

PREACH

the Word

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CONNECTING TO THE WORD AND CONNECTING TO PEOPLE

Mark, the gardener for our church property, speaks highly of his pastor. "He preaches verse by verse from the Bible, and goes through the Bible book by book." I have heard similar words from others who attend the same "non-denominational" church that Mark attends.



"He preaches verse by verse from the Bible." WELS pastors want their people to say the same thing about them.

Preaching is exciting when eyes are following along in the text as the pastor preaches verse by verse.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus joyfully exclaimed, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

In this issue Mark Cordes continues his series on "The Exegetical Groundwork of Good Sermon Preparation" and Charles Degner completes his two part series on sermon illustrations.

Suggestions for future articles and comments can be sent to scdegner@aol.com.

THE BEST SOURCE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Do you need a good story to illustrate a truth in your sermon? The best source is the Bible itself. The rich word pictures and the wonderful stories of God's people give us illustrations for every truth we want to illustrate.

At the risk of sounding blasphemous, most preachers are not very skilled in using illustrations. We know the stories so well that we assume everyone will get the point if we just *mention* the story or refer to it briefly in our sermon. We don't really want to tell the whole story because that would take up too much time.

There was a comedian who died and went to heaven. He found the place in heaven where all the comedians went to tell their favorite jokes. "This is really heaven!" he said to himself. As he sat down to listen, one man got up and said, "No. 652." Everyone laughed. Another said, "No. 451." Again everyone laughed. A third said, "No. 132." There were only a few polite chuckles. "I don't get it," the comedian asked an angel. "Well," the angel explained, "there are only so many jokes you can tell. A long time ago, they gave up telling them because everyone had heard them before. Now they just call out the number." "Then why didn't they laugh at No. 132?" he asked the angel. "Oh," the angel replied, "that was Bernie. He never could tell a good joke."

In a way, we assign a number to a Bible story when we only refer to it by name. We assume that everyone knows the story anyway and will easily see how it illustrates the truth. First of all, not everyone knows the story that well. Many may not know the story at all. Second, if you want to let people see and feel the truth you are illustrating, then tell the story! Tell it as if you were telling it to a group of preschoolers who are hearing the story for the very first time.

Look at the two examples below from the author's files which make use of the same Biblical illustration. In this case, it isn't a story but a word picture from the Old Testament. Which has more impact?

When John saw Jesus, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." First, he calls Jesus the 'lamb.' In the Old Testament, when people sinned, they were required to bring a lamb to the altar and sacrifice it. The lamb shed its blood before the altar. The blood of that lamb was a picture of how God's Son would have to make a sacrifice of his blood to take away the sins of the world.



Here's the second.

What did John mean when he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God?" To us, a lamb is a cute picture.

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SERMONS THAT HELPED ME

In my second year of seminary I purchased a little sermon book by Martin Franzmann with the title, *Ha! Ha! among the Trumpets*. Often I have grabbed for this little book and marveled at his gift of using words in an interesting way to communicate the truth of God's Word.

Here is an excerpt from a sermon delivered to seminary graduates, urging them to be like the warhorse in Job 39, eager to enter the battle fray:

God has made him a horse, a steed of war. He delights in being a horse; he is glad to work like a horse and to fight like a steed of war. He hears the trumpets of war, and he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet; that trumpet is God's call to him to be what God has made him. And he greets that call with an equine Alleluia! He snuffs the air, and stamps the ground, and "saith among the trumpets, 'Ha! Ha!'"

Words like this connect with people and draw them into the truth of Scripture that is being expounded. I ache to be that warhorse, hear the trumpet call, paw the ground, and eagerly enter the field of battle.

Wait a minute, I am that warhorse, gifted by God and made to be who I am. Words do change the heart.

Last summer I had the privilege of listening to another wordsmith, another Franzmann, Thomas by name. Tom took us to the heights at our district convention with a sermon "Oh, the Work the Savior Gave Us" based on Jesus healing the blind man in John 9. I enjoy sharing this quote with you. I can still see the sparkle in Tom's eyes as he spoke these words to our convention delegates:

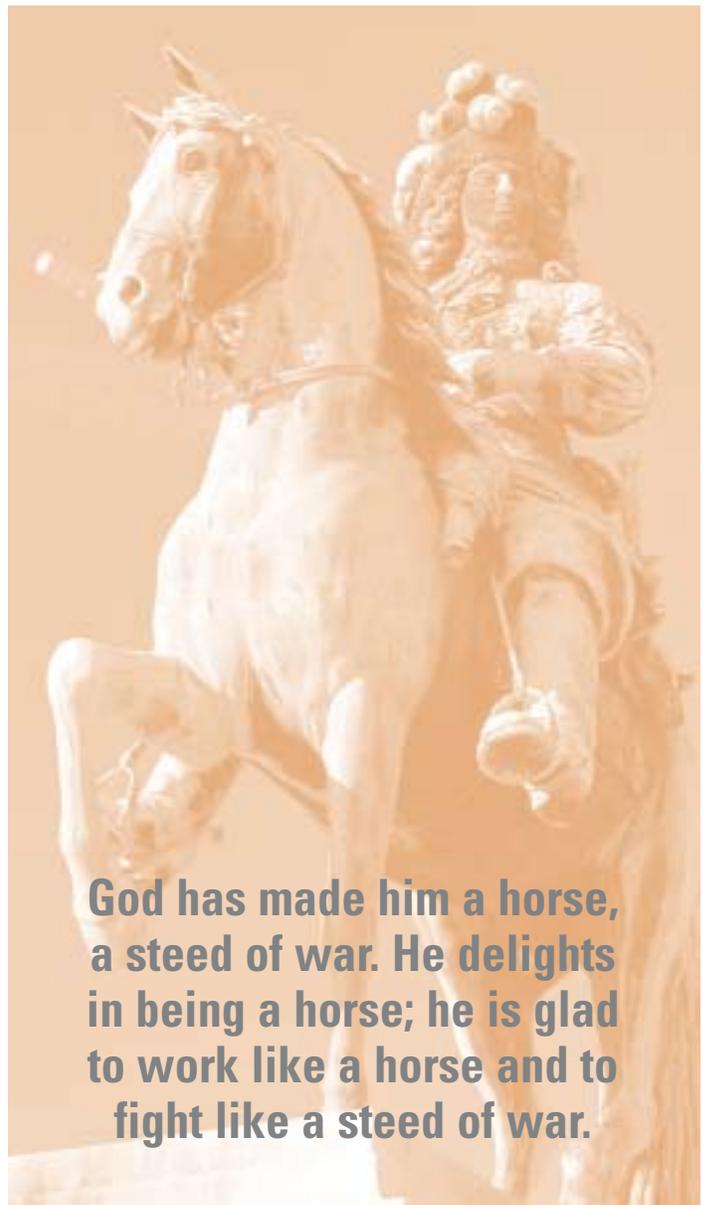
The work of God brings compassion to the suffering. Blind from birth, neglected, totally dependent, despised by onlookers – this man now sees clearly. He sees high-definition, digital, wide-screen images of everything around. Wonderful! Just wonderful! Wouldn't it have been fun to be there that day?

The preacher was not done with us. He took us even higher as he proclaimed:

The work Jesus gave us is glorious because it effects changes of the highest order. That man changed from abject beggar to proud parishioner in Jesus' Church, changed from having a heart beclouded to believing the truth clearly, changed from an unnamed mendicant to star performer on the stage of Christian history, changed from a statistic in hell to a white-robed resident of heaven. Such changes are the stuff of Jesus' work.

The sermon ended with a call to not be complacent in the Lord's work.

The Church of believers must not become complacent. We must ward off all temptations to dilute the message our



God has made him a horse, a steed of war. He delights in being a horse; he is glad to work like a horse and to fight like a steed of war.

Savior has given us. We must resist every attempt of Satan to divert our resources. We must negate and remove every distraction. We must take positive steps to resolve issues that contribute to delay. Like Jesus, we must be willing to pause to see the blindness around us, and to open eyes to the Gospel. In so doing we will lift blood-bought souls from a morass of meaninglessness, and set them on a course of willing and joyful discipleship.

Jeb Schaefer, long-time editor of the Northwestern Lutheran, said of one contributor, "You can cut his sentences in any part and they always bleed." It's worth the effort to revisit our written sermon, tighten sentences, and find words that draw people into the message. We want our sentences and words to bleed with the love that Christ has for us.

Steven Degner

“THE EXEGETICAL GROUNDWORK OF GOOD SERMON PREPARATION”

The more we study each Word as God gave it, the more we overflow with love for the Lover of our souls.

Περὶσσεύω—At least twenty-seven times in twenty-two passages of his thirteen epistles the Lord’s Apostle Paul uses this favorite word. Its Old Testament Hebrew equivalent is נִבַּח—to flow, pour out, pour, gush forth, spring, bubble up, ferment.” Paul puts *περὶσσεύω* in faith-born love contexts like the great resurrection chapter which concludes in triumph: *“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to (περὶσσεύοντες - literally “overflow with”) the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain”* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

When the glass of our heart is filled to overflowing with the *“the water of life,”* the message of Christ’s substitutionary death and glorious resurrection overflows into our work for the Lord. This overflow keeps us from being discouraged by everything the devil throws at us. *“For just as the sufferings of Christ περὶσσεύω into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort περὶσσεύω.”* (2 Corinthians 1:5). With this word the Holy Spirit pictures the super-abundance of God’s blessings in Christ. Paul wrote to his dear Philippians: *“...Your joy in Christ Jesus περὶσσεύω..... I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have περὶσσεύω”* (Philippians 1:26;4:12).

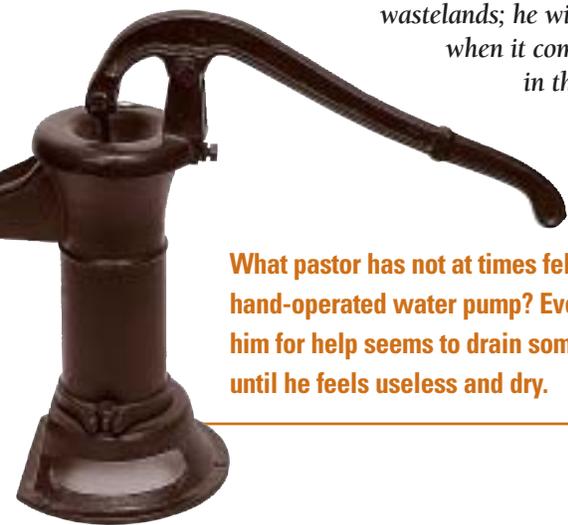
What pastor has not at times felt like an old hand-operated water pump? Every person asking him for help seems to drain something out of him until he feels useless and dry. One pastor on a retreat was advised, “If your reservoir runs dry, you’ve got to go deeper.”

The God-inspired prophet Jeremiah pictures a bush setting its roots in shallow soil only to shrivel and die. Jeremiah draws a contrast to the one who lives in faith:

“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of

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CAN YOU USE THIS?

A Mother and an Alligator

From *Lonely Husbands, Lonely Wives*, Dennis Rainey, p. 181



A story that has remained riveted in my mind every since I read it concerns a couple who built a home on the banks of a small pond at the headwaters of a creek in Florida, not far from the Gulf of Mexico. Their twelve-year-old son,

Michael, loved to snorkel in the two-acre pond, and one evening as twilight fell, he and two cousins, Kelly and Jill, went for a swim just after dinner. Kelly decided to come ashore but the other two youngsters remained behind, continuing to enjoy the wonders of snorkeling in the clear waters of the pond.

Oblivious to any danger, they were unaware that a huge alligator was bearing down on them. Neighbors spotted the beast and tried to distract it with shouting and clapping, which alerted Jill, who managed to make it ashore. But Michael, head under water, could hear nothing as he floated peacefully, peering at the rocks below.

The alligator lunged for Michael’s head. As its jaws snapped shut, its teeth slashed a six-inch wound in his scalp and ripped the snorkel mask from his face. Miraculously, the boy’s head came free, and he began swimming for the shore as fast as the huge flippers on his feet could move. Only momentarily diverted, the alligator spotted the boy and was after him again. By this time his mother had heard all the screaming and came running to the water’s edge where she saw her son only twenty feet away in a race against death. He was swimming as fast he could, but the alligator was gaining on him every second.

The mother reached out to grasp her son’s hand just as the beast opened its huge jaws and snapped them shut on the boy’s left leg. What followed was a grim tug of war between the 100-pound mother and the 400-pound alligator. Clutching her boy’s hand in a death grip, she pulled with superhuman strength and suddenly, unaccountably, the beast let go! Perhaps the eighteen-inch rubber flippers on the boy’s foot was the cause—no one is sure—but the frantic mother dragged her son out of the water and up the bank to safety as the alligator sank back into the pond with what witnesses called a “disappointed look” on his face.

Three months later, Michael, his wounds completely healed, showed a visitor the spot where the attack took place. There were few outward signs of his brush with death. The scar on his scalp was now covered with hair, and his left leg, broken by the force of the ‘gator’s jaws, had mended. Scars on his calf and ankle were covered by his socks. Proudly, however, he showed the visitor three small scars on the back of his right hand, inflicted not by the alligator, but by his mother’s fingernails. She had literally drawn blood when she pulled him from the jaws of certain death.

Application

The wounds on the hands of Jesus speak a far greater story of love that rescued us from eternal death, give us peace with our God, and carry a promise of protection forever.

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We imagine the lamb that the Good Shepherd is holding in his arms. This was not the lamb that John was referring to. John was talking about the lamb of sacrifice that people brought to the temple when they had sinned against God.

When Andrew heard John call Jesus the Lamb of God, he thought of that first time when he came with his parents to the temple. They brought a lamb that day. It wasn't so small that you could carry it. It was a year old. It was the best lamb in their flock. That year, the lamb they picked from the flock was Andrew's favorite. He even had a name for it. It would come when he called it.

He remembered the day they brought the lamb to the temple. On one side was the altar of sacrifice. On the other was the big brass basin holding hundreds of gallons of water to wash away the blood of the sacrifices. They took his lamb to the priest. The priest led him to the altar. He straddled the lamb and held it between his knees. He put his hand over his mouth so the lamb couldn't cry out. Then he took the sharp killing knife and cut the carotid artery in the lamb's throat. The lamb struggled only a little, but Andrew could remember the blood. Lots of it. It spilled on the stone pavement. Some was caught by the priest in a bowl and sprinkled on the altar. The best parts of his lamb were put on the altar and burned. With the odor of burning flesh in his nostrils, he watched as Levites came and washed away the blood. The boy, Andrew, felt a little sick inside. His father explained to him that the lamb had to die in their place, to take away their sin. Even as an adult, he never got used to seeing the sacrifice.

When John shouted, "Behold the Lamb of God!" what do you think crossed Andrew's mind when he pointed to Jesus and said that?

Here are a few guidelines to help you use your favorite stories and word pictures as illustrations in your sermons.

- Never make reference to a Bible story without telling the story! Your listeners aren't as familiar with those stories as you are and your point will be lost on them.
- Make sure that you check the details of the Bible story before you use it for an illustration. You think you know a story because you've heard it so many times. It's amazing how often preachers confuse details.
- Learn how to tell a story! Practice vividly narrating Bible stories to a kindergarten class. You will get immediate feedback if you are communicating. If you're not, Johnny will be playing with the Susie's pigtails. In the pulpit, tell your story to your kindergarten class.
- Emphasize the gospel with your illustrations. For some reason, it is easier to focus on the law than on the gospel. Does the story of Peter's denial illustrate the weakness of Peter, or the grace evident in the Savior's look? Most of the Bible stories want us to focus on our gracious God more than fallen man.

The best illustrations for your sermons are found in the Bible. You can use them poorly, but you cannot overuse them.

Charles Degner

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the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.

"But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit" (Jeremiah 17:5-8).

In seasons of spiritual drought, gospel preachers especially need to dig deeper wells . . . into the one source of "living water," the Bible.

In the drought of 1988, Minnesota farmers did something that seemed very strange to metro area residents. They took their heavy equipment into the dried up ponds and lakes around their farms and dredged out the bottom. "Why are you doing that?" neighbors asked. "There's no water. It's a drought." The farmers answered in typical fashion by shaking their heads and going back to work. And when the rain returned they had deeper water on their acreage for the next drought. Few suburbanites realized that their farming neighbors may have contributed enough to the water table to keep their precious lawn sprinklers swishing in the heat.

In seasons of spiritual drought, gospel preachers especially need to dig deeper wells, not into human sources, but into the one source of "living water," the Bible. We can περισσεύω more abundantly by drinking deeply of the gracious water of life waiting to be tapped in the Holy Spirit's original languages.

Mark Cordes

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