

# PREACH

Vol. 6 No. 1 *the Word* September/October 2002

## WELCOME TO THE SIXTH VOLUME OF *PREACH THE WORD*

### Connecting to the Word and Connecting to People

Whether you are preaching to large crowds in an established urban congregation, or standing before a newly gathered flock in a high school gymnasium, we share the same challenge of connecting to the Word and connecting to people through the God-given privilege of preaching.

In his book *Between Two Worlds*, John Stott comments on our mutual, privileged task, "We have the same Word of God, and the same human beings, and the same fallible preacher called by the same living God to study both the Word and the world in order to relate the one to the other with honesty, conviction, courage and meekness." (p. 11)

"Connecting to the Word and Connecting to People" is the theme for this 2002-03 volume of *Preach the Word*.

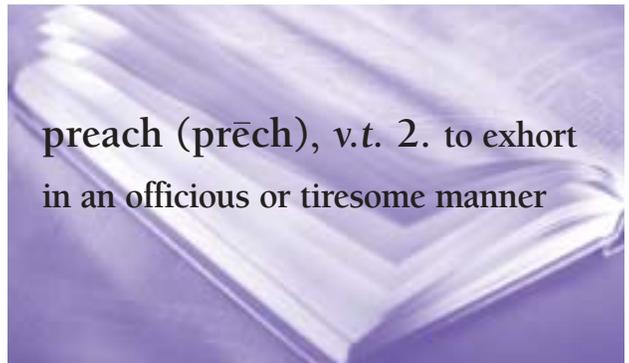
Pastor Mark Cordes has consented to write articles on "Faithful Exegesis and Good Sermon Work." Professor Daniel Leyrer will offer articles based on his series of lectures at the WELS 2002 National Worship Conference, *Full Strength Law and Gospel Preaching*.

As space permits we will be sharing illustrations that can serve to illuminate the proclamation of the law, or the gospel, and several articles on using illustrations. Spurgeon fondly called them, "feathers for arrows."

Each issue the editor will reflect on preachers and sermons that left their mark on him and helped him connect to the Word and connect to people. My e-mail address is [scdegner@aol.com](mailto:scdegner@aol.com).

## FULL STRENGTH LAW AND GOSPEL PREACHING

Because the Seminary library was updating their dictionary collection, I recently picked up one of their old ones. It's one of those huge, unabridged Webster's that requires good reading glasses and a sturdy table. One time I looked up the verb "preach." One of the definitions: "to exhort in an officious or tiresome manner." Ouch. I'm a pastor who was taught to give the preparation and preaching of the weekly sermon a top priority in my activities.



**preach (prēch), v.t. 2. to exhort in an officious or tiresome manner**

There's still nothing in pastoral ministry I enjoy more than preaching. But ... "to exhort in an officious or tiresome manner?" Is that what people think of preaching? Or, to ask a more sensitive question, is that what *the people of God in my congregations* used to think of my preaching? Ouch.

Granted, we cannot always control what individual parishioners think about the concept of preaching. But we can control what we think of it. Best of all, if we tie our purposes for preaching to God's purposes for preaching, then we are able to serve God's people well through the sermons we preach.

What is God's purpose for preaching? It seems to me Paul summarized it when he wrote "God was pleased through

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## SERMONS THAT HELPED ME

"I want to be like Dave. I want to preach and expound the text of Scripture the way he does." Those thoughts went through my mind as I exited the church in La Habra, California on the evening of October 31, 1973. Pastor, now Professor David Valleskey had just preached for the Reformation Service that coincided with the Arizona-California Pastoral Study Conference.

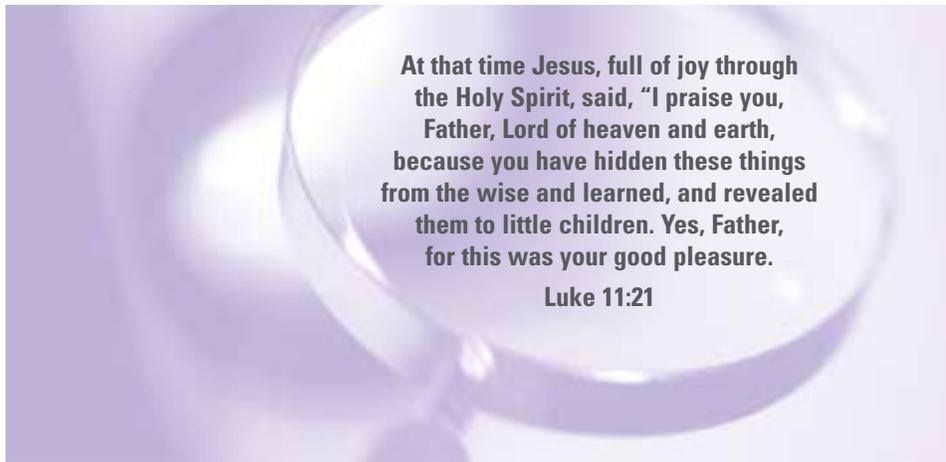
It was my first year in the ministry, and I was hungry for good role models in preaching, teaching and evangelism. The text for the sermon was Luke 11:21-28. The theme "The Battle for Hearts of Mankind."

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John Stott says of sticking to the text in preaching, "Whether [the text] is long or short, our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, without addition, subtraction, or falsification." (*Between Two Worlds*, John Stott, p. 126)



**At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.**

**Luke 11:21**

I asked Professor Valleskey if he still had a copy of that sermon. He did. The words were still there. These were the words that had held me riveted on the edge of the pew, words expounding the truths of the text in simplicity, eloquence, and conviction. He opened the text with the scene of a rancher protecting his homestead from all intruders, comparing the rancher to Satan protecting his turf. Then Pastor Valleskey held forth on the words of the text:

*"That 'strong man, fully armed' is a picture of Satan. His homestead is the human heart. And we humans are no match for him. He is the 'prince of this world.' He is not simply 'flesh and blood,' but 'principalities and power.' He is not a meek and mild pussy cat, but a 'roaring lion.'"*

I have seen people sitting on the edge of their pews, riveted to the words of Scripture and following along with their Bibles or the words printed in the bulletin. I have seen them grow impatient when an application went too long. They want to get back into the Word and have more of the Word opened to them. That's the kind of impatience a preacher loves to see in people as they itch to be back into the Word. That kind of preaching connects with people.

As Valleskey said recently, "It is always my hope and prayer that people will have a better understanding and deeper love for the part of God's Word that served as the text for my sermon."

*Steven Degner*

## CAN YOU USE THIS?

The following words from "Hints from Heloise" can be used to illustrate the current thinking that all religions are equal and none can claim superiority over the other. A piece of aluminum can be held up in the sermon for an object lesson if you are comfortable doing this.

*"Ask any great cook about aluminum foil and you're bound to get an opinion on which side is 'best.' Some swear the shiny side must always be on the outside of a baked potato, while others condemn such nonsense and emphatically claim exactly the opposite. Meanwhile, the manufacturer stays amused and gives a good lesson in dogmatism and tolerance. When foil is made, it is rolled. One side of the foil gets shiny because it comes in contact with the heavy roller. The other side stays dull because it never makes contact with the roller. Both sides produce the same results! Surely you don't have any church members who could benefit from this little lesson on tolerance." ("Hints From Heloise," *The Houston Chronicle*, August 1989)*

It makes no difference what side of the aluminum you use for grilling. When it comes to eternal life, there is only one side that gets the job done, the salvation found in Christ and what he has done for you. How much more compelling are Jesus' words in John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me."

## FAITHFUL EXEGESIS AND GOOD SERMON WORK

It's hard to miss the "city-slicker" phenomenon sweeping the country these days. Farmers—and ranchers, maybe even hunters and fishermen can get full service from a 4x4 SUV. But those of us who rarely see a gravel road, much less a muddy forest trail, can enjoy the extra traction only now and then in a snowstorm.

What good is a high-powered PC if you only do email? Why buy a 12" Delta table saw to cut firewood? Why go to the trouble and expense of full mountain climbing gear if you never hit the heights that call for pitons?

They climb the mountains "because they're there." They cut the cabinets because they can. They go for more gigahertz because they want their software to work harder. They hit the hills for the thrill of the wind in their face.

Humanly speaking, we could board our sleek vessel and sail this article with a hearty "Heave-ho the exegesis!" just because we're rigged to catch the wind. With WELS training, "Do it because you can" would be enough for most any sporting exegete.

But good exegesis is hard work in weeks of ministry that rarely settle for 55-60 hours and often push a score more. Which means we need better reasons, stronger motivation, and perhaps better tools to do what we've been trained to do.

Over the years we've heard all sorts of reasons to do good exegesis. Every once in a while we need to hear these and other solid reasons you could provide:

- Positively speaking, the sermon is still the pastor's best time to reach the greatest number of souls with the law and gospel, sin and grace of Christ-crucified.

- Jesus is the Incarnate Word. The more we study each word as God gave it, the more we overflow with love for the Lover of our souls.
- Good exegesis impresses the memory with unforgettable images and illustrations so that the preacher can be free to deliver the message eye-to-eye and heart-to-heart with God's people.
- The most vivid illustrations, piercing insights, and practical applications flow from the Holy Spirit's own master painting in all its divine color, depth and direction.
- Seriously, Luther said, "Lose the languages, lose the gospel." And the flipside is also true: Use the languages, use the gospel.
- Faithful exegesis is a safeguard against false doctrine or self-delusional hypocrisy. This was the expressed concern of the Lord's Apostle Paul: "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:27).
- Good exegesis helps us pay closer attention to what God is actually saying, so that we do not just talk about the gospel; we proclaim the gospel.
- Good exegesis is a window to the loving heart of God who says, "To this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2).

What God promises here to the humble and contrite soul is the heart of preaching—Christ crucified. I want, no, I simply must have the comfort of

knowing and feeling—whenever my feelings can catch up with my faith—that the Lord of life and love holds me in His strong arms.

God's law catches my attention, mirrors my sin, and helps me see my desperate need for each word of the sweet Good News of Jesus. The entire message of the Bible flows purely out of grace for a sinner like me.

God forbid that I should ever say a single syllable that might bring His saving truth into question or trouble a conscience with my own doubts and fears. I want to see my crucified and risen Savior and Lord looking at me with His kind and loving face through faithful exegesis.

*Mark Cordes*



Continued from page 1

the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). God wants to save people through preaching. By applying the Word to people’s hearts through our preaching, God seeks to work faith and strengthen faith. While our sermons might have secondary purposes like teaching stewardship or correcting false teaching or encouraging prayer, it is good for us to remember that the primary purpose of our sermons never changes. God wants to save people and keep them saved by the clear proclamation of his Word. That is, he wants to work faith and strengthen faith in Jesus by the preaching that is delivered from our pulpits. It’s no wonder the Apology states that “there is nothing that so attaches people to the church as does good preaching” (article XXIV). God has a purpose for our preaching.

To bring the saving Word to people in our sermons is to recognize that God has spoken to us with two messages: law and gospel. Rightly we call these two messages opposites. They are opposites in definition. The law teaches us what we are to do for God while the gospel teaches us

what Christ has done for us; the law teaches us that we are sinners worthy of eternal punishment while the gospel teaches us that we are forgiven and headed for eternal life. The law and gospel of God are also opposites as to their effect on the human heart. The law, by itself, strikes terror and offers no comfort, all of which leads to despair. The gospel removes fear and replaces it with peace and joy. Full strength law and gospel preaching does not try to relieve the tension between the two.

However, full strength law and gospel preaching does not make the mistake of assigning different goals to law and gospel. God has given his two teachings the same goal, namely, salvation. The law serves God’s goal of salvation by leading the listener to see his need for Christ’s cross. The gospel then proclaims what happened at Christ’s cross. Thus the law serves the gospel in a preparatory way. While opposites, the two are reconciled at the cross. Though C. F. W. Walther wrote 25 theses that led to 39 lectures on the distinction between law and gospel, he was careful not to call them contradictory.

Dr. Walther wrote, “Each is distinct from the other, but both are in perfect harmony with one another. Distinct, but united in goal—it is good for us preachers to remember these qualities of law and gospel as we find them in a text and preach them in a sermon. If our purpose for preaching is to get people to heaven, let us understand that explicit law serving explicit gospel is God’s way to accomplish this purpose. Like a sailing ship tacking across a body of water by going in a zigzag pattern, so our preaching of law and gospel in every sermon takes people in different directions but ultimately leads them to the final goal of heavenly glory.”

Therefore, we do not expect the law to comfort or empower, because that’s not why God gave it. We do not expect the gospel to condemn or produce guilt, because that’s not why God gave it. We do expect law and gospel, working in harmony, to move God’s people across the sea of life to paradise’s shore. When our purpose for preaching is in harmony with God’s, clear law and gospel will always be present.

Daniel P. Leyrer

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*Preach the Word* is published bimonthly by the WELS Commission on Worship  
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