

PREACH

Vol. 4 No. 1 *the Word* September/October 2000

Welcome to the Fourth Volume of *Preach the Word*

Welcome to the fourth volume of *Preach the Word*. During the past six issues Pastor Vic Prange has given some practical advice for our weekly homiletical task. I especially appreciated how he wove the sermon into the liturgy and the liturgy into the sermon. For all these things and for the special attention he gave to the church year, we thank you, Vic!

This issue begins the editorship of Prof. James Westendorf. He is the chair of the homiletics department at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and a member of the Preach the Word subcommittee of the Commission on Worship. His past experience in the parish and, currently, in the classroom will enable him to take from the homiletical storehouse new treasures as well as old. Welcome, Jim . . . and God's blessings!

Wayne A. Laitinen
Managing Editor

Looking Ahead

Allow me just a few comments on the upcoming year. Unlike two former editors, John Jeske and Joel Gerlach, who also taught homiletics at the seminary, I have not yet reached the age of retirement. There is no special advantage in that, except for the fact that I have my colleagues in the department close by. It is easy for me to enlist their considerable talents for the newsletter, and I plan to do so. This issue is mainly my work, but fortunately for you, the reader, that will not be the case in future issues.

The members of the Homiletics Department are conducting a year long study of the various forms which are popular in modern preaching, including inductive, narrative, and "moves" preaching. I am asking the man who is leading our discussion in each case to write a brief article on how our preaching might benefit from elements borrowed from each form and also to make us aware of what things tend to militate against true textual preaching.

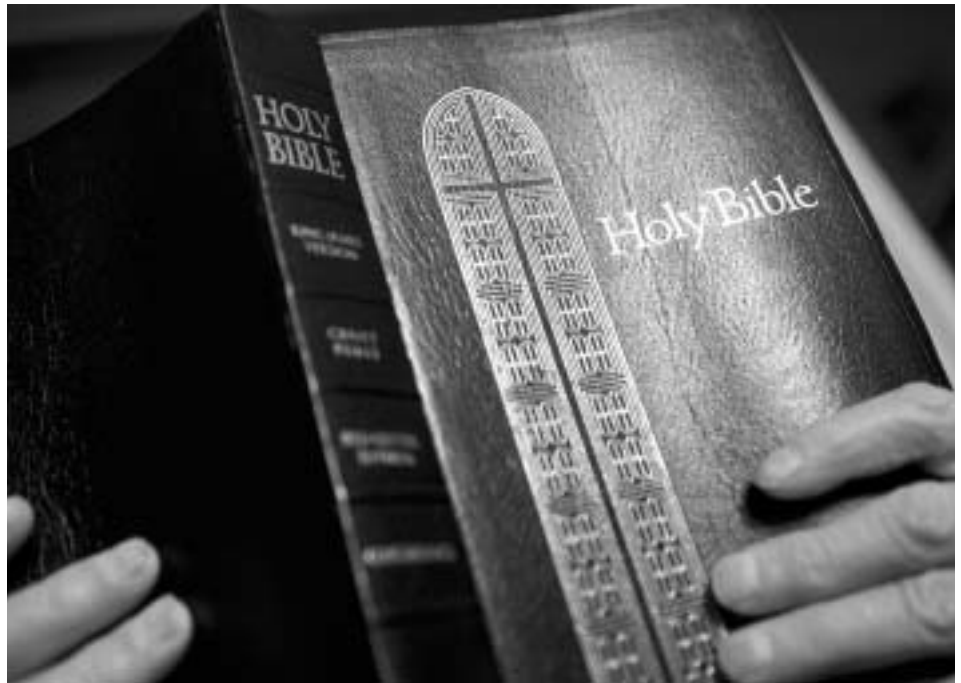
A few things are new in this volume. *View from the Pew* is included because I spend as much or more time during worship services in the pew as I do in the pulpit. Therefore, I consider myself as much parishioner as preacher. If other readers are in a similar situation and would like their reactions to the preaching they hear briefly recorded, e-mail me and I'll include your observations. *Can You Use This?* is just the previous *Worth Quoting?* in a slightly expanded form. Hopefully, these and other columns will be useful to you. It is my prayer, as editor for this volume, that the newsletter continues to display the high standards of past editors, and that the Lord uses it in some way to bless the preaching of the Word that goes on in his kingdom.

My e-mail address: westendj@wls.wels.net

Passionate Preaching by Impassioned Preachers

One of the goals of the Homiletics Department at the seminary is to send our students out with a passion for preaching. Does that zeal to preach remain with you after a number of years in the parish? I know we would all like it to, but sometimes, perhaps more than we care to admit, the preparing and delivering of sermons can become routine, or worse, drudgery. Perhaps the worst thing about this is that if we are not mightily moved to preach, the end result, the sermon and the way it is delivered, isn't going to be very passionate either.

What to do? I know one thing not to do, and that is to try and compensate for a lack of passionate preaching by turning to dynamics. Now before I get too critical, let me



Dynamics as a consequence of the urgency we feel in our hearts to preach is good, BUT dynamics as a substitute for passion is bad.

I think there is a better way to keep or rekindle the passion for preaching in our hearts and to produce passionate sermons, sermons that speak from the heart to the heart. These are not quick fixes, but the final results make the effort worthwhile.

Know Your Text. One pastor recently remarked to me, “The men in our winkel don't really do exegesis on their texts. They simply read the texts in English, look at a couple of commentaries or a sermon study book or two, and then they make their outlines.”

In spite of busy schedules, if we are really going to get enthusiastic about a text, or discover things we didn't see the last time we used the same text, we are going to have to get a little better acquainted with it than that. Often when you go up to

a person you didn't know very well before and start asking him questions about himself, rather than simply listening to what other people have to say about him, you find out some very interesting things. You may get to know the person so well that you want to introduce him to your friends. The same thing can happen with texts. You begin a dialogue with a text, asking questions of it and listening for its unique answers, given in a way that perhaps no other text can give, and you start getting excited. The conviction begins to grow in mind and heart, “Wow, this text has some amazing things to say, and it says them so marvelously. I can't wait to introduce it to my people next Sunday.

Know Your Pulpit. I don't know how many times I have heard the advice or given it myself: “Be yourself in the pulpit. Don't try to imitate somebody else. Don't speak, gesture, or move in ways that you don't in everyday

I know one thing not to do, and that is to try and compensate for a lack of passionate preaching by turning to dynamics . . .

Dynamics as a consequence of the urgency we feel in our hearts to preach is good, BUT dynamics as a substitute for passion is bad.

say that dynamics can be very good for a sermon. Changes in volume, speed, and the rhythm of our speaking will provide variety to keep our listeners attention and interest. They will help us orally underline the important points we are making. They may even assist in giving meaning to our words.

conversation.” All of this is good advice to keep us from looking and sounding artificial, and therefore, insincere, in the pulpit. Yet there is something else to consider. The sermon is not everyday conversation. What we have to say is not just small talk about the weather. We get to speak in the name of the Lord Jesus. Our mining of the sermon text has filled us with its inspired truths. Our hearts are beating hard and fast; the adrenaline is flowing because of the opportunity that lies before us. How can we just be our everyday selves? One veteran

One veteran preacher told me early in my ministry, “The day that I am not filled with nervous excitement, as I prepare to step into the pulpit, will be the last day of my preaching.”

preacher told me early in my ministry, “The day that I am not filled with nervous excitement, as I prepare to step into the pulpit, will be the last day of my preaching.” In fact, when we once again ponder what it is that we are actually doing in the pulpit, the problem should be keeping our excitement under control, not wondering where it disappeared to. I hardly am known as one who bubbles over with excitement all the time. Ask my wife and kids. But when I return from a trip, there are things I have seen and heard that I am eager to share. Sometimes I find myself talking faster and louder than usual. Somebody may even have to tell

me to calm down. Won't it be the same with our preaching? The sermon is our chance to tell others what we have seen and heard from the mouth of God himself. I wonder with what feeling Philip spoke the words to Nathanael, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote— Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph”? I don't think those words were said matter-of-factly because what they revealed was so mind-boggling and amazing. You are in the same situation when you preach, only you don't have to find the people first. They have come to you! Don't hide the excitement. Let the enthusiasm that is in your heart show!

Know Your People. Someone has wisely said that half of sermon preparation takes place at the preacher's desk in the company of the Word. The other half takes place in the members' homes as they reveal to him what is on their hearts and in their lives. This means to say that the impassioned preacher is not just a visiting pastor, he is also a listening one. He does the hard work of actually paying attention to what his people are saying. He makes mental notes of the fears, disappointments, doubts, and hopes which his parishioners describe. If he has done the preliminary work on his text earlier in the week, he already can hear in his mind what next Sunday's text has to say to what he is hearing. As he compares what his members say with what his upcoming text declares, his enthusiasm grows. Because he loves his members and wants to give them the comfort and

Continued on page 4

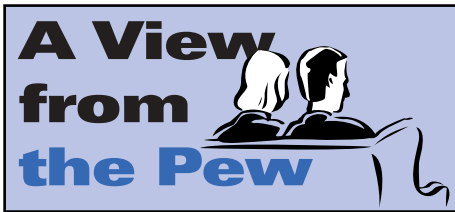
“Can You Use This?”



On a recent trip my wife and I were privileged to take to Istanbul, a Turkish guide was trying to show that Moslems and Christians have more similarities to unite them than differences to divide them. He said, “We Moslems believe almost everything you do. We honor Moses and accept the Ten Commandments as God's will. We believe in Jesus as a great prophet and confess that he was born of the Virgin Mary whom we also greatly respect. The only thing we don't believe is that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world.” The Gospel is cut in half, and what remains is turned into law. It was amazing to me how satisfying this statement was to the Christians present. I wonder how many WELS Christians would have found it satisfying as well.

Never think you are preaching the Gospel too much. Its truths are not native to man's human nature, and they do not survive long in the heart when left unattended.

J. Westendorf



Continued from page 3

hope which only God can provide, he becomes more and more eager to get that sermon ready. When he is in the pulpit, all those conversations come flooding back into his memory. In his voice can be heard his unrestrained joy that says, "Boy, do I have something wonderful to tell you."

Know Yourself. I'm sure you have been told more than once in your career, "Preach every sermon and apply every text to yourself before you take it to your people." When that is done faithfully and regularly, the enthusiasm to

Dear Pastor,

I appreciate the enthusiasm you put into your preaching. I would much rather have the dynamics you use in a sermon than to listen to a preacher who speaks in a monotone with no apparent feeling. But sometimes your dynamics become too extreme. The main offenders are loudness and speed. The fact that you can get me to jump in my pew with a loud blast may mean you have my attention, but not my good will which is necessary for communication to take place. And, of course, if you blast out my eardrums, I won't be able to hear you at all.

Then there is speed. When you start racing through your sentences so fast that you don't finish them completely, or you cut off the final syllables of words, it becomes very difficult to listen, and I don't even have a hearing disability. I find myself pondering one sentence and missing the next three. I feel like somebody trying to keep up with a fast runner. I get tired and out of breath long before the sermon is over.

Your use of dynamics helps me listen to and understand your message. Just keep them under control.

Thank you for the way you bring us God's Word every week,

One of your parishioners

... when you get up in the pulpit, you are not just preaching from a text; you are preaching from experience, and when your people sense that, as they most certainly will, they say, "Here is somebody who has been there. He knows what he is talking about." And they listen.

share grows. After all, you are in the same boat that every member of your parish is in. You stand convicted, and your knees shake before the holiness of God and his righteous demands. Your heart is filled with the comfort and joy of being assured that you stand justified before God's tribunal for Jesus' sake. You know of the new life that has been created in your heart through the Gospel, and you have seen it at work in your life. You also have been at war with your sinful flesh and the world around you, so you know how strenuous the effort is, and how some battles are won and some are lost. And, you know where to flee for forgiveness and strength when the failures to live for Christ grow and the spirit lags. This work of the Spirit has been going on in your hearts since the time of your baptism, but every text study confirms and strengthens it. This means that when you get up in the pulpit, you are not just preaching from a text; you are preaching from experience, and when your people sense that, as they most certainly will, they say, "Here is somebody who has been there. He knows what he is talking about." And they listen.

There are no magical formulas and no artificial contrivances that can keep the fires burning and the juices flowing, but that doesn't mean there are no solutions to the absence of passion in our hearts and in our sermons. You are regularly working with the Spirit's own instrument. Let it have free course in your heart. The passion will be there; passionate sermons will be the result. You and your people will reap the benefits.

J. Westendorf

PREACH
the Word

Preach the Word is published bimonthly by the WELS Commission on Worship
2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398
414/256-3265
FAX, 414/256-3899 • <brygerlach@aol.com>
<www.wels.net/sab/frm-cow.html>

James Westendorf, editor
<westendj@wls.wels.net>
Wayne A. Laitinen, managing editor