

PREACH

the Word

Vol. 7 No. 1

September/October 2003

SIX VOLUMES ARE AMAZING ... SEVEN ARE HARD TO FATHOM ...

How swiftly the years have flown since August 1997 when Pastor John Jeske edited the first issue of *Preach the Word*!

As I recall the editors of the past six volumes, I've discovered that five were currently serving as parish pastors and one was a homiletics professor. It is fitting then, that we turn again to a professor for volume 7.

Enter: Professor Keith Wessel. Keith spent three years as tutor at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, followed by eight years as an associate pastor at the 350+-member Beautiful Savior Congregation in Marietta, Georgia. During his time in the South Atlantic District, he spent two years covering a vacancy at two small ELS churches. It has barely been a year since he moved north to Martin Luther College where he teaches Latin, Greek, and religion. So when he says, "I've preached in schools. I've preached in barns. I've preached in storefronts and makeshift chapels," he really means it. And I think it bodes well for a readership as diverse as ours.

Just the other day Keith shared with me some of the preaching articles we have to look forward to in the next six issues. We will focus on the peculiarities of dealing with sermon texts from the Old Testament, the Psalms, the Gospels, and the Epistles. One issue will feature an interview with an exegete. Of course, there will be the usual spectrum of other topics related to the art of preaching.

So...a hearty welcome to Prof. Wessel and heartfelt thanks to Pastor Steven Degner who helped us "connect to the Word and connect to people!" God bless you both for your work in the Lord!

Cordially in Christ,
Wayne A. Laitinen
Managing Editor

BALANCED PREACHING

Every Sunday morning the preacher steps up to the pulpit and stands before God's people to share a message from the Scriptures. At least, that's what happens in our churches. As orthodox Lutheran preachers we do not stand up to proclaim opinions about spiritual things nor do our voices sound soothing words from the book of positive thinking. We proclaim Jesus Christ—the gospel, God's message—and God's people listen.

Amazingly God's saints have set aside time to listen, and they come into God's house rather than stay in bed or find something more interesting to do. That is no small miracle in our contemporary world of personal time, recreation options, and busy schedules. And the Holy Spirit rewards them as he works to nurture faith and draw them closer to Jesus and heaven through the gospel.



When God's people come and sit quietly to listen, I want to be as effective as I can. God has called me to preach and asked me to employ all the talents he has given me to communicate his truth. I don't think about Aristotle very often as I prepare or as I proclaim. But I found something in Aristotle a few years ago that I think applies to the task of preaching. Yes, Aristotle. Of course, I remember Luther, my homiletics professors, and a few books I've read on preaching. Aristotle is not a Christian resource but a resource on rhetoric—a long forgotten discipline.

Continued on page 3

A SERMON SERIES FOR FALL

Like many preachers, I too have used the summer months as a time for a special series of sermons centered on a general theme. For example, a couple of years ago my associate and I had it in mind to preach some texts from the Soll lectionary, and with the plethora of text choices (yes, there are many, many more choices listed in the full Soll lectionary than those listed in *Sermon Texts* by NPH) we were able to put together a nice series of sermons under the general theme for the summer, “The Heart of Faith.” Another summer we decided to preach a shorter series of sermons focusing on Matthew 13 with all the “plant” and “growth” imagery found in those parables.

Although a summer sermon series may provide a refreshing change of pace for both the preacher and the congregation, one drawback we found in our congregation was that with busy vacation schedules, many of the members did not enjoy the benefits of hearing the entire series of sermons from start to finish.

For this reason, my associate and I decided to preach a sermon series in the autumn days of the Pentecost season. In our congregation we usually experienced more consistent attendance in the fall as parents enrolled their children for Sunday School and as a new round of adult Bible classes were beginning. It seemed to be a nice time of the year for a sermon series that God’s people could follow through from beginning to end.

But what to do about the church year, especially in later fall (Oct.- Nov.)? We didn’t wish to simply abandon it and ignore the four “End Times” Sundays in deference to our sermon series. Here’s the solution we came up with. We chose to preach a sermon series on the Lord’s Prayer that tied in with the ending of the church year. For this calendar year (2003) the series would look something like this:

Sept. 28 – Our Father in heaven	Nov. 2 – Forgive us our sins as we forgive those...
Oct. 5 – Hallowed be your name	Nov. 9 – Lead us not into temptation
Oct. 12 – Your kingdom come	Nov. 16 – Deliver us from evil
Oct. 19 – Your will be done on earth as in heaven	Nov. 23 – For the kingdom...
Oct. 26 – Give us today our daily bread	

With this breakdown, a preacher may preach a series that most of his congregation will be able to follow through from beginning to end and yet honor the tradition of the church year with its special emphases. While the first five Sundays would, admittedly, depart from the themes of the regular cycle of readings, the last four need not. In fact, the last four sermons in the series dovetail rather nicely with the worship emphases of the closing Sundays of the church year:

- **Reformation (Nov. 2)** – Forgiveness of sins is what the message of justification by grace through faith is all about.
- **Last Judgment (Nov. 9)** – The petition is a prayer that God preserve us from Satan so that we do not stand in unbelief at the Judgment.
- **Saints Triumphant (Nov. 16)** – The final victory of the saints is God graciously delivering them from all evil.
- **Christ the King (Nov. 23)** – The Doxology appropriately summarizes what the kingdom of Christ all entails.

I don’t suggest any specific texts for the sermons. Some preachers may wish to choose texts that illustrate the truths of the individual petitions. For our purposes, we simply used the words of the petition themselves as our sermon texts. Worship planners may also wish to consider using one verse of “Our Father, who from heaven above” CW 410 as either the hymn before the sermon or as a response to the sermon, with the appropriate verse being sung for the appropriate Sunday.

One final note. This series on the Lord’s Prayer has the added benefit of helping the congregation review the Catechism. In our congregation we actually read through the petitions responsively at the onset of the sermon. For more on the benefits of preaching on sections of the Catechism, please see Pastor John Vieth’s fine presentation from the 2002 Worship Conference, “Preaching the Catechism,” available at the Worship section of the WELS web site, specifically www.wels.net/worship/96-99-02-conf-materials.html

Keith Wessel

Among other things, Aristotle suggested that effective speakers employ three means of persuasion. He called the first *logos* or a rational approach. The second he called *pathos* or an emotional appeal; the third he called *ethos*, that is, an ethical appeal. Aristotle's terms may be familiar to preachers of the New Testament, but we must remember that Aristotle lived before the New Testament filled these words with Christian connotations.

For Aristotle, *logos* had nothing to do with the opening words of John's gospel. Instead it meant argument or reason. It was an appeal to the understanding and mind of the hearer. It involved logic—deductive and inductive reasoning. As preachers we use this means as we organize our material in clear chunks of thought that progress from point to point. We ask ourselves whether this point makes sense and whether it “proves” what we want to communicate. Sometimes we refer to this as the cognitive approach. I suppose we could say that systematic theology or doctrine is an application of this approach.

The second means Aristotle suggests, *pathos*, scares us a little. We are Lutheran preachers that seek to avoid emotional outbursts in the pulpit. We have associated emotions with revivalists and charismatics. We are legitimately concerned that our people do not base their faith on the emotions of the moment which fluctuate dramatically at times. We are also concerned that human emotions may dominate a Christian's life and crowd out God's grace. We strive to preserve God's activity in Jesus Christ as the sole reason for our salvation and remove any human contribution including emotional assent or enthusiasm.

But what if we were to define *pathos* as the affective approach? I think that makes a difference. We accept principles with the mind and logic (cognitive) but our emotions (affective) generate the drive to execute the principles in daily life. Recent research on the brain has confirmed that there is no separation of the mind and the emotions. Both are engaged in learning and in life. This may sound like a lot of psychological babble, but think of the tears in the eyes of a convert when he or she discovers what Jesus is really all about. What about the appreciative comment at the sick bed or the warm hug God's people offer to pastors from time to time? These come from hearts that have been touched by the gospel. I admit that I've sat in church on Easter and been so choked up at times that I can't finish singing “I know that my Redeemer lives.” Why do people open their checkbooks and contribute to God's work? They know Jesus and their hearts are stirred by his love (2 Corinthians 4:14).

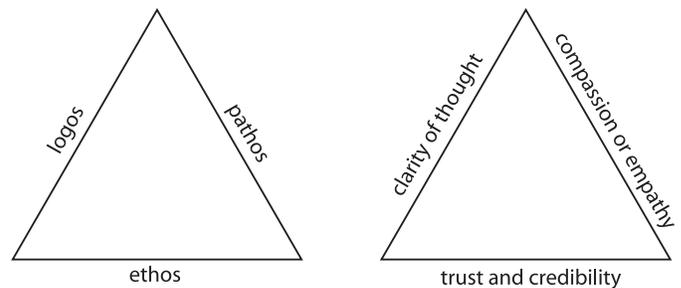
The third means of persuasion is based on the character of the preacher—*ethos*. Aristotle suggested that this appeal came from the way the speaker gained the trust and admiration of his audience. The Greek philosopher did not know anything about the regular Sunday morning sermon. He suggested that this appeal flows out of the speech itself. I'd suggest that it is cumulative for the Lutheran preacher. Over time the preacher gains or loses the trust and respect of his hearers. Through his

sermons and what he does as the pastor or shepherd of God's people, he creates the *ethos*—the trust, respect and admiration—that gives his message credibility.

Even such things as tone of voice, clothing, and appearance influence the way hearers receive the message. I think a friendly smile and a warm concern for people also contribute to the way God's people receive the gospel from their called servants. It's not just a simple thing of getting into the pulpit and proclaiming the gospel for twenty minutes. Effective preaching stretches far beyond the worship service and into the daily contact preachers have with God's saints. Preachers build credibility, trust, and affection so that the members of the congregation receive the gospel with ready ears, minds, and hearts.

Aristotle suggested that this may be the most important of the three. His reason was simple. If a speaker could convince the intellect and move the emotions, but the audience did not trust the speaker, there was little hope for any effective communication. Politicians understand the principle when they take great care to create a proper image in the eyes of the voters. We do too when we ask a preacher of God's word to resign when he has committed a public sin. Such a preacher has lost the trust of God's saints and discredited his message. Simply, if God's people do not respect the preacher, they will not listen to his message.

I've often thought of these three means as an equilateral triangle—a unit, working together. The two triangles below illustrate the thought. The first uses Aristotle's three terms. The second substitutes terms that are more familiar to us as American Lutheran preachers.



Do we approach our tasks with this kind of balance? Over the years I've listened to preachers and reviewed my own sermons too; I wonder if we have been as effective as we can be. We do a very good job of appealing to the intellect. We teach principles and present Bible stories making sure that we get all the facts straight. Doctrine and truth dominate. We should do that, but it is only one part of the task. Sometimes I sense that we do not connect these intellectual aspects of our work to the hearts of God's people. The gospel means something to me and to all committed believers. We feel its importance deeply. God speaks to the mind and the heart—intellect and emotions.

Continued on page 4

And what about credibility? The Holy Spirit working through the gospel can and does make up for our shortcomings and failures. But we should realize that what we do during the week will influence how people receive the message we proclaim on Sunday morning. The reputation we build in our service as pastors paves the way for the gospel or rips up the road leaving it difficult for our hearers to navigate the pot holes.

Aristotle suggested that effective speakers employ three means of persuasion. He called the first *logos* or a rational approach. The second he called *pathos* or an emotional appeal; the third he called *ethos*, that is, an ethical appeal.

So now set Aristotle aside and think about the apostle Paul. He wrote, "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:8-11).

In this little passage Paul has woven the intellectual truths of justification and Christ's resurrection together with a deep conviction of the heart. Can I suggest an emotion, *pathos*, or passion for these truths? He does not write this as a merely personal confession, but his target is God's people, the Philippians first and then others who would read his words. I think in his mind's eye he can see those Philippians. He punctuates the cognitive and affective with his personal *ethos* as an apostle when he says "I." Remember this is the same apostle who wrote at the end of Galatians, "See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!" (6:11). He depended on the trust and respect God had attached to his work.

In our world today, speakers of all kinds, especially preachers, abuse appeals to emotion and use credibility to hide bad messages. Appeals to the intellect also often distort logic and truth in order to convince people to adopt destructive behavior. But Aristotle's comments have helped me think of the balance necessary to communicate Christ effectively.

John A. Braun



While conducting a hospital visit with a Bible on your Palm or Handspring PDA may be a bit on the tacky side (to say the least), nonetheless there is a neat resource available at the Worship section of the WELS web site—Series B and C lectionaries for PDA available for downloading. These files are tied to the Palm OS Datebook and will install the lectionary information directly into your desktop calendar to the specific dates for the next two years.

To obtain these files simply do the following:

1. Follow the link "Lectionary in PDA format" from the WELS Worship homepage www.wels.net/worship and download the files.
2. Use the Import Command from the "File" menu in your desktop software (Do not try to import this directly via a HotSync using "Install" or something similar. On my Handspring software I had to "Import" as a .dba file from the File menu. Once I figured that out, it went rather smoothly.)
3. Perform a HotSync to get the info from your desktop to your PDA.

Once installed, you will see each Sunday and Minor Festival, the three lessons, the psalm, the Hymn of the Day, and the color of the season. Thanks to Pastor John Koelpin for making this resource available.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

If you have any questions or comments about *Preach the Word*, feel free to contact this year's editor directly at wesselkc@mlc-wels.edu

PREACH
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/worship>

Keith Wessel, editor <wesselkc@mlc-wels.edu>
Wayne A. Laitinen, managing editor <wlaitinen@newulmtel.net>