

# PREACH

*the Word*

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## A PROMISE FOR PREACHERS

"No ... way!" you blurt emphatically when somebody tells you what you would never believe to be true, but it's good news so you give them the benefit of the doubt. "You've *got* to be kidding me!" is more of a question than a statement, for the most part denying that what just happened really did occur, but you're elated nonetheless. That's how the Spirit describes the response of the disciples when they laid eyes on their dead friend and Savior, Jesus, now standing before them very much alive. "*They still did not believe it because of joy and amazement*" (Luke 24:41).

That beats not believing because of fear – like storm-tossed disciples convinced that a sleeping Jesus is as good as a mute idol. Or greed – like Herod dismissing the King of the Jews because that is a title he doesn't wish to share. Or pride – like Pharisees unyielding in their self-righteousness. Or lust – like Ananias and Sapphira detoured from the faith by the neon lights of materialism.

When those of us who preach don't believe, we better ask ourselves why. Do I not believe in my wearied writing style, in my slacking preparation, or in my repetitive delivery patterns? Those are stewardship issues worthy enough of repentance and renewal. More than that, when I preach only because it's Sunday and mount the pulpit worried that I get through this without looking like an idiot ... is there deeper evil lurking within?

Honest messengers of God will say it is certainly so. We will confess that sometimes we don't believe because of fear or greed or pride or lust. We fear the turbulence of a storm tossed schedule battering our conscience, so we don't believe that the quiet hours of studying will help us get to the other side. We secretly desire public approval, and when we receive none we don't believe we have served our Lord. We covet the skilled success of others and, ironically, don't believe they can be serving the Lord.

How, then, can we be messengers of divine truth when we ourselves have not held to its virtues? Only by the promises of the one who appoints us to the task, insisting that his hopes and dreams for preaching the gospel must find their mark. In us.

"*Touch me,*" Jesus tenderly invited his slow-to-believe followers (Luke 24:39). "Everything must be fulfilled," Jesus reminded his skeptical ambassadors after swallowing a piece of fish to show



them he was the real thing (Luke 24:44). And he meant everything, including his promise that "*repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached ... you are witnesses*" (Luke 24:47,48).

Jesus insisted that his suffering, dying, and rising fulfilled the power and promises of God. And the preaching and witnessing performed by his believers would be a fulfillment just the same. Jesus believed in his disciples – because he gave them forgiveness to believe in, because he "*opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures*" (Luke 24:45), because his Spirit anointed them "*with power from on high*" (Luke 24:49).

Jesus believes in you, preacher. Jesus' words do find their mark in you, preacher. Jesus' resurrection opens the tomb of your repentance to a new forgiven world of amazement that finds it difficult to grasp everything divine and do everything there is to do, but finds it joyful nonetheless. Jesus' ascension lays hands of blessing on your sermon preparation and delivery, anointing you with quiet power to change lives with words that cause angels to rejoice.

Oh, believe it! Jesus' hope comes true in you. Preach, therefore, with newfound faith – a faith that is challenged only by joy and amazement.

Daron Lindemann

## SERMON HELPS

The following material is presented for two purposes, 1) to help you as a resource for sermon preparation in the weeks ahead, and 2) to help you as a model for communicating the word. Glean what you wish. Repeat whatever is fitting. But whatever you do, be sure to pause, ponder, and listen to the message therein. Remember, preaching begins in the ear.

 A fuller version of these sermon helps is posted online at [www.wels.net/ptw](http://www.wels.net/ptw).

### Easter 6

The Greek god, Zeus, was supposedly the king of the gods and a father to many of them. Legend had it that the Greek god, Hermes, was born in a cave on Mt. Cylene. He is the speedy messenger of the gods and is often depicted wearing winged sandals and hat. The hopes of Paul and Barnabas that the people in Lystra would forsake their gods for the true God were ripped away as much as their tunics were ripped down the front of their chests when they saw the priest of Zeus coming to offer sacrifices. *"Why are you doing this?"* they protest. *"We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God."* Paul and Barnabas don't even give Zeus and Hermes and the other mythological figures of the Greek religion the honor of being called "gods," but instead call them "things." Inanimate objects like stones, wood chips, raindrops, or figments of the imagination. They might look good and make you feel good, but they don't do any good. They're worthless. Compare them to the *"living God."*

### Sermon thoughts for Easter season and Fathers' Day

 From the sermon *"Approval from This Father"* posted online at [www.wels.net/ptw](http://www.wels.net/ptw)

There's something terrifying about a father, and I don't mean the bad kind. I mean the good kind. I mean fathers who are dependable and respectable and responsible. Fathers who are loving and caring and nurturing. Fathers who are good role models and good providers. There is something terrifying about a good father. A father can be terrifying because of the power he has over us. And fathers have power over us because of how badly we want their approval.

### Pentecost

 From the sermon *"Pentecost Reverses Babel"* posted online at [www.wels.net/ptw](http://www.wels.net/ptw)

This was an intervention of mercy. The LORD *"came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building."* There is humor in that line: they wanted to build a tower *so big* that everybody would notice them; the tower turned out to be *so small* that God had to *come down* to take a look at it . . . And so this was a pre-emptive strike of his mercy that *"the LORD"* confused their languages. He saved them from themselves, and from glorifying themselves over him.

Fast forward to Pentecost. The gift of tongues the Holy Spirit gave the first disciples showed them that the gospel of Jesus is meant for everybody in the world. . . . If the people could have *frustrated* God's purposes with their common language, think what God wants us to do with the "common language" of Jesus' good news.

Pentecost happened on a Sunday, centuries ago. But Pentecost happens each new day, as the Spirit of God revitalizes us through the Word, redirects our focus to the common language of the gospel, and re-energizes us and equips us with his gifts to do his mission.

### Holy Trinity

 From the sermon *"Extreme Makeover – Soul Edition"* posted online at [www.wels.net/ptw](http://www.wels.net/ptw)

People spend agonizing hours wondering if God loves them. They look at their life for signs of God's love, as though God's love could be measured by health and wealth. People look within themselves to determine whether God loves them, as though God's love depends on how you feel about it? Think about that! Does a certain amount of happiness make God's love real? Can you make God stop loving you if you feel like he doesn't? Life is a spiritual roller-coaster if you're going to read God's love in the events of your life or the emotions of your day. You can know God loves you, no matter what. Look at Jesus' cross. God did that because he loves you. Because God did that, he'll never stop loving you. Look at God's Word, timeless truth answering contemporary hurts and fears. The *Extreme Makeover – Soul Edition* is the evidence that God loves you, totally.

### Pentecost 2

How odd! The *Da Vinci Code* is an entirely made-up story of how early bishops suppressed the truth and invented the Bible. Every religious scholar who has read it says it is factually inaccurate, yet it is a wild best-seller. Yet churches that claim to have the truth and are willing to confess it may be dismissed as out of touch. God wants churches to be places where his truth is confessed.



# PREACHING BY FRED B. CRADDOCK

## Study Guide # 9 – Enriching the Form

### Pages 194–209

Craddock offers ten different exercises that can aid the preacher in keeping language fresh (pp. 198-200). Rate them below according to your personal interest. Mark the one which appeals to you most with a 1. Mark the one which appeals to you least with a 10 and others in between. (It can be helpful to start by marking three of the most appealing then three of the least appealing then sort out the middle). Compare with others in your group. Do you notice any trends? Discuss.

- \_\_\_ Read writers who are experts at fresh and powerful language.
- \_\_\_ Use different expressions for preaching that are more imaginative.
- \_\_\_ Read writers who are recognized as great writers.
- \_\_\_ Write personal letters to friends or relatives.
- \_\_\_ Review your preaching every six weeks and grant a sabbatical to overused words.
- \_\_\_ Listen to conversations revealing the rich range of ordinary speech.
- \_\_\_ Speak with people who are learning English.
- \_\_\_ Talk with small children.
- \_\_\_ Change vague sermon ideas and concepts into phrases that appeal to senses.
- \_\_\_ Play word games.

Based on the first paragraph of this section on pp. 203 and 204, do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Good preachers don't need to use illustrations.

Do you have concerns or contradictory experience related to Craddock's answers to the following questions on pp. 206-209?

- In speaking how does one handle those materials which in writing would be footnoted?

- Can ministers use in sermons events or conversations from their pastoral work?
- Is it ethical to create stories for a sermon?
- Are stories of self-disclosure appropriate in preaching?



A fuller version of Study Guide #9 is posted online at [www.wels.net/ptw](http://www.wels.net/ptw).

## Study Guide # 10 – Delivering the Sermon

### Pages 210–222

Speech and hearing clinic? Speech teacher or textbook? Practicing Scripture readings aloud? Does a busy preacher really have time for this? And, besides, isn't this overkill? Should we just trust the Word? Read p. 210 for background.

“The Bible is more than words on pages; it is a symbol of authority and inspiration.... When ministers are reading the Bible it should be clear they are reading the Bible.... Reading joins the text to the Bible, the very same source that every parishioner can read in the pew and at home; quoting joins the text to the preacher and subtly relocates the center of authority for the message” (p. 212). How many in your group read Scripture quotations directly from the Bible and not from the manuscript/outline/notes? Explain Craddock's rationale for doing so. Are the reasons for doing otherwise strong enough?

Some occasions and purposes are best served without notes or manuscript. Give some examples.

“The most consistently effective delivery is by reexperiencing the message as it is being spoken” (p. 218). What are some of the results of such a delivery, mentioned on pp. 218–220?



A fuller version of Study Guide #10 is posted online at [www.wels.net/ptw](http://www.wels.net/ptw).

## AN INTERVIEW WITH THOSE WHO TEACH TO PREACH

Always striving to provide the greatest and the latest preaching helps, this editor interviewed a former homiletics professor and a current homiletics professor, one having taught and the other still teaching at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Thanks to Rev. Joel Gerlach and Prof. Richard Gurgel, respectively, for taking the time to share their insights with *Preach the Word*. Excerpts of their answers are printed here, while the answers in their entirety are posted on our web site.

*To what resources do you turn a parish preacher for professional growth?*

Rev. Joel Gerlach offers input, not surprisingly, connected to this publication. But he continues with another suggestion that may surprise you ...

*When preachers use online resources how much is too much?*

**Prof. Richard Gurgel:** Pastor Gerlach mentioned before reading the sermons of others. I think we can easily die from lack of input. First of all, lest this gets lost in the point I'm about to make, to be able to read good sermons by others, both within our fellowship and an excellent preacher outside, can be very helpful to us, to each of us. However, I do have concerns about taking wholesale, especially before I have preached. [Another] concern is taking large chunks of others' work and just importing it into my sermon, and certainly without acting as if I had their experiences, or their analogies were from my family and my household. The question of integrity in the pulpit becomes huge ...



(Videos of the complete answers to these questions are posted online at [www.wels.net/ptw](http://www.wels.net/ptw))

## TAKE MY WORD FOR IT

Members of the National City Christian Church in Washington, D.C. were surprised to find that their pastor, a respected preacher in that denomination, was preaching sermons he had found on the internet. He has since left.

Rev. E. Glenn Wagner, former pastor of the mega Calvary Church in Charlotte and minister-at-large with Promise Keepers, left his church after confessing that, during a difficult time in his ministry, he had preached sermons written by others.

Here in *Preach the Word* we provide not merely preaching ideas but plug and preach sermons. If you were busy like the rest of preachers during Lent, perhaps you purchased a series written by a respected preacher, memorized each sermon faithfully, and delivered it so skillfully that someone told you it was some of your best preaching ever.

So how far is too far when repeating the sermon material of others? When does preaching become plagiarism? And do your listeners really care, as long as it's good stuff – maybe even better stuff?

Opinions abound, and I want to share them with you, from the advice of [www.desperatepreacher.com](http://www.desperatepreacher.com) to some wisdom from Gene Edward Veith to a book I found called *An Essential Guide to Public Speaking: Serving Your Audience with Faith, Skill, and Virtue*. Not to tell you what to do, but to help you think this through and improve your preaching.

I'm developing a list of what I believe to be the top ten issues regarding plagiarism from the pulpit. Here are a few I have so far:

- Practical – busy preachers can use someone else's sermon, save time, and offer a better product, isn't that good stewardship?
- Ethical – is using without citing a breach of the 7th commandment?
- Commercial – there's plenty of great sermon material out there for a good price, and they give you permission to use it, so why not?
- Pastoral – do your listeners really need to know that you didn't write half of that sermon, as long as you deliver it sincerely ... and what's the big deal if they do know?

Do you have any others on your mind? E-mail me or write me, and I'll develop a list to be shared in the next newsletter.

Finally, I've asked Rev. John A. Braun, executive editor of *Forward in Christ* magazine and vice-president of Northwestern Publishing House, to co-author with me an upcoming series of articles about these issues of plagiarism from the pulpit.

So get ready to grow, check back with *Preach the Word* in future issues, for added fun google "pulpit plagiarism" and you'll find some fascinating opinions, respond to me with what you believe are the hottest points about the topic, and to sweeten the deal, you can find on our website a new segment of an interview with Prof. Richard Gurgel and Rev. Joel Gerlach when I asked them about pulpit plagiarism.



## THEMES AND PARTS

The best kind of sermon themes, and their corresponding parts, are textual. So textual that, dare I say, one should be able to read them and determine almost instantly the exact portion of Scripture on which textual themes and parts are based. Here are a few examples. Can you determine the texts?



You can check your accuracy online at [www.wels.net/ptw](http://www.wels.net/ptw).

### **The Kind of Place God Wants Our Churches to Be**

A place where his truth is confessed by those who believe it  
A place where his grace is extended to those who seek it

### **Good Things Come in Threes**

The Father's care  
The Savior's grace  
The Spirit's peace

### **Let's Make a Name for Ourselves!**

Man's glory language  
God's gospel language

### **Jesus Prayed that We May Be One**

United by his holy words  
United for all the world to see  
United through all eternity



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