

# PREACH

*the Word*

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## REPETITION

*Repetitio est mater studiorum*, that is to say, repetition is the mother of learning. So began my first day of Latin class as a freshman in high school. Here I am twenty years later proving that what my teacher wanted to impress on his class is true—he repeated that Latin proverb so often I still remember it. Good teachers have always understood the value of repetition. Repetition can aide the preacher, too.

Repetition starts in the pastor's study. Unlike many other professionals, such as doctors or lawyers who have entire shelves of books we expect them to master, God's people have called the pastor to be fluent in only one book. The simplicity of that task allows the preacher to lose himself in constant repetition of his subject. The book that I, as a preacher, plan on preaching from this year is the Bible—same as it was for the last eight years and the same it will be for the next thirty, if God gives me the strength. The book that I plan on teaching from, as a Bible class leader, is the Bible—same as it was for the last eight years and the same it will be for the next thirty. The book that I plan on using for my daily devotions is the Bible ... you get the idea. Even the extra books that we study with planned repetition, like the Lutheran Confessions, the Catechism, or our dogmatic's notes, are all based upon and servants to the Scriptures. Such a daily diet off the same menu might seem boring, but it is only arrogance on our part that allows the living and active Word of God to become mundane. The humble preacher will always find freshness even on the weathered pages of his oft-used Bible.

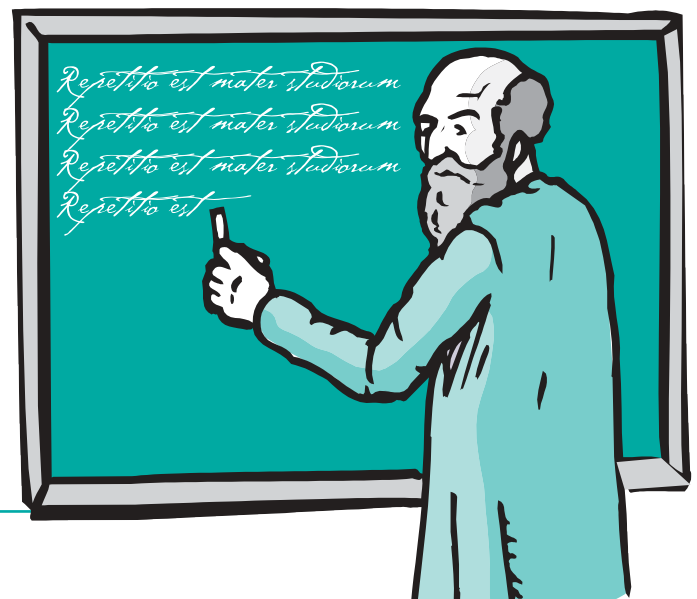
Repetition moves from the pastor's study to the people's pews. Especially in those congregation's where the Lectionary decides what cuts of the Scriptures serve as readings, the people will learn well the dance steps of the Church Year. The repetition of the Lectionary from lectern and pulpit help to drive the main themes of the Christian faith into head and heart. Couple that with a weekly juxtaposition of sinners against God, of our faithlessness against God's faithfulness, of our immorality against God's mercy, of sin against grace—and you have a powerful tool that the Holy Spirit uses to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify his Church on earth. With such repetition, the people in the pew ought to be able to anticipate every sermon's general content. But just as a spouse never tires of hearing "I love you" whispered sweetly in the ear by a loved one, so God's people never grow weary of hearing God say "I love you" every Sunday in Word and Sacrament. The beauty of the preacher's repetitious study of God's Word at his desk is that he is thereby better prepared to offer up the same message every Sunday with fresh vibrancy and vitality.

Finally, repetition finds its way onto the manuscript and out from the pulpit. Most of those who read *Preach the Word* have been trained as "Theme and Parts" preachers. The theme of the sermon intends to distill the main thought of the text into a

brief and memorable proposition. The repetition of the theme throughout the sermon helps the preacher with his outline and memorizing and aids the people in remembering the main points of the message. The easy repetition of a theme requires that the theme fit within the oratory of the sermon. The better a theme fits within the structure of a sentence, the easier it is to repeat. Crafting a theme that the preacher can weave seamlessly into the text of the sermon is hard work. But the opportunity for the repetition pays dividends when God's people can more easily remember the point of the sermon.

Repetition without reflection can turn quickly into "same old, same old." Nonetheless, from a rhetorical point of view, repetition is still the mother of learning. When the pastor combines the repetition of his study with the repetition of the church year, the sermon, and the theme, that is repetition with reflection—an awesome tool for the faithful preacher.

John M. Koelpin



## IS THAT REALLY WHAT GOD IS SAYING HERE?

Twelve years ago the church I belonged to hosted a special event. We invited the community and the news media to a special service in which our pastor presented the gospel as God's cure for the drug-infested community around us. We were elated when the local news station appeared with reporter and camera. I overheard one of members saying to the reporter, "Drugs are a huge problem in our community, just a huge problem, but we are out here today to say that God has an answer and a cure, and it is found in his Son, Jesus Christ." I watched the news that night with optimistic anticipation. But when the story came up I was terribly disappointed. All they showed of our member's comments was, "Drugs are a huge problem in our community, just a huge problem." How frustrating! In her quest to make her own point the reporter left out our member's main thought.

There is a lesson in that story for preachers. When we stand up to proclaim God's truth from a portion of his Word, we are reporters for him. It is a fundamental guideline for preaching that we report his message accurately and faithfully. God wants his messengers to preach his thoughts with integrity.

Preaching the text with integrity is preaching the words of the text with the same content, spirit, and attitude with which they were originally written in their context. What WELS pastors would disagree? Of course we preach the text. But permit me a word of caution. Sometimes we think we preach the text when perhaps we preach right next to it. Let me explain. Preaching the text doesn't mean just using thoughts from the text. It means sharing the thoughts of the text in the same way that God had them written.

There are several ways we can think we are preaching the text when in fact we are only preaching with the help of the text or with thoughts from the text. For instance, sometimes we rush to get a theme and parts instead of humbly trying to understand the text. When that happens the text becomes the servant of the theme and parts rather than the other way around.

There are other distractions that would prevent us from preaching the text.

Sometimes a word study is so exciting that it makes us want to preach that word more than the text. It happens with  $\alpha\rho\alpha\pi\tau\eta$ . The Apostle didn't have Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich at his side when he wrote, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." The main point is not that God's love is unconditional. It is that God's love made him give his Son. Similarly, in John 19:30 Jesus shouts out  $\tau\epsilon\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\sigma\tau\alpha\iota$ . Just because some shards somewhere use this word for "paid in full" does not mean that Jesus was thinking of that specific usage. The context suggests otherwise. Two verses earlier John tells us that Jesus knew everything was accomplished ( $\tau\epsilon\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\sigma\tau\alpha\iota$ ) in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled ( $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\omega\theta\eta$ ). What Jesus meant was "It is accomplished." The Scriptures and their plan of salvation have been fulfilled. It would be better to preach the text than to preach the shards.

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Sometimes, because of our desire to see our people grow and change, we will craft imperative themes for texts that predominantly use the indicative. If the Spirit wrote indicative forms to encourage God's people, let's keep in step with him.

Sometimes we study and preach the text as if it is an island with no historical or literary context. That's sloppy reporting. The context is essential to properly expounding the true meaning of the text. To preach the text is to preach it in its proper context.

To be faithful to the text includes maintaining the emotions of the text. For example, it isn't fair to Paul or the Holy Spirit to take the doxology at the end of Romans and preach it in a cerebral way, emphasizing that God is independent, wise, and omniscient. Paul breaks forth in heartfelt praise because of God's gracious choice to save Gentiles. The sermon ought to do the same.

One final caution—be careful not to turn every sanctification text into a justification text. A dull sameness that is not the work



of the Holy Spirit emerges when we do that. Our zeal to preach Christ as the Savior of all people in every sermon is commendable. But when preaching a sanctification text, let Christ, the Sanctifier, use his good news to change his people the way he intended when he inspired that text.

Here is a short list of questions to ask yourself right after you finish writing your sermon: 1) Did I properly explain this text of Scripture in its context? 2) Does the emotion of my sermon match the emotion of the text for the original author? 3) Are my descriptions of words from the text helping the listeners to understand the text, or are they simply delighting them in a word? 4) Does my introduction prepare the listener to understand the text as well as understand the theme of my sermon? 5) Am I letting the indicatives and imperatives in the text be the indicatives and imperatives of my sermon? 6) When my listeners leave church today will they know what God says to them from this text, or will they only know what I said to them from my heart or mind? 7) If the focus of the text is sanctification, have I preached sanctification or have I turned every phrase toward justification only?

Gentlemen, our job is simple! Preach the text! God was perfectly satisfied to inspire it in the form that you see it. Let him speak his text to his people when you enter the pulpit as his reporter. The Lord watches with optimistic anticipation each Sunday when we enter his pulpits to tell his people what he has said. May it never be that after he listens to our sermons he would muse, "But that isn't really what I said!"

*Donald W. Patterson*

## TIDBITS ON PREACHING . . . FROM LUTHER

Preaching is proclamation, instruction, comfort, and warning wrapped into one. It is not artificial but sincere. It speaks to people where they are and lifts them up to God.

Preachers are wordsmiths and they use tools—logic, rhetoric, and illustrations—as handmaidens to the Word. No tool is used to overpower the text, but to convey God’s message to hearts. “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart; that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming,” St. Paul to the Romans.

In passages here and there, Dr. Martin Luther offers insights into the value and use of words, logic, rhetoric, and illustrations for preaching. We offer them without comment for the reader to mull over.

### Words, words, words

“Printed words are dead, spoken words are living. On the printed page they are not so forcible as when uttered by the soul of a

person through the mouth. . . . Whoever is to preach and teach must know beforehand what a thing is and what it is called. . . . Knowledge is of two kinds—one of words, and the other of things. Whoever has no knowledge of the things will not be helped by a knowledge of the words. It is an old proverb: “One cannot speak well of what one does not understand.” . . . But whoever thoroughly understands a matter [the text] will speak wisely and reach the heart, though he may be lacking eloquence and readiness of speech.”

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**“Printed words are dead,  
spoken words are living.”**

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“A knowledge of words or grammar becomes easier when the subject in hand is understood, as Horace also teaches. But when the knowledge of a subject

is wanting, then a knowledge of words is useless. I do not wish to be understood as rejecting grammar, which is necessary. But I say this: If the subject is not studied along with the grammar, one will never become a good preacher. For as some one has said, ‘The preacher’s sermon should be born, not in his mouth, but in his heart.’”

### Logic and rhetoric

Luther commended the use of logic and rhetoric in preaching—with evangelical caution. “Logic instructs and rhetoric moves. The former appeals to the understanding, the latter to the will. . . . Logic does not give us the power to speak on all subjects, but simply is an instrument by which we can speak correctly and methodically about what we already know and understand.”

“One should accustom himself to good, honest, intelligible words, that are in common use and serve to elucidate the subject—a gift that comes from the grace

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

The preacher always wants to deliver the message of God’s Word in such a way that the Holy Spirit is not hindered from penetrating the hearts and minds of the hearers. Using illustrations is one way a preacher might highlight portions of his message. However, illustrations must be employed carefully.

Our Lord used parables, metaphors, simile and other forms of speech to illustrate the message he delivered. Following the example of the Master Teacher, we should not hesitate to use illustrations in our sermons. But keep illustrations in their proper place. An illustration should not be the basis of the message. It should not drive the chain of thought. This should remain the domain of the Word of God. I once heard a sermon whose four parts were four illustrations. Though such a practice is not wrong, in this particular sermon the hearer was given the impression that the four illustrations were parts looking for a text.

Finding good illustrations can be a problem for some of us. I once had a vicar skilled in weaving personal experiences within his sermon. As a result, the message was more personal for his hearers and easier to remember. I knew a senior pastor who had an illustration file. He clipped illustrations from newspaper articles, magazine articles, comic strips and quotes from books that he read. He filed them, and when writing his sermon, he would check to see if he had an illustration that could punctuate his message. Preachers can also reference any number of books of illustrations or even receive regular offerings from the internet.

I believe that the very best source of illustrations is the Bible. When you use an illustration from the Scriptures, you have two things going for you. First, the Holy Spirit works through your biblical reference. Second, biblical illustrations familiarize your hearers with more of the Word of God, in this way helping them to further apply to their lives portions of God’s Word they already know.

Use illustrations. They can add clarity and a penetrating element to your preaching.

*Vilas R. Glaeske*

## A PREACHER'S LOOK AHEAD

The selections from the Old Testament (2nd Sunday after Pentecost through the 10th Sunday after Pentecost) provide some fascinating cuts of Scripture from which to preach. In order, the lessons cover: Moses' encouragement to fix the law on heart and mind, Hosea's recording of God's words concerning his desire for mercy and not sacrifice, Israel's acceptance of the covenant at Sinai, Jeremiah's confession that God's Word burned like fire within him when he tried to keep his mouth shut, Jeremiah's confrontation of the false prophets, Moses' request to see God's glory, Isaiah's promise that God's Word will not return empty, Joel's vision of the day of judgment, and Solomon's request for wisdom.

The Romans readings begin on the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost and occupy the Second Lesson until the 17th Sunday after Pentecost. Especially in the first months, this series of readings offers a weekly focus on the great things God has done for us in justifying us. Whereas the Gospel lessons generally tell the story of our Savior, Paul's letters explain the meaning behind the story.

In the Gospel lesson the Pentecost season settles nicely into a rhythm of lessons from one Gospel—Matthew. The readings focus more on Jesus' teachings than on the events of his life. For the three weeks beginning with the 4th Sunday after Pentecost, Jesus instructs and sends the Twelve on their mission trip. During the last three weeks of July there is a series of readings from Matthew 13, the great Parable chapter.

God's blessings on your Pentecost preaching.

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of God. Many would-be preachers purposely obscure a subject with odd, unusual, and high-flown words, and seek a new style of discourse that is so ambiguous and unintelligible that it can be understood as one pleases."

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**"Logic does not give us the power to speak on all subjects, but simply is an instrument by which we can speak correctly and methodically about what we already know and understand."**

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### Illustrations

For a message to be intelligible, Luther gives counsel on the use and limitations of illustrations as windows into the meaning of the text. History, for example, is a textbook of illustrations.

"History is nothing else than an indication, recollection, and monument of divine works and judgments, showing how God maintains, governs, hinders, advances, punishes, and honors people, according as each one has deserved good or evil. . . . We read not only in the Holy Scriptures, but also in heathen books, how people introduced and held up the examples, words, and works of their ancestors when they wished to accomplish something with the multitude, or to teach, admonish, warn, or terrify."

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**"History is nothing else than an indication, recollection, and monument of divine works and judgments, showing how God maintains, governs, hinders, advances, punishes, and honors people, according as each one has deserved good or evil. . . ."**

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"It is customary to use similes and pictures in order to comprehend and remember doctrine better, for such illustrations are before our eyes daily and cannot but remind us of doctrine. Thus Scriptures picture Christ and his Church as a bridegroom and his bride. . . . But he who does not already believe that Christ is our Savior, through whom we are justified, pure, and holy and with whom we have become one flesh, will not be profited even by such an illustration of doctrine."

"It is fine now and then to add some allegory after the foundation has been faithfully laid and the case conclusively proved. For as a painting is an ornament to a house that has already been built, so an allegory is a light for a speech for a matter that has been already otherwise proven."

"For preaching purposes it is useful to have comparisons and examples on hand. Not only Paul but also the prophets and Christ himself very often used them."

*Prof em Arnold J. Koelpin*

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