

PREACH

the Word

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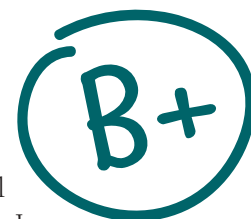
When There is No Gospel— Another Thought

Both Professor Jeske and one of his former students reminded me after the last issue came out [Vol. 4 No. 3 “When There Is No Gospel”] that another way of finding the gospel in a text that is otherwise all law is to look for the Tetragrammaton. That itself contains a sermon on the faithfulness of God to his promises of grace and mercy. The Tetragrammaton occurs in the text cited from Amos. Of course, one need only look at Ezekiel to realize that the Tetragrammaton also contains a sermon on the law. The LORD proclaims that he is faithful both to his threats in the law and to his promises in the gospel. He is to be taken seriously in either case.

J. Westendorf

YAH
WEH
JEHO
YAH
I AM

Listeners' Grade Today's Preaching



Both Commission on Worship Administrator Bryan Gerlach and *Preach the Word* Managing Editor Wayne Laitinen have made me aware of the survey on preaching that appeared January 2001 on the *Christianity Today* website titled “Special Report on Current Research on Churches” by John C. LaRue, Jr.

In the report LaRue indicated that he had previously surveyed pastors to get their perspective on their own preaching. Now he was asking for the listeners' side of the story. What was interesting about the survey is that listeners consistently graded preachers higher than they graded themselves. The listeners also thought less of methods preachers felt would help their preaching than the preachers did. Below is a sampling of areas surveyed:

Preaching Skills (Excellent Rating)

Preachers of themselves	10%
Listeners of their preachers	57%

Ability to Communicate

Preachers of themselves	20%
Listeners of their preachers	56%

Ability to Apply Biblical Truths

Preachers of themselves	26%
Listeners of their preachers	59%

Preaching Is:

Clear

Preachers	46%
Listeners	58%

Convicting

Preachers	18%
Listeners	32%

Energetic

Preachers	43%
Listeners	29%

Conversational

Preachers	46%
Listeners	22%

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PREACHING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LITURGY

On fifty-two Sundays of the year the average WELS pastor walks to his pulpit to preach the sermon. On most of those fifty-two Sundays he preaches his sermon in the middle of what we call the liturgy.

Jesus preached on mountainsides and from fishing boats more often than he did in public worship. But at times both he and his apostles preached in synagogues, and synagogue worship was carried out with a standard ritual. The most well-known example of this kind of preaching is found in Luke 4:16-21. Unfortunately, the Holy Spirit chose not to have Luke include the entire sermon Jesus preached. All we know is the text from Isaiah 61, and the theme (or the conclusion): "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." But it is interesting to see how the Savior went about preaching in the middle of what we might call the liturgy. As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus certainly wasn't bound to observe the synagogue's ritual. Nevertheless:

- He respected the synagogue's order. The lesson he read from was undoubtedly the lesson appointed for that particular Sabbath. He might

have chosen to preach on the basis of hundreds of other prophecies, but he chose to preach on the lesson chosen for that day.

- He respected the synagogue's ceremony. Jesus surely could have spoken the passage from memory, but he waited for the attendant to hand him the scroll. From what we are told of synagogue ceremony at a slightly later time, the attendant would have walked to the ark with measured steps, removed the scroll from the ark, unwrapped its outer wrapping, and then unrolled it until he found the Isaiah prophecy. Not until the attendant returned the scroll to the ark did Jesus begin his sermon.
- He respected the synagogue's customs. He stood to read; that was the custom. He sat to preach; that was the custom.

There are no rules here, no New Testament ceremonial laws. There is an example here, however, of how the greatest preacher preached in the context of ritual.

The Ritual of Lutheranism

The order of service we use in public worship is not that of the Old Testament synagogue, but a version of the rite used in the Christian church since the second century. The early Church formed its worship rite to highlight what it knew Christians needed the most, Word and Sacrament. Eventually, the churches in the east departed from this focus and emphasized forms of worship that appealed to mysticism and emotion. The western church, however, retained its means of grace rite. Luther, after purging it of Rome's sacrificial heresies, presented the liturgy to Lutheran Germany where it remained in place until Pietism. Our synod began to use this order of service in a fairly com-

plete form when *The Lutheran Hymnal* came on the scene in 1941.

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The western rite, the order of worship we usually call the liturgy, consists of the Ordinary and the Proper, both of which serve the Word and the Sacrament. The Ordinary is a set of five song texts (one of the texts, the Creed, is spoken in our version of the liturgy) that repeat the central themes of salvation Sunday by Sunday. The Proper is a set of lessons, songs, and prayers that retell Jesus' life and work on a year by year basis. *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* contains two versions of the historic liturgy, the Common Service and the Service of Word and Sacrament. It also contains the Service of the Word which is patterned after the liturgy but omits the Sacrament. It is within the context of these three services that WELS pastors preach the vast majority of their sermons.

Preaching that Respects the Liturgy

How might 21st century Lutheran preachers imitate the respect Jesus had for the ritual of public worship in his day?

- Preach on the basis of a text that respects the liturgy's Proper. The lessons, prayers, and hymns chosen for the various Sundays of the church year intend to carry a theme. The preacher respects that theme by allowing it to come through in his sermon. Preaching on



one of the chosen lessons makes this fairly easy, but other texts can be used that respect the day's theme. He can also use the material found in other parts of the Proper for illustrations and explanations. If the preacher feels it important that the sermon have a different focus from the day's theme, he is encouraged to change the entire Proper. Choose lessons, psalms, and hymns, which match the theme of the sermon.

- Allow the ceremony of the liturgy to remain intact. The liturgy anticipates that all three lessons will be read consecutively and that they will be adorned and highlighted by the Psalm, Verse, and Hymn of the Day. The liturgy expects that the congregation will stand for the reading of the Gospel and will acclaim the words and works of Jesus ("Praise be to you, O Christ!"). Resist the practice of reading two lessons from the lectern and the third (the sermon text) from the pulpit. While such a practice may save some time, it also undermines the symbolism of standing and acclaiming (if the day's Gospel is the sermon text), and it eliminates either the Psalm or the Verse. There is nothing in the church's past practice that insists the sermon text must be read from the pulpit or that the people must stand for the reading of the text. The preacher can announce already at the lectern which of the lessons serves as the basis for the sermon. He can allow the congregation to remain seated at the beginning of the sermon and begin to repeat the text during the sermon's exposition.
- The liturgy has two central foci, the Word and the Sacrament. Both the Ordinary and the Proper focus on those two means of grace. The architecture of Christian churches since the time of Constantine takes these same two highlights into consideration.*

The sacrament is offered from the altar; the Word is proclaimed from the ambo (or pulpit). Altar and ambo are more than functional furniture, however. The sacrament comes from the altar just as mercy proceeds from the mercy seat, the symbol of the presence of God. The pulpit is the throne of the Word; the fact that it stands "six feet above contradiction" means to make a statement. Think twice before taking up the popular practice of walking away from the pulpit and preaching from the center of the chancel. Ask yourself if the benefits some say can be gained will offset the benefits that may be lost.

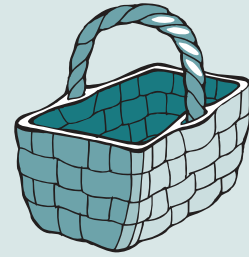
Jesus preached in boats, he preached along the road, he preached on the basis of whatever words from the Law and the Prophets seemed appropriate. But he also preached in public worship and in the context of ritual, the Synagogue ritual. When he did, he respected that ritual, apparently down to its most minute details.

WELS preachers preach in a variety of contexts, too. They preach in hospital rooms and in Bible classes, they preach Easter sermons in parks and funeral sermons in mortuary chapels. Dozens of times each year they modify their preaching styles to match the situation at hand. But most WELS preachers also preach within the context of the Liturgy. What are the implications for this kind of preaching? How does the liturgical context affect the sermon's style and form? How can we preach the Word and respect the liturgy at the same time? Jesus gives us some examples and we are wise to apply his practice to our own.

James Tiefel

*Since Reformation times baptisms are usually administered in church, giving public worship a third central focus. This focus encourages the symbolic prominence of the baptismal font in Lutheran church design as well as the altar and ambo.

"Can You Use This?"



A funny story tells about an old lady who was living in the village. She had never owned nor even been in a car before. One day, she was returning home from the market carrying a big, heavy basket on her head, when a rich man in his car passed by. Kindly, he offered to drive the lady to her home. She thanked him and got into the car with her basket. On the way, the man glanced at the lady in the mirror, still holding her basket over her head. Astonished, he asked her to lay the basket down in the car and rest. The old lady naively replied, "Oh, my son, your car is carrying me; this is enough, I should not burden it carrying my basket too!"

What an innocently funny response! We sometimes do the same with God. Everyday, God carries us during the day. Still, we insist in carrying our heavy baskets of worries and fear of the future—for family, kids, spouse, money, job, etc. We are carried by Almighty Hands, watched over by Sleepless Eyes, and God plans our future. Let us then relax and lay everything down, into God's Hands.

Continued from page 1

Q. What would improve preaching?

Storytelling, Narrative, or Dramatic Techniques
 Preachers60%
 Listeners17%

Illustrations
 Preachers46%
 Listeners14%

Movement Outside the Pulpit
 Preachers37%
 Listeners14%

Personal Stories
 Preachers25%
 Listeners12%

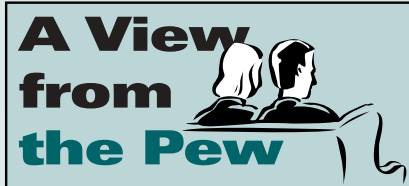
References to Popular Culture
 Preachers22%
 Listeners11%

Gestures
 Preachers32%
 Listeners9%

So what do you think? Are pastors too critical of themselves, or are listeners not critical enough, or, perhaps, long-suffering?

To view the entire survey go to:

www.christianitytoday.com/yc/2001/001/17.96.html



Dear Pastor,

"Look at me when you say that!" I think people make such a request of a speaker because they feel that "looking one in the eye" promotes

honesty and sincerity. I don't know if that is always true. I suppose that an accomplished liar can look another person in the eye and still lie through his teeth. But I do know from my own experience that when a pastor keeps eye contact with me, or with the audience of which I am a part, it helps to proclaim to me the heartfelt, genuine character of his message.

Don't get me wrong, pastor. I know you have spent a great amount of time and effort putting down on paper exactly what you wish to convey to your congregation on a Sunday morning. I want to benefit from that effort. But I also want to be assured that you are speaking from your heart to my heart. Maintaining eye contact with your congregation does that for me.

I'll be honest with you. When I listen to a preacher, and he keeps looking down, say fifteen (even ten) times during a sermon, he places a barrier, a paper fence, between himself and me. He tells me, "This is what my mind decided to say, and what the text indicated I should say, but it really isn't enough a part of me to say it without being prompted." Such a delivery also leads me to think, "That man is more concerned with exact wording than he is with me." Are those thoughts unfair? I'm willing to admit that they may be. It is more an impression, and impressions in communication are extremely important.

There certainly are times when I expect a preacher to look down at the material before him. When he quotes from the Scriptures, I expect that his eyes will fall upon the Word of God lying before him. That action helps assure me that this is what the Lord says, and is not the preacher's commentary. Also when a preacher ends a thought or a section of his sermon, I am not put off if he looks down momentarily. In fact, that often has the effect of resetting the clock of my attention span. For me, however, breaking eye contact much oftener than that is disturbing.

I say all of this, because I am leading up to simply thanking you for looking at me when you preach. I don't know how you do it; I'm sure you have your time-proven methods for making a written sermon your own. But, whatever the method is, and however much time you spend in the effort, please know that the results are greatly appreciated by somebody like me who spends my time listening to you.

Your grateful parishioner

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