

PREACH

the Word

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CHRIST AND PREACHERS AT WORK

Graduation ceremonies celebrate what has taken place and they anticipate what will take place. The ascension of Jesus Christ celebrates what has been and what will be. In chapter 24 of Luke's gospel the final words of his account not only report the ascension of Jesus Christ but outline his threefold office, pointing preachers both back and ahead.

Either at his ascension or during the days that preceded it, Jesus, with his disciples around him, "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (v. 45). Events they were witnessing had already been predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures. Now they were fulfilled before their very eyes! Christ the Prophet opens their minds to recognize and appreciate it.

Preachers depend on our Prophet to do the same for us, opening our minds to understand and appreciate the Scriptures. More than that, he promises to speak through us.

There's much to appreciate and communicate, especially Christ's work as Priest. He tells his disciples, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations" (vv. 46, 47). Christ is priest both to his disciples and through his disciples. Being forgiven by Christ the Priest and preaching forgiveness in the name of Christ the Priest fulfills what has been written in the Scriptures.

We who proclaim forgiveness are thus drawn into what our Priest has already done while also being propelled toward what he is yet to do. Appreciation spawns anticipation.

After telling his disciples that they'd be witnesses, Jesus says, "Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (v. 49). Then like a new president raising his hand to take an oath of office, Christ the King raises both his hands and blesses them with promises. These men, previously cowering in the corner out of fear, now publicly worship Christ the King who rules their hearts with new courage and commitment (vv. 52, 53).

Preachers often explain that we wear robes so that people don't see us, but there's another reason we wear robes – so that people do see someone else. Christ the King. Our non-trendy vestments represent otherworldly power clothing us, covering our insufficiencies with the work of the all-sufficient One.

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, but he doesn't leave you alone. Anywhere. Not even in the pulpit.

Daron Lindemann



SAMPLE SERMON

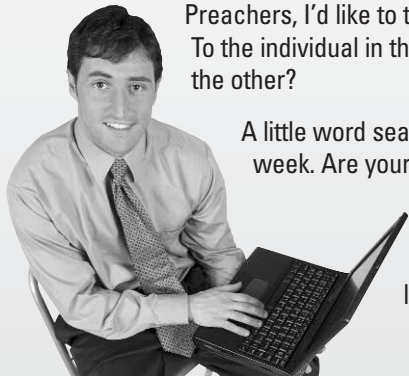
Preaching something other than the Acts account on Pentecost can be a rewarding experience for preacher and congregation, as long as the text supplements the Pentecost event. Consider this sermon entitled, "Pentecost Reverses Babel," based on Genesis 11:1-9. Below, sermon portions in the left column receive the treatment of evaluating comments in the right column.

SERMON	COMMENTS
<p>You probably "get" this story a little more if you have ever traveled someplace where you heard different "tongues" being spoken around you, on the streets and in the stores. We often use the word <i>babel</i> to describe it. Missionaries tell how it took them years to acquire even a basic ability to speak the local language; just the slightest slip could mess them up. They have some embarrassing, sometimes humorous stories they tell on themselves. One missionary inadvertently introduced his daughter as <i>his mistress</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The preacher makes the language barrier that exists today more real for us by an example and anecdote.</i>
<p>The world used to have a common language and a common speech. Because of that there was a kind of unity in that world, a kind of togetherness, that we do not enjoy today. But people used that unity to defy God, not to serve him, and, in judgment, God confused their languages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This paragraph introduces law preaching by making the statement that people defy God and God judges such defiance.</i>
<p>Luther says somewhere that this judgment – confusing people’s languages at Babel – was a worse judgment than when God sent the flood. Maybe that sounds like an overstatement, but think how much your life has been affected, day-to-day, by the flood. Not very much. Then think about how much it has been affected by the Tower of Babel. Different languages confuse; they breed differences in culture; differences in culture breed fear and mistrust. It plays a part in the long, on-going unrest between Israelis and Arabs in the Middle East; it contributes to the mistrust if there are people in your office or your shop who stand talking to each other in Italian or Hebrew or German. "What are they saying?" "Why do they do that?" "What don't they want me to hear?"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The law preaching continues as the preacher chooses to make the point with everyday examples instead of exposition of the text. This method is more acceptable when an audience is already familiar with a popular Bible story, but any new Christians or visitors may not make their conclusions based on Bible truth. So the high degree of relevant law comes with some risk of being understood only as a sad symptom and not a damnable sin.</i>
<p>The world has been like that for a long time; if left to itself, it would stay like that. But the Holy Spirit reversed Babel on Pentecost. The Spirit gave the disciples the ability to speak in different languages, and what they spoke was the good news about Jesus!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This paragraph introduces gospel preaching and the main thrust of the sermon.</i>
<p>Greek, German, Spanish, English. We still speak different languages, and maybe even in heaven those language differences will remain. But we have been given a new "common language." The new "common language" is Jesus! We can all think of things that are <i>different</i> about us; think of what you and I have in common with everyone else: Jesus died for us all, and all who believe have eternal life.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There's something better than a common language people speak, and that's the "common language" of Jesus. Clear gospel preaching that answers the curse of the law.</i>
<p>They wanted to build something impressive and permanent. God had said, "Fill the earth and glorify me." They said, "Let's stay in this place, and build something magnificent, to glorify us."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This exposition preaches the law as it remains focused on the theme of defiance.</i>
<p>This was an intervention of mercy. The LORD <i>came down to see</i> the city and the tower that the men were building. There is humor in that line: they wanted to build a tower <i>so big</i> that everybody would notice them; the tower turned out to be <i>so small</i> that God had to <i>come down</i> 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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Textual gospel preaching.</i>
<p>Fast forward to Pentecost. Those 11 disciples, those 120 followers, hardly looked like a promising bunch to bring his gospel to the whole world. But the Spirit's gift on Pentecost filled them with a common purpose.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Notice that the same theme remains in this gospel application: something common.</i>

TO WHOM DO YOU PREACH?

Preach the Word has created a space on the internet for preachers to collaborate, discuss, question, and share. Log on to www.wels.net/ptw and click on the discussion board link to begin your exploring. The page includes a welcome message that provides more details about using this exciting new tool for your preaching, including how to log into the board as a new user. We have updated these procedures so that anyone can have access (if you tried previously and it didn't work, try again!).

Freddy Krieger, writing as "PewView," eagerly awaits your reaction to his most recent post entitled, "To Whom Do You Preach?" copied here:



Preachers, I'd like to take a little poll. Please respond as you are able. The question is ... To whom do you preach? To the individual in the pew? To the congregation as a corporate body? A mix of the two? More of one but some of the other?

A little word search of the pronouns you used in your last few sermons may reveal the answer. Try it this week. Are your sermons predominated by the first person pronouns "we," "us," and "our?" Or are they populated with the second person singular "you" and "your?" Or do you carefully consider how and in what proportion you mix the two? Based on the responses posted on the board, perhaps some meaningful and enlightening points might be made about communicating the law and gospel to those you've been called to serve. Looking forward to your replies!

BOOK PREVIEW: THE ART AND CRAFT OF BIBLICAL PREACHING

It's as thick as your Bible and, similarly, contains works by different authors on different topics which you can read from beginning to end or skip around based on personal interest. Over 200 articles offer such titles and authors as "Theology of Powerful Preaching: Nine beliefs at the heart of biblical preaching," by Jay E. Adams, "Preaching to Everyone in Particular: How to scratch where people niche," by Haddon Robinson, "Grace: A License to Wander? The need for a balanced message," by Bryan Chapell, and "Getting the Feedback You Need: How to invite a constructive critique," by William Willimon.

The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching (Robinson, Haddon and Larson, Craig Brian, general editors, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005) sells for \$26.39 at Amazon.com and the treasury of theory and practice it contains in its 732 pages is well worth it.

Most of the authors are renowned preachers in contemporary evangelicalism and, depending on the topic, some doctrinal sifting for confessional Lutherans is necessary. On the other hand, the experience and insight gained from this wider panel of contributors provides more material than a seminary classroom or preaching newsletter.

The entries are organized into 11 different categories: The High Call of Preaching, The Spiritual Life of a Preacher, Considering Hearers, Interpretation and Application, Structure, Style, Stories and Illustrations, Preparation, Delivery, Special Topics, and Evaluation. Additionally helpful are the Scripture, author, and subject indexes as well as the appendix of books for preachers to read and a sermon checklist. Finally, an audio CD accompanies the book, and it contains examples of various preaching practices referenced in articles.

To whet your appetite for the preaching wisdom you'll find in this book, here are a few quotes to ponder in the first few days of reading:

"We don't 'make the Bible relevant,' we show its relevance" (p. 24).

"I lead people with every message. But the target is to nurture the benevolent purpose of God for their lives. It's not to get them to meet some ethical requirement ... [or] local congregational goal" (p. 39).

"Worship can be summarized as revelation and response" (p. 41).

"We often discover that we declare too many ideas in one message ..." (p. 56).

"No two preachers can preach the same message because no two preachers are the same. In fact, no *one* preacher can preach the same message twice if he is living and growing at all. The human personality is a vital part of the preaching ministry ... God prepares the person who prepares the message. Martin Luther said that prayer, meditation, and temptation made a preacher. Prayer and meditation will give you a sermon, but only temptation – the daily experience of life – can transform that sermon into a message. It's the difference between the recipe and the meal" (p. 75).



WALTHER: NOT "ABOUT" PREACHING

In Thesis XIII Walther promotes "preaching faith into a person's heart by laying the Gospel promises before him." Focused law and gospel preaches faith, preaches Jesus, preaches condemnation, preaches redemption. It does not merely preach about faith, Jesus, condemnation, and redemption. Walther explains further ...

"A preacher must be able to preach a sermon on *faith* without ever using the term *faith*. It is not important that he din the word faith into the ears of his audience, but it is necessary for him to frame his address so as to arouse in every poor sinner the desire to lay the burden of his sins at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ and say to Him: 'Thou art mine, and I am Thine.' ...

"You may spend a lot of time telling men that they must believe if they wish to be saved, and your hearers may get the impression that something is required of them which they must do. They will begin to worry whether they will be able to do it, and when they have tried to do it, whether it is exactly the thing that is required of them. Thus you may have preached a great deal about faith without delivering a real sermon on faith" (pp. 260-261).

(Walther, C. F. W. *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1986).

WHAT IS FOCUSED LAW/GOSPEL PREACHING?

Focused law and gospel help preachers separate the purpose of the pulpit in the chancel from the podium in the classroom. Preaching incorporates some teaching, but preaching is not teaching. Here's a portion of an article from *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching* that explores this issue. Log onto the *Preach the Word* discussion board if you'd like to offer any kind of feedback about this article, and reply to the post entitled, "Preaching for a Verdict."

"Preaching for a verdict is one of the things that distinguishes preaching from teaching. Teaching is aimed at the mind, preaching at the heart. 'Hold on! When I teach, I'm seeking to move my hearers to action, and when I preach I'm educating my people in the truths of the word.' Of course. Good teaching is aimed at change, and good preaching is solid teaching.

"Why, then, the distinction? Several major streams of influence in preaching hold that the correct homiletical approach is verse-by-verse exposition of a text, teaching as many truths as the author may pack into the passage. I would say that is better described as teaching. But when the preacher pulls together the teaching of a passage toward a single goal that calls for response or marshals evidence from various passages of Scripture to drive home a point that requires action, that's preaching, preaching that demands a verdict ...

"It should not be our aim just to add to the store of accurate biblical information – a book or computer might serve that end. What we're after is change. If the audience leaves stirred or more biblically literate but doesn't change, there's been no spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is change, and change takes place when choices are made. And so, preaching that demands a verdict is critical to spiritual formation, or, as Paul would put it, to transformation."



VIDEO: PREACHING THAT DESERVES THE NAME "LUTHERAN"

Prof. John Jeske, former homiletics professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, identifies focused law and gospel as key elements to Lutheran preaching. Listen to an interview with Prof. Jeske and then watch the introduction to a Lenten sermon he preached at St. Luke Lutheran Church in Watertown, WI. Both videos are posted on the *Preach the Word* web site at www.wels.net/ptw.



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