

PREACH

the Word

Vol. 9 No. 6

July/August 2006

according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:1)

THE PREACHER, TORN

“Pastor,

... I want you to feel happy and successful in your work. Working with people is so messy and no one is ever happy all at the same time. You can see why some pastors, social workers, police officers, etc, call it quits after a while and work in a hardware store or a greenhouse or a coffee shop.”

– from a 2006 email



John Huss awaits the stake

I don't know if there is a better book than Jeremiah to teach a young man about the ministry of the Word. Some who dismiss it profile Jeremiah as a weak-hearted poet sniffing into his hankie.

In this 52-chapter concrete pier are all the familiar clash-points. The Call. The pastor alone with the Word. The beauty of the New Covenant. Having to watch as the collapse of one's nation approaches. The Lord knoweth them that are his. Nasty truth about the human heart. The man of God: vulnerable, insecure, persecuted, restored. First the cross, then the crown.

The big picture is that Jesus himself experienced in his ministry what Jeremiah dealt with in his. Jeremiah is good medicine for the Lutheran preacher, because God has promised to conform his Christians to the image of his Son.

“Young pastors today just aren't prepared for the flak.”

A MODERN AESOP'S FABLE (EXCEPT IT'S TRUE)

On the 19th Hole the two men were at a table when one straightened up, turned blue, and keeled over. My councilman knelt next to him and attempted CPR. The distressed victim convulsed and, and ... and suddenly threw up on his would-be, well-intentioned rescuer. Long seconds passed. Then mercifully, thankfully, the afflicted man sat up, got to his knees, stood up. Alive and well – think of it! His life had been truly salvaged. Remarkable. A miracle. God is so good!

Meanwhile, back to his life-saver. “Two minutes ago I was quietly enjoying a pleasant episode of life, but now I am covered in another person's vomit.” Moral: If you are going to attempt to help someone, if you are going to engage in the human dilemma, then, friend, you are going to get some on you. “And the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory, after you have suffered a little while, will himself confirm you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (1 Peter 5:11-12).

CONTRITION + FAITH = REPENTANCE

After twenty years in the ministry, these words have proved themselves worth memorizing:

“Now repentance consists properly of these two parts: the one is *contrition*, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin.

“The other is *faith*, which is born of absolution or of the Gospel, and believes that, for Christ's sake, sin is forgiven, comforts the conscience, and delivers it from terrors.

“Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance.”

Augsburg Confession 12

BORN SLAVES

Pastor Phil Hirsch, Manhattan, KS

The un-free will necessitates the proclamation of the hidden God.

The concept of an enslaved will has everything to do with the purpose of this little paper – to *Preach the Word*.

A study of the bondage of the will in Luther could initially seem impertinent. Do we really need to think about sin again? And to such a depth? Can't PTW offer me something more practical? This, here, is the "rock-bottom of the Reformation" (PTW 8.5).

You're a theologian learning the art of the proper separation of Law and Gospel in the school of experience. You know very well that a stilted use of the Law/Gospel rubric sometimes becomes its own legalistic strait-jacket; you know, "Preach a little Law, then a little Gospel and send them home!" Your regular listeners maybe can even time their watches by the Law portion and then the Gospel portions of your sermons.

I'll submit that a re-read of Luther's BW will make you sit up for, among other things, at least one outstanding theme – Luther's *deus absconditus* (God hidden). To consider (and then to proclaim) a hidden God is far more than merely to admit that we don't know the will of God in a particular circumstance. For Luther it meant to admit that even when we see God at his most revealing, he is hidden. And, paradoxically, when God is most hidden (on and under the cross), he is most revealed. Faithful proclamation of the Word of God is far more than an exegetical task. Faithful proclamation is more than some legal demands along with some nice sentences about forgiveness. Faithful proclamation is the very height of the foolishness of God – proclaiming Christ, the revelation of God and the hiddenness of God. Talk about coming again and anew to the Holy of Holies!

To consider (and then to preach) the hidden God means that we will always "make room for faith" and will, as a consequence, flee from the temptation to delve into a proclamation that makes all things make sense ("See, you sinned. See, you have a Savior" – as if such a message is some kind of logical, predictable, controllable mere mass of information about God). Consideration and proclamation of the hidden God safeguards your preaching from the temptation to delve into a Theology of Glory which claims to reveal what God has not promised to reveal. It means sticking to the task at hand – proclaiming Christ crucified and risen – the strange, foolish and final Word of God to the sinner.

So, careful text work, yes! Finding the Law that a specific text teaches in the color of that text, yes! Finding the sweet Gospel that a specific text teaches in the color of that text, yes! But coming face to face again with Luther's (Scripture's) hidden God of the BW – this will mean again that the whole enterprise is utterly and always out of the control of the exegete/preacher and properly in the *where and when he wills* of the Holy Spirit.



It means to be refreshed again in the sure knowledge that one's preaching should not have specific aims or goals other than faithfulness to the Lord of the Church. I certainly must not begin to quantify outcomes. This means that the ultimate compliment is simply the face of a humble sinner, listening to the Word of his God, which we believe actually presents Christ to him in a way that the prophets wished could have been their experience.

Read BW again.* Invite Prof. Koelpin to present it for your conference. Marvel again at the un-free will that is man's. Get on your knees before our Holy God and marvel at his revelation in his hiddenness ... and his hiding in his revelation. And proclaim, yes, *merely proclaim* Christ crucified. Preach the Word.

* [If you have been thwarted by *Bondage of the Will*, join the club. But take heart. Here's a secret: *Luther's Works*, volume 33, has 295 pages. Try opening up the book to page 246 and start your reading there. It's part VI of the outline. When you get to the end of the book, start from the beginning. The rest will be easier to understand. Someone suggested this and it worked for me. –ed.]

THEME OR TOPIC?

A strong Seminary emphasis by our homiletics professors regarded the heading of your sermon. "Make it a theme, not merely a topic!" That preaching commandment elicited groans then – and still does. Really, who cares? And aren't the unchurched looking for spiritual *topics*, anyway?

Let's say that you're going to preach on Psalm 34:4-7. Here angels make their first appearance in the Psalms. No doubt you could entitle your sermon "Angels." Further, there are lots of unchurched people interested in angels. As a Lutheran preacher, however, your duty goes beyond the fact that angels are interesting. *You need to identify the clash-point*. "A sermon is not just information, it is *conflict*" ("Preaching through Antithesis," PTW 9.4). God designed the powerful and wise angels to serve his *Christians* on a spiritual killing-field, vs. the Enemy, rugged and relentless.

Theme or topic? Picture a small lake. Are we going to water-ski around the lake today, or are we boating straight to a certain spot, where we'll drop over the side to scuba-dive down deep?

Theme or topic? Pencil out a rough theme by making God the subject of the sentence. What is God doing in this text? It's okay if you decide to go with a different final theme – or if you don't plan on announcing your theme. Since you, preacher, need a straight attack route, let's agree that this is probably a necessary piece of concentration and planning. Know your theme in your head.

Finally, remember that there is a vast amount of information you can pass on about God which could be preached in a Mormon church or Jewish synagogue. Everybody talks about God; you and I need to be introducing *Jesus*, exposing the cross in the text ... or finding something else to do for a living.

BROTHER MARTIN ON PSALM 118:21



I thank Thee that thou has humbled me and become my salvation.

“Are you not a wonderful and delightful God, to govern us so amazingly and so kindly? You exalt us when you humble us. You make us righteous when you make us sinners. You lead us to heaven when you cast us into hell. You give us life when you permit us to be killed.

You comfort us when you cause us to mourn. You make us rejoice when you permit us to weep. You make us sing when you cause us to cry. You make us strong when we suffer. You make us wise when you make fools of us. You make us rich when you send us poverty. You make us masters when you permit us to serve.

“Innumerable are the wonders included in this verse, and all Christendom together praises God for them in these few short words ...”

[Note: in our NIVs verse 21 says *answered* instead of *humbled*. Lexicon has both these meanings. —ed.]

LUTHER ON VOCATION

“The sun shines in exactly the same way on all: the peasant and the king, the thorn and the rose, the pig in the alley and the lovely girl. They all receive alike of the sun’s light and warmth. But the works and actions which such diverse creatures carry on in the sunlight are widely different, and must be so. Likewise, all people are alike before Christ, who, like the sun, gives himself alike to all. All receive the body and blood of Christ in the Lord’s Supper; all hear the same Gospel.

“As for the reality which makes us Christians, there is not the slightest difference between man and woman, young and old, learned and unlearned, great saint and frail character. The differences among persons all lie in ... a capacity or a work, and these activities are directed ‘downward’ to the service of others. Before God in heaven there are no differences; all are simply human beings and sinners to whom Christ is given, just like the sun that sheds its light on all without discrimination.”

Gustaf Wingren (*Luther on Vocation*, p 174)

PLAYING A SONG WHILE AVOIDING SOME KEYS

I tighten up when the text makes reference to

- the doctrine of fellowship
- money
- the word *submit*
- fear of God

Unless forced, I probably will avoid the word

- hate
- divorce
- circumcision
- homosexuality

THREE FROM WALTHER

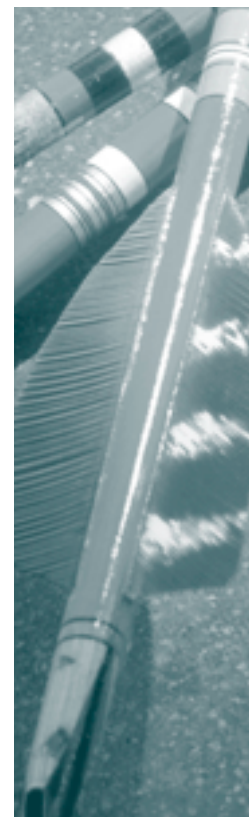
- 1 “The Lord Christ does not intend to walk about in the world in visible, human form, proclaiming to men the forgiveness of their sins, but he has commanded his Christians to do this. Yea, he has ordained a peculiar office, the incumbents of which have nothing else to do than to keep on saying to men what Christ said to the paralytic” (Mt 9:8). (176)
- 2 “Observe that the Gospel bestows the faith which it demands” (Ac 16:31). (16)
- 3 “Worldly men and all false Christians cannot but attack those who teach a faith and doctrine different from theirs and to regard them as disturbers of the peace, as peace-hating, quarrelsome, and malicious men. These unfortunate people have no idea of the blindness which enshrouds them; they do not know how gladly the boldest champions of Christ would have kept peace with all men, how much they would have preferred to keep silent, how hard it was for their flesh and blood to come out in public and become targets for the hatred, enmity, vilification, scorn and persecution of men. However, they could not but confess the truth and at the same time oppose error. Their conscience constrained them to do this because such conduct was required of them by the Word of God.” (266)

THIS TEXT, THIS AUDIENCE, THIS DAY

The preacher knows that his text has more buried in it than can be mined and presented in one sermon. Your goal is ... ?

- to help the listener understand who God is (appropriation)
- to move the listener to do what God wants (application)
- to lead the listener to repent (change mind)
 - about his sin
 - about his Savior
- other (explain)

Narrow the focus like the tip of an arrowhead. The question is: “What does the Holy Spirit intend to accomplish through this Word of God in the hearts and lives of his people on this occasion?” Balge/Gerlach (*The Sermon*, p 26)



YOU CAN PRINT THAT

1 “Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all sentences short, or avoid all detail or treat all subjects only in outline, but that every word tell. Many expressions in common use violate this principle.” [Let’s start by eradicating “as well” from our speech; it has become a spreading mildew in American English. –ed.]

Strunk/White (*The Elements of Style*)

2. “Christ’s death and resurrection together are the turning point of all history. That is to say: history, if it has any meaning at all, hinges on this once-for-all event, this utterly unique event which is within history and yet transcends history. Without this event, history with all its singular incidents would be quite literally what some cynic has called it: ‘just one damned thing after the other.’ Meaninglessness and absurdity would be the only fit description for everything historical.

“This is in fact the sober conclusion that thoughtful and perceptive men ... have often reached as they try in vain to make sense out of the grotesque and gruesome patterns that history seems to weave; they observe how often in human affairs sound reason is undone by idiocy, nobility and goodness crushed by evil, innocence mangled by suffering, ravaged by vice, or destroyed by the irrational fury of nature’s unleashed power.”

Richard Jungkuntz (*The Gospel of Baptism*, p 50)

3 “The preacher-pastor labors to make the service of worship and the moments of preaching a piece of the same companionship which he shares week-round with his people in Christ.... The house-going preacher is not dismayed by the panorama of pain which his parish unfolds before his eyes, for he knows it is God’s opportunity....”

Richard Caemmerer (*Preaching for the Church*, p 280)

PREACHING DURING WAR

Father, help us to believe that this is still your world. You had the first word, and you will have the last. We call to you this day on behalf of our soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq.



Help them with their loneliness; help them with their fear. Those who are Christians, remind of their citizenship in heaven. Those who are not, let this land of danger and death move them to seek out knowledge of your Son.

For the innocent men, women, and children of Iraq and Afghanistan, we pray that you protect them from bullets and bombs and bad men. Give them courage to bear this season of suffering, to stand up for their freedom, to rid their neighborhoods of tyrants. Raise up honest leaders to lead a new government, rooted in the freedom and dignity of the individual. Especially send plenty of the freedom and dignity which come from hearing the Gospel of forgiveness – forgiveness free and forgiveness full – in Jesus, your Son, our Savior, whose flesh and blood knew violence and death, but who lives again, and today is giving still the peace the world cannot give.

Amen, absolutely, Father, let it be so.



THAT GREAT SHEPHERD OF THE SHEEP

Forget not, preacher: the Lord Jesus shares your flesh and blood. If one of his pastors is feeling it, ascended Jesus is feeling it, too.

Pastor Tom Jeske
Omaha, Nebraska

As the ninth year of Preach the Word comes to a close, so does the two-year editorship of Pastor Thomas Jeske. For his faithful work and for the unique perspective he brings to the felicitous burden of preaching, we owe him a debt of gratitude. May a double-portion of his spirit fall to the editor of the tenth volume: Pastor Daron Lindemann. Pastor Lindemann serves Grace Church in Milwaukee. With this issue, I also say farewell as the managing editor. I have no doubt that during the past decade I have been the greatest beneficiary of my brothers’ contributions in PTW. Thanks be to God!

Wayne Laitinen



Preach the Word is published bimonthly by the WELS Commission on Worship
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