

PREACH

the Word

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Greetings

EASTER

Greetings in the name of our risen Savior! As you well know, brothers, all history centers on this vital event, the resurrection of Christ Jesus. Likewise, every worship service centers on this vital truth, namely, that Jesus was dead, but now is alive for ever and ever. Or as one of our hymns states so well:

This is the three-fold truth on which our faith depends

And with this joyful cry worship begins and ends:

"Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!"

In this issue we continue our series on the basic components of the proclamation of the Word, as Aaron Glaeske focuses us on the preaching of the psalms. Also, there is another collection of quotes in the *Florilegium* column (remember, feel free to contribute your own), as well as an update on work currently being done on the lectionary as part of a proposed hymnal supplement (2008).

May that good shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus, who returned from the dead, give you strength and joy to proclaim from the rooftops his Easter victory.

- KCW

PREACHING THE PSALMS

Aaron Glaeske



A well-known theologian once commented that music, particularly words set to music, are the way the Holy Spirit wings the gospel to the human heart and soul. While often hailed as a bit of unique insight, this truth could have been expressed by anyone familiar with the Bible in general and with the psalms in particular. These inspired words were the hymns of their day and still serve as songs in our worship today. As with any song, it's the words that matter. But when good words are put to rhythm and rhyme, the human heart embraces them and the human mind tends to remember them. There are no better songs than the psalms.

In my ministry I have frequently returned to this songbook of the living word for shut-in, hospital and prison devotions. I learned early on—perhaps at the Seminary—that, while it is always good to have something prepared for a visit, there was no way I could anticipate the condition of every soul I met. The shut-in who is usually chipper, today I find depressed. The prisoner who is usually battered because of his struggle with temptation, today is smiling because the Lord has helped win some personal victories.

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HYMNAL SUPPLEMENT: LECTIONARY EXPANSION

The summer of 2003 saw the formation of the Hymnal Supplement Committee, a group appointed by the Commission on Worship to oversee the development of an additional worship book for the synod. Its size is currently envisioned to be similar to supplements of other church bodies, namely, about 216 pages. Such a supplement was always in the vision of the original Hymnal Committee, whose thinking was that an additional resource would be beneficial about half-way through the (anticipated) lifespan of *Christian Worship*. This hymnal supplement is slated for release in 2008.

Your current PTW editor is serving as the chairman for the “rites section” of this hymnal supplement. As such, it was felt by our Rites Committee at our most recent meeting that now was perhaps a good time to inform the brothers of the first major task we are addressing, that of expanding the Series A, B, C lectionary.

“Expansion” is the term that we have settled on. The Rites Committee felt that “revised” or “alternate” didn’t accurately capture what we are trying to accomplish with this project. It is not the intent of the Rites Committee to supplant the current lectionary, as if it were to be used no longer. Rather, it is our intent to offer the preacher additional lessons he may use for worship / preaching. Specifically, the Rites Committee was asked to address the second lesson selections, either changing them or choosing entirely new readings that better tie in with the Old Testament and Gospel readings.

The major impetus for such a change is the desire of worship planners to emphasize the theme of Sunday worship. In addition to the theme of the season, most of our churches have grown accustomed to the idea that each service also centers around one main theme. The second lesson—the *lectio continua*—often is the “odd man out” when it comes to organizing a service around a theme. Thus this lectionary expansion seeks to tighten the bond between the three readings.

Yet it is not only the expansion of New Testament lessons that is being considered. All the Old Testament lessons are also being revisited, with an eye toward cutting back on the (copious) number of readings from the prophets and placing before the congregation again a healthy number of the familiar Bible stories. With the increasing secularization of American society, no longer can any pastor assume even a core amount of Bible knowledge among church goers. And with some Evangelicals preaching almost exclusively (it seems) from the epistles (possibly also Deuteronomy), one wonders where prospects will even hear the mighty deeds of old proclaimed from pulpits. The need has been perceived, and incorporating more Old Testament narrative into the lectionary is one of the committee’s guiding principles.

At this point, an example of the committee’s work may best illustrate the approach being taken. Here is a proposed expansion of the lessons for **Advent 1, Series A**:

First Lesson: Currently: Isaiah 2:1-5. Suggested Change: Gen. 6:9-22; 7:11-23

Reasoning: Describes the “days of Noah” that ties in with the Gospel. Also, no lectionary currently has any Noah narrative.

Second Lesson: Currently: Romans 13:11-14 Suggested Change: None

Gospel: Currently: Mt. 24:37-44 Suggested Change: Mt. 24:36-44

Reasoning: This one verse expansion seems to explain the narrative more fully, and v.36 contains a suitable thematic sentence for the service.

This example illustrates well what this project is all about. It is an “expansion,” not an entirely new lectionary designed to replace the current one. Rather, the Rites Committee envisions this lectionary working hand-in-hand with the current one, giving worship planners and preachers more options while still centering the service on the same Gospel of the Day.

It is also the work of the Rites Committee to look at incorporating additional psalms into the lectionary. Understandably, this particular facet of the work will entail much coordination with the Hymn Committee’s work as they also consider presenting new psalms for worship.

The Rites Committee hopes, God willing, to have completed their work by the fall of 2004. At that point, the expanded lectionary will be turned over to a review committee appointed for the task by the Commission on Worship. Following their review (by April 2005), the lectionary phase of the hymnal supplement will be completed. It has not as of yet been determined whether the lectionary will be disseminated via the web or will appear only with the printing of the supplement.

The following brothers are involved in the task of this lectionary expansion. The chairman of each sub-committee also serves on the Rites Committee of the hymnal supplement.

Series A: Paul Naumann, (Ch.), Brent Brutlag, Jim Langebartels, Tom Ehnert

Series B: Steve Lange (Ch.), George Ferch, Jon Hein, Adam Mueller

Series C: John Koelpin (Ch.), John Vieths, Earle Treptow, John Liebenow, Gary Kluball

Psalms: Jon Zabell (Ch.), Tom Jeske, Phil Sievert, Don Wichmann, Scott Schultz (vic.)



The patient I figured would be devastated by her doctor's sad announcement today is rejoicing in the assurances that are hers through baptism. You know the scenarios I'm describing and you know how important is that you have a quiver full of scripture passages which will speak to each of these hearts in their current condition. The Book of Psalms is that quiver for me.

Time and time again, I discover just how well the writers of those ancient songs capture the feelings of God's people. These inspired writers spoke from the heart—a testament to us that the Holy Spirit, who lives in us, does know our inmost thoughts, feelings and desires and is able to express them to our Father in groans and sighs that our words cannot express. In the words, the pictures, and the parallelism of these songs the Spirit of God captures the full range of human emotions and expresses them in words and in ways to which we can relate. Another way of saying it is that in David, Moses, Asaph and the others, I meet believers who struggled, rejoiced, praised and gave thanks in much the same way I and God's people still do. However, I realize that these inspired writers have expressed it better than I ever could.

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a testament to us that the Holy Spirit, who lives in us,
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that our words cannot express.**

I have also learned from my use of psalms in devotions, that I do not have the time to read many of them in their entirety, much less expound them fully. So I select a few verses which capture the main message or the conflict and resolution expressed in them.

What is true for the small devotion is also true for the Sunday sermon. Short devotional texts are certainly sufficient material for preaching. There is no law that dictates you must preach an entire psalm, just as there is no law that says you should preach the entire chapter of any other book. In fact, the homiletics professors would warn against it. Just as with any other text, a few select verses from a "chapter" in the Psalms may capture the theme quite well. Although our lectionary offers the entire psalm, our hymnal does not print the entire text of many of the psalms found in the Singing the Psalms section. The hymnal may be the place to find suggestions for the verses you will preach, especially since these are the words the people would have sung and be most familiar with.

How do I approach these verses of the psalms when I prepare to preach them? I follow the advice which has been offered in this publication time and time again. There is no shortcut for text



**Who of us hasn't seen a deer or some other
wild animal panting for water? Each of us also has
a soul that thirsts for living water.**

study*, word study, meditation and prayer. When working in the psalms, it can be especially helpful to note the kind of psalm it is. Whether a psalm is imprecatory, messianic, a Psalm of Ascent, or general praise, certainly has much to do with its content and or how the worshipers in the Old Testament used it. This can offer direction to the preacher. But if, for example, he would fail to recognize the messianic verses in Psalm 118 he might easily miss key points, if not the message altogether. Another way to avoid such a mistake would be to see if and how the New Testament writers have used the verses of the psalm you are studying. Paul uses various psalms frequently to support his writing, and it would be wise not to overlook his inspired commentary.

Besides the obvious blessings that come with the preaching of psalms, another benefit is that the words and pictures used by these song writers provide ready-to-use sermon illustrations. Even if some of these word pictures may need explanation for the 21st century believer, these expressions are the hot irons that touch the hearts of our hearers and make the Word come alive for them. These pictures—the text itself—are the memory hooks. There is good reason why Psalm 23 is one of the best-loved, most well-known chapters in the Bible. Consider also some of these: *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God* (42:1). Who of us hasn't seen a deer or some other wild animal panting for water? Each of us also has a soul that thirsts for living water. *Why are you downcast (a shepherding term!), O my soul?* (43:5). Because of our humanity each of us at one time or another has surely felt like our souls were dying, haven't we? My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the King. *You are the most excellent of men, and your lips have been anointed with grace* (45:1, 2). If you've ever had dreams as a preacher, perhaps you have wondered what it

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would be like to stand before the president or some other head of state and give a witness to him. I think your heart would be stirred, to say the least. Can't you see the picture of oil on the lips and realize that his grace is behind everything God speaks? (The real curse is when God keeps silent!) *Surely you place them (the arrogant and wicked) on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors* (73:18, 19). Surely those of us who have seen cars or people slipping and sliding on ice can understand how God causes the wicked to fall. Those of us who have seen the TV documentaries of floods sweeping homes, cars and people away can relate to the way God says he will sweep the wicked away by terrors. Both of these pictures serve as a warning and a comfort.

The ultimate blessing of working with texts from the Psalms is that we are reading, studying and meditating on the glorious Word of our gracious God and Savior. These are the Scriptures which testify of him! His message is one: all are sinful and deserve his punishment, but in love he sent his Son to live and die, rise and rule for us. So whenever we study the Psalms, we would ask the Holy Spirit:

*Let me see my Savior's face.
Let me all his beauties trace.
Show those glorious truths to me,
which are only known to thee.*

That prayer—like the psalms—is a song, isn't it? Perhaps that's why I have never forgotten it.

The Lord bless and prosper you and your hearers as you share the Word of truth found in the Book of Psalms.

Pastor Aaron Glaeske serves the Lord and his people at Rock of Ages, Madison, TN

* Readers are encouraged to remember that within the past year NPH has produced a book of text studies on the psalms found in Christian Worship. – ed.

FLORILEGIUM

An arrangement of quotes plucked from various sources. Readers are invited to contribute their own quotes to the editor for upcoming editions.

“Grace”

His resurrection is the first and decisive blast of God's great final music. That music cannot cease because the score is written by God, and He writes no unfinished symphonies.

– M. Franzmann

This gives us exquisite comfort that we hear that Christ, after his resurrection and exaltation, also gladly wants to be with and around us. He did not just want to go around in heaven with the holy angels and the souls of the elect, but he also wants to be with us on earth – just as he has promised in Matt. 28:20.

– J. Gerhard, On Holy Easter Day III

But grace is not something for which I must look in my heart. It is in the heart of God. Grace cannot be found in me, but is outside of me.

– Walther, p.145

Grace is obtained either entire or not at all; it is never gained piecemeal, as Luther puts it. A person is either a child of the devil or a child of God... there is no middle ground.

– Walther, p. 148

As my eternal purpose hath decreed: Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will, Yet not of will in him, but Grace in me.

– J. Milton (*Paradise Lost*, III, 170)

But few, very few, there are, even among Lutherans, who truly believe in absolution. That is the curse of false teaching. By incorrect preaching men are deprived of their most precious treasures.

– Walther, p. 173

It is a festal grace, splendid, lavish, extravagant, prodigal. Everybody spends too much money on weddings, and so it is just wedding festivity that furnishes the figure for the grace of God. “All things are ready; come to the marriage!”

– M. Franzmann

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

**If you have any questions or comments about
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