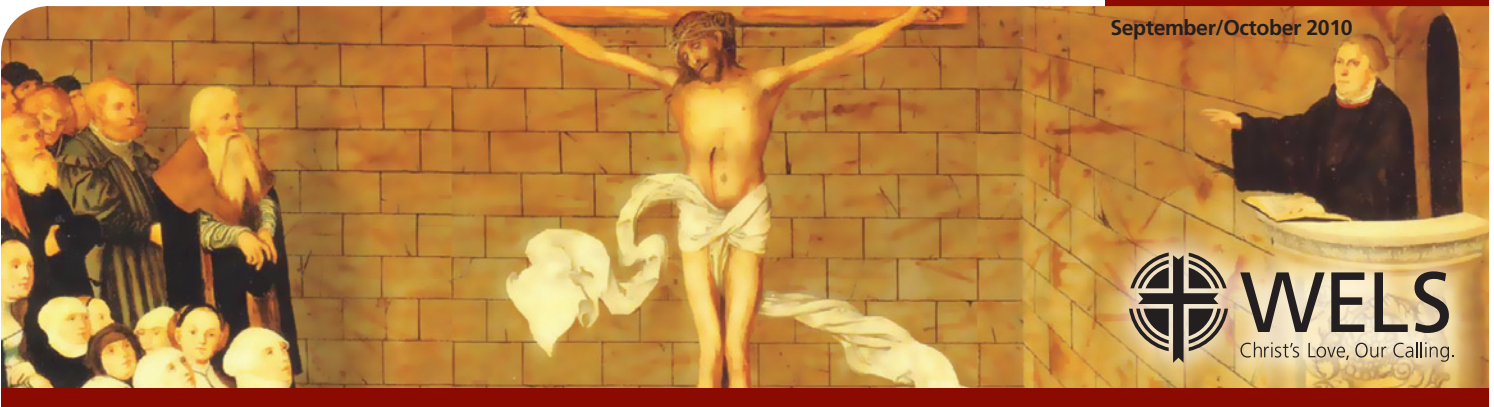


# Preach the Word

Vol. 14 No. 1

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## Proclaim Grace!

By Richard Gurgel

This issue introduces a comprehensive two-year program for growth in preaching for WELS pastors entitled Proclaim Grace!

While for thirteen volumes every issue of *Preach the Word* has focused on preaching with greater conviction and clarity, these two volumes seek to work as a coordinated whole to address ten key issues (page 3) that challenge us as we face the task of proclaiming the gospel Sunday by Sunday.

### How Beautiful Are Your Feet?

How critical this task! "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isaiah 52:7) As we step up to preach, God calls us to have the most beautiful feet in his kingdom. Like messengers in ancient Israel running on Judah's mountains with victorious news from distant battles, we are messengers in Zion. We run with news of a gory wooden cross and a glorious empty tomb, news of the comfort of Jesus' sitting at his Father's right hand and his coming glory in the clouds. We proclaim grace: Jesus has utterly defeated our every enemy.

Such is preaching's privilege—and its awesome challenge. How do we stay nimble as we run on Zion's mountains? There are pitfalls aplenty waiting to trip us as we run.

How justly powerful are the hurting voices and ministry challenges crying for attention in parish ministry! Our task of running as heralds can be jostled far back into the pack of competing priorities.

How easily we let apparently familiar terrain lure us into complacency as we fail to note each text's unique topography. The joy of that week's proclamation evaporates before we ever leave our studies.

*We use First Article gifts to proclaim Second Article truths with Third Article confidence.*

How quickly we can turn preaching into a lonely and discouraging solo run. We leave behind those willing to run by our side.

But does all this matter? Is it all that important to run well since the Word doesn't receive its power from us?

Here a statement from our systematics' notes proves invaluable. In the locus on the Word, our notes state: "the mode of operation of the word is both supernatural and psychological."

By the supernatural working of the Word our fathers remind us the Spirit's power always accompanies the Word. By the psychological

*Continued on next page*

### A New Look and a New Editor

For thirteen volumes and 78 issues, PTW has encouraged and enriched preachers. This issue brings the first redesign since 1997 and welcomes a new editor, Prof. Richard Gurgel. For two years and twelve issues he will share a variety of approaches designed to help pastors grow in their privileged duty of proclaiming God's Word. Prof. Gurgel recently completed doctoral work with a focus on professional growth for preachers. He was appointed in 2010 to lead the seminary's continuing education efforts part-time while also continuing to teach part-time. We are delighted that he has consented to lead preachers on a journey of discovery and enrichment through this newsletter.

Recent seminary graduates will recognize the image above from Cranach's altar painting in the Wittenberg Stadtkirche. A print hangs at the entrance of the seminary library. Seminary homiletics professors have used the image to make obvious points about Lutheran preaching. A commentary on the painting is at [wlsce.net](http://wlsce.net).

This new design of PTW is consistent with other recent changes in WELS communications. The companion newsletter, WTL, will not be redesigned until its current series is completed.

Bryan Gerlach

those same fathers remind us the Word works like any other human communication. It appeals to intellect, emotion, and will. The Word does not approach us as some unintelligible heavenly language which works faith even though no one knows what is being proclaimed. Such a misunderstanding reeks of Rome's *ex opere operato*.

### A Full Three Article Approach to Preaching

As Lutherans we thank God for the clear teaching on the inherent supernatural power of the means. We are convinced that all growth in faith and power for sanctified living comes only by the Spirit's power in the gospel. Our knowledge, skills, and abilities cannot convert an unbeliever or empower a child of God.

But right there we must be careful that we don't draw an unbiblical conclusion that would make us quite imbalanced in theology and ministry. We dare not ignore the simultaneous psychological working of the Word.

We can relate this simultaneous two-fold working to the three articles of the creed. The heart of our preaching is the gospel of Jesus Christ confessed in the Second Article. Lutherans strive to match Scripture in being Christocentric (John 5:39). When it comes to what makes the difference between damnation and salvation, with Paul we strive to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2).

What is more, our ultimate confidence as we proclaim that gospel is in Third Article truths. The gospel always carries with it the Spirit's power to change hearts. The Spirit through the gospel accomplishes the church's internal and external growth.

*There is room in the ministry for many and varied sets of First Article gifts. But there is no room in the ministry for a variety of effort.*

But we dare not ignore the First Article in our zeal to be Christocentric (Second Article) and confident in the gospel's power (Third Article). There we find a whole host of God's gifts to be summoned for gospel service. As Luther summarized that article in the Catechism, "I believe that God created me and all that exists, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities . . . . For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him." First Article blessings are given to use to God's honor and glory. Perhaps nowhere can these gifts be pressed into kingdom service more beneficially than in the proclamation of God's truth in the sermon.

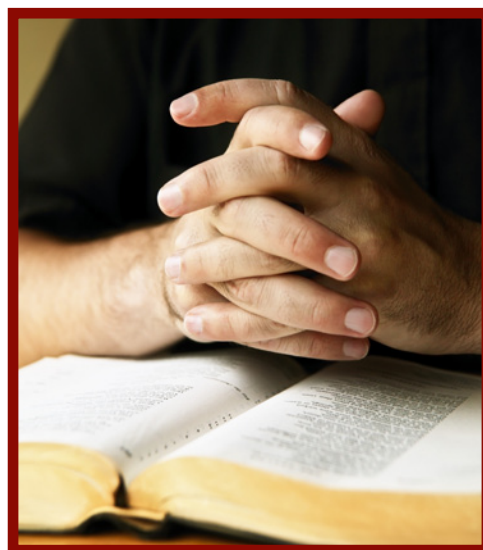
So, we use First Article gifts to proclaim Second Article truths with Third Article confidence. The gospel and the means, the Second and Third Articles, stand in magisterial position within the church. First Article gifts stand in ministerial position. Whatever First Article gifts God has given us, we use them to the fullest to make sure the gospel gets out and is heard.

As Lutherans we ask: "What does this mean?" For instance, when it comes to proclaiming Christ from the pulpit, we know that what we are doing is much more than exercising good communication skills (First Article). As we proclaim the gospel (Second Article), we unleash the Spirit's power (Third Article) on hearers' hearts.

But while proclaiming the gospel is much more than good communication, it is certainly not intended to be less. God has chosen to communicate his saving truth in the same outward form as any other human communication. So with Paul we work hard to set "forth the truth plainly . . . to every man's conscience" (2 Corinthians 4:2). We imitate Jesus as he summoned the simplest truths of nature or current events (Luke 13:4) to illuminate gospel truth. We mirror Paul's study of the Athenians (Acts 17) to understand what language will suffer the least distortion in this "spiritual" age.

Just as we dishonor the gospel if our confidence in changing hearts is our charisma and power of persuasion (shifting confidence from Third Article to First Article), so we easily allow gospel distortions if we truncate our theology and ignore the importance of God-given First Article gifts. With apologies to John Milton: those gifts also serve that only stand and wait on the gospel. We are, after all, the spiritual children of a man who walked marketplaces around Wittenberg so as to translate the Bible into a language his dear German people would easily grasp.

As Professor Tiefel remarked in the seminary's 1988 opening service, "There is room on this campus for a variety of gifts, but there is not much room for a variety of effort." There is indeed room in the ministry for many and varied sets of First Article gifts since Christ has distributed gifts in multifaceted variety (1 Peter 4:10). But there is no room in the ministry for a variety of effort. Gifts received are to be fanned into flame for zealous use. And nowhere is that more important than in the pulpit. That is the theological basis for this two year effort to strengthen our preaching!



# Proclaim Grace!

## An Overview of Volumes 14 & 15

### The Development of the Ten Key Issues

The ten key issues filling these pages for the next two years emerged from input received from almost 150 pastors and lay people from every synodical district.

One rich source of information was thirty-two interviews in 2008-2009 with parish pastors as well as with others who teach preaching or provide continuing education to pastors in our synod. Seven of the interviews were with those who teach preaching or provide continuing education beyond our circles. It was in reading and re-reading the 250 pages of interview transcripts that the key issues began to come into focus.

The key issues emerged also from feedback received from a separate pastors' survey. That survey, conducted in fall 2008, asked 33% of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduates from

1983, 1993, and 2003 to respond to more than 80 questions. The remarkable patience of the respondents needs to be commended. 79% of those asked completed the entire survey!

The key issues also reflect insights from forty lay men and women. Pastors who completed the survey provided names of one spiritually-mature lay man and woman from their congregations. Twenty men and twenty women were selected at random and asked to share their observation of strengths and weaknesses of preaching in WELS. Their unique view from the pew was critical for a complete picture.

Finally, two focus groups of pastors, professors, synodical leaders, and lay people had the opportunity to give feedback on the ten key issues (and the plan for how to address them) before these issues and the delivery plan were put into final form.



### The Issues Themselves

Here is the issue-by-issue focus for the next two years:

#### ◆ November-December 2010

Key Issue #1: Keeping preaching Christocentric

*Making sure the gospel is not assumed and recognizing textually legitimate and illegitimate ways of displaying Scriptures' gospel predominance*

#### ◆ January-February 2011

Key Issue #2: Growing in freshness and variety in proclaiming law and gospel

*Refusing to reduce law and gospel proclamation to a predictable caricature of itself – finding the unique way each text proclaims those truths*

#### ◆ March-April 2011

Key Issue #3: Guarding sufficient time for sermon work in busy schedules

*Helping resolve the tension between time spent with people and time spent in the Word – practical ways to shape schedules to reflect preaching's importance*

#### ◆ May-June 2011

Key Issue #4: Making the most of time in the Word

*Strengthening our personal devotional lives and mirroring such personal application of the Word in our "professional" study – strengthening/renewing original language skills*

#### ◆ July-August 2011

Key Issue #5: Partnering with the pew

*Making more of the encouragement available in the body of Christ as we train and equip lay men and women to be fuller partners in preaching*

#### ◆ September-October 2011

Key Issue #6: Partnering with peers

*Making more of the encouragement available in the body of Christ as iron sharpens iron among brothers in ministry*

#### ◆ November-December 2011

Key Issue #7: Proclaiming the gospel to a storied postmodern culture

*Seeing opportunities and*

*overcoming barriers so the Word can be heard by those affected by the culture around us*

#### ◆ January-February 2012

Key Issue #8: Preaching sanctification flowing from and empowered by the gospel

*Recognizing what makes Lutherans unique in a Christ-centered approach to preaching sanctification*

#### ◆ March-April 2012

Key Issue #9: Growing in sermon delivery that honors the gospel

*Working towards an ever more fluent and free delivery that displays an understanding of the dynamics of good communication*

#### ◆ May-June 2012

Key Issue #10: Imitating scriptural variety in our preaching styles

*Paying attention not only to what Scripture says but also to how it says it – allowing the text itself to form both content and style*

#### ◆ July-August 2012

*Encouragements for continued growth in preaching beyond this effort*

## Proclaim Grace Is Your Project!

Joel Gerlach, in his 1994 essay "Revitalizing Our Preaching," shared this comment from a mission counselor:

*I am reasonably certain that the one area of ministry that is pursued least in either formal or informal continuing education is preaching. It is a rare pastor who has read even one book on homiletics since graduating from the seminary. A renewal of preaching will not happen unless preachers themselves are convinced of the value of continuing to study the theory and practice of preaching.*

I confess to beginning research on this project wondering if this observation still applied. But, thankfully, current reality seems vastly different! In interviews and survey, pastor after pastor gave concrete evidence of a high interest in preaching growth.

*In interviews and survey, pastor after pastor gave concrete evidence of a high interest in preaching growth.*

Abundant supporting evidence will be shared during these two volumes of *Preach the Word*. Not only have the key issues been developed from field input, but many brothers shared helpful insights related to each key issue. This two year project may have sprouted in Mequon, but it will reveal roots buried deeply in pulpits around the synod.

But that evidence so far comes from about 10% of WELS pastors. There is no doubt more to discover. That's why issue by issue *Preach the Word* will ask you to share samples of sermons or questions or insights or resources related to each upcoming key issue.

How can all of that fit into a brief newsletter? It won't, and it isn't meant to. As part of WLS's new continuing education initiative, the seminary is launching a new Web site devoted entirely to continuing education ([wlsce.net](http://wlsce.net)). One section of that Web site will be dedicated entirely to this effort. As each new issue hits your mailbox, the goal is to have multiple companion pieces available online.



As we work together, you will find:

- more in-depth articles that go beyond what this brief newsletter format allows
- tools and resources developed by preachers
- suggested books, essays, and articles on preaching – along with study guides for use by individuals and especially by circuits or other study groups
- sermons in print and/or video format that model the key issue (with study guides)

This project's interactive design is meant to communicate a larger message to pastors. As the seminary expands its continuing education work, we are well aware that the most beneficial growth in ministry often happens in study among brothers right where ministry takes place. A big part of the work of WLS's new CE institute (*Grow in Grace*) will be encouraging and strengthening the growth that is already going on among brothers individually, in study groups, and in conferences and circuits. *Grow in Grace: the Institute for Continuing Education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary* is not all about credits and classrooms, degrees and diplomas. It is all about what its motto declares: *partnering in the lifelong pursuit of spiritual and professional growth.*

*Grow  
in  
Grace*



### YOUR INPUT PLEASE!

- Key Issue #1: Keeping Preaching Christocentric
- Key Issue #2: Growing in Freshness and Variety in Proclaiming Law and Gospel

By September 10 for Key Issue #1, and by October 1 for Key Issue #2, please submit any questions, tools, resources (such as books, essays, or articles) or ideas related to keeping our preaching Christ-centered or in maintaining freshness and variety in proclaiming law and gospel.

If you have any sermons that you have heard (or preached) that you believe model well either of those two key issues, please feel free to share those as well.

The simplest way to submit questions or ideas is to use the "Ideas" tab on the new CE Web site: [wlsce.net](http://wlsce.net).