be applied to the hearts and lives of the people.

## **2. Rebuke (*elegmon*)**

Rebuke is the other side of the coin from teaching. Teaching is the positive proclamation of doctrine and its application. Rebuilding is the exposure and refuting of error and false teaching. At times the false teacher who promotes a particular error may be exposed as well.

There is a place for rebuking in a sermon. I think we would be surprised if the errors of the Roman Catholic Church were not at least alluded to in a Reformation Day sermon. Such rebuke could make a sermon very timely, especially when our parishioners read that Lutheran leaders are holding meetings aimed at unity with Catholic theologians, and their Catholic neighbors are telling them that the RCC has really changed. I also remember the first congregation that I served. It is located in a small community to the southwest of Saginaw, Michigan. The Jehovah's Witnesses were very strong in the area, so strong that the annual statewide convention of the sect was held every year in the local high school. While everybody was there from across the state, they blanketed the community with their house-to-house calls and their literature. To have ignored this phenomenon and not to have warned about the dangers of this unchristian cult's teachings would have done a disservice to my parishioners. In these and all cases where rebuke is a purpose of the sermon (I can hardly imagine it ever being the chief purpose in any sermon.) its inclusion must be to warn of danger to faith and life and to show how error distorts the divine truth. "Reproof in sermons is positive and constructive when it 're-proves' what God is saying." (*PTG*, p. 61)

Again a warning must be sounded. Polemics may at times be necessary from the pulpit, but normally the preaching format is not the best place for it. First of all, the hearers are addressed as a body. Rebuke of certain errors and of the individuals and/or heterodox church bodies who foster them may be of value and accepted by some in that body. Others, especially those who may be visiting from that group or have relatives there, may misunderstand the preacher's intentions. They may never come back again. Secondly, all the communication is one way. Nobody in the audience has the opportunity to talk back. Some may think the preacher unfair in his comments but they have to swallow their objections. Thirdly, there is the danger of setting up straw men and knocking them flat, if somebody finds out that the alleged errorist has been pictured unfairly, he may decide that his pastor is the one who is wrong. Finally, there just isn't enough time in a sermon to deal with complex or subtle errors. Skimming the surface can cause misrepresentation or misunderstanding.

### 3. Correction (*epanorthosis*)

Correction deals with the area of morality just as rebuke deals with doctrine. It refers to the preaching of the law as a mirror. The law of God is held up so that every sinner can catch a good look at himself in it. Because we plan to say much more in the next session concerning the preaching of the law, we will touch on it very lightly here.

The root meaning of the Greek work is “to restore to an upright position.” That meaning points not only to a purpose; it also applies an attitude. This purpose of preaching is not to condemn the listener, but eventually to restore him. It is hard to imagine any sermon that does not have this purpose in view somewhere along the line. Every pastor who is conscious of the fact that his ministry revolves around the gospel is anxious to get there as quickly as possible. But gospel planting is premature when the soil of the heart has not first been plowed by the law. I don’t know of too many farmers whose greatest joy in life is plowing. Planting and nurturing those plants is where it is at. But if it is going to pay to go through the effort of planting at all, you have to plow the field first. Every sermon certainly should get to planting and nurturing faith with the gospel. If that is true, then correction is going to a sub-purpose of every sermon. One of the questions that should be asked of every text is: What specific sin (“the malady,” homiletically speaking) does the Holy Spirit wish to confront with his divine law in this text?”

### 4. Instruction in Righteousness (*paideia en dikaiosune*)

This purpose is paired with *apanorthosis* as *elegmon* is paired with *didaskalia*. It again is the other side of the coin. It is the use of the law as a guide, as opposed to its use as a mirror. As our homiletics textbook says,

“This is the ethics portion of a sermon. It explains for God’s people the practical implications living under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Just as *didaskalia* sheds a divine light on the Bible, helping a Christian to know what God says, just so *paideia* sheds a divine light on life, helping a Christian to do what God says...

The root of the word *paideia* is the Greek word for child. In the instructional sermon each hearer is addressed as a privileged child of God, a child who needs encouragement and direction to grow and mature in faith and life.” (PTG, P. 8)

Although the emphasis in this purpose is on the sanctified life, it is inconceivable that this purpose can stand alone in a sermon. Living the life of righteousness flows from and is empowered by the gift of righteousness that Christ has earned for us. “You are declared righteous. Your Savior guarantees that. Now go and be righteous.” This is the Scriptural cause and effect that must be proclaimed clearly in every sermon.

Again because we plan to say more about this subject next time when we consider the matter of preaching sanctification, we will allow the above brief treatment of this purpose to suffice for now. These four purposes can be arranged as follows:

	Doctrine	Living
Positive	Teaching	Instruction in righteousness
Negative	Rebuke	Correction

### 5. Encouragement/Comfort Hope (*paraklesis kai elpida*)

This purpose for preaching the Word could be added to Paul’s list above. Actually Paul himself adds it when he says, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us,

so that through endurance and the encouragement (*paxakleseos*) of the Scriptures we might have hope (*elpida*).” (Ro 15:4) Sermons with this primary emphasis seek to produce in God’s people the Christian virtue of patience to deal with trials they are already experiencing and to face tribulation and catastrophe that still lies in the future. The preacher directs his listeners to see the Lord dealing with them in his grace seeking his child’s eternal good, and invites them to trust in his never-ending faithfulness.

Again the department textbook offers this caution:

“Student sermons sometimes offer *paraklesis* with a peculiar eschatological twist. They attempt to comfort Christians with the thought that if things are going badly in this life, all they need is patience; heaven will be better. That kind of preaching may obscure the fact that God intends the whole of a Christian’s new life to be a blessed one, lived in close and constant communion with God, blessed by his touch and rewarding even when trials and troubles are many. In other words, ‘hope’ preaching should have a here-and-now thrust as well as an eschatological one.” (PTG, p.9)

### **B. For the People**

We have been looking at the general purpose of our sermons from the point of view of the Word. There is another way that we can look at them. We may view the purpose of our sermons from the effect that they are designed to have on our hearers.

The Scriptures are not unaware of the fact that the people they are addressing have a specific psychological makeup. The people to whom we preach have minds that are to be instructed. They have hearts that are to be reached and persuaded. And they have wills that are to be moved and motivated. Here too the preacher must search the word and ask which of these psychological aspects will receive the emphasis in any particular text.

#### **1. Teach Them**

The people whom we face from the pulpit every week are rational, thinking human beings. If they are given information in a clear and logical presentation they are able to assimilate this material and use it. They can appreciate cause and effect, purpose and result, conditional clauses and all the other meaning that can be conveyed through grammatical construction. Reason is the handmaid of theology. It is not to be the judge over the Scripture nor does it stand on equal footing along side them, but is certainly can and must be utilized when comprehending their message.

“But as for you, continue in what *you have learned...*” St. Paul tells Timothy, “because you know from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation. . . .” (2 Tim 2:14-15) I have omitted certain parts of this passage since they really apply more to the next section, but Paul’s message here is clear. Timothy has sat at the feet of his mother and grandmother and he has been instructed. He has learned and memorized the facts about God’s saving love and this learning was absolutely necessary if he was going to know his Savior. A person cannot know the Lord if he has not been taught and if he has not learned who God is, what his will is, and what the scope of his gracious love is.

It is true St. Paul says that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” But you cannot begin with the calling. He continues, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in” But even here is not the starting point. “And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” Paul’s very thought structure throughout chapter ten of his letter to the Romans is a strong appeal to the human reasoning process. You cannot have the effect, he argues, without first of all having the cause that brings it about. He also emphasizes the prime importance of teaching in the course of preaching. Especially in view of the spiritual ignorance of natural man, as we discussed before,

he must know before there can be any believing or doing. He must be taught clearly, concisely and unequivocally exactly what God's law proclaim about the holy will of God. He must be shown from scripture itself what the depth of his sin is how it taints everything that he does and how it makes him stand accused and condemned before God's tribunal. He must be shown the depth and breath of the Lord's saving love. The facts of God's rescue mission must be placed in front of him. He must learn that God created the earth on which he lives. He must be told that the creation has been horribly marred and disfigured by sin. He must be shown the Savior, amazingly both God's and Mary's son, who by a perfect life and an atoning death has won righteousness for the unrighteous and forgiveness for the unforgivable. He must be told, as the disciples were that in the Father's eternal house are many mansions. If that were not the case, the Lord Jesus himself would not have told him so clearly in his word. We could go on and on. But the point has been made. Very often, yes, we ought to say in every text there is going to be a strong element of teaching. The pastor is an intelligent person and he has intelligent people sitting in front of him. Communication on the intellectual level, from mind to mind can, will and must take place for the Spirit to do his work of creating and nurturing faith.

## **2. Persuade Them**

We make a serious mistake, however, if we think that once we have done our teaching, we have completed our task. We have not as yet preached to the whole person before us. Our hearers have hearts, the seat of their emotions. We must communicate with them on this level as well.

If there is one criticism that is often leveled against Lutheran preachers, it is that they stop short of reaching the whole human being. The emphasis is on teaching, and well it should be because nothing else can take place without it. If the preacher tries to speak to the heart without first addressing the mind, he is dabbling in pure emotionalism. But he must also reach the heart. He must not only seek to teach, he must seek to persuade.

But here some red flags quickly come popping into view. Wait a minute! I cannot persuade my listeners to believe. That is the Spirit's work, and now I am in danger of invading his domain. Yes, it is true. We cannot create faith; but the Word can. We confess with the Apostle Paul that the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. And we have that Word. That is what we are preaching.

When God spoke to Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, he gave them a command. "Be fruitful and increase in number," he said, "fill the earth and subdue it." These were not things that were in the power of this couple to carry out. But notice that Moses says, "God blessed them." True, these words were in the imperative form, but actually they were blessings. The words themselves bestowed the power to carry out what they commanded. So it is with what we call the "Gospel imperatives." What they command the sin-filled human heart has no ability or desire to carry out. No amount of emotionalism on the part of the preacher is going to change that fact. But these imperatives are really blessings of God. They carry with them the power to perform what they command. They cause rebirth. They bring spiritual life and the ability to respond as God commands them. One of the best examples of seeking to persuade that I have found is in 2 Corinthians, chapter 5. There the Apostle Paul is speaking about the ministry of reconciliation and look at what he says. He speaks of purpose, "Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men." (v.11) "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." (v.14) "We are convinced," Paul says, "and that is why we seek to convince you. Here is real heart-to-heart communication. Paul has been won for the Lord Jesus, and he urges his readers to join him there.

This is not emotionalism on Paul's part. He does not forget the objective basis of his appeal. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." (v. 19) That is the grand and glorious truth of what God accomplished in Christ, and this

reconciling by God created an amazing situation. Paul says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (v.21)

Now what has God done? “(He) gave us the ministry of reconciliation,” Paul says. And how does Paul use that ministry of reconciliation? Listen to the apostle. “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. *We implore you* on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” (v.19-20) He continues in the opening verse of chapter six, which really belongs with chapter five. “I tell you,” Paul proclaims, “now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” (v.2) “*We urge you* not to receive God’s grace in vain.” To be sure St. Paul teaches the objective truths of salvation in these words, but having done his teaching, he does not forget to make his appeal. And when he makes his appeal, he also makes it clear that he is not doing the appealing. It is God who is appealing through him, and that divine appeal blesses the receiver with the power to respond.

How should a Lutheran preacher use a “text such as this? What should be the case. Jesus says, “By their fruits you will know them,” and James reminds us that a faith without works is dead. But when we are left staring at ourselves for the certainty of salvation, we are lost. As soon as my assurance that all is right between God and me has me staring at my faith, or the works of my new man, or anything else in the general area of my navel, I am building on shifting sand.

There also seems to be an unhealthy emphasis on victory in living in Evangelical sanctification. Gone is the struggle of the Apostle Paul. Gone, or at least, greatly de-emphasized is the constant need for repentance and the admission that we fall short of our sanctification goals. In its place is the Bible as a magnificent rulebook. Follow the rules and you will have a successful marriage. Follow the guidelines for a rewarding prayer-life. The list of successful “how-to’s” could be greatly expanded. This approach to sanctification allures our people with its promises of pleasing God and living the full life. But it replaces “Christ for us” with “Christian power.” They are of a different spirit.

But the Evangelical misdirection ought not keep us from proclaiming what the Gospel is doing in our hearts. I recently heard a presentation in which WLS homiletics was criticized as falling short. The comment was made that WELS preaching is strong on justification and redemption, but weak on reconciliation and appropriation, and because the new life is not proclaimed regularly as a result of the Gospel coming into our hearts, sanctification is divorced from the justification that it is supposed to follow. I will let you judge for yourselves whether the criticism is justified or not. But the warning for our preaching is there. Proclaim everything that the Gospel does. It says that Christ delivers us from the power as well as the guilt of sin.

#### **D. Preaching the Law as a Guide**

I have heard pastors say, “I find that when I preach the law as a mirror, preaching the sanctified life with the law as a guide pretty much takes care of itself,” There is some truth to this comment. Preaching the law as a guide for Christian living is simply the other side of the coin from preaching it as a mirror. When I tell my people what they should not do, I am already implying what in repentance and faith they should do. And when I urge people out of thanksgiving to Christ to live lives that please him, any honest child of God is going to see his failings and the need for repentance.

But the Bible does put the law on both sides of the Gospel. The inspired writers use the law to condemn sin and threaten the wrath of God. But God’s will is also laid before Christians as the fruits that they are to produce as fruits of repentance. The need for the law is the sinful nature still present in the believer’s heart. Sanctification is imperfect. The law is not as yet perfectly imprinted on the heart. There still is need for external knowledge.

But won’t calling for certain fruits of faith lead to ‘the always present temptation to trust in those works for salvation, “I’m doing the best I can.” Probably. The sinful flesh taints

everything that goes on in the believer's heart. His sorrow over sin is not perfect. His faith is not perfect. And neither is his sanctification. But that ought not prevent us from calling for it. We might also suggest, that if we are going to be specific with our condemnations of sin, and with our preaching of the Gospel, why not be specific with Christ's merits. Therefore they are able to communicate heart to heart. Their lives are shining examples of the sanctification that they call for. With a will that is moved they speak to move the wills of others. Good purposeful preaching begins with God accomplishing his purposes in our hearts and lives. This says tons to our personal devotional life. Search the Word, believe the word and live according to the Word.

### **C. Conclusion**

There are others ways in which we could determine that purposes for our sermons. We address our sermons to people who are sinners and saints. One of those aspects will probably receive the emphasis. A sermon on justification will have as its purpose appropriation; a text on sanctification will have as its purpose application. Some of these are just different ways of cutting the pie of purpose. Others will receive more attention next week as we discuss the content of our sermons.

## **LUTHERAN PREACHING: IN A CONTEMPORARY**

### **Lecture #3**

It is very fitting that this afternoon's lecture finds itself in the third place in this series, as far from the beginning as it is from the end. It holds this middle ground because it is meant to be the high point of the series. I call it the high point, not because I have poured so much extra quality into it, but rather because of the subject matter under discussion. Today we wish to discuss the content of our sermons.

For the confessional Lutheran pastor nothing can be more important than the content of the sermon he is preaching. I say this because what we are handling in the content of our sermons is the divinely inspired, the all-powerful word of our God. In the Word itself is the power to accomplish what God sent it to do. We do not want to misrepresent him by what we say how we say it or why we say it. To do so presents the very real danger of frustrating what the Lord wishes to do with his proclamation of divine truth.

God directs us as St. Paul directed Timothy, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct; rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction." (2 Tim. 4:2) But he does not leave us only with this directive. He also clearly reveals what he wants accomplished by that preaching. He tells us to use his Word to make disciples of all nations. He enlists us to feed his lambs and his sheep. God revealed his truth to win the lost; to recall the erring and the fallen; to nurture the weak, hurting and doubting; and to strengthen the strong.

True, the text before us on any given week will determine specific content, but there ought to be a general, broad overview of content as well. Are we giving our people a balanced, well-rounded diet of the Word? Do we preach Law as well as Gospel, subjective justification as well as objective justification, sanctification as well as justification? Are these Scriptural truths proclaimed, not only in the proper order, but also in the proper amount? Too much of any one part of the whole and too little of another can end up defeating the purpose of the whole diet. I will never forget a newspaper article that I read early in my ministry about a woman in California. She had been told that vitamins were good for her child. She reasoned that if a small dose was good, a large dose would be better. Every day she fed her child 900 times the recommended daily dosage of vitamins. The result was tragic. The growth plates on the ends of her child's bones calcified. The child's growth in its limbs became stunted. The result of the woman's actions was the exact opposite of what she wished to accomplish. We do not wish for stunted Christians caused by an unbalanced diet of the Word.

We also know the same diet is not fitting for everybody all of the time. Babies cannot use meat and potatoes. Adults need a lot more than milk. My son tends to get dehydrated quickly when he is playing football or basketball because of the low fat content in his body, I am told. He probably could use a little more fat in his diet. One look at my physique and cholesterol count will tell you that is decidedly not the case with me. Our congregations as well have their strengths and weaknesses, their needs and their saturation points. We by knowing our people will use our sanctified wisdom to determine what the proper spiritual diet for our people will have to be at any given time.

Let these remarks suffice to illustrate what I'm sure you already agree to: The content of our sermons is all-important. And so today we wish to discuss Lutheran Preaching in a Contemporary World.

### **III. Its Content (Law and Gospel)**

#### **A. Preach the Law as a Mirror**

There is a tremendous need for the preaching of the law as a mirror in our present day. We live in an age of great scientific and technological advances, but morally and spiritually that knowledge has not helped us one iota. A man can hate his wife and plan to be unfaithful to her just as much if he is going mach 2 in a jet fighter as if he is going 2 miles/hour in an oxcart. Modern advances do not change human nature. Today's children can operate computers and other electronic gadgets in a way that amazes their parents and overwhelm their grandparents, but I dare say, they often know less than their parents and alot less than their grandparents about the holy will of God. The members of the present generation may know more about sex than previous generations did at their age, but they do not know or believe that prescribed limits on sexual activity are established by God's universal will, not by outdated, Victorian prudes of the nineteenth century. The knowledge of, God's will is at an all-time low in our society, and many people, content to live in their sin, are happy to leave it that way.

I admit that this may not be an accurate-picture of your congregation. But it is an accurate portrait of the society in which your members mingle. How can they help but be affected by the bombardment of heathen influences that hammers home again and again on primetime TV and in newspaper editorials that homosexuality is an alternate lifestyle; marriage is an option where sexual activity is concerned; gambling is an innocent pastime; really expressive people always curse, swear and use extreme vulgarities in their speech; a real man makes his enemies pay for the way they have injured him; and on and on and on. This is what our people are told, and the antidote isn't used very often. Who will disagree that our people spend more time watching TV than they do reading the Bible and that they read more secular literature than home devotions. What can we expect in such a situation but to find knowledge of the truth blurred, and the cutting edge of the conscience blunted? Contemporary Lutheran preachers must be powerful preachers of the law.

How can we do this? We can begin by making sure that our people know what the holy law of God demands and what it calls sin. We should also clearly proclaim that such sin merits and brings God's certain wrath and condemnation. Such preaching begins with original sin. Often preachers speak about the sinful human nature in a way that even the heathen could agree with. They say, "we are all sinners," and the man of this world nods his head and says, "of course, we are not perfect. To err is human" But the Bible speaks of original *sin*. Sin means guilt before God, and guilt means God's anger and punishment. We were "by nature the children of wrath." (Eph. 2:3) God is like the patient bicycle racer who finally receives in the mail the new sprocket with which he plans to repair his bike, only to find that half of the teeth are missing. Without ever trying it to see if it will work, he casts it into the wastebasket. "Get this thing out of my sight," he mutters. They are to know that the doctrine of original sin is one of absolute despair. It is worse

than God taking each of us out of the box and rejecting us. St. Paul says, “the many died by the trespass of the one man.” When Adam sinned our doom was sealed. Our death was certain.

Our people also must know about actual sin. St. Paul said, “through the law we become conscious of sin,” (Ro 3:20) and he made his people conscious both of sin and its punishments: “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Co 6:9-10)

Furthermore, our people must know that they are sinners. This means; that we cannot be satisfied simply to preach about sin, or sin in all those people out there somewhere. We ought to not just proclaim that divorce when it breaks the marriage relationship is adultery. We ought to point at ourselves and the people around us and say, “when we chip away at the foundation of our marriages with angry words and selfish deeds, when we hurt our spouses by what we say and do, we stand guilty of despising God’s holy institution of marriage.” “When you hate your brother, you are a murderer, no better in God’s eyes than Jeffery Dahmer or Charles Manson.” This does not mean we must be fire-and-brimstone preachers, pounding on the pulpit and scaring the daylights out of little children. I wonder if Nathan pounded on David’s throne and screamed the words, “You are the man.” I don’t think so. He didn’t have to. The Law is terrifying enough by itself. Our goal is to be like Nathan and to get those fingers to turn, our own and our listeners as well, from pointing to extenuating circumstances, and our blameworthy neighbors to ourselves with the words, “I am the man. I am the one who stands guilty and under the wrath of God.” True law preaching produces more than sorrow, more than guilt. It produces the terrors of conscience that reduce us to quivering, frightened sinners, who are constantly flinching because they expect the punishing blow to fall at any time. Because this is what law preaching produces, we can and should say with John the Baptist and Jesus, “Repent!”

Having said this, it is important to remember that we as preachers are not going to wring this confession of sins and despair out of our members.

This state in which man begins to see the enormity of his sin and to despair of ever being able to save himself is called “contrition.” Contrition is often in popular language defined as “being sorry for sin.” This definition, however, is rather vague and subject to a great deal of misunderstanding. Contrition is defined by the dictionaries as the state of being bruised or crushed. This definition is helpful in reminding us that contrition is something done to us rather than something done by us... Contrition is something that happens to us when the Holy Ghost through the Law convicts us of sin. (Becker, Siegbert, *The Holy Ghost and His Work*, p.11)

As is the case with all our preaching, we do the proclaiming; the Holy Spirit does the work. When [the Counselor] comes, he will convict the world of guilt.” (John 16:8)

Finally, we ought to add that the Gospel preacher is going to preach the law out of necessity, not because he finds any joy in doing so. He is saddened that sin has its way in his own heart as well as in the hearts and lives of his people. So he often uses the first person plural pronoun when preaching the specific law, not to soften the law’s punch, but to show his people that he sympathizes with their plight he is in the same boat. In fact many of his specific applications of the law come from an honest inspection of his heart and life. The *Formula of Concord (Thorough Declaration)*, V, 11 says that “[the Holy Spirit] must do the work of another (reprove), in order that he may afterwards do his own work, which is to comfort and preach of grace.” The same attitude will rest in the heart and be displayed in the words of the Lutheran gospel centered preacher. He diagnoses the sinners’ fatal, spiritual disease, not so that the sinner dies, but so that he sees his need for divine healing.

### **B. Preach the Gospel That Pardons and Restores (Christ for us)**



It would be hard to imagine the Gospel preacher who enjoys and who expends his greatest amount of energy in preaching the law. After all he represents and serves a God who declared to his Old Testament people, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” (Jer 29: 11) St. Paul describes that God with the words, “[he] wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth,” (1 Ti 2:3) This was the truth about the Savior God which focused Paul’s preaching. “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you,” he declared, “except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” (1 Co 2:2)

The specific Gospel of Jesus Christ is the center of God’s revelation, and it must be the center, necessarily the focus, but the doctrinal center of every sermon that we preach. The message is one of absolute certainty. St. Paul says, “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.” (Ro 5:19) Jesus Christ, God’s one and only son, came to this earth and became a member of the human race. He willingly submitted to God’s law and earned for all the world a robe of righteousness. He willingly shouldered the sin and guilt of every man, woman and child on earth and took it to the cross. When we were still powerless,” Paul proclaims, “Christ died for the ungodly.” (Ro 5:6) St. John joins the chorus and assures us, [Jesus Christ, the Righteous One] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:2) This is the objective, the external, the totally outside-of-us message of the Gospel. When Adam sinned, we were declared sinners and condemned to death. When Christ died and rose again we were declared righteous and heirs of eternal life.

As Gospel preachers we want to make sure that we proclaim the total accomplishments of Christ’s work. Jesus died and shed his precious blood. That sacrifice washes our sins away. We are forgiven. Our guilt is gone. Our sins are separated from us as far as the east is from the west. In Christ God has cast them into the depths of the sea. But let us not forget the other side of the coin. Jesus didn’t just do away with the filth of sin. The proclamation of the Gospel of justification doesn’t just tell us what we are not anymore. It doesn’t leave us in a neutral state. It also tells us what we are. We are redeemed. We are declared righteous. We are reconciled. We are purified. This is the glorious message of Christ for us.

What Christ has done for the world, he certainly has done for me. The road of divine logic that faith pursues is this: “Christ died for the whole world of sinners. I am a sinner, and I am part of this world, therefore, Christ died for me.” But let us not let our people walk down that road by themselves. Let’s take their hand and lead them. St. Paul confesses his own personal faith when he says, “Christ Jesus came to into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.” When we are proclaiming the objective truth of what Christ has done for sinners, I believe we just naturally slip into the first or second person pronouns as I did above. But don’t let it be an accidental thing. You have just finished pointing at your hearers, or rather getting them to point at themselves and say, “I am a condemned sinner.” Now point at them just as certainly and proclaim, “Christ has died for you.”

There are several things that can hinder effective Gospel preaching. One is when we preach about the Gospel, reviewing it in a historical sense, but never really laying it in front of our hearers for their appropriation. Secondly, we may talk in general about the love of God, or even the love of God in Christ, without ever getting around to specifically describing what that love accomplished for us. Thirdly, we may turn to stereotyped descriptions of what God did in Christ. That takes the wonderful message of the Gospel and makes it about as exciting as a television rerun that we have seen for the tenth time. The Gospel is central to the message of Scripture. The Bible is speaking about it all the time using all kinds of different pictures and illustrations. Be as fresh as God is when he is proclaiming his good news.

“Faith comes from hearing the message,” St. Paul says, “and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” The word you proclaim is not powerless, dead words written in black ink on white paper. It accomplishes the mission on which the Lord sent it. The great missionary to the Gentiles proclaims, “[The gospel] is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” The Gospel in your mouth is powerful. It is effective as it comes from your pulpit. Therefore, you can complete your work as a preacher of repentance. Repentance in its broadest use comprises not only a confession of sins from the convicted sinner, it also involves a declaration of faith in the saving work of Christ. We do not want to contribute to the eternal death of anyone. Because of Christ, when we call for confession, we are not asking anyone to sign a death warrant, just a declaration of a need for the Savior who is there for them. Preachers of repentance are able to call out with Jesus, “Repent and believe the Gospel,” Believe that Christ has done all things perfectly for you.

### **C. Preach the Gospel That Enlivened and Empowers (Christ in us)**

A marvelous thing happens when the Gospel of Jesus Christ for us is preached to us. The Holy Spirit uses that Gospel. He takes you and me who were dead in trespasses and sin and he makes us alive. He quickens and regenerates. We become new creatures, reborn in the image of God. He converts us. We who were by nature enemies of God and hostile to his every word, now are given a new heart, a soft heart where the Word of God can grow and prosper. He takes us who were blind to the truth and who were walking in the darkness of our sin and he enlightens us so that we willingly walk in his way.

The Scriptures speak of this new life in various ways. St. Paul says to the Corinthians, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.” To the Ephesians he writes, For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. . .” (Eph. 2:10) He also speaks of the new life of the Christian in terms of Christ living in him. Paul says to the Galatians, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” Nothing could make the truth clearer that Christ in me flows from and results from Christ for me. When Christ died for me, he freed me from guilt. He declared me holy. He declared me a fitting place for him to dwell. As a result Christ comes in me through his Spirit and the power of his Word. Therefore the new life in Christ is also the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as St. Paul reminds the Corinthians, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Co 6:19). Also the fruits which this indwelling of the Spirit produces is called by Paul “the fruits of the Spirit.” (Gal. 5:22)

The new life, Christ in us, is imperfect at best. Our faith that apprehends what Christ has done for us is weak and often entertains doubt. Such faith is saving faith, not because of its strength, but because of whom it depends on. We must cry with the man whose son Jesus healed, “I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief.” Our sinful flesh has not been totally destroyed, and we must confess with Paul, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.” And so warfare is the order of the day for the baptized child of God. By contrition and repentance he, or rather the power of Christ, Christ’s Spirit and Christ’s Word drowns the old man and strengthens the new. And it is that new man, created by God to do good works that calls out, “Whatever the Lord commands, I will do.” The course for the Lutheran pastor would seem clear then. Continue to preach Christ who has done all for our people. Hold before them the cross, but know when you do so you are not only an instrument of the Spirit by which he assures your people that Christ has done all for them, you also are a means by which the life-giving Gospel comes to them. You regularly proclaim to them that Christ lived and died for them. Also remember to proclaim that Christ lives in them. They need to be told that, because in a lifelong struggle such as Paul describes in Romans 7, it isn’t always going to be very obvious.

The Lutheran preacher is going to point out to his parishioners that the very purpose of Jesus' work of redemption is their sanctification. Sometimes Lutheran preaching might sound as if the final purpose of Jesus' work were the justification of man, the forgiveness of sins, and nothing more. But, Jesus came, suffered, and died, worked out our redemption for the purpose of making us holy, holy and righteous, not only by imputation of his righteousness, but also by the power of his righteousness living in us. Zacharias speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit declared, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David... to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days." (Luke 1:68-69,74-75) St. Paul writes, "He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." Jesus told His disciples: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." St. Peter reminds his readers, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins, and live for righteousness." And finally in similar words St. Paul reminds baptized Christians, "Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."

Lutheran pastors are to remind their people that Christ Jesus certainly did redeem them *from* sin and death. But they also are to be reminded that he redeemed them *for* something, namely a life of service and righteousness to the glory of God the Father. While it no doubt is true that in this life remission of sins is always going to overshadow the positive living in righteousness, encouragement to live our faith which believes that we have been redeemed for the Lord and his will never be absent. "Christ declared you to be holy, now lead a holy life in the power that he gives. Christ purified you in his blood, now live your life in purity. Christ reconciled you to God, now live your life in peace with God and your fellow man." Such is the message of new life that the Gospel proclaims and that we preach.

One more matter in preaching the Gospel could be mentioned. We rightly confess with Scripture that the Holy Spirit converts and regenerates; and he does that through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. But how often do we preach specifically on the means of grace. I know that we mention them often, and maybe give them more than passing attention, but how often do we devote a sermon or part of a sermon to the promises and blessings which God conveys in Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper? I'm afraid I am confessing my own shortcomings by asking this question. Maybe the 3-year lectionary will help solve the problem, at least with Baptism. Romans 6 is used on Pentecost 6, Series A. Titus 3 is used on Christmas Day in all three series. Mark 16, however, is not used. The chief communion texts are still pretty much limited to Maundy Thursday. However, any time the body and blood of Christ are part of the development of the thought of a sermon, the Lord's Supper and its blessings can be developed as well.

We cannot leave this discussion without discussing briefly the Evangelical emphasis on sanctification that is all around us. The religious bookstores of our land are filled with "how-to" Christianity. Well over 80% of the religious books in our land are written by Evangelicals. The message is often the same, "If you want to have a successful Christian, here is what you do." The television and radio devoted to religious broadcasts often give the same message.

Why this great emphasis on sanctification in Evangelical circles? A group of believers, Christian or non-Christian, learns to do best that which is the focus and basis of its religion. Take the Jehovah's witnesses, for example. They merit their salvation by being faithful witnesses of Jehovah. No wonder they are so zealous for making house calls. It is their way into God's favor. Stop witnessing and they are lost. For the Evangelicals sanctification is the center of their

theology. Justification by faith is there, but it is incidental. The important thing is “Christ in me.” That is the guarantee of salvation. I remember back to the early years of my ministry. I was on good terms with the Baptist pastor in town because he and I were the only clergy in the community who believed that the Bible was the inspired and inerrant Word of God. One day we were talking on the street and one of his parishioners, a teenage boy, came up to him and asked, “How do I really know that I am saved, pastor? Some people in my class want to know.” “Show them that the Spirit is working in your life,” he said. “That is evidence that cannot be denied.” I can well imagine that if sanctification is the foundation on which the certainty of salvation rests; there is going to be an urgent, yes, frantic scramble to display what I have got to have or I’m lost.

Of course, there is a relationship between faith and good works. If faith in Jesus Christ is the cause of good works, that is bound to be the purpose of his sermon? Certainly a sermon on 2 Corinthians 5 will have a teaching purpose in it. The objective truths found there must be proclaimed and expounded. But I’m afraid that some preachers would also simply expound Paul’s exhortations and urgings and think that they had done justice to the text. This Word of God is not about urging and exhorting; it is urging and exhorting. Paul did not say, “OK, Spirit of God, I’ve proclaimed the truth, now you go ahead and persuade them, you convince their hearts.” He spoke the imperatives. But Paul is not in front of our people. We are. Paul sought to persuade on Christ’s behalf. We should seek to persuade on Christ’s behalf. Paul implored and Paul urged. We should implore and we should urge. That is not usurping the Spirit’s work. That is the Spirit using us who are using his word, his instrument of grace, to accomplish his gracious purposes. Don’t just preach about reconciliation. Urge, plead with, implore your people to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Jesus pleaded with the people of Galilee, “Believe the Gospel.” Paul told the jailer at Philippi, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Let us issue the call to faith as well. Don’t just preach about faith. Urge it! Some sermons are going to have as their chief purpose to persuade. The communication is from heart to heart.

### **3. Move Them**

The people to whom we preach also have wills. The Scriptures realize this and address the will of the hearer as well. Once again the verb form is often in the imperative, and the Scriptures are full of such verbs. For example, St. Paul says in Ephesians, chapter 5, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. “The motivating power for moving the will comes from the Gospel. That is clear from the way that Paul undergirds his commands with the love of God in Christ. But he does not stop there. In this text the love of God in Christ is preliminary to his main point and that is action. Live as Christ lived! Live in harmony with the righteousness that Christ has given you as a free gift.

Sometimes our sermons do not get to the point of calling for the fruits of faith. Salesmen are often told when they are learning sales techniques that they cannot just talk about their product. They cannot even be satisfied with saying that the person they are talking with should want and should use their product. Finally they have to get to the point of asking, “How many do you want?” They call for action based on their pitch. Preachers have the best product in the world, yes, in the universe. It sells itself. They don’t have to make a sales pitch on its behalf. But they still have to get to the point of calling for action and specific action at that. For a chapter and a half St. Paul gives specific advice and calls for specific action from those who have been “sold” on the Gospel. Teaching will be there; persuading will take place; but the focus of Ephesians 5 is moving the will. With Paul as his model, the preacher will seek to do just that.

I would like to sound a note of encouragement to preachers as we close this section. Please observe how Paul sought to teach, persuade and move. He did not ask anything of others that was not already the case with him. To Timothy he said, “Teach what you know.” He told the

Corinthians that he sought to persuade them because he was already convinced. He often encouraged his readers to live according to the example that he provided for them. Effective preachers are those who know what they proclaim. Their knowledge of Scripture allows them to bring all of the Word to bear on their message. They have been convinced of the truth of the Gospel and their hearts rely on it with sanctification as well. One of the signs of immaturity is the inability to put general principles into practice. And we are much more spiritually immature than we care to admit. Why not make suggestions, of exactly how a husband can show Christ-like love to his wife? Why not some specific suggestions on how we can love our enemies, or find joy in suffering. Doing the right things is not going to make our prayer-life successful, but giving suggestions on how to pray, when to pray, what to pray for, etc. are going to encourage praying, make it less haphazard and more enjoyable.

Preach the Word! God has provided the full menu. He has established the order of the courses, and he has determined how he will use each one. Let us in prayerful diligence give our people a well-rounded diet of the Word. Let us supply them as they have need.

## **LUTHERAN PREACHING IN A CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

### **Lecture #4**

Speaking of church rites and ceremonies the *Formula of Concord (Epitome)*, Article Ten, states: “We believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has the power, according to its circumstances, to change such ceremonies in such manner as may be most useful and edifying to the congregation of God.” The Christian freedom expressed in these words applies to all of the worship service and that includes the place that the sermon holds in it. Please, understand that the statements in this lecture are made in the spirit of the Formula. There is no attempt to bind consciences here or to establish a new ceremonial law governing our worship and the preaching that is done in it. But the fact that there is not “one” way to determine what texts we will preach on Sunday after Sunday and what the specific focus of our sermons will be, does not mean that there is not a “preferable” way. The purpose of this lecture is to attempt to review by means of what I say and by means of what you contribute in the discussion that follows what that “preferable” way might be.

Let us look then at Lutheran preaching.

### **IV. Its Setting (Worship Service and Church Year)**

#### **A. A Brief History of the Sermon in the Service**

Our sermons do not exist in a vacuum. They are not diamonds lying around without a setting to hold them. They are precious stones (if that metaphor doesn't give our sermons too much credit) that are set, and the settings are as precious as the stones they contain. That setting is the two thousand-year-old liturgy of the Christian Church as it has been developed and as it has found its way into the Lutheran Church of today.

Actual the sermon or homily, usually based on one of the chosen readings for the day, as part of the service on the Lord's Day goes way back into the history of the synagogue service. The Masoretic tradition preserves two ways of dividing the Hebrew Bible into portions for liturgical purposes. The first is the “seder” system with the sections marked on the inside margin with a *sameq*.

This sign divides the Hebrew Bible into 452 lessons. These divisions are associated with the Palestinian tradition. They far predate the division into chapters that was not made until the fourteenth century. The exact location of the divisions and their number vary somewhat among manuscripts... Whatever the proper number is, the sederim were used as weekly liturgical readings or lessons which would cover the entire Pentateuch in about three years... [The *parashoth*] (abbreviated *prsh* on the inside margin of our Hebrew

Bibles) divide the Pentateuch into 54 lessons. The *parasoth* are longer sections similar in function to the sederim. However, they are associated with the Babylonian tradition. They appear only in the Pentateuch and provide for a one-year liturgical cycle. (Scott, William A Simplified Guide to BHS, P.1)

These liturgical divisions of the Pentateuch and the Prophets were used as readings and as the basis for homilies in the synagogues of Jesus' day and in those in the diaspora visited by Paul. Luke 4:16-21 reports:

[Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: (Jesus then reads Isaiah 61:1-2). . . Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (The homily continues with Jesus speaking of the rejection God's prophets suffered in the midst of God's own people, Israel.)

The events in Pisidian Antioch from the Apostle Paul's first missionary journey are reported thus in Acts 13:14-16 and in 13:42:

From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak."

Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said:...

As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath.

These examples are not meant to say that every sermon recorded in the New Testament had its setting in a worship service. However, many did, and they provide the model that the Church has followed down through the ages.

Of course, preaching did not disappear after the apostolic age only to reappear at the time of the Reformation. Men like John Chrysostom. (born 347 AD in Antioch) come to mind. Preaching was carried on before and during Luther's childhood.

Luther did not introduce preaching or even preaching in one's mother tongue. For centuries before Luther the Franciscan and Dominican friars of the mendicant orders went about preaching. Berthold of Regensburg, Meister Eckhart, John Tauler, Geiler of Kaisersberg, and Gerhard Groote were noted preachers in their day. The usual length of a fifteenth-century sermon was one hour. In content the sermons were ethical rather than doctrinal, and the introduction of funny stories (to keep the audience awake?) was not unusual. The discourse abounded, of course, in anecdotes from the legends of the saints. Luther preached his earliest sermons before his fellow monks in the refectory at Erfurt after 1505. For years he feared to ascend the public pulpit. Luther's early sermons are somewhat philosophical and moralizing. Preaching is indebted to Luther for having made the sermon the center of the worship service and Christ the center of sermonizing, as he did before long. (Plass, Ewald *What Luther Says*, Vol. III, footnote on pages 1125-1126.) More and more Luther clearly saw the preeminent position that preaching of the word should hold in the regular weekly service. In a sermon preached at Torgau in 1544 he had this to say:

But by the grace of God we know how this commandment concerning the Sabbath is to be understood, for it reads thus: You shall keep the Sabbath or day of rest holy. Here pay attention to the words. What does it mean to "keep holy" or "sanctify" a day, an hour, or a

week? Obviously it does not mean, as the Jews and our false saints dream, to sit in idleness and do nothing. It means rather, in the first place, to do something on that day which is a holy work, which is owing only to God, namely, that above all other things one preaches God's Word purely and holy, not as these scribes, and Pharisees who falsify and pervert God's commandment because they have more regard for an ox or animal than a man. And likewise, that the others hear and learn God's Word and help to see to it that it is purely preached and kept. This is what it means rightly to observe the day of rest and to "consecrate" or "sanctify" the place or the church: as we, praise God, are consecrating this house! Yes, this preaching of the Word is the aspergillum (a brush or perforated container for sprinkling holy water) which all of us together should grasp and with it bless and sanctify others and ourselves. (*LW*, Vol. 51, pp. 342-343)

### **B. The Place of the Sermon in the Service**

If we divide the service into its chief parts revolving around Word and Sacrament, then the sermon is the high point of the Service of the Word. After God's people have been cleansed by confession and absolution, they turn in faith and with reverent attention to what their Lord has to say to them. In the psalm for the day, the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel readings this takes place. But in the sermon the climax is reached. God speaks to his people in the exposition and application of his word. This is a rather sobering thought for a pastor to ponder.

Yes, I hear the sermon; but who is speaking? The minister? No indeed! You do not hear the minister. True, the voice is his; but my God is speaking the Word that he preaches or speaks. Therefore I should honor the Word of God that I may become a good pupil of the Word. (*What Luther Says*, Vol. III, p. 1125)

If we recall the way we designate certain parts of the service as sacramental (God coming in his grace to us) and sacrificial (our responding to God), then the sermon surely qualifies as a sacramental portion. Jesus reminds the preachers of his word that when people listen to them, they are listening to him, and when they listen to him, they are listening to their Father in heaven. The sermon is sacramental, God coming to us.

Luther again reminds us, however, that the sermon can be viewed as a sacrificial element of the service as well.

Everything that is done in such an assembly of the whole congregation or church is nothing but holy, godly business and work and is a holy sabbath, in order both that God may be rightly and holily served and all men be helped...

For when I preach, when we come together as a congregation, this is not my word or my doing; but is done for the sake of all of you and for the sake of the whole church. It is only that it is necessary that there be one who speaks and is the spokesmen by the commission and consent of the others, who, by reason of the fact that they listen to the preaching, all accept and confess the Word and thus also teach others. (*LW*, Vol. 51, p.343)

Preaching in the service, then, is not only God coming to his people. When people listen to the word as you're preaching, when they give a mental or perhaps even a physical nod of assent to the Law and Gospel that they are hearing, they are joining you in that sermon. The doctrinal truths become their confession. The words of praise and honor glorifying the grace of God in Christ Jesus become part of their doxology of praise just as is the case when you lead them in prayer. There is a sense of appropriation in the process of preaching long before you ever call for or encourage it. The sermon does not belong exclusively to the pastor who is preaching it. He is preaching for the church and to the church. The sermon, then, is no place for personal opinion and pet topics of the pastor. He is to preach the word, which is the treasure of the entire church, and he is to preach it in a way that pleases his Lord and that allows all the people of God to claim possession of it. The sermon has been placed in different locations in the service

throughout the years. Luther in his Latin Mass suggested that the sermon be placed at the very beginning of the service so as not to break its liturgical continuity. But in his German Mass he favored the place it now occupies following the Creed. Luther Reed provides the following Justification for this placing of the sermon:

The Sermon follows the Creed as the Creed follows the Gospel. It must be true to the common faith as the expression of this faith must be true to the everlasting gospel. It has no value in itself. Its only effectiveness as a means of preaching the Word of God. This Word is also proclaimed in the administration of the sacraments and in other elements of testimony and edification in the liturgy. But the Sermon is the voice of the living church lifted in instruction, testimony and exhortation. (Reed, Luther, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, P. 306)

The use of the sermon as described above would seem to focus on its sacrificial aspect. It is seen as belonging with the creed. So it remains in the Common Service in *Christian Worship - A Lutheran Hymnal*. In the two new services, however, the Service of Word and Sacrament (page 26) and the Service of the Word (page 38), the sermon is being placed after the reading of the Gospel and the Hymn of the Day following the thought of the Gospel. This emphasizes more its sacramental aspect as the proclamation of the Word by which God comes to us, condemning our sin, declaring our forgiveness and enlisting us as his servants who will live for him. We might also mention here, although it perhaps fits better in the next section of this lecture, that the congregation is being encouraged to remain seated after the Hymn for the Day. This is because it is hoped that the sermon text will generally be one of the readings already used in the service. It will already have been read. The preacher needs only to refer to it. Although I am not encouraging it against the Hymnal Committee, I suspect that many congregations will retain the practice of rising for the reading of the sermon text right before the sermon itself. Your comments on this aspect of the new service are certainly invited in the discussion to follow this lecture.

### **C. Liturgical Preaching (The Church Year)**

By liturgical preaching I mean preaching the church year. Liturgical sermons are those which flow out of the thought for the week, incorporate the other readings used in the service and display a unity with the other service propers and the liturgical signs of the season.

Liturgical unity requires that the sermon should bear a definite relationship to the liturgical lessons, or at least to the thought of the day or season. By building upon the thought of the lessons the Sermon becomes the climax of the Office of the Word. By relating the sermon and the service of any one day to the cycle of the church's year, completeness and strength are gained. "Not that which for the moment is nearest the heart of the minister, nor that which is nearest the heart of the individual members, but that which is so arranged that the entire contents of the divine Word are unfolded and communicated in a complete cycle, will afford most permanent edification, and maintain the interest of devout people." (The final quote is from H.E. Jacobs, *The Lutheran Movement in England*, p. 302 as quoted by Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* p. 307)

I imagine after reading the definition at the beginning of the last paragraph, many of you may be saying, "Isn't it already the custom among us to follow a pericope series that parallels the church year?" No doubt it is for many of you. And yet the reality among us today is that having picked a series on which to preach, we leave it so often for so many special reasons that dropping our chosen liturgical series becomes the norm during the year, not the exception.

In an age when there seem to be many good reasons to abandon or compromise this practice, we are wise to review the value of liturgical preaching. Please allow me to give just a few reasons why liturgical preaching is still preferable, even in our modern day and age.

**1. It reflects a fellowship with the saints throughout the ages.** Who is the pastor who has not wrestled with the conflicts that arise when the themes of our church year and the themes



of our society clash? New Year's Day falls on the Festival of the Circumcision of Jesus (always). The Fourth of July falls on a Sunday (sometimes). Pentecost and Mother's Day fall together on the second Sunday in May (too often). Other cultures bring other such clashes like Juneteenth Day. What's a pastor to do? He can ignore the world around him and give the impression that celebrating the New Year, being patriotic and honoring mom are things that are not important to Christians and should not be mentioned in church; or he can try to combine disparate emphases in his sermon under one theme and come up with as much unity as the fractured hymn verse:

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest;  
We love you, Mom, you are the best.

I'm not going to tell you how to solve such dilemmas. But I am going to say that often liturgical preaching and following the seasonal focus of the church year is preferable, especially when the liturgical focus for the Sunday is highly significant. There is nothing wrong with celebrating Mother's Day and other secular holidays and thereby admitting that we are people of our age or our culture. We can even find texts which show why such occasions are important to God's people. But liturgical preaching reminds us that we are people of another fellowship. Christians from the time of the apostles have used the church year in whatever stage of development they found it in their day to celebrate the life, death and exaltation of Jesus Christ for their salvation, to grow in faith and to be strengthened in their discipleship. Luther and our other Lutheran forefathers celebrated Pentecost seven weeks after Easter during their lives. Our doing the same is one way of demonstrating our oneness in faith and hope with them. And when you really think about it, we have or should have more in common with these saints of ages past than we do with the world of our day. Furthermore, this fellowship will still exist in heaven, long after we are no longer people of our age. What a grand unity to accentuate! It is deeper and more lasting than anything we share with our world and society.

**2. It applies God's Word to peoples lives in a more natural manner.** We are a people of special emphases. We all have the programs of our local congregations which demand one or a series of sermons. Then there are the pleas complete with sermon outlines and special orders of service from synodical divisions and parasynodical organizations for synod-wide observances. I have heard pastors justly complain: "if I have any more special emphasis Sundays this year, there will not be room for any regular ones."

Stewardship provides a handy example. If the running of a stewardship program always coincides with budget planning or financial crises, people can get a message we do not intend to send, namely, whenever we have a need or want people to operate in a certain way, we use God's Word to get them moving. They can come to resent that. We come off as manipulators who use a dose of God's Word to get people moving in a direction we need them to go.

It is far more natural to let God speak to us first in the on-going, Sunday-by-Sunday proclamation of his Word. Liturgical preaching allows that Word to convict us of our greed, to call us to repentance and to guide us in a God-pleasing use of our time, talents and treasure, not because there is a need, but because this is the message God wants us to hear and obey. A liturgical pericope series such as the 3-year ILCW series provides numerous opportunities to speak of about stewardship, education, evangelism, missions and marriage and the family. Make a list of the emphases you know your congregation needs to hear, and then let a regular series of texts allow you the opportunities to preach on them.

**3. It enables preachers better to present the whole Word of God.** No pericope series is perfect. All of them are the product of human endeavor and have inherent weaknesses. The time-honored Historic Series, for instance, has been criticized for lacking Old Testament materials (now remedied) and for having too much emphasis on ethical texts while giving insufficient stress

to doctrinal portions of the Bible. But the strength of all the liturgical series is that they were not created with favorite subjects or a particular congregation in mind. They were formed to reflect the themes of the church year. So all, or most of them, will assist us in giving to our people the well-rounded diet of Christocentric themes that the seasons of the church year are able to impart. We might add here that most liturgical series attempt this emphasis not only for the entire year, but also within each text. All of Scripture is God's Word, but some sections serve better than others for preaching to God's people.

**4. It allows the pulpit to be used for that for which it is best suited.** Since the sermon is part of a worship service, it proclaims God's Word most effectively when it is furthering the main thrust and unity of that service. It is most beneficial when the preacher can refer to the two readings in the service, which repeat point or make those that are complementary to the thoughts of his text. As the sermon serves the rest of the service by maintaining a unity of thought, so the and other propers serve the purpose of the sermon by reemphasizing its focus.

If special occasion preaching is used on a Sunday morning, then the readings and other propers ought to be changed to match the theme of the sermon, thereby creating a new unity to replace the original liturgical one for the day. At least the sermon then is not a foreign element in its own service. At other times special occasions can be placed in seasons where their emphasis and the one of the season are the same or similar. Mission Festival slides more smoothly into the liturgical mainstream in the Epiphany season than it does in mid-Pentecost. Although it certainly can be instructive and edifying, devoting a series of sermons to one topic or to one book are not what sermons are best suited for. These approaches are better left for the Bible class. Sometimes I wonder whether we do try to get it all done with the sermon. It becomes a tool of evangelism, a Bible class, a home devotion, and everything else for which the Word of God is profitable. Such extended use of the sermon certainly is understandable. Pastors realize that many of their parishioners just are not using the Word outside of the worship service. So while he has them, the pastor is going to get all of the necessary work done. Of course, preaching on one book and covering its focus and progression of thought is not unheard of even when following a pericope series. We can point, for instance, to the 3-year lectionary's habit of using the *lectio continua* method for Epistle readings during the seasons of Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost. This is done at the expense of the unity of the readings that then must be coincidental, forced or abandoned. From the point of view of liturgical preaching it is a weakness of the series. It is also a feature that will be circumvented in the church year of our new hymnal. I understand that alternate Epistle readings that will fit the thoughts of the particular Sunday are in the process of being chosen.

Sometimes we point to Luther as our model for preaching a series on the catechism or same topic of the Christian life. But the editors of *Luther's Works* point out in the introduction to the sermon on the Third Commandment from which I quoted several times earlier that the text for this sermon, preached on October 5, 1544, was the Historical Gospel for the seventeenth Sunday after Trinity. They state, "Luther rarely chose special texts for special occasions." Often his catechetical series and special-text preaching took place in sermons later on a Sunday or during the week.

Martin Luther understood the great value of liturgical preaching. From his pen flowed any number of sermon books, designed for the novice preacher, which were based on the texts of the lectionary. He wrote, "The festivals have been so arranged because all parts of the gospel cannot be heard at once, and therefore its doctrines must be distributed throughout the year."

#### **Other Balancing Thoughts**

I do not want to sound as though I feel that liturgical preaching in a season and liturgical unity in a service are always and only the way to go. As far as seasons are concerned the flow of thought from one Sunday to another in the Pentecost Season is not easy to find. On some Sundays

we may even question whether there is much unity between the three readings selected for any given Sunday. Certainly there will be no unity at such times when you try to use one pericope series for your sermon texts and another for the readings. But even at these times I prefer unity at least in the particular Sunday service. If the sermon theme finds nothing in common with the readings, perhaps the readings can be changed to agree with the sermon. Perhaps the other readings from the particular series from which the sermon was chosen could be used. Alternate readings could also be used when the preacher is using a topical series.

There is no doubt about it that the less structured Pentecost Season and even some other longer seasons like Lent or Epiphany have room and allow themselves to be used to cover topics and special emphasis Sundays or the Sunday-by-Sunday covering of an entire book of the Bible. Again such nonliturgical preaching should be inserted in the service as smoothly as possible.

### **In Conclusion**

There is no one-and-only way of doing anything in the life of the church. But when it comes to preaching, it would be good not to lose or ignore the heritage of the church year which has been handed down to us. The benefits are just too great. The practice of liturgical preaching has a long tradition in our circles, let's think twice before we let our interest wane. Its values have long been appreciated, I feel, they remain valid today.

## **LUTHERAN PREACHING IN A CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

### **Lecture #5**

We have talked about the source, about the purpose and focus, about the content and about the setting of our sermons. Can there really be anything else to discuss? Some preachers might feel that we have discussed everything important. But we are not quite done. There is one more very important subject to tackle, and that is style, the style of both our written sermons and our delivery of them.

There will be some people who staunchly maintain that the power and effectiveness of the sermon is in its content, as opposed to the style in which it is written or delivered. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is the power of God unto salvation. That Gospel is the tool of the Holy Spirit. The preacher's role is only described negatively. He must be careful not to detract from the content by the way he speaks or performs.

There is truth to this contention. There is nothing that we can do to make the Gospel more effective in the hearts and lives of God's people. But the preacher's role can be described positively, not only negatively. Although the message of Scripture is divinely revealed, in the sermon it is the words chosen by the preacher that bring that divinely revealed message to the hearers in exposition and application: and it is the style in which the preacher brings those words to his people that also becomes a very important part of the message, of the content, if you will.

You have perhaps heard the story, in one version or another (purportedly true) of the tourist in a foreign land who with his guide and interpreter one day encountered a small group of people gathered around a sidewalk preacher in a public park. The preacher was angrily pounding his fist into his hand, wagging a finger at his listeners, frowning and scowling at them, and haranguing them in harsh and abrasive shouts.

The tourist who didn't understand the language, whispered to his guide, "What's the fellow preaching about?" To which the answer came, "Love."

True or not, that little story illustrates the point I want to make in these pages, and it seems to bear out the accuracy of a set of statistics I recently read: that 55% of the total emotional "message" transmitted between people is altogether nonverbal (including gestures, so-called "body language," clothing, facial expression, posture); 38% is vocal (tone of voice, pitch, speed of speech, modulation, inflection, etc.); and a mere 7% is

verbal (the actual cognitive content of the words used in communication.) (Bosch, Paul *The Sermon as Part of the Liturgy*, p.12)

I don't know how such figures can accurately be determined or even estimated. But even if the figures quoted above have a margin of error of 20%, shortchanging the verbal communication, the point is still forcefully made that communication of the Biblical message is a total package of verbal content, plus the style in which the sermon is written and delivered. When one part of that package contradicts another, or fails to hold up its part of the whole, the entire communication suffers.

Another reason for good style in our sermons is that our people are used to getting messages with good oral style. They listen to the radio, and they watch plenty of TV. These messages are delivered with great style. Often the style replaces the content of the message (some ads and perhaps some television preaching). Often the style adds subtle, unspoken messages. But whether the use of style is good or bad, our listeners are used to being inundated by it. They may tolerate less polished style from us because they know how important the content of the message is, but they will be turned off by a preacher's indifference to or ignorance of the style in which he delivers his sermons.

With this in mind we turn to Lutheran Preaching in a Contemporary World

### **V. Its Delivery (Written and Oral Communication)**

Before getting to the style of the written sermon, we perhaps should not assume that a written sermon is something every pastor has before him at the end of a week of homiletical work. I have heard any number of pastors say that they never bother to write out a sermon. They don't have the time to do so. They never follow it when they preach anyway. They can express their thoughts more freely and from the heart when they develop no more than an outline.

There is no doubt that good and effective sermons have been created in the pulpit from no more than an outline. Perhaps some of yours are among them. It is also true that practice improves a preacher's ability to preach in such a way. It may be that some of the things accomplished by writing a sermon, the outline-preacher has learned to do in his head, long before he gets into the pulpit. But I think it is also true that writing the sermon out, maybe not word for word, but at least with short phrases and clauses, makes for exactness, freshness and variety, and clarity, all things that help make for an effective style. You may do well with just an outline; you might do better by writing out your sermon.

If oral and literary language are not the same, why write? First, you must plan exactly how you will express the thoughts that are contained in the text and summarized in your outline. Precision, logical order, smooth transitions, clarity, variety in language, correct grammar, current usage, sentence structure and arrangement of paragraphs—the list is not exhaustive—are safeguarded by careful writing. Fluency is another prime consideration. To grope for words when you are in the pulpit or to become entangled in a complex sentence distracts the hearer, undermines your composure and creates obstacles for the message. Then, too, doctrinal statements must be carefully thought out and carefully expressed to forestall the inadvertent intrusion of false teaching or ambiguity. Furthermore, references to biblical persons, places and history need to be checked for accuracy so that no incorrectness of detail disturbs your hearers. Even non-biblical references must be checked for accuracy. Careful writing helps you to fix the plan and details of the sermon in your mind and thus contributes to a smooth delivery. (*Preach the Gospel*, p. 97)

#### **A. The Oral Style of the Written Sermon**

We ought to say at the beginning that, the style we display in writing our sermons is never divorced from delivery. We don't write sermons so that they can remain black words on white or yellow paper. They are written to be delivered. Therefore right from the first words that we put

down on paper, we are writing in an oral style. One of the biggest mistakes in style that beginning preachers make is to write their sermons in the same style in which they write their dogmatics papers. Then they try to commit to memory something that is totally different from the way they normally speak. The result is a series of problem. Either they ignore the manuscript totally, saying that for some reason they had trouble memorizing or didn't like what they put down, or they deliver a memorized sermon in a very stilted and didactic style.

By now all of you have developed your own ways of making sure that your written sermons are put down on paper in an oral style. I, however, tell my students that they should "write what they say." I usually walk around in my study preaching my sermon from an outline, paragraph by paragraph. I keep on discarding mental drafts or revising them until I am satisfied. Only then do I write anything down. Then I have written down what I want to say. I am not trying to say what I have written down. Of course, the memorizing of the sermon is virtually completed in the process as well.

How does a written sermon prepared for oral presentation differ in style from a literary piece that is to remain written? Much of the answer to that question will appear in the categories described below. However, we can offer some quick item:

1. Sentences are shorter and more concise. The hearer does not have the time to analyze compound-complex sentences. He only hears them once. If he misses what the sentence with its intricate structure means to say, there is no instant replay.
2. Words are shorter and simpler. The preacher may have a well-developed vocabulary. There may be words that he thinks his people should know, but they do not. There are only hymnals and maybe Bibles in the pew-racks, no dictionaries, and the people wouldn't, have time to use them if they were there.
3. Punctuation takes a different form. Some preachers may like to draw their quotation marks in the air. Maybe they verbalize their exclamation marks. Usually those tactics do not work, however. Tone of voice and pitch, the force put behind the sentence on the individual words, and the pauses that we use in strategic places serve to punctuate our oral sentences. Repetition (saying the same sentence or words over again) and restatement (rephrasing the same thought in different words) replace the underlining that we do in written pieces. A paragraph in a sermon on John 1:14 could simply say, "The Word became flesh. This is a truth that goes beyond our understanding." However, this profound and unfathomable truth could also be emphasized with repetition and restatement. "The Word became flesh; (pause) the WORD became flesh and made his dwelling among us. These simple words roll off our tongues without our giving them a second thought. They are so easy to say. The Word became flesh. But think about what you are saying. God's Son, the One and True God became a human being. (Pause) Amazing!" With changes in tone, volume, and speed, with pauses, repetition and restatement God's truth is underlined, and really we could say, expounded. We add one warning, however. Repetition should never take the place of sound exposition. Often repetition appears in sermons because the preacher doesn't seem to know what else to say. That is the result of shoddy and shallow exegesis and preparation, and it leads to shallow and uninteresting sermons.

### **B. Elements of style in the Written Sermon**

All homiletics textbooks have chapters devoted to the style of the written sermon and its delivery. Ours is no exception. As our textbook states, the style of the sermon ought to have in mind, and ought to match the purpose of our sermons.

The people to whom we preach have been endowed by our Creator with intellect, emotions and will. As we address the whole person we must keep in mind that we are instructing, attracting and persuading. The Savior instructed his disciples as to his person and work. He

attracted them to himself. He persuaded them to follow. With the psychological makeup of human beings in mind, Augustine said that our preaching must be factual, balanced and forceful. Reu spoke of “convincing clearness” addressed to the intellect, “pleasing elegance” to touch the emotions and “moving force” to influence the will (M. Reu, *Homiletics*, pp. 169-232). We will want to remember these three facets of personality and their concomitant needs when we discuss style. More important, we must be conscious of and sensitive to them in our preaching. The sermon must be more than an intellectual exercise and more than an emotional experience. It ought to instruct and move and persuade. (*Preach the Gospel*, p.97-98)

William H. Kooienga in his book, *Elements of Style for Preaching*, makes the same threefold division, but uses somewhat different terminology. He speaks of teaching, persuading and moving. Kooienga also sees five different elements that in varying combinations make up the three styles. They with their sub-elements are:

1. Clarity - the right word, simple words, simple language, specific language, and avoiding unconventional words, jargon and abstractions.
2. Interest - human interest, imagery, contrast, tension, interesting expressions, example, questions, variety, and avoiding archaic language.
3. Evocation - descriptive language, analogy, imagery, sense appeal, direct address, rhetorical figures (schemes which deal with the structure of words and sentences, and tropes that have to do with meaning) and avoiding cliches.
4. Energy - vivid words, Anglo-Saxon words, simplicity, the second person, active verbs, present tense and shorter sentences.
5. Emotion - description, imagery, antithesis, personification, repetition, question clusters, progression, the second person and hyperbole.

### THE TEACHING STYLE

It emphasizes clarity. Clear words, not vague or obscure ones are the hearts of this style. Short, concrete words and the absence of jargon, unconventional language, and abstract words contribute to clarity, a major element of a good-teaching style. Preachers do not need to avoid the other elements of style when they instruct. These other elements usually remain in the background, however, for if misused or overused they can compete with that primary element of clarity.

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Clarity	Interest	Evocation	Energy	Emotion



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Clarity

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Interest

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Evocation

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Energy

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Emotion

The elements of style described above can be rehearsed. Our use of them can be improved. But style should never be exaggerated; nor should it be slavishly copied from another preacher whom we admire. Such practices will make us look unnatural. We will become caricatures of the preachers we want to be, and the effect will be the exact opposite of what we want it to be. Instead of communication being enhanced, by our style, it will be hindered or totally destroyed.

After all is said and done, however, I think the sincere style of the pastor who himself has been instructed by the Word, persuaded by its appeal and moved by its force will be the one in the best position to instruct, persuade and move others. Let the pastor be himself and let his sermons be comprehensible (mind to mind), appealing (heart to heart) and encouraging (will to will).

### **C. Elements of the Style of Delivery**

The most important element in delivery, of course, is the use the preacher makes of his voice. The preacher's voice is to him and his calling as the pitcher's pitching arm is to him and his craft. The preacher should take care of his voice at all costs. Not taking care to protect it as much as possible from colds, or misusing it to the point of hoarseness is not showing much concern for the most precious gift the Lord has given the preacher outside of the Word itself.

We have already mentioned above how use of the voice will add to the content of the sermon. Be yourself, but within those parameters employ considerable variety in the use of your voice. Volume variation adds much to sermon content. With today's PA system the preacher can speak very softly and still be heard, as long as he speaks distinctly. He also can speak quite loudly as long as he does not blast people out of the building. Some preachers get into the pulpit, and immediately they are loud. They remain so until they step out of the pulpit again. No sermon ought to be all loud, all soft or all somewhere in between. Difference in volume (and here we can again add speed, pitch, tone, etc.) provide content and meaning to our message.

After the voice and the words that it produces, the most effective part of our bodies for communication is our eyes. Eye contact is absolutely essential for good communication. If eye contact takes place between two people, some further form of communication must take place. If we do not establish eye contact with somebody else or break that contact, we are saying, "I don't want to communicate with you," or "I do not wish to continue communicating with you." Where eye contact is broken or never successfully established during our sermons, communication suffers. This is not to say the eye contact is never to be broken. At the end of a section in our sermons that contain a complete and finished thought, we may wish to break eye contact. This action says that a thought is now finished, and we wish to rest and recapture our concentration (both preacher and audience) before attacking something new.

This leads very naturally to speaking about how we will deliver our sermons. Will we read them, memorize them, paraphrase them or create them in the pulpit. A course on speaking from MATC given on PBS and in our tape library says there are three kinds of delivery for speeches: spontaneous, extemporaneous, read or memorized. The spontaneous speech is made up on the spot, outline and all, probably to make some point in an assembly. Its advantage is that it is contemporary and from the heart. Its disadvantage is that it is disorganized, though not entirely so, and may not be complete and accurate. The extemporaneous speech is made from notes or an outline. It is better organized than the spontaneous speech and also from the heart, but it may be imprecise, and unclear because the speaker has not worked on choosing the right words beforehand. The read speech is very precise, clear and organized, but it almost totally lacks eye contact and makes a void between the speaker and his audience. This is especially fatal for a



sermon. The memorized speech has all the advantages of the read one, without its drawback of lack of eye contact. But it still comes off the page, not from the mind and heart. Therefore, it can be delivered in a stilted, rote and remote manner, again distancing the preacher from his audience.

There are disadvantages to all the forms of delivery mentioned above, and on the other hand, it must be said that various pastors have mastered different ones of these deliveries and minimized their disadvantages. Having said that, however, I think it still is best to strive for the best of all worlds. Ideally, we want a delivery that has the precision and clarity of the memorized speech and the spontaneity of the extemporaneous one. Here at the seminary we help our students to strive for what we call a “free delivery.” Such a delivery is not tied to a manuscript, and yet is faithful to its content, clarity and order.

Following our eyes the rest of our face is the next body part that adds to or detracts from communication. Preaching the Law should find a serious look, perhaps a look of sadness, if not a scowl, on our faces, The Gospel with a scowl contradicts the good news that it proclaims. Again a word of warning. Be yourself. If it is not natural for you to smile broadly in the pulpit, don't do it. Plastered-on smiles look ridiculous. A pleasant look will serve just as well.

Following our faces come our hands and arms as communicators. They in turn are followed by the movement of our entire bodies. Again be natural. If the pulpit is the only place where we stand ramrod straight and never move a muscle, or is the only place where we gesture and climb all over the place, it will look out of place and interfere with real communication. Be yourself but a practiced and refined self that has the rough edges filed off and that seeks to apply the ideal oral communication principles effectively.

#### **D. An Addendum on variety in Form of Sermons**

As I was finishing this series up, it occurred to me that various forms of sermons, different from the usual way we do them, help to add interest to preaching. Professor Johne presented an enlightening paper on this topic to the Metropolitan South Conference in September of 1988. Francis Rossow has also written a helpful book, published by Concordia, entitled, *Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively*. I only list them here. You may choose one or the other for discussion or comment if you wish.

It seemed to me as I approached the various creative methods that they could basically be divided into two groups: variations on preaching from one text, or dramatic presentation. Some might be a combination of the two.

#### **Variation on Preaching from a Text.**

1. The text is one word.
2. The text is a whole book.
3. The texts are a series from one book.
4. Texts are used in pairs to complement each other (example: prophecy and fulfillment) or to provide contrast (example: Ro 4:3 and James 2:20 ff).
5. The text (usually a longer one) is treated with a homily.
6. Children's sermon (or one addressed to any special group).
7. Inductive, rather than deductive approach (parts are not announced at the beginning, but are gradually arrived at.)

#### **Dramatic Variations**

1. Transposing ancient narratives to modern settings.
2. Dialog
3. Monolog
4. Press conference
5. Planned interruptions from the audience.

6. Soliciting immediate audience response.
7. narrative
8. meditation
9. montage
10. vignette
11. parable
12. allegory
13. extended illustration
14. chancel drama
15. various forms of audio-visual aids

All of these are possible alternatives to the traditional sermon. (Actually I would call them substitutes, because they are often entirely different genres of communication from the sermon which is oral proclamation. But they must be done well. Our people are used to seeing especially dramatic presentations done in a professional manner. They may tolerate and even enjoy extreme amateurism from their children in the school play, but they would expect more out of their pastor and whomever he employs to help him in these presentations.

#### **In Conclusion**

Sermon production and delivery is something that can be improved whether we have been in the preaching ministry for four or forty years. We never ought to be satisfied with the “status quo.” It is too easy to fall into a rut, and God’s Word deserves better. Thanks be to God that the Word of our Lord is effective and accomplishes God’s gracious purposes only through us, not because of us. Let us only pray and work that it is not in spite of us.