

PREACH

the Word

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PRAYING AND PREACHING

It has been said regarding the Christian practice of prayer that one ought to pray as if everything depends on God and work as if everything depends on oneself. Apart from each other, this pair of truths would lead to either fatalism or humanism, neither of which Lutheran preachers wish to promote.

Regarded properly as a pair, however, might the helpful motto be applied to our preaching? Specifically, to the pursuit of better preaching?

We preach as if everything depends on God. We deserve no glory. We stumble through a poorly prepared and delivered sermon gladdened by the Spirit's miraculous breath. We stutter when it comes time to cheer on the congregation with the example of our halfhearted piety. And we fully admit that Jesus could make the stones cry out as preachers more skilled than we. Striving for better preaching as we face this reality seems futile. Why make the effort? We believe, after all, that the Word works! As much as we believe prayer works.

Yet we not only fold our hands and ask for daily bread, we untuck ourselves from the comfort of the bedroom's covers each morning and earn a paycheck. The latter is part of God's answer to the former. *"It is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth"* (Deuteronomy 8:18).

Yes. The Word works. But we don't print the three lessons for Sunday in the bulletin and then announce, "Read it for yourselves, folks. This is the Word of the Lord." We prepare to read Scripture to God's people with the inflection that its breaking news for the day deserves. We get our nose out of the book and look repentant sinners in the eye with genuine hope when announcing the Savior's meaningful love. We accompany the promises of a heavenly Father with sweet melodies sung as hymns in worship. We juggle verbs and adjectives until a well-balanced, textual, evangelical theme and parts smiles back at us from the page with satisfaction. We read and discuss books and newsletters about



preaching, analyze and imitate the sermons of others, sit at the feet of men who teach how to preach, and strive to improve our preaching.

Not because God can't do the work. Because he does. *"The Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'Now I have put my words in your mouth'"* (Jeremiah 1:9).

"The twin convictions that a message of burning significance will, without art or skill, cut its own path to the hearer's heart, and that the Holy Spirit, without human contrivance, opens the listener's ear, are widely and firmly embraced. And not without reason. There is enough truth in both of them to give pause and correction to any who become enamored with their own artistry. However, there is enough deception in both of them to alert any preacher to the danger of allowing unhealthy convictions to replace healthy work habits" (Craddock, *Preaching*, p. 154).

This issue of *Preach the Word* walks further down the path of improving preaching with the help of study guides for Craddock's book. One study guide helps preachers negotiate the distance between text and listener, and the other discusses qualities of a sermon to pursue. Lent and Easter sermon helps also abound. Finally, it's a thrill to share portions of an interview I had with Rev. Joel Gerlach and Prof. Richard Gurgel – their thoughts related to the need, benefits, and cautions of preachers striving to improve.

Daron Lindemann

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SERMON HELPS

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



A fuller version of these sermon helps is posted online at www.wels.net/ptw.

Lent 2



From the sermon "Where There's a Will ..." posted online at www.wels.net/ptw

"I will" Jesus announces twice in one breath, defying Herod's attempt at scaring him away. Jesus has a mission to complete and nobody will deter him from it. Jesus has your soul to save, your sins to forgive, your death to resurrect, your doubts to resolve, your fears to calm, your weaknesses to strengthen and it will happen on a hill outside Jerusalem. It *will* happen.

Lent 4



From the sermon "Our God Loves the Lost ..." posted online at www.wels.net/ptw

The only one in this parable who acts in a way that is really surprising, the only one whose behavior isn't predictable or recognizable in anything we know from our own earth-bound lives is the father.

Palm Sunday

Unfortunately, many of Israel's kings forgot their God-given assignment. Some kings misled God's people into false religion; others took advantage of them, overtaxed and overworked them just so they themselves could have a fancy palace. A whole string of wicked kings brought it about that God's people were finally defeated in battle and led off into captivity. Now listen to the prophet Zechariah describe the kind of king Jesus is.

Good Friday

When a debt is cancelled, someone has to absorb that debt. When a hurt is forgiven, someone has to accept that hurt. That is what the God-man, Jesus Christ, did on that Friday we call "good." Some say this is unfair, unjust. It cannot be unjust, because God did it. It cannot be unfair, because Jesus did it willingly.

Easter Dawn



From the sermon "Jesus Is Alive!" posted online at www.wels.net/ptw

Let the story be told again and again. The tomb is empty, the mess has been tidied, eyes have seen angels, and hands have touched the risen Savior. Do not be afraid, but rejoice for *Jesus Is Alive!*

Easter 2



From the sermon "Antidote to Doubt" posted online at www.wels.net/ptw

What's behind those doubts? Where do they come from? Something inside Thomas prompted him to say, "*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands ... I will not believe it.*" Who's the focus of attention here? Unless I see – I will not believe. That's not the language of faith Thomas is expressing.

Easter 4

"Salvation" means deliverance. Deliverance from our sins and fears. Deliverance from a meaningless life and hopeless existence. And it belongs to *our God*, because *our God* invented it and owns it. *Our God* holds the patent on it and distributes it according to his own standards of grace, sitting on a throne so nobody can make him do otherwise. And this deliverance also belongs to the Lamb, Jesus Christ. He completed its work by giving himself as a sacrificial substitute into death for us. Then he rose to life so that our deliverance became a finished project. We praise nobody else for this deliverance. "*Salvation belongs to our God*" (Revelation 7:10).

With the angels and elders and living creatures we say, "*Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen*" (Revelation 7:12)! There's no doubt in our words any more. All our arguing with God about whether he really meant what he said, our hesitation when he called, our mush-mouthed mumbling of God's truths we really didn't consider all that important, our sinful silence when we should have witnessed our faith, all have been cursed forever by our God – sins buried in the depths of hell when the Lamb suffered in our place, and now we're in heaven as far away from them as the east is from the west. Our sins have nothing to do with us now! So we speak clearly to our God with bold confidence stating the obvious with joyful celebration. Heaven's praises belong to God, and we gladly sing them.

Easter 4

When the Good Shepherd noticed that wolf coming he didn't run, but he counter attacked. Your life was being threatened by a powerful predator who could have easily snatched you up and separated you from your green pastures forever; but your Good Shepherd would not let it happen. He faced the enemy and fought for you – to the death. He died to protect you. Imagine what that evil wolf, the devil, was thinking when Jesus died. Just picture him, boasting in his apparent victory, stalking around the dead Shepherd, licking his chops as he looks over the shepherdless sheep. The scared sheep scatter. The wolf plans his attack. The dead shepherd comes to life! He steps between the surprised wolf and the scared sheep with a presence unequalled in authority and power, a glory neither fully used nor fully displayed since the creation of the world, a victory for heaven overpowering all the spiritual forces of evil!



PREACHING BY FRED B. CRADDOCK

Study Guide #7 – Interpretation: Between Text and Listener Pages 125-150

The Difficulty of Interpretation – “An eighty-year-old woman will find more meaning in a specific incident in the life of a twelve-year-old Galilean boy than in facile attempts to be timeless and universal by speaking in general to everyone about everything” (p. 130). What are some common methods of trying to speak in general to everyone about everything? What makes specific exposition a better alternative than broad application?

Craddock’s basic definition of the word “interpretation” is “negotiating the distance, or more precisely the various kinds of distance, between the text and the listeners to the sermon” (p. 136). How does this compare with your own definition of “interpretation?”



A fuller version of Study Guide #7 is posted online at www.wels.net/ptw.

Study Guide #8 – Qualities to Be Sought in the Sermon Pages 153-169

“That the preacher has a message does not mean that the listeners will get the message” (p. 153). With this thought Craddock transitions us from discovering the message to designing a way to share that message. Which of the two is more of a joy for you at this time in your ministry? Why?

Read pp. 155-157. Why is unity and “singularity of direction” such a difficult task for the preacher? Why is it, however, well worth the effort?

The nod of recognition, that is, “the sense of already knowing and agreeing,” precedes the shock of recognition, that is, “the sudden realization that I am the one called, the one addressed, the one guilty, the one responsible, the one commissioned” (p. 160). How is this dynamic significant when applied to the “never exceed 10% new information” rule (p. 160) and the common fault of preachers to eliminate details of an event (p. 161)? List some biblical examples of the nod and shock.

“Intimacy is not a quality put into a sermon but a quality out of which preaching is done” (p. 168). How, then, can a preacher improve the intimacy of his sermons (pp. 168-169)?



A fuller version of Study Guide #8 is posted online at www.wels.net/ptw.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THOSE WHO TEACH TO PREACH

Always striving to provide the greatest and the latest preaching helps, this editor interviewed a former homiletics professor and a current homiletics professor, one having taught and the other still teaching at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Thanks to Rev. Joel Gerlach and Prof. Richard Gurgel, respectively, for taking the time to share their insights with *Preach the Word*. Excerpts of the interview will be printed in this newsletter or posted online beginning this month.

How has homiletical instruction changed at the seminary in the last twenty years?

Rev. Joel Gerlach: I would say that how homiletics was taught during the years that I served at the seminary is pretty much epitomized in the homiletics textbook *Preach the Gospel*. That book was published the year after I left the seminary in 1982, and whatever changes have taken place since then Prof. Gurgel will have to respond to.


How has it changed? I would say one thing that was in the beginning stages of a change about the time that I left the seminary was an emphasis on an inductive method or approach to the sermon. The primary emphasis during the time that I was at the seminary was on the deductive method. Outlines were formed with the deductive method in mind, and then the sermon itself was deductive in content as well. About the time that I left the seminary we were beginning to discuss an alternative to, or variation of that, and that’s to use an inductive method.

Prof. Richard Gurgel: More has stayed the same than what has changed. Our textbook remains the same, *Preach the Gospel*. Even though we have added a few more inductive features to preaching, the outlines, for the most part, are a theme and parts deductive outline that the juniors and middlers are writing.

If anything has changed more in teaching homiletics, it’s the students themselves.

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They've come out of a much more storied culture, a narrative culture, a televised-media culture. They think in story more than in syllogisms; in narrative than in logical categories. A more inductive sermon almost comes naturally to them. Probably the biggest task is helping them make sure it's ordered in some form that the hearers can follow it. But I would see one of the biggest changes being the students themselves, the new generation of students that we're teaching.

 (A brief video excerpt of the complete answers to the next two questions is posted online at www.wels.net/ptw.)

So a preacher who has graduated from the seminary 20 years ago, he's out in his parish and he was taught the deductive method. Is there a reason for him even to consider an inductive approach to his preaching?

I think one simple, inductive feature that those out 20 years, 10, or 30 could recapture is learning again to enjoy retelling the biblical narrative and not assuming those stories. I think that would be a very simple inductive feature to add into preaching.

I'm going to put you on the spot here and ask you, is a new homiletics textbook due at the seminary?

It's essential that students receive instruction ... it's probably time.



THEMES AND PARTS

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

 You can check your accuracy online at www.wels.net/ptw.

His Majesty, the King!

Look at the qualifications he brings to his job
Look at the blessings he brings to his people

We Belong in Heaven because Heaven Belongs to God

Heaven's people belong to God
Heaven's praises belong to God
Heaven's prerequisites belong to God
Heaven's perfection belongs to God

The Lamb of God Suffered in Silence

Stay in Step with the Lord

Only he can light the way to heaven
Only he can protect you on the path

Because Jesus Lives, Nothing Is as Expected

The tomb announces life instead of death
The angel proclaims peace instead of fear
Jesus calls us brothers instead of enemies

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