



Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

Leader's Guide

Leader's Guides

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LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Proclaimer

Leaders 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”?

The goal is to introduce the topic of evaluating preaching in a natural way. Whether we willfully acknowledge it, evaluation happens all the time. Always active is the tension between what God wants, the condition of the hearers, and our own strengths and weaknesses. We have incredible privilege and an overwhelming task. Depending on the level of trust in this group, you can hear a combination of personal story and theological premise. The goal is to put on the table the assumptions of what makes a “good sermon.”

2. SCRIPTURE SEARCH

What makes a sermon “good” from God’s perspective?

- 2 Timothy 4:1-5
This key verse is paralleled well by 2 Timothy 3:16-17. We are charged in the presence of God to consider what we are doing (verse 1). Yes there is opposition, misunderstanding, confusion, falsehood in the world. In that context, we remain clear, bear up, and fulfill our call.
- Proverbs 4:23
Our heart infects and affects our preaching. Unless we guard our hearts we ourselves can become the most significant audience.
- Romans 1:16-17
The efficacy of the word of the Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. The Gospel itself gives the power to grasp the Gospel.
- Luke 4:14-30
The servant is not above his master. Jesus experienced opposition to proclamation; so we ought not be surprised at opposition, even when freedom is being proclaimed.
- Colossians 1:28-29
We are not done until they and we are mature.

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?

Draw out from the participants the assumptions of Lutheran models for preaching.

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

Some things do not change. The human conditions of flattery and criticism continue to affect preaching. This excerpt from a 1920 seminary homiletics text talks about the commonness of interaction with people:

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

How you view your church will determine how you preach to them. Ask, "Is your church a desert or a garden?"

- 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."³

Liturgy is not enough. Walther's comments on the central role of preaching are crucial.

- 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.

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.

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

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.⁴

Help participants note the aspects of Lutheran preaching identified here.

- 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. Points to Ponder

- We have an incredible privilege to proclaim Christ.

It is a privilege to proclaim, not a chore, a privilege.

- We stand on the shoulders of those who have proclaimed Christ before us and to us.

We are not the first and we will not be the last to proclaim. That truth brings both responsibility and humility to our preaching.

- The Gospel itself gives the power to believe the Gospel.

The Gospel itself is the power behind preaching, not we ourselves.

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

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.

- When Christ proclaimed freedom and it was not universally accepted, we ought not be surprised.

Universal approval is not a driving objective our preaching.

- The Gospel is not just a tool of our trade but food for our very souls.

We do not just preach the Gospel; we need the Gospel.

- We are not done proclaiming until our hearers and we ourselves are mature in Christ – a task unfinished until He comes again.

God calls us to patient, enduring, life-long preaching.

5. FOR CONVERSATION (for large group or small group 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

There is some comfort in knowing that our spiritual forbearer also experienced frustration in this most important task.

- What is your mental model of preaching?

Help draw out the set of assumptions, ideas and expectations that the participants have about their call to proclaim.

- 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.

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

- Which thoughts presented today will you go back to and think about again?
- When can you say to yourself, “Good sermon, Pastor”?

Be sure to close the conversation with prayers focused on our preaching and other needs of participants.

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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."ⁱ 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.

If the leader has access to Horton's book, it would serve the group well for him to become familiar with its themes. Horton gives a broad perspective of how we end up placing more emphasis on what we do (e.g. trying to follow what Jesus would do) as opposed to what Jesus has already done for us in His holy life, death and resurrection. The new gospel, which is no Gospel at all, is Christless, because we are the center of attention.

For Reflection and Conversation

- What pressures do you feel to give up your confession of Jesus as the only way of salvation?

Some examples:

- 1. Don't offend anyone, especially the good givers.**
- 2. Make sure people feel good when they leave the sanctuary.**
- 3. Focus only on the steps they need to take (reliance on the law)**

- How might this pressure affect your preaching?
- What pressure is on your people to abandon the confession of Jesus?

Some examples:

- 1. Don't offend anyone, especially special interest groups.**
- 2. Don't mention Jesus in public lest they offend someone.**
- 3. Work hard to do "what Jesus would do."**

- How does your preaching take this pressure into consideration?

SCRIPTURE SEARCH

Please note how the first five texts below use the same word, *ομολογεω*, which is translated, "confess." In each of these texts it might be helpful to ask who is saying the same thing as whom?

- 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

The objective of Satan to pressure God's people to abandon the true confession remains constant. This objective is undertaken through many different tactics. There are subtle differences between the pressure noted in this text and the pressure on us today. For example, at the time this text was written there was little fear of offending outsiders with a true confession.

- 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}

There is still a lot of "god talk" in church bodies that have abandoned the true confession. It may sound genuine, even biblical. Who can argue with "God is love.?" But when the demonstration of God's love as seen on the cross and in the resurrection of Jesus is omitted, the true God is not the reference. Those who deny the Son have various idols: success, fame, pleasure etc.

- 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..."^v

Jesus is sent, ("apostle") to make sacrifice ("high priest") for the true confession. (The book of Hebrews notes the duties of a priest as offering sacrifices and gifts, [5:1 and 8:3] and having authority "over the house of God" [10:21]. The point seems to be that Jesus is the source as well as the sustainer of this confession.

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."^{vi}

Note the progression in these texts from Hebrews. In this text the author moves from Jesus as the source of the confession to our response to Him as our High Priest who passed through the heavens to be "with us" in the flesh. The Greek verb, *krateo*, is in the subjunctive, and thus translated as an exhortation to respond, "let us hold fast." The Gospel in this text is found in the succeeding verses that speak of His enduring for our sake what we endure in this world of sin.

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

The progression continues in this text as we are now called to hold fast "without wavering." The argument is then brought to its conclusion by an allusion to the 3:1 text using the word "faithful" again. We are not the source of the confession nor do we have the strength to hold fast to it. God is faithful in maintaining this confession. He holds onto us as we try to get away from Him in our sin. A different verb is used in this text for "hold fast." The Greek word, *katecho*, is perhaps stronger than *krateo* because it implies holding onto something that may be lost or taken away. In this case the author suggests that there is pressure to give up the true confession of Jesus as the great High Priest who takes away the sin of the world.

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."^{viii}

This text is included to remind pastors that God has given us a gift to steward. It is the Gospel. It is clear that the gift is to be managed by preaching it. The text may be used to argue that the preacher has a responsibility to guide the congregation in holding fast to the confession. It is his stewardship to use the gift as God intended it to be used. Woe to him who uses it in any other way.

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'"^{ix} (Formula, SD, Art. III, par. 6).

This text connects the previous Scriptural texts to the particular tactic Satan uses in today's world as noted in Michael Horton's book. Satan is attacking the chief article, the article of justification by God's grace through faith in Jesus, by creating pressure to

abandon the confession of Jesus. Two results of a compromise of the chief article are noted: 1. No one can have abiding comfort. 2. No error or heresy can be repelled.

“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”^x (Formula, SD, Introduction).

Holding fast to the true confession is not just a matter of playing with words. While Lutherans are often accused of this, (and in some cases it may ring true, as when we want to win an argument that does not have a Scriptural basis), the point is that we hold fast to the confession for the sake of the Gospel. A compromise of the Gospel cannot be tolerated in the church of God. Notice first that the Word of God is used to explain the controverted articles. Secondly, “approved writings” and the “Christian Augsburg Confession” as a means of explaining the controversy. In other words the Lutheran Confessions may be used as tools to help us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.

“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).

“We believe, teach, and confess” are important words to confessing Lutherans. In this trinity “confess” takes on a special connotation. “Believe” seems to refer to the personal aspect of holding fast the confession. “Teach” may be understood as an ecclesial activity as those within the church are catechized. “Confess” implies the activity of the church in the world. This is not just a strident, defensive activity but also a proclamatory activity as the church holds the confession out to the world for everyone to hear and believe.

Please also note that by quoting Galatians 1:8 the confessors at this point chose to remind the reader that the Gospel, the chief article of the Christian faith, cannot be changed.

POINTS TO PONDER

The leader may choose to use the following as points for discussion.

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.
3. 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, *homologeō*, 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?

The preacher is to "say the same thing" as God says. He dare not say anything that is not congruent with the Word of God. The preacher is given the responsibility, (AC, V) to manage the Word and the sacraments so "that we may obtain this faith." The confession belongs to God. The preacher finds ways to make this clear to the hearer.

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?

I would agree. In everything he does the pastor is confessing the faith, but the confession is particularly powerful in preaching. The liturgy of the Church is designed to deliver God's gifts, the Word and the sacraments, to the world. That means that people of God come expecting to receive God's gift of the Word. That is why Paul says in I Corinthians 9:16, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel." The people of God learned to hold fast to the confession as it is modeled in the primary way they receive it, through preaching.

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?

The confessing preacher responds to the attacks of Satan to diminish the confession of Christ not by turning inward and not by using the tools of the world, but by turning to the great High Priest. We know that because He was tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin, we can trust Him to hold us fast in this

confession. The world, our sinful flesh, and Satan will attempt to take this confession from us, but we will not waver because He who promised is faithful.

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?

Much of the visible church has already abandoned the true confession of hope in Jesus by refusing to proclaim the chief article of the Christian faith. There is even pressure from one church body to another to conform to this non-offensive gospel. This calls for great wisdom. Preaching against a specific error in teaching is necessary. How can we avoid allowing our preaching to degenerate into a general denunciation of large groups of people (some of whom may be seeking to be faithful), or into slander of an individual as opposed to decrying the offending confession?

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?

These are the results: 1. No one can have abiding comfort. 2. No error or heresy can be repelled. The result is that the denomination will look just like the world. Law will be proclaimed as an attempt to comfort, but no comfort will be found. Every person's opinion will be accepted as equally valid. There can be no truth where there is no standard for determining error.

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.

The confessing preacher is always in the act of confessing while he is in the act of holding fast the confession. These two cannot be separated or set in opposition to each other. The biblical texts referring to the confession of Jesus demonstrate an intersection of the church and the world that can be nothing but an opportunity for confessing the name of Jesus. Where the Word is proclaimed there the Holy Spirit of God is active, calling people to faith. Whether the confession takes place in a more defensive setting or a more proclamatory setting, the Word carries the same power.

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?

Satan is constantly attacking the confession of the Church. In this action he is also attacking believers who seek to hold fast the confession. The Lutheran Confessions can be used as a tool to help us hold fast the confession. They can be used in teaching and preaching to make the confession of the faith clear. The

confessing preacher must take care to help his hearers know what these confessions are, and, secondly, to know that they are only to be used as expositions of the Word of God, not as equal to the Word of God.

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?

There are countless other “gospels” proclaimed by countless other “preachers” The world perverts the Gospel and confuses hearers. Our own sinful flesh closes and bends our ears so that we do not hear God’s Word aright. The confessing Lutheran preacher does not tire of saying the same thing over and over because he knows that holding fast the confession of our hope is the only way that his listeners can hear the Gospel and come to faith in Jesus as their Savior.

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. **It might be good to close by saying this prayer together:**

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

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

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

^{iv} *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (1 Jn 2:23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

^v *The 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.

^{viii} *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.

^x 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.



Faithful & Alive

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Proclaimer

Leader'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.

Noted homiletician Eugene Lowry writes: "The first step in the presented sermon, then, is to upset the equilibrium of the listeners, and is analogous to the opening scene of a play or movie in which some kind of conflict or tension is introduced."¹ One way to "upset the equilibrium of the listeners" is by employing the homiletical strategy of inversion. By putting the cart before the horse, the pastor alters the expected sequence and thereby elicits people's attention. For example, a sermon on vocation might begin with the phrase, "Take this job and *love* it!" Preaching on the incarnation a pastor may state, "This is a *riches to rags* story." A homily on the church may announce, "Where two or three are gathered together, there is *Satan* in their midst."

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

¹ Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*. Rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 30-31.

(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.

In this situation Amos could not simply repeat words from the Pentateuch, but neither could he embark on a mission that completely jettisoned Israel's theological language. Andersen and Freedman describe the prophet's dilemma this way: "A judicious balance needs to be struck, one in which the prophet's role as conservator of ancient tradition is blended with that of radical critic of current behavior and intention."² Amos' challenge, therefore, was to use theological language itself to show the inadequacy of what the language had become and to reconnect its parts in a way that would make it fresh, real, and alive. Amos' rhetorical task was to recreate the language's *surprise*. Needing to accomplish this using the resources of the language itself, he employs the rhetorical strategy of inversion.

Amos takes Israel's theological premises and reshapes them to awaken his listeners from their spiritual slumber. He employs Pentateuchal language and theology that simply cannot be contradicted *and contradicts it!* Amos peppers the nation's leaders with challenging "in-your-face" questions.

What if election means *judgment*? (3:2). What if worship is a *crime*? (4:4-5). What if the Day of Yahweh turns out to be the *night* of Yahweh? (5:18-20). What if Yahweh's presence in the temple brings not a blessing but a *curse*? (9:1-4). And what if Yahweh had accomplished an exodus for *other nations*? (9:7). By relentlessly posing these unsettling inversions, Amos takes the people's language and turns it against them. We will now consider these texts in greater detail.

- Amos 3:1-2

Amos begins this section with the words, "Hear this word that Yahweh has spoken concerning you, O children of Israel, concerning the entire clan which I brought up from Egypt, saying" (3:1). His audience might have concluded at the end of this verse that the exodus was a sign of Yahweh's ongoing and eternal favor (e.g., Num 24:8; Jud 6:13; 1 Kings 8:51-51); it forever guaranteed Israel's "favored nation status" before Yahweh. In the next verse, however, Amos flatly contradicts these expectations. He quotes Yahweh as saying, "You alone have I known from all the families of the earth, therefore I will visit upon you the fruit of all your iniquities" (3:2). Amos inverts the election verb *yada* ("to know"). The prophet overturns expectations by using Yahweh's gospel events to speak judgment and law.

- Amos 4:4-5

In these verses Amos takes the genre of priestly Torah and turns it upside down. The prophet imitates the priestly call to worship, not because Israel's worship violated Levitical standards, but because justice and righteousness had been thrown down and poisoned (cf. 5:7; 5:24; 6:12). Psalm 95:6-7 is a familiar liturgical piece in the Office of Matins: "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before Yahweh our Maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." These verses display a two-part structure: (1) the invitation, using an imperative verb (in this case "come"), and (2) the reason expressed in the sentence with the word "for." Imitating the call to worship, Amos 4:4 begins with an imperative of *awb*.

² Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman. *Amos*. Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 539.

“Come to Bethel,” Amos cries out. Then the other shoe drops. Instead of continuing with the theme of worship, kneeling or bowing down, he says, “and commit a crime.” The prophet employs the verb *pasha* (“commit a crime”) throughout Amos 1:3-2:3 to denote “crimes against humanity.” The shock in Amos 4:4, therefore, is that Israel’s worship life is placed on the same moral level as these crimes of the nations! Worship is a crime against the Divine Suzerain. Imagine this sign on a marquee outside of a Christian sanctuary, “Come to this Church and Commit a Crime!” Amos 4:4-5 goes on to list the normally pious actions of offering sacrifices, bringing tithes and presenting thank and freewill offerings. These sound more like a list that a church would draw up to describe her “member of the year,” rather than an indictment for excommunication. But Israel’s elite had the form of godliness while denying its power (see 2 Tim 3:5).

- Amos 5:18-20

Amos begins this unit with the cry “woe.” Much like church bells in a small town tolling to announce a funeral, when a person cried out “woe” one would immediately ask, “Who died?” In Amos’ case the answer would be, “You!” In his next inversion Amos announces that the Day of Yahweh will actually be the Night of Yahweh. This oracle assumes that there were those listening to Amos who could identify with the phrase. Both the rhetorical questions and the repetition of the contrast between “darkness and not light,” suggest that the prophet was trying to refute a widely held view that “the Day of Yahweh” would usher in more of Yahweh’s blessings.

- Amos 9:1-4

In the grand finale of his series of five visions (the others are in 7:1-3; 7:4-6; 7:7-9; 8:1-3), Amos again takes several time-honored ideas and stands them on their head. Some psalms celebrate Yahweh’s goodness because He is everywhere (e.g., Pss 95:3-4; 139:5-12); however, Amos uses the motif as a guarantee of Yahweh’s destructive reach. In his second inversion, the prophet takes a positive Old Testament idiom, “I will set my eye upon them” (e.g., Gen 44:21; Jer 24:6), and assures Israel that Yahweh’s eye is upon them for evil and not good.

- Amos 9:7

The impenitent Israelites embraced a “once saved, always saved” theology. But the exodus did not automatically imply Yahweh’s divine protection forever. Amos compares God’s people to the far-away Cushites in Africa. Yahweh shows no favoritism ethnically, geographically, politically, or historically (see Acts 10:34-35; Rom 2:11). The Arameans and Philistines were some of Israel’s most despised enemies. And, to think, Yahweh accomplished an exodus for them as well! We can almost hear Israelites respond, “You have made them equal to us” (Mt 20:12).

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.”³

Amos offers more than a *rhetoric* for preaching; he also teaches a *theology* for preaching. The prophet’s audience readily accepted Yahweh past action of the exodus and conquest (e.g., Amos 2:9-11), even as they longed for Yahweh’s future action (e.g., Amos 5:18). But Israel’s elite had no room for a *present* word from Yahweh. They did everything they could to squelch the *viva vox Dei* (Amos 2:12; 7:10-17). Their reasoning went something like this. “If we can successfully deny that Yahweh has any word for us in the present moment, then we can remain ‘religious’ and even ‘orthodox’ and still be free to do anything we want!” Amos’ theological task, then, was to strip away the past and the future and confront Israel’s leadership with Yahweh’s word for the present moment.

Gerhard Forde maintains that all too often the proclamation of the Gospel gets displaced by explanation, teaching, lecturing and the like. But Lutheran preaching – indeed prophetic and apostolic preaching – is to be “the direct declaration of the Word of God, that is, the Word *from* God.”⁴ This is different than preaching *about* God. Preaching like Amos means that we include present-tense verbs and first and second person nouns. Just as the pastor absolves, baptizes and distributes the Eucharist in the present tense, so the sermon is to be God’s present action, his current mighty act.

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.

The immediate danger of cliché is the audience’s passive response. This is what Homer meant when he spoke about the poet’s creativity: “For men praise that song the most which comes the newest to their ears.”⁵ Amos had to invert language and genres in order to gain a hearing from people.

- 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.

To be sure, the preaching of Law and Gospel requires language that is faithful to the text and in accord with sound doctrine. But at the same time it must shock sensitivity, call attention to what is not noticed, break the routine and cause people to redescribe things that have long since seem settled.

- If the past and future are the only points in our preaching, then our error is not only rhetorical, it is theological.

A sermon that focuses solely upon what God has done in the past or will do in the future neglects that preaching is the proclamation of the *viva vox Dei*. God always has a present word for His people. Christ is not preached if He is not preached as condemning and absolving *now*.

³ AE: 30:3.

⁴ Gerhard Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 2

⁵ Homer, *Odyssey*, 1.351-52.

- 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.

Of course his most well-known are in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-12; Luke 6:20-23). But he also says, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it” (Matt 16:25); “the last will be first and the first will be last” (Matt 19:30; 20:8); and “let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the one who rules like the one who serves” (Luke 22:26).

- 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.

Following the lead of Amos, pastors will be better equipped to proclaim Yahweh’s word of Law that finally yields to the Gospel’s greatest inversion of all: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” (Luke 24:5b-6a).

5. FOR CONVERSATION

- Read Amos 7:10-17. Patrick Miller presents this narrative as a conflict between the different perspectives of Amos and Amaziah:⁶

Amaziah’s Perspective	Amos’ Perspective
Jeroboam ben Joash is King “Thus Amos has said ...” (v. 11) “Jeroboam will die by the sword.” (v. 11)	Yahweh is King “Thus says Yahweh ...” (v. 17) Yahweh will kill Jeroboam by the sword (v. 9)
“Amos has conspired ...” (v. 10) Amos should prophecy in Judah (v. 12) Amaziah says to Amos, “Go!” (v. 12)	“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?

- On a scale of 1-10 (1= never; 10=always), how often do you preach like Amos?
- 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
- How can you encourage one another to preach more often with prophetic boldness?

⁶ 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.

Amos' courage in the face of Amaziah is part of a long tradition in which prophets dare to challenge the sinful establishment. Moses confronts Pharaoh with Yahweh's thunderous, "Let my people go" (e.g., Exod 5:1). Nathan courageously puts his prophetic career on the line when he thunders to David, "You are the man" (2 Sam 12:7). Elijah takes the heat from Ahab who calls him "the troubler in Israel" (1 Kings 18:17). Jeremiah daringly rewrites Yahweh's word for Jehoiakim after the king had sliced and burned it (Jer 36:27-32). And Daniel's dream of the night subverts Nebuchadnezzar's illusion of the day (Dan 4:1-27).

Standing with Moses, Nathan, Elijah, Daniel, and Amos is Israel's final prophet who took the greatest stand. He also dared to turn His world of power politics upside down when He made proclamations like, "the last will be first" (Matt 20:16; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30). Jesus once had the zeal first to make a whip and then use it to cleanse His Father's House (John 2:15). Another time He looked the religious leaders straight in the eye and said, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence" (Matt 23:25). And climactically He stood before his Amaziah – the High Priest Caiaphas – and confessed, "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt 26:64; Mark 14:62).

Jesus was not crucified for merely giving to charity. He was executed for living out a love that disrupted the Jewish Greco-Roman social order. He called for a new kingdom, and He was the new King (John 18:36). Jesus was not crucified for helping poor people; He was crucified because He *joined* them. Societies don't execute conformists, but they do silence someone who shakes their religious and social conventions to their very core.

Jesus is the Lion (Rev 5:5), but He is also the Lamb (John 1:29, 36). His power is made most perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9). He allows soldiers to march Him through the city streets on the *Via Dolorosa*, shouldering his crossbar while blood drips from His butchered back. He allows these same executioners to strip Him naked, shove Him to the ground, and pin Him to wood with their tools of torture. He takes the spit and the insults without calling to His Father to immediately dispense twelve legions of angels (Matt 26:53).

Amaziah and company do everything they can to cage the Lion, and if they can't cage Him they kill Him. And for three days all the demons of hell thought they had won. But coming forth from the tomb the Lion's fierce love roars on! Revelation 5:5 boldly proclaims to the persecuted churches in Asia Minor: "See, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, He has triumphed!"

- 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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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Preacher

Leaders 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.

In this example, the liturgical context was not only on the First Sunday in Lent but also throughout the season of Lent, culminating in the rite of washing feet on Maundy Thursday. The sermon unfolded Jesus' life of faith lived in servanthood and given to His disciples in the Supper of his body and blood. Thus all liturgical preaching is sacramental preaching because liturgy seeks to lead the body of Christ to participate through faith in the Word proclaimed and the Word sacramentally enacted.

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?

As with the Greeks who came to see Jesus in John 12, through Word and Sacrament liturgy, God the Father reveals Himself in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son through the power of His Spirit. Liturgical preaching

should allow the assembly to see, trust in, and follow the Son of Man and Lord of all as He is revealed in the liturgical events of Word and sacraments. Liturgical preaching unfolds and unpacks the worship of the church for the sake of all who participate.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH

These three selections from God's Word were chosen to demonstrate how preaching functions within the context of worship. These texts make clear that the Word of God when proclaimed is a performative Word that is intended to do what it says. It liberates the captives, forgives sins, raises the dead, and is communion with God in the fullest personal way. Preaching in the liturgical context proclaims into being the people of God gathered to receive His mercy.

1. Luke 4:16-30

In His preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus manifests at least three things about preaching in the church. First, Christian preaching takes the liturgical context into account. Jesus preaches from the prophet Isaiah, one of the two passages that would have been read, the other being a reading from the Law. In addition, he attends to the context of the hearers from his hometown of Nazareth and their messianic expectations. Most likely he preaches interacting with the assembly (vv. 21-23) as was characteristic of later synagogue preaching. Second, the liturgical context expected that Scripture interprets Scripture and Jesus did not disappoint. Although Luke does not reflect upon Jesus' interpretation of the Law, he does interpret Isaiah 61:1-2 from the former prophets, 1 Kings 17:8-16 (Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath) and 2 Kings 5:1-14 (Elisha and the healing of Naaman the Syrian). He proclaims the Word so that the blind (even the poor and oppressed of Nazareth) might recover their sight through Him as the one anointed by the Lord. Third, the Word He proclaims is a performative Word. It seeks to put to death all forms of self-righteousness and self-justification in Nazareth and to elicit trust in Yahweh and His messenger alone. Liturgical preaching, as worship, will aim to do all of these things.

2. John 6:22-59

Jesus' sermon on the Bread of Life, following the feeding of the five thousand, demonstrates that the proclamation of God's Word is a personal invitation to communion with God. His words further show that belief in the Word proclaimed (eating the Word, whether in hearing or in the body and blood of the Lord's Supper) is the actual agency of fellowship itself. As Hughes Oliphant Old notes in his exhaustive study of preaching throughout church history concerning John's Gospel,

The incarnation of the Word leads to the proclamation of the Word, and this proclamation is in the end the establishing of communion both with God and with the worshipping congregation. To put it succinctly, the apostolic Word is the basis of worship" (Old, Hughes Oliphant, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, Volume 1, The Biblical Period, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998, 164).

Old notes (159) that Jesus' sermon takes rabbinic form with a four-point sermon based on the text of Exodus 16:4, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." Jesus interprets the text from the Law with other scriptures, Psalm 78:24 and 105:40. In rabbinic fashion he interprets the phrases from Exodus 16:4 so as to proclaim that God is providing bread from heaven to eat NOW. Through that bread of the Word, which is Jesus' flesh and blood, those who hear and believe have life and communion with God. Such communion occurs whenever the bread of Life is received, both in the hearing of the proclaimed Word and in the eating of the flesh and blood of the Son of Man. Just as Jesus preached here, so liturgical preaching will aim to unpack the Word of God so that the people of God commune with God in worship through the living Word of God. Liturgical preaching is Word and sacrament preaching.

3. 1 Peter 2:4-10

Earlier in Peter's epistle, he makes it clear (as with Luke 4 and John 6) that the Word of God is living and saving (1 Peter 1:23-25). By this preached Word people are born anew and spiritually given new life. The Word creates life. Such proclamation will build the people of God into the living spiritual house or temple of God, composed of living stones built on the cornerstone of the living Word, Jesus Christ. Being built into this spiritual house through the proclaimed, living Word, the people of God become a royal priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices to God.

According to 1 Peter 2 those spiritual sacrifices include the declaration of the works of God (witnessing the Word of God to others). Since Peter appears to be interpreting Psalm 118 in light of Psalm 50 and Malachi 1, it is apparent that the spiritual sacrifices also include praise, thanksgiving, and prayer offered to God and the right ordering of life that follows upon such sacrifices (sanctification). As Hughes Old notes, the early church would have understood the spiritual sacrifices of which Peter speaks as the form of worship in the synagogue: a worship constituted by the Word, prayer, and praise. This worship was spiritual even if it was formal.

Thus, the contrast in Peter's letter is not between spiritual and formal, but between spiritual and dead in relation to the living Word of Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God who has been raised from the dead. These spiritual sacrifices are something that engage the entire priesthood of God's people. The public reading and preaching of the mighty acts of God, even when represented by the preacher's voice alone, "is a witness the Church as a whole lays before the world" (Old, 233). The preaching of the living Word forms and shapes the people of God through the entire context of the liturgical event of spiritual sacrifices. The sacrifice of Christ received and the sacrifices of God's people offered to God mark us as a sacramental, liturgical people who live by faith in the mercy of God.

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).

The Formula of Concord confesses that the proclaimed Word of God is the power of God by which God is graciously present in the hearts of those who hear his Word and believe it. It is a performative Word of grace eliciting trust and faith. The Holy Spirit is active in that Word as Christ has promised. These words from the Formula confirm how the Word of God is understood in the Scripture passages discussed above. Preaching in a liturgical context will proceed on the basis of this power in the Word and will assume that the liturgical context, which is a Word context, will have the same aim.

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).

Preaching sacramentally means preaching the Word so that God's children see life through the lens of liturgical experience. Satterlee and Ruth give the example of Paul saying in Romans 6 that one should cease sinning because it contradicts the experience of death and resurrection in baptism. Sacramental preaching seeks to ground the believer in sound teaching, which is the teaching of God as the creator who has redeemed the fallen creation in his Son Jesus Christ and is bringing the creation to its fulfillment at the eschaton by the working of the Holy Spirit. Preaching ought to shape a life according to that sound doctrine as experienced in the church's worship. Sacramental preaching shapes a vision of the Christian life for those assembled by proclaiming the vision of that life experienced in Christian worship (See the earlier discussion of servanthood in terms of a rite of foot washing).

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?

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*)

This sermon, often attributed to St. John Chrysostom, is an attempt to unpack the resurrection Gospel as an invitation and event in the present for the one who hears the Word of Christ's resurrection. Using Scripture to interpret Scripture (the Passover, the Sermon on the Mount [Matthew 16:16-18]), Chrysostom calls the assembly to see the resurrection life in the table of the Lord. It is a call to participate in that life through the Word that he proclaims and through the feast that God has prepared in the Lord's Supper. Christ is Life, and here His life is spread before the assembly in the Word of resurrection and the cup of faith.

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."

Liturgical preaching is a performative, living Word intended to bring life, just as the sacraments do.

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.

Liturgical preaching brings life through the law that kills and the gospel that gives life to hearers dead in the sins of their Old Adams and Eves.

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.

Liturgical preaching allows the living Word to be interpreted by the entire living Word of the sacramental, liturgical context.

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.

Liturgical preaching preaches toward the communion of the entire human person with the entirety of the living Word.

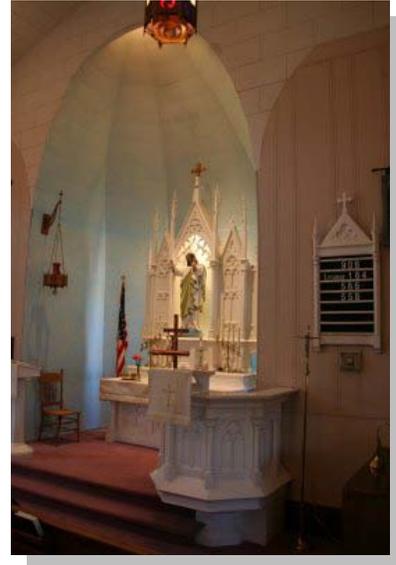
5. Spiritual worship (Romans 12:1) is not equal to informal worship. Spiritual worship includes study and proclamation of the Word, prayer, and praise, the activities of the

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.

Liturgical preaching preaches so that the people of God live the totality of their communal life as people in communion with God through the witness of the Word, prayer, and praise.

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.

This prayer may be helpful to conclude:

Strengthen, O Lord, the hands that holy things have taken, that they may daily bring forth fruit to thy glory. Grant, O Lord, that the lips which have sung thy praise within the sanctuary, may glorify thee for ever; that the ears which have

heard the voice of thy songs, may be closed to the voice of clamor and dispute; that the eyes which have seen thy great love, may also behold thy blessed hope; that the tongues which have sung the Sanctus, may ever speak the truth. Grant that the feet that have trod in thy holy courts may ever walk in the light, and that the souls and bodies, which have tasted of thy living Body and Blood, may ever be restored in newness of life. Amen.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Preacher

Leader'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?

Answers will vary but focus on the individual’s quest to discover the sacred. This begs for a definition of “sacred”.

- What is the source of this “spirituality”, how is it to be known and confirmed?

Note that the individual is the source of their own “spirituality”. The individual knows and confirms their “spirituality” according to the subjective emotional and psychological experiences.

Note that this “spirituality” is severed from any objective source outside of self. Also note the necessity of defining the “most expansive sense” to validate this concept of “spirituality.”

- In what ways does this description of “spirituality” reflected in religious life as you encounter it in your place of ministry?

Some cultural aspects that might be included would be: People are attracted to what is personal and experiential. Our society is consumerist and pluralistic. There is a strong anti-authoritarianism present. While some prefer not to use the word “Postmodern,” when you Google “Postmodern characteristics,” you come up with a helpful list of what American spirituality tends to be like today (See www.allaboutphilosophy.org/characteristics-of-postmodernism-faq.htm)

- 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?

The question is not about how to preach to this type of spirituality or American culture. Rather, it seeks to get at why doing spiritual and cultural analysis is helpful. Some answers might be: helps to see the different way words are used, cautions about making assumptions about what people hear when even a word like “God” is used since church members are also much influenced by culture, it gives some specifics when preaching the Law, informs about the broader characteristics of American society. This type of analysis enables the preacher to speak apologetically of and to those floundering in this vague spirituality with the Word of faith.

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?

He is angry that the glory due God is given to idols. He is grieving that people are lost. However, the specific focus for this passage is the ignorance of the true God that is evident in Athens. It is not just that the Athenians are

covering their bases by having an altar to an unknown god, but that they don't know the God who has revealed Himself in Jesus.

- Describe Paul's hearers and their spirituality in this passage.

Athens, even though under Roman domination, represented the highest level of culture in classical antiquity, especially in philosophy, sculpture, literature and oratory. The leading men enjoyed listening to new ideas and debating about them. They were religious, but many were more likely just superstitious. They may have believed in the immortality of the soul but not the resurrection of the body. Many had a low regard for Paul and his message. Some were Stoics who tried to live in harmony with nature and emphasized self-sufficient rationality. They were basically pantheistic with a strong morality and a dedication to duty. Spiritual pride was evident. The Epicureans saw pleasure as the chief goal in life. Pleasure was defined as a life of peace, without pain, disturbing passions and superstitious fears. They believed the gods were not concerned with life on earth.¹

- Describe Paul's hearers and their spirituality in Acts 13:13-52

The people were religious, attending the synagogue worship, including the rulers of the synagogue. They were monotheistic. They had a specific heritage that was revered and remembered. The Old Testament Scriptures gave them revealed knowledge of God and His acts of judgment and salvation. They understood Paul's use of vocabulary, traditions, prophecies and history, and many were receptive to Paul's message of Christ crucified and resurrected. Those who rejected Paul did so out of jealousy and because his message contradicted the legalism rampant in Judaism at that time. The Gentiles rejoiced at being included.

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?

The place where he met the people (marketplace/synagogue). The appeal he made (altars to unknown gods/OT history). The authorities cited (Greek philosophers and poets/OT prophecy). The language used (common vocabulary for the Athenians' religious philosophy/a rich vocabulary of theological terms, significant historical events and people, and community hope). All this points to Paul's awareness of who his hearers were and how they would best hear the Law and the Gospel.

- 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?

Paul's desire to bring about repentance. The Biblical revelation of the one true God as Creator of all, distinct from all creation. The Law as expressed in terms of what they had done and not done. The omnipresence of God, yet His concern that all be saved. Jesus' resurrection as the ultimate reality of God's dominion which brings righteousness and hope on the day of judgment. F.F. Bruce writes,

Here [Acts 17] Paul does not quote Hebrew prophecies quite unknown to his hearers; the direct quotations in this speech are quotations from Greek poets. But he does not descend to the level of his hearers by arguing from "first principles" as one of their own philosophers might. His argument is firmly based upon the Biblical revelation of God, echoing throughout the thought, and at times the very language, of the OT Scriptures. Like the Biblical revelation itself, his argument begins with God the Creator of all and ends with God the Judge of all.²

- Notice Paul's takes his message in Antioch to Jesus' resurrection. Why might that be the case?

Paul is speaking to a Jewish gathering, probably familiar with the authority structures of the Sanhedrin. Christ's resurrection was a demonstration of God over-ruling or superseding the highest of authorities of the old covenant through Christ. Paul starts with a point of contact and then heads straight for the most significant point of contention, the one event that would cause people to stop listening to him. The resurrection, along with the crucifixion, is the dominant theological foundation for all he says and does. The road to Damascus is not only the focal point for his personal life of faith but for his whole ministry. He simply cannot keep quiet about the crucified and resurrected Christ or else his preaching would be in vain (1 Cor. 15: 3-3-6; 12-21).³ So would his hope, joy, peace and the certainty of salvation.

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, Melancthon'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.⁴

- 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?

From Arand: "The culture will usurp and transform the church's message. . . . Languages embody specific cultural assumptions and thought worlds. The language learned in the home and on the street takes on its own connotations."⁵ One example is the word "spirituality" from the beginning of this study. A couple other challenges would be: Most researchers today do not hold the same assumptions about creation or God's involvement in the world through His providential care as the church does. So many people are writing books, articles and Internet posts in these areas that it is difficult to filter out the dross from the valuable.

All preaching does well to use the language in which one speaks the Word of God. In our quest to speak Christ to the culture and spirituality in which we serve, there is a great temptation to jettison Biblical and doctrinal terminology so as to remove opportunities for confusion and possible offense. It is critical that we do not forfeit the Biblical and doctrinal language, but define it and reveal the glorious meaning communicated in and through it.

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.⁶

- 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?

Certainly, any spiritual benefit from our preaching comes from the Spirit through the means of grace. Faith is created, grown and preserved by the Holy Spirit solely through the Word of God. God has entrusted this Word and the means to us as stewards, and this stewardship places responsibility upon the preacher to help the hearer hear, understand and remember what has been proclaimed to him.

The preacher can hinder the hearing of the Word or he can facilitate the hearing of God's Word so that the hearer grasps what is said and carries it away with them for reflection and sanctified action.

The sole responsibility for the spiritual change and growth lies with the Holy Spirit working through God's Word. As the steward of that Word and responsible for the care of the souls entrusted to him, the preacher has the front-line responsibility to articulate both the Law and the Gospel in such a way that each may be heard in the life of the hearer beyond the moment the sermon is preached.

Through an analysis of the cultural and spiritual landscape of the preacher's contexts, along with doctrine of proclamation, rhetorical communication theory and practice, the preacher is better able to bring the efficacious Word to the people in such a way so as to give the Word a better chance to be heard and remembered.

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.⁷

- 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?

Whether broad/abstract or through metaphor, by definition we simply cannot NOT live in culture. Whether we like it or not, we will be in dialog with a culture we are a part of. Culture is where we live. It is the created realm of social arrangements, language uses, values, authorities, etc. Our doctrines of creation, the two kingdoms, civic righteousness and providence inform the reality that we live in 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?

Sin has so infected the world we live in that it is no longer "good" as it was in Eden but now contains a deep and thorough perversion of God's original intent. Hence, the dialog needs to be well informed. We are not to abandon culture or somehow remove ourselves from it (as if we could), but we live in our culture settings as those who have been made saints. We live within the culture according to our new nature in Christ. This does not require a rejection of the culture but embracing it according to God's original design. This is exactly what Christ did through His earthly ministry. While He was in the world He did not conform His living to the perversions sin and sinful man had brought to it. Inasmuch as we are both saint and sinner, we live by faith in Christ and we are to be careful and intentional both in how we live in it ourselves and learn how it has influenced the people who listen to our sermons.

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?

A subtle change occurs in the study at this point. The identification of the hearers is much less cultural and much more Christological.

The hearers in our pews are those who are both sinner and saint. Many tend to ponder the paradoxical reality in terms of percentages, more saint than sinner yesterday, more sinner than saint today, etc. The reality is that each hearer, like the preacher himself, is 100 percent sinner and 100 percent saint. As such, the preacher preaches the Law and the Gospel to both. The Law to the death of the sinner and the Gospel for the resurrection and strengthening of the saint. What tends to be forgotten is that while the sinner within our hearers has been defeated in death, it is not yet fully dead, it lives every moment of every day in the constant quest to rule over the hearer as Paul describes in Romans 7. Thus the preacher constantly preaches the divine rescue that is given through Christ's Cross and the resurrection. The preacher sets before the hearers the life and living of the saint within them as they live by faith and not by sight.

- Why is it critical for our proclamation to give both the Cross of Christ and His bodily resurrection to the hearers?

Here a general brainstorming is envisioned. Discuss whether how the context of our preaching affects which of these two great blessings are proclaimed. David Maxwell has a helpful article in the *Concordia Journal*.⁸ The resurrection is more than just the confirmation that Jesus' death was accepted by the Father. The bodily resurrection guarantees our resurrection on the last day. It speaks volumes about this world as God's creation and the need to care for it because it too is looking forward to the last day (Romans 8:19-24). The key terms of hope, victory and joy find their foundation in a living Lord.

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?

Some possible reasons for "why not" could be: too busy with other facets of the ministry, resignation to that's the way things are, difficult to keep up with what's happening in the culture or even to think theologically about it, it's a challenge to maintain that emotional intensity when engaging the culture over the years of a ministry, we may be more of the world than we care to admit. Some pastors see the ignorance within their own parishes as a verdict upon them for not having taught their people better. There may be some truth to this, but such ignorance ought be seen as the glorious occasion for preaching and teaching the truth of God in Jesus Christ.

- How might you preach about/to the cultural reality described by the USA TODAY article about spirituality?

Be sure the Biblical text of the sermon drives the sermon, not the article. Proclaim the Gospel as that is the power of God to change people's hearts and minds so that they believe in the one true God not some vague spirituality. Incorporate it as a warning for the people as to what passes for faith today.

- 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?

Some reasons might be our almost exclusive focus on the legal and sacrificial metaphors take us back to the cross, art/architecture/jewelry portray the cross not the empty tomb, our eschatology stops at the interim state rather than emphasize the last day resurrection, personal experience relates to death but not resurrection, we talk about the theology of the cross which can keep us from seeing the resurrection as a part of that theology.

Brainstorm on possible ways to incorporate the resurrection might be preach in the metaphors of the text.⁹ Proclaim Christ as *Victor* as well as *Victim*, read the Scriptures with a goal of seeing the resurrection wherever it may be found, be like Paul and proclaim it every chance you get.

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.¹⁰

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

The question is designed to distinguish between what is useful for us to adopt, what we can adapt and what we need to avoid. A helpful article is "Connecting with Postmoderns" by Robertson McQuilkin (www.preachingtodaysermons.com/cowio.html).

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.”¹¹

The focus here is to see that culture takes place within the context of God’s creation. Christ entered into both creation and its culture. While it is corrupted in sin and bound in sin, we need to follow Christ and live within God’s creation and culture, taking them captive to His Word and His given means of grace so that we are better able to bring His Word of eternal life to our people.

- 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 F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 350-1.

² *Ibid.*, 355.

³ See also the importance of the resurrection in Paul’s theology of reconciliation in Romans 5:9-10 and baptism in Romans 6:4-11. The number of references to the resurrection in Paul’s letters is eye opening. Read Romans once with an eye to when he incorporates the resurrection. You might be surprised how often he does so. I Corinthians 15 is not an isolated doctrine in his writings, but the powerful statement of what has been so often proclaimed throughout his ministry.

⁴ Charles Arand, “A Two-Dimensional Understanding of the Church for the Twenty-First Century,” *Concordia Journal* 33 (April 2007): 156.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Glenn Nielsen, “No Longer Dinosaurs: Relating Lutheran Homiletics and Communication Practice,” *Concordia Journal* 25 (January 1999): 27-28.

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

⁸ See David Maxwell, “The Resurrection of Christ: Its Importance in the History of the Church,” *Concordia Journal* 34 (January-April 2008): 22-37

⁹ See Jacob A. O. Preus, *Just Words* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000).

¹⁰ Nielsen, 28.

¹¹ Rick Blackwood, *The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 77.



Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Proclaimer

Leader'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

Read the following aloud.

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.

2. Scripture Search

Preaching "Christ crucified" with Paul

Read these passages together as a large group. The leader comments are made with reference to the ESV.

1 Corinthians 1:18-24

Point out that the verb in verse 23 (κηρυσσομεν) is present indicative active. This suggests "Christ crucified" is not something that Paul ever "got past" in his preaching. Lenski: "The present tense means that this is our one, constant business."²

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Discuss especially Paul's statement in verse 4 that his message was proclaimed "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (δυναμεις)" (2:4). Gregory Lockwood suggests that this phrase refers to the miraculous signs that accompanied Paul's message.³ But there is probably more to it than that. Look up the following passages to shed light on what Paul means by "Spirit and power."

Romans 1:16

The Gospel is the power of God. When Paul proclaimed, "Christ crucified" the message itself was the power of God. It needed no additional signs. Its power was demonstrated by the faith that was created through it (cf. Romans 10:17).

John 6:63

Jesus says that his words are "Spirit and life." They are not just *about* the Spirit or *about* life. They are his instrument for giving his Spirit and creating life in those who are dead (cf. Isaiah 55:10-11; Ezekiel 37:1-14).

Preaching "Christ crucified" with Peter

Divided into three smaller groups and assign a passage from Acts to each group.

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

In each instance, Peter's version of "Christ crucified" was not just *about* Jesus. He did not simply say, "Jesus died on the cross." He went a step further and confronted his hearers by accusing them: "You crucified and killed him!" (2:23, 36; 3:14-15; 4:10-11).

After Peter's sermon in Acts 2 and Acts 3, thousands of people came to believe in Jesus (2:41, 4:4). But after his preaching in Acts 4 he was commanded to stop preaching in the name of Jesus (4:18). AC V reminds us that not everyone who hears the Word of Christ will believe: "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel" (Kolb/Wengert, 40). For some reason God did not create faith through Peter's proclamation in Acts 4.

1 Peter as a whole

Spend a minute or so skimming through 1 Peter as a whole. Some commentators believe that 1 Peter was originally a baptismal sermon.

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

The answer is yes. Throughout his letter, Peter proclaims the good news of Christ (1:3-8; 2:4-10; 2:21-25; 3:18-22; 4:13-14; 5:10-11). But he also gives plenty of instruction for living the Christian life (1:13-25; 2:1-3; 2:11-20; 3:1-17; 4:1-19; 5:1-9). This suggests that faithful proclamation of Christ crucified includes the good news of the Gospel *and* instruction for Christian living. In other words, Peter proclaims both Law and Gospel.

Preaching "Christ crucified" with Jesus

The following passages tell us that Jesus sent us to do more than simply preach *about* him. He sent them to speak his own Word, just as the Father sent Jesus to speak the Father's Word.

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

Luke 24:44-49

Jesus sent his apostles to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name. This is not preaching *about* repentance and forgiveness. It is calling sinners to repent and forgiving their sins—just as Jesus himself did.

John 20:21-23

Jesus sent his apostles as the Father sent him. When preachers proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name, they are preaching the same message that Jesus preached. To empower this proclamation Jesus gives them his Spirit (the same Spirit that he received at the beginning of his prophetic ministry and that we received in our Baptism).

Luke 10:16

In Luke 10, Jesus sent his disciples to speak his Word on his behalf.

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

Read these passages together as a large group. Take time to discuss them in light of the three preaching styles of “Christ-Crucified”.

“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.

4. 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.

This is how Peter preached in Acts. This is what Jesus sent us to proclaim.

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.

The law is good, of course. But it cannot create faith in those who hear it or empower them to live the Christian life. The Gospel is the power (δυναμις) of God.

Only Christ and his Word of forgiveness can create faith and empower Christian living.

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.

It is a misunderstanding of the nature and function of the Bible to suppose that a biblical sermon could ever “get past” Jesus. He is the main point and ultimate goal of these writings!

5. For Conversation

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

We don’t want to presume to have the same authority as the Bible. For those who are concerned about this, it is helpful to recognize that there is more than one form of the Word of God. The written Word of God (the Scriptures) is the final source and norm of our preaching and teaching. But Jesus sent us to proclaim the spoken Word of God (repentance and forgiveness in Christ). The spoken Word that we are called to proclaim is based on and bound to the written Word of the prophets and apostles. Luther writes, “It is impossible to derive the Word of God from reason; it must be given from above. Verily, we do not preach the human wisdom of philosophers, jurists, medics, or of any other professions...The apostles transmitted it to us, and thus it will continue until the end of the world.”⁴ For a fuller discussion of Luther’s understanding of the written and spoken Word, see Uuraas Saarnivaara, “Written and Spoken Word” in *Lutheran Quarterly* 2 (1950): 166–179.

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?

Because of their respect for God’s sovereignty and transcendence, many Reformed Christians believe that only God can forgive sins. Lutherans, however, read John 20:21-23 to mean that, not only *can* we forgive sins, but also we must.

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?

There is an important place for “explaining” in our proclamation of the Gospel. But “explanations” of the Gospel do not always convict and comfort because they do not always confront the hearer with Christ’s own Word. Explanations of the Gospel are easy to keep at arm’s length. When Christians (or preachers) feel the need to “get past” Christ, this may be because they have heard (or said) a lot *about* him but not enough *from* him.

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?

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is talking about the substance of what is preached. He contrasts “lofty speech” and “wisdom” with the message of “Christ crucified.” He is not discussing *how* to preach Christ crucified. This passage is not a license to be lazy or negligent about continuing to grow and improve in our rhetorical skills as preachers. Gregory Lockwood writes, “Paul’s concern is clearly not to depreciate these [rhetorical] gifts; they have their proper place in helping the preacher convey his message persuasively.”⁵ Faithful preachers always seek creative and effective ways of proclaiming the powerful Gospel of Christ crucified. See Francis Rossow, *Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively* (CPH, 1983).

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

A follow up question might be, "How would your people respond if you preached like this?"

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

² R Lenski, *The Interpretation of Paul’s First and Second Letters to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 66.

³ For example, see Gregory Lockwood, *1 Corinthians: Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis, CPH, 2000), 86.

⁴ Quoted in H. S. Wilson, “Luther on Preaching as God Speaking” in *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005): 68.

⁵ Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 84.



Faithful & Alive

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Proclaimer

Leader'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.

Consider the Alcor example. In this case, the *past experience* is scientific discovery. By examining scientific discoveries throughout history, individuals see science as a process leading progressively to greater discoveries. Because of that, they can envision *a certain future* where bodies and brains suspended in nitrogen can be revived and illnesses leading to death can be healed. Confidence in this *larger story* of scientific progress leads the individuals to change the way they live in *the present*. They make financial arrangements with Alcor to take their bodies or brains, infuse them with cyroprotectants, and store them under liquid nitrogen until that day when they can be brought back to a different kind of life. This larger story of scientific progress joins past, present, and future in a way that makes Alcor, for some, a present experience of hope.

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

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.*

- 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?

The goal of this discussion is to practice a way of thinking about hope. Guide the participants in looking for a larger story that involves a past experience, leads to an envisioned future, and holds implications for present action.

For example, a student graduating from college in a severe economic climate might be one in need of hope. The American cultural narrative of the “rags to riches” story (made popular by Horatio Alger, Jr.) provides one story of hope, wherein the student is encouraged to remain honest in his or her actions, and diligent in efforts to find a job, in hope that such behavior will be rewarded. In addition to this cultural myth, the college or university has stories that it tells, involving the reputation of the institution, the cutting edge nature of its education, the social networking that being a graduate provides, or even the tradition of a year of humanitarian service after graduation. These and other stories (e.g., familial or political), each encourage different ways of living in hope.

2. Scripture Search:

Divine hope in Jesus Christ is not a “pie in the sky by and by,”² way of distracting God’s people from the realities of life in the world today. Rather, it serves to shape 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?

In this section of Romans, Paul addresses division within the Roman house churches. Upon the accession of Nero (54 AD), Claudius’ expulsion of the Jews from Rome (probably c. 49 AD) ended and the Roman house churches began to assimilate Jews back into what was now predominantly a Gentile church. Upon such integration, difficulties arose concerning the observance of dietary laws and other matters (14:1 – 15:13).

Within this section of the letter, Paul places this situation within a *larger theological framework*. It would have been easy for the Roman Christians to live with the political narratives of Rome, interpreting the Jewish people according to the powers of this world. Paul, however, challenges that understanding by proclaiming the larger narrative of salvation that includes the working of God in Jesus Christ to bring all people together in him. That larger story is anchored in the past history and promises of God to Israel and *centered in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ*, now risen from the dead and ruling over all things as Lord (cf. Rom. 1:6, and note the political implications of Paul’s proclamation of Jesus Christ (and not Caesar) as

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.

Lord; cf. also Rom. 10:8-9). It offers these Christians a certain future that shapes in very practical ways their life with one another as the body of Christ. Reminding the Roman Christians of the promises of God to bring Jew and Gentile together as one holy people in Christ (15:8-12), Paul calls them to live now in harmony with one another as a manifestation of the hope they have been given in Christ (15:4-7 and 13).

Within this practical application, Paul offers us an insight into his understanding of the spiritual dynamics of hope.

First, Christian hope is *based upon God*. Unlike the hope of this world that could be based on many different things, Christian hope finds its basis in God, now revealed in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as, in the Old Testament, Israel identified God as the source of hope for Israel (Jer. 14:8) and for the world (Ps. 65:5) by calling upon him as such in prayer, so too, Paul concludes this section with a prayer to the “God of hope” (Rom. 15:13).

Second, Christian hope is *generated by the Holy Spirit working through God’s self-revelation in his Word*. Hope is not merely the vain imaginings of people. It is based upon past experience. The past experience upon which Christians base their hope is the revelation of God in history proclaimed to his people through his Word. Here, one finds *the promises of God* that shape the lives of God’s people (cf. Rom. 4:18, where Paul notes how Abraham relies upon the promise of God for his hope even though it goes “against the hope” of this world). Here one finds the working of God that reveals *his attributes* upon which we base our prayers (cf. Jer. 14:22)³ and his actions through which we understand *God’s larger story* of creating, judging, redeeming, and restoring the world. In this particular situation, Paul reminds the Roman Christians of the promises of God (15:8-12) that have now come true in the work of Jesus Christ in history (15:3, 7-8).

The Holy Spirit works through this revelation to generate hope in God’s people. For this reason, Paul identifies God as the actor working through the Scriptures, both naming him the “God of endurance and encouragement” (15:5) and closing with a prayer that identifies the Spirit as the power generating hope among God’s people (15:13). The Holy Spirit thus works through the Scriptures (“whatever was written in former days,” 15:4) to generate hope among God’s people, reminding them of God’s promises and revealing to them God’s attributes and saving acts, made certain for them in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Third, hope has *an effect upon present living*. In this case, Paul desires that the vision of salvation extending to the Gentile nations (a certain work of God yet to be fulfilled even today) will shape their understanding of life with one another in the present. Here, the implications of that promise involve how they live in harmony

³ Note how the traditional collect form is actually a prayerful practice of Christian hope, anchoring one’s petitions upon an attribute or act of God revealed in sacred history.

with one another (15:5), building one another up (15:2), manifesting in their lives the life and ministry of Christ (15:3, 5, and 7), and looking forward to the final consummation of all things as they join their voices with all creation in praise to the glory of God (15:6; also Rom. 5:1-2 and 8:18-24).

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.
- B. In his work, Theology Is for Proclamation, 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."⁴

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

Pastors can preach about hope, explaining it to people, analyzing how it is present in a text, or exhorting people to have it in their present situation, but never get around to actually serving the Spirit in the office of preaching so that "through the encouragement of Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Walther's words about preaching and faith in Thesis 13 offer guidance in how this could be done.

- C. In Thesis 13 of Law and Gospel, 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."⁵

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 Gerhard Forde, Theology Is for Proclamation (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 1-9.

⁵ C. F. W. Walther, Law and Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible, trans. Christian Tiews (St. Louis: CPH, 2010), 287.

In his explanation of this thesis, Walther notes, “a preacher must be able to preach a sermon on faith without ever using the word *faith*.”⁶ With this insight, Walther recognizes that faith arises by the working of the Spirit. The preacher sets before the hearers what God has given and the Spirit leads sinners to trust in these promises and receive these gifts. Exhorting people to believe often turns attention toward their efforts at believing, which leads into that difficulty of wondering whether one has truly done enough to believe.

In a similar way, preachers serve the ministry of the Spirit by proclaiming the hope that God has given his people in Jesus Christ. Christ is at the heart of any proclamation of hope, since “all the promises of God find their Yes in him” (2 Cor. 1:20). Therefore, preaching Christ is indeed a proclamation of hope.

Yet, preaching hope also entails preaching the promises of God for the formation of God’s people. Rather than exhort the people to have hope or explain what hope means, the preacher sets before the people God’s promises and work, which is theirs in Christ. Through these Scriptures proclaimed, the Spirit brings about hope.

In concrete terms, this may involve *promises* of the future (e.g., the resurrection of the dead, the restoration of all creation, the return of Christ), *attributes of God* revealed in divine history (e.g., God’s justice, patience, omnipresence), or the *larger story* of God’s work throughout history that shapes our lives (e.g., Paul’s proclamation in Romans 15 helps the Roman Christians see their present situation in light of God’s saving work among all nations and manifest their hope in that work by embodying harmonious relationships with one another).

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.

In American Christianity, hope can easily be an isolated individualized experience, akin to positive thinking. A person selects one Scriptural verse, reads it out of context, and applies it to one problem in his or her life. In this case, the art of preaching hope is the art of selecting the right verse.

The apostle Paul, however, enacts a different handling of Scripture. He proclaims the larger story of God in such a way that Roman Christians see how God’s work in the past is joined to a certain future that changes the way they live now.

⁶ Ibid.

In sermon preparation, it is helpful to discern the spiritual dynamics of hope, not moving selectively from the past text to the present hearers but expanding our vision to include the larger narrative and discerning its present implications for our hearers.

Preaching hope is different than preaching about hope.

Ask participants what they believe is the difference between preaching ABOUT HOPE and preaching HOPE. When preaching about hope, the message focuses upon explaining what it is, its value for the life of the believer and exhorting listeners to hope, e.g. “You need to have hope as you go through this illness.” When preaching hope, the message focuses upon the thing(s) of God that are at work in the listeners lives for the sake of Jesus Christ, e.g. “Baptized into Christ, your life is hidden in Him. He is with you and He will keep your life secure in Himself and bring you through this illness.” If viewed purely in earthly terms, this may seem to promise too much, yet it is the very basis of all hope. When preaching hope, it is a time to proclaim the promises, attributes, and story of God that is at work in their lives, for this is the means by which the Spirit brings 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”?

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

For helpful reflections on preaching biblical hope at funerals, consider Jeff Gibbs, “Regaining Biblical Hope: Restoring the Prominence of the Parousia” in Concordia Journal 27.4 (Oct. 2001): 310-322.⁷

- 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.

⁷ This article is also accessible on-line at <http://www.csl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/October-2001.pdf>.

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 the 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?

For helpful reflections, you may want to consult the essays on sacramental preaching by Robert C. Preece and Kenneth W. Wieting in Liturgical Preaching (St. Louis: CPH, 2001), 51-82.

- 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?

In Preaching Christ from the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), Sidney Greidanus notes that much of our preaching from the prophets can neglect how these oracles continue to be prophetic for us today. Reducing the prophecy to one small reference that foretells one incident in the life of Christ, we fail to explore the fullness of the prophecy and the way in which it envisions a future for which God's people still hope, a future that shapes our present action.

You may want to consult Greidanus' work (pp. 206-212 and 242-249) for further reflections.⁸

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⁸ Consider also Elizabeth Achtemeier's chapter on "Preaching from the Prophets" in her book Preaching from the Old Testament (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 109-135.



Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Preacher

Leader's 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 shepherd 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 ποιμην, 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

From this passage, encourage participants to discuss the relationship between comfort and pastoral care.

People begin listening to the Sunday sermon with all kinds of "warfare" going on. They may be literally fighting at home or at work. You could tell them that their warfare could be over if...but the condition which follows the "if" is always the condition we sheep can't meet.

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.

So, pastorally, tell the church, the New Jerusalem, that her warfare is over, unconditionally, on the cross. The gospel never has conditions attached.

If the warfare is that personal struggle of trying to be right with God by our own works, that is especially over. It is always comforting to hear that we are justified by God's grace in Christ Jesus. Be sure to clarify that there are other kinds of warfare that are never over on this side of heaven, namely, fighting against the devil, the world and our flesh. In fact, the continued fighting against those things may be another reason we are so tired in spirit and especially need comfort, peace and pardon.

Bring the participants to the question: "How does preaching of the law and repentance fit into this warfare context?" At that point, guide the discussion around these two Bible verses, taken together: "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Matthew 3:1-2 and "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Matthew 4:17

Note that the content of the preaching of both John and Jesus was recorded by Matthew to be exactly the same! Examine this in light of the usual perception that John and Jesus had different messages. Many think of John as a fiery preacher of the law and of Jesus as a gentle preacher of the gospel! So, we should conclude that preaching of repentance does not have to be harsh with the law predominating. Since repentance is God's work of turning us from our sins to faith in Christ, there is a true gospel dimension to it.

Have the participants reflect on the very familiar words of 2 Timothy 2:4 "...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." It may not seem that "reprove, rebuke, and exhort" go with "complete patience." But they must, or our hearers may lose their patience and tune out before we get a chance to preach the gospel! One could say that "complete patience" is the essence of pastoral care. Keep in mind the outcome, "repentance to the forgiveness of sins" so that call repentance can best be heard in terms of the second use of the law and not primarily the first use. Though there is a place for curbing sin, in the pastoral context, the law acts primarily as a mirror to show us our sin so that the way is paved for the gospel of forgiveness to predominate.

PLEASE NOTE: There is an intentional correlation between Bible Verse in 2. a. and the 'a.' sections which follow in "From our Lutheran Perspective" and "Points to Ponder" and even somewhat in the "For Conversation" section. In all the sections, the letter 'a' section generally deals with preaching that comforts.

- b. *"The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season."* Psalm 145:15

To reinforce this point about preaching as the pastoral care which involves feeding God's people.

Have the participants read the conversation between Jesus and Peter in John 21:15-17 "When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that

I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep.’”

Then have the participants discuss the relationship of tending and shepherding ...NASB has “shepherd my sheep” where ESV has “tend my sheep...to pastoral care. Point the key aspects in the sermons that Peter preached in Acts 2:14-36 and Acts 3:12-26. He really did feed the sheep and his preaching resulted in amazing responses from the people. Of course, you’ll have to pace yourself here, mentioning this only in passing, or you would not be able to get through the bulk of the material and we don’t want the later points to be neglected due to lack of time.

PLEASE NOTE: There is an intentional correlation between Bible Verse ‘2. B.’ and the ‘b’ sections which follow in “From our Lutheran Perspective” and “Points to Ponder” and even somewhat in the “For Conversation” section. In all the sections, the letter ‘b’ section generally deals with preaching that feeds God’s people.

- 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*

Pastoral care in a sermon is most clearly sensed where preaching the gospel leads to the response of joy in the hearers. This joy comes from justification. We are right with God through the active and passive obedience of Jesus and not our own actions. We are at peace with God.

Ask the participants to discuss how they deal with the tension of preaching Biblical joy that we are to proclaim and the earthly joy that many itching ears want to hear?

The pastoral context of our sermon is reflected also in the “bookends” preachers typically use to begin and end a sermon. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:2; Philemon 3 and “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7.

This is further reinforced when the Nunc Dimittis is sung right after the sermon: “Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation!”

PLEASE NOTE: There is an intentional correlation between Bible Verse ‘2. c.’ and the ‘c’ sections which follow in “From our Lutheran Perspective” and “Points to Ponder” and even somewhat in the “For Conversation” section. In all the sections, the letter ‘c’ sections generally deals with preaching that leads to joy in the hearers.

- 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

The word order which is used here seems especially important. For the sermon to have a pastoral tone, the preacher first must pay attention closely to who he is! If he sees himself as a teacher, his sermons may generally take a didactic tone. I heard a recent reference to “cowboy” preachers, in contrast to “shepherd” preachers. Instead of gently leading like a shepherd, cowboys get faster horses, sharper spurs, and longer whips! If that is the way a preacher sees himself, his sermons will not be pastoral in tone. So the preacher checks himself first, to be sure that whatever the text, whatever the occasion, whatever the situation, he is always consistently the pastor. Then the sermon can’t help but be in a pastoral context!

You may also look a few verses earlier and note 1 Timothy 4:13 which says what we are to be devoted to: *“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.”* A sense of duty and obligation which often surrounds the preparation and delivery of the sermon is understandable. God gives us a devotion to preaching and teaching which will show up in obvious pastoral care and concern.

Ask the participants what they do to observe themselves and their teaching.

Attention! There is an intentional correlation between Bible Verse ‘2. d.’ and the letter ‘d’ sections which follow in “From our Lutheran Perspective” and “Points to Ponder” and even somewhat in the “For Conversation” section. In all the sections, the letter ‘d’ section generally deals with the attitude and the self perception of the preacher as pastor.

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.”*² C.F.W. Walther

You might also mention this additional Walther passage: *“A preacher must not think that every true Christian must be so spiritual, so strong and heavenly minded, that he does not sense earthly trouble and needs no special comfort against it. A preacher must show a fatherly, indeed a motherly heart toward his listeners (I Cor. 4:15; 1 Thess. 2:7; see Is. 66:13) and measure the causes of all kinds of sorrow and trouble not as they are in themselves but as they are felt by the Christians entrusted to his care, who are weak or sometimes become weak.”*³ C.F.W. Walther

Isn’t Walther’s distinction between a “fatherly” and “motherly” heart interesting. Which do you think would be interpreted by the hearers as most “pastoral?”

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. 70

You may also want to insert a comment by Donald Deffner: “But preaching about Christ, about hope, about peace is like extolling the properties of a fresh glass of water to a person dying of thirst—without giving the individual a drink.”⁴

I’m not sure where this fits in this Bible Study, but I think it ought to be mentioned early and emphasized often. Application is crucial! Just as talking about Christ does not give Christ, talking about comfort and forgiveness is not nearly as pastoral as giving that comforting grace and declaring forgiveness.

Ask participants if they have ever repeated the general absolution in their sermon. Ask if they have ever declared their hearers to be forgiven in their sermons. Why or Why not? This a direct application of the gospel? In fact, this comment about giving them water instead of talking about it may be a good segue to the next section about giving food to the flock. We don’t just talk about food...we feed God’s sheep!

- 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.”⁵ Donald Deffner

Ask the participants whether they concur with Deffner’s assessment that the sermon may be overrated. Inasmuch as “faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of Christ” can it be overrated? Why some may hold high the sacraments, they are nothing apart from the proclamation of the Word.

You may also want to introduce into the discussion the comments in the most recent update of the Lutheran Pastoral Theology edited by Mueller and Krause, we read “As a congregation gathers on a Sunday morning, the people bring a variety of concerns, hurts, and needs. The sorrowful and the impenitent, the oppressed and the unforgiving, the weak and the strong come together to hear a Word that touches them all. They are all sinners who need a Savior. They need to hear the voice of that Savior, calling them to repentance and announcing his forgiveness. The pastor who brings the Savior’s message needs to keep his mind on his congregation’s ultimate need and his purpose in speaking to that need. The sermon’s ultimate purpose, therefore, is not to engage the hearers’ mind, entertain their emotions, or persuade their decisions –although a good sermon will be logical, engaging, and persuasive!—but to apply the Word of God to their hearts and lives.”⁶ Norbert H. Mueller and George Krause

You may also bring in this passage by Donald Deffner: “Whatever the objective of the sermon may be, this writer feels that today we need a) a re-emphasis on

⁴ Ibid. p. 29

⁵ Ibid. p. 113.

⁶ Norbert H. Mueller and George Krause, Ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1990), p. 82-83.

preaching repentance to forgiveness; b) we need less purely “didactic” preaching and more problem/resolution preaching.”⁷

- c. “... the pastoral sermon, is the purest type of the congregational sermon. Here we have, more truly than elsewhere, a ‘*ομιλειν*, 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.”⁸ 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.”⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

This quotation may seem out of place since Bonhoeffer is really talking about proclamation to individuals rather than proclamation to the entire congregation from the pulpit. It still is fitting, however, in the overall picture of preaching as pastoral care. Bonhoeffer indicates that such individual proclamation may be necessary to bring the person who has been absent from worship back to the point where he hears the sermon together with the rest of the congregation.

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!
- 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.

⁷ Ibid. p. 22.

⁸ M. Reu, *Homiletics* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1924); Reprinted in Concordia Heritage Series (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), p. 130.

⁹ 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.

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?

In spite of the fact that pastors preach publically to anyone who walks through the doors on Sunday morning, I’ve found that they are extremely reluctant to discuss their sermons with other pastors!

Do what you can to invite them to discuss their preaching. How they approach the task and what helps them keep their focus.

These notes assume a basic sermon construction approach where a sermon has a clear theme stated in a gospel direction. The theme is a full sentence which has God as the subject and a vivid, memorable verb. It also has an outcome, reflected by the words “so that...” Some of your pastors may have progressed all the way to David Buttrick’s 700 page homiletics text with its complicated plots and moves. Others may use narrative or inductive forms. Some may use the tested and true deductive outline. Whatever form is used, these notes assume there must be a brief introduction leading to the theme; exposition of the law from the text, application of the law to the hearers, exposition of the gospel from the text (and related verses), application of the gospel to the hearers, and a brief conclusion which is always gospel in tone!

Although you will not have enough time, it may be useful to discuss such things as symmetry in a sermon. If a sin is exposed in the application of the law, does the

pastor come back and address the forgiveness of that sin, covering it with the gospel in the application of the gospel?

As a seminary professor, I listen more than I preach. I notice that many sermons do not have a clearly stated theme. Even fewer employ a clear visual image related to the text and theme. Since minds wander, a clear and compelling theme with a vivid visual image must be repeated a few times throughout the sermon to get those wandering minds back! I also note that pastors are generally good at applying the law, but preach the gospel in a more general sense without specifically applying it to me! This involves that symmetry that I mentioned above.

Finally, I note that pastors often close the sermon with the law. It's usually good law and sometimes it's law spoken in a very nice way, but it's still law and if the hearers came in knowing that they were not the people they should have been last week, they will likely see any assignment and encouragement for the week ahead as equally impossible to attain.

Leave us with what God has done. The gospel motivates!

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2010-2011

The Pastor as Proclaimer

Leader'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' parables 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.

Scholars who believe Aesop was indeed an historic person identify a Greek slave, mentioned by both Herodotus and Pliny, who lived around 600 B.C. It is clear that some of the fables attributed to him came from other sources—from India and from folk traditions of Greece and elsewhere, before and after Aesop's day.

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

With whatever embellishments the volunteer wishes to add, the fable tells of a fox that sees an appealing cluster of grapes hanging from a vine high overhead. The fox tries all sorts of tricks to reach them, but when he is unsuccessful, he finally concludes that the grapes are surely sour anyway.

What is the point? Easy, right?

The fable gives us the phrase, “sour grapes.” What we cannot have—especially when someone else does get it—we often dismiss as being not worth having after all. Just as true today as in ancient Greece.

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?

A first century audience would not immediately dismiss the obvious: real sheep and a real shepherd. However, figuratively, the parable could be simply teaching “the value of the one.” Alternatively, it could be expressing the common feeling that an item seems more precious to us once we have had to do without it. There certainly is a sense of exhilaration upon finding something we have lost, even if we had previously taken it for granted.

What do the actions of the shepherd reveal about him?

- “leave 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?

A smart businessman would surely say “He’s nuts!” The potential risk of losing the 99 is too great, yet he takes the risk! The cost of time in searching could easily become greater than the single sheep is worth, yet he spends it. Surely, the sheep should be made to pay for such inconvenience, yet he picks it up and carries on his shoulders. Moreover, who in their right mind would spend more time and money rejoicing with friends over a wandering sheep that was found than the sheep is worth, yet he does.

The lost sheep is what matters most to this shepherd. The expense of finding and saving that lost sheep do 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?

Jesus reveals that the shepherd is operating with a heavenly value system.

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?

Absolutely! Jesus reveals to the Pharisees, who refer to Him in a dismissive way as “this man”, that He is the heaven sent Shepherd whose love of the sheep has brought Him in search of all who are lost in sin. The passion and death of Christ

testifies to how far He would go and how much He would spend to seek, to find and to save all the lost sheep.

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?”

The parable and the explanation are to be taken as a whole. As such, the identification of the sinner and the righteous must arise from within the parable and explanation. To be a sinner, to be lost is not just about being tax collectors and sinners. Inasmuch as others are invited to celebrate the work of the shepherd, whether one celebration with the heaven sent shepherd also becomes determinative of whether one is a sinner, one is lost.

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

Does this parable help you understand anything more?

This parable is almost identical to the first, adding only that it is the “angels of God” who celebrate. However, the lead-in verses give the vital context: Pharisees and scribes are resenting Jesus’ attention to tax collectors and public sinners.

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? when he came to himself? the robe, the ring, the shoes? the fattened calf? Add to the list.

The point here is that allegorizing numerous details becomes never-ending speculation. Who is to say that discovering the real identity of the pigs, for example, is not essential to proper interpretation.

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?!!

When the interpretation has become so open-ended, it also becomes thoroughly subjective. Give some real time to this discussion. Some ideas will surely be eye opening and helpful to the group. However, point out where such an approach could go. For instance, the phrase, “when he came to himself” (v. 17), could quite naturally be interpreted as a “decision for Christ.”

By the way, speaking of “walking together,” our synod—or the Lutheran Confessions—has never required or expected uniform exegesis of particular passages, as long as the doctrinal conclusions one finally draws are consistent with the whole teaching of Scripture (the analogy of Scripture and the analogy of faith).

However, such open-ended allegorizing of parables *could* actually lead to false doctrinal conclusions—such as decision theology.

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!

The context (vv. 1-2) makes clear that the original audience was to see the younger son as an illustration of the gathered tax collectors and sinners. Just as unmistakable was the identity of the older, resentful son as the Pharisees and scribes, in that they were begrudging Jesus' overtures toward undesirables. Not too tough seeing that the father must be intended to represent the Father in heaven—a rather galling proposition to the naysayers.

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

Again, do not overlook the dangerous hint of synergism—or other unhelpful interpretations—that could be incorrectly drawn from the parable if ones approach has been so open-ended.

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

While the parable indicates the father's love also for the Pharisees and scribes (v. 31), it ends with no encouragement as to their future. If this were all we knew, the parable could, for the Jewish leaders, only be a reprimand. In fact, knowing only this, one might even argue that to shame these men is the *ultimate* purpose of the parable.

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**.

Have a participant read the verses. Then discuss. By already rejecting Jesus as the possible Messiah, the Jewish leaders were “the one who has not” and would therefore lose even what they did have (v. 12). They are those who “seeing...do not see, and hearing...do not hear” (v. 13) because they had seen Jesus' miracles and acts of love and heard His clearer teachings but did not believe. Therefore, they would not understand the parables either, just as the interpretations we have explored, detached from the identity of the teller, have proved fruitless. Jesus would still love for them to “turn” and be healed (v. 15), but that will be impossible as long as they reject Him.

Ready to preach on Luke 15? Easy, huh?

It maybe not as easy as even experienced Lutheran pastors might think.

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*).

Scharlemann writes, “Normally a parable has but one main point. The details of the story have no independent significance of their own. They must be subordinated to the chief point. Therefore, only those details can be interpreted which are affected by the point of similarity. George Hubbard once remarked, ‘A parable is like a lens which gathers many of the sun’s rays and brings them to focus on a single point. It is like a circle with many radii of detail meeting at the center, and this center it is which the expositor is concerned to find’ ” (Scharlemann, 28).

How is that different from interpreting an allegory?

Scharlemann further: “It is this central focus which most distinguishes the parable from allegory; for in allegory every detail has a significance of its own” (Scharlemann, 28). That is to say, if a text is to be interpreted as an allegory, the preacher should look for a one-to-one correspondence between each significant detail in the story and some element in reality—and he should spend time in his sermon with each of them. If, on the other hand, the text is a parable rather than an allegory, the many details of the story should be discussed only as to how they contribute to the one main point the parable is intended to make. Scharlemann does recognize that in some parables a number of details may have corresponding realities (as when Jesus interprets various elements of the parable of the sower, Matthew 13:18-23, or the parable the wheat and the weeds, Matthew 13:36-43). However, these corresponding realities merit inclusion in a sermon still only to the extent that they contribute to the single point of comparison.

Scharlemann’s recommendation, of course, begs the question, “Which texts did Jesus intend to be allegories and which did He intend to be parables?” For this, there will indeed be as many answers as there are commentators and preachers. Many early church fathers, it is well known, loved to allegorize. However, note well, as Scharlemann does, that even Chrysostom cautions, “Don’t overwork the details of the parable” (Scharlemann, 30).

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

Many items on the list compiled earlier could quite obviously be dismissed. Many others should probably also be set aside until a preacher has determined the single point of comparison. Even the details, which seem obvious, based on the context of vv. 1-2 (the younger son as the notorious sinners, the older son as the Jewish leaders) will prove to be more flexible than they initially appear, once a point of comparison is discovered. There will be more on this in what follows.

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?

Suddenly the shepherd and the woman, the ones searching, are the focus.

The activities of these two individuals reveal whom they represent. "God is in Christ seeking His own; these *sinners* are His creatures, in whom He has an owner's interest (cf. Jn 10:11–17), for whose return He is willing to take trouble, to *seek diligently* (8), at whose recovery He and all His angels rejoice exceedingly (10). There is *joy in heaven* (7) now when Jesus admits sinners to table fellowship with Himself; shall there be murmuring on earth?" (Martin Franzmann: Concordia Self-Study Commentary Electronic. CPH c1979, 1998).

Now the point of the parable is not to shame the Pharisees and scribes. Instead, the point of comparison might be stated like this: *Like a lost sheep or coin that is found, every single sinner is so precious in heaven that Jesus has come to find him or her.* (Notice, this is still faithful to the context of vv. 1-2, because it still *implies* to the Jewish leaders that their resentment is sinful, but the *explicit* message is predominately Gospel, not Law. Thus, it is also an invitation to the scribes and Pharisees to join in welcoming sinners.)

In the parable of the Lost Sheep, Lenski leaves no doubt about who is searching and who is being sought. "In so masterly a way is this done that very parable (of the lost sheep) becomes a seeking and reaching out by the Shepherd Jesus after these Pharisaic lost sheep so that their joy at being found may produce still more joy in heaven among the angels." (R.C.H. Lenski The Interpretation of Luke. Augsburg c1961, p. 795)

In the next parable of the Lost Coin, Lenski suggests that Jesus changes the individual to a woman for the purpose of pointing to the church's ongoing mission to seek the lost. "By this "woman" Jesus pictures the church, which is filled with the same spirit as her Lord, seeking the lost and rejoicing over the found." (R.C.H. Lenski The Interpretation of Luke. Augsburg c1961, p. 804)

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?

First, of course, the parable applies also to all Israel—the nation and the New Testament church. We are the sinful young son, as surely as were the tax collectors, but that means the father has run to embrace us just as surely as well.

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 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*?

Here, second, is the surprise casting of others also to be the *younger* son, and here is the true genius of this parable! Every previous clue has been pointing toward the Pharisees and scribes being the older son, and, indeed, as the ones who have stayed home, outwardly obeyed the father, and now resent the younger son’s welcome, they are. However, this sin of resentment is just as serious a squandering of the father’s inheritance as is greediness or prostitution. That makes the Jewish leaders the younger son as well. Not only then have they always had all that is the father’s as their own (v. 31), but they also are eagerly and lovingly forgiven. Gospel even for the “heavies.” Why? Because the one telling the story is the One who comes not to shame God’s people, but to bring the kingdom of God to all Israel, also to the Pharisees and scribes! The key is the identity of the one telling the parable!

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.

One way to word the *tertium* might be: *Like a father who loves both his sons, God is always eager to embrace us, whatever our sins have been.* Notice that to say every parable is really about Christ does not require finding Him as a character in the story (such as making Jesus be the father). That would be required only if we were interpreting the text as allegory. In this parable, the father clearly represents God, but it is not necessary to distinguish among the persons of the Trinity. (If we did so, the likely choice for the father would be the Father, not the Son). In any case, Jesus’ coming to earth demonstrates God’s forgiving love, which runs to embrace us, and it is Jesus’ death on the cross that has reconciled us to the Father. As a parable—with one point of comparison—the story is indeed all about Jesus.

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?

While each of the parables reveals the want and work of God that the lost be found, Jesus does speak all three parables in response to the Pharisees’ and scribes’ complaints about Jesus receiving sinners and eating with them. This shifts the point of comparison from find the lost, to how the people of God receive those that God finds and brings home. Look close at each parables’ conclusion; there is no call to go and search for what is lost, but there is a call to welcome, receive and celebrate what was lost and is found, what was dead and is now alive.

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..."

The suggested points of comparison below are by no means the definitive or final word on the proper interpretations. Very likely, the group will generate ideas that are highly defensible.

Matthew 13:1-9 (18-23)

As a sower's seed falls here and there sometimes bringing a crop and sometimes not, God's Word does bear fruit—even if it is unfruitful in some hearers. A caution in preaching on this parable: Any sort of imperative to "be good soil!" removes the focus from the good word of Christ—which creates good soil—and asks hearers to do what they themselves are incapable of doing.

Matthew 13:24-30 (36-43)

As the master would not allow the weeds to be uprooted before the harvest, so God will not destroy unbelievers until every soul who will ever believe has been brought to faith. Our interpretation sees v. 29 as the key to understanding the parable as being of Christ and the Gospel. Many unbelievers whom we might see as hopeless weeds and whom we wish God would remove from among us, He will yet bring to faith and salvation. To do as we desire would uproot some whom God has elected.

Matthew 13:44 and 13:45-46

It is critical when working with these two parables that they not be seen as making the same point. Note the points of comparison hinges on the two different things the kingdom of heaven is likened to: *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure... the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant ..."*

In the first, the kingdom is likened to an object lost. The second likens the kingdom to a merchant searching. In the first, the man who finds the treasure, is the one to whom the Lord reveals the kingdom and the treasure that it is. In response the man, the believer sells all that he has, i.e. loses his life, denies himself, that he may get this field.

In the second parable, the pearl is the world that God, the merchant, judged of great value and so loved that He gave, went and sold his Son to buy, to have/save the world.

Mark 4:26-29

As a crop grows even while the farmer sleeps, the kingdom of God does not need us to produce its harvest. That is to say, of course, that God in Christ does all the work to bring souls to salvation.

Mark 4:30-32

As a mustard seed begins small and grows large, the kingdom once seemed insignificant but now rules all things. True quite apart from its measurable size!

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