

PREACH

the Word

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Many thanks to Prof. Keith Wessel for editing volume 7. We have benefited from the insights of the writers he engaged over the last year and from the Florilegia he shared with us. Now we move, as with previous volumes, from a ministerial education editor to a parish pastor and let our new editor, Pastor Thomas Jeske, introduce himself.

Wayne Laitinen, Managing Editor

according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:1)

GREETINGS! from the new editor

Short bio: I am a pastor. I'm a husband; I'm a father. As for preaching experience, two years as a Tutor with fond memories of evening chapel. The congregations I was later called to serve in the Nebraska District have been small, somewhere around 100 adults and 35 kids each. Serving congregations with pastoral vacancies has been another aspect of my career. I preach often to groups of a dozen or fewer. Such environments will have an effect on the way a man preaches.

I've accepted this PTW assignment, but not because I was looking for a little more excitement with deadlines in my week. And to contribute to a newsletter about preaching certainly sets a man up for the criticism that he may think too highly of himself. I'd much rather suggest that if you are looking for a primer on Lutheran preaching, you will get a good return on your time if you reread the first years of *Preach the Word*.

I am willing to stand this watch, however, if I may in some small way encourage one of my brothers in his challenging—and critically important—*vocatio*.

And Your Audience Is Whom?

Your editor is told that some outside our church body read *Preach the Word*. I'll have to be honest: I should think that much of what's written here will lack context. (We salute you nevertheless).

Nor, if I may say so, is PTW compiled with our Seminary students in mind. This is not said unlovingly. You, young brothers-to-be, are to learn your school lessons. You are to drill. You are to pay attention to your professors. You are to get used to handling the nuts and bolts. Soon enough comes the *Lutheran Pastor's Desk Diary* from Thrivent.

We all remember language profs in college being eagle-eyed as to what books guys had open on their desks. One veteran teacher gazed sadly when I brought *Index to Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew Lexicon*. The verb roots and forms were to be learned, not lamely and furtively read out of a book.

Ten years after that, I took a class at WLS Summer Quarter. That same prof encouraged us to use any translation tool we could get our hands on! My conscience was not convinced. You could have knocked me over with a feather when he said "Back then you were learning the basics, and the use of that book was improper. But now God has made you a pastor. Whatever tools you need to keep your Bible languages alive—use them!"

The Grind is what pastors often (affectionately) label their chore of preaching every week. An aim of this year's PTW newsletter is to let you hear the voice of one fighting alongside you, a fellow who by God's grace has marked twenty years in pastoral ministry. This is the only experience I have to share with you. It remains for other men with other experiences to share those with you.

Parish pastors are generally not writing sermons for publication. The Sunday sermon is not a paper to be delivered and dissected at a conference. Nor are gathered worshipers exactly like a classroom setting. To preach the Word is a strange and wonderful kind of communication. It is writing and public speaking combined.

One hundred years ago, August Pieper wrote the *Foreword* to a book of another man's sermons. First he spoke about the preacher's content, then about style:

"It is the old sturdy and infinitely tender Lutheranism of the Reformation, undefiled by modern theological skepticism ...

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It stands squarely on the Bible as the infallible Word of God, it professes Christ as the true Son of God and the heaven-appointed Mediator between God and a world spiritually dead and utterly lost through sin. It preaches that there is salvation in none other, neither is there any other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. It teaches that salvation is by grace alone, through faith in Christ, and to no part by the deeds of the Law. It insists that Christ is the fullness of all things, and that in Him we are complete.

“It lays due stress on the regenerative power of the Gospel, by which men are born from above and made new creatures in Christ Jesus. It urges all believers by the mercies of God, that they present their bodies as living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God. It beseeches all who are afflicted to bear their cross willingly for Christ’s sake, and wait patiently for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall wipe away all tears from their eyes and comfort them as one whom his mother comforteth.

“The author is well-known among Lutherans for his clearness of logic, for the simplicity, terseness and force of his diction, while he makes *no pretense of finished rhetorical elegance*. His style is the result of his untiring application to the language of the Bible, which will ever remain the unsurpassed model for all who desire to preach the Gospel of God into the hearts of all classes of men.”

(*The Way to Life*, by Henry Sieck, NPH, Milwaukee, 1905).

Isn’t it interesting? A professor who knew how to use words powerfully noted with respect a preacher who *made no pretense of finished rhetorical elegance*.

Neither do you or I.

To C.F.W. Walther, with Affection

Many men who have come through our seminary have heard that a Lutheran pastor should read C.F.W. Walther’s *Law and Gospel* once a year for the first ten years of his ministry. Is that statement a) hopelessly naïve, or b) recklessly bold, inducing needless guilt generation after generation?

Many will nod solemnly while a brother speaks of “Walther” in reverential tones, but deep inside we know it’s 413 pages of single-spaced, 8 point type. Yet it’s true what its own Preface & Introduction promises, “The reader will find in this treatise amazing insights opened up for him into his own inner life and that of other Christians and his fellow-men in general.”

The pastors of our circuit meet once a month, and one of the things we do is to bring our Walthers and read for 45 minutes. It may seem childish for grown men to go around the table reading out loud one paragraph at a time. His lectures, however, still communicate to pastors who have to preach again Sunday. If you have not experienced Walther, or if it has been ten years,

find one of your brothers, and offer to buy the coffee on Monday morning. You spread open your *Law and Gospel*. Be the latest to listen:

“A speaker, especially an extempore speaker, is not under the same restraints before his audience as an author before the reading public. Moreover, a greater freedom, even a certain *abandon*, is quite acceptable when an old, beloved professor is talking to an audience made up almost entirely of his students ...

... A speaker can accomplish something by a gesture, a pose, a modulation of the voice, a pause, a change of the tempo of his address, which an author can not achieve at all in his lifeless print or but inadequately by illustrations.” (Preface)

It came as a surprise to me when I learned that Walther did not write this book, but it was taken down, stenographer-style, by his students. God bless it!

Three from Walther

“But since it is dangerous for a Christian to pass his days in ease in this present life, the Savior has taken the precaution of putting the cross upon him ... but how light is the burden of Christ compared with that of the Law!” p. 76

“A true Christian says ... ‘indeed, my sins go over my head. That was my plight not only in the days when I was not converted, but it is still my plight. I do not believe this merely because I read about it in my Bible, but I experience every day what a wicked thing my heart is and how frail my old Adam.’” p. 121

“Don’t base the validity of absolution on our own contrition, but make our contrition rest on our absolution.” p. 191

The Pile is your heap of mail and unread magazines, that small blizzard of unfiled conference papers in a corner of most every pastor’s study.

As a compost pile produces heat, The Pile produces guilt. A good way to cause a pastor to glaze over is to hand him a book and say “Here, Pastor, you have to read this.”

Mark Twain writes in his autobiography that he hated answering mail. He’d let it pile up—for a month, he says!—and then one morning he’d light the stove with it. He tells how very satisfying *that felt*. We all love closure.

The team producing this newsletter fears that PTW may, without meaning to, add to The Pile of Unnecessary Guilt. That’s one reason that PTW is limited in size. (You’ve seen some of the massive periodicals on preaching; you get all those postcards in the mail with offers for “three month’s worth of biblical, interesting, funny sermons – already prepared for you! What’s your VISA number?”)

Let it be said here that should your editor mention a book, paper or article, it is one that he has actually read; it is one for which he's grateful to the brother who tipped him off to it; it is one which has helped him with his struggles during a specific week of preparing to preach.

Launching the Sermon

An observation: sometimes we pastors go on too long with the sermon's Address. The Greeting in this case is not direct, but roundabout; it becomes a sort of mini-sermon, a prologue, as opposed to a warm nod and corporate "At ease."

As soon as you catch yourself starting to mention all the great things that Jesus has done and is doing for us, let the worshipers sit. Then preach the Gospel!

A Preacher's Mornings

Have you ever been a little frustrated that Paul the Apostle can tell us to *be prepared in season and out of season*? As Charlie Brown used to say, "Aauugh." You know the feeling.

Sometimes Council meetings can be so stressful. Who knows which marriages are hanging by a thread? Who's visiting the neighborhood non-denominational church? How are your congregation's teenagers ever going to survive their sexuality battles with peer pressure?

Maybe your struggles are with concrete-hard traditions and the people who hold to them without much thought. Maybe "the bloom is off the rose" at your first parish, and some long-time members are chewing on you. Maybe you're a little lonely or a little angry at God. Let's face it, you have to love some unlovable people. Now top it off: you have to preach again this coming Sunday. Aauugh.

I like the advice of a classmate who endured a rough chapter of ministry. When I asked him how it was going, he said "Nothing I can't handle with a good night's sleep ... and some devotion time in the morning."

Lutheran Preacher, start your day by reading the Scripture! Set your alarm. Get by yourself. Graze like a sheep in the pasture of the Word. You can't preach to anyone else if you are gasping for air.

I try to read four chapters a day. I don't always make it. (Especially for you younger pastors: Did you know that if you discipline yourself to read four chapters a day, you read through the whole Bible every year?) Isn't that a worthy and reachable goal? No one has to be a great scholar or have outstanding gifts to do this. You put yourself before the living words of the Holy One of Israel. How can something not happen to you?

After I finish reading, then I pray. We all know that prayer is not a Means of Grace. First the preacher listens, then the preacher speaks.

MY PRAYERS TODAY

Confess _____ _____ _____	People _____ _____ _____
Thank _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Needs, Plans, Worries & Ideas _____ _____ _____	

In this world you will have trouble, but take heart; I have overcome the world (John 16:33)

I made a little pattern to help me. Of course it's not original with me—just ask Peter the Barber. And yes, I can actually pray without it. But I'm a person who easily loses his concentration. This little outline helps me in a way that I suppose is akin to how journaling helps some people think. I list four matters on my conscience and confess them. I list four specific gifts for which to thank God. I make myself write down ten names or initials. The last section is a hodgepodge of hopes, dreams, needs, and half-baked ideas. Brother, you do it your way and improve on my idea. But hear Luther:

"Whenever I happen to be prevented by the press of duties from observing my hour of [Word and] prayer, the entire day is bad for me. Prayer helps very much and gives us a cheerful heart, not on account of any merit in the work, *but because we have spoken with God and found everything to be in order.*"

You know that by "prayer" he meant "Word and prayer." Preacher, your morning Word and prayer will serve you well as you present devotions in meetings of every type, hospital visits, confirmation Bible classes, unexpected phone counseling, difficult face-to-face conversations, and finding the love to make outreach a part of your week.

The best part of a morning devotion is the sweet experience of a clear conscience. "Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love," (Ps 143). Battered and fearful hearts know no finer way to spend time. Perhaps the second-greatest benefit of a morning devotion is its cumulative value for your preaching. Your preparation, your product, and your confidence to step before God's people to preach are going to grow steadily.

Your Bible becomes an old friend in a new way. Notes in the margins, color outlining, coffee drips, underlinings, question-marks, hi-lighting, and tear stains are no longer merely the by-products of a professional scribe. They become among a preacher's most prized possessions, because they are hard-earned in the wee hours while the rest of the house sleeps.

Lokal-Gedächtnis

Dr. Becker was an absolute wonder for the sheer amount of the Bible he'd memorized. He told his students that one key to this is to use the same edition of the Bible as much as possible. It is a huge help in memorizing and retaining a feel for the outline and flow of a given book. Plus you get the benefit of Lokal-Gedächtnis.

One thing I never prepared for was the wearing out of the Bible I bought at Sem. And now that Bible edition is out of print! (NIV editors continue to make small text and format changes). Sure, one can get a book rebound, which I've done (\$100) to preserve my personal glosses. But it's helpful to have a couple copies of the same Bible around, for pulpit, travel, vacancy pulpit, and desk.

Bottom line for young guys: it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to obtain another copy (or two) of the very same edition of the Bible you now use regularly. In ten years, you will be congratulating yourself.

You Can Print That

1. "O Lord, I know my helplessness, so I pray thee never let it come to this, that in the hardness of my heart I harden myself in impenitence, so that thou must cast me off forever."

George Stoeckhardt
(*Biblical History of the New Testament*)

2. "Sin demands to have the sinner alone. It withdraws the sinner from the community. The more isolated individuals are, the more destructive will be the power of sin over them; the more deeply they become involved in it, the more disastrous is their isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. In the darkness of the unexpressed, it poisons the whole person.

In confession, the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the open.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(*Spiritual Care*)

3. "Whether the Father gave him bread or whether the Father gave him failure as his portion (Mt 11:25-27), Jesus gave thanks."

Martin Franzmann
(*Grace Under Pressure*)

4. "The final and most complete frustration is death. Nobody escapes it, and everybody wishes he might. Death cuts off, cleanly and decisively, all personal projects or programs. We try to arrange for a kind of continuance by having children, but that is not as satisfactory as we wish it to be. Death utters its definite NO to our going any farther. It relegates every one of us to the ash heap. It's the most humiliating thing that can happen to a man. It puts an end to all our dreams. It stops the future."

Herbert F. Lindemann
(*A Sick World and the Healing Christ*)

5. "Write with nouns and verbs, not with adjectives and adverbs. The adjective hasn't been built that can pull a weak or inaccurate noun out of a tight place."

E.B. White
(*The Elements of Style*)

6. "The entire Bible is the unfolded name of God."

Franz Pieper
(*Christian Dogmatics*)

The Introduction to the Sermon

All eyes are on the pastor. No worshiper's late night has yet caused him to drowse. The preacher hasn't lost anyone due to missing transitions.

Right here the man in the pulpit is ready to lay the big anecdotal introduction on them.

I wonder if the very beginning of the sermon -- when you have everyone's attention -- might rather be an excellent time to a) ask a hard question, or b) state a difficult Bible truth. The hearers' minds are fresh. Sock them, to put it another way.

Later on, when after six to eight minutes you need a change of pace, bring in your biggest and best illustration. You and your hearers will be grateful for it at that point.

Pastor Tom Jeske, Omaha, Nebraska

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

If you have any questions or comments about
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