

*This sermon was preached on Tuesday, September 21, 2010, in the auditorium of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary at the communion service that was part of the seminary's Symposium on Worship & Outreach. The preacher was Pastor Jonathan Hein of Beautiful Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church, Summerville, South Carolina.*

## BE A GOSPEL MAN

**I am not ashamed of the gospel,  
because it is the power of God  
for the salvation of everyone who believes...**  
*Romans 1:16*

So which one are you? Are you a worship guy? Or are you an outreach guy?

I think it's fairly common that we use those labels. Sometimes we do it by divine call: the seminary has a professor of worship and a professor of evangelism. Other times we do it informally, according to personal interests or skills. In a dual parish, one pastor does all the worship planning while the other spearheads the outreach efforts. At the very least, we put others into what we think is the appropriate box. If it were announced that the Board for Home Missions was opening three new churches this year, there are guys men know – outreach guys – who you would expect to see on the call list. There are guys who you would not expect on such a list.

We have men who have interests in areas beyond worship and outreach – discipleship, youth ministry, stewardship. But I don't know that those people are identified as such. In my years of ministry, I can't recall anyone ever saying, "So-and-so is a fantastic stewardship guy." But "worship guy" or "outreach guy"... I hear that all the time. I have heard men refer to themselves in such terms. Perhaps it's because those two tasks are so essential, so basic, to a congregation's ministry. We focus on them. We discuss them more than any other areas of ministry. After all, we're gathered here at this Symposium to focus on just those two tasks. And so it begs the question. Which one would you be more likely to identify yourself with? Are you a worship guy? Or are you an outreach guy?

On the one hand, it's wise to acknowledge that the parts of the body are not interchangeable, that the body suffers when you try and have a hand do the work of an ear. Moreover, life would be boring and ministry would be redundant if we all had homogenous gifts.

But on the other hand, it is also wise for us to remember that it is probably not wholesome to *aspire* to be a worship guy or an outreach guy... to want to be identified primarily as such. I think St. Paul would have found that at best an odd ambition, and at worst spiritually unhealthy. In that well-known verse that I just read, Paul pushes us to think of ourselves differently – not as a worship guy, nor as an outreach guy. He encourages us: be a Gospel man.

**I am not ashamed of the Gospel**, he says. That's remarkable. For what had the proclamation of the Gospel gotten Paul? He had been imprisoned in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica, and smuggled out of Berea. And that happened when he did his work in the outward territories. But for a long time now, Paul had expressed his desire to cut to the heart of the Empire, to get to Rome. And Rome was not just a political center. It was the religious capital too, blending polytheism with emperor worship. Your Roman patriotism was measured by your willing paganism. Those who didn't engage in emperor worship – such as Christians – were often made scapegoats of the Empire's problems. If Paul had been brutalized and beaten and bloodied while working on the edges of the Empire, what was going to happen when he peddled his wares in Rome itself? It was reasonable to expect he was going to face some major hardships. And so he writes to the Roman Christians living there in part to assure them that his delay in getting to Rome was purely a matter of circumstance. His delay was most certainly not born out of a fear of sharing the Gospel there. **"I'm not ashamed of the Gospel!"** he states.

And why was Paul proud to proclaim the Gospel? He immediately explains. **"It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."**

**Comment [g1]:** Notice how Pastor Hein wisely introduces an element of the malady (specific law) of the sermon already in the introduction. This helps give the listeners a reason to travel with him into the exposition of the text. It builds anticipation that an important answer to a question of faith and life (and here of ministry) will be found before the "Amen!" is spoken.

If we assume such interest (and thank God for how many do await the Word eagerly!) our sermon may miss many who come to worship that day distracted or disinterested!

About a month ago, Hurricane Gaston blew by the South Carolina coast about two-hundred miles offshore. So my family and I did what lots of Lowcountry families do when a hurricane gets near. We went to the beach. The wind of the hurricane whips up massive waves, great for surfing or body-boarding. I walked to the tip of the barrier island we were on. It was an amazing sight. The waves that hit the edge of the island were at least ten feet high. And everyone that hit would take a visible bite out of the beaches and dunes, pulling five or six inches of coast back into the ocean. One of the ocean-side county parks started that day with 400 parking spots. It ended with about 50. It's amazing, the amount of power that God has put into the sea... the power that he has entrusted to nature. And yet not all the waters of the deep has the power of the water in a Dixie cup, which a pastor applies to the head of a sick newborn while speaking our Triune God's name, a name which is pure Gospel. Why? Because while God has given the ocean power to be a force of nature, he gives that tiny bit of water combined with the Gospel power for salvation.

Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel, because the Gospel's power brings about the most profound changes. It transforms the simple – water, Word, wine – into the sublime. It takes a sinner and instantaneously transforms his status to saint. It transforms that which is pointless into that which has purpose purposeful.

There really is no point in a group of people gathering together to sing songs about God, to observe ancient rites or rituals, to utter prayers and bring offerings. Worship is pointless if the Gospel is not front-and-center. I don't even care how much Scripture is read. Scriptures were read during the worship of Jesus' day. But that action only became purposeful when, as happened in our Gospel lesson, it was demonstrated that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Scripture. Likewise, in these latter days, there are plenty of popular preachers who fill seats, sell books, tug at heartstrings, all while quoting plenty of Scripture. But their ministry is largely pointless, because the Gospel is largely absent.

There is absolutely no point in having a strategy of how to penetrate your community... no point in going door to door... no point in "building bridges"... unless you also have the courage and conviction to share the Gospel. You can have four dozen women in your mommies-day-out. You can have capacity enrollment in your preschool. You can have 2000 people come to your church carnival. But if you do not also proclaim the Gospel to those people, it's utterly pointless. All those "accomplishments" are as spiritually pointless as what those zealous Mormon missionary teams with their black ties and backpacks do. It's churchy work. It's just not Gospel work.

Paul had not risked his life... Paul was not going to Rome... just to do churchy work. He was coming for a larger, nobler reason. He describes it in the very first verse of this epistle, when he introduces himself. **Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.** Paul was going to Rome, not because he was a worship guy and was looking forward to discussing what instruments the church at Rome would use for their weekly worship. (Although, I wouldn't be surprised if Paul enjoyed such conversations.) Paul wasn't going to Rome because he was so eager to walk the many streets around Palatine Hill. (Although, I'm sure Paul intended to do that.) Paul was going to Rome not as a worship guy or an outreach guy, but as a Gospel man. The Gospel was his mission. The Gospel was his message. The Gospel was his motivation. The Gospel was both tool and goal, both means and end.

**I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.**

We read that well-known verse and we think, "I'm right there with you, Paul! I'm not ashamed of the Gospel either!" But do you think that's really what Paul means? Do you think the bar is so low, that we're doing good work if we simply aren't embarrassed by the Gospel? Of course not! Paul is using a figure of speech (litotes) where you emphasize what you mean by denying its opposite. If you think the Packers are a good team you might say, "Those Packers aren't too bad this year!" If I say, "You ain't lying," I'm trying to emphasize that what you say is Gospel truth. Likewise, when Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel," what he's actually trying to stress is that the Good News of Christ is a great source of pride for him. It is his entire life. It consumes him. Could we still say, "I'm right there with you Paul!?" I think it's hard to say you're consumed by the Gospel if you like to think of yourself in the terms of "worship guy" or "outreach guy."

There's the mission pastor who is down because his mission isn't growing as fast as he likes. He begins to slip. You see it initially in the way he follows up on prospects, almost apologetic about what he has to offer them. "Sorry we don't have more for your kids. We hope to grow into that." What an odd thing! He has shared the

**Comment [g2]:** Notice the beauty and symmetry of the language used here to share the beauty of the gospel. Notice in particular the threefold repetition of phrases to drive home a point.

Such threefold repetitions are common features of spoken rhetoric since it depends on purposeful repetition to highlight and drive home key points. Two parts often have a feel of too little, and four or more can easily become pedantic (although a fourfold repetition that works quite well, follows in a couple paragraphs). In classical rhetoric such repetition was called "anaphora."

A previous threefold repetition in the sermon (though simpler in format) occurred when Pastor Hein reminded us of Paul's ministry in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Two more threefold repetitions are coming two paragraphs later ("no point...no point...no point..." and "you can have...you can have...you can have." There are several other such repetitions scattered throughout the sermon.

**Comment [g3]:** The gospel of the day was Luke 4:14-22: Jesus preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth.

eternal Gospel with them, and yet apologizes! It's a bit like a surgeon who has just cut out a tumor, saving your life, and then apologizing, "Sorry I wasn't able to juggle for you while you were undergoing anesthesia. I'm still learning." That mission pastor's slipping of the spirit turns into a freefall when he begins to look for other ways to get God's Word done... to get the results that he wants. That pastor might be an outreach guy, but he's not much of a Gospel man.

There's the associate pastor who is called to plan worship and oversee administration. And so when Lent rolls around and the outreach pastor goes out canvassing in the community, inviting the community to come and hear the Easter Gospel, the worship-administrative guy stays back at church. "It's not really part of my call." Never mind that he sets a horrible example to his members, because you really can't ask your members to do something you aren't going to do yourself. What is much worse – if he can't find two hours in his weekly schedule to participate in an activity so basic and essential to Gospel ministry... well... I think that worship guy cannot in good conscience call himself a Gospel man.

There's the pastor who is certain he doesn't have time to do more outreach. After all, a sermon is twenty hours of work. Picking out the perfect hymns, choosing the perfect choir piece, writing the occasional special order of service – these all take time. Then there's the pastor who doesn't have the time to write his own sermon. He preaches that of others, regardless of Gospel quality, believing that he's a good enough actor to convince his people he's excited about a message which cost him no blood or sweat or tears. He justifies this by saying, "But I'm surrounded by so many lost. There's so much outreach to do!" In conducting their ministry in ways that are entirely comfortable to them... ways that fit their own personal preferences... such pastors prove they don't really understand the Gospel very well, at the center of which is a cross.

The Apostle also writes, "When I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16). If I'm honest with myself... if you're honest with yourself... then we must admit that there are times when we do indeed deserve nothing but woe, because our zeal for other things has surpassed our zeal for the Gospel. And even if those "other things" are noble in-and-of-themselves, like worship and outreach, they become sin when our love for the activity surpasses our love for the Gospel itself. Then, our most righteous acts become the filthiest of rags.

Yet, while we might all deserve woe, eternal woe is not in our future. How can we know this for certain? Simple! It is the promise of the Gospel.

Paul writes, "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my Gospel" (2 Timothy 2:8). Remember Jesus, because Jesus was the consummate Gospel man. His whole purpose in leaving his throne and entering our world was to fulfill the Gospel promise first made by God in Eden.

Remember Jesus, because if there was anyone who could have built a numerically booming ministry on the basis of razzle-dazzle, it was Jesus. My goodness! He made the lame to walk! He made the blind see. He caused demons to tremble. And yet, when Jesus would heal someone (proving he was the Son of God and therefore proving he had the authority to forgive sins) what would Jesus instruct that person to do? He'd instruct them *not* to tell others who had healed them... *not* to talk about the miracle. Jesus didn't want people following him for the razzle-dazzle – because of his healing power. He wanted people to follow him because of the Gospel's power. I'm looking at an auditorium full of hundreds of imperfect pastors. Fortunately, we all have the perfect pastor as our Savior!

Remember Jesus. Remember how the Good Shepherd became the sacrificial sheep, cleansing every one of his sub-shepherds of all the selfishness we display, not just on our bad days, but on our best days too. The sin we commit even as we conduct worship or engage in outreach – gone! It's down in Christ's love... nailed to the cross... buried under buckets of blood.

You feel guilty because there have been times when you have thought of yourself as "a worship guy" or "an outreach guy"... times when your love for a task has surpassed your love for Gospel ministry. Let your conscience be saved. For the ministry that we share wasn't given to us because of our zeal for the Gospel. It was given to

**Comment [g4]:** Notice how clearly Pastor Hein allows us to see the "so what" of the malady, the specific law, of the text. The pastor who has not seen himself depicted in these paragraphs (at least a close enough facsimile of himself) is not listening.

Notice also, other than importing "filthy rags" from Isaiah, and the "woe" of 1 Corinthians, the law in this whole section is spoken in language and imagery suggested by **this text**. This is **not** a "law template" from Pieper's dogmatics suddenly being lowered onto the text ("ka-chunk!")!

**Comment [g5]:** There is beautiful specific gospel in this section. If any criticism could be offered it would be this: almost a second text and its unique gospel language ("remember...remember...remember...") is introduced at this point. That creates a bit of a sense of being disjointed from the earlier portion of the sermon. Could not everything that is being said in this section be drawn straight from the language and imagery of Romans 1:16? Everything that is listed in these paragraphs is why we speak the same litotes with Paul, "I am not ashamed of the gospel because..." To keep the same "language" as the earlier sections of the sermon might have given the whole sermon an even tighter fit than it already has.

**Comment [g6]:** Notice how the specific wounds the law inflicted earlier are healed specifically by the gospel. The gospel in the abstract is wonderful ("all sins were laid on Jesus") but the gospel in the concrete ("for **this specific sin** that burdens your conscience you are forgiven") is what often brings special comfort and joy to our hearts!

A simple but critical rule of preaching is this: before you say "Amen!" heal specifically every specific wound inflicted! That also helps guard us from lapsing into generic gospel paragraphs!

us because of Christ's zeal for us. With Paul we say, "I became a servant of this gospel *by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power*" (Ephesians 3:7).

**I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation.** The Gospel grants salvation from our sin, from death, from hell. But there's more. Just as God's power raised Jesus from the dead, so also God's power enables us to live a new life. Thus, the Gospel is *also* God's power to save us from the one-dimensional, empty type of ministry that is the inevitable result when we start to think of ourselves too narrowly: worship guy, outreach guy. No! You are *better than that*, my friends! God has made you much more than that! He's made you a Gospel man!

Our song is that of the psalmist, who in the psalm we sang earlier (Psalm 96) lumped worship and outreach together – both fruits which are naturally produced by all those who have been touched by the Gospel.

**Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.** Worship. And in the very next verse...

**Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns."** Outreach.

Basking in the Good News of our salvation, we equally embrace, equally enjoy, equally participate in any and all opportunities to share the Gospel, be it from the podium of our classrooms or from the pulpit in our church or from the pavement in our neighborhood. For we are Gospel men.

We want to be known as nothing more. For we can be known as nothing greater.

Amen.

**Comment [g7]:** Here is one more threefold repetition!