

PREACH

the Word

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SOME STRANGE PULPITS

“Our Lord Jesus preached from some very strange pulpits ...” Prof. John Jeske begins his Lenten sermon now posted on the *Preach the Word* website www.wels.net/ptw. A mountainside. A boat. A bowlful of water for washing feet. A casket. But the strangest of all: the cross. The “seven words from the cross” echo throughout the ages as the greatest sermon ever preached. The grandeur of their meaning is made real by the place from where they were proclaimed.

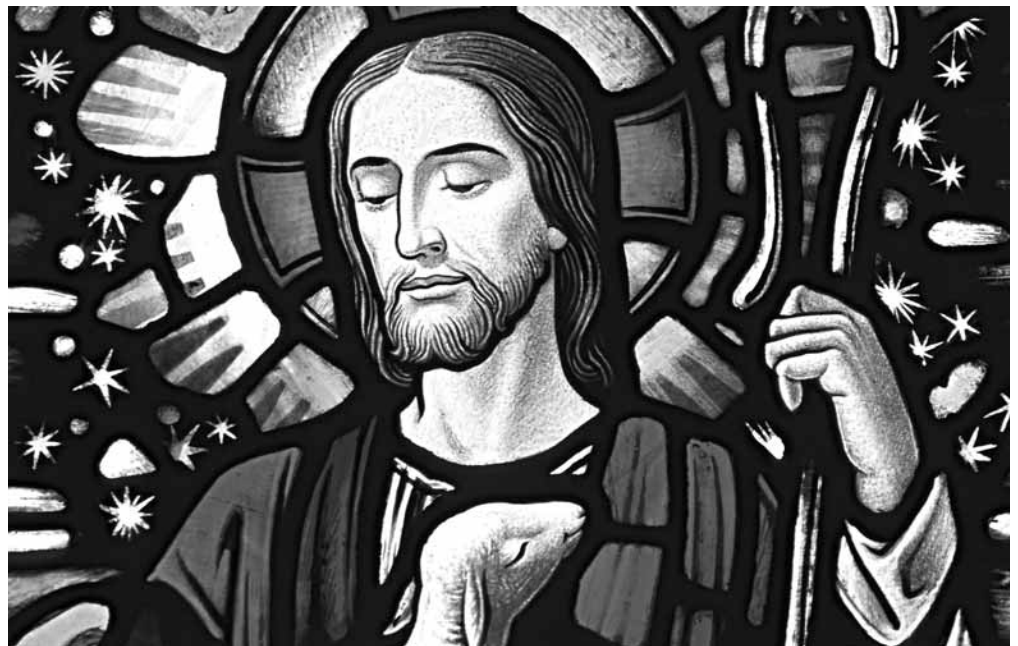
This, of course, was not all Jesus had to say. He would announce his final “amen” not from the cross but from the tomb. Blank. Barren.

History reveals that the greatest rulers of the world made bold statements in their deaths. One thinks of the pharaohs encasing their embalmed bodies in elaborate structures – filling them with the chronicles of their achievements and all their trophied treasures.

God’s final statement to the world? An empty tomb. No trinkets. No hieroglyphics. Not even an embalmed body. This empty pulpit speaks volumes. The achievements of this King are not buried here but revealed out there in the dying and rising of his believers. The meaning of life is not in what we bring to God like the women’s arms at Easter sunrise filled with spices, but in what God gives to our emptiness, our loneliness, our weakness. The destiny of the One on whom our salvation depends is not a dead end but a new beginning.

That means there is still preaching for Jesus to do. So he stands alive in yet another pulpit. Yours.

Daron Lindemann



VIDEO: PREACHING THAT DESERVES THE NAME “LUTHERAN”

Prof. John Jeske, former homiletics professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, identifies focused law and gospel as key elements to Lutheran preaching. Listen to an interview with Prof. Jeske and then watch the introduction to a Lenten sermon he preached at St. Luke Lutheran Church in Watertown, WI. Both videos are posted on the *Preach the Word* web site at www.wels.net/ptw.

SAMPLE SERMON

For preachers, it doesn't get much better than festival preaching. And for festival preaching, it doesn't get much better than Easter! Gospel joy abounds! A fun challenge is to preach the same, old story in a fresh, new way without robbing the Scriptures of their timeless, relevant truth. That means paying attention to specific textual opportunities for focused law and gospel preaching, as does this Easter sermon from Job 19:25-27. Below, sermon portions in the left column receive the treatment of evaluating comments in the right column.

SERMON	COMMENTS
<p>Ever since the creature's will first clashed with the Creator's will, ever since Adam and Eve defied God and did what they wanted, God's words to the first sinners have (in one way or another) been coming true for all sinners – dust you are and to dust you will return. So we frail, sinful creatures of dust take our meds, pay our health insurance premiums and buy our burial plots.... Crying out from deep despair with what we would call a strong Easter faith, Job spoke about one person who did not return to dust but who on the last day would stand on the dust, alive, exalted and glorious, one whom Job affectionately called "my Redeemer," one who will raise us up from the dust of death to shine like the stars forever and ever.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>These statements from the introduction accomplish the goal of an introduction: to funnel attention toward a specific, textual theme. Here that theme is the reconstitution of the dust of death to life in our Redeemer.</i>
<p>I take it you've heard of the patience of Job. Does Job sound <i>patient</i> to you, or does he just sound <i>like</i> you? Even when we don't specifically address the words to God, all the whining and complaining and sniveling we all hurry home to do send up a detestable, foul smell to God. Do we actually have the nerve to think that we can take issue with what God allows to come our way, as if we somehow deserve much better?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Thought questions aren't always the most direct law preaching, but this preacher's questions are addressed immediately with the intended response. The advantage of questions is that they draw the hearers in. The disadvantage is that the hearer is given the opportunity to opt out.</i>
<p>The story of Job isn't complete until we remember that the Lord revealed himself to Job as the Redeemer. Job knew Jesus, not by that name (Jesus), but he knew him. "My Redeemer lives. He is my Redeemer and I am redeemed!"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The gospel focuses on the objective truth "Redeemer" that is personally appropriated as "my."</i>
<p>32 times in a hymn that has 32 lines – he lives! And the greatest blessing that God has ever given you, second only to Jesus himself? – that he's put it in your heart to say as Job did, "I know! I know that my Redeemer lives!" When the pressure from a hundred problems is pressing down, making you want to gripe and grumble – "I know." When faith hasn't been what it should have been – "I know." When the funeral has to be arranged for a Christian loved one – "I know." When it seems that there is no good to speak of, despite every depressing thing that my head tells me regarding the current state of affairs – "I know. I know that my Redeemer lives, what comfort this sweet sentence gives."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The all-encompassing benefit of Easter comes across in this gospel paragraph that relates to everyday living. Employing a popular Easter hymn enhances the meaning. Some inconsistent pronouns in this paragraph may lessen the effect, however. Why not stay with the first person, "When I ... I know," or the second person, "When you ... you know"?</i>
<p>What we want this Job passage to do for us is to help get us past the thinking that the resurrection is some unrealistic science fiction movie that's all pulled off with the latest special effects technology. It's a very real part of our Easter faith. The dust of Adam and Eve and Abel, scattered as it may have been by the devastation of the Flood, is somewhere on this earth, awaiting resurrection. Traditional burial in a casket, organ donation, cremation, amputation – none of that will have mattered when Jesus does for us what God did when he created Adam. He will take us from the dust that we became and give us living, shining, breathing, seeing, speaking, glorified bodies. Bodies and souls together again, never again to be separated by death, we will live with Jesus and for Jesus in joy everlasting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The preacher takes us from the gospel confidence of Easter forgiveness to the gospel joy of bodily resurrection and eternal life. He faithfully stays focused on his unified theme and offers meaningful application.</i>
<p>As you feel the imperfections or notice more and more the wear and tear on your body, as you see how the years fly by so much more quickly the older you are and you begin to anticipate the day when you'll lie down for the last time, read these words. They contain a message that will make your heart yearn to be with Jesus.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The reality, according to this concluding thought, is that we are still here and not yet dusted by death. Such a time will come soon for each of us, and when it does, this sermon will have helped us to welcome it gladly.</i>

NEW AND IMPROVED! DISCUSSION BOARD FOR PREACHERS

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 link to explore the new discussion board. 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!).

The discussion board is posting a new series of ideas, suggestions, and thought-provoking items aimed at the preachers of the WELS exclusively online. Its source is one of our own, now enjoying the "view from the pew" after having preached for twenty years from the pulpit. Retired now because of health concerns, Freddy Krieger has had the privilege of hearing dozens of different preachers. An idea or two on preaching from such an interested and interesting third party can be helpful.

Freddy will post his lively thoughts on the *Preach the Word* discussion board with the username "PewView" and eagerly awaits your reaction. In his first posting, currently online, Freddy inquires of us, "Why change the future indicative to the optative?"



WALTHER: PREACHING PITFALLS

Walther states in Thesis IX, "The Word of God is not rightly divided when sinners who have been struck down and terrified by the law are directed, not to the Word and Sacraments, but to their own prayers and wrestlings with God in order that they may win their way into a state of grace; in other words, they are told to keep on praying and struggling until they feel that God has received them into grace" (p. 127).

Certainly no Lutheran preacher would intend to direct his hearers to their own praying and struggling to find grace. That intent becomes compromised, however, when our preaching offers any hint of the following.

1. God is hard to deal with and there is no real reconciliation with him until his heart is softened by us.

"People imagine that, after Christ has done his share, man must still do his, and man is not reconciled to God until both efforts meet ... [This pictures] reconciliation as consisting in this, that the Savior made God *willing* to save men, provided men would be willing on their part to be reconciled. But that is the reverse of the gospel. God *is* reconciled ... Righteousness lies ready; it must not first be achieved by man" (p. 136).

Beware of messages in your sermons that people could interpret as conditional gospel.

2. The gospel is nothing else than instruction for man, teaching him what he must do to secure the grace of God.

"In reality the gospel is God's proclamation to men" (p. 136).

Understand that when preaching justification the purpose of the law is to condemn and the purpose of the gospel is to answer any guilt or shame with the Savior's pardon; when preaching sanctification the purpose of the law is to guide and the purpose of the gospel is to answer any doubt or fear with the Savior's power. Use each appropriately, and none should ever stand alone.

3. Faith is a quality in man by which he is improved.

"Genuine faith changes a person completely. It brings love into a person's heart. Faith cannot be without love, just as little as fire can be without heat. But this quality of faith is not the reason it justifies us, giving us what Christ has acquired for us, what hence is ours already and only need be received by us" (pp. 136, 137).

Carefully distinguish between the object of our faith (our gracious Savior and all he promises) and the subject of our faith (the person who believes). To produce spiritual results, point your hearers to the object of their faith.

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

LAW/GOSPEL

WHAT IS FOCUSED LAW AND GOSPEL?

One of the reasons the gospel predominates in Lutheran preaching is that “we are addressing a Christian congregation and not a group of unregenerate heathen” (Balge, Richard, and Joel Gerlach, *Preach the Gospel*, Northwestern Publishing House, 1982, p. 75).

“I cannot forget that the believing subjects to whom I am addressing that law and gospel are different at their core. I must not forget that I am preaching to Christians who possess a new self...

“I dare not speak to them as if I believed they are all nothing but hypocrites or describe them as sinning in such a way that the old self has entirely taken over and the new self has been banished (“You are always doing nothing but lying to your neighbor!”)...

“Yes, the law we preach to the Christian will kill and crucify his old self and, in that sense, lead him to hell. But we are not justified therefore in speaking as if they were already in hell and as good as judged – only to smile a moment later and say, ‘Never mind!’ I cannot forget that as I preach I have an ally within my hearers with whom I am partnering ... the new self within...

“Sin doesn’t own us anymore. Christ does!” (Gurgel, Richard, “Honest Preaching: Faithfully Proclaiming the Law for the Sake of the Gospel,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 104, No. 2, Spring 2007, pp. 135, 136.)



LOOKING AHEAD

Consider these law or gospel focuses for the coming weeks.

Good Friday

Have you ever been a member of some group that was punished because of the misdeeds of just one person? Maybe one of your classmates was goofing off when the teacher was out of the room, and when she came back she punished the whole class even though it was just the one person who was goofing off. How do we feel when something like that happens to us? We complain about how unfair it is! We shouldn’t be punished for something that somebody else did! But then we turn to Jesus and view his suffering. What suffering! Notice how Jesus reacted. He didn’t complain. He didn’t moan and groan. Instead, Isaiah tells us, the Lamb of God suffered in silence. He had every reason to complain, but he did not utter a word of protest. “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”

Easter

With feet still running to get to the tomb the women felt the earth shake. As the loud quake of a shaking earth tolled the bell for Jesus’ death, so the earth would peal again in its surging to announce his resurrection.

Easter

Why do some people receive a birthday gift and ask, “For me?” Aren’t you tempted to say, “No, it’s not! I just happened to buy it, wrap it up, put your name on it, and put it into your hands on your birthday. There must be some mistake. It’s really for the neighbor.” Duh! Of course the gift is for the birthday gal or guy! But what if that person has been lazy, made messes, or wasted money and still receives a nice birthday gift? What if a person is caught breaking company policy and still gets a bonus? What if a person close to you has been too busy to pay attention to you and still gets a gift? Then, “Is this for me?” would be a logical question. Easter’s message assures us that our God is not a gruff, scary, old man down the block trying to make children like him with bribes of Easter candy but a loving Father with arms extended to wayward children. Come! His smile is not candy. His arms are not money. His love is not bribe. That’s the living, loving Lord’s smile, arms, and heart that beckon you. This happened for you.



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