

PREACH

the Word

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NOW

Lutheran hymn writer Jaroslav Vajda died on May 10 at the age of 89 years. Dr. Vajda authored more than 225 hymn texts and translations that appear in over 60 hymnals and printed collections on five continents. Most meaningful to us are the hymn phrases we cherish because of his work.

Can I, will I, forget how Love was born, and burned
Its way into my heart unasked, unforced, unearned?
(*Where Shepherds Lately Knelt*)

Then the knowing
Then the light
Then the ultimate adventure. (*Then the Glory*)

Here you heard my dear Son's story;
Here you touched him, saw his glory.
Go, my children, sins forgiven,
At peace and pure. (*Go, My Children, with My Blessing*)

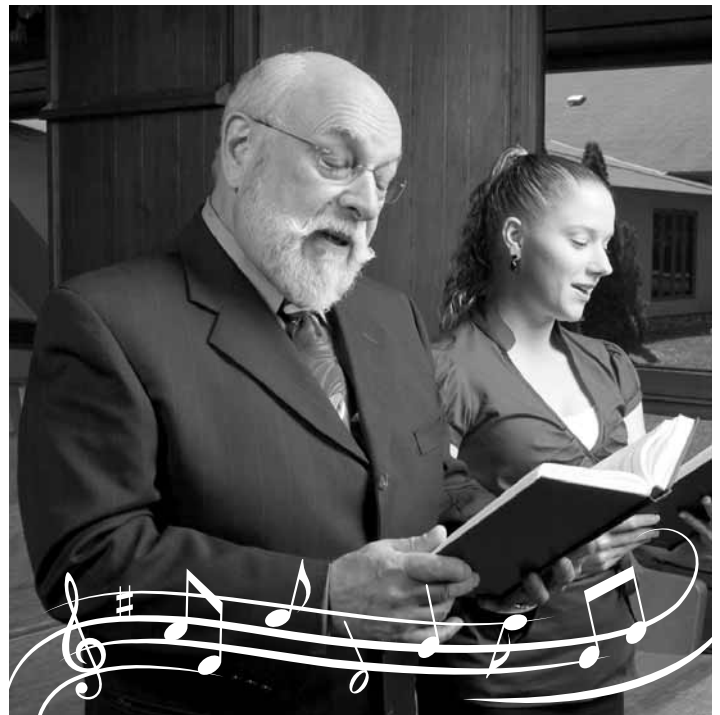
Vajda is one of those authors whose hymns I sing thinking, "I wish I could preach like that." Dr. Carl Schalk, who had the opportunity to work closely with Vajda for over 40 years, writes in the *LCMS Reporter*, "Jary had a remarkable ability to fashion a striking new image [and] to reshape an older one, recreating it in a way which brought fresh insight and new understanding" <http://www.lcms.org/pages/tpage.asp?NavID=13510>.

That's true for me. Ever since I first sang, "How should I not have known Isaiah would be there?" I picture Isaiah standing near the manger whenever I contemplate the nativity scene. If the Spirit would use your preaching to create a similar lasting impression on just one hearer you'd be thrilled, wouldn't you?

There's no reason the Spirit cannot use you as he used Vajda. "One is always struck by the strong theological thrusts of Jary's texts," Schalk continues. You may not possess his same gifts, or in the same bounty God gave to him. But you have the same Savior, and you preach the same theology he proclaimed in his hymns. So improve your ability to fashion striking new images and reshape older ones in your preaching.

The time to start is now. Oh, I forgot to mention that Vajda didn't write his first hymn until he was 49 years old!

Daron Lindemann



The hymn phrases above are from *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI, 1993. The new *Christian Worship: Supplement* (NPH 2008) provides an additional five Vajda hymns to join seven, plus one translation, in CW. Two of the new hymns are included in a double CD of CWS highlights sent to churches and schools in June. Here's a sampling.

I tremble as I feel your hand, Expecting retribution,
Yet hear no curse or reprimand, But grace and absolution:
With you there is forgiveness, Lord, You speak the sweet,
consoling word,
And I am sure you love me! (*In Hopelessness and Near Despair*)

And God embodied love and sheathed his might –
Who could but gasp: Immanuel! Who could but sing: Immanuel!
(*Peace Came to Earth*)

SAMPLE SERMON

Here is a sermon written by Martin Franzmann for the installation of a seminary professor. It is based on Matthew 5:3 and titled, "Poor in Spirit" (from *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1994, pp. 77-85). I offer it not only as an exemplary sermon but as encouragement to men of the Word.

SERMON	COMMENTS
<p>Now, every theologian has before him two choices. Either he can cast a critical and selective eye upon God's revelation of Himself, upon Scripture, and according to his own preferences and predilections make his God of whatever elements in that revelation seem to him essential and of "abiding value." He can reject, select, trim, splice, plane, and smooth according to his bent and bias and build himself a comfortable, medium-size deity with whom he can stand pretty well shoulder to shoulder, a god who can reasonably be expected even to feel flattered that someone believes in him.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>This is the first paragraph after a general introduction! Franzmann rifles us with hard hitting law within the framework of a choice we make. The message is: when you are tempted to choose this god, don't or you're dead.</i>
<p>Or the theologian can ... accept the God who has revealed Himself in all the uncompromised splendor, all the uncomfortable greatness of his Deity. He can accept, even though he cannot face, the terrible exalted holiness before which the seraphim veil their faces.... He can accept His eternity, the "I am that I am," the one fixed point that will not flow with the flux of our changing thought or change with our mutable existence, that absoluteness that by an awesome paradox we both hotly desire and fiercely reject in the thinking of our flesh.... He can and does accept the measureless and immeasurable grace of the revealed God, the love past all searching out, the love of God that will not let him go.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Objective truths of salvation beg for faith that accepts them as true. As valid. For me. This is focused gospel preaching, not an emotional plea for a decision, not a few good points about God. This is gospel.</i>
<p>To be poor in spirit is something more basic than the virtue of humility. It means being a beggar before God.... It is to see steadily and clearly our own nothingness and the <i>allness</i> of God.... But that is the beginning, not the end of being poor in spirit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Franzmann astutely includes a disclaimer and clarifier and then a motivator to hear more. Something to consider when preaching any Scripture that has been popularly misunderstood.</i>
<p>We are poor; we are empty; but that poverty or that emptiness is our only possibility of becoming rich and full. For so, and only so, can the kingdom of heaven be ours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>The malady of our own nothingness becomes the miracle of salvation. A creative use of textual thoughts in transition. Stay focused on the single theme of the sermon!</i>
<p>For we serve a church the glory of whose history is the fact that its course has always been a firm, determined confessional march.... But the hard thing is to march: to be good, not clever; to be faithful, not brilliant; to be honest, not urbane; to be the rough wool blanket that keeps the faithful people warm, not the flapping scarf of changeable silk that men admire.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Here Franzmann is defining "blessed." His illustration of a march weaves through this section, accompanied by the colorful metaphor comparing a wool blanket to a silk scarf.</i>
	
<p>Blessed, for we shall not march alone. When the communion of saints lifts up its united voice and prays, "Thy kingdom come," you will know that it is praying for you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Preacher, take heart. This prayer is also for you. Your congregation prays for you and your preaching.</i>



PEW VIEW

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

Freddy Krieger, writing as "PewView," eagerly awaits your reaction to his most recent post entitled, "We ... Us ... Our ... Let Us," copied here:

Many WELS preachers have lapsed into a vast overuse of first person plural pronouns and the subjunctive in their sermons. Hence the subject heading. Everything is expressed in terms of "we ... us ... our ... let us."

How 'bout you? Whom do you address in your sermons? Pronouns of the first person plural are effective when addressing the body before you as a collective whole. That has a place, especially considering the doctrine of the communion of saints. But so does direct address to the individual in the pew.

What an opportunity you have each Sunday ... an occasion to personally counsel each individual sitting before you, to speak to each heart and soul individually!

Speak directly to the individual! He who has ears to hear will listen. That means lots of "you" and "your." Abandon the predominant "let us;" don't be afraid to issue the gospel imperative instead!

Personal appropriation of the truths of God, whether preaching law or gospel, will surely result.

This isn't so much a matter of doctrine, it's a matter of good communication from the pulpit. I know the Holy Spirit is responsible for getting your message into the individual's heart. But it would be great if you'd speak to that person with the tools the Holy Spirit uses. Not just to the collective whole.

As a pew-sitter, I crave being individually addressed and challenged – challenged to accept the reality of the law in its first use, to trust the Gospel of Christ, to apply the third use of the law.

Somehow, the strength of what God has to say to me is diminished when always communicated in the first person plural. I need and want to hear what God says to me. Don't hesitate to speak to me directly!

Of course, you'll want to throw in the occasional "you and I" and "for you and me, too" and "your and my." You don't want to come off as haughty or "preaching down to" God's people.

Abandon the predominant "we ... us ... our." Use "you" and "your," and leave the "let us" to the general prayer.

NOW

Now the silence

Now the peace

Now the empty hands uplifted

Now the kneeling

Now the plea

Now the Father's arms in welcome

Now the hearing

Now the pow'r

Now the vessel brimmed for pouring

Now the body

Now the blood

Now the joyful celebration

Now the wedding

Now the songs

Now the heart forgiven leaping

Now the Spirit's visitation

Now the Son's epiphany

Now the Father's blessing

Now

Now

Now.

(Jaroslav Vajda, *Now the Silence*, © 1969
Hope Publishing Co., Carol Stream, IL 60188;
reprinted with permission.)



Thanks

THANK YOU, PREACHERS

Over the past two years this newsletter has printed and posted sermons, in part and in whole, as well as themes and parts for sermons. These were real sermons preached in a real setting by a WELS pastor, unless otherwise noted. Thank you to the following men who provided sermon content for the newsletter:

Mark Braun, Richard Balge, Jon Buchholz, Ken Cherney, Daniel Deutschlander, Joel Gerlach, James Huebner, John Jeske, Mark Jeske, Paul Kelm, John Koelpin, Paul Prange, Peter Prange, Michael Schultz, Earle Treptow, Paul Wendland, and Keith Wessel.

I consider these men of God not only exemplary preachers and communicators, but true friends. May their preaching, under God's grace, continue to be a blessing to many as it has been to us.

Daron Lindemann

THANK YOU, EDITOR

For two years Pastor Lindemann has given us new tools and needed reminders to explore the pastor's primary public duty and delight. He nudged a paper newsletter into cyberspace by providing online supplemental content. In this way he effectively expanded the reach and the impact of this little newsletter. Preachers – and listeners, even if they don't read this newsletter – have benefited from the tools he provided and the encouragements he shared. Next issue we welcome a new editor, Pastor Brent Merten, from Eagle, Colorado.

Bryan Gerlach

WHAT IS FOCUSED LAW/GOSPEL PREACHING?

Focused law and gospel do not exist as equals in a Lutheran pulpit. They do not share equal minutes of air time as co-sponsors of the Lutheran sermon. Lutheran preachers do not design sermons so that law and gospel balance delicately.

Walther states in his twenty fifth thesis, "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the gospel to have a general predominance" (p. 403).

Preachers who craft sermons so that the gospel predominates "will always mount your pulpit with joy because you are bringing the blessed message of joy to your congregation. [You] will furthermore notice that wonderful things are happening among them. Alas! Many ministers do not meet with these wonderful experiences; their hearers remain sleepy; their misers stay stingy. What is the reason? Not sufficient gospel has been preached to them" (p. 406).

The temptation remains popular and tantalizing for preachers to haul out the big guns of the law to get results. The problem is, the results, if any, aren't healthy fruit.

"In accordance with God's will it should be the preacher's aim to proclaim the gospel to his hearers till their hearts are melted, till they give up their resistance and confess that the Lord has been too strong for them, and henceforth they wish to abide with Jesus" (p. 406).

"... Your hearers will be spiritually starved to death if you do not allow the gospel to predominate in your preaching. They will be spiritually underfed because the bread of life is not the law, but the gospel" (pp. 406,407).

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

VIDEO: INTERVIEW AND SERMON

When you sneeze and somebody says, "God bless you," does he?

Watch a video of Pastor Fredric Piepenbrink, speaking in an interview about important elements to sermon preparation and delivery, as well as what makes a "successful" sermon. Pastor Piepenbrink then preaches a sermon titled, "God Bless You," and models an energetically insightful style with real-to-life applications accompanied by hearty Scriptural support.

The interview and sermon were taped when Pastor Piepenbrink served at Atonement Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, WI.

Both videos are posted on the *Preach the Word* web site at www.wels.net/ptw.



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