

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

Participants Guide

Participant Guides

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LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Proclaimer

Participants Guide

September 2010 "Good Sermon, Pastor!" — The Pastor as Proclaimer

1. FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

If you are reading this, God has called you to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. That itself is good news! May God bless your ministry, and especially your proclamation of Christ. This study begins a series of nine Bible studies focusing on the privilege and task of preaching.

We have all imagined the day when we will be called home to be with Jesus Christ. We long to hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." That will be quite a day! But until then, we get something of a "Well done..." at the doors of our sanctuary. We have many other days that mirror that coming day. We work hard, set aside the time, study, pray, and study some more, research, and construct the best sermon we can for God's people. We proclaim the Word of God and the Word made flesh to the best of our ability. When the service ends, we stand at the back of the church to shake hands. Then we hear it: "Good sermon, Pastor!"

A good Lutheran question asks, "What does this mean? When someone says, "Good sermon, Pastor," what exactly are they saying? Three participants in proclaiming the word define "good" in this case: the hearer, the proclaimer, and the one proclaimed.

For Conversation

What do you think people usually mean when they say, "Good sermon, Pastor"? When can you look in the mirror and say to yourself, "Good sermon, Pastor"? And more significantly, when do you think God says, "Good sermon, Pastor"?

2. SCRIPTURE SEARCH

What makes a sermon "good" from God's perspective?

- 2 Timothy 4:1-5
- Proverbs 4:23
- Romans 1:16-17

- Luke 4:14-30
- Colossians 1:28-29

3. FROM OUR LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE

- For reflection or conversation:
 - What makes a sermon "good" from the perspective of Lutheran theology?
 - What books, preachers, and theologians have shaped the way you preach?
 - What or who comprises your mental model of preaching?



 Read this excerpt from Theodore Graebner's The Expository Preacher: A System of Inductive Homiletics (1920).

Don't overvalue compliments for sermons. When you are enthusiastically told what a great sermon it was, congratulate the hearer on having been so attentive a listener, but lay not the flattering unction to your soul that such compliments from the pew, no matter how feverish the warmth of their utterance, are always – spontaneous.

Don't be shattered by some adverse criticism of your sermon. Take an hour's walk and think over the criticism like a rational being: Was it justified? — was it not justified? Then be governed accordingly. But do not feel crushed to earth because a clerical brother has found fault with your gestures, or because a lay-member has remarked with some bitterness on your failure to end every sermon with a hymn-verse, "like our old Reverend used to do." ¹

 This following excerpt from C.F.W. Walther's The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel: Thirty-Nine Evening Lectures (1920) calls on the proclaimer to consider the congregation a garden and the proclaiming task as the garden tool.

Its import is that a minister must not be satisfied with merely proclaiming the truth; he must proclaim the truth so as to meet the needs of his people. He may have to defer saying many things until his people have gained confidence in him and his teaching and he knows that he may frankly tell them anything without fear of repelling them. Briefly, he must resolve to turn his congregation from a dreary desert into a flourishing garden of God.²

¹ Th. Graebner *The Expository Preacher: A System of Inductive Homiletics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1920) 94.

² Dr. C. F. W. Walther *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel: Thirty-Nine Evening Lectures* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1897) 208-209.

Here is Walther again:

Even if a preacher conducts the liturgy very well or is very gifted at governing the congregation or carrying out private pastoral care, etc., all of that can never replace correct preaching. It is and remains the main means for the blessed administration of the holy office. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV, Of the Mass, says: "There is nothing that keeps the people in church more than good preaching." In the Article on Confession [it says]: "If you want to keep the church with you, you must be concerned that you have correct teaching and preaching. Thereby you can bring about good will and constant obedience."

 In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession we have this as a focus and context of preaching:

Among our opponents, there are many regions where no sermons are preached during the whole year, except in Lent. But the chief worship of God is the preaching of the Gospel.

When our opponents do preach, they talk about human traditions, the worship of the saints, and similar trifles. This the people rightly despise and walk out on them after the reading of the Gospel. A few of the better ones are now beginning to talk about good works, but they say nothing about the righteousness of faith or about faith in Christ or about comfort for the conscience. In their polemics they even attack this most salutary part of the Gospel. In our churches, on the other hand, all sermons deal with topics like these: penitence, the fear of God, faith in Christ, the righteousness of faith, comfort for the conscience through faith, the exercise of faith, prayer and our assurance that it is efficacious and is heard, the cross, respect for rulers and for all civil ordinances, the distinction between the kingdom of Christ (or the spiritual kingdom) and political affairs, marriage, the education and instruction of children, chastity, and all the works of love.

• As a testament to the fact that we stand on the shoulders of those who proclaim the Gospel, this quote from 1902 acknowledges that we are not the first nor by the grace of God will we be the last to be Gospel proclaimers:

The Gospel is not the Word which teaches how men might by their own exertions render God fully propitious, but the Word which assures us that God was reconciled to all men through the vicarious sacrifice of Christ. Therefore, to preach the Gospel does not mean to lay before men a mere plan of salvation, or to declare the conditions of forgiveness, but preaching the Gospel is preaching pardon itself, salvation itself, 'remission of sins' itself (Luke xxiv. 47). The Gospel is 'nothing else than a great letter of pardon directed to the whole world. Hence it is that Luther frequently says: "A minister preaching the Gospel can not open his mouth without constantly remitting sin.⁵

⁴ Theodore G. Tappert, et al, eds. <u>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</u> (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) 220-221.

³ Dr. C. F. W. Walther <u>Walther's Pastorale That Is American Lutheran Pastoral Theology</u>, trans. John M. Drickamer (New Haven: Lutheran News, Inc., 1995) 60.

⁵ The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1902) 147.

4. Points to Ponder

- We have an incredible privilege to proclaim Christ.
- We stand on the shoulders of those who have proclaimed Christ before us and to us.
- The Gospel itself gives the power to believe the Gospel.
- When Christ proclaimed freedom and it was not universally accepted, we ought not be surprised.
- The Gospel is not just a tool of our trade but food for our very souls.
- We are not done proclaiming until our hearers and we ourselves are mature in Christ – a task unfinished until He comes again.

5. FOR CONVERSATION

 Have you ever just wanted to quit preaching? You would be well within our "Lutheran Heritage."

At the close of his sermon of Jan. 1, 1530, Luther announced to Bugenhagen's Wittenberg congregation that he would no longer preach to them, giving as his reason that they despised preaching. He said, "I would rather preach to mad dogs, for my preaching shows no effect among you, and it only makes me weary. Therefore I shall leave the preaching to the pastor and his assistants, and I shall confine myself to my classroom lectures." But within a few weeks Luther was back in the pulpit. See W, XXXII, p. XIX f.⁶



- What is your mental model of preaching?
- Who are the various hearers when you preach? How do you balance preaching to all of these "audiences?" What unites them?
- What is your greatest challenge in preaching? Your greatest joy?
- Share a time you received a great encouragement or great disappointment in preaching.
- Which thoughts presented today will you go back to and think about again?
- When can you say to yourself, "Good sermon, Pastor"?

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⁶ Hilton C. Oswald, ed. <u>Luther's Works: Lectures on Isaiah, Chapters 40-66</u>, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972) 128-129.



LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Proclaimer

Participants Guide

October, 2010

Hold Fast the Confession: Preaching for the Church

FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

A few days prior to the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, when pressured by the emperor to give up his confession of faith, George, Margrave of Brandenburg, stepped forward and made bold the confession. "Before I let anyone take from me the Word of God and ask me to deny my God," he said, "I will kneel and let them strike off my head." The center piece of that confession, the chief article of the Christian faith, is Article IV, i.e., justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Today Lutheran preachers are under similar, if less deadly pressures to abandon their confession of faith. Their listeners also feel this pressure.

In his book *Christless Christianity* Michael Horton exposes the demands on the Church today to abandon the chief article by avoiding the name of Jesus. Horton writes: "I think that the church in America today is so obsessed with being practical, relevant, helpful, successful, and perhaps even well-liked that it nearly mirrors the world itself." ⁱⁱ He is concerned that this obsession has affected our preaching. Since we find ourselves unwilling to preach Christ and Him crucified, we preach about our attempts to improve ourselves.

For Reflection and Conversation

- What pressures do you feel to give up your confession of Jesus as the only way of salvation?
- How might this pressure affect your preaching?
- o What pressure is on your people to abandon the confession of Jesus?
- How does your preaching take this pressure into consideration?

SCRIPTURE SEARCH

1. There is nothing new under the sun. The Church is always pressured to abandon its confession.

John 9:22: "His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue."ⁱⁱⁱ

2. Any confession that abandons Jesus is idolatry.

I John 2:23: "No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also." iv

3. We hold onto our confession only because He holds onto us.

Hebrews 3:1: "Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him..."

Hebrews 4:14: "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."

Hebrews 10:23: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." Vii

4. Preachers have a stewardship to confess this Good News.

I Corinthians 9:16: "For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship."

FROM OUR LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE

"In the words of the Apology, this article of justification by faith is 'the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine, without which no poor conscience can have any abiding comfort or rightly understand the riches of the grace of Christ.' In the same vein Dr. Luther declared: 'Where this single article remains pure, Christendom will remain pure, in beautiful harmony, and without any schisms. But where it does not remain pure, it is impossible to repel any error or heretical spirit'" (Formula, SD, Art. III, par. 6).

"After all, these controversies are not, as some may think, mere misunderstandings or contentions about words, with one party talking past the other, so that the strife reflects a mere semantic problem of little or no consequence. On the contrary, these controversies deal with weighty and important matters, and they are of such a nature that the opinions of the erring party cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended. For that reason necessity requires that such controverted articles be explained on the basis of God's Word and of approved writings in such a way that anybody with Christian intelligence can see which opinion in the controverted issues agrees with the Word of God and the Christian Augsburg Confession, and so that well-meaning Christians who are really concerned about the truth may know how to guard and protect themselves against the errors and corruptions that have invaded our midst" (Formula, SD, Introduction).

"We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must

be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.' And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, 'Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed"^{xi} (Formula, Epitome, Introduction).

POINTS TO PONDER

- 1. The pressure to abandon the confession of faith that Jesus is the only way of salvation has been a constant in the life of the Church. Only the details of how that pressure is manifested have changed.
- 2. Many denominations and even more preachers have consciously or unconsciously given up the confession of the true faith. Without the confession of the name of Jesus there is no salvation.
- The writer to the Hebrews first tells us that Jesus is the High priest of our confession. He
 goes on to tell us that because He is our High Priest we can hold fast our confession. He
 finally encourages us not to waver and reminds us that God is faithful in maintaining the
 confession.
- 4. As a trustworthy steward of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1-2) and in keeping with his ordination vows, the pastor is the keeper of the congregation's confession of faith.
- 5. Preachers must respond to the pressure to avoid the name of Jesus not only for the sake of their confession but also for the sake of the souls of their hearers.

FOR CONVERSATION

(The following questions relate to the Scripture texts and confessional passages above.)

- 1. The Scripture texts use the Greek word, *homologeo*, for the word translated, "confess." Literally it means to say the same thing. Since God makes this true by speaking His Word through the Pastor, to whom does the confession of faith actually belong? How do you make this clear in your preaching?
- 2. Agree or Disagree? The preacher's primary task is that of confessing the faith. Both in the pulpit and in daily ministry he is responsible for guiding the congregation to "hold fast the confession..." Which Biblical text might be used to support this thesis?
- 3. If Michael Horton's thesis is accurate, and the American church has developed a "Christless Christianity," how would the three texts from Hebrews above direct you to respond? How can you do this from the pulpit?
- 4. Some of Jesus' fiercest opponents came from within the visible church. This opposition culminated in the judgment recorded in John 9:22. What parallels do you see in the visible Church today? How can you responsibly preach against what others might be preaching?
- 5. According to the Solid Declaration, Article III, two things will happen when the confession of the chief article of the Christian faith is compromised or lost. What will the confession, ("denomination") look like when these two become a reality?

- 6. The word, confess, has many subtle nuances. We use it to speak of both a confession of sin and a confession of faith. We may also think of confessing the faith in a militant or defensive setting, as with George of Brandenburg, or in a proclamatory setting, as with Paul in Athens. Some might suggest that the confessing preacher is less missional and more maintenance oriented. On the basis of these texts, explain why missional and confessional are not dichotomous terms.
- 7. Who is the author of the "errors and corruptions that have invaded our midst" (Formula, SD, Introduction)? How can you use the Confessions of the Lutheran Church to combat his lies? What dangers might there be in the use of the Confessions in your sermons?
- 8. The familiar phrase, "We believe, teach and confess" introduces the section from the Epitome. Why are Lutherans so intent on confessing the same thing over and over?

CLOSING

Spend time in prayer for one another's faithfulness in confession and in ministry.

Notice how the following prayer recognizes the changes of the world but fixes our hearts on the one true confession that abides.

O God, you make the minds of your faithful to be of one will; therefore grant to your people that they may love what you command and desire what you promise, that among the manifold changes of this age our hearts may ever be fixed where true jovs are to be found; through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the 5th Sunday of Easter)

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The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. 2001 (Jn 9:22). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Johann Michael Reu, The Augsburg Confession, Concordia Publishing House, 2005, p. 93.

Michael Horton, Christless Christianity, Baker Books, 2008, p. 16.

i The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. 2001 (1 Jn 2:23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

^vThe Holy Bible: English Standard Version. 2001 (Heb 3:1). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

vi The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. 2001 (Heb 4:14). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

vii The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. 2001 (Heb 10:23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. 2001 (1 Co 9:16-17). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society. ^{ix}Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran

Church (540). Philadelphia: Fortress Press. *Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran

Church (502). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

^{xi}Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (464). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.



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The Pastor as Proclaimer

Participant's Guide

Prophetic Preaching November, 2010

1. FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Familiarity breeds contempt. Old Testament prophets knew this, first hand. So what did they do? Hosea married a prostitute. Isaiah went barefoot and naked for three years. Jeremiah buried dirty underwear and then, after some time, dug it up and began wearing it again. And then there is Ezekiel! This prophet/priest shaved his head and beard, lay on his left side for 390 days and then on his right side for 40 days and once almost cooked his food using human dung as fuel. The prophets did everything possible to gain a hearing so that Yahweh's word of Law and Gospel could kill and make alive, destroy and recreate people's lives.

Today we are going to study the preaching of Amos; specifically, how he employed the homiletical strategy of inversion.

Why do you think Amos employed this preaching tactic?

Do you think people listened to him?

How are our congregations similar to what Amos faced? How are they different?

2. SCRIPTURE SEARCH

In the early part of the 8th Century BC, the leaders in the Northern Kingdom had become deaf to Yahweh's word. Familiarity had tamed their awareness of roaring Lion Yahweh (Amos 1:2, 3:4, 6, 12; 5:19). Amos stepped into this situation and employed homiletical inversions. He takes Gospel language and turns it into Law.

- o Amos 3:1-2
- o Amos 4:4-5
- o Amos 5:18-20
- o Amos 9:1-4
- o Amos 9:7

3. FROM OUR LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE

Luther was just as adamant as Amos when it came to confronting people with God's living Word. The Reformer called it the viva vox evangelii, "the living voice of the Gospel." He writes: "Actually, the Gospel is not what one finds in books and what is written in letters of the alphabet: it is rather an oral sermon and a living Word, a voice that resounds throughout the world and is proclaimed publicly, so that one hears it everywhere."

4. POINTS TO PONDER

- In his context Amos could not have been effective if he had employed stereotyped language, because stereotyped language is a language of cliché.
- We can learn from Amos' rhetorical strategies because far too often our sermons are full of dull, conventional, and routinized speech. People spiritually slumber because they become used to theological jargon. One alternative is to employ adrenalin-laden inversions that push beyond the status quo.
- o If the past and future are the only points in our preaching, then our error is not only rhetorical, it is theological.
- o Jesus went even further than Amos. He not only uttered subversive words; He is the subversive Word. In His antagonistic context (e.g., Matt 23:25-26; Mark 3:6; Luke 4:28-29; John 8:59), Jesus also employed inversions.
- Instructed by Amos and fired by the Holy Spirit, the employment of the homiletical strategy of inversion uses Law for the sake of the Gospel in order to awaken the church from what has grown ordinary, stale, and routine.

5. FOR CONVERSATION

o Read Amos 7:10-17. Patrick Miller presents this narrative as a conflict between the different perspectives of Amos and Amaziah:²

Amaziah's Perspective

Amos' Perspective

Jeroboam ben Joash is King "Thus Amos has said ..." (v. 11) "Jeroboam will die by the sword." (v. 11)

"Amos has conspired ..." (v. 10) Amos should prophecy in Judah (v. 12) Amaziah says to Amos, "Go!" (v. 12)

Yahweh is King "Thus says Yahweh ..." (v. 17)

Yahweh will kill Jeroboam by the sword (v. 9)

"Yahweh took me ..." (v. 15)

"Go ... to my people Israel" (v. 15) Yahweh says to Amos, "Go!" (v. 15)

Which perspective did Israel choose? Did they opt for the "boat-rocker" Amos or the "status-quo loving" Amaziah?

² Patrick Miller, "The Prophetic Critique of Kings," Pages 526-47 in *Israelite Religion and Biblical* Theology. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 267 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 531.

- o On a scale of 1-10 (1= never; 10=always), how often do you preach like Amos?
- o Share a time when you ...
 - Got stuck in jargons and clichés
 - Used a homiletical inversion
 - Spoke the viva vox evangelii
 - Sought to upset the status quo
- o How can you encourage one another to preach more often with prophetic boldness?
- o In closing, ask the Holy Spirit to give each participant a holy and prophetic boldness in their preaching. The noun *parresia* ("boldness") is a theme-word in the book of Acts. It appears five times in Acts (2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 28:31) while the verb *parresiasomai* appears seven times (9:27, 28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26).

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The Pastor as Preacher

Participants Guide

PREACHING AS LITURGY The Sermon in the Liturgical Context

FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

I don't know if the people of God at St. Peter Lutheran Church remember the sermon I have in mind, but I do. It was the First Sunday in Lent. Since we were planning to mark the Lenten season by focusing on the servanthood of Christ Jesus, culminating in a foot washing rite on Maundy Thursday, I began the Lenten season with my feet in the water. Literally!

Connecting the baptism of Jesus, His willingness as messianic servant to enter the journey to the cross, to His call for us to walk our baptismal journey, loving one another by washing one another's feet, I delivered the entire sermon seated in front of the altar with my unshod feet in a basin of water. It was a striking image. The sermon sought to unfold the sacrifice of Christ on the cross enacted for the disciples as He washed their feet in the upper room. As Jesus demonstrated His love for His disciples through the washing of feet, His liturgical act became the dominant image for our Lenten pilgrimage.

All preaching of the Word serves as the central unfolding of God's life for us in Christ as played out in the liturgy and in liturgical acts. The sermon and participation in Christ's body and blood are the two primary liturgical acts by which the entire Resurrection Day worship of the people of God holds together.

For Conversation

- Offer an example of preaching in which you unfolded Christ's life for us in the liturgy?
- The pulpit of my congregation has imprinted on its inside, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." If
 one of the primary purposes of resurrection worship is to help us see Jesus as God's
 Son, how does preaching function as a primary liturgical act?

SCRIPTURE SEARCH

- 1. Luke 4:16-30
- 2. John 6:22-59
- 3. 1 Peter 2:4-10

FROM OUR LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE

- 1. "Therefore, neither the preacher nor the hearer should doubt this grace and activity of the Holy Spirit, but they should be certain that when the Word of God is preached purely and clearly according to God's command and will and people listen to it seriously and diligently and meditate upon it, God will certainly be present with his grace and give, as has been said, what human beings otherwise could neither receive nor take on the basis of their own powers. . . . Instead, because the Holy Spirit's activity is often hidden under the cover of great weakness, we should be certain, on the basis of and according to the promise, that the Word of God, when preached and heard, is a function and work of the Holy Spirit, through which he is certainly present in our hearts and exercises his power there" (FC SD, II, 55-56; Kolb, Robert, and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000, 554).
- 2. Craig Satterlee and Lester Ruth in their book *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments* offer the following criteria for creative sacramental preaching:
 - It should encourage worshippers to adopt the sacraments as a lens for seeing life.
 - Creative sacramental preaching roots its listeners in the fundamentals of faith by laying out sound doctrine.
 - Creative sacramental preaching can contain admonitions for a Christ-like life.

(Satterlee, Craig A., and Lester Ruth, *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments*, Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2001).

3. These selections from one of John Chrysostom's Easter homilies unfold the resurrection Gospel in terms of the liturgical experience of God's people throughout Lent leading to the Easter feast. How in these selections does Chrysostom unpack and proclaim Jesus' resurrection within the liturgical context?

John Chrysosto

Are there any who are devout lovers of God? Let them enjoy this beautiful bright festival! Are there any who are grateful servants? Let them rejoice and enter into the joy of their Lord! Are there any weary with fasting? Let them now receive their wages!

You that have kept the fast, and you that have not, rejoice today for the Table is richly laden! Feast royally on it, the calf is a fatted one. Let no one go away hungry. Partake, all, of the cup of faith. Enjoy all the riches of His goodness!

Christ is Risen, and you, o death, are annihilated! Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down! Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice! Christ is Risen, and life is liberated! Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead; for Christ having risen from the dead, is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be Glory and Power forever and ever. Amen! (*Public Domain*)

POINTS TO PONDER

- 1. As in Luke 4, the preaching of Jesus, and therefore of the apostolic church, proclaims that today in the sacramental (liturgical) event the Word of God "has been fulfilled in your hearing."
- 2. The preaching of Jesus and the apostolic church takes into account the liturgical context (the synagogue) and the lives of the hearers in applying law and gospel.
- 3. Preaching in the liturgical and hermeneutical contexts of the worship service flows from the practice of letting Scripture interpret Scripture as Jesus does in John 6.
- 4. In John 6, the Word and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper form a unity in the preaching of Jesus as communion/fellowship with God comes through both believing in and eating the Bread of Life, God's incarnate Word.
- 5. Spiritual worship (Romans 12:1) is not equal to informal worship. Spiritual worship includes study and proclamation of the Word, prayer, and praise, the activities of the holy priesthood celebrated in 1 Peter 2. Liturgical preaching aims toward forming such a holy people of God who offer in their worship the spiritual sacrifice of faith.

FOR CONVERSATION

- 1. Often a pastor or layperson comments that preaching is the most important thing in Christian worship and that everything else, including the Lord's Supper, pales in comparison. Where does the truth lie in that statement and what is false about it?
- 2. If preaching is intended to mold and shape faithful disciples of God, how does preaching that ignores the liturgical context violate this intention?
- 3. Preaching as a liturgical event presumes use of the space in which the liturgy takes place. If a worship space has a pulpit, it plays a central, symbolic role in framing the preaching in the space. How can the preacher mold the sermon as a liturgical event taking into account his use the pulpit as well as the entire space? How can leaving the pulpit for the sermon be considered part of the liturgical act of preaching?

4. What does liturgically aware preaching sound like as it interprets the biblical Word for preaching in light of a rich biblical context of liturgy, including the other readings? What can be done to unpack the Word-experience of the liturgy through the proclaimed Word?

5. How does this liturgical text express the unity and constant movement in the liturgy between the preached Word and the feast of the Word in the Lord's Supper?

Come, O faithful ones, let us enjoy the Lord's hospitality, the banquet of immortality. In the upper chamber, with minds uplifted, let us learn the Word from the Word, whom we magnify? (Point 4; cited in Baker, J. Robert, and Barbara Budde, eds., *A Eucharist Sourcebook*, Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999, 54).

6. Pray for preachers that they we preach toward the formation of disciples of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; pray that hearers may participate in the liturgical event and through the preaching be formed as faithful disciples.

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LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011 The Pastor as Preacher

Participant's Guide

Speaking to the Culture: Paul on Mars Hill and Cultural Dialog in the Pulpit

1. Focus of the Study

In the September 13, 2010, USA Today column called "The Forum" (p. 13A), Chris Mooney argues that common ground can be found between New Atheists (like Richard Dawkins) and strident believers, including those who advocate intelligent design. Instead of the old conflict between science and faith, he argues that "spirituality" is something both sides can affirm. Much of the article is devoted to how New Atheists can agree to spirituality as long as it isn't "confused with the supernatural." The premise of the article is certainly debatable, but that is not the focus of this study. Instead read these sections from that article as a description of the cultural setting in which we preach.

Across the Western world – including the United States – traditional religion is in decline, even as there has been a surge of interest in "spirituality." What's more, the latter concept is increasingly being redefined in our culture so that it refers to something very much separable from, and potentially broader than, religious faith. . . .

Spirituality is something everyone can have – even atheists. In its most expansive sense, it could simply be taken to refer to any individual's particular quest to discover that which is held sacred. . . .

We can all find our own sacred things – and we can all have our own life-altering spiritual experiences. These are not necessarily tied to any creed, doctrine or belief; they grip us on an emotional level, rather than a cognitive or rational one. That feeling of awe and wonder, that sense of deep unity with the universe or cosmos – such intuitions might lead to a traditional religious outlook on the world, or they might not.

- How is "spirituality" defined in these excerpts?
- What is the source of this "spirituality", how is it to be known and confirmed?
- In what ways does this description of "spirituality" reflected in religious life as you encounter it in your place of ministry?

• In a very basic way, you have just done a cultural analysis. Why is it helpful for our preaching to be aware of these particular aspects of the cultural/spiritual landscape?

2. Scripture Search

- Read Acts 17:16-34 Paul in Athens (on Mars Hill)
- The word "provoked" (ESV) indicates Paul is irritated and angry; distressed and grieving. Why?
- Describe Paul's hearers and their spirituality in this passage.
- Describe Paul's hearers and their spirituality in Acts 13:13-52

A basic communication principle is that who you see your hearers to be will greatly influence what and how you speak to them. A critical aspect of who you see your hearers to be, is knowing how your hearers hear. This truth is reflected in the differing content Paul uses at Mars Hill and in Antioch. While each brings Christ and Him crucified and risen to the hearers, the path to this message differs. This principle is evident in the type of devotion you would use at a youth lock-in in comparison to one at a nursing home.

- What differences do you see in how Paul addresses these two groups of people?
- Yet Paul does not compromise the revelation he has been given concerning God's Law and the Gospel message of Christ risen from the dead. In the two accounts what remains the same and what was different?
- Notice Paul's takes his message in Antioch to Jesus' resurrection. Why might that be the case?

3. From our Lutheran Perspective

Learning the cultural and spiritual landscape in which you preach certainly calls for you to be aware of what is going on your people's lives and the community where you do your ministry. But besides one's own observations, other academic disciplines such as cultural anthropology, sociology and rhetoric can assist us in learning how to frame your messages so that God's Word is applied so as to aid your hearers in your cultural context. Charles Arand writes,

How do the people of God deliver that Word? In order to bring people into contact with the Word, the church has over the course of two millennia been attendant to the needs of the culture in which it finds itself. Given their Biblical understanding of God's creation, Lutherans believe that the exercise of academic disciplines are part of the dominion God gives His human creatures (Gen 1:28), and, therefore, they use the insights gained from them (such as the social sciences) in order to study and develop aspects of the horizontal realm of church life. One need only consider, for example, Melanchthon's use of Ciceronian rhetoric for the proclamation and defense of the Gospel. Such disciplines

help Christians see how human needs in the spiritual and other parts of human life are expressed in particular social situations and structures – and thus how the church can address those needs. The Christian Church has always engaged the surrounding culture in order to deliver the Word. ¹

• Despite the Church's long history of making use of various academic disciplines, there are risks in making use of other disciplines and rhetoric. What might be some of those risks, especially in terms of using others rhetoric?

Another way to see the dialog with culture in light of the preaching task is to relate the efficacy of the Word for the faith that holds on to Jesus for salvation which results in the obedience that comes from that faith (Romans 1:1-6) and faithfulness to the call as preachers to bring the Word to people effectively as stewards of the mysteries (Col. 1:25-26). Consider these quotations in terms of the communication skills needed to preach in today's culture and cultural spirituality.

... the pastor's stewardship of the Word is at issue. How will we handle this precious message so that people are able to give ear to it, experience it properly and carry it into the days that follow? The answer involves many rhetorical tasks that are the responsibility of the preacher so that the people, as the Confessions state, will hear and meditate upon it [Tappert, 532:55, 378:96-98]...

The challenge of communicating today is enormous. Yet we who would preach to be heard need to be aware of not only how difficult it is for people to listen to a fifteen to twenty minute monologue, but also how to overcome that difficulty with communication skills and strategies. . . . To assume that people are listening is dangerous and often erroneous. Instead, continued study and growth in the field of communication practice is essential for the preacher who would faithfully carry out his pastoral responsibilities as a steward of the mysteries of God.²

• What is the preacher for the Word responsible for in the sermon and in his use of the means of grace? What is he not to take responsibility for?

4. Points to Ponder

While most definitions of culture are so broad and abstract that you have a hard time picturing what is being described, they do show how much of life is included in culture when defined in its broadest, yet most basic, sense. For example,

By "culture" we refer to all the learned behavior and symbols that make our world home. Clyde Kluckhohn describes culture more fully as follows:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts: the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as

products of action, on the other as conditional influences upon further action. (In Malina, The New Testament World, 11).

Notice that ideas and attitudes as well as symbols and artifacts make up the meaning of which we live.³

A simpler way to see culture is when it is compared to the water in which a fish swims.

- What does this say about the analysis and dialog with culture?
- How would you relate Jesus' prayer in John 17 about being sent into the world but not of the world to our analysis and dialog with culture?

The Scripture study looked at two different groups of hearers. Most LC-MS pastors, however, are not preaching in the marketplace or synagogue as Paul did. Instead, most are preaching to the baptized people of God in a congregation.

- Read Phil. 1:1-18, which would be a closer parallel to today's congregational setting than Mars Hill. Describe how Paul sees this group of hearers and therefore how we are to see our hearers?
- Why is it critical for our proclamation to give both the Cross of Christ and His bodily resurrection to the hearers?

5. For Conversation

- Are you as "provoked" as Paul was by the ignorance of the true God in the context of your ministry? in the context of our current congregation? If so, what do you do about it? If not, why not?
- How might you preach about/to the cultural reality described by the USA TODAY article about spirituality?
- Even a cursory reading/listening of Lutheran sermons shows that the resurrection is not central to our preaching. Good Friday dominates, while Easter is often missing (except during the Easter season. Why might that be?
- How can we preach more like Paul and proclaim Christ crucified and risen?

The following quotation is a cultural analysis of those listening to our sermons.

People in the United States are post-modern. They are post-literate. They live in a post-Christian society. The effect of the media on listening skills and the thinking process is extensive. The values and norms of the social/civic realm affect all congregational members. Visual and emotional avenues of communication dominate. Narrative logic

rather than deductive argumentation is the effective medium of electronic technology. An informal orality is in; a formal written/read style is out.⁴

• How might we better preach in order to gain a hearing as well as help our people to understand and remember what is said?

Taking 1 John 1:1-3 as a model for how God communicates to us and considering the Small Catechism's explanation to the First Article of the Creed ("that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them."), discuss this quotation about making use of all three learning styles -- auditory, visual and interactive – in our preaching. "The pastor who teaches in a multi-sensory form is not mimicking the culture; he is mimicking the Creator."

• Read 1 Cor. 15:54-58 and close with a prayer for one another's ministry that is not in vain when it is carried out in the victory of Christ's resurrection.

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¹ Charles Arand, "A Two-Dimensional Understanding of the Church for the Twenty-First Century," *Concordia Journal* 33 (April 2007): 156.

² Glenn Nielsen, "No Longer Dinosaurs: Relating Lutheran Homiletics and Communication Practice," *Concordia Journal* 25 (January 1999): 27-28.

³ William A. Dyrness, How Does America Hear the Gospel? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 7.

⁴ Nielsen 28

⁵ Rick Blackwood, *The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 77.



LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Proclaimer

Participant's Guide

Christ-Centered Proclamation

"For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:22-23)

1. Focus of This Study

On October 17, 2007, Glenn Beck interviewed Joel Osteen on CNN. Osteen is the senior pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, the largest church in America. Here is part of their conversation:

BECK: People say you are the most influential Christian pastor in the country. Does that amaze you?

OSTEEN: It amazes me.

BECK: OK, yet there's not a lot of Jesus talk... If you're a Christian leader, is it important for you to talk about Christ?

OSTEEN: I think it is. And I think that's the core of my message, is that we believe that Christ came down on the cross, rose again for our forgiveness, and we have to receive him. But once you get past that, Glenn, being a pastor, every week I try to teach people how to live the Christian life.¹

Each weekend 45,000 people attend worship at Lakewood Church. 7 million viewers from 100 countries tune in on TV to hear Osteen's message. It would seem that many people are anxious to "get past" Jesus so that they can learn "how to live the Christian life."

For Starters

- What does Osteen's desire to "get past" the crucified and risen Christ say about his conception and purpose of Christ-centered preaching?
- Has anyone in your congregation ever suggested that you "get past" the cross and empty tomb of Christ in your preaching?
- Have you ever felt the need to "get past" these things so that you can focus on teaching your people "how to live the Christian life"?

This Bible study is designed to take a closer look at what it means to proclaim "Christ—crucified." The Scripture passages fit into three categories: (1) Paul's description of his proclamation; (2) examples of Peter's proclamation; and (3) Jesus' own directions for what his people should proclaim.

1. Scripture Search

Preaching "Christ crucified" with Paul

1 Corinthians 1:18-24

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Romans 1:16

John 6:63

Preaching "Christ crucified" with Peter

Consider this question as you read these passages: How is Peter's proclamation more than simply a message *about* Jesus?

Acts 2:22-39

Acts 3:12-26

Acts 4:5-12

1 Peter as a whole

In this letter, is Peter proclaiming "Christ-crucified" or "how to live the Christian life"?

Preaching "Christ crucified" with Jesus

Consider this question as you read these passages: What exactly did Jesus send us to proclaim?

Luke 24:44-49

John 20:21-23

Luke 10:16

2. From Our Lutheran Perspective

"Where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call, and gather the Christian church, apart from which no one can come to the Lord Christ." Large Catechism II.45 (Kolb/Wengert, 436)

"Wherever there is God's Word, no matter whether it is in Baptism, in Absolution, in the Sacrament [Lord's Supper] there God Himself speaks to us. In the Absolution, He Himself absolves us from [our] sins. In the Sacrament or the Lord's Supper, Christ Himself feeds us with His body and blood. We thus have God's Word in the church, indeed, in the home. Whenever the pastor speaks to us in the church or the father in the house, then God Himself speaks to us." Luther, sermon on Luke 18:31-43 (1534). Quoted in J.T. Mueller, "Notes on Luther's Conception of the Word of God as the Means of Grace" in CTM 20 (August 1949), 588.

"The Lutheran assertion that...preaching, in so far as it is Lutheran preaching, is God's own speech to men, is very difficult to maintain in practice. Instead, it is very easy to slip into the idea that preaching is only speech about God. Such a slip, once made gradually alters the picture of God, so that he becomes the far-off deistic God who is remote from the preached word and is only spoken about as we speak about someone who is absent."

Gustav Wingren, *The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1960), 19.

"It is remarkable that during his sojourn in Corinth, Paul was day and night wrestling with the problem how to bring Christ into people's heart and how to lay a solid foundation for their faith in Christ and their joy in Him. Jesus Christ was the marrow and substance of all his preaching, the golden thread that ran through all his sermons." C.F.W. Walther, 39th Evening Lecture in Law and Gospel (CPH, 1929), 405.

3. Points to Ponder

Proclaiming "Christ crucified" is not simply preaching *about* Christ. It is also proclaiming the message that Christ himself proclaimed. This message consisted of calling people to repent and forgiving their sins.

Proclaiming "Christ-crucified" necessarily includes teaching people how to live the Christian life. Jesus did this throughout his ministry (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount) and he sent us to proclaim his own Word. The problem with the preacher who feels the need to "get past" Christ and preach only (or primarily) about how to live the Christian life is that he leaves his hearers with nothing but the Law.

Preachers like Joel Osteen claim to preach "biblical" sermons. But the purpose of the Bible is to lead us to Christ (John 5:39; 20:31). This means that a sermon is not truly "biblical" unless it proclaims Christ.

4. For Conversation

Some preachers are hesitant to identify their sermon with the Word of God. Why is that?

A Presbyterian pastor said that if he got up in front of his congregation and said, "As a called and ordained servant of the Word, I forgive you all your sins..." he would be kicked out of his congregation before he finished the sentence. Why is that?

In *Theology Is for Proclamation*, Gerhard Forde makes a distinction between explanation and proclamation. Explanation is *about* the Gospel. Proclamation *is* the Gospel. Is it possible that some of our people (and some of our pastors) are looking for "how to live" sermons because too often they hear (and preach) *about* Christ crucified instead of preaching Christ crucified?

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 that his preaching was not with "lofty speech or wisdom." Is he suggesting that we should not try to use persuasive rhetorical devices in our preaching?

Should we follow Peter's lead and preach from our pulpits today: "You crucified Jesus!"? Why or why not?

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¹ For a transcript of the entire interview visit http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0710/17/qb.01.html



LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Proclaimer

Participant's Guide

Preaching Hope: Preaching in the Future Tense

1. Focus of the Study:

Hope can mean many things. In a non-descript gray office building in Scottsdale Arizona, nestled in among other businesses, is the research and storage facility for Alcor Life Extension Foundation. Here, over 100 human bodies and brains (including that of baseball great Ted Williams) are infused with cyroprotectants, packed into metal canisters, and stored under liquid nitrogen. The hope of these individuals (and the current 900+ members) is that they will be preserved in this state until technology has advanced to the point that they can be restored to health.¹

Simply defined, hope is an expectation of the future. Yet hope is so much more than that. Hope involves a larger story, as the past, the present, and the future are woven together in a delicate, life-changing balance. To be more specific, hope occurs when a past experience generates trust in a certain future that changes one's way of life in the present. To evaluate any situation of hope, we can consider these dynamics: how the past event and the certain future are joined together in a larger story that gives shape to present experience.

God has entrusted us as pastors with proclaiming the larger story of Jesus Christ that embraces our past, present, and future and recreates us to live in Christian hope. As we do this, however, we speak to a world full of people who are living by other narratives, stories that offer them hope for the future and shape the way they live now.

Consider the following situations where individuals have or are in need of hope:

- a student graduating from college;
- a young woman recently engaged;
- a couple adopting their first child;
- a 10 year old girl whose parents are getting divorced;
- a 35 year old man diagnosed with multiple sclerosis;
- a 54-year-old autoworker who has lost his job.

¹ Cryonics at Alcor, 2010, Alcon Life Extension Foundation, 12 Dec. 2010 http://www.alcor.org:80/index.html.

- A. What are some of the larger narratives our world would tell these people to provide hope in these situations?
- B. How are these narratives based upon past experiences?
- C. What is the imagined future do these narratives provide?
- D. How would these imagined futures shape the way each should live in the present?

2. Scripture Search:

Divine hope in Jesus Christ is not a "pie in the sky by and by," way of distracting God's people from the realities of life in the world today. Rather, it serves to shapes the baptized people of God, as they understand their lives in light of God's work in Jesus Christ and His past, present, and future working in the world through his Word and sacraments.

This year, the three-year lectionary turns our attention to Romans, a book filled with the language and theology of hope. Read Romans 15:1-13. Here, as Paul addresses issues of dietary laws and relationships among believers, one would not expect to find a theology of hope. Yet Paul knows that hope is not merely an expectation of the future, "pie in the sky by and by," but rather a confession of faith that shapes the lives of God's people, individually and corporately, in the present. Paul demonstrates how even the most obscure of congregational situations can be faithfully addressed within a theology of hope.

- A. How does Paul proclaim a larger story to the Roman Christians that joins past events with a certain future in a way that gives shape to their present experience?
- B. How is that story centered for them in Jesus Christ?
- C. What does this passage teach us as pastors and preachers about the spiritual dynamics of Christian hope:
- D. Upon what is hope founded?
- E. How is it formed within God's people?
- F. What effect does it have upon daily life?

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective:

A. This written Word of God, to which Paul turns for hope, is now publicly proclaimed among God's people in the office of preaching. Through such proclamation, the Holy Spirit works not only the forgiveness of sins but also the formation of hope among the faithful.

² In 1911, Joe Hill used this phrase in his song *The Preacher and the Slave* to mock the Salvation Army's song *In the Sweet Bye and Bye*, and to raise questions about any theology that focuses upon the salvation of souls in the hereafter but shows no concern for their lives here and now.

B. In his work, <u>Theology Is for Proclamation</u>, Gerhard Forde brought one particular insight to bear upon Lutheran preaching: to preach forgiveness is different than to preach about forgiveness. Proclamation, for Forde, is present tense, personal discourse, enacting the forgiving work of God in Christ "for you." One can teach hearers about forgiveness. One can describe it and analyze it but never bring it home. Present tense personal proclamation does the act of forgiving in the midst of the sermon. Preachers forgive God's people as they proclaim the saving love of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ "now," "for you."

How could Forde's insight be applied to preaching hope?

C. In Thesis 13 of <u>Law and Gospel</u>, Walther writes, "You are not rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel in the Word of God if you explain faith by demanding that people are able to make themselves believe or at least can collaborate toward that end. Rather, preach faith into people's hearts by laying the Gospel promises before them."

How would this thesis shape our preaching if we substituted the word "hope" for "faith"?

D. Make a list of some of the promises, attributes, and acts of God we could proclaim and, then, consider in concrete terms how the Spirit could use those words to bring about hope.

4. Points to Ponder:

Preaching hope involves proclaiming the larger divine story in which God's work in the past is placed in the present through His Word and Sacraments to work and secure his people a certain future that shapes they way they live now.

Preaching hope is different than preaching about hope.

5. For Conversation:

A. Funerals are a time for preaching hope. Discuss with one another how you preach hope at funerals.

What is the biblical hope to be proclaimed at a funeral?

How does this hope differ from the hope offered by our culture?

How do you proclaim such hope, moving beyond the anemic response that this person "died and went to heaven"?

³ Gerhard Forde, <u>Theology Is for Proclamation</u> (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 1-9.

⁴ C. F. W. Walther, <u>Law and Gospel:How to Read and Apply the Bible</u>, trans. Christian Tiews (St. Louis: CPH, 2010), 287.

Has your proclamation of hope in funeral sermons changed over time and how does it change depending upon the nature of the funeral?

B. Weddings are also a time for preaching hope, as bride and groom consider the future and look toward God for blessing upon their entry into his institution of marriage.

Spend some time defining what Christian hope is at a wedding.

How does this hope differ from the hope offered by our culture?

How do you proclaim such hope?

C. Sacramental preaching is filled with hope. Discuss with one another, in general, how you integrate the sacraments into your preaching.

Now consider more specifically how the dynamics of hope (i.e., proclaiming a larger divine story in which God's work in the past offers his people a certain future that shapes they way they live now) could shape your preaching in relation to baptism and then the Lord's Supper. What does it sound like to preach each of these sacraments with an emphasis upon hope?

D. Preaching from the Old Testament often involves preaching Christian hope, not only the hope that has been fulfilled in the first coming of Christ but also the hope yet to be fulfilled in the second coming, hope that shapes our lives in God's kingdom now.

How often do you preach from the Old Testament prophets? Why or why not?

What are the challenges you encounter?

Why is such preaching beneficial for God's people?

E. Using the readings for Proper 9 (Series A), how would you go about preaching the fuller narrative of hope on the basis Zechariah 9:9-12? More specifically, how does this prophecy continue to function as a source of hope for Christians today, after Christ's entry into Jerusalem?

What has yet to be fulfilled?

How does that certain future shape our present living in God's kingdom?

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LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011 The Pastor as Preacher

Participants' Guide

The Preacher As Shepherd: The Sermon in the Pastoral Context

1. Focus of this Study

Pastor, when are you most pastoral?

The crisis call, the sick room and the deathbed are times of interruption and confusion when God's sheep cry out for rescue. You, pastor, are God's sheepherd sent to rescue God's sheep with God's Word. The sheep will recognize your voice because they have heard it before. They have heard God speaking through you from the pulpit. Your sermons have taught, fed and warned the sheep. You have forgiven them and proclaimed that they are right with God through His grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. As the under shepherd of the Good Shepherd, you have been most like Jesus when you have comforted sad sheep and strengthened sick sheep with the gospel. In past several months, you have discussed many aspects of preaching. Now we consider the preacher as the $\pi o \iota \mu \eta \nu$, the shepherd.

Can the pulpit be the place where the Shepherd best cares for God's sheep?

Can the sermon be the most familiar context for pastoral care?

2. Scripture Search¹

a. "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem; and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." Isaiah 40:1,2

- b. "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season." Psalm 145:15
- c. "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy; for you stand firm in your faith." 2 Corinthians 1:24

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

d. "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." 1 Timothy 4:16

3. From our Lutheran Perspective

- a. "A servant of Christ and shepherd of His sheep is administering his office very poorly if the often burdened and bothered Christian heart that hurries to church does not find the comfort he so much needs and wants." C.F.W. Walther
- b. "The sermon can be overrated since it is only one of the ways we have of communicating with our people. But it is still a glorious opportunity to reach people with the Good News of God's reconciliation with us through our Lord Jesus Christ. And people still come hoping they will hear a good sermon. What a challenge! The faces are uplifted before you as you start your sermon. The people are saying: 'For God's sake, preacher, give us some food!' And, the Holy Spirit giving you the grace, you can do it. In your own way. With your own shortcomings. But also with your own gifts so that you can feed God's sheep and His lambs." Donald Deffner
- c. "... the pastoral sermon, is the purest type of the congregational sermon. Here we have, more truly than elsewhere, a 'omileiv, a speaking of Christian brother to Christian brother; here troubled souls are shown the way to joy in their Lord in their divine sonship, while the lax are spurred on upon the road to Christian perfection." Professor M. Reu
- d. "Caring for the soul is a special sort of proclamation. The minister should proclaim wherever possible. The minister is the pastor, that is, the shepherd of the congregation which needs daily care (2 Tim. 4:2). 'Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.' Caring for souls is a proclamation to the individual which is part of the office of preaching." Dietrich Bonhoeffer

4. Points to Ponder

a. The pastor is preaching most clearly as a shepherd when words of comfort prevail. The shepherd knows the burdens and cares his hearers bring with them and seeks to relieve the burdens and answer the cares with the Gospel. Sound preaching of the law is necessary, but it doesn't necessarily have to sound mean!

⁴ M. Reu, Homiletics (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1924); Reprinted in Concordia Heritage Series (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), p. 130.

² C.F.W. Walther, American Lutheran Pastoral Theology, translated by John M. Drickamer from the Fifth Edition, 1906 (New Haven: Lutheran News, 1995), p. 70.

³ Ibid. p. 113.

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Spiritual Care* (Translated by Jay C. Rochelle from the German "*Seelsorge*," Band V, *Gesammelten Schriften* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1982) English translation copyright 1985 by Fortress Press.

- b. The pastor is preaching most clearly as shepherd when he feeds his flock with the rich doctrines of Holy Scripture. Justification is the chief doctrine and it is entirely a teaching of the gospel.
- c. The pastor is preaching most clearly as shepherd when he has an outcome in mind for the sermon and that outcome is the joy of his hearers at the power of the gospel.
- d. The pastor is preaching most clearly as shepherd when he reminds himself that he is never a hireling, but steps into the pulpit as the shepherd God has called to tend this very flock.

5. For Conversation

a. When we check our rough draft, how can we be certain the gospel really does prevail?Is it always in volume of words or may it sometimes be in the force with which words are said?

In delivery, are we careful of the tone of our voice?

If the law is in the "preacher's voice," how can the gospel be in the "pastor's voice?"

b. In these times of decreased personal contact, how can a pastor keep track of his members so that he knows their burdens and their cares?

When we feed the flock, do we teach them how to listen to a sermon?

Do we teach them the difference between the law and gospel as they are preached?

Are we clear with both exposition and application?

- c. Don't hold back on application of the gospel...FORGIVE! How can we find ways to repeat the word of absolution with respect to the problems being addressed in the text and applied to the hearers?
- d. How would your sermon be different if you were preaching it to one person instead of to the entire congregation?

In our ministry to individuals to bring them back to corporate worship, are we careful also to rightly divide law and gospel and rightly include exposition and application?

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LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Proclaimer

Participant's Guide

Preaching with Parables

1. Focus of This Study

Parables often seem so simple, so straightforward and many of them are so familiar. There is a popular theory that stories—many (though not all) of which Jesus' parable are—work so well because they are universal, fully self-contained, quite apart from the context of teller, audience, and setting in time or place. For example, we do not know whether there ever was a real Aesop, but "his" fables still ring true.

Who knows the one about the fox and the grapes? Tell it to the group.

What is the point? Easy, right?

2. Scripture Search

Turn to **Luke 15:1-6**. As you read the parable, pretend you do not know who is telling it. Also pretend you do not know the audience and setting from vv. 1-2. (Remember, we are testing this theory about stories being fully self-contained.) In addition, do not consider v. 7 just yet; that is the explanation, not the parable itself.

What would the parable mean? If asked to come up with some sort of universal truth, what would it be?

What do the actions of the shepherd reveal about him?

- "<u>leave</u> the ninety-nine in the open country"
- "go after [i.e. search] the one that is lost, until he finds it"
- "he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing"
- "calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me'"

What does and does not matter to this shepherd?

Now read **15:7** as part of your analysis. The value system of this shepherd based on his actions is totally other than any earthly value system.

Who does this verse tell us shares the shepherd's value system and rejoices at his actions and the ends he accomplished?

While Jesus uses this verse to reveal heaven's perspective on the finding of the lost through repentance, does He use this verse, in the context of vv. 1 & 2, to reveal who the shepherd is?

Now the questions arise. Without immediately jumping back to vv. 1 & 2, and keeping in mind the value system of the shepherd, how would you answer the questions of "Who is a sinner?" and "Who is righteous?"

Read the next parable (15:8-10), but this time keep in mind vv. 1-2.

Does this parable help you understand anything more?

Read **15:11-32**. There is no new information and what you know is from vv. 1-10. Now brainstorm together about the meaning of "The Prodigal Son"... or "The Waiting Father"... or "The Prodigal Father"... or whatever you want to call it.

Which elements are you going to interpret?—the younger son? the father? the older son? the inheritance? the far country? the reckless living? the famine? the pigs? coming to himself? the robe, the ring, the shoes? the fattened calf? Add to the list.

Then start interpreting and take some time with this. Where are you going? Where is the next circuit brother going? And the next? Some "walking together," eh?!!

The storyteller has you onto the identity of the younger son, right? Whom does he represent? And the older son—naughty boy!—you recognize him, right? And since we have established that this is all somehow religious, the father must be...? God! Good guess!

So there is hope for tax collectors and sinners! As long as they first come to their senses?

What about for the "older sons" of this real-life world? How do they come out?

A sterilized interpretation like this is not just hypothetical; it is exactly the approach Jesus' enemies were taking as they listened to Him. They had already ruled out any special significance of the teller. The result? See **Matthew 13:10-15.**

Ready to preach on Luke 15? Easy, huh?

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

Martin Scharlemann suggests in his book *Proclaiming the Parables* (CPH, 1963), that a parable is properly interpreted by discovering and preaching the single "point of comparison" (the *tertium comparationis*).

How is that different from interpreting an allegory?

How might that trim the possibilities for understanding the parable of the prodigal son?

More importantly, Scharlemann argues that Jesus' parables are *not* self-contained, independent of context. When Jesus comes on the scene, he says, the Jews are living in almost feverish expectation of the coming of the kingdom of God. Prefigured throughout the Old Testament, it is to be the establishment of God's gracious rule, which sets His people apart as a new community, in judgment of their enemies, in a new covenant of forgiveness. All this is to be inaugurated by the Christ coming to dwell in the flesh with mankind. This expectation, the setting in which the parables were told, is crucial! The expectation is crucial because it screams out, "Is the one telling the stories the Expected One?!!" If he is, then the point of every parable is just that—He has come!

4. Points to Ponder

You know the Storyteller! Who is doing all the work in the parables of the sheep and the coin?

Inasmuch as the one telling the story of the sons and the father is the one the Father sent to redeem Israel (old and new), then who gets to be the son that was lost but is now found? *Just* tax collectors and sinners? Who else?

If the Pharisees and scribes are sinfully begrudging—that is, if they're the older son—then they're lost, aren't they?—prodigally squandering the riches the Father had imparted to the them early on, right? Ah, that makes them turn out to be the prodigal, too, eh? If so, then what has the Storyteller come to do for them? Shame them? Or tell them about how their Father runs to embrace wasteful sons *just like them*?

How different when the parables are suddenly all about Christ! How would you express the one point of comparison for the parable of the prodigal son, knowing everything you really do know? Talk about how you would preach that.

Now go back and look at the beginning of all three parables, vss. 1-3. What do these verses do to the point of comparison?

5. For Conversation

For any or all of the following parables, formulate a point of comparison, keeping in mind that the one bringing the story is the One bringing the Kingdom. Furthermore, make sure that the comparison makes close attention to the words, "the kingdom of heaven is like..."

Matthew 13:1-9 (18-23) & Matthew 13:24-30 (36-43) & Matthew 13:44 and 13:45-46

Mark 4:26-29 & Mark 4:30-32

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