

PREACH

the Word

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APPROPRIATION

Ever since Adam and Eve threw off the *imago Dei* (the image of God), mankind has been destined to live under the garb of wanting to be *sicut Dei* (just like God). Created in the image of God, mankind enjoyed the perfect freedom and desire to live under God and to feel love toward God. Adam and Eve lived within a harmonious unity with one another and with God. But the harmony of perfect love and willing obedience was shattered by the duplicity of knowing by experience both “good and evil,” just as Satan had foreshadowed (Genesis 3:5). That incident at the Tree thrust humankind into the legal fray from which there was no way out. The morality with which Adam and Eve first lived changed from a desire to a demand. The *opinio legis* reasoned that God’s favor could be curried by acceptable behavior.

This natural bent toward a legal righteousness shows itself in various ways. For example, the foundation of all natural religion is a desire to appease the “gods” with right living. Or, ask a hundred unchurched people why they think God ought to let them into heaven, and a majority will give you some semblance of “because I’ve been a good person.” Even Christians manifest their legal mindset when they clamor for sermons that tend toward the practical. Our desire to get quickly and heavily to application, perhaps at the expense of appropriation, reveals in

part how the *opinio legis* works. Honesty would admit that even God’s children in this world would often rather be told what to do than what God has done.

The difference between application and appropriation is as striking as the difference between law and gospel. Applications within the sermon belong in the area of sanctification, a part of the Christian life where the law pertains. Assuming your audience is entirely made up of believers, every person to whom you preach is, as a whole person, both old man (who only understands the legalities of good and evil, i.e. *sicut Dei*) and new man (who has been restored in the image of God, i.e. *imago Dei*). The old man in us makes each of us, as undivided entities, dull people. We need the law to show us the way. Because we retain the old man on earth, we need instruction so as to better decipher what thoughts, words and actions are a pleasing thank-you for all that God has done. This is the arena of application.

Before we can offer God our thanks, we need something to thank him for. We have no lack of things for which we can offer God our thanks. What God has done—that is where the Gospel pertains. The words and works of God’s goodness to us rise like a mountain with no peak. He created us as the objects of his love and, like the steady beating of drums, rhythmically provides



for us in the time signature of 24:7:365 (First Article). He conceived of the plan to rescue us from the experience of *sicut Dei* by restoring us to the *imago Dei* by means of the *Agnus Dei* (Second Article). He performs silent miracles of faith through the means of a message, proclaimed by mundane words, water, wheat and wine (Third Article). These are God’s actions, which call for no work on our part other than for us to relish them. God makes promises and wants only for us to take them to heart. This is the arena of appropriation.

There are places within every sermon to make application and to speak in terms of appropriation. Both are important. But because both preacher and hearer alike prefer the law by nature, the temptation both from within (our old man) and from without (the devil) will be to weight the sermon toward application. Accolades from the pew fall easily at the feet of the preacher who has made his applications for Christian living many, winsome, and clear. But the

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FESTIVAL PREACHING

Prof. James Tiefel, homiletics professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, offers us some timely advice on festival preaching.

Does the preacher preach differently on festivals than he does on other days? He certainly prepares the festival sermon the same as he prepares other sermons. An in-depth text study, a logical outline, a written manuscript, and thorough memorization are the building blocks of every sermon. Good preaching always includes specific law and gospel, as well as relevant applications and encouragements.

Here are a few suggestions to consider as the preacher thinks about preaching on festivals.

Definitely Preach

Resist the temptation during the busy holiday schedule to replace the festival sermon with a song service. Of course, the people like to sing, and Scripture lessons can punctuate their songs, but the preacher ought to be in the pulpit to interpret, apply, and encourage. Christmas Day calls for festival preaching that helps make clear why it's worth coming back to church after Christmas Eve.

Showcase the Gospel

There isn't a text in the Bible that doesn't allow for gospel preaching, but many sermon texts highlight the believer's response to the gospel. This is good. On festivals, however, it's probably best to showcase the gospel, and this is especially true of the Christ festivals. One could preach on Luke 2 with the outline "Celebrate Christmas with the Shepherds: Come and See, Go and Tell," but that direction focuses more on the need for Bible study and evangelism (the believer's response) than on Christ. This outline showcases the gospel: "His Majesty Is in the Manger: Human like you; Humble for you."

Tell the Story

During the era after the Reformation, Lutheran preachers were often required to preach on the Gospel on Sundays and festivals; pastors preached on the other lectionary texts on weekdays. We'll make no such rules, but we will make a

suggestion: On festivals, preach on the Gospel of the Day. The church year festivals celebrate the most important events in the life of Jesus, and these events are what constitute the gospel. The good news is that Jesus was born, that he was baptized, that he was transfigured, that he has risen. Tell the story! And then imitate the old preacher who used to say, "Dearly beloved, what shall we learn therefrom?"

Don't Assume

Preachers mount the pulpit for Reformation, Mission Festival, and other festivals of the Church eager to exhort and encourage worshipers to contend for and with the gospel. Sometimes they are so eager, they forget to preach the gospel! "I assume they know the gospel," the preacher replies. Don't assume. The gospel is not simply a story that sticks in the memory. The gospel is a power that moves Christians to faith and action. On festivals, power the people with the gospel first, and then plead with them to defend it and share it.

Preach; Don't Teach

There is a place for teaching in the pulpit; didactic sermons are appropriate, for instance, when preaching about the Christian life. But detailing how heretics deny the resurrection or the virgin birth or how Luther went about translating the New Testament is not nearly as important on Easter, Christmas, and Reformation as detailing how God saves and protects his people. Preach it; proclaim it: "This is what God did. And all this he did for you!"

Save the Tricks

Sometimes preachers get the feeling that festival preaching demands innovation. They search for ways to make the story heard so many times before more interesting. Creative preachers ought to spread their wings from time to time, but our advice is: Save the tricks for Pentecost 14. Festivals exist to highlight the Bible's most important truths. Let the truth hold the spotlight, not the method of sharing it. What ought to elicit comments in the car on the way home from church is not the pastor's new preaching style, but the Bible's truth. Yes, the festival stories have been

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told and retold, but preaching will make them vibrant and alive if the preacher demonstrates both the need for the old story (specific law) and the implications of the old story (specific gospel).

Say it Memorably

Preaching the same old truths with the same old preaching style doesn't force the preacher into a boredom corner. Tell the old story in a new way. Turn a phrase. Proclaim the gospel and proclaim it memorably. "God hates it when we sin and God hates us when we sin. But when Jesus came, he took the hate out of God by taking the sin out of us." "The greatest Christmas gift of all came wrapped in the womb of the virgin Mary with the words attached, 'To you, from Father, with love.'"

Don't Bellyache

Preachers almost always prepare festival sermons under the stress of a busy schedule. The Christmas festival follows Advent, Easter follows Holy Week, the installation is held in the afternoon after the preacher preached in his own pulpit in the morning. "I just didn't have the time," is the usual lament. Some loving advice: Quit bellyaching! People don't come to worship caring much about the preacher's busy schedule. They do come to worship for a reason, however. Perhaps they come because someone is making them, perhaps they come supposing they're doing God a favor, perhaps they come because they're afraid or hurting or confused. Whatever it is that leads the people to the pews, it needs to be treated by the man in the pulpit. Let the preacher look for ways to avoid the kind of crunch that can compromise thorough preparation. And then—always, but especially for the highest celebrations—let him give it his best!

FINISH THE THOUGHT

Leading the listener right up to the well without giving him a drink is a common pitfall in writing sermons, particularly for young homiletics. The preacher engages the listener with one link added to another in his chain of thought. Then suddenly the chain is broken. The preacher leaves the thought unfinished but in the process also leaves the listener scrambling to find the connection to what is said subsequently.

It is a common mistake. We are so filled with the message of the Word we are delivering, we assume our listeners know what we are talking about and what we are going to say next. We mistakenly think that the final statement in our line of thought is so obvious we don't need

to say it. Often the statement we leave out is a key that links what we have said to what is coming. Those obvious thoughts left unsaid leave the real punch out of the message.

Look at one of your old working manuscripts. Do you find you had to pencil in a sentence here and there to clarify your thought? In doing so, you were adding links to the chain of thought that carried your listeners from one bank of the creek to the other. You did not want to leave them washed out on the other side.

As you read over your manuscript this week, ask yourself if you are assuming your listeners know where you are going without saying so. Check for broken links in the chain of thought. You will often find those

gaps at the end of a paragraph. Even if your listeners can anticipate your concluding thought, say it anyway. Doing so confirms for them that they have been on the same track with you. It helps solidify the message for your listeners.

Interestingly, when we write a message for children we are less likely to make this mistake. The reason is that we don't assume the children know where we are going with our thoughts and so we are more specific in telling them everything. Treat all the children of God the same way. Finish your thoughts. Then your hearers will still be with you at the end of the message.

Vilas R. Glaeske

PREACHING EMPHASIS AT WELS WORSHIP CONFERENCE: JULY 21-24, 2002

Two workshops will focus on preaching skills and perspectives.

Full Strength Law and Gospel, with Professor Daniel Leyrer (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary)

Preachers regularly insure that their sermons contain specific Law and Gospel. This seminar, presented in three 75-minute segments, will sharpen our ability to do this, as well as to preach and teach "full strength Law and Gospel."

Preaching the Catechism, with Pastor John Vieths (Dallas, Texas)

Luther and early Lutherans regularly preached on parts of the Catechism. How can the modern preacher incorporate this fine practice today? May preaching on the Catechism replace the traditional emphasis on the Gospel of the Day? How might various Catechism sermon series fit into the year?



In addition to featured preachers in four plenary services, five services during workshop times will model "small church" worship and a variety of preaching approaches. Numerous other workshops will serve pastors from churches large and small. Look for a registration brochure in March. Online information: < www.wels.net/worship/events.html >.

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preacher who tells the "old, old story" without the same dedication of time to application may receive only faint praise. The tension for balance between application and appropriation was once voiced this way, "Pastors need to spend more time on sanctification and less time on justification." A respectful reply helped balance the conversation, "One can't have the former unless one understands and believes the latter!"

Don't take these words as a discouragement toward making applications. God's people need preachers to apply God's Word to their lives, especially when the text calls for it. Rather, take these words as an encouragement to spend more time in your preparation and preaching finding those places where the wonders of what God has done and the promises he has made can be laid on the hearts of the people for their enjoyment. Give the Good News its "appropriate" time.

John M. Koelpin

A PREACHER'S LOOK AHEAD

Lent is a busy season of the church year for the preacher. With advance preparation, however, the preacher can begin to anticipate the messages from God's Word that he will focus on during Lent and Holy Week. *A Preacher's Look Ahead* for this edition takes a look at the last weeks of Epiphany, Lent, and Holy Week.

The Epiphany, Easter, and Pentecost seasons strive for *lectio continua* in the lectionary. By contrast, the readings in the season of Lent seem driven by the theme of the Sunday. As a result the First and Second Lessons (and to a certain degree also the Gospel, especially in year A) are much more eclectic. The preacher will benefit from extra time in studying the readings for each Sunday with an eye toward their combined focus. For example, on the First Sunday in Lent the First Lesson tells about the fall of the first Adam when tempted by Satan while the Gospel tells about the victory of the second Adam over the temptations of Satan. The Second Lesson bridges the gap with a reading from Romans about the impact of both the first and second Adams. The Second Sunday in Lent has a similar tight arrangement. The Genesis reading lays out the cluster of promises God gave to Abram. In the Second Lesson Paul gives us his commentary on Genesis, emphasizing Abraham's faith in God's promises. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of himself as the fulfillment of the promise of salvation to the Samaritan woman. In the Third Sunday in Lent, Isaiah, always the illustrator, introduces the image of spiritual blindness in the last half of the reading from chapter 42. Paul picks up the theme under the images of light and darkness in his letter to the Ephesians. Finally, Jesus uses the healing of a man born blind as a

springboard for a brief sermon on spiritual blindness.

While preparing for Sundays in Lent, remember also what *Christian Worship: Manual* says, "The Sundays in Lent were not counted as part of the forty days since they were not fast days but retained their significance as 'little Easters' (p.373)." Let your mid-week Lenten series carry the penitential theme of the season, and give your people each Sunday an oasis of hope in the anticipated victory of Easter.

Within the set of First Lessons for these months there are a few items of note. Readings from Micah and Jonah appear only twice in the entire lectionary, once each in these coming months—Micah 6:1-8 (the Lord's accusation against Israel and his desire for mercy) on the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany and Jonah 2:2-9 (Jonah's prayer from his "tomb") on Easter Day. The Hosea 5:15-6:3 text from the Fourth Sunday in Lent also appears later in the year on the Third Sunday after Pentecost. A similar thing occurs with the Ezekiel 37 text from the Fifth Sunday in Lent. It is also the reading for The Coming of the Holy Spirit: The Day of Pentecost in Year B. A preacher might use the Ezekiel text to focus on the bodily resurrection in Lent, then focus on the spiritual resurrection of coming to faith a year later on Pentecost.

The Second Lesson for Year A relies heavily on the book of Romans. However, as mentioned earlier, during Lent and Holy Week the *lectio continua* has been all but abandoned in preference for readings that match the day's emphasis. If it has been a while since you have looked at the Second Lesson as a text because it is often the "odd-man-out," or if you plan on preaching the Gospel during your

mid-week services and during Holy Week, then give some thought to the New Testament perspective that the Second Lesson provides during Lent.

In these last days after the Epiphany into Lent and the beginning of Easter, the Gospel thrusts forward the great events of Jesus' life for our salvation and his powerful preaching. Epiphany ends with a reading from Jesus' beatitudes. In the subsequent weeks the preacher can tell the story of the transfiguration, the temptation of Jesus, his raising of Lazarus, his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the foot-washing, Jesus' death, and his resurrection. Relish the opportunities this time in the church year affords you to proclaim the Gospel story, the message by which God brings and strengthens faith. The preacher may want to note that Year A intersperses more John texts in Lent than the other two years. This is also the year in which the Maundy Thursday Gospel is the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet and his "new" command to love one another (the Lord's Supper is covered in the Second Lesson from 1 Corinthians).

A final word about a Proper not often highlighted in *A Preacher's Look Ahead*—the Psalm of the Day. The psalms do provide excellent homiletical material throughout the year and especially during Lent and Holy Week. By the end of 2002 Northwestern Publishing House will publish a sermon book covering the psalms from the *Christian Worship* lectionary. Also, this year's NPH mid-week Lenten series, "His Mercy Endures Forever," is based on the psalms.

God's blessings on your Epiphany, Lenten, and Holy Week preaching.

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