

PREACH

the Word

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according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:1)

FAITH AND LOVE

Monday morning: a Bible lies open on the pastor's desk. Three or four days pass: today he turns to face an audience. It is required of him that he announces *This is what the LORD says*. His pulse races: "Have I analyzed this text correctly?" As a woodworker reaches for his level, the pastor reaches for his. *A person's relationship to God – that's faith*. That's vertical. That's justification. It's forensic, in the courtroom. God is speaking to the heart.

If the text speaks about *a person's relationship to Neighbor – that's love*. That's horizontal. That's sanctification. That's outward, on the street. God is speaking to the *hand*. In the courtroom, the work is done and the verdict has been spoken. On the street, the needs remain and the day's work lies before me.

THREE FROM WALTHER

- 1 "Nowhere in the Scriptures do we find the apostles treating the members of their congregations as if they were uncertain regarding their standing with God; their treatment of them is always such that one can see they presuppose that their members, spite of their weaknesses and blemishes, are dear, beloved children of God." (392)
- 2 "The Law makes no concessions. That is utterly beside the character of the Law. It only makes demands." (80)
- 3 "What is to be effected by preaching? Bear in mind that the preacher is to arouse secure souls from their sleep in sin; *next*, to lead those who have been aroused to faith; *next*, to give believers assurance of their state of grace; *next*, to lead those who have become assured of this to sanctification of their lives; and *lastly*, to confirm the sanctified and to keep them in their holy and blessed state unto the end. What a task!" (248)



*According to one of his contemporaries, Martin Luther had falcon's eyes.
(Painting by Prof. Karl Bauer, 1868-1942)*

TO STAND IN JOY BESIDE YOU (PART 2 OF 3)

Bridegroom/Bride Imagery in Preaching:

Prof. Arnold Koelpin, New Ulm, MN

The Mystical Union

Hymn-writer Paul Gerhardt strikes a chord in the human heart with a song of faith that heaven alone will finalize. Even now our voices give words to faith's longing as we anticipate that day in intimate bridal terms: "Lord, when your glory I shall see and taste your kingdom's pleasure, Your blood my royal robe shall be, my joy beyond all measure! When I appear before your throne, your righteousness shall be my crown. With these I need not hide me. And there in garments richly wrought, as your own bride I shall be brought, *to stand in joy beside you.*"

Gerhardt had a mentor. Professor Luther seized on the bridal image to clarify the Scripture's long neglected truth – justification by faith alone. And he did so by referencing the bridegroom/bride image in marriage. The bridal image was the heart of Luther's Christology. The sinner-saint makeup of Christian life has its setting in the work of Christ as the heavenly bridegroom.

In the paradox of life, the King of kings and Lord of lords comes down from heaven. He picks us up off the streets of this world – poor little whores that we are. He wills to marry us who have been lusting after other gods and have nothing to offer him but our sin (Ho 1:2; Ex 20:3). And he gives us the wedding ring of faith. As his dowry the heavenly Bridegroom takes our sins (Is 53:6). In exchange he gives us all that is his – life with God, peace, and joy. He forgives our waywardness, puts aside his anger, and freely declares his love for us once more (Ho 14:1-4; SS 2:3; Is 44:2).

Now in the glorious union of bride and groom, he has become our sin and we are his righteousness. Confidently we can boast of our Bridegroom without blushing and, in Luther's words, say, "'Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered and died as he did.' Just as a bridegroom possesses all that is his bride's and she all that is his – for the two have all things in common because they are one flesh (Gn 2:24) – so Christ and the church are one spirit (Ep 5:29-32)" (Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness).

The Crucified covers his bride with a pure white wedding dress of his making (Rv 6:11; Is 61:10). The Bridegroom presents us to his Father as pure. His death removes sin's sting; his resurrection to life breaks down death's barrier for a reason. That powerful duo – sin and death – has kept us from enjoying life together with God (1 Co 15:54-57). Christ Jesus makes his bride God's own prize possession once again (Is 44:2; 53:6-10; Gn 1:27f; Rv 19:6-9). Christ's righteousness replaces the righteousness long lost in paradise. For the Bridegroom is our God. He is God-and-man in an indivisible and eternal union. Faith alone grasps the mystery of God's work on earth, and receives its benefits.

(Continued on page 4)

YOU CAN PRINT THAT

1 "We are thinking rightly about our baptism when we see our passing through its waters as that crisis in our personal history in which we were simultaneously judged and delivered, drowned and saved, killed and brought to life."

Richard Jungkuntz (*The Gospel of Baptism*)

2. "The divine service begins with a bit of name dropping: *In the name of ...* God dropped his name on you when you were baptized. And now you drop his name back. His name tells you that you belong to God, that you belong here among his people."

William Cwirla (*Liturgical Preaching*, essay: "Unfolding the Meaning of the Liturgy")

3 "The Church has always had to mourn for renegade sons and daughters. Scripture tells of Saul the king, of Demas and Hymenaeus, of Alexander and Philetus, Phygelus and Hermogenes, and of Judas the traitor. The Church of today is losing hundreds and thousands of her young men and women who fall from the faith.

Why? What is it that ensnares them? ...

There are no facts of science, there is nothing in the reasoning faculty of man to prevent him from believing Christ and the Bible. The Gospel of Christ carries its own spiritual evidences with it. There is, in reality, only one cause for apostasy, for falling away from the faith. This is absolutely general – working in all cases. It is *giving way to the lure of sin against the warning of conscience.*"

August Pieper ("The Judgment of God on the Ungodly, Romans 1:18-32"; conference paper, 1926)

4 "The really difficult thing is to learn how to get on paper the kind of English we use naturally when we are speaking to a friend about something that is really important to us. The barrier that a manuscript can create has been greatly reduced because the manuscript is oral in style, not literary. It sounds right and real, yet it has precision and economy that the less fully-scripted preacher seldom attains. Some of the greatest preachers I know script their sermons fully, and nobody knows or cares because of the skill with which they get themselves on to paper and off it again."

Ian Pitt-Watson (*A Primer for Preachers*)

PREACHER, BE YOURSELF

Pastor Phil Hirsch, Manhattan, KS

It is a great blessing that God continues to cause growth in Christians – and in their pastors.

I was one who viewed the chapel talk as an NWC junior with the greatest of fear and trepidation; it almost made me quit. As a tutor, however, the task of working with juniors and seniors as they prepared their chapel talks was a real highlight. Years later, I was able to attend evening chapel from time to time as a faculty member. What a fun time to see each individual young man prepare the best piece of work he could! And, most of the time, it was very good work – Law and Gospel, faithfully done. But let it also be said, at times it was painful to be served by a young man who was trying to live up to what he thought was the right way to do it. Often that meant he was trying to be someone else. I said many times to younger brothers in Christ, “Just be yourself. Be who you are and don’t try to be someone or something else.” (Easier said than done).

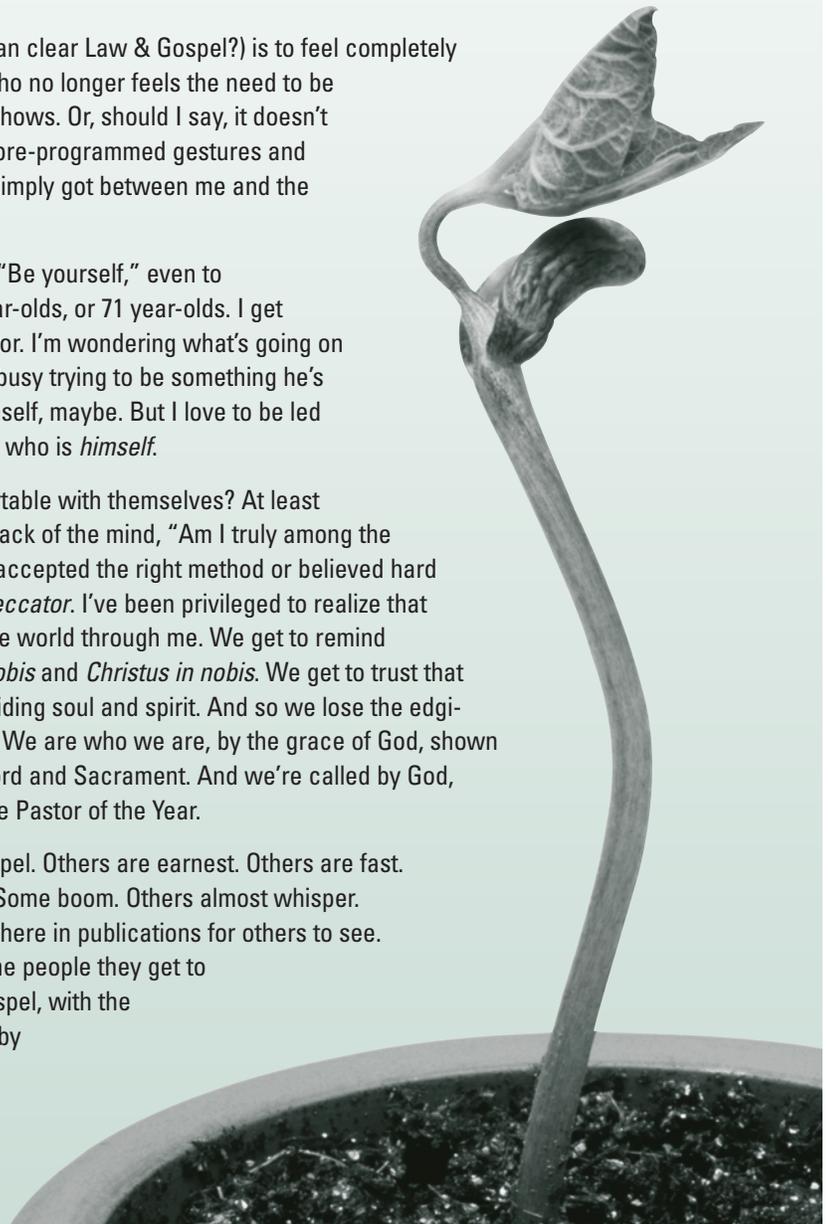
Over the years I’ve been served by those former students who are now pastors of their own congregations. How great it is to hear the same Word from the same mouth, but only better, if you know what I mean. Almost always the more incise application of Law has been noticeable. And almost always a cleaner and deeper understanding of the Gospel of Christ shows itself.

Maybe an even nicer blessing (what could be better than clear Law & Gospel?) is to feel completely at ease at the feet of this servant of the Word of God who no longer feels the need to be someone else. He’s comfortable in his own skin and it shows. Or, should I say, it doesn’t show. He’s not play-acting anymore. He’s not stiff with pre-programmed gestures and searching for the perfect play on words – all of which simply got between me and the Word of my God.

I’m convinced it was worthwhile counsel to have said, “Be yourself,” even to 21 year-olds. And I think it’s still helpful today, for 41 year-olds, or 71 year-olds. I get edgy, as a listener, when I’m sitting at the feet of an actor. I’m wondering what’s going on inside the head and heart of the speaker when he’s so busy trying to be something he’s not, or trying to live up to an even grander image of himself, maybe. But I love to be led through an exposition of the mysteries of God by a man who is *himself*.

Who better than confessional Lutherans can be comfortable with themselves? At least according to our theology we aren’t wondering in the back of the mind, “Am I truly among the Elect?” Not fearful that I haven’t quite done enough or accepted the right method or believed hard enough. We’re blessed to understand *simul justus et peccator*. I’ve been privileged to realize that God doesn’t need me on his team, much less to save the world through me. We get to remind ourselves of the complete sufficiency of *Christus pro nobis* and *Christus in nobis*. We get to trust that the Word of God is powerful and cuts all the way to dividing soul and spirit. And so we lose the edginess that is born of fear and sin and depending on self. We are who we are, by the grace of God, shown us in Christ and communicated to us by the Spirit in Word and Sacrament. And we’re called by God, through his Church, to be servants of his word, not to be Pastor of the Year.

So some guys are excitable as they serve Law and Gospel. Others are earnest. Others are fast. Others say half as many words in twice as much time. Some boom. Others almost whisper. Some turn phrases that really should be quoted somewhere in publications for others to see. Others get stuck in blind grammatical alley-ways, but the people they get to serve love them anyway. All of them serve Law and Gospel, with the Gospel dominating. But each gets to be himself, called by God through the Church, as he preaches.



TO STAND IN JOY BESIDE YOU

(PART 3 OF 3) Bridegroom/Bride Imagery in Preaching

Marriage imagery preached

Pastors preach this incomparable benefit of faith. And they graphically proclaim the joyous exchange between bride and bridegroom with as powerful a scriptural imagery as Luther used in his inimitable way.

The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh (Ep 5:31-32). And if they are one flesh there is between them a true marriage – indeed the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but poor examples of this one true marriage – it follows that everything they have, they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own, and whatever the soul has, Christ claims as his own.

Let us compare these and we shall see inestimable benefits. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now *let faith come between them* and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's. For if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things that are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?

Here we have a most pleasing vision, not only of communion but of a blessed struggle and victory and salvation and redemption. Christ is God and man in one person. He *has* neither sinned nor died, and is not condemned, and he *cannot* sin, die, or be condemned. His righteousness, life, and salvation are unconquerable, eternal, and omnipotent. By *the wedding ring of faith* he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell that are his bride's. As a matter of fact, he makes them his own and acts as if they were his own and as if he himself had sinned. He suffered, died, and descended into hell that he might overcome them all.

Now since it was such a one who did all this, and death and hell could not swallow him up, these were necessarily swallowed up by him in a mighty duel. For his righteousness is greater than the sins of all men, his life stronger than death, and his salvation more invincible than hell. Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of its faith is free in Christ, its bridegroom – free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ its bridegroom. So he takes to himself a glorious bride, “without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her by the washing of water with the word” of life (Ep 5:26-27), that is, by faith in the Word of life, righteousness, and salvation. In this way he marries her in faith, steadfast love, and in mercies, righteousness, and justice, as Hosea (2:19-20) says.

Marriage imagery applied

Who then can fully appreciate what this royal marriage means? Who can understand the riches of the glory of this grace? Here this rich and divine bridegroom Christ marries this poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil, and adorns her with all his goodness. Her sins cannot now destroy her, since they are laid upon Christ and swallowed up by him. And she has that righteousness in Christ, her husband, of which she may boast as of her own and which she can confidently display alongside her sins in the face of death and hell and say, “If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, and all his is mine and all mine is his,” as the bride in the Song of Solomon (2:16) says, “My beloved is mine and I am his.”

This is what Paul means when he says in I Co 15, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,” that is, the victory over sin and death, as he also says there, “the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” From this you once more see that much is ascribed to faith, namely, that it alone can fulfill the law and justify without works” (The *Freedom of a Christian*, 1520).

Preach the Good News

Preaching justification by faith alone is not proclaiming “a doctrine colder than ice” as some charge. Luther uses the bridal image to embody the great exchange between Christ and undeserving sinners in such a dynamic way that it fills the heart of the bride with joy and certainty. Earthly marriage is reserved for this life; our union with Christ lasts forever. Preach the Word!

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? If you have any questions or comments about *Preach the Word*, feel free to contact this year's editor directly at tomjeske@phonet.com

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