

PREACH

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NEW EDITOR

The *Preach the Word* Newsletter is now entering its fifth year of publication. Three of the past four editors have at one time or another taught homiletics. It's time to turn back to a parish preacher—this time from an outlying district. Pastor John Koelpin has spent the eight years of his ministry in the pulpit of Calvary Lutheran Church in Dallas, Texas. As you will see, he is a faithful servant of his hearers because he is God's servant foremost. We pray for God's blessings on volume 5 and give our heartfelt thanks to Prof. James Westendorf for the volume which has now come to a close.

Pastor Wayne A. Laitinen
New Ulm, Minnesota
PTW Managing Editor

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years

PROCLAMATION



Did you take a speech class? Do you remember the different kinds of speeches? Some speeches inform, others entertain, and still others try to influence. Because each kind of speech aims at a different outcome, they are written and delivered in different styles.

Delivering sermons is much like giving speeches. Both text and circumstance help to determine the sermon style. Though we might not use words like inform, entertain, or influence to describe a sermon, sermons do take on different “personalities”. For example, it is difficult to preach on Philippians 2 without doing a heavy amount of teaching on Jesus' states of humiliation or exaltation. On the other hand, a text like Matthew 11:25ff is rich comfort and encouragement.

A popular preaching style today seeks to influence the hearers by making a logical case for its message rather than simply proclaim the truths of the Bible. In a teaching sermon, for example, the preacher ought to craft his message in such a way that the hearer not only sees his logic but also finally agrees with his conclusions. In a similar way, accusations of law and comforts of the gospel should be designed within the sermon in such a way that the hearer will agree with the preacher's assertions. But beware, for the preacher may begin to resemble a salesman at the state fair, hawking his wares with such a slick presentation and tight logic, that the audience can't help but buy into the product.

Sermons meant to influence in this way shift the attention from the pulpit to the pew. “Thus saith the Lord,” begins to fade into the background in favor of “Thus saith the people.” A steady diet of the “see-if-this-makes-sense” style seems to offer up the truths of the Scriptures for discussion rather than for believing. For example, while preaching specific law (either as a mirror or as a guide) the preacher may hope to inductively develop such a convincing case for living a life of love that in the end the hearer must agree with the preacher's conclusion. As a result the hearer is either convicted of sin or encouraged toward sanctification. But what happens if the logic wasn't tight enough or if the hearer remained unconvinced? Is there room for discussion about living a life of love? Is the preacher's conclusion valid if I don't agree with him? If I don't agree that the conclusion is true for me, can I modify it, offer my own alternative, or just leave it? When the purpose of the sermon is to influence, the preacher can only mark a success when the people agree with his conclusions. That's a shift from marking a sermon a success in terms of preaching the pure Word of God.

Don't misunderstand my point. Sermons ought to be logical. There is nothing wrong with presenting sound reasoning for the point one wants to make. When making a case for the accusations of the law or the comforts of the gospel, every preacher hopes that his people will agree with his message for it is God's message. Nonetheless, be aware that an over-emphasis on “logical defenses” can shift the onus of faith from the Holy Spirit to the preacher.

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LUTHER'S BASELINE FOR PREACHING

For 38 years Professor Emeritus Arnold Koelpin taught in the Church History department of MLC. A noted Luther scholar, Professor Koelpin offers us a lesson from Luther for our homiletic growth.

“Luther did not lecture on the Gospels.” This offhand comment in von Loewenich’s Luther biography caught my eye. Martin Luther, the man to whom justification by faith was core and substance of life, did not lecture on the Gospels?! My set of “Luther’s Works” underscored the insight: Vols. 1-20—Lectures on the Old Testament; Vols. 25-30—Lectures on Epistles. But, in between, Volumes 21-24, were sermons, Sermons on the Gospels.

There was my explanation. Luther normally did not lecture on, he preached on the Gospels, consciously, intentionally, though not exclusively. As professor, he had a deep scriptural sensitivity that the gospel was to be preached; it was good news to be proclaimed, and he observed it in his classroom course arrangement. Why? Luther had two special reasons for his action regarding gospel proclamation, one practical and one historical.

In a practical sense, Luther considered the gospel a war cry. “God’s evangel is a good piece of news, a war cry,” he observed. As a messenger, you shout and declare a victory. The war is over. The enemies are routed. Go in peace, freed from captivity to sin, death and the devil. Go on with your life in freedom. “No poor person chained in sin, dead, and bound for hell can ever hear anything more comforting and

encouraging than this precious and lovely message about Christ.”

Sure, Luther knew that the Gospels were written down into the record that we might believe. But that did not prevent the dear Doctor from distinguishing (not separating) preaching and God’s Word,” as he did in explaining the Third Commandment. What does “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” mean? He could have said, “. . . that we do not despise God’s Word,” and been perfectly correct. But he wrote “. . . that we do not despise *preaching* and God’s Word,” knowing that when the people gather for worship, there, in the preacher’s focus on worship, is the war cry.

Sure, historically speaking, Luther championed the fact that the gospel was imbedded in (not separated from) the Old Testament and the New Testament Epistles. His lectures prove this; they contain law and gospel throughout. But he was continually aware that the real good news from the battlefield comes with the incarnation, cross, death and resurrection of Jesus, Immanuel, God with us—not in promise, but in reality. He is there—the Word in the Word.

The Old Testament, on the one hand, made promises of the Savior to come. Its ritual pre-enacted Christ’s advent as conqueror. Even the Law of Moses, a necessary codicil to God’s Old Will, guarded, and guided believers in learning the meaning of the Messiah as victim, vicar, and victor. But, historically, the fullness of the times is on record in the Gospels—the battle, the suffering, the victory, and the war cry.

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The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, in spreading the battle news looks backwards to the Christ who has come, as did the other epistle writers, as do we. The unfinished work of the church, the consummate work of every preacher, comes to its expression in preaching—in the worship service, at the bedside, wherever. We look back to Jesus and let out the war cry of victory for the sinner; the Spirit of God confirms and blesses our preaching. And, as Luther concludes in his *Preface to the New Testament*, “The sinner cannot help exulting from the bottom of his heart and rejoicing over it [*the gospel*] when he believes it to be true.”

In the final analysis, it is a matter of focus. Luther was both preacher and professor of theology. He followed the injunction given in the letter to the Hebrews, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,” in his classroom perspectives and in his pulpit preaching. In providing this focus, he helps us to keep the baseline for preaching.

The Scriptures offer the preacher an alternative to the influential style. In his Word, God describes preaching as “proclamation.” The word is κηρυσσῶ in the New Testament. Thayer, in his *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, defines κηρυσσῶ in this way, “to proclaim after the manner of a herald; always with a suggestion of formality, gravity, and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed.” (page 346) The herald wasn’t in the business of making a pitch to his audience. He didn’t offer up his message for argument or persuasion. The messenger who ran ahead of the king’s entourage didn’t try to convince the people that the king was on his way; he told them. The herald sent to keep the general informed about the battle didn’t try to sway him into believing that the battle was going one way or the other; he told him. Whether the herald’s audience believed him or not didn’t matter to the herald. It wouldn’t change his message anyway.

Κηρυσσῶ—“to proclaim as a herald”—this is the word that God uses to describe his preferred preaching style. John the Baptist *proclaimed* his message in the wilderness (Matthew 3:1). Jesus wandered Galilee *proclaiming* the gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14). The disciples were commissioned to *proclaim* the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Paul, who considered himself a herald (1 Timothy 2:7), urged his companions to *proclaim* the Word (2 Timothy 4:2). As successors to the Apostles we have the same commission to proclaim the Word. Proclamation is the style God has handed to us.

Preachers, then, are not salesmen for the latest “get to heaven quick” scheme, but heralds of the truths which God has laid down in his Word. These truths, whether law or gospel, take hold in the heart of the hearer by the power of the Holy Spirit, not by the power of the presentation. Even Paul admitted this when he said to the Corinthians, “My message and my preaching (τὸ κηρυγμα) were not with wise

and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.” (1 Corinthians 2:4). It is for this reason that so much preaching is done in the declarative. The message we have to offer is the truth, the truth given us to herald by God. We declare this truth with the authority of God himself. We offer these truths, not as the basis for discussion or argument, but as messages that are to be believed. For example, keeping God’s law is not optional; it is what he demands. Anything less than perfect obedience is sin against God. And sin deserves death. No logic (especially not post-modern relativism) can convince the unbeliever this is true. God must convict us. On the other hand, the truth of salvation is that Jesus Christ, God’s own Son, lived, died and rose again to save the world from sin. These truths contradict the opinion of natural man, who would rather save himself by works of the law.

Let a voice from the past speak on the subject. Dr. Siegbert W. Becker, in his “Commentary on Romans: A Transcript of Dr. S. Becker’s Lectures on Romans” comments on Paul’s apostleship with the following:

At the very beginning of this letter, Paul pulls rank on his hearers, you might say, by calling himself an apostle. There are a lot of people nowadays who insist that it is very unpopular to go out and preach in an authoritarian way. The new way of teaching religion is to present the facts to people and let them make up their own minds. This irritates me no end because this is not the way to teach religion. The teaching of religion ought to be a confession of faith. This doesn’t mean that you present something objectively - as though this is a possibility, and that is a possibility, and now you can choose. What you are to do as a teacher of religion is to tell people the truth, and tell them that it is the truth.

[Others] said, “This is the way to teach in a democratic society. You must never

teach in an authoritarian way.” But the prophets of the O.T. didn’t say, “Look, folks, we’ve got something to tell you; see what you think of it.”

I remember talking to [a] prominent pastor in 1947. I said, “Don’t you preach the truth from the pulpit?” He said, “No, I don’t really know what the truth is; but I present these things for my congregation’s consideration.” And that’s how we were supposed to present things in class too! You could teach anything you wanted to as long as you didn’t say that this was the right thing—because that’s authoritarian, contrary to the spirit of modern man. It’s not only contrary to the spirit of modern man—it’s contrary to the spirit of man all the way back to the Garden of Eden! This is man’s rebellion; it has nothing to do with being modern. St. Paul doesn’t teach that way; neither did the O.T. prophets. They didn’t say, “Now look, we’ve got something to say; see what you think of it.” The first thing that they said, usually, when they got up to teach, was, “Thus saith the Lord! You’d better not contradict it.” This is authoritarian teaching. That’s the way Paul starts here, too, when he says, “I’m a servant of Jesus Christ, but I’m also called to be an apostle. I am an apostle of Jesus Christ. You had just better listen to what I have to say, because what I have to say is the truth. It’s a message from God, not something for you to accept or reject on the basis of your own personal likes or dislikes. This is the Lord’s message, and you deny it at the risk of your own salvation.” (pages 2,3)

It is neither the preacher’s purpose nor place to convince his hearers of his conclusions because of sound logic or powerful speech. It is the preacher’s purpose to seize the opportunity afforded him by the sermon to proclaim to his hearers the powerful truths of God’s Word. God will give the increase!

Fellow preachers, “Κηρυξατε το ευαγγελιον!”

John Koelpin

PITFALLS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PARTS

For more than a decade, Pastor (and president of the South Central District) Vilas Glaeske helped train future WELS pastors in the vicar program. In the coming editions of Preach the Word, he will offer a regular column of preaching helps and hints gleaned from his years of looking over vicars' sermons. We hope you enjoy his insights and down to earth advice.

The obvious pitfall of positive and negative parts is repetition. The preacher can hold the attention of the hearer in part one, but when the cud comes around for the second chew, the eyes will begin to glaze and roll back. Because the preacher is not leading the mind of the

hearer forward, that mind will tend to drift to its own thoughts or hit neutral. This kind of sermon becomes an exercise in saying the same thing in a variety of different ways. The delivery must carry the day because the content is wanting.

Positive/negative parts also fail to divide the key thought of the theme. The diamond remains uncut and the beauty of its facets hidden. The listener does not see the gem because it looks like just another stone. Consequently the Scripture may not be opened to the degree it might have been with a different approach to the text.

When a preacher hits on a theme that only seems to allow for positive/negative parts, it may mean that the preacher has not yet discovered the right theme. The text study leading to theme and parts needs more work. Positive/negative parts are often a renaming of the same thought. The true second part has yet to be formulated.

If a person finds himself in the pit of positive/negative parts, try making the positive part the theme. The first theme may become one of the parts. This approach can start the preacher thinking outside of the pit in which he has found himself.

A PREACHER'S LOOK AHEAD

The busy parish pastor may not always have time to study the lectionary in advance. The press of other duties can make choosing a text a week-by-week task. "A Preacher's Look Ahead" intends to examine the upcoming readings to give the preacher a head start on deciding preaching texts.

September and October 2001 cover the last Sundays of the Pentecost season (13th - 21st after Pentecost). These Sundays offer some unique opportunities for preaching.

On the Old Testament side, readings from the Proverbs come up in consecutive weeks in the middle of September. This is the only time in the CW lectionary that readings from the Proverbs come in succession. The same is true of the two readings from Amos in early October. (there are two readings from Amos in series B, but not one right after the other). October winds down with readings from Habakkuk and Ruth. This is the only time in the three-year cycle that these books come up.

The Epistle lessons tend to follow a continuing series of readings from one book. Beginning on the 12th Sunday after Pentecost and continuing through the 15th Sunday after Pentecost, the readings are taken from the book of Hebrews, chapters 11-13. Perhaps the preacher could anticipate a sermon series from the book of Hebrews. Then follows a reading from Philemon, three from 1 Timothy, and two from 2 Timothy (it can be up to four depending on the length of the Pentecost season). All three of these books appear only here in the three-year cycle. If preaching through a book appeals to your preaching style, here is your opportunity to preach on these Pauline epistles.

Finally, the Gospels in these two months all come from Luke. In all but the final reading, these are "red-letter" texts. Jesus' words instead of his works are in focus. His words in these readings are particularly vivid. When not speaking in parables (Luke 15 and 16), he uses powerful illustrations (Luke 12, 13, 14, and 17). Many of the texts are found only in Luke. A careful study of those materials unique to Luke's Gospel may provide the preacher with some valuable homiletical insights (confer Franzmann's *The Word of the Lord Grows* pp. 181 and 200ff.).

God's blessings on your Pentecost preaching.

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