

PREACH

Vol. 4 No. 2 *the Word* November/December 2000

Textual Preaching

There are three sources on which to base a sermon. The first is non-biblical literature assumed by the preacher to present a truth in an interesting way. When I was at my first parish, I served a vacancy about a half hour away. While returning from the Sunday service, I often listened to a Mormon preacher on the radio. He usually preached non-biblical sermons. Some poem or provocative piece of prose caught his attention during the week, and his sermon consisted of his musings on that literature. With his offerings of pious, practical wisdom he sought to comfort and edify his listeners. Some Sundays he rarely mentioned God at all. I find it hard to believe that any WELS preacher would ever preach a non-biblical sermon.

Then there is the sermon based on biblical truth in general. I remember a few years ago receiving a taped sermon, a sample from a series that preachers could subscribe to. The man who introduced the sermon said, "This sermon can be used with a variety of texts." He was right in the sense that the preacher never referred to a specific text. He was wrong in the sense that the sermon could be used with any one text because it wouldn't have done justice to any text. It didn't expound what any text said.

Actually, the sermon was an example of narrative preaching. (More about that in a future issue.) It consisted of two stories told in a very engaging way.

I listened with interest to both. The first illustrated salvation by God's grace without our works and presented biblical truth; the second spoke of "making your decision for Christ" and was not biblical. Whether the sermon parts presented orthodox or heterodox teachings, there was no text in sight, just interesting illustrations.

I can see some occasions when non-textual sermons might be used. Maybe we are setting aside one or a number of Sundays for special emphasis on stewardship, evangelism, etc. We might choose to preach on topics and bring in Scripture as it applies. Even in those cases, however, I would rather see a series of texts used and expounded. Perhaps this is an extreme reaction, but with non-textual (topical or biblical) sermons I get the feeling that the preacher is saying, "Here is what I have to say on the subject, and, look, the Bible agrees with me."

There are times when we inadvertently preach non-textual sermons with a text in front of us. I have had students tell me, "My vicarship supervisor told me that there are too many thoughts to cover in most texts, especially epistle texts. So just pick one thought, develop that, and forget about the rest of the text." Of course, if the preacher ignores what the rest of the text says about that one thought, he must search all over Scripture to develop it. In essence he is preaching a non-textual sermon.



The third source on which to base a sermon is a defined section of Scripture that we call a text. Our homiletics textbook *Preach the Gospel* states the chief reasons for preaching on a text:

1. A text offers a manageable and distinct part of the whole.
2. A text injects discipline into the homiletical process.
3. A systematic series of texts provides material for presenting more of God's instruction and encouragement than random selection according to the preacher's preferences can afford.
4. A variety of texts helps to insure freshness in preaching.

The seminary homiletics department makes no apologies for advocating textual preaching. In this volume of *Preach the Word*, an important criterion the writers of articles on sermon types will use is whether a sermon type contributes to or hinders textual preaching. The next two articles in this issue present a dialogue on the inductive style.

J. Westendorf

Confessions Of A Former Inductive Wanna-Be

By 1984 my sermon file had 5 years' worth of sermons, most of which were comprised of a theme and two, maybe three, parts. The themes were, for the most part, propositional statements deliberately drawn from the Bible text. Even with this "Thus saith the Lord" form, I did my best to let the sermon be a dialogue between the people and the Lord. I tried to answer their questions and to illuminate difficult concepts by means of illustrations. Overall, my early sermons had a prophetic quality to them. I spoke for God to the people. You could call them "deductive" sermons.

But there comes a time in a preacher's career when the sameness of weekly preparation makes him restless. It was just about then when I read a couple of books about inductive preaching. What attracted me was the promise that sermons could be an adventure where the listener and the pastor could move from one common experience to another, until, together, they reached the point God was trying to make in the sermon text. I felt that by preaching deductive sermons, I had been clobbering people with foregone conclusions and not respecting them enough to reach those same conclusions by their previous experience. The inductive method promised not to "drone along one flight above reality"; but to allow for more than just the listening process; to involve the people more; and to increase the preacher's credibility. With all those promises, who wouldn't want to be an inductive preacher?

So I studied the flow charts of inductive sermons. I read sample sermons and listened to audio tapes. Some of them were enthralling. Others were downright confusing. But, to my great disappointment none of them brought me any closer to Christ. I longed for the theology of the cross but they gave me "guideposts".

Over the next five years I tried giving the inductive method a Lutheran baptism. Since then I've decided to leave it to other Lutheran homileticians more capable than I.

These struggles have raised questions, especially about the not-so-subtle presuppositions given by the main proponents of the inductive method. If you are a parish pastor, beware of the assumption that you are preaching to the unbaptized. His sheep hear his voice. They don't feel clobbered by deductive statements like "Amen, I say to you," or "Thus saith the Lord," or "It is written." They rejoice in his word as a lamp to their feet and a light for their path—regardless of methodology. If you are preaching to the unconverted—or to the Old Adam—you may be tempted to think that the inductive method is the silver bullet that will ease a soul into conversion.

I offer some insights from a little book by William H. Willimon entitled, *The Intrusive Word* (1994, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI): "In our preaching, we need to help 'thinking people' discover how unable they are to think, how unintelligible their lives are, when left to think for themselves. We really have no idea what is happening to us until we meet the gospel, until the gospel helps us to name our pathologies—pathologies that are so widespread in this culture as to make them appear normal . . . That's why the gospel never asks for mere intellectual agreement. The gospel call is for conversion, detoxification, rebirth . . . Our preaching to the unbaptized must aim for conversion rather than mere agreement, evangelism rather than apologetics."

The Duke University professor continues, "Thus we can understand the waning interest in so-called inductive preaching, which begins not



with the biblical text, but rather with the hearer's experience and seeks, through the biblical text, to evoke or tap into certain aspects of the experience. Assuming that modern listeners recognize no authority other than that of their own experience, the inductive preacher bows to that authority and forms the sermon exclusively on the basis of what the preacher thinks the hearer already thinks. The listener's experience, as defined and described by the listener, is taken as preaching's point of origin" (p. 40).

In short, there will have to come a time in the inductive pattern of experiential illustrations when the hearer will have to make a quantum leap from experience (as it is defined by his mistaken world view) to God's conclusion (which can only be known by revelation). This calls for a radical egoectomy, performed by the Holy Spirit. For "the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God." (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Finally, the triumph of Lutheran preaching is not to avoid the scandal of the cross but to embrace it. Faith comes from hearing the message. And the message is, as Dr. Luther taught us, "the external Word."

Wayne A. Laitinen

A Look at the Inductive Sermon Form—Again!

For those of you who can actually remember what appeared on the pages of *Preach the Word* three years ago, the “confessions” of Pastor Wayne Laitinen about inductive preaching on page two of this issue may seem like a contradiction. In December 1997 Professor Jeske compared inductive and deductive form, and concluded, “I confess that the longer I serve in the ministry, the more attractive inductive preaching has become.” In this issue Pastor Laitinen says, “. . . I tried giving the inductive method a Lutheran baptism. Since then, I’ve decided to leave it to other Lutheran homileticians more capable than I.” I can hear the implied advice in those words: “You’d be better off leaving it alone, too.”

I believe this is more than a difference of opinion about the value of inductive preaching. It really is a difference of how inductive preaching is being viewed.

The preaching that Pastor Laitinen warns against assumes that a hearer will not accept the authority of the Word unless it is validated by one’s own experience. Therefore, the preacher must start where the people are and hope that they will come along with him.

This kind of preaching also assumes that the listeners will accept no point the sermon makes unless they can come to it on their own. They will be turned off by a theme and parts that are laid on them without their permission. Fred Craddock in his book, *As One Without Authority*, says, “Sermons that move inductively sustaining interest and engaging the listener do not have points any more than a narrative, a story, a parable, or even a joke has points.” There is a point, Craddock maintains, but the hearer arrives at it on his own.

In an article that appeared in the January 1992 issue of the *Concordia Journal*, entitled “Lutheran Preaching: Proclamation, Not Communication,” Robert Schaibley calls such preaching “communication preaching” which

occurs within a “synergistic” framework. He says, “Communication requires the cooperation of the hearer; without that cooperation there is no communication. Communication appeals to reflective reason for consent . . . The hearer is empowered to say, ‘What I know and see to be true, this I affirm; what I do not know or see to be true, this I deny.’”

In contrast to this type of preaching Schaibley describes what he calls “proclamation preaching.” This preaching is set in a “monergistic” framework. He says, “Proclamation requires the presence (obviously), but not necessarily the cooperation of the hearer; even without that cooperation proclamation occurs (assuming the Gospel has been voiced) . . . Because proclamation does not appeal to reflective reason, it does not . . . empower the hearer to become the final arbiter of the communication of truth. The hearer yet may say, ‘this I deny.’ But proclamation still has occurred, where the Word of the Gospel has been proclaimed, and there, as we publicly confess, ‘the Holy Spirit is given who works faith where and when it pleases God.’”

Can such “proclamation preaching” assume an inductive form without losing its essential character? I think it can, but proponents of inductive methodology probably would deny that it is truly inductive preaching. Many inductive preachers seek to avoid making assertions and making them authoritatively. Professor Jeske speaks only of delaying proclamation of such points until the particulars have been investigated. He says, “Inductive preaching postpones declarations and assertions until the listeners have had a chance to weigh the evidence, think through the implications, and then reach the conclusion along with the preacher.”

Inductive preaching in the broadest sense of the term is neutral. It does not

deny or doubt the authority of God’s Word. It makes no assumptions about the attitude of the hearers or what they are willing or unwilling to hear. It simply is a mode of logic that proceeds from the particulars of the text and perhaps the situation of God’s people to the general solutions and proclamations of God’s Word.

Sidney Greidanus in his book, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, (1998, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI) speaks of four different options of deductive and inductive preaching.

Deductive – First state the general point, then particularize it.

Inductive – Present particulars first; state the point last.

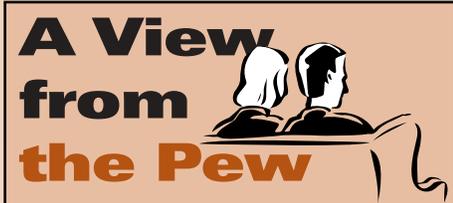
Deductive-Inductive – First state, then particularize, then restate at the last.

Inductive-Deductive – Present particulars first, next state the theme, then work out its implications.

In closing, let me just say that any sermon, inductive or deductive, should follow certain guidelines. First, it should be textual, making the main point (theme) and subpoints (parts) that the text makes. Those points should be made clearly so that the listener can confidently take hold of them, and not wonder if he actually heard them at all. Second, it should proclaim, not suggest (after all, preaching is *kerygma*, that is, proclamation). The very tone of the sermon should convey the thought, “This is what the Lord says,” not, “Can we agree that such and such thoughts are contained here that correspond to what I think?” Finally, of course, a sermon must contain explicit Law and Gospel, no matter what form it assumes to get there.

Encouragement and warning!
Both are in place when considering inductive preaching.

J. Westendorf



Dear Pastor,

Thank you for your sermons. Week after week, they're solidly textual and thoroughly evangelical. Your love for God's Word and God's people shines through every time you preach, and I wanted you to know it's appreciated.

Compared to the strengths of your preaching, its weaknesses are trivial. They do, however, detract from your effectiveness in the pulpit, and I thought you should know.

The problem, as I see it, pastor, is "filler." It's redundancies and unnecessary words. It's your predilection for verbosity. I've just engaged in a little of it myself in the hope that you'll get the point. Our "blessed, glorious Lord Jesus Christ" is made no more "blessed" nor "glorious" nor "Lord" nor "Christ" by our repeatedly calling him such. Call him "Jesus" once in a while. That's his name. When it comes to modifiers, the old rule still is good advice: "When in doubt, strike it out." When you start piling up modifiers, it sounds like you are treading water, waiting for your next thought to occur to you. We are waiting, too, and while we wait, we tune you out.

It's not just your phrases. It's your sentences. Sometimes you have so many coordinate and dependent clauses that at the end of the sentence I have no idea who is doing what anymore. Unfortunately, what should be a bone-chilling statement of God's law, or a soothing statement of his gospel, ends up losing much of its impact because you've buried it in a run-on sentence.

You could shorten your paragraphs as well. Three examples are not necessarily better than two. Often one good one is all you need.

Maybe the real problem is that I'm part of a TV generation. Our attention spans are short. The advertising world knows it; these days it comes at us, not even with short sentences, but with two- and three-word fragments. I'm not suggesting you preach that way; but I do wish you'd strive for impact, rather than exhaustive thoroughness, when you write.

That's the real problem, isn't it? Do you still write out your sermons? Forgive me, but sometimes you end up saying things that a literate person such as you couldn't possibly have put down on paper. I know you have a million other things to do, or maybe you've begun to feel you no longer need to write out a manuscript. Maybe you don't need to—but I don't think I've met the preacher who couldn't benefit from it. Please—at least occasionally—write out your sermon. Then go at it with a red pen. I think you'll be surprised by how much is there that doesn't need to be.

What I'm asking is that you take the real gems you manage to come up with every week and simply place them in our hands. We will get that much more benefit from your consistently excellent exegetical and organizational work. If that means you end short of twenty minutes on occasion, I promise, you won't hear a word of complaint from me.

I will be and remain,

Your grateful parishioner

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the Word

Preach the Word is published bimonthly by the WELS Commission on Worship
2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398 414/256-3265
FAX, 414/256-3899 • <brygerlach@aol.com>
<www.wels.net/sab/frm-cow.html>

James Westendorf, editor
<westendj@wls.wels.net>
Wayne A. Laitinen, managing editor