

# PREACH

*the Word*

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

## THE SHEPHERD UNDER PRESSURE

The ministry of the Word is not easy on the nerves; how strange to reflect further that many of its problems are of my own making. It's a fact that nearly all professional people in our congregations are required to participate in ongoing learning. But what sort of preacher pursues continuing education? Show-off scholars? Shoe-shiners and apple-polishers? Guys without enough real ministry going on to keep them busy?

### My Reasons to Avoid Summer School

For goodness' sake, I'm too old for this.

And who'd preach for me while I'd be away?

I wasn't much of a student back in school.

My wife won't like being left at home.

Who is supposed to pay for this little experiment?

My congregation will view this as a vacation.

(Add your reason here)

### A Second Opinion

From the January 2005 issue of *Faith and Fellowship* (official publication of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren):

- According to recent polls, 80% of seminary and Bible school graduates who enter the ministry will leave the ministry within the first five years.
- 90% of pastors said their seminary or Bible school training did only a fair to poor job of preparing them for ministry.
- 70% of pastors polled said the only time they spend studying the Word is when they are preparing their sermons.
- 70% of pastors do not have a close friend, confidante, or mentor.
- 80% of pastors' wives feel pressured to do things and be something in the church that they really are not.
- The majority of pastors' wives surveyed said that the most destructive event that has occurred in their marriage and family was the day they entered the ministry.

(Interview with Gaylan Mathiesen, Professor of Missions at Lutheran Brethren Seminary).



### Summer Quarter and the Preacher

Tell the truth: are you grappling with restlessness or bitterness? Do you feel as if something *has* to change in your ministry? Have you thought of resigning? Is your preaching suffering ... or are your people suffering under your preaching?

A wish for our ministerium: that each pastor could try SQ for its 3-week session once every 5 years of ministry. To get back to Mequon is a rare experience. Sit at the dinner table with this classmate, that prof, two home missionaries, a young CELC pastor from Europe. Chapel worship is packed each morning with 125 voices.

The three weeks force you to think about something other than the problems and people of your parish.

(I still remember at one point during my ministry, our Circuit Pastor, in his 50s, went to SQ for the first time. He admitted that he was a little nervous, but that he wanted to set an example for the men he served).

Sure, it will take some planning; sure, the classroom demands some concentration. But the three weeks fly by, and just think

*Continued on page 2*

## TO STAND IN JOY BESIDE YOU (PART 1 OF 2)

Prof. Arnold Koelpin, New Ulm, MN

### Bridegroom/Bride Imagery in Preaching

Preaching the Word deals with Christian images, not abstract but concrete, life-like, vivid, intimate, moving images. God with us on earth is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). Through Christ our preaching becomes the heart-warming story of the lost and found, of paradise lost and regained. Jesus restores God’s image to us, returning what was originally lost through Adam’s sinful break with God. But the breakthrough came in the Second Adam (Ro 5:15). Jesus finds us. And, like early Christians, we tell others in our excitement “We have found the one ... Jesus of Nazareth” (Jn 1:45)

Such sermonizing does not use abstract images. It deals with a *mystery* now fully revealed (Col 1:26). The mystery of Jesus’ work is the subject of worship. We hymn its message in song as did the early Church – “the mystery of godliness is great: he appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit ... seen by angels ... preached among the nations ... believed on in the world ... taken up in glory” (1 Ti 3:16). People need to hear God’s mystery from our preaching. This touches our relationship to God and neighbor.

### The Bridal Image

Since Eden, no images project our relationship to God in a more stark and natural way than birthing and marriage. A single command of God to our original parents signaled life in God’s creation. This creative word from God has to do with the life’s beginnings and continuation, with the gift of earthly life and the intimacy of marriage, with sex and family. To Adam and Eve – Man and Woman, Earthling and Life, male and female, human beings both – God gave his creative word by a dynamic command: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gn 1:27-28).

What God commands, he fulfills. He gives the power to do what he commands and establishes the marriage union to carry out his divine will in an orderly way. So “a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh” (Gn 2:24). Through the union of the two sexes in marriage, God acts to fill the earth with people, to honor the intimacy of marriage, and to bring glory to himself (1 Co 11:11-12).

### Using the Bridal Image

But over and above human relationships, the images of birthing and marriage mirror and echo God’s relationship to us in the Church (Eph 5:31-32). Since Eden, birthing and wedding are God’s expressions used to proclaim reunion and reconciliation with God. In baptism we are “re-born”. Through the Gospel we are “re-united” with God. No images are more stark, natural and real to depict God and us in the new life of faith than the ones implanted in God’s creative order. None bring the *emotions* of faith to the fore more wholly and intensely. The bride-groom/bride relationship, anchored in human life and sexuality, is so strong and vivid an image that it brings joy to the heart of all believers. The bride/bridegroom’s love relationship evokes a happiness that takes Christians captive to joy, and anticipates a final reunion with God at death.

*Part 2 follows in the next issue.*

*Continued from page 1*

what comes home with you! Bible classes, sermon material, divorce counseling, not to mention the trust built between brothers who didn’t know each other personally.

Forget about any competitive aspect like back in high school or college. The profs treat you and your fellow pastors like soldiers on leave from the battle line.

Some doubts, some fears, perhaps some anger, more than a little self-pity and maybe even need-less regional or personal competitiveness are left in the dumpster as you drive away from that beautiful Sem campus. SQ is not about a grade or a degree – let SQ be about a certain invigorated Lutheran preacher.



## THE PREACHER AND WINDSHIELD TIME

Do you have the Bible on CD for your car? Even a trip downtown to the hospital will allow you to listen to a dozen psalms or the whole of an epistle. This can truly salvage your day if it started out hectic.

A couple Saturday afternoons each month I drive 90 minutes to serve a vacancy. On the trip down, I’m nervous with a pending sermon. The trip home in the dark is different, a gray time drained of energy and ideas.

*Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter*, an audio book written by Thomas Cahill (*How the Irish Saved Civilization*), changed that. Mindless windshield time disappeared for me into a story of blood and bronze, of gods, duty, and family. Here’s the mind of the ancient Greek on his homeland, hospitality, Homer, homosexuality and Hades. This is a series of stories using Greek *words*, words spoken and sung and acted and written down, that Greek language we Lutheran preachers care so much about.

## THREE FROM WALTHER

- 1 “The *forma* of a Christian – that which makes a person a Christian – is that he knows how to seek his salvation in Christ and thus to escape the Law.”... (Luther: ‘In your tribulations you will become aware that the Gospel is a rare guest in men’s consciences, while the Law is our daily and familiar companion.’)” (p 49)
- 2 “The Savior himself says that ‘many receive the Word with joy,’ (Mt 13:20), but smother the sprouting germ when tribulations arise ... tedium regarding spiritual affairs, sluggishness in prayer, negligence in hearing the Word of God, contempt which Christians have to suffer from worldly men, etc ... in cases like these the Pietists declare that there had been no conversion. But does not the Lord say: ‘For a while they believe?’” (Lk 8:13) (p 368)
- 3 “Forgiveness of sin must not be proclaimed to impenitent and secure sinners ... When I know that a person is not in a condition to have the Gospel preached to him, I must not proclaim it to him. However, when I speak in public, the situation is different. *There I must take into consideration chiefly the elect children of God.*” (p 39)

## ON BEING A PREACHER OF THE CROSS

Pastor Phil Hirsch, Manhattan, KS

Best little book I’ve read in recent years.

Am I being guilty of that tendency in Baby Boomers – noted and derided by many – to trumpet something as if it were “the first,” or “the greatest,” “never been seen before?” Or have I been shallow in my understanding of Lutheran Christian teaching? Am I being hoodwinked by an ELCA theologian who is taken to task in our *Quarterly* (Summer 2004) for his un-Lutheran understanding of sanctification? Or is Luther’s *theologia crucis* simply such a rare bird, that to have its message compared to the *glory story* is truly a breath of fresh air?

Why don’t you read *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Eerdmans), by Gerhard Forde, and then tell me what you think?

The Preface and the Introductory Matters are worth the purchase price by themselves. The author gives three reasons for writing the book:

- 1 *To fill a need*: “to make a modest addition to the understanding of the Theology of the Cross” (p. vii)
- 2 *To speak against a Theology of the Cross that has become sentimentalized*, “especially in an age that is so concerned about victimization. To be sure, [the theology of the cross] speaks much about suffering. A theologian of the cross, Luther says, looks at all things through suffering and the cross. It is certainly true that in Christ God enters into our suffering and death. *But* in a theology of the cross it is soon apparent that we cannot ignore the fact that suffering comes about because we are at odds with God and are trying to rush headlong into some sort of cozy identification with him” (p. viii) ...

“It is evident that there is a serious erosion or slippage in the language of theology today ... to take a common example, *we apparently are no longer sinners, but rather victims*, oppressed by sinister victimizers whom we relentlessly seek to track down and accuse” (p. ix). “The language of sin, law, accusation, repentance, judgment, wrath, punishment, perishing, death, devil, damnation, and even the cross itself - virtually one-half of the vocabulary - simply disappears. It has lost its theological legitimacy and therefore its viability as communication” (p. x). (One suspects that Forde is reflecting on the theology he must be hearing on a regular basis in his home church).

- 3 And in the Introductory Matters, the *author compares* the most common overarching story we tell about ourselves - the *glory story* - to the *cross story*. “One of the decisive questions in the battle between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross will always be the question of the will. A theology of glory always leaves the will in control. It must therefore seek to make its theology attractive to the supposed ‘free will.’ *A theology of the cross assumes that the will is bound* and must be set free. The cross story does that. Either it claims us or it doesn’t.” (p. 9)



Continued on page 4

## YOU CAN PRINT THAT

- 1 "I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching, not ready for writing out, until *we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as a crystal*. I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labor in my study."

J.H. Jowett, quoted by Haddon Robinson (*Biblical Preaching*)

2. "Airlines require that twice a year pilots spend a week retraining and sharpening their skills. When I asked them why retraining is required so often, the answer was 'Because people's lives depend on how skilled we are.' That's true of ministry as well. At Saddleback, we offer a basic training conference for church leaders at least once a year."

Rick Warren (*The Purpose-Driven Church*)

- 3 "Young people especially have a finely-developed sense of whether somebody merely wants to 'influence' them, or whether here is a man who has seen something that hit him and overpowered him and to which he must now bear witness no matter what it costs."

Helmut Thielecke (*The Trouble with the Church*)

- 4 "The world takes offense and is provoked by the Gospel of Christ, because it will not trust in the grace of God, but rather in its own works and merits. And again the world takes offense at Christ because he is so utterly poor and wretched. And again, that as he carries his cross ... he admonishes his followers to take their cross and to follow him through all manner of temptations and afflictions. To this the world is especially hostile. *Thus is our dear Lord Christ everywhere in the world an annoying preacher.*"

Martin Luther (sermon, Third Sunday in Advent, 1544)

- 5 "... *sympathy for the reader*. [He] felt that the reader was in serious trouble most of the time, floundering in a swamp, and that it was the duty of anyone attempting to write English to drain this swamp quickly and get the reader up on dry ground, or at least to throw a rope."

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

Then detonate the theological theses of the *Heidelberg Disputatio*. A brief section of Reflections follows each. It's helpful that the author makes no attempt to make Luther's teaching relevant in a contemporary way. Forde (who gets such a low grade for his role in ELCA's early 80's *Christian Dogmatics*) appears in this 1997 book to let Luther's theses say what they mean and mean what they say.

A part of the struggle for the 21st century confessional Lutheran Christian pastor is to walk (and to serve our people with the gospel with the goal that they also walk) the narrow Lutheran road between mainline Christianity's message of, um, well, what? ... and the Fundamentalist/Evangelicals' legalistic "biblicist" message. At times, we must admit getting pulled too much to one end of the pendulum swing or the other. Perhaps for this pastor, it has been too much in the direction of the Fundamentalists/Evangelicals and their "biblical" teaching. It seems that Gerhard Forde is one writer who has seen the other end of the pendulum's swing. He wishes to help others avoid it by pointing to Luther's "*Crux sola est nostra theologia*," what Forde calls "the only ultimate hope" (p. xiv). It seems that anyone who wishes to avoid the false extremes of American Christianity will be well-served by working through this accessible, 115-page book.

I greatly appreciated being led through the Heidelberg Disputation and being forced to think about how the cross story is so different - at its core - from the glory story.

*To my band of brothers in the preaching ministry: why not make it a goal this week to look over the menu for 2005's WLS Summer Quarter? In your morning devotions, ask your Father if this could be your time to break out and make a run for it.*

Pastor Tom Jeske  
Omaha, Nebraska

**QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?** If you have any questions or comments about *Preach the Word*, feel free to contact this year's editor directly at [tomjeske@phonet.com](mailto:tomjeske@phonet.com)

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