

PREACH

the Word

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PASSION

When you feel a passion for something, it's easy. If you like reading, it's easy to grab a book and spend an afternoon in its pages. If politics are a priority, it's easy to share your political opinions with others. If you love your spouse and family, it's easy to become emotionally involved in their lives. Passion has its place in preaching, too.

Preachers ought to have a passion for their study of the text. In speaking about the joys of being a pastor, a preacher once quipped, "There is an excitement in sitting down on Sunday night, opening up the Scriptures, and discovering what wonderful message God has for his people in the coming week." Note how the pleasure of preaching meant beginning the text study already on Sunday night! Depending on your circumstance and discipline, prayerful preparation of God's Word may begin even earlier.

But no matter what

your study routine, passion for preaching will lead the preacher to allow ample time for a thorough study of the text.

Text study is hard work, but it is exhilarating. For sinners it is perhaps as close as we can get to gazing at the jewels of heaven that John beheld in his revelation. As the preacher turns his text inside and out—studying it in its immediate context, looking at it in the wider context of the entire Bible, picking it apart word by word and phrase by phrase in the original, and viewing it through the eyes of previous confessors—he finds a bit of gold here and some shining sapphire there, just waiting to be displayed before the hearts of God's people. Like the prophets of old we "search intently and with the greatest care" (1 Peter 1:10).

Preachers ought to have a passion for God's people. Paul did. He felt such intense love for his fellow Jews that he acknowledged his wish "that I myself were cursed

and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel" (Romans 9:3). What pastors do in the pulpit is not merely an exercise in speaking; it is preaching that assumes an audience. It is true that the preacher must first preach his sermon to his own heart, but he must not forget the people who have called him to be their shepherd. He loves them, too. His heart bleeds for them. His heart rejoices with them. He deeply desires for them to come to or grow in faith. Such passion for the eternal lives of people moves the preacher to ascend the pulpit.

Preachers ought to have a passion for the Savior. Is it too syrupy to say that we are "in love" with Jesus? Reserve such language for marriage, you say! Yet, in his Word, God often uses the illustration of marriage to describe the way he feels about us, his Church. If God feels such passion about us as to call us his Bride, can we not feel such passion for him, the God of mercy who saved us from our certain doom and handed us a certain heaven? We can hardly look at what our Groom did for us on the cross and

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PREACH FROM THE HEART—NOT FROM A MANUSCRIPT!

Have you ever had a preacher who couldn't look you in the eye? Have you ever sat before a man whose eyes were glued to his manuscript? Distracting, isn't it? Here are some impressions this style of preaching gives: The man would rather be somewhere else. He has little concern for his hearers. He doesn't really know what he's talking about. He doesn't really mean what he is saying.

Preaching without a manuscript makes for better preaching and that's our goal, isn't it?

Let me be clear, I'm not opposed to bringing written quotes into the pulpit or even a manuscript hidden in the back of one's Bible as a security blanket. What I'm talking about is reading one's sermon. Preaching without a manuscript makes for better preaching, and that's our goal, isn't it?

For most of us, missionary or servant of a large congregation, our sermon is the most important work we do each week. We admonish, comfort, edify, and inspire the saints of God. We want our message to be trusted, understood, remembered, repeated, and lived by our hearers.

No doubt, somewhere in your training you heard the encouragement, "Preach as a dying man to dying men." Let me enlarge on that advice just a bit. I suggest that you preach as a dying man standing in the midst of dying men saying with face aglow, "I have just learned the secret of life. You shall not die but live." Such joyous preaching begins with a prayer. Mine goes something like this, "Lord, teach me what you have to say to your people. And, Father, don't forget this old ox who is threshing out the grain."

The first step that enables one to preach without a manuscript is thorough text study. My goal is to so fill myself with the text that it exudes from my pores. It's hard to get "stuck" if you thoroughly know your subject matter. If one point escapes you, you can go on. In short, know what you are talking about.

Another picture I try to keep before myself as I prepare to preach is that of a father sharing an orange with his child. Bit by bit, he takes of the orange and gives it to the little one. In a similar fashion a preacher takes the Word he has carefully studied and shares it with his hearers in digestible portions.

After text study, I see benefit in reading what godly men have had to say about that portion of the Word. I do so not to copy them but rather to stimulate my own meditation on the text. It's good to give the Word ample time to work on one's own heart. I am a poor sinner just like my hearers, and what applies to me will probably apply to them.

We want our message to be trusted, understood, remembered, repeated, and lived by our hearers.

A well-developed outline makes the sermon easier to follow. I picture the preacher as a rabbit being chased by a dog. However, in this instance the rabbit doesn't want to lose his pursuer. He always wants to make it easy for the dog to follow him. Besides making the sermon easier to write, a good outline will serve to fix the thoughts of the lesson in the mind of the preacher.

I still write my sermons word for word. After I write them I rewrite them and then

try to eliminate difficult and unnecessary words as well as illustrations that make the sermon difficult to follow.

Commit your sermon to memory.

The final tip I have for learning to preach without a manuscript is: commit your sermon to memory. Yes, it can be done. It is very difficult for me to memorize. It took me three weeks to learn my first sermon. At this stage in my life I find that if I read my sermon eight times, I'm quite sure I know it.

The Word of God is powerful and effective. It alone has the power to turn hearts from unbelief to faith. This truth, however, is no excuse for a poorly prepared or shoddily delivered sermon.

As we love our Lord and his people, we would never want to do anything that would discourage our hearers from listening to us. I've heard arguments for using a manuscript. Some are genuine, but I fear some are only excuses. My reason for writing is to encourage you, my brother, to better preaching. In most instances, better preaching means preaching without a manuscript.

Eugene F. Ahlsweide



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However, in this instance the rabbit doesn't want to lose his pursuer.

He always wants to make it easy for the dog to follow him.

BULL'S-EYE!

When you shoot a shotgun you end up with little holes all over your target. On the other hand, when you fire a rifle, there is just one hole, hopefully right in the bull's eye. In preaching we want to avoid the shotgun approach. We want to have a clear message that penetrates the hearts of our hearers. We want to bring the theme through the text to the people.

We all strive to deliver a clear message. However, at times our desire to be faithful to the text results in a shotgun pattern rather than a rifle shot because we feel compelled to explore all the elements within the text. We resist being topical preachers and are drawn to expound every truth of the text. The attempts to balance this tension can result in a message that loses its focus.

God's people are far better served when we narrow down the thought of the text. To do this may mean waiting for another time to treat some of the other truths of the text. Those with a few years of sermons on file can go back and see the same text treated in different ways. Approaching a text from different perspectives and emphases does not mean that we have been unfaithful in one case or the other.

Look at your next manuscript and see if you are carrying the theme through to the end of the sermon. Hearers today are conditioned by the media to be receptive to simple themes rather than working their way through a complex presentation. Preach through to the point! Aim for the bull's-eye.

Realize that I am not advocating topical preaching. We have been trained to prepare and deliver textual sermons. Preaching through to the point of the text remains faithful to textual preaching.

Vilas R.. Glaeske

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mumble a half-hearted, "I like him." Jesus' love for us is the very thing that cuts out our cold heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh that beats with a fervent, "I love you, Jesus. I love you, Jesus. I love you, Jesus." If passion for people leads the preacher into the pulpit, it is passion for the Savior that moves the preacher to speak Good News from that pulpit.

Finally, preachers ought to exhibit their passion from the pulpit. Did the prophet Ezekiel stand rigidly by and watch with detached emotion as God spoke of his judgment? No, on more than one occasion Ezekiel cried out before the Lord in a loud voice. David danced in front of the Ark of the Covenant, Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus, and Paul shed tears for his congregations. Faith is not an unemotional thing. When the Holy Spirit touches our hearts with the fire of his love, he not only affects our intellect and will, but also our emotions. Sin makes us sad or even angry. Salvation makes us glad and full of joy.

Must the preacher "rise above" such emotions? When Paul called preachers jars of clay his point was to emphasize our weakness. He was not insinuating that we ought to be as cold as a pot. If the law portion of your sermon calls for a stern face, then give it a stern face. When the Good News makes you smile on the inside, why not smile on the outside, too? Certainly, the Lord has made us all individuals, with our own set of preaching skills and abilities, our own styles and comforts. The level of passion exuded from the pulpit will vary from preacher to preacher. But let's not avoid the passion with which our study of God's Word has filled our hearts, nor the passion we feel for God's people, nor the passion we feel for our Savior. Let your people see your passion. Such passion makes preaching all that much easier!

John M. Koelpin

A PREACHER'S LOOK AHEAD

The Easter Season is one of the most tightly organized sections of the lectionary, not only in each of the three readings, but also in each of the three years of the lectionary series. "A Preacher's Look Ahead" for this edition examines the Easter season along with the festivals of Ascension, Pentecost, and Holy Trinity for series A.

Each set of lessons in the Easter season progress in an easy-to-follow pattern. The first lesson focuses on the work of the early church, particularly Peter and Paul, in a series of readings from Acts. The second lesson preaches through Peter's first epistle. The Gospel highlights "sermons" from Jesus that are of particular importance to the post-resurrection/post-ascension Church. Each set of readings would make a nice sermon series.

The first lesson in each year of the lectionary comes from the book of Acts. In series A there is a mixture of readings about Peter, Paul, and the early church. In subsequent years the focus shifts to Peter's sermons (B) and to Paul's life and travels (C). The early church sermons that make up this set of readings are powerful. In the first two Sundays, Peter preaches to the predominantly Jewish crowd at Pentecost. In the following Sundays Stephen proclaims the truth to his Jewish captors while Paul preaches to Gentiles in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. Finally, the Lord himself preaches his final earthly sermon at his ascension. At each occasion the early church emphasized the resurrection of Christ. The audience, however, differed in each case, offering variety to a constant theme.

Both Ascension and Easter 7 (which fall within three days of one another) use the ascension account from Acts as the appointed first lesson. If a congregation does not have a special Ascension service, the preacher could focus on the ascension on Easter 7. But, if a congregation does celebrate the Ascension, the Easter 7 text offers additional material by including the choosing of Matthias. On Pentecost the first lesson from Joel is essentially the text Peter uses in his Pentecost sermon (second lesson from Acts 2). On Holy Trinity the preacher has his only opportunity throughout the three-year cycle to preach on the creation account from Genesis 1 and 2.

In each year of the cycle, the second lesson focuses on one of the later epistles. Year A comes from 1 Peter, Year B from 1 John, and Year C from Revelation. Peter's epistles were written as an encouragement for suffering churches, a message that rings loudly from the selected texts. Special care was given to select a "Shepherd" text from Peter on Easter 4, traditionally known as Good Shepherd Sunday. This series of 1 Peter readings offers the preacher an opportunity to touch on a number of important topics from the resurrection to the Church, from bearing the cross to the descent into hell. A preacher can hardly read the second lesson for Easter 3 without thinking of the words of Luther's explanation to the second article.

The readings for Ascension remain the same in each year of the cycle. The Ephesians text focuses on the power of God expressed in the ascension. Pentecost preaches Peter's sermon from Acts 2. An interesting



juxtaposition in series A is Peter's words in his first epistle alongside his sermons from Acts. After hearing Peter through letter form during Easter, one might consider hearing Peter in sermon form on Pentecost. Paul's Apostolic Blessing is the text chosen for the second lesson on Holy Trinity.

The Easter season Gospel strays from its Year A focus on Matthew, selecting texts from John and Luke. In the first two Sundays of Easter, we see Jesus appear to his disciples in the locked room and on the way to Emmaus. Good Shepherd Sunday appropriately takes a text from John 10 in which Jesus proclaims himself the Gate. In subsequent Sundays we hear the pre-resurrection Jesus speak words of encouragement—words that have special meaning after his resurrection. On Easter 5 Jesus speaks of being the Way, Truth and Life, on Easter 6 he promises the Holy Spirit, and on Easter 7 he prays for himself and his disciples (in each year the Gospel is from Jesus' High Priestly prayer).

The Gospel for both Ascension and Pentecost tells the story of the event. The Gospel for Holy Trinity is the Great Commission chosen for its Trinitarian baptismal formula.

God's blessings as you bask in the joy of the Resurrection.

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