

PREACH

the Word

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



Vicar year. It was time to read through the entire Bible. Fascinated by all the different names used for God and for his Son, I began scribbling them inside the back cover. Quickly a page filled with columns -- “Bright Morning Star,” “He who watches over Israel,” “Lion of the tribe of Judah.” I began to write smaller, but still the lists grew: “Architect and Builder of the City with Foundations,” “the Fear of Isaac,” “the Gate.” Here were not a dozen, or even fifty -- it seemed the prophets and apostles fairly rained hundreds upon hundreds of different names for God upon the eyes and ears of their readers.

And so it dawned on me while the likeable fellow preached at our conference worship. Every time he referred to God he named him “Lord.” Was it by design or by default? I found myself counting and wondering if and when he would alter his predictable pattern.

I mulled this over on the way home. Since we have a significant education in Hebrew we are familiar with l-o-r-d's second (and lesser-known) meaning. We have learned the meaning of LORD, *I Am*, the God of free and faithful grace. A Sem prof made us memorize Exodus 34:6-7. So when we Lutheran preachers say “Lord” we subconsciously see in our mind's eye the spelling LORD.

Even if we mean well on this one, the hearer is not picking up the distinction unless she has a printed copy of the sermon before her.

Another possibility: perhaps my conference brother didn't type his sermon out. It seems likely that the man who doesn't script his sermon would be more open to this weakness, this riffing on one name for God. A different sermon by a different preacher, however, revealed a dozen or more “Lord” references on only one page of his *printed* sermon. Remember that the Canaanites, too, used the term *lord*. We, however, preach about *Jesus*.

Friend, take a yellow marker and hit each use of *Lord* in your sermon from last Sunday. Evaluate. You have hundreds of alternatives at hand. Then when you do use it, *Lord* will resonate as it is intended to.

EXPOSED

“The very word of God that imparts forgiveness tells of man's inability to help himself. God's very act of revealing himself is a denial of our ability to penetrate to his hidden nature by our own creative efforts. Through the preaching of the covering-over of sin, he uncovers the burden of our guilt. As he grants forgiveness, he makes us conscious of how deeply we have injured him by our rebellion. The divine necessity of the Incarnation is the proclamation of human godlessness. When the Holy One of God has been crucified as a blasphemer by the pious leaders of a pious people, the fact is blazoned forth that our holiness is still a blasphemy of God.”

Adolf Koeberle (*The Quest for Holiness*, p 57)

TOTALITER

Professor Arnold Koelpin, New Ulm, MN



What does this strange word have to do with preaching the Word? Everything. *Totaliter*, a lively word in past Christian literature, simply means *totally, entirely, wholly, completely*. It means 100% -- not 90% here and 10% there. The opposite of *totaliter* is *partial* or *fragmentary*. The theological application of this single word has an impact on our preaching, practice, and understanding of the Scriptures.

Without the wholeness inherent in *our* nature (*totally* sinful from conception), in the nature of *God* (*altogether* holy, powerful, righteous, and true), and in the person of *Christ* (*fully* human and divine), Christianity becomes another religion among the works-religions of the world. As a result people are left hanging without the certainty of completeness. *Totaliter*, in one sense, summarizes Luther's biblical reform in a single word. In a peculiar way it also encompasses our preaching of the Word.

We always need an understanding of the big picture in the church because the holy Scriptures reveal the truth, the *whole* truth, and *nothing but* the truth. The Apostle Paul's resolve to know "*nothing except* Christ and him crucified" highlights our preaching mission and ministry (1 Cor 2:2).

Over time, the devil has a way of skewing God's Word and its application to life. Preachers, reading God's Word with earth-bound Law-based glasses, divide what God put together. In attempts to be practical and relevant according to everyday reasoning and desires, preachers express God's real-life truths only partially -- truths about God and man, Christ and the cross, birth and rebirth, repentance and faith, life in the state and in the church. Without God's big picture, much preaching ends up as moral advice and spiritual speculation. An endless stream of entertaining personal life-experiences jump over and neglect the *entire* view of life that God has revealed.

In Application

Thesis 1 of Luther's famous Ninety-Five is a case in point. The young Doctor wrote with studied emphasis: "When our Lord Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he meant that our entire life is to be one of repentance." In this simple declarative sentence Luther explains a basic problem in church life. His emphasis does not fall, as one might expect, on repentance as such -- as vital a subject as repentance is for faith and life. The weight of his biblical insight falls on the phrase "*entire life*." Indulgence preaching and practice produced a false hope of repentance for those receiving gifts from the "treasury of merits." People needed an understanding and insight that focused on Christ's *all-encompassing* work in the life of repentance.

Totaliter: Entire life! That dynamic word continues to form the core of Christian preaching and practice in every age.

The Christian church constantly needs reform in preaching for one basic reason. Christians are not merely sinner/saint. The early and medieval church recognized the sinner/saint from the daily confession: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins". The sinner/saint message was and continues to be the basis of Christian preaching. But the meaning easily morphs. In penitential preaching and practice, works of faith were commingled with Christ's work and said to complete it. This partly/partly model (partly-Christ/partly-us) was the basis of the "Indulgence School" of sinner/saint preaching and practice.

Even in Christian proclamation, as a result, repentance can become a matter of doing penance. Christ's righteousness is supplemented by the sinner's penitential acts, and repentance becomes a cooperative enterprise between God and us. To do what is in you [*facere quod in se est*] is the formula that a confirmand learns as part of penitential practice. Without distinction, the righteousness Christ won on the cross is topped off by a person's righteous acts, like ice cream on cake. Active and passive righteousness commingle to the people's confusion and uncertainty. Having received forgiveness, a Christian is now thrown back upon himself.

But true repentance is God's work. It consists of godly sorrow over sin and faith in God's mercy (Lk 24:47; Is 30:15; 2 Co 7:10). Based on Christ and his redeeming work, true repentance covers our *entire* life and is as certain as Christ's death for the world's sins. In godly sorrow we need not recall each and every sin, weighing, distinguishing, and differentiating one from another. This turns repentance into torture. It is enough sincerely to confess that I am *altogether* sinful from birth. I knowingly admit sins in thoughts, words and deeds as mirrored in God's law (Ps 51:1-5). In this way I confess *all* sins without omitting or forgetting a single one (Ps 19:12).

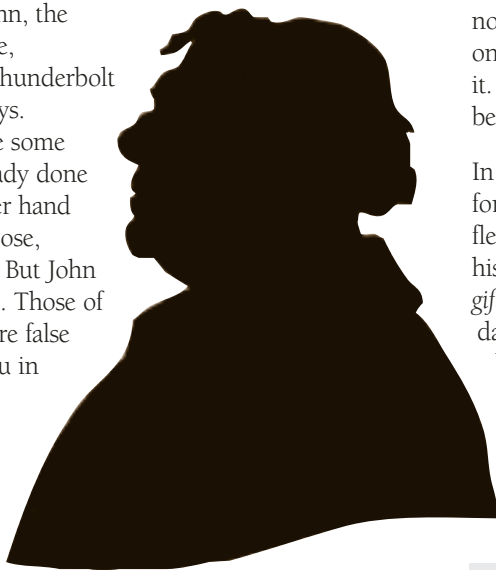
Certainty, Certainly!

In this way also, sorrow over sin and faith in God encompass our *entire* life constantly and consistently, whether we are waking or sleeping -- and continues until death. Repentance is the godly way of life. As long as we live, our sinful flesh clings to us. Through repentance we are given a whole new outlook toward God, toward life, toward the world and toward our neighbor. As a result we no longer live for ourselves alone but in Christ and in our neighbor (Cl 3:1-3; 12-14). We live in Christ by faith and in our neighbor by love. God alone works this new way of life in our lives through his Word and sacraments.

So Christians are *totally* sinner and *totally* saint in one person, just as the Lord Jesus was *totally* human and *totally* divine in one person. The paradox of Christian life lies in the inconceivable revelation of God: *two* wholes make up *one*. For the sake of preaching they cannot be divided lest we make the human being into two persons and not one being. We can only distinguish our sinful self from our saintliness in Christ. Being *altogether* sinner and saint throughout our earthly life remains a mystery to our human mind, a mystery grasped only by faith. But God reveals this mystery in the work of Christ and it is known only by his revelation through God's Spirit. Our assignment: Preach the Word distinctly, *totaliter*, to give the joy of certainty to all who hear and believe.

DR. LUTHER ON TOTALITER

Here the fiery angel St. John, the *preacher* of true repentance, intervenes. With a single thunderbolt he strikes. "Repent," he says. On the one hand there are some who think, "We have already done penance," and on the other hand there are others who suppose, "We need no repentance." But John says: "Repent, both of you. Those of you in the former group are false penitents, and those of you in the latter are false saints. Both of you need the forgiveness of sins, for neither of you know what sin really is, to say nothing of repenting and shunning sin.



None of you is good. All of you are full of unbelief, blindness, and ignorance of God and God's will. For he is here present, and from his fullness have we all received grace upon grace. No man can be just before God without him. Accordingly, if you would repent, repent rightly. Your repentance accomplishes nothing. And you hypocrites who think you do not need to repent, you brood of vipers, who has given you any assurance that you will escape the wrath to come?"

St. Paul teaches the same thing in Romans 3:10-12: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, *together* they have done wrong." And in Acts 17:30, "Now he commands all men everywhere to repent." He says "all men," that is, *excepting no one* who is a human being. Such repentance teaches us to acknowledge sin -- that is, to acknowledge that we are all *utterly* lost, that from *head to foot* there is no good in us, that we must become *altogether* new and different men.

This repentance is not *partial and fragmentary* like repentance for actual sins, nor is it *uncertain* like that. It does not debate what is sin and what is not sin, but lumps *everything together* and says, "'We are *wholly* and *altogether* sinful.'" We need not spend our time weighing, distinguishing, differentiating. On this account there is *no uncertainty* in such repentance, for nothing is left that we might imagine is good enough to pay for our sin. One thing is sure: We cannot pin our hope on anything that we are, think, say, or do. And so our *repentance cannot be false, uncertain, or partial*, for a person who confesses that he is *altogether* sinful embraces *all sins* in his confession without omitting or forgetting a single one. Nor can our satisfaction be uncertain, for it consists not of the dubious, sinful works which we do but of the sufferings and blood of the innocent Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is the repentance which John preaches, which Christ subsequently preaches in the Gospel, and which we also preach. With this repentance we overthrow ... everything that is built on

our good works. For all of this is constructed on an unreal and rotten foundation which is called good works or the Law, although no good work but only wicked works are there and although no one keeps the Law (as Christ says in John 7:19) but all transgress it. Accordingly the entire building, even when it is most holy and beautiful, is nothing but deceitful falsehood and hypocrisy.

In the case of a Christian such repentance *continues until death*, for all through life it contends with the sins that remain in the flesh. As St. Paul testifies in Romans 7:23, he wars with the law in his members, and he does this *not with his own powers* but with the *gift of the Holy Spirit which follows the forgiveness of sins*. This gift daily cleanses and expels the sins that remain and enables man to become *truly* pure and holy.

Smalcald Articles III, III, 30-40

THREE FROM WALTHER

- 1 "My doctrine is of such a nature, that if it is properly proclaimed, thetically and antithetically, peace among men cannot possibly be preserved. For as soon as my Word is proclaimed, men will divide into two camps; some will receive it with joy, others will be offended by it and begin to hate and persecute those who receive it... The Church is not a kingdom that can be built up in peace; it is located within the domain of the devil, who is the prince of this world." (266)
- 2 "True, our Lord says 'Come unto me, *All,*' but he immediately adds: 'ye that labor and are heavy laden.' Thus he serves notice upon secure sinners that he is not inviting them. They would only ridicule him if he were to lay his spiritual, heavenly treasures before them." (115)
- 3 "Luther occasionally uses this expression that, objectively, every person is already righteous in the sight of God because of the living and dying of Christ in his stead. When God justifies an individual by offering him the Gospel and the individual refuses to accept it, he is, indeed, not justified, but is and remains a condemned sinner." (291)





STABBED BY SILENCE

“All of us, especially if we are not fully-scripted, have a secret fear of getting stuck. Even the scripted preacher has a fear of losing the place or finding the last page of a manuscript has been left in the study. To reassure ourselves we keep talking, talking, and talking. Silence is scary!

“It is interesting to see how, if for any reason a preacher does get stuck, even the semi-comatose in the congregation immediately sit up and take notice. They have been lulled to sleep by a steady flow of words but are stabbed awake by the silence. Take your time. Before you say anything, wait for the congregation to settle...

“Above all, remember that *pause* is the instrument through which we create verbal paragraphs. Paragraphs in written English are made by leaving some white space on the page, reinforced by a change of line. Paragraphs in spoken English are represented by a pause, often reinforced by a new vocal line -- a change in pace, pitch, volume or vocal color... A book that goes on for many pages without a written paragraph to be seen is dreary to the eye. A sermon that goes on for many minutes without a verbal paragraph is dreary to the ear.

“Hesitation is no necessary obstacle to communication. It occurs constantly in ordinary [conversation] and can actually become a part of the communication process. The mortal enemy of good communication is not the occasional hesitation, but the relentless monotony of words without pause.”

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

YOU CAN PRINT THAT

1 “Wait until the audience is well-seated after you have read the text. Face the audience squarely as a man that is ready to begin, and wait until the last rustle subsides. Wait still a little longer. All eyes will fix themselves on you -- waiting. And like a magnetic current, which you can actually sense and feel, the attention of the audience will rise to meet you. This is the psychological moment to begin.”

R.C.H. Lenski
(*The Sermon -- Its Homiletical Construction*, p 292).

2. “God is like a hen (Luke 13:34). The moment you threaten a hen’s chicks, this humble bird with the bobbing head and silly walk is transformed into a storm of wings and feathers, riveting beak, scratching claws and ear-shattering squawking. If she succeeds in stopping your invasion, she gathers her chicks about her and spreads her wings in protection. The message is clear: if you want one of her chicks, you’ll have to go through her to get it.”

Todd Temple (*52 Simple Ways to Teach Your Child about God*), Nelson Publishers.

3 “A wise man attacks the city of the mighty and pulls down the stronghold in which they trust” (Proverbs 21:22).

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world... they have divine power to demolish *strongholds*. We demolish *arguments*... We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

4 “In the holy ministry we are dealing with the eternal welfare of the souls of men, for whom the Son of God shed his holy precious blood. Can you conceive of any greater burden that a man might be persuaded to take upon his heart and conscience? Who of us in the ministry has not trembled at the words ‘They watch for your souls as they that must give account?’ ... A preacher of the Gospel must know what he is doing and that what he is doing is right. I would want no part of the ministry ... if I did not have the conviction that in this book we have the very words of God.”

Siegbert Becker (essay from *This Steadfast Word*, Lutheran Free Conference Publications, 1965).

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