

# PREACH

*the Word*

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

## READ WIDELY

Pastor Phil Hirsch, Manhattan, KS

You've been around the block enough times now to know when someone is feeding you a line. How did you come across it before? By listening.

You know this. You've heard it many times. You've said it: "Before one can speak well, one must listen carefully." And he should listen to many people, in many different contexts, saying many different things. The wise listener who listens to all these different messages is the one who *actively* listens ("Why did he just say that? What is he trying to prove now? Where will he be going next? Why didn't he say it this way? What is he *not* saying? *Why?*")

Preachers, you have a rare privilege. Where else, in the course of a week, will your people sit down and give someone as much time to speak as they give you? Even the most unregenerate person in the crowd, or the church-shopper, still is expecting something special from the preacher. Is he expecting what you have for him? How could he?

Since we servants of the Gospel realize this is such a privilege, we'll spend a large chunk of quality time every week preparing. What is the best preparation before I preach? Listening.

Of course, the most important listening is to God himself as he reveals himself in the face of Christ, brought to you by the Spirit in his Word.

You will also be giving an ear to the people you're called to serve, both members and people you're seeking to serve outside the congregation. If you aren't talking the whole time, you'll hear what the specific fears are, the specific areas of temptation, the weaknesses, the idolatries.

Further, you'll be serving your people well by listening to many other voices in our 21st century American world, and not only to talk-radio (as if contemporary American "conservative" political views are right in line with confessional Lutheran teaching!) Listen to the NPR crowd. Read your local paper's editorials. Listen to the big news weeklies. Expose your mind to the Far Left, the Far Right, and everything in between. (And these points of view to check out are only the *political* ones).



If confessional Lutheranism is truly the authentic voice of catholic Christianity, then we are foolish enough to think that the theology of the cross is for more than only Packer fans. What we have to offer is for more than *my* crowd. So we're wise to listen to (i.e. read) the various points of view, also from the religious marketplace. If you listened to how superficially and vacuously the *Christian Century* treated Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*, you can appreciate how far mainline Christianity has departed from Christ. When you listen to conservative Roman Catholic writers in *First Things*, you can appreciate first hand how legal the Gospel is in Rome. When you listen to what seem to me to be cockamamie ideas from *The Utne Reader*, you gain insight into what the Gnostic New Age people think they have to offer for what they perceive are the world's problems.

Lutherans have long encouraged enjoying the whole range of the arts – and not just the arts that are used in worship. We're the ones who can appreciate something just because we appreciate it, not only if the thing has a chapter and verse from Scripture attached to it endorsing it. So I'll suggest to you that it's also OK to read simply for the pure joy of it. Works that have been published have at least this *imprimatur* – someone thought the message and the way the message was stated was worth the money to publish it. Someone thought it would move a reader somehow.

We live in an age of specialization. And specialists we preachers are – in terms of being faithful proclaimers of Law and Gospel. But I think we're also wise to be the kind of generalists that a liberal arts education aims to produce. Because that's where the people are whom we want to serve. Only the big ideas can speak to such a varied audience.

So listen carefully. Read widely. Specialize in Law and Gospel.

## SUMMER QUARTER, VIEWED FROM BELOW

Duty presses the preacher to have a personal method of operation and to conform to a weekly schedule. He doesn't need to consult others much because he has all those books on the shelf behind his desk. The world comes to him on his computer screen and cell phone.

Could it be that busy in my burrow is right where Satan wants me to stay put? He relentlessly probes my blind spots and insecurities. For him it would be a disaster for me to participate in Summer Quarter's exchange of ideas, stripping away of stereotypes, its loss of labels. There is that infectious enthusiasm in the crowded corridors, the roar of "Father, We Praise You" in Monday morning chapel. My adversary prefers that I not sit next to a stranger in the library, that I not need to introduce myself as I fill my plate in the dining hall at noon or commandeer a sink in the a.m. Nor does he relish that I have to listen to other's ideas in the crucible of the classroom. The proud spirit cannot abide that trust be built among brothers-in-arms as they move out with the Gospel.



## PREACHING THROUGH ANTITHESIS

"Dialog is part of a very high percentage of his sermons. Usually he spoke in the first person for both parties. There is conversation between Luther and his hearers, between God and humanity, God and Adam, Jesus and the disciples, God and Satan, Luther and Satan, sin and righteousness, life and death, heaven and hell. In almost every sermon two sides confront each other ... it was the way he saw life. 'Wenn ich eine Predigt tue, so mache ich eine Antithesisin.' [Luther says that if he is working on a sermon, he sets up a contrast. - ed.] ... That was an expression of his insight that the sermon is part of the battle still going on between God and evil for the universe. And a battle always has two sides. The sermon is not just instruction, but *conflict* – of truth with error, God with Satan."

Fred W. Meuser (*Luther the Preacher*; Augsburg)

## A SPIN ON LOWRY'S LOOP

Pastor Bob Johannes, Mishicot, WI

Narrative preaching has been a hot topic among American preachers for almost 20 years. The method intrigued me but I had avoided trying it. I don't consider myself a good storyteller (I have to practice just to tell a joke effectively). I'd read a number of narrative sermons in which the story, rather than the text, appeared to be the point of the sermon.



Luther preaches against the iconoclasts.

I picked up Eugene Lowry's book, *The Homiletical Plot*, after hearing a recommendation at a pastors' conference. I hadn't read far in its 130 pages when Lowry confessed a homiletical shortcoming which I also felt: "I had been taught the engineering science of sermon construction." That is, to take the text apart, and then "organize the pieces and hope the parts would look like they belonged together." He also described another experience I had, the sermon that seemed to write itself: "I used to feel guilty about the sermon which seemed to have its own demands and desires. Its flow and movement just would not be restricted to three points, and I know I was violating the principles of sermon making I had been taught. Yet this organic development kind of sermon took less preparation time, and it 'preached' better."

Lowry proposes that "a sermon is a plot (premeditated by the preacher)." That plot is what we struggle with in our personal study of the text. "Like any good storyteller, the preacher's task is to ... resolve matters in the light of the Gospel and in the presence of the people." Lowry explains that some texts have a natural plot, but "why not conceive every sermon as narrative – whether or not a parable or other story is involved?" Why not involve our fellow Christians in the tension, questions, discovery, and denouement that we go through as preachers? We struggle with the text and what the Lord is saying to us personally as we study the Word. Why can't we structure a sermon the way a novelist structures a novel, grabbing our hearers from line one with a mystery, a conflict, or a problem. We then take listeners with us as the problem deepens, and we discover that the Lord has given us the answer to the big problem along with the smaller problems in our lives?

Lowry's method has come to be known as "Lowry's Loop." He diagrams the loop in the book, but let me try to describe it for

you. The first stage of the sermon he calls “Oops!”, or *Upsetting the Equilibrium*. This is where the preacher presents the mystery, conflict, or problem. The second stage is called “Ugh!”, or *Analyzing the Discrepancy*. Here we explore the depth of the problem, what the problem really is and why it occurs. The third stage is “Aha!”, or *Disclosing the Clue to Resolution*. Here the preacher fills in the missing link, the Scripture’s view of human problems, their source in sin and the absolute need for grace. The fourth stage, “Wheel!”, or *Experiencing the Gospel*, allows the preacher to proclaim and explain the Gospel. And in stage five, “Yeah!”, or *Anticipating the Consequences*, we point to applications and appropriations of that wonderful Gospel.

I have used Lowry’s Loop in a large number of my sermons over the past four years. It requires thorough study, pondering and prayer over the text and the “plot.” But the sermons wrote easier, were learned easier, and preached better. I noticed that my congregation was attentively with me in the process of solving the problem and unraveling the plot. And Lowry’s Loop truly lends itself to probing Law and powerful Gospel preaching. But as with any structure, including deductive theme-and-parts preaching, the method can get overused. I found that Lowry’s method produced very intense sermons for the preacher and the congregation. My son also noticed a similarity in structure of these sermons. All the same, Lowry’s Loop is an excellent tool for proclaiming the saving Word. Let me suggest you put it in your toolbox.

Eugene Lowry (*The Homiletical Plot*, John Knox Press, 1980 & 2001).

## THREE FROM WALTHER

- 1 (2 Corinthians 5:13) “Paul says that a minister must manifest greater earnestness and zeal than the majority of his congregation may like or approve. The apostle does not mean to say that in his ministry at Corinth he displayed zeal without knowledge ... but that he was more zealous than the Corinthians desired. Every sincere preacher and minister of Jesus Christ shows himself full of zeal and earnest determination, though he may not reap any better reward from his congregation than unpopularity, hatred and enmity. A sincere minister will go through such experiences rather than gain any one for himself by hushing the truth, veiling it, or grinding down its sharp points.” (308)
- 2 “No heresy can bear the teaching of divine grace.” (160)
- 3 “As to the Apostles, no sooner had their hearers shown that they were alarmed than they seemed to know nothing else to do for them than to comfort them and pronounce absolution to them. Not until that had been done would they say to their people: “Now you must show your gratitude toward God.” They did not issue orders; they did not threaten when their orders were disregarded, but they pleaded and besought their hearers by the mercy of God to act like Christians.” (94)

## USING LAW-GOSPEL PAIRS IN PREACHING

“We run the danger of becoming stuck in the rut of presenting Law and Gospel in the same way every Sunday. We may like a certain Law-Gospel pair and use it until it becomes monotonous in our sermons.

Soon, our presentation of the Gospel becomes frustrating to us. Sunday after Sunday we seem to see our members tune us out when we begin to mention the cross and the suffering and the death of Jesus. ... We can even be misled into thinking that our members are receiving the Gospel in vain and are ungrateful to God.

This frustration may also lead us to underrate the preaching of Law and Gospel. Instead of making Law-Gospel the center of our sermons, we are tempted to remove it from its rightful place in our message and begin to locate it in places where it can be conveniently squeezed in. We yield to other material the central place in our message.”

### Physical Comparisons

Sick-healthy  
Dead-alive  
Blind-seeing  
Deaf-hearing  
Leprous-cleansed  
Thirsty-refreshed  
Hungry-filled  
Paralyzed-free to move  
Demon possessed-God possessed  
Crippled-whole  
Filthy-clean  
Bitter-sweet

### Legal Comparisons

Miss the mark-scored bullseye  
Enemy-friend  
Criminal-pardoned  
Killer-amnesty  
Prisoner-released  
Convict-ex con  
Unrighteous-God’s righteousness  
Self righteous-alien righteousness  
Slave-child  
Slave to sin-slave to God  
Debtor-forgiven  
Guilty-innocent  
Lawbreaker-law keeper  
Foreigner-citizen  
Judged-acquitted  
Sinner-saint  
Evil-good  
Book of life: no entry - Name in Book of Life  
Kidnapped-ransomed

### Behavioral Comparisons (Man)

Sad-joyous  
Despair-hope  
Insecure-security  
Fearful-confident  
Terrified-comforted  
Troubled-at ease  
Ignorant-wise  
Insensitive-loving

### Behavioral Comparisons (God)

Fury-mercy  
Hate-love  
Angry-reconciled

### Comparisons from Nature

Dark-light  
Far away-near  
Lost-found  
Separation-atonement  
Unprotected-sheltered  
On road to hell-on road to heaven  
Exposed to death-shielded from death  
My sin recorded in God’s handwriting - handwriting blotted out  
Bad news-good news

Gary Griep (for more of this article, see *WLQ*, vol 79, #2, Spring 1982).



## NO CLASS NOTES ALLOWED

When we were children our teachers told us not to write in our textbooks. Many a pastor, however, works out of a Bible with margins scribbled full. One of your preaching brothers uses a 1978 NIV that looks as if it has been vandalized – every page seems to be a confused canvas of colors, outlining, and marginal glosses.

His desk Bible is something precious to a pastor – no matter how it appears to others. And, as with the *text*, after a couple years the *notes* also become familiar. Outlines at the beginning of Bible books or explanations in parentheses may become second nature, now accepted without scrutiny.

Here's an idea for 2006. Acquire a second copy of the same edition of the Bible you now use. Keep it on your desk. In your morning devotion time, as you read through the Bible this year, force yourself to read it through from the Bible with no notes. A variation on this approach is to read a Bible book from the "clean" text, then read it through a second time, this time from your old faithful. What are some potential blessings?

## WHAT AM I DOING UP HERE IN THE PULPIT?

- Here stands the text
- Here are God's people with their needs
- God has called me through these people

Brothers, the Lord Jesus, who holds his *αγγελου* in the palm of his hand (Rv 1), will give you all you require to preach the Word.

*Pastor Tom Jeske  
Omaha, Nebraska*

## YOU CAN PRINT THAT

- 1 "The human personality naturally seeks balance, stability, and equilibrium, and it is the management of this anxiety that keeps the listener engaged. Suspense is necessary for people to listen. Therefore, the first organizing principle of the emotional context of the celebrative sermon is the introduction of suspense. The preacher must introduce and manage suspense to keep the listener actively engaged in the sermon."

*Frank A. Thomas (They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: the Role of Celebration in Preaching; Pilgrim Press)*

- 2 "Do not join independent clauses with a comma. If two or more clauses grammatically complete ... are to form a single compound sentence, the proper mark of punctuation is a semi-colon ... indeed, this simple method of indicating relationship between statements is one of the most useful devices of composition.

*Mary Shelley's works are entertaining; they are full of engaging ideas.*

*It is nearly half past five; we cannot reach town before dark."*

*Strunk / White (The Elements of Style)*

- 3 "The sacrament or sign of baptism is soon performed, as we see. But the meaning of it ... the drowning of sin, is continued all through our earthly life and cannot be fully achieved while we are alive on earth. Only at the hour of our death is it completed."

*Martin Luther (Sermon on the Holy and Venerable Sacrament of Baptism, 1519)*

- 4 "... the Sinaitic pedagogy of the Lord ended in the complete apostasy of his chosen people ... any further application of this kind of rearing by the Law is useless ... there is no longer any possibility of change for the better that might lead to salvation ... only destruction is now in order. The house of Jacob has been rejected. Therefore a wholly different royal child must appear and establish a new kingdom – he who is Wonderful, Counselor, Power, Hero, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace – who will prepare and establish his kingdom with a judgment and a righteousness of another kind."

*August Pieper (Isaiah II, p 31)*



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