

PREACH

the Word

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RUN OUT OF THINGS TO PREACH ON?

When I was growing up, a doctor lived behind us. For many years, he and his wife occupied an apartment just beyond our backyard. He was not an MD. Nor was he a dentist or podiatrist or chiropractor. No, our backdoor neighbor was a doctor of divinity who taught theology at a local Presbyterian college.

One summer, when my oldest brother was home on break from Northwestern College, our neighbor-doctor struck up a conversation with him over the back fence. After learning that my brother was studying for the ministry, the good doctor declared, "I'm so glad I don't serve as a minister of a local congregation. I'd run out of things to preach on!"

With an attitude like that, his would-be parishioners could certainly be thankful that he didn't spend his career in the pulpit. That statement surely strikes a confessional Lutheran pastor as absolutely ludicrous. How could one ever run out of things to preach on? As long as people sin against the holy God, we will never run out of things to preach on. As long as God still promises his grace and mercy to sinners, we will never run out of things to preach on. No, as long as we preach the Word, we will not run out of things to preach on.

The message is ancient, yet it is ever new. The message is simple (just two subjects: law and gospel), yet it is oh so complex. I have often pulled old sermons out of my file cabinet, based on the same scriptural text as a sermon I'm currently working on, and been amazed at how different they are. There are so many facets to God's Word that even if the Bible were a fraction of its size, it would still offer a limitless supply of admonishment, comfort, guidance, and topics for sermons.

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

Brothers, we are privileged to preach this Word Sunday after Sunday! Our challenge isn't to come up with novel things to preach about; our challenge is to try to limit our getting in the way of the Word with our own weaknesses. It is my humble privilege to serve as the new editor of *Preach the Word*. My prayer is that the coming issues might be of some assistance to you in not getting in the way of God's amazing Word when you step into the pulpit.



I have no special credentials that qualify me for this editorship, I assure you. For the past 19 years, I have had the amazing opportunity to preach God's Word to God's people, the first seven years as an associate pastor of a large (1,000 communicant member) Midwestern congregation, and the past 12 as pastor of an exploratory (now self-supporting) mission congregation high in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. I have also served on the Colorado District Mission Board for the past eight years, so hopefully my tour of duty as PTW editor will bring with it some emphasis on preaching in mission settings.

I invite your feedback in the coming months. If you have suggestions for topics, constructive criticism, or a book or article to recommend, please e-mail or call me. Together, let's encourage each other to preach the Word.

Brent Merten

THE DOG DAYS OF THE GREEN SEASON

We're in the dog days of the "green season," as we start to come to the end of the non-festival half of the church year. This means that the lessons often point to our response to the work of our Savior, in contrast with the first half of the church year, which focuses on the work of Christ. Yet Christ and his redemptive work must still remain at the heart of our preaching.

Consider the focuses for the coming Sundays, drawn from the days' Gospels in *Christian Worship* (and supported by the Old Testament lessons). How can you keep Christ in the center? (Note that the Gospels for these final Sundays before End Times all consist of parables of Jesus, mostly taught during Holy Week.)

Pentecost 17

"Forgive and forget." That's a tall order. Yet that's exactly what God has done when it comes to our sins.

Pentecost 18

God's ways are often beyond our understanding. Yet his will for our lives is clear: To serve him now on earth, and to live with him forever in heaven.

Pentecost 19

God doesn't want us merely to "talk the talk" when it comes to our faith; he expects us to "walk the walk" by living lives of repentance.

Pentecost 20

God expects us to bear fruits of faith wherever he has planted us.

Pentecost 21

Our Lord calls us to a lavish, amazing banquet. Sadly, many refuse to accept his gracious invitation.

Pentecost 22

Christians have dual citizenship. We are citizens of our nation,

who are to respect and support our laws and our leaders. But we are also citizens of heaven, who honor and respect our God. *(N.B.: With a presidential election coming up in a few weeks, this week's Gospel presents an excellent opportunity to teach what the Christian's response ought to be should the "wrong" candidate be elected.)*

Pentecost 23

God's expectations of us are quite simple: perfection! He expects us to love him and each other perfectly. But we can't do that, can we? Yet what we can't do, God did for us through his Son.

Pentecost 24

God entrusts his people with differing gifts and abilities. But the one thing that is consistent is his expectation that we use these gifts and abilities faithfully, to his glory. *(N.B.: It's not very often that we have a 24th Sunday after Pentecost. But with Easter falling so early this year, pericopic preachers have a rare opportunity to preach on the lessons for this Sunday.)*



WISDOM FROM WALTHER

How important is it for the preacher to maintain a healthy devotional life, and not merely study God's Word "professionally?" Listen to what Walther had to say:

"Preach so that every hearer feels: 'He means me. He has painted the hypocrite that I am.' Again, the pastor may have described a person afflicted with temptation so plainly that the actual victim of a temptation has to admit: 'That is my condition.' The penitent person must soon feel while listening to the pastor: 'That comfort is meant for me; I am to appropriate it.' The alarmed soul must be led to think: 'Oh, that is a sweet message; that is for me!' Yea, the impenitent, too, must be made to acknowledge: 'The preacher has painted my exact portrait.'

"Accordingly, the preacher must understand how to depict accurately the inward condition of every one of his hearers. A mere objective presentation of the various doctrines is not sufficient to this end. A person may be orthodox, may have apperceived the pure doctrine, but he is not in personal communion with God, has not yet settled his account with God, has not yet attained to the assurance that his debt of sins has been remitted. How can such a person prepare a Christian sermon?" (p.53).

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

SUPPLEMENTAL LECTIONARY: AN INITIAL REACTION

Editor's note: Most readers are aware that this past summer's release of the new Christian Worship Supplement included an expansion of the lectionary used in Christian Worship. This supplemental lectionary is not intended to replace the lectionary used by many of us for the past fifteen years but rather to offer worship leaders the option of using alternative lessons.

This supplemental lectionary is available not only by purchasing Christian Worship Supplement; it is also available on the Commission on Worship Web site (www.wels.net/worship).

The following article is a perspective from someone who has been preaching texts from the supplemental lectionary for several months.

The Word of God is the supreme object of veneration, in fact, it is the only sacred object of veneration that we Christians recognize and possess.... The treasure that sanctifies all things is the Word of God.... In whatever hour one uses, preaches, hears, reads, or thinks about God's Word, it sanctifies the person, his day, and his work, not because of the external act, but because of the Word that makes saints of us all. ...If our life and labor are to be God-pleasing or holy, they must be conducted in the light of the Word of God.

Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*

We believe, teach, and confess that God's Word is central to everything we do, including our worship. That has led us to critically evaluate how well we are proclaiming God's Word in our worship. This led to most churches moving from the one year historic lectionary to the three year ILCW series. It led the committee that prepared *Christian Worship* to clarify and "clean up" the End Times portion of ILCW. With the publishing of a hymnal supplement, a critical evaluation of our proclamation of the Word was made once again. (For detailed information on the process used by the Rites Committee, see the May/June 2004 issue of *Preach the Word*.) Their two main goals:

- Emphasize a single theme with all three lessons, including the second lesson. Many of the ILCW second lessons were chosen to give an overview of certain Epistles over a period of weeks.
- Replace some of the many lessons from the Old Testament prophets with familiar Bible stories. The prophet Isaiah is used over 50 times in the three year cycle. By comparison, there are less than 20 lessons from Genesis.

The supplement committee was kind enough to post on the Worship Web site the supplemental lessons beginning with year A. Our congregation has been using these lessons since Advent, December 2007.

Some general observations about the new choices:

- We decided to use the supplemental lessons as often as we could and preach on them according to our normal pattern. Members of the congregation enjoy the variety they lend. So do their pastors!



- Some of the changes are minor. Epiphany 2, Isaiah 49:1-6, has been changed to Isaiah 49:1-7; Pentecost 8, Isaiah 55:10-11 has been changed to Isaiah 55:10-13. These generally provide a little more context or a little fuller reading to carry out the theme of the day.
- Other changes are more significant. Advent 1, Isaiah 2:1-5 has been changed to Ge 6:9-22, 7:11-23; Epiphany 4, Micah 6:1-8, has been changed to Daniel 3:13-27.
- Overall some very good work and good thought has been put into the supplemental lessons. They do a much better job of emphasizing a single theme for the Sunday. No matter which lesson is the basis for preaching, the emphasis for that Sunday will remain the same. The committee has met their goal admirably.

There are some concerns of which pastors should be aware:

- In many cases the supplemental lessons would seem better suited as lessons than as sermon texts. Most of the new lessons are longer, sometimes considerably, than those they replace. Congregations with multiple services need to consider this in planning the overall time of their worship hour.
- When preaching on these texts, many will be a challenge because of the amount of study necessary. The time-taxed preacher may want to pick out the few most significant verses of the longer texts, exegize just those few verses, and use the rest as context. The supplemental lessons are not included in the NPH Sermon Studies series.

I would encourage anyone to make use of these supplemental lessons. There may be a given Sunday when the *Christian Worship* lessons are preferable. I know that we will be using the supplemental lessons extensively to give our people a larger taste of the whole counsel of God. I am thrilled to see young children relate well to familiar stories like the Flood, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. As a congregation with many people new to Scripture, I appreciate the added opportunity to make use of some of the familiar stories many of us learned in Sunday School. We and our people have been well served by these efforts.

Pastor David Clark, Glendale, Arizona

PEW VIEW

Daron Lindemann, the previous PTW editor, started a Preach the Word internet discussion board. One feature of this discussion board was a series of postings by Freddy Krieger, a former WELS pastor. For various reasons, the discussion board saw very little usage. But rather than just letting Freddy's posts disappear into cyberspace, Preach the Word will be featuring some of them in upcoming issues.

These "Pew Views" will contain ideas and observations from someone who spent 20 years as a WELS pastor, serving congregations in Alaska, Arizona, and as an instructor at an area Lutheran high school. Freddy retired because of health reasons, and now operates a plumbing business in Michigan. Unlike most of the readers of PTW, Freddy has had the opportunity to listen to dozens of WELS preachers over the past several years since leaving the public ministry. Combined with his training and experience in the pulpit, this gives him a rather unique and valuable perspective.

A DEDUCTIVE RUT?

Having been a PewViewer for about five or six years now, I've had a number of preachers share with me their concern that their preaching seems to be in a rut. I appreciate their honesty, am humbled at their confidence to share their frustrations with me, and admire greatly their desire to always do their best.

How 'bout you? Ever have that "I wonder if I'm in a rut" feeling?

Here's one suggestion some have welcomed which seemed to have helped. If your sermons are all deductive sermons, try formulating inductive sermons.

As a PewViewer, I've gotta say, there's something attractive and appealing about inductive sermons. Honestly speaking, I find myself zoning out with deductive sermons week after week. The truth is stated to me in the theme. It's expanded upon in the parts. It's restated before the "Amen" in the conclusion. There's no room for me to be brought along on any sort of path of discovery. I feel like a hearer, but not so much a participant in the sermon. I've already been told the truth up-front, and find myself fighting the temptation to boredom between the statement of the theme and the "Amen."

Am I typical? Those of you who know me would say not. And I wouldn't necessarily debate you. But maybe there's a thought or two here of some value.

What do I like about inductive sermons?

I appreciate the "here's the question you and I are going to solve based on the Word today" approach of inductive preaching. I like being a participant in the sermon as the pathway proceeds from relevant questions to mutually discovered biblical answers. From problems to solutions. From uncertainty to the truth.

From "I don't know" to "Now I know!" From "What?" to "Now I see!" The last part of the sermon is a cause to celebrate as the sermon culminates in a grand celebration of the arrival of the truth of the sermon! I was brought from "Huh?" to "Hooray!" From perplexed to pacified. From "I'm not sure" to "Now I know!" The well-formulated conclusion sends me off into the week with an exclamation mark impressed upon my heart and mind that I don't soon forget.

That's what it does for me as a hearer. I've sensed myself and seen in others what it does for *der Prediger* himself.

Haven't tried inductive preaching?

One good resource, among many available is the publication, *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen*, by Lewis. If you don't have a copy, Google it, order it, study it, and try it. The author has some great insights regarding how people listen and learn, and how the preacher can retain their attention and challenge them. He gets a little too complex at times, but try to ferret out the simplicity of the approach.

Developing inductive sermons is one way some preachers I know have added vitality to their preaching when they have that "I seem to be in a rut" feeling.

Freddy Krieger



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