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# Know Thy Hearer!

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## Introduction

In his book, *Pastoral Theology*, John H.C. Fritz declares, “It is to be borne in mind that the *ultimate purpose* of all preaching should be to influence the heart of the hearer in the direction of true faith and a godly life.”<sup>1</sup> It stands to reason that, if the preacher is to achieve this ultimate purpose, he will need to know his hearers.

This seminar paper will support the thesis that in order to influence the heart of the hearer in the direction of true faith and a godly life, the preacher will need to know his hearers. This thesis will be supported through an exploration of four questions. The first question is “Why does the preacher need to know his hearers?” Under this section there will be a discussion of the preacher’s call, the idea that sermons are to be appropriate to the hearers, preaching as pastoral care, the hearers as participants in the preaching task, the image of the preacher, and ethos.

The second question supporting this thesis is, “What does the preacher need to know about his hearers?” This section will include discussions of the hearers’ spiritual condition and physical make-up, the various generations to which hearers belong, modernism and postmodernism, communication cultures, and the importance of keeping abreast of current events.

The third question to be discussed in support of this thesis is, “How shall the preacher get to know his hearers?” This section will include a discussion of home visits, study groups, questionnaires, the use of imagination, conversations with one’s spouse, and preaching the whole counsel of God.

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<sup>1</sup> John H.C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 78.

The final question discussed for this thesis is, “What are the elements of a sermon that influence the heart of the hearer in the direction of true faith and living a godly life?” Under this section we will discuss sermon content, introductions and conclusions, sermon style, the use of technology, visual aids, and sermon delivery.

Before commencing on a discussion of the questions just mentioned, the terms “hearers” and “heart” need to be defined. The author realizes that, at any given service, the hearers of the sermon will be both believers and unbelievers. However, when it comes to the preaching task and the discussion of the hearers in this essay, the hearers will be approached as though all were baptized Christians who have been absolved and desire to receive the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner. When this paper uses the term “heart” the word is being defined as “The central core of the individual’s being and personality: the deep-seated element of a person that provides both the energy and the drive for all of the faculties. It denotes the governing center of life.”<sup>2</sup>

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are taken from *The Holy Bible: The English Standard Version*. All citations from the Lutheran Confessions are taken from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert.

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<sup>2</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, “Preaching to the Heart.” *Preaching* 18, no. 5 (March - April 2003): 9.

**Question One:  
Why Does the Preacher Need to Know His Hearers?**

The question “Why does the preacher need to know his hearers?” has several answers. Each answer supports the thesis that in order to influence the heart of the hearer in the direction of true faith and a godly life, the preacher will need to know his hearers.

***The Call***

One of the most basic answers to the question we are considering is that the preacher is called to preach. According to Article XIV of the *Augsburg Confession*, no one should preach or teach publicly without a proper call. From the Scriptures we learn two important elements concerning this call. The first is that the call comes from God. This can be seen in passages such as Ephesians 4:11: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,” and 1 Corinthians 12:28: “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.” The second element is that the call comes mediately through the local congregation. This can be seen in the practice of the early church. After the mission work on Crete resulted in congregations being established, Paul instructed Titus to ordain elders in every city (Titus 1:5). In Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas are given the duty of ordaining elders in the congregations which came into existence following Paul’s first missionary journey. From this

we learn that the local congregation has a right and duty to establish the preaching ministry in its midst.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the preacher's call comes from God mediately through the congregation leads to the conclusion that there is a special relationship between the preacher and the hearers. Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession*, and the rite of ordination as it appears in the *Lutheran Worship Agenda* support this conclusion.

According to Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession*, the church is an assembly of believers in Jesus Christ who are gathered around the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is the called preacher who preaches the gospel and administers the sacraments. Through these means the pastor does God's work; he feeds and nurtures God's people who have been entrusted to him by the Holy Spirit, as Acts 20:28 informs us: "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."<sup>4</sup> Given this charge, we conclude that the special relationship between the preacher and hearers is one of shepherd and sheep in which the preacher tends the flock of God through the Word of God and the Sacraments.

The rite of ordination as it appears in the *Lutheran Worship Agenda* addresses the special relationship between the preacher and his hearers. Under the section entitled "The Institution of the Office of the Public Ministry" we find this passage:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord,"

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<sup>3</sup> Albert H. Schwermann, "The Doctrine of the Call," in *The Pastor at Work* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 87.

<sup>4</sup> Richard R. Caemmerer, "The Pastor in the Pulpit," in *The Pastor at Work* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 125.

he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-17)<sup>5</sup>

The preacher is instructed to “feed” Jesus’ lambs and sheep. In his work *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*, Richard C.H. Lenski notes that the preacher “feeds” Jesus’ lambs and sheep as he provides them with the spiritual nourishment of God’s Word, teaches them all that Jesus has commanded, and governs them by the gospel.<sup>6</sup> In his comments on the phrase “take care of my sheep,” Lenski notes that the preacher is being instructed to do the work of the shepherd and care for the whole flock of sheep, both young and old.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the preacher’s work as shepherd, the rite of ordination provides a second insight into the relationship between the preacher and his hearers. In the section entitled “The Responsibilities of the Office of the Public Ministry” we find this passage:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:1-5)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Lutheran Worship Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 209.

<sup>6</sup> Richard H.C. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 1422.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1423.

<sup>8</sup> *Lutheran Worship Agenda*, 210.

From this passage we learn that the preacher has the responsibility of correcting, rebuking, and encouraging his hearers. In his comments on these words, J.N.D. Kelly writes that Paul is instructing the preacher to correct error by reasoned argument, offer a rebuke when censure is called for, and offer encouragement by exhorting the hearers to repentance and perseverance.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly there is a special relationship between the preacher and his hearers. It is one of shepherd to sheep in which the preacher cares for God's flock through the Word of God and the Sacraments. In order to do that work effectively, the preacher will need to know his hearers so that he may know their condition, determine what kind of spiritual nourishment they need, and properly apply the Word of God to the hearers' lives via correction, rebuke, encouragement, and instruction.

### ***Sermons Are to Be Appropriate to the Hearers***

A second answer to the question "Why does the preacher need to know his hearers?" is that sermons are to be appropriate to the hearers. As Richard Lischer states, "The sermon is the Word of God for a particular time, place, and people."<sup>10</sup> Gregory the Great (540 A. D. - 604 A.D.) recognized the importance of this point long before Lischer made it. In his work, *The Book of Pastoral Rule* (c. 591 A.D.) Gregory, under the rubric of "one doctrine: many exhortations," lists thirty-six pairs of opposite characters (e.g. men and women, the poor and rich, the slothful and the hasty), and then proceeds with an address which is appropriate to each

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<sup>9</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), 206.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1992), 60.

pairing. This section of the *Pastoral Rule* is thus a series of sermon helps designed, in Gregory's words, "To suit all and each for their several needs."<sup>11</sup> Gregory notes:

Since, then, we have shown what manner of man the pastor ought to be, let us now set forth after what manner he should teach. For, as long as before us Gregory Nazianzen of reverend memory has taught, one and the same exhortation does not suit all, inasmuch as neither are all bound together by similarity of character. For the things that profit some often hurt others; . . . Therefore according to the quality of the hearers ought the discourse of teachers to be fashioned, so as to suit all and each for their several needs, and yet never deviate from the art of common edification. For what are the intent minds of hearers but, so to speak, a kind of tight tensions of strings in a harp, which the skillful player, that he may produce a tune not at variance with itself, strikes variously? And for this reason the strings render back a constant modulation, that they are struck indeed with one quill, but not with one kind of stroke. Whence every teacher also, that he may edify all in the one virtue of charity, ought to touch the hearts of his hearers out of one doctrine, but not with one and the same exhortation.<sup>12</sup>

A modern day example of what Gregory is saying takes place when one compares two different congregations. Consider the differences between St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Luzerne, Iowa (hereafter Luzerne) and St. Paul's Lutheran Chapel, Iowa City, Iowa (hereafter Iowa City).<sup>13</sup> Luzerne is a rural town. The average Sunday attendance is eighty. The median age is forty-three years old. There is no viable Sunday school or youth group. Most of the members are involved in the agriculture industry. While most members have a high school education, few have a four-year college degree and some have only an eighth grade education. Primary concerns are health, family, town affairs, and agricultural markets.

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<sup>11</sup> Gregory the Great, "The Book of Pastoral Rule, Part III, 1-3, 8," in *Theories of Preaching: Selected Readings in the Homiletical Tradition*, ed. Richard Lischer (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1987), 261.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>13</sup> The author served as pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Luzerne, Iowa from December of 1996 to July of 2001. The author has served as campus pastor at St. Paul's Lutheran Chapel, Iowa City, Iowa from July of 2001 to the present.

Iowa City is a fulltime campus ministry located on the eastern edge of the University of Iowa campus. The average Sunday attendance is sixty-five. The median age is twenty. There is no viable youth program, although a small Sunday school, composed predominant of the pastor's children, does exist. Primary concerns of the hearers' are classes, exams, relationships, job options, and world affairs. Those gathered to hear the sermon are highly educated. Most have a high school education, most are working on or have completed a bachelor's degree, and several have masters' and doctoral degrees. Postmodern ideals are prevalent.

Clearly two such different congregations would not be served by the same sermon. Each would need a sermon appropriate to the hearers.

The idea that hearers need sermons that are appropriate to them infers that sermons need to be timely. In his *Pastoral Theology*, C.F.W. Walther supports this notion when he says that a requirement of public preaching is that it be timely.<sup>14</sup> An example of timeliness can be seen in the sermons of Martin Luther. In his sermons, Luther addressed the issues of the pope, monasticism, and self-chosen works. These topics were appropriate for his time. Today's hearers are dealing with different issues such as health care, war, and Social Security. A preacher who knows his hearers will take into account the important issues which affect his hearers' lives, so that he may apply the Word of God to his hearers in a timely way.<sup>15</sup>

To ensure a timely sermon, the preacher will want to ask himself three very important questions as he begins his sermon preparation. The first question is "Who will hear the sermon?" This question is to be answered with specifics that pertain to the hearers' occupations, spiritual maturity, age, income, etc. The next question is "When will this sermon be heard?"

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<sup>14</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, trans. John M. Drickamer (New Haven: Lutheran News Inc., 1995), 60.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

Every preacher knows that the tenor of an 8:00 A.M. service of Holy Communion is far different from that of a 7:30 PM Vespers service. The final question to be asked is “Where will this sermon be heard?” Sermons preached in the sanctuary are different than those preached at an outdoor service.<sup>16</sup>

For examples of sermons that are appropriate and timely to the hearers, please consult Appendix A and Appendix A1, which contain two sermons on Philippians 4:4-7. One was preached at Luzerne, the other at Iowa City.

### ***Preaching As Pastoral Care***

A fourth answer to the question “Why does the preacher need to know his hearers?” is preaching as pastoral care. Pastoral care is often viewed as a one-on-one ministry, and to a great extent it is just that. However, in the weekly sermon the pastor applies the Word of God to a set need of the congregation, which, even though it is a corporate body, is made up of individual hearers. Each individual hearer will listen to the message and apply it to his or her own life as the Holy Spirit sees fit, thus making the weekly sermon the highlight of weekly pastoral care.<sup>17</sup>

The notion of preaching as pastoral care is widely supported. In his *Pastoral Theology*, C.F.W. Walther notes that the preacher may very well proclaim God’s Word in all truth and purity. He may very well proclaim that word for the sake of setting forth doctrine, reproof, correction, comfort, and instruction in righteousness, and still miss the mark because he has failed to take into account the special needs of his listeners. Public preaching is a personal business in that the Word of God is applied to a specific group of people at a specific time and in

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<sup>16</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 92-93.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-134.

a specific place, such that, when a preacher examines a text for preaching, he does so with his congregation's needs in mind.<sup>18</sup>

Another supporter of preaching as pastoral care is Harry Emerson Fosdick. In his article "Personal Counsel and Preaching," Fosdick encourages the preacher to know his hearers so that he can address the hearers' problems. He notes that people come to church with their sins, shames, vices, anxieties, and every difficulty and problem that humans face in the forefront of their minds. They come looking for answers and solutions to these problems. He further declares that it is the "main business" of the sermon to address these issues head on. Fosdick asserts that preaching is essentially pastoral care and that, even though the sermon is preached to a congregation, it is nevertheless a personal consultation with each listener.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Hearers Are Participants in the Preaching Task***

A fifth answer to the question "Why does the preacher need to know his hearers?" is that the hearers are participants in the preaching task. Martin Luther states this idea plainly in his 1544 sermon for the dedication of the Castle Church at Torgau. Luther writes:

For when I preach, when we come together as a congregation, this is not my word or my doing; but is done for the sake of all of you and for the sake of the whole church. It is only that it is necessary that there be one who speaks and is the spokesman by the commission and consent of others, who, by reason of the fact that they listen to the preaching, all accept and confess the Word and thus also teach others.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>19</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Personal Counsel and Preaching," in *Theories of Preaching: Selected Readings in the Homiletical Tradition*, ed. Richard Lischer (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1987), 291-297.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, "Sermon at the Dedication of the Castle Church, Torgau, 1544," in *Luther's Works American Edition Volume 51 Sermons I*, ed. and trans. John W. Doberstein, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg Press, 1959), 343.

Richard R. Caemmerer is in agreement with Luther when he reminds us that preaching is not a monologue. Rather, it is a conversation between the Word of God, the preacher, and the hearer, such that when the preacher speaks he does so with his ear pointed to the heart of his hearers so that he can meet their reactions, needs, and answer their questions. When done well, preaching becomes “a person to person exchange of insight, diagnosis, remedy, and encouragement.”<sup>21</sup>

In order to accomplish the conversation that Caemmerer promotes, the hearers will need to be involved not just in the delivery of the sermon, but also in its preparation. As the preacher begins sermon study, he has two points of reference and the distance between them. One point is the biblical text, including its historical, theological, and literary contexts. The other point is the hearers, including their personal, domestic, social, political, and economic contexts. One of the goals of sermon study is to bridge the gap between the two so that the hearers might hear what the text says in a fresh, appropriate, and indigenous way.<sup>22</sup> Given this, when the preacher goes to the Scriptures to begin his sermon study he takes with him the questions, needs, and concerns of the hearers. He does this because the word he will deliver to them will be a word for them and not for someone else. Once the preacher arrives at the Scriptures with his hearers in tow, he will find that the Scriptures speak to him, and to his hearers, in a way that is very specific.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that the hearers are active participants in the preaching task implies at least three points, some of which have already been touched upon. The first is that the sermon will be appropriate to the assembled hearers. Sermons are appropriate to one time and one place. Therefore, to construct a sermon that connects with the hearers requires a thorough knowledge of

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<sup>21</sup> Caemmerer, “The Pastor in the Pulpit,” 126.

<sup>22</sup> Craddock, *Preaching*, 85.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1989), 55.

and a listening to the congregation. Next, since the hearers are participants, sermons should proceed in a way in which the hearers are given something to think, feel, decide, and do during the sermon. Lastly, preachers who view their hearers as participants in the sermon will construct sermons that speak for the hearers as well as to the hearers. This point rests on the idea that the Bible is the church's book. Therefore, when the preacher proclaims a biblical text he is most certainly speaking to the assembled congregation, but he is also saying to the world what it is that the church desires to say. Hence, he speaks for the church in such a way that the hearers say, "Yes, that is my message; that is what I have wanted to say."<sup>24</sup>

### *Images of the Preacher*

A sixth answer to the question "Why does the preacher need to know his hearers?" is embodied in the images of the preacher. In particular, two images of the preacher highlight the importance of the preacher knowing his hearers. The first is the image of the preacher as pastor. Implicit in this image is the preacher's message touching and answering the personal concerns of his hearers. The goal of such preaching is to empower the hearers to make a change for the good, make sense out of their lives, and live in a more responsible way. In order to achieve such goals, the preacher, as pastor, will need to identify the hearers' problem and then turn to the Bible as a resource to help the hearers resolve the problem. This therapeutic approach to preaching requires the preacher to have a relationship with his hearers such that he can employ elements of style, personality, character, and previous experiences into his sermon in an effort to bring about the aforementioned goals.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Craddock, *Preaching*, 25-27.

<sup>25</sup> Long, 31-32.

A second image of the preacher, which underscores the importance of him knowing his hearers, is that of the preacher as witness. When one understands the preacher as a witness, it becomes evident that knowledge of the hearers is crucial. The congregation sends the preacher, as witness, to the Scriptures, on their behalf. The result is that the church goes to the Scripture by means of the preacher. As the congregational representative, the preacher searches, studies, and listens to the Scriptures for the congregation. As he does this, the preacher keeps the questions and needs of his hearers in the forefront of his heart and mind.<sup>26</sup> He also carries with him the views, thoughts, feelings, and theological convictions of his hearers.<sup>27</sup>

The images of the preacher as a pastor and witness are wholly consistent with what was said concerning the preacher's call. As was previously noted, the preacher's call comes from God mediately through the congregation. The preacher is the pastor, the called shepherd, who is sent from God. He is not a hired hand. The hired hand thinks of himself first and the sheep second. The pastor, the shepherd, thinks only of the sheep. He puts them first and he knows them well so that he might speak the Word of God to them. Through that word the sheep hear the voice of their Good Shepherd, Jesus, who forgives them, leads them and guides them.<sup>28</sup> In addition to this, both preacher and hearers are members of the priesthood of all believers. Every member of the priesthood has priestly privilege and power to confess Christ to others, teach the Word of God, reprove sin and error, admonish and comfort, and pray for his or her fellow Christians. The preacher, however, is the one called by God through the congregation from the midst of the priesthood to the distinct office of the public ministry. In that office the preacher

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>28</sup> Oswald C. J. Hoffmann, "The Pastor: Preacher and Teacher," in *Reflections on the Pastoral Ministry: Essays in Memory of The Rev. Dr. Carl A. Heckmann*, ed. James R. Haner (Austin: Nortex Press, 1998), 50.

performs the priestly duties publicly on behalf of the priesthood.<sup>29</sup> This being the case, the preacher is not some visitor from another planet or land. He is rather one who comes from the hearers so that he might speak God's Word to the hearers, not as one who is better than they are, but as one who knows them, their hearts, their lives, their joys, and their sorrows. He knows all of that because he is one of them; he is their witness.

### *Ethos*

Ethos is a seventh important answer to the question under examination. Ethos is the ethics and character of the speaker, and is a crucial element of preaching because of the relationship between preacher and hearers. If the hearers doubt the integrity of the preacher, if they do not trust him, chances are they will have trouble listening to him, no matter what he says. If, on the other hand, the hearers sense that the preacher believes what he is saying, loves them, cares for them, and stands with them, chances are they will listen much more intently to his sermons. Ethos is about nurturing the relationship between preacher and hearers.<sup>30</sup> Ethos is made known to the congregation through the sermon itself, but it is also made known through the preacher's dealings with the hearers on a day-to-day basis.

### *Conclusion to Question One*

The seven points that we discussed in this section can be boiled down to a common statement: The preacher will need to know his hearers so that he can effectively carry out his divine call to speak the Word of God into the heart of the hearers so that the hearers' hearts are influenced toward true faith and a godly life. As the preacher seeks to know his hearers and

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<sup>29</sup> Schwermann, 86-87.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 28.

influence their hearts, may he be guided by these words of Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2:

“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

**Question Two:  
What Does the Preacher Need to Know About His Hearers?**

Having established that the preacher will need to know his hearers, a new question arises: What does the preacher need to know about his hearers? Answering this question is essential for any preacher who wishes to influence the hearts of his hearers toward true faith and godly living. The simple answer to this question is that the preacher will want to know as much as he can about his hearers. However, given that the hearers are complex people, they are not easily described in any one way, and given the limited scope of this paper, it would be impossible to give a complete treatment of every aspect of the hearer. Therefore, this paper will limit itself to brief discussions of six key factors which influence and in part define the hearers. These factors include spiritual condition, physical make-up, the various generations to which the hearers belong, modernism, postmodernism, and communication cultures. In the following subsections, each of these factors will be briefly described as illustrative, but not comprehensive, of what a preacher can know about his hearers. Of course, hearers are individuals. Therefore some hearers will be more influenced by the factors mentioned, others less. Nevertheless, a helpful picture of what a preacher can know about his hearers in a broad and generalized way will emerge.

***Spiritual Condition***

First and foremost the preacher will want to be aware of his hearers' spiritual condition. Much can be said about the hearers' spiritual condition, and to be sure, it changes with the ups and downs of life. In general, however, hearers do have a constant spiritual condition, which St. Paul describes in a very practical way in Romans 7:15-23:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. [16] Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. [17] So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. [18] For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. [19] For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. [20] Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. [21] So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. [22] For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, [23] but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

In his *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, 1522, Martin Luther comments on these verses and describes our spiritual condition. Luther writes:

This point of view will help you to understand chapter 7[:9f], where Paul depicts himself as still a sinner; and yet, in chapter 8[:1], declares that no charge is held against those who are 'in Christ,' because of the spirit and the (still incomplete) gifts. Insofar as our flesh is not yet killed, we are still sinners. Nevertheless insofar as we believe in Christ, and begin to receive the spirit, God shows us favor and good will. He does this to the extent that He pays no regard to our remaining sins, and does not judge them; rather He deals with us according to the faith we have in Christ until sin is killed.<sup>31</sup>

Each Christian has a double nature; he has an old Adam, who is under the law and wants to engage in disobedience against God, and a new Adam, who is under the gospel and desires to please God.<sup>32</sup> We Christians are simultaneously saints and sinners. Practically speaking, this dual nature informs the preacher that he will need to address both natures through the proper application of law and gospel. Both law and gospel are applied to the hearer so that the old Adam may be put down and the new Adam lifted up to love and serve God.

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<sup>31</sup> Martin Luther, "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, 1522," in *Martin Luther Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 23.

<sup>32</sup> Edward W. A. Koehler, *Summary of Christian Doctrine* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1939), 197.

### ***Physical Make-Up***

In addition to the spiritual condition of his hearers, the preacher will also want to be familiar with his hearers' physical make-up. Hearers are more than just sets of ears. Hearers are composed of all those parts that are mentioned in Martin Luther's explanation to the first article of the Apostles' Creed in the *Small Catechism*: "...body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties." This listing of parts reminds the preacher that his hearers are multi-sensual beings.

The preacher will also want to be aware that each hearer has a two-hemisphere brain, and each hemisphere concerns itself with different styles of learning and communication. For example, the right hemisphere of the brain is more holistic, artistic, symbolic, intuitive and creative. The left hemisphere of the brain is more logical, mathematical, linear, sequential, intellectual and analytical.<sup>33</sup>

The preacher who takes into account the fact that his hearers are multi-sensual and have two-hemisphere brains will deduce that a sermon which appeals only to the ears will not have the same impact as a sermon that appeals to the ears, the eyes, the hands, the nose, and the feet. He will also realize that a sermon which appeals only to left hemisphere logic will not have the same impact as one that appeals to left hemisphere logic as well as right hemisphere creativity. Given this, the preacher will want to construct a sermon that appeals to as many of the hearers' senses as possible as well as to both hemispheres of the brain. Such an appeal can be made through the use of a well organized, logical presentation that is rich in picture language, visual aids, dramas, illustrations, and stories. Many of these elements will be addressed in the section of this paper

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<sup>33</sup> Richard A. Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching In A Post-Literate Age* (Lima: CSS Publishing Co. Inc., 1993), 27.

entitled, "What are the elements of a sermon that influences the heart of the hearer in the direction of true faith and living a godly life?"

### ***The Various Generations to Which the Hearers Belong***

The spiritual and physical conditions just discussed are present in all people, irrespective of the generation to which they belong. Nevertheless, each generation has its own unique characteristics that shape the hearers within those generations. Therefore, the preacher who wishes to influence his hearers will be aware that on any given Sunday he may be facing four different generations of hearers. These generations can be classified as Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials.

Traditionalists were born between 1900-1945. The events through which this generation lived have helped to shape them. For example, many Traditionalists have lived through both the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression. The experience of boom and bust has taught this generation to value saving instead of extravagance. Their tendency to save is made evident when one considers that, even though this was the first generation to receive allowances for good behavior as opposed to labor, they were known to put three fourths of their money into school supplies, church boxes, and savings.<sup>34</sup> This group knows the value and power of working together for the common good. They fought in the great World Wars and won them both. They know what it is like to engage in rationing so that no one goes without.<sup>35</sup>

Traditionalists have respect for authority. Perhaps their respect for authority is due to the fact that the government provided them with numerous advantages. Consider what has come to

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<sup>34</sup> William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future 1584-2069* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 267.

<sup>35</sup> Diane Swanbrow, "The Millennials," *LSA Magazine*, (spring 2004): 18-19.

be in their time: The first White House Conference on Children (1909), the creation of the U.S. Children's Bureau (1912) and the first federal child labor law (1916). As they grew older, there was the first White House Conference on Aging (1961), the first federal age discrimination law (1967) and the creation of the National Institute on Aging (1974). In 1965, they benefited from the creation of Medicare.<sup>36</sup> Given all of this it is no surprise that traditionalists are characterized as being patriotic, loyal, and prudent.<sup>37</sup>

The accomplishments of the Traditionalists show that they have excelled in areas that are typically spoken of as being left brained. For example, as of 1991, Traditionalists had won ninety-one Nobel Prizes, that is roughly two-thirds of all those awarded to Americans, and they have dominated the areas of physics, chemistry, medicine and economics.<sup>38</sup>

Traditionalists born in the later half of this time period, approximately 1925-1945, are in many ways similar to those born in the earlier half. For example, many of them recognize the need to work for the good of all, and thus many have entered into the helping professions of teaching, medicine, ministry, and government. Yet those born in the later half of this generation are also different from those born earlier. For example, every major figure in the civil rights movement came from the 1925-1945 half of this generation, including Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Cesar Chavez.<sup>39</sup> Those born in the latter half have also been less successful at developing a sense of national or personal direction. They are concerned about the lack of connectedness they see in American life.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Strauss and Howe, 265-268.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 292.

After the Traditionalists come the Baby Boomers. These people were born between 1946 and 1964. Baby Boomers are described as being idealistic, competitive, and revolutionary. No doubt this description is due in large part to the events which define them. These events include the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the first moon landing, women's rights, civil rights, and the Vietnam War.<sup>41</sup>

In many respects, Baby Boomers differ from their Traditionalist parents. They are the first television generation. They tend to be non-authoritative and are known to question authority. They favor spiritualism over science, gratification over patience, negativism over positivism, fractiousness over conformity, rage over friendliness, and self over community.<sup>42</sup> Whereas their parents worked together for the common good, Boomers are "The Me Generation." This focus on self has led Boomers to make plans and judgments according to internalized standards. They exalt individual conscience over duty to community, so much so that they have difficulty in achieving consensus and mobilizing as a unit.<sup>43</sup> The focus on self over community can be seen in the Vietnam War through the phenomena of draft dodging and conscientious objection.

Spiritually speaking, during the 1980s the Boomers left mainline churches for the supposed greener pastures of evangelical churches and the New Age movement. In the 1980s boomer church attendance rose by 30 percent. The fastest growing church at that time was the Assembly of God and the number of charismatic Roman Catholics quadrupled.<sup>44</sup>

The generation to follow the Baby Boomers is Generation X. Members of Generation X were born between 1965 and 1980. Defining moments for this group include the end of the Cold

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<sup>41</sup> Swanbrow, 18-19.

<sup>42</sup> Strauss and Howe, 302.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 307.

War, the Clinton - Lewinsky scandal, and technological innovation such as VCRs, computers, and video games.<sup>45</sup>

Gen Xers, as they are sometimes called, are serious about life. They have inherited many quality of life issues, such as social security and global warming, which makes them give due consideration to decisions that will affect their present and future.<sup>46</sup> They also tend to be stressed-out. School, family, peer pressure, sexuality, techno-stress, finances, crime, and even political correctness contribute to their stress-filled lives.<sup>47</sup> In addition to this, Gen Xers are self-reliant. One indicator of this concerns religious faith; Gen Xers believe that the individual alone can make sense of religion without the aid of others.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps this is why Generation X is so highly spiritual. However, being highly spiritual does not mean they are all Christians. Rather it means they desire to have some kind of spiritual understanding of daily life.<sup>49</sup>

Members of Generation X place a high value on community. The desire for community is connected to the high divorce and family breakdown rates of the parents of Generation X. Since so many have never experienced a stable family, they have responded by searching for relationships and community outside the family. The need to belong to a group is so strong for this generation that individual success is often seen as less important than group belonging.<sup>50</sup>

Members of Generation X dislike close supervision and are, in general, skeptical of authority. Being skeptical of authority is, in part, the result of the corruption and failure they have seen at every level of authority, including that of president (through the Clinton

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<sup>45</sup> Swanbrow, 18-19.

<sup>46</sup> Jerry Solomon, *Generation X*, Probe Ministries International 1997. [home page on line]; available from <http://www.probe.org/docs/genera-x.html>; Internet; accessed 26 June 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Swanbrow, 18-19.

impeachment) and in their own homes through the high divorce rate. However, given their desire for relationships and community, they will listen to an authority if a relationship exists with that authority and if that authority is genuine and authentic. Members of Generation X put it this way: "Care for and be interested in me, and I will listen to you!"<sup>51</sup>

Another trait of Generation X is that its members have been profoundly influenced by twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week media coverage. Through the media, they have seen the integrity of the family, the church, the military, and the presidency called into question.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, Generation X tends to be very pessimistic. Again, this is due in large part to the fact that they have been hit hard by divorce. In 1980, just fifty-six percent of all dependent children lived with two once-married parents. Fourteen percent lived with at least one previously married parent. Eleven percent lived with a stepparent. Nineteen percent lived with one parent.<sup>53</sup> Add to that their experience of corrupt politicians, church, and educational leaders, a view of the world which says that the economic order is destroying the planet, an individualistic society which has created the paradox of people being alone in a multitude, and it is no wonder that this generation is pessimistic.<sup>54</sup> Sadly, and all too often, pessimism deals this generation a fatal blow. In the 1980s roughly five thousand children under the age of eighteen committed suicide each year, the largest number and proportion ever in that age bracket.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, and Gen Xers, Millennials will be present in the pews to hear the sermon. Millennials were born between 1981 and 2000. Defining events

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Strauss and Howe, 325.

<sup>54</sup> *On the Trail of Generation X*, Shoot the Messenger. February 1998. [home page on-line]; available from [http://www.shootthemessenger.com.au/u\\_jan\\_98/infowism/i\\_trailgenx.htm](http://www.shootthemessenger.com.au/u_jan_98/infowism/i_trailgenx.htm); Internet; accessed 26 June 2004.

<sup>55</sup> Strauss and Howe, 326.

for Millennials include the Oklahoma City bombing, Columbine, the war in Kosovo, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the McGwire – Sosa homerun derby.

In general this generation has an unrelenting belief in unlimited possibilities. Nevertheless, they are also realistic and they are savvy enough to know when someone is not being truthful with them. This generation embraces diversity and change, in large part because they are constantly exposed to new ideas and technologies.<sup>56</sup>

Millennials embrace more traditional values. Members of this group consider their parents to be a major influence in their lives. Millennials also state that their values are pretty close or very close to their parents and that family and religious values are important to them. In conjunction with their traditional values, Millennials tend to be conservative and they look for meaning within institutions they already know. These two characteristics give some insight as to why this generation is often described as being optimistic, confident, idealistic, traditional, ambitious, passionate, committed, and empowered, in spite of the fact that so many of their defining events were so negative.<sup>57</sup>

Millennials are the first thoroughly postmodern<sup>58</sup> generation and this has deeply affected their religious life. For them faith is less what the church says and more whatever one feels. They see true faith as experiential. It is found in doing. To that end, Millennials define true faith in terms of faithfulness to building institutions that become the vehicle for spreading a message in the community. Also, because of postmodernism, this generation does not want to be preached at. In other words, they do not want to be told what to do and not do. Arguments,

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<sup>56</sup> Swanbrow, 18-19.

<sup>57</sup> Chantal Liu, "Faces of the New Millenium." 3 December 1999. [home page on-line]; available from <http://pubweb.nwu.edu/~eyc345/final.html>; Internet; accessed 25 June 2002.

<sup>58</sup> Postmodernism will be defined in the subsection entitled "Postmodernism" on page 28 of this paper.

logic, rational truth, and propositional truth are often lost on them. To connect with this group, it is best to teach and preach from a relational standpoint.<sup>59</sup>

Technology has deeply impacted the Millennials' approach to religion. It has affected how they make choices. The Internet offers numerous choices. If one does not see what one wants, one is only a click away from something new, better, and different. Being only a click away has led this generation to develop a shorter attention span. As a result, they have trouble staying focused. It is difficult for them to spend time and energy in ongoing spiritual growth.<sup>60</sup> One result of technology is that Millennials move on quickly if they are bored or dissatisfied and rarely give someone or something a second chance to make a lasting impression. Technology has also affected how this generation receives information in that this generation favors gaining information through the use of narrative.<sup>61</sup> That technology leads to a preference for receiving information through the use of narrative is made evident through television commercials. Consider the recent ads for Budweiser beer. Instead of presenting the features, advantages, and benefits of its product through the use of logical argumentation, Budweiser's parent company, Anheuser-Busch, proffers the adventures of lizards, frogs, and a Clydesdale "wannabe" donkey. Anheuser-Busch uses technology to tell a story. They don't present people with facts and figures.

In spite of postmodernism and technology, Millennials are, nevertheless, spiritually hungry. They want to be challenged intellectually and spiritually. They want authority and they

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<sup>59</sup> University of Generations 1997, [home page on-line]; available from <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Meadows/4180/>; Internet; accessed 26 June 2002.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Kenneth Judd, *Training for Professionals Understanding Millennial Generation to Manage Them Successfully*, Digital University: December 2000. [home page on-line]; available from <http://www.digitu.com/enews/012millenials.html>; Internet; accessed 26 June 2002.

admire it. They want substantive truth. They are burned out on what they call “fluff and stuff.”<sup>62</sup>

In general, Millennials are optimistic, and this outlook leads them to have a renewed reliance on the Spirit. They have a sense that God is moving in the world today. They have an expectation that the church must change to meet new challenges. They are the ones who will provide leadership in the new church structures, which emerge to meet new challenges.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Modernism***

In addition to being familiar with the generations to whom he will be preaching, the preacher who wishes to influence the hearts of his hearers in the direction of true faith and godly living will want to be familiar with the basic tenets of modernism.

Even though today’s preaching takes place in a postmodern world, modernism still casts a mighty shadow, and thus today’s preacher faces hearers who have at least one foot still in modernity.<sup>64</sup> Given this, the preacher will want to be familiar with some of the basic tenets of modernity.

One tenet of modernity is that knowledge is inherently good. Knowledge deals with facts, which are neutral and value free. True knowledge corresponds to reality and exists as a

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<sup>62</sup> Presbyterian Church in America: Christian Education and Publications, *The Church’s Challenge – Reaching the Millennials*. Copyright 2000. [home page on-line]; available from <http://www.pcanet.org/cep/Youth/Rising%20Generation.htm>; Internet; accessed 26 June 2002.

<sup>63</sup> University of Generations, 1997.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Oden says “That the modern age lasted exactly 200 years – from the fall of the Bastille in 1789 to the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989.” However, ideologies do not simply disappear. Their influence can be felt long after their reported end. Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First-Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 24.

certainty and reason is what determines truth.<sup>65</sup> A shining example of this modern tenet is the *Star Trek* character Spock.<sup>66</sup> Spock is concerned about the facts of any given situation; he does not allow emotion to cloud his thinking. He is always rational and through the use of reason he is often able to solve the crisis de jour.

Progress is another tenet of modernity. Progress, which is related to scientific discovery, technology, and economic advancement, is essentially good and leads to a better world and personal happiness.<sup>67</sup> Examples of progress that have led to a better world and personal happiness would be the discovery of the polio vaccine, the automobile, the telegraph, and the telephone.

Still another tenet of modernity is humanity. In modernity individuals are autonomous and society recognizes and protects the rights of the individual. Prior to modernity individuals were viewed as being subservient to society. Overall, modernity presents people as being good, for they use their powers of reason and ingenuity to solve the world's problems.<sup>68</sup> An example of modern humanitarianism would be Social Security and welfare. Through these programs individuals are cared for by the society at large. The goodness of people is also demonstrated in that, working through the government, they have set up programs into which almost all workers pay-programs which seek to solve social problems such as poverty and hunger.

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<sup>65</sup> Johnston, 24.

<sup>66</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 5.

<sup>67</sup> Johnston, 24.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

## *Postmodernism*

Although modernism remains an influence, postmodernism rules the day.

Postmodernism has been defined as follows:

Postmodernism refers to a worldview, a way of perceiving the world, that is a backlash against the Enlightenment dream and dismisses any overarching set of ideas. Postmodernity is the worldview that says no worldview exists. The Enlightenment arrogance sought to provide answers to all questions. Postmodern people simply live in the quandary of not knowing and of potential meaninglessness.<sup>69</sup>

A postmodern person tends to be characterized by the following. First, he is reacting against the basic tenets of modernity. As we have seen, modernity is characterized by reason, science, and the human ability to overcome. The postmodern person rejects the view of the universe as mechanistic and deterministic.<sup>70</sup> Postmodernism is characterized by mysticism, relativism, and the incapacity to know what is true or the answers to life's great questions. In the postmodern mind, technology has not solved the world's problems: it has increased them. Modernity viewed the world with certainty. Postmodernism views it with an openness that says each person's reality is legitimate and the goal is to embrace everyone's point of view.<sup>71</sup>

The postmodern person rejects objective truth such that one cannot speak of or know of anything that is objectively true. Instead, all that one can say is, "In my perception this or that is true." The reason why no one can claim objective truth is because, in the postmodern view, one cannot divorce one's self from the interpretive process. A person's perceptions, understandings, biases, and presuppositions will always taint that person's conclusions over what is true. In

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>70</sup> Joel P Okamoto, "Lutherans Speaking the Gospel into Postmodern Ears," *Concordia Journal* 27 (April 2001): 102.

<sup>71</sup> Johnston, 27-29.

short, truth is what one wants it to be and truth is up for grabs.<sup>72</sup> In the postmodern world the plurality of truths is quite acceptable. Postmodernism embraces a radical kind of relativism and pluralism.<sup>73</sup>

Postmodernism is skeptical and suspicious of authority. As we have said, in postmodernism, truth is what the individual makes of it and everyone's truth is legitimate. Therefore, authority comes from within and not from without. Given this, no one can claim authority over another simply because he or she knows *the* truth. To make such a claim would be both pompous and arrogant in a postmodern world which embraces tolerance for all points of view and states that every point of view is equal.<sup>74</sup> Given this, the preacher who declares, "Thus says the Lord," is met with "In your opinion, but I have a different point of view."

Postmodernism rejects the idea of a metanarrative, that is, an overarching story that applies to all human beings. Instead, postmodern thinkers favor local narratives, which are stories that apply to a specific group of people in a specific place, and primarily to the individual. Each person experiences the world within the context of the society in which he or she lives. Therefore the community to which you belong often determines your story and your truth. It stands to reason that since there are many communities, there are also many stories and many truths. For the postmodern thinker, life is a drama and one needs to fabricate a story, a narrative that can define the individual's experience.<sup>75</sup> The rejection of a metanarrative and the creation of local narratives creates a huge challenge for preaching the gospel, because the gospel is the grand metanarrative. It is the story that embraces all people.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>73</sup> Greutz, 14.

<sup>74</sup> Johnston, 31-34.

<sup>75</sup> Greutz, 44-46.

Gene Edward Veith says, "If there are no absolutes in the objective realm, neither can there be absolutes in the subjective realm. There can be no fixed identity, no sense of self, and no unified human soul. Modernism was activist, optimistic, and self-confident. Postmodernism is passive, cynical, and insecure."<sup>76</sup> This problem is compounded by the fact that postmodern culture favors style over substance. Therefore, for many, identity is found in fashion and music trends. For others identity is found in terms of an interest group such as environmentalism, animal rights, or physical fitness. The problem is that fashion trends, music trends, and interest groups change quickly and the person who cannot keep up with the trends is left wondering, "Who am I?"<sup>77</sup>

Postmodernists have an interest in the spiritual. However, since the postmodern person rejects objective truth, there are no external standards of right or wrong and no one set of beliefs is better or worse than another. Therefore, spiritual meaning and truth, what one should or should not believe, is not determined by examining a set of doctrines. Nor is it determined by reason. One determines spiritual meaning and truth, and chooses what to believe, largely through the use of emotions and intuition. For the postmodern person, the key question of faith is not "Did this really happen?" but whether or not a particular tenet of a particular faith is desirable. In other words, one has faith in something because he or she desires it to be true.<sup>78</sup> In his book, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, Graham Johnston uses the growth of Mormonism as an example of how postmodern people will be drawn to a belief system because they find those beliefs desirable and wish for them to be true. Johnston writes: "The Mormons understand that the average person is more influenced by a perception of good than the content of good

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<sup>76</sup> Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), 83.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-86.

<sup>78</sup> Johnston, 44.

doctrine. In 1998, the highest ranking Mormon official was asked to comment about a long-held tenet that essentially God shares the same substance as that of any human being. The official simply replied, 'We don't emphasize that anymore.'"<sup>79</sup> The Mormons no longer emphasize their doctrine of God's substance, not because the doctrine has been proven wrong (which it is), but because that the doctrine is no longer desirable. No longer emphasizing the doctrine of God's substance is a classic example of how style can trump substance, even in matters of faith.

In a postmodern world, family and society no longer provide the source and norm for how one is to conduct one's life. The individual's right to choose has replaced these traditional resources. In a postmodern world the individual determines his or her own path and does what is right in his or her own eyes. Individuals are encouraged to explore each and every option. The only obstacles to such exploration are "stupidity and arrogance."<sup>80</sup>

Finally, postmodern people live in the here and now and tend to be pessimistic. They have no grand belief that things will get better and human beings will overcome their problems. Since the future offers little help or hope, they live in the here and now. This attitude leads many postmodernists to be materialistic consumers. As Graham Johnston notes, "In postmodernity, the ride of life is headed down a dead-end road, so one might as well sit back and enjoy the scenery."<sup>81</sup> To enjoy such a ride one needs to be "living phat." Money, cars, clothing, vacations are all necessary, desired and important. Truly, in and of themselves money, cars, clothing, and vacations are fine things. Many Christians have been blessed with material wealth and are "living phat." The difference between the postmodern person and the Christian is one of attitude. Whereas the Christian views his or her wealth and possessions as gifts from God to be

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 57.

used for his glory and the good of the neighbor, the postmodern person views them as the be-all and end-all of life. In other words, whereas the Christian is motivated by this verse: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:30-31),” the postmodern person is motivated by this verse: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die (1 Corinthians 15:32).”

As one considers the tenets of postmodernism an apparent contradiction arises. On the one hand, the postmodern person is a rugged individualist. As we have seen, there is a great amount of emphasis placed on the individual’s choices and experiences. Yet, on the other hand, there is also a great emphasis on community and belonging to a group. This apparent contradiction is explained when one remembers that the rugged individuals form groups with those who have reached the same conclusions and believe the same truths. As was shown, the individual finds his or her identity within a group. Thus, a postmodern person can be both a rugged individualist and a committed member of a community all at the same time.

### ***Communication Cultures***

In addition to understanding generations and the basic tenets of modernism and postmodernism, the preacher who wishes to influence the hearts of his hearers in the direction of true faith and godly living will also want to be familiar with communication cultures. Richard Jensen asserts that there are three communication cultures. The first is called the oral-aural culture. The second is called the script culture. The third is the electronic culture.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-Literate Age*, 17.

In the oral-aural culture, communication is shaped by the human voice and ear. In other words, the preached word leaves one person's body through the mouth, and enters another person's body through the ear. In this culture, words are sounds, which are more real than other sense objects because they take place in the present, rather than in the past or future. Oral-aural culture builds community because, whereas it takes only one person to read, it takes two people to have a conversation – one to speak and one to listen.<sup>83</sup> In the oral-aural culture a person knows only what he or she can remember. Knowing only what one can remember greatly impacts preaching and other forms of communication in that many techniques were required to make communication easy and memorable. Some of these techniques included mnemonics, rhythms, repetitions, formulae, and stitching stories together.<sup>84</sup>

In his work, *Thinking in Story*, Richard A. Jensen offers seven characteristics of preaching in the oral-aural culture. The first characteristic is that of stitching stories together. An example of stitching stories together is Jesus' parables on the kingdom of God: The kingdom of God is like seed scattered on the ground, a mustard seed, and a woman who took yeast and mixed it with three measures of flour. Stories that are stitched together do not necessarily flow in a linear way. Rather they move in an episodic manner, so that the hearer participates in the life of the story.<sup>85</sup>

A second characteristic of the oral-aural communication culture is the use of repetition. This technique allows the preacher to deliver his message in a way that he and the hearers can remember. Jensen offers a modern day example of this technique when he writes:

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Quicke, "Technologizing of the Word – Flight, Fight, or Befriend?" *Preaching* 18, no 1 (July – August 2002): 9.

<sup>85</sup> Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-Literate Age*, 23.

Preaching in the African-American culture retains this strong use of repetition. We've all heard the advice of the African-American preacher who said he first tells the people what he will tell them; then he tells them; then tells then what he told them. African-American preaching is preaching that almost always has what I like to call a living center. There is a center, a focus to the presentation. That center is returned to again and again in the preaching event.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to stitching stories together and the use of repetition, a third characteristic of the oral-aural culture is that it gives special emphasis to universal themes. These themes are treated through the use of particular stories. For example, a universal theme is that we are at the same time saint and sinner. Such a theme is easily understood when we see Peter confessing Jesus as Lord and then denying that he even knows who Jesus is only a few chapters later.<sup>87</sup>

A fourth characteristic of preaching in the oral-aural culture is that preachers relate the story of the Christian's battle against the enemies of the faith. In this communication culture sermons are seen as a battleground in which the world, the flesh, and the devil are engaged and the identity of God's people is established in and through these battles. Jensen states that Martin Luther was known for this. He writes that, for Luther, "Every sermon was a battle for the souls of people....a sermon was an apocalyptic event that set the doors of heaven and hell in motion, a part of the actual continuing conflict between the Lord and Satan."<sup>88</sup>

A fifth characteristic of this communication culture is that it is geared more toward right brain communication. As we have already seen, the right hemisphere of the brain is more holistic, artistic, symbolic, intuitive and creative. Oral-aural communication appeals to this side of the brain through its use of stories and repetition.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 27.

The sixth characteristic of the aural-oral culture is that stories are used not merely as illustrations, but rather as metaphors of participation in that the hearers are invited to live in the world of the story and be a part of it.<sup>90</sup> In other words, the hearers become so involved in the story that the story being told becomes their story. They see themselves in the characters.

In order to create a world of story, those who preach in the oral-aural culture condition themselves to think in story instead of idea. Thinking in story is the seventh characteristic of the oral-aural culture and it revolves around asking the question, “What story can I tell that will allow the hearers to become a part of the message?” as opposed to “What ideas do I need to communicate?”<sup>91</sup> Asking such questions is crucial, for in this culture, faith is communicated via immersion, which involves memorization through symbolic procedures and dramatic presentation,<sup>92</sup> all of which assist a person in learning, remembering, and living the faith.

The next communication culture is print culture. This culture trades the ear for the eye as the receptor of communication. The eye takes the place of the ear with the advent of the first alphabet and moveable type.<sup>93</sup> The invention of Gutenberg’s printing press in the 1450’s accelerated this culture.

Richard A. Jensen’s book *Thinking in Story* offers seven characteristics of preaching in the print culture. The first characteristic is that sermons are linear in nature. He offers this quote from Francois Fenelon (1615-1715), in which we are told that sermons are to be orderly successions of proofs: “First, principles; then facts; and from these draw the conclusions which you desire to reach; taking care to arrange the reasoning in such a manner as that the proofs will admit of being borne in mind easily....the hearer should feel more and more the growing weight

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>92</sup> Quicke, 9.

<sup>93</sup> Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-Literate Age*, 17.

of truth.”<sup>94</sup> The second characteristic is that sermons appear in an outline form; ideas are structured in a space. Next, sermons contain propositions as the main points, because, in a print culture, sermons are fundamentally concerned with delivering ideas. The fourth characteristic is that sermons are analytical in nature. The task of preaching is to analyze the ideas of the text, regardless of the genre of the text. The fifth characteristic Jensen proffers is that preaching in print culture favors left brain communication. Since the left hemisphere of the brain tends to be more logical, mathematical, linear, sequential, intellectual, and analytical, such an emphasis on these brain functions corresponds well to the other characteristics previously mentioned. The sixth characteristic is that stories are used to illustrate points, but are dispensable once the point is made. Dispensing with the illustration is possible because print culture values logic and ideas over story, such that illustrations are seen as mere aids to intellectual understanding and not as holistic communicators of truth in and of themselves. The final characteristic Jensen offers is that in print culture, preaching is a presentation of ideas. Texts are studied in search of ideas and once we have our ideas we can shape a sermon. Thinking in ideas is the way to discover and present material in a print culture.<sup>95</sup>

Following the print culture came the third communication culture, sometimes called the electronic culture. This culture is also known as the post-literate culture. In this culture, electronic media has overtaken printed media as the major form of non-face-to-face communication.<sup>96</sup>

The preacher who wishes to influence the hearts of his hearers toward faith and godly living will be keenly aware that he is preaching in an electronic culture. He will be aware that

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 40-43.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 46.

the present day hearer is bombarded by television, stereo, DVDs, videos, and computers. He will be aware that the present day hearer spends a great deal of time in front of a screen and receives most of his or her information through that screen.<sup>97</sup> Electronic culture is a far cry from an oral culture that communicates through hearing and a print culture that communicates through seeing. Television communicates through hearing and seeing in its own unique way. The image changes very quickly. The image carries the message and the words simply back it up. Take, for example, a typical television commercial. It can send a person fifty or more images in the span of thirty seconds as it employs a minimum of words.<sup>98</sup> In addition, television impacts a person's whole being in a way that oral and print communication cannot. Consider Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. The story of Scrooge can be told in an oral-aural way, and one can be truly frightened by the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come. One can also read Dickens' book and be equally touched. However, when the story is presented on a screen and the combination of words and images hits our ears and eyes, as we are exposed to the black cloak and chains of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come, we may very well have trouble sleeping that night. To be sure, oral-aural and print communication can impact us in a mighty way, but the combination of images and words impacts us in a much more powerful way because so many more of our senses are being stimulated.<sup>99</sup>

There are several basic characteristics of the hearer who has been influenced by television and other forms of electronic media. Primarily, the hearers understand an idea or concept best if it is conveyed in image or story. They need and desire a visual image to grasp the idea being conveyed. The visual image helps to make that which is abstract concrete in the

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<sup>97</sup> Michael Rogness. *Preaching to a TV Generation: The Sermon In The Electronic Age* (Lima: CSS Publishing, 1994), 12.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

hearts and minds of the hearers. Hence, the preacher will want to do more than simply explain a concept; he will want to paint a verbal picture of it. Jesus often did this. When he wanted to explain the love of God for the lost he did not give a dissertation on the topic. Instead he painted a picture of a shepherd and his lost sheep, a woman and her lost coin, a father and his lost son in such a way that the images drove the point home.<sup>100</sup>

A second characteristic of electronic hearers is that they have been conditioned to receiving information in bytes. Once again think of the television commercial which bombards you with fifty images in thirty seconds. The hearer is accustomed to grabbing bits and pieces of sights and sounds and putting them together to create the message in his head. Sermons, which mimic this technique through short, punchy, visually rich paragraphs, will go a long way to impacting the hearts and lives of the hearers.<sup>101</sup>

Another characteristic of the hearer who lives in the electronic communication culture is a short attention span. Television provides us with a break every ten to twelve minutes if not sooner. Shortened attention span greatly affects sermon length and, more importantly, content. A crucial question now becomes, "Are there enough visual and captivating elements in my sermon to hold the hearer's attention for ten minutes and beyond?"<sup>102</sup>

Still another characteristic of the electronic communication culture is that the hearers listen more passively. Television has conditioned us to listen with half an ear; it's okay to be distracted and do something else because the person talking to us from the box in the corner doesn't know if we are listening or not. Therefore, we can move from listening to not listening

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

as often as we like. We can be superficial in our listening. This says much about the preacher's need to use his voice and gestures in a way that encourages attentive listening.<sup>103</sup>

A final characteristic is that electronic media has conditioned the hearers to consider both verbal and non-verbal communication. This is a shift from print culture in which words on a page have meaning in and of themselves. In the electronic media culture hearers ask, "What is being said?" "How it is being said?" "Who is saying it?" "What is the personality of the person who is speaking to me?" Given these questions, the following situation is not far-fetched. Preacher Jones mounts the pulpit to deliver the Sunday message. He preaches a textual, law gospel sermon. He delivers it in a way that exudes sincerity and professionalism. For the electronic-media-conditioned hearer Pastor Jones' demeanor makes the message even more believable because of the confidence with which it was delivered. Later that day, Pastor Jones delivers the same sermon. This time, however, he comes off as being nervous and unprepared. His demeanor makes him unbelievable because he is sending all the wrong non-verbal cues. In reaction to how the message is given, many of the hearers shut Pastor Jones off much in the same way they shut off the television, the computer, or the DVD.<sup>104</sup>

The electronic culture is the culture in which preaching takes place in 2004. As is plain to see, this era is both right and left-brain oriented. Electronic media employs both audiovisual images and data-processing information. Heart and feelings as well as intellect and reason are involved in this form of communication.<sup>105</sup> The preacher who fails to understand this culture will most likely fail to connect with today's hearers.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 24-30.

<sup>105</sup> Quicke, 7.

### *Conclusion to Question Two*

Through the six key factors just discussed, an image of today's hearers has emerged. Today's hearers are simultaneously saints and sinners, who are also multi-sensual. This spiritual and physical make-up is true of all hearers, be they Traditionalists, Baby boomers, Gen Xers, or Millennials. As they assemble in the pews, many of these hearers live with one foot in modernity and the other foot in postmodernity. The hearers have been heavily influenced by the electronic communication culture, so let the preacher preach with words and images. Is this a comprehensive image of today's hearers? By no means, but it is a helpful image for the preacher who wishes to preach in such a way as to influence his hearers toward true faith and godly living, for these six key factors truly affect how people listen.

### **Question Three: How Shall the Preacher Get To Know His Hearer?**

Thus far this paper has established the preacher's need to know his hearers and what he needs to know about them. The next issue to be addressed is, "How shall the preacher get to know his hearers?" There are a variety of ways to respond to this query and the following subsections will highlight some of them.

#### ***Home Visits***

One of the most effective means is the pastoral home visit. Since the preacher preaches to all members, old and young, rich and poor, home visits are an important part of his ministry. Therefore, within the first few months of arriving at his parish, and then at regular intervals thereafter, the preacher could visit members of the congregation in their homes.<sup>106</sup> How many of these visits the preacher makes during the course of a year will depend on the ministry setting. For example, in a congregation of one hundred communicant members it is conceivable that the preacher could visit each member during the course of a year. In a congregation of four thousand members it is inconceivable that the preacher could visit every member in the course of three years. Nevertheless, the preacher will want to take the opportunity to learn more about his hearers' lives by visiting with as many members as possible during the course of a year.

When making home visits, it is important to remember the motivation for making these visits, which is love. As an under-shepherd of Christ, the preacher's love for his hearers reflects Christ's love as shown in Matthew 9:36: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them,

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<sup>106</sup> Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, 55.

because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”<sup>107</sup> Home visits are not social calls. They are made so that the preacher might get to know his hearers, establish a mutual trust and respect, and discuss with the hearers their needs. As the preacher visits his hearers, he will learn much about their hearts and lives as he pays attention to their “character, disposition, temperament, opinions, environment, education, friends and acquaintances, occupation, business associates, poverty or wealth, special hobbies, reading, physical condition.”<sup>108</sup> These visits also provide the hearers with an opportunity to discuss with the preacher their concerns. Understanding these matters will allow the preacher to structure sermons which speak more specifically to his hearers’ hearts such that they grow in true faith and godly living.

### *Study Groups*

The preacher can also learn a great deal about his hearers by meeting with a select group of them in what is called a study group. Such groups could meet on a regular basis to discuss the upcoming preaching texts. Ideally, these groups would represent a cross section of the congregation, and include therefore representatives from the youth group, the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, The Lutheran Laymen’s League, Sunday school teachers, executives, retirees, etc. The congregation at St. Paul’s Lutheran Chapel in Iowa City, Iowa, has instituted such a group. As was stated earlier, St. Paul’s is a campus ministry, thus the group is composed of undergraduate students, members of the permanent congregation, and a few international students. Each week the group meets to discuss an upcoming preaching text. The pastor guides the discussion of the text through a series of open questions. A copy of these questions can be found in Appendix B. As the group answers these questions, the pastor takes notes. When the

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<sup>107</sup> Fritz, 173.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

time comes for the pastor to prepare a sermon on a text which the group has discussed, he reviews his notes. This practice allows the preacher an opportunity to discover ways in which he can address his hearers' particular concerns. Since he has met with the hearers and discussed their concerns, he is able to form a sermon that is more specific to his hearers.

### ***Questionnaires***

Another tool that will assist the preacher in getting to know his hearers is the use of a questionnaire. In his book, *The Preacher and His Audience*, Webb B. Garrison suggests that through the use of a questionnaire the preacher can take the pulse of the congregation, discover the hearers' concerns, and then address those concerns via the Sunday sermon either directly or by implication. Garrison suggests that the questionnaire could be filled out during the course of Sunday school classes, Bible studies, youth group meetings, etc.<sup>109</sup> A copy of Garrison's sample questionnaire is located in Appendix C.

In addition to using a questionnaire to discover the congregation's concerns prior to constructing a sermon, it is also valuable to gain their reaction after a sermon is preached. Through a post-sermon questionnaire, the preacher can discover whether or not his sermon addresses his hearers' hearts. An example of such a questionnaire appears in Appendix D.<sup>110</sup>

### ***The Use of Imagination***

In addition to home visits, study groups, and questionnaires, the preacher will also gain insights into the hearers by using his imagination in an empathetic way. When the preacher does

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<sup>109</sup> Webb B. Garrison, *The Preacher and His Audience* (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1954), 34-35.

<sup>110</sup> Keith Willhite, "A Preaching Check-up: Three Strategies to Check and Improve Your Preaching," *Preaching* 17, no. 2 (September - October 2001): 45.

this, he asks questions such as, “What is it like to be facing surgery, burying a spouse or child, getting married, or dealing with unemployment?” Through the process of asking and answering such questions, the preacher gains insights into the hearers’ experiences even though the preacher has not personally experienced them. Through such an exercise the preacher will gain insights into the human condition that he can then reflect in his preaching. He will gain a wealth of ideas and anecdotes which he can address in his preaching. He will also grow in his ability to preach sermons that consistently impact the hearts of his hearers because he will be preaching in a way that incorporates his hearers’ concerns.<sup>111</sup>

### ***Conversations with One’s Spouse***

Another easy and valuable way for the preacher to gain insights into the congregation is through his spouse. Many preachers find it helpful to have their wives read through the sermon manuscript and check it for flow of thought, clarity, and mistakes. Through such a practice the spouse can also be encouraged to offer suggestions for illustrations and life application. Often the spouse will have insights into the life of the congregation which the preacher has missed.<sup>112</sup>

### ***Preaching the Whole Counsel of God***

As we consider the question, “How shall the preacher get to know his hearers?” one caveat needs to be offered. The preacher will want to be mindful of the fact that one of the most important requirements of public preaching is that “The whole counsel of God be proclaimed to the listeners for their salvation.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Craddock, *Preaching*, 97-98.

<sup>112</sup> Willhite, 44.

<sup>113</sup> Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, 60.

To be sure, home visits, study groups, questionnaires, the use of imagination, and conversations with one's spouse are all helpful tools for the preacher who wishes to get to know his hearers, but they are limited resources. The information gathered will apply only to that group. If the preacher relies only on that information he may very well end up preaching only what that group wants to hear, as opposed to what they need to hear. For example, suppose the pastor is preaching a series on the Ten Commandments. The time comes for him to preach on the Sixth Commandment. As a pastor who knows his hearers, he realizes that many of his members see nothing wrong with the practice of living together without the benefit of marriage. Here is the preacher's golden opportunity to address this issue; however, he decides to avoid the topic because the chairman of the salary committee's daughter is currently living with her boyfriend. The preacher fears the consequences should he preach on the sin of living together before marriage. This is just one example, but as those who are at the same time saints and sinners, preachers can fall prey to the trap of preaching merely what the hearers want to hear as opposed to the fullness of God's Word.

To avoid falling prey to the trap just mentioned, the preacher will want to engage in personal Bible study. As he does, the preacher should try to distance himself from the hearers so that he can hear what it is the Bible has to say about them, irrespective of the preacher's relationship to them. As he listens to the Bible, the Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God, will reveal to the preacher God's understanding of human beings, so that the preacher will come to see his hearers as God sees them.<sup>114</sup> Then, once the preacher has heard the Scriptures, he strives to preach the Word of God in all boldness and confidence to hearers that like it or like it not.

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<sup>114</sup> Caemmerer, "The Pastor in the Pulpit," 126.

### ***Keeping Abreast of Current Events***

In conjunction with everything else that has been mentioned, the preacher will also want to keep abreast of current events. The people to whom the pastor preaches are either consciously or unconsciously affected by current events. Newspaper headlines, the nightly news, and prime time programming all play a part in stirring up the emotions of the hearers. Since this is the case, the preacher will want to subscribe to the local paper and/or a weekly news magazine. He will also want to attend community functions such as high school football games, local parades, and town celebrations. All of these activities will go a long way toward the goal of knowing the hearers and being able to speak God's Word of law and gospel to them in a way that directs them toward true faith and godly living.<sup>115</sup>

### ***Conclusion to Question Three***

Homes visits, study groups, questionnaires, the use of imagination, conversations with one's spouse, preaching the whole counsel of God, and keeping abreast of current events will assist the preacher in getting to know his hearers. Such efforts will also go a long way to establishing a relationship of trust and love between the preacher and the hearer as well as providing an opportunity for the preacher to learn of the hearers' needs, concerns, and conditions.

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<sup>115</sup> O.A. Geisman, "The Pastor as a Person," in *The Pastor at Work* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 28.

**Question Four:**  
**What are the Elements of a Sermon That Influence the Heart of the Hearer  
in the Direction of True Faith and Living a Godly Life?**

Once the preacher knows his hearers, he will be more equipped to preach a sermon that will influence their hearts toward true faith and living a godly life. Therefore, this paper now takes up the question, “What are the elements of a sermon that influence the heart of the hearer in the direction of true faith and living a godly life?” It is important to remember that when we preach to the heart of the hearer, we preach in a way that impacts the very core and center of the hearer. In other words, we preach to impact lives. Such preaching appeals not only to the mind, but to the emotions and senses as well.

Sermons that influence the heart of the hearers in the direction of true faith and godly living will have a number of elements, not all of which can be discussed in this paper. However, through a brief discussion of sermon content, introductions and conclusions, sermon style, the use of technology, visual aids, and sermon delivery, the reader will gain important insights into the elements of a sermon that influence the heart of the hearer.

***Sermon Content***

The first element to be discussed is sermon content. First and foremost, sermon content is to be biblical. The Bible is the authoritative source for preaching and the biblical text is the focus of the sermon. Given this, the preacher may wish to place the biblical text into its historic context and then explain that context to the hearers so that the hearers can gain greater insight into the passage. To ensure a sermon that is strong in biblical content, the preacher will want to engage in careful text study as well as the practice of writing and revising a sermon manuscript.

Solid biblical preparation leads to a well-prepared sermon, which will assist the hearers in their ability to follow the sermon.<sup>116</sup>

Sermon content that is truly biblical will present the story of Jesus as our Lord Jesus Christ himself instructs us in Luke 24:46-47: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." The sermon tells the story of Jesus, namely that he died for our sins and rose again from the dead as the Scriptures foretold. In so doing he has rescued and redeemed us from sin, death and the devil. This content is presented to people so that they might be moved toward faith and godly living.<sup>117</sup>

Sermon content that tells the story of Jesus has one important non-negotiable: it will contain both law and gospel, for as C.F.W. Walther states:

#### Thesis I

The doctrinal contents of the Old and the New Testament, are made up of two doctrines differing fundamentally from each other, viz., the Law and the Gospel.

#### Thesis II

Only he is an orthodox teacher who not only presents all the articles of faith in accordance with Scripture, but also rightly distinguishes from each other the Law and the Gospel.<sup>118</sup>

There is no doubt that the Lutheran preacher must preach the law of God. According to *Solid Declaration* Article VI: "The law of God is used (1) to maintain external discipline and respectability against dissolute, disobedient people and (2) to bring such people to a recognition

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<sup>116</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 217-221.

<sup>117</sup> Richard R. Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church: Theology and Technique of the Christian Sermon* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 5.

<sup>118</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W.H.T. Dau (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), 1.

of their sins. (3) It is also used when those who have been born anew through God's Spirit, converted to the Lord, and had the veil of Moses removed from them live and walk in the law." From this description we can see that in its first use the law functions as a curb; in its second use as a mirror; in its third use as a guide.

While the law does have three uses, it always accuses, so that when the preacher preaches the law, God is always saying, "You are cutting yourself off from Me, you are experimenting with death; see its signs! You need help!" The fact that we human beings need to hear this indictment from God is made evident when one considers that our satisfaction with material things, the preoccupation with physical life, worry, and a host of other maladies are symptoms of our underlying sin problem.<sup>119</sup> Another reason why we need the indictment of the law is that, as we have said earlier, we human beings have a dual nature. We are saints and sinners and as such we need the law to curb our sinful desires, show us our sins, and lead us in the way to live.

For the Lutheran preacher there is no question that he must preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, for if preaching is to be preaching, it must reenact and participate in the defeat and victory of Jesus.<sup>120</sup> Yet the question arises, "What must I say in order to be preaching the gospel?" In response to that question the preacher will want to preach the following five items. First, he will want to preach that Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem, taught in Galilee and Judea, and was crucified in Jerusalem, is the promised Messiah of God come to redeem his people. Second, he will want to preach that, according to God's plan of salvation, as given to us in the Old Testament, Jesus rose from the dead and lives and reigns for all eternity. Third, the preacher will proclaim that the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection "is a message which His

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<sup>119</sup> Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church: Theology and Technique of the Christian Sermon*, 25.

<sup>120</sup> Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*, 27.

followers proclaim to their world and to each other.”<sup>121</sup> Next, the preacher will proclaim that the message of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection has the power to change lives, for it brings with it God’s power to change the lives of those who hear it. Finally, the preacher will proclaim that the message of Jesus changes people because it has the power to convey the forgiveness of sins, which is the purpose of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Inherent in these five elements is the news that Jesus is both true God and true man and that he will one day return to earth in glory to rule and reign and judge the living and the dead.<sup>122</sup>

When it comes to preaching the gospel the preacher will take care not to preach it the same way every time. If he does, the preaching of the gospel will become stereotyped and his hearers may grow bored and disinterested in the gospel because of monotonous repetition. To avoid this problem, the preacher should make use of the rich variety of expressions of the gospel which the Scriptures provide.<sup>123</sup> Different passages express the gospel in different ways. For example, Luke 15:1-7 proclaims the gospel in terms of a shepherd finding a lost sheep. Ephesians 2:1-10 proclaims the gospel in terms of the dead being made alive. Philippians 2:1-11 proclaims the gospel in terms of Christ’s humble service to the human race. The preacher who wishes to impact his hearers’ hearts will do well to proclaim the gospel in the language and metaphor of the preaching text.<sup>124</sup> Such an approach will provide variety to the proclamation of the gospel, and variety is something which helps people to keep listening.

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<sup>121</sup> Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church: Theology and Technique of the Christian Sermon*, 5-6.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>124</sup> An excellent book on this topic is Jacob A. O. Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000). In this work Preus develops some twenty-three scriptural gospel metaphors and makes a convincing case that preachers should preach sermons using the metaphor that the preaching text provides.

In his treatise, "The Freedom of a Christian," Martin Luther instructs us concerning improper and proper sermon content. Luther says that it is improper to simply preach the words, works, and life of Jesus as though they were only historical facts. It is also improper to preach the laws of men. Nor should one preach so as to move the hearers to feel sorrow for Christ and anger against the Jews. Such preaching does not influence the hearers' hearts because it is not directed at them. Proper preaching preaches Christ for us. Such preaching establishes and nourishes faith in Christ in the hearers. It does this by presenting to the hearers the reasons why Christ came to earth, explaining what Christ has brought and bestowed, and what benefit it is to us to accept what he has done. When hearers are exposed to this content in sermons, they will rejoice for they have received the comfort of Christ. They will also take comfort in the victory that is theirs in Christ, which is victory over sin, death, and the devil.<sup>125</sup>

Sermon content, which presents the story of Jesus in a biblical, law and gospel way, will also seek to have a single and solitary aim. The preacher who has multiple aims for his sermon is like a duck hunter shooting at the entire flock as it flies overhead. That hunter will probably hit nothing, but the hunter who aims at a single bird might, with God's blessing, get it.

The aim of a sermon states the function of the sermon. The aim should state what it is the preacher wants the hearer to believe or do depending upon whether or not the sermon has a faith goal or a life goal. For this reason, it is well to begin the statement of the aim with the words "to empower the hearers to, etc." The aim is stated in this way because the business of preaching is to preach the gospel. Preaching the gospel means the sermon does more than say something or teach. It empowers people toward faith and godly living. Given this, the aim will, as was stated

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<sup>125</sup> Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian, 1520," in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 65-66.

previously, have either a faith goal or a life goal. The preacher who tries to combine the two will be taking on too much in the sermon; indeed, he may even end up with two sermons in one.

The aim of the sermon should be related to the aim of the writer of the text. Until the preacher has a grasp of the aim of the writer, he should not try to formulate the aim of his sermon. Until the preacher understands the aim of his sermon, he should not try to put a sermon together. When and if the preacher tries to write his sermon before he has formulated his aim, he runs the risk of composing a sermon that contains extraneous material, and extraneous material distracts the hearers from realizing the aim.

The aim should be a simple statement, not a complex statement including qualifiers, conditions, conclusions, and the like. When the preacher can make a simple statement of his aim, he can probably get the hearers to understand what he wants them to believe or do. In addition, since a sermon is not a mystery or a riddle, the aim should be stated at least once in the sermon. The preacher ought not keep the aim a secret. The hearers should know what the preacher is trying to persuade them to believe or do.<sup>126</sup>

### *Introductions and Conclusions*

The preacher who wishes to influence the hearers' hearts toward true faith and godly living will want to present his sermon in such a way that it captures the hearers' attention and is remembered when they leave the place of preaching. To accomplish this goal, the preacher will need a good introduction and conclusion.

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<sup>126</sup> The entire section on aim is summarized from an e-mail message that was sent to the author on 25 June 2004. The e-mail came from Pastor Emeritus Roy Schroeder of Ascension Lutheran Church, East Lansing, Michigan.

Much has been said about introductions: they are to be brief, poignant, give a preview of the sermon, and state the goal of the sermon. All of these points are valid and helpful, but one of the most helpful bits of advice for sermon introductions is the oft said, "Don't jump out from behind the same tree every week." In other words, the preacher will want to have variety in his sermon introductions, for if he begins each sermon with the same kind of introduction, week after week after week, his hearers will soon become disinterested in what the preacher has to say. To avoid boredom and promote interest, the preacher will want to employ a variety of sermon introductions. One kind of introduction involves beginning with a question such as, "If you were at Mary and Martha's house would you help in the kitchen or sit at Jesus' feet?" Another introduction involves creating a conflict that will later be resolved such as, "Isn't that the way it always works? You have friends for dinner and one person does all the cooking and cleaning while the other sits on the couch, drinks mint juleps, and chats. What Mary is doing to Martha, well, it's just not right!" Still another introduction that can be employed involves the preacher enticing the hearers with a bare minimum of information. For example, a sermon on the conversion of St. Paul might begin like this: "In the prime of his life he hated Jesus. At the end of his life he longed to be with Jesus." These three kinds of introductions bring the hearers in by giving them just enough information that they say, "I have to keep listening in order to find out what this is all about and what difference it makes in my life."<sup>127</sup>

A good conclusion is as important as a good introduction. The conclusion of the sermon is the last chance the preacher has to influence the hearers. As John Killinger advises, the conclusion is "The final opportunity to drive home some everlasting truth, some winsome ideal,

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<sup>127</sup> Steve Larson, "7 Ways to Grab a Listener's Attention: Designing More Effective Sermon Introductions," *Preaching* 19, no. 6 (May-June 2004): 25-26.

to engage people's wills in the performance of some sacred duty."<sup>128</sup> M. Reu puts it this way: "[The conclusion's] purpose is to gather up the various statements, appeals and motives of the sermon and bring them to bear in their united force upon the hearer, so that they may produce a permanent impression."<sup>129</sup>

There are several marks of a good conclusion. One is that it is natural and appropriate. It should seem to the hearers that, in light of all that has been said, this is the logical and fitting conclusion. The points have been made and the arguments have come to an end. No new material is introduced at this point. The conclusion should also be unmistakably personal in its aim. In this section of the sermon the preacher will want to speak very directly to his hearers. The conclusion should be alive and energetic. This is the time to speak with passion and energy so that the aim of the sermon may be driven home like a nail into a piece of wood. Lastly, the conclusion should be definite and clear in thought and expression. This is the place for clear and definite counsel to the hearer. Words need to be carefully chosen so that, once again, the aim of the sermon can be driven home into the hearts of the hearers.<sup>130</sup>

There are several ways of concluding the sermon which will impact the heart of the hearer. Some common approaches are to offer a summary of what has been said, use a quotation from poetry, hymns, and other sources, or conclude with an illustration which shows how the ideas of the sermon can be given shape in a real situation. Another way is to let the last move or point serve as an ending, especially if that last move or point is stated in such a way that the hearer is left with the aim of the sermon. Still another way to end the sermon is to conclude with

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<sup>128</sup> John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 104.

<sup>129</sup> M. Reu, *Homiletics: A Manual of the Theory and Practice of Preaching*, trans. Albert Steinhäuser (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), 502.

<sup>130</sup> John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Rev. Vernon L. Stanfield (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), 109-111.

the text. Sometimes there is nothing more apt for closing a sermon than simply reading the text. This can be very effective especially when the preacher, instead of dealing immediately with the text, chooses to begin with an idea or a problem and work gradually toward the text, culminating the sermon with it.<sup>131</sup>

### *Style*

Sermon style is another element to be considered when asking the question, “What are the elements of a sermon that influence the heart of the hearer in the direction of true faith and living a godly life?” For the purposes of this essay, the term “style” is defined as the various forms or structures in which a sermon can be presented.

A wide variety of sermon styles are available to the preacher; the only limiting factor will be the preacher’s imagination and creativity. Therefore, on one occasion the preacher may preach in story, on another occasion he may use a first person narrative, and on another occasion he will use a three-point outline or some other form of sermon structure. No doubt his choice of style will be influenced by the text he has chosen to preach. However, regardless of the specific style used, there is always an underlining goal: to construct a sermon with the hearers in mind such that the hearers move from one point to another, clear away their misconceptions, and think about themselves and Christ all at the same time. When this happens the sermon will stand a greater chance of achieving its aim, be it a faith goal or a life goal.<sup>132</sup>

In the current electronic, postmodern age, a sermon which influences the hearers’ hearts will most often move more inductively than deductively. Deductive movement is from the general truth to the particular application or experience. In preaching a deductive sermon, the

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<sup>131</sup> Killinger, 105-109.

<sup>132</sup> Caemmerer, “The Pastor in the Pulpit,” 132.

preacher states the thesis, breaks it down into points, explains and illustrates these points, and then applies them to the particular situations of the hearers.

One of the major concerns of deductive preaching is that the main point of the sermon is revealed before the sermon ever gets going. The preacher begins with his conclusion, which raises this question, "As the hearer, why do I need to listen to a twenty minute sermon when the preacher reveals to me the main point within the first two minutes?" The answer is, there is not much incentive to listen.

The deductive method of preaching assumes that the preacher is the authority who deserves to be listened to simply because he is the preacher. As we have already noted, that notion does not sit well with postmodern hearers, nor Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and even Millennials, who want to participate in the sermon and reach their own conclusions.

In many ways the deductive method undoes what we have said about preaching, in that the hearers need not play a vital role in the preaching event. When the main point and conclusion are stated up front, the preacher runs the risk of having a sermon in which there is no dialogue, no listening to the speaker, and no contribution by the hearers. The hearers described in this essay are much more influenced by a participatory style than one emphasizing deductive reasoning and argumentation.

An inductive sermon moves in a much different way than a deductive sermon. It moves in the way that stories and jokes do: you start at the beginning and move to the end. An inductive sermon begins with immediate and concrete experiences with which the hearers are familiar and it moves to a conclusion that becomes the hearers' and not just the preacher's. In other words, the hearers complete the sermon, not just the post-benediction implementation, but the completion of the thought, then movement, and the decision-making within the sermon itself.

Inductive preaching offers the hearers two distinct advantages over deductive preaching. The first is that the hearers travel with the preacher to a conclusion he reached in his study earlier in the week. With induction, the preacher leads the hearers through the biblical text to the conclusion, that is, the main point, as opposed to starting with the conclusion and then moving backward through the steps it took to get there. When the hearers truly desire to arrive at the conclusion, they will engage the sermon and travel with the preacher. A second advantage is that the hearers have made the trip to the conclusion; therefore, it belongs to them, and the sermon's implications and applications about them and for them.<sup>133</sup>

As has been demonstrated, the inductive style of preaching has distinct advantages over the deductive style of preaching. These advantages will aid the preacher in influencing the heart of the postmodern, electronic-communication-culture hearer of any generation. The advantages of the inductive style may lead the reader to conclude that the deductive style is a dinosaur that can no longer be used. Such is not the case. Many biblical texts lend themselves well to being preached in a deductive way. If the text lends itself to being preached deductively, the preacher would do well to employ that style in his sermon. In addition, it should be noted that many hearers are very adept at working and listening in a deductive, didactic, logical, outlined world. Traditionalists and Baby Boomers grew up listening to "three points and a poem." Traditionalists and Boomers still have one foot in modernity and have had experience listening to a deductive and didactic sermon; so, too, college students. College students, even though they are postmodern, electronic culture Millennials, still spend a good portion of each week listening to deductive lectures. In order to be successful in school they must develop skills so that they

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<sup>133</sup> The entire section on deductive and inductive preaching is taken from chapter 3 of Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock. [homepage online]; available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=797&C=987>; Internet; accessed 25 June 2004.

can listen to and absorb information from these kinds of presentations. It stands to reason that if they can do it in the classroom, they can do it in the sanctuary as well.<sup>134</sup>

Another style of sermon which the preacher can employ to influence the heart of the hearer toward faith and godly living is the interactive sermon. As stated earlier, preaching is dialogical. Usually this is a silent dialogue between the preacher and the hearers. The preacher preaches in such a way that the hearers ask questions in their minds which the preacher then answers through the course of the sermon. Even with this understanding of dialogue, the sermon is still, practically speaking, a monologue.<sup>135</sup>

While this dialogical monologue has been the norm for many years, the postmodern people of today's world are no longer willing to sit in silence. Instead they cry out for true interaction and dialogue. A sermon in which the hearers are permitted to have a verbal dialogue with the preacher is called an interactive sermon.<sup>136</sup>

So what is an interactive sermon? It is a dialogue between the preacher and the hearers. Please note, it is a dialogue and not a discussion. In a discussion we talk about our point of view and try and convince others that we are right. In dialogue we talk about our thoughts, feelings, stories, and experiences so that we might understand our self and others better.<sup>137</sup>

Since we wish to foster dialogue, we need to consider what kinds of questions to ask. One type of question is the life experience question. Life experience questions are designed to encourage people to remember feelings from the past and share their own stories in a way that will illustrate the text and provide the sermon with life application. Such questions will be based

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<sup>134</sup> Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-Literate Age*, 57.

<sup>135</sup> John Sweetman, "Talking Back: Is There a Place for Interactive Preaching?" *Preaching* 19, no 4 (January-February 2004): 21.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

on the preaching text. For example, if one is preaching on the Prodigal Son one might ask, “In the story the son turned away from his father. Can you share an experience of turning away from your Heavenly Father?”<sup>138</sup>

A second kind of question is the general experience question. This kind of question differs from the life experience question in that it is less personal. Again, the text is the Prodigal Son and this time the question might be “What stops you from going home to God when you fail?”<sup>139</sup>

A third kind of question, which fosters dialogue, is a present experience question. This type of question calls upon the hearers to explain what it is they are experiencing as they listen to the sermon. When preaching on the Prodigal Son you might ask, “What are you thinking of when I say ‘wild living?’”<sup>140</sup>

Yet another helpful kind of question is a feeling question. This kind of question explores the hearers’ feelings or the feelings of one of the characters in the text. If the text is the Prodigal Son you might ask, “What do you think the son is feeling as he feeds the pigs?”<sup>141</sup>

There are many solid reasons for using an interactive sermon. One reason is the biblical example of Jesus. In John 8:31-41 we see Jesus speaking with the Jews who believed in him. As he speaks to them, Jesus allows both questions and comments. So, too, when he is preaching in the synagogue in Luke 4:16-27. In addition, many biblical texts are in the form of a dialogue and it might be wise, from time to time, to reflect this structure in the sermon structure, for the sake of variety.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 21.

Another reason to employ an interactive sermon is that this style addresses many of the cultural issues that preachers face. As we have seen, postmodernism is a trend with which preachers must deal. Postmodernists react negatively to experts who claim to have a corner on the truth. In a postmodern world truth is defined by the group. An interactive sermon which has input from the congregation (i.e. the group) will aid the postmodern hearer in understanding that the sermon represents and presents the truth of the community, which, when presented correctly, is in agreement with the biblical truth. In addition to this, the interactive sermon will be relevant to the hearers because the hearers will be playing a vital and active role in the sermon.<sup>143</sup>

Still another advantage of the interactive sermon is that it addresses many practical issues which the preacher faces. One of those issues is maintaining the hearers' collective interest. While interaction does not guarantee interest, well-structured hearer involvement can hold interest in a way in which a monologue cannot. Interactive sermons also give the hearers ownership of the sermon. Since they are actively involved, it becomes their message. Ownership increases the chances that the hearers' lives will be changed by the sermon. By having the hearers play an active role, the preacher's supply of illustrative material will grow. The preacher is only one man with limited life experience, but he has many hearers with many experiences, many of which they would be willing to share during the sermon. The advantage in this is that these stories and illustrations would be fresh and relevant to the hearers for they come from the hearers.<sup>144</sup>

For all its positives, interactive preaching also has some negatives. Confusion over pastoral role and authority can occur. In Article XIV of the *Augsburg Confession* we state that only those with a regular call should preach publicly. If an interactive sermon involves undue

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

hearer participation, some in the congregation might become confused over the pastor's role in preaching.<sup>145</sup>

Another point to make is that an interactive sermon is not something that can be done by any preacher in any congregation. For it to work well, there needs to be a great deal of trust between the preacher and the hearers. One could not attempt such a sermon in a setting where preacher and hearers are strangers or in conflict with each other.<sup>146</sup>

The preacher who attempts an interactive sermon will want to take care that all the dialogue is governed by the biblical text. A great amount of harm can take place if, during the dialogue, questions and comments are made which are in conflict with the biblical text. Problems will also arise if the questions and comments cause the sermon to run wild and become unstructured. Nor can the preacher permit questions or comments that contain heresy. If such questions and comments occur they cannot go unaddressed. In short, all questions and comments must be governed by the biblical text and, clearly, the preacher cannot permit a free-for-all.<sup>147</sup>

Like an interactive sermon, a sermon preached in story also involves the hearers. Preaching in story is yet another sermon style that preachers can employ. Proponents of story preaching argue that story sermons may or may not contain actual stories, but they should move in the listeners' consciousness like stories. To this end, these sermons have plots instead of points. They flow with the logic of narrative rather than the more linear logic of a philosophical argument.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Long, 38.

Story and narrative preaching is not just an endless line of illustrations. Illustrations and stories differ.<sup>149</sup> Whereas the best illustrations don't need explanation, they are, nevertheless, secondary because they take their meaning from a truth that has already been explained. A story can stand on its own and carry the truth on its own. Nevertheless, the story will still need to be applied to the hearers' lives, otherwise its openness to random interpretation will allow the hearers to run with it in many and various ways, some of which may be contrary to the preacher's aim and the biblical text.

Preachers who preach in story often do so because this style of sermonizing offers at least five advantages. One advantage is that the gospel is a story. Consider the following. When someone asks us, "Who is Jesus Christ?" very few would respond by listing a series of vital statistics. Rather, most would say something like, "Let me tell you who he is. There was a virgin named Mary, who was engaged to a man named Joseph. One day the angel Gabriel came to her...." Simply put we would tell a story.<sup>150</sup>

A second advantage to story preaching is that it is an effective form of communication. Just about everyone likes to hear a story. Not only do people like to hear stories, people remember them. People might not remember the book, chapter, and verse that the sermon expounded, but they usually remember the story that was employed to expound a particular text.<sup>151</sup>

A third advantage of story preaching is that Jesus preached in story. When asked in Luke 10: 29 "And who is my neighbor?" he did not respond with a doctrinal three point discourse. He responded with the story of the Good Samaritan.

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<sup>149</sup> William R. White, *Speaking in Stories: Resources for Christian Storytellers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 26.

<sup>150</sup> Long, 36.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

A fourth advantage of story preaching is its ability to connect with everyday life. This feature will move the hearers to the text's meaning and apply it to their lives.<sup>152</sup> Story preaching creates a picture of life in the heart and mind of the hearers. When people can see and hear how a biblical truth works in their lives, then the preacher has moved the hearer from the realm of abstract idea to a concrete life reality.<sup>153</sup>

The final advantage of story preaching is that, when it comes to communicating the truth, stories can make philosophical and historical truths more palatable. When one uses a story he is free to design a character which embodies a particular thought or idea in a concrete way. When that concrete example is combined with solid explanation and application the hearer is inspired to become like that character or is warned to avoid that character's behavior because it leads to dire consequences.<sup>154</sup>

When preaching in story, the preacher can present the biblical story on which he is preaching in a variety of ways. One way is to simply tell the biblical story with your own amplifications, elaborations, and decorations. Once the story is over the preacher can then make the appropriate application for the hearers.<sup>155</sup>

Another way to present the biblical story is called delaying the story. In this form the preacher begins with stories other than the biblical story. These stories are then used to pave the way for the reading of the biblical story, which is delayed until the end of the sermon. Often the

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>153</sup> Marc T. Newman, "From Mars Hill to the Movies: Preaching with Cultural Icons to Engage Culture," *Preaching* 19, no. 5 (March-April 2004): 25.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-Literate Age*, 123.

non-biblical stories will show us our need for God and the biblical story will show us God's response to our need.<sup>156</sup>

Suspending the story is another way of presenting the biblical story. In this style the preacher begins by telling the biblical story. He then suspends that story in order to tell another or other stories and then he returns to the biblical story.<sup>157</sup>

Alternating the story allows the preacher to present the biblical story by moving back and forth between the biblical story and the contemporary world. This kind of alteration is very much a part of those who live in the electronic culture of communication.<sup>158</sup> Consider how a soap opera works. Often the viewer is asked to alternate between three stories in a one-hour program in which all the characters, story lines, and settings are different.

First person narrative is yet another way in which the biblical story can be presented. In this form the preacher delivers the sermon as though he were one of the characters in the biblical text. This kind of sermon is best done when the preacher can identify with the biblical character he wishes to be. Thus it might be difficult for a male preacher to do a sermon as the Virgin Mary. This form of story preaching is perhaps the most challenging because it frequently requires the preacher to either memorize long sections of Scripture which are in the character's own words or carefully paraphrase them so that the story sounds as though it is coming from the biblical character's lips. For example, if you are preaching Paul's sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 as Paul, you either need to memorize the text or carefully paraphrase it so as not to forget the details, because few people forget the details of their own story.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>159</sup> David P. Mulder, *Narrative Preaching: Stories from the Pulpit* (St. Louis; Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 31-32.

The biblical story can also be presented through the use of short stories. By linking two or three short stories together the preacher can, quite effectively, make his point, without ever having to say, "My point is this." The stories used in this method can be either factual or fictional. If fictional, it would be good to indicate that to the congregation.<sup>160</sup> When using short stories one needs to be careful when using personal stories. Personal stories are quite powerful. Stories about the death of one's mother or the birth of one's children can make quite an impact on the hearer. However, overuse of personal stories can make the preacher sound narcissistic.

While stories appeal to each generation, story preaching is quite effective for influencing the heart of the postmodern Generation X, and Millennial hearers who live in the electronic communication culture. The following quotes clearly illustrate this:

Analysis after analysis of our 'postmodern'...culture recommends story as the most appropriate communicative tool in reaching this generation through preaching. Our preaching needs to be story-oriented. Some of our sermons should probably be oriented more specifically to the telling of biblical stories. Most of our Bible contains stories stitched together. Our gospel writers, according to the new narrative critics, intend their individual story units to be understood in the context of larger story units. This is another charge to tell stories, biblical stories, in our preaching. Such story telling is vital in a culture that is no longer familiar with the old, old story.<sup>161</sup>

So you're in quite a pickle: you can't tell us that the Church has "the Truth," and we know that the Church won't miraculously cure us of our misery. What do you have left to persuade us? One thing: the story. We are story people. We know narratives, not ideas. Our surrogate parents were the TV and the VCR, and we can spew out entertainment trivia at the drop of a hat. We treat our ennui with stories, more and more stories, because they're the only things that make sense; when the external stories fail, we make a story of our

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>161</sup> Richard A. Jensen, "Internet-Shaped Preaching: How the Internet May Impact the Art and Practice of Preaching." Lutheran Partners. [homepage on-line]; available from <http://www.elca.org/lp/ishaped.html>; Internet; accessed 25 June 2004.

own lives. You wonder why we're so self-destructive, but we're looking for the one story with staying power, the destruction and redemption of our own lives. That's to your advantage: you have the best redemption story on the market.<sup>162</sup>

### ***Technology***

In addition to preaching sermons that reflect a wide variety of styles, today's preachers may wish to employ technology in an effort to construct a sermon that will influence the hearts of the hearers. Technology can be particularly helpful to the preacher who is addressing hearers who are grounded in the electronic communication culture.

Kent V. Wilson is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Willard, Ohio. He advocates incorporating multimedia ministry into congregational life. In the November/December 2003 issue of *Lutherans Online*, Rev. Wilson was interviewed concerning his use of technology for worship services and specifically preaching. Rev. Wilson noted that his congregation makes extensive use of technology including a 9-foot-wide screen, a projector, a video mixer, a computer (PC-compatible) with a scan converter and second monitor, Microsoft PowerPoint® presentation software, two live cameras (Canon GL1s), and three video decks (VHS, Mini-DV, and a DVD player). For video editing they use a Macintosh G4 and Final Cut Pro video editing software.

All of this equipment is used in three main ways to enhance the congregation's worship and preaching. First, the theme of the day is projected onto the screen. The words of the theme are embedded into a visual image. The visual image is projected on the screen throughout the service as a kind of background onto which hymn lyrics and other materials are displayed. The

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<sup>162</sup> Sarah E. Hinlicky, "Talking to Generation X," *First Things* 90 (February 1999): 10-11.

advantage of this, says Wilson, is that the theme of the day is always before the people. Second, the congregation makes use of short (2-5 minute) locally produced videos. These videos are shown in about 70 percent of their services and are used to lead worshipers into a theme or as a review of a recent ministry trip. Third, the congregation uses live cameras during worship to draw people into various parts of the worship service. They find that this is especially helpful for children's messages and baptisms, but also, during the offering, to draw attention to a design on a parament, the flame of the eternal candle, the font, or other items.

When it comes to preaching, Rev. Wilson refuses to uses "sermon points" on the screen. He claims that he tried it for a few weeks, but that it turned his conversational style of preaching into a lecture. So instead of using points, Rev. Wilson uses images to reinforce his points.

Wilson says that through the use of technology his preaching has changed. Wilson notes that he is no longer solely responsible for telling the story. Instead, he now works with a team of members who help him craft a theme out of the text he wants to preach. Together, he and the team determine what visual elements, as well as music, drama, and other means can help communicate that theme in the most powerful way. Wilson goes on to say that because of technology, he now thinks more in terms of story and visual images. He notes that often times, with the help of video, he can allow the hearer to share their own faith story, rather than merely attempting to replicate it himself.

Clearly technology can be used to influence the hearts of the hearers. Through the use of images and music the preacher can reach the hearer in a more complete way than can a sermon which enters only the ear. In addition, the preacher can let the hearers participate more fully in

the sermon by allowing the hearers to assist in the determination of what images and what music will be used.<sup>163</sup>

### *Visual Aids*

The use of complicated technology is not the only tool available to the preacher who wishes to influence the hearts of hearers toward faith and godly living. Another helpful tool is to employ visual aids in preaching.

In his tome, *The Preacher and His Audience*, Webb B. Garrison, notes the impact of visual aids. He writes, "Studies of classroom learning, conducted by a team of psychologists, yielded conclusive proof that when material was presented with visual aids it was more effective for immediate recall than when presented without the use of such aids."<sup>164</sup> Webb's words should come as no surprise. The use of visual aids in preaching has a long history. Consider the preaching of Jesus and Paul. In Matthew 18:3-4, the disciples ask Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus responds by using a little child as a visual aid and saying, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Paul makes a similar move in Athens by employing the images and art of the Athenians as touchstones from which he proclaims Christ. Preachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have perhaps an even greater need to use visual aids than did Jesus or Paul. We live in the electronic communication culture in which people need and desire a visual image to grasp the idea being conveyed.

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<sup>163</sup> The section on technology is summarized from Kent V. Wilson, "Preaching So People Can Hear (and See) It," Lutheran Partners on Line November-December 2003, Volume 19 Number 6. [home page on-line] [http://www.elca.org/lp/0312\\_03.html](http://www.elca.org/lp/0312_03.html); Internet; accessed June 25, 2004.

<sup>164</sup> Garrison, 233.

When using visual aids, the preacher will want to be mindful of a few cautions. The first is that he will want to make sure that the image does not overpower the text. The second is that images cannot be used as a substitute for solid, biblical, and doctrinal content, but they can be used in support of that content.<sup>165</sup> Next, when using visual aids, the preacher will want to make sure that the image has a tight connection to the text and sermon aim. If not, the hearer may very well remember the visual aid but not the message. Lastly, given that images aid in memory and immediate recall, the visual aid needs to support and enhance the gospel rather than the law.

### *Delivery*

The sermon may have excellent content and an outstanding style, but to influence the heart of the hearers, the sermon also needs a good delivery. When it comes to delivery the preacher will want to practice good oral communication. One of the most important aspects of oral communication is the preacher's word choice and sentence structure.

Concerns about word choice and sentence structure include more than just good grammar. A sermon that influences the hearts of the hearers will be preached in the language of the people who hear it. In other words, the sermon will deliver the Word of God in the language of the family room, the café, the playground, and the office. Should the preacher need to use technical theological language, he will want to explain his terms. All of this is done so that the people can understand. As Oswald C.J. Hoffmann once put it: "The goal of every pastor must be to preach without becoming preachy."<sup>166</sup>

In addition to using the language of the people, the preacher will want to use short words and sentences. Listening is a more difficult task than reading, because in listening one cannot go

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<sup>165</sup> Newman, 25.

<sup>166</sup> Hoffmann, 49.

back and revisit a word or phrase. Given this impediment, the use of short words and sentences is preferred over multi-syllabic words and long sentences. The longer the words and sentences, the greater the chance that the hearers will misunderstand the preacher.<sup>167</sup> The use of short words and sentences is, of course, key when communicating with people in an electronic communication culture who have short attention spans and are used to receiving information and images in brief bytes.

The preacher will also want to use his short words and sentences to speak in concrete terms which create images in the hearers' minds of things seen, heard, tasted, smelled, and touched. For example, the sentence "Tom went to the store," is flat. It creates few images. However, the sentence, "Tom threw on his blue Levi's jean jacket and sprinted on down to the Piggly Wiggly," creates many images in the minds of the hearers. This example highlights the need for descriptive phrases in preaching. Remember, the hearers are not just sets of ears. They have eyes, noses, taste buds, and fingers. The more senses to which the preacher can appeal, the greater the impact will be on the hearer.<sup>168</sup>

Sermons that contain good grammar, short words and short sentences are much easier to remember than sermons that lack these elements. A sermon which is easily remembered enables the preacher to preach without notes. Preaching with notes, especially when that preaching consists of the reading of those notes, gives the impression that the preacher cannot remember the sermon. If the preacher cannot remember the sermon how can the people?<sup>169</sup> Preaching without notes creates an atmosphere in which the preacher can look the people in the eye as if to say, "I love you and care for you. I know your needs and your concerns. I have come to bring

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<sup>167</sup> Garrison, 95.

<sup>168</sup> Larson, 25.

<sup>169</sup> Caemmerer, "The Pastor in the Pulpit," 126.

you healing through the Word of God.” Note how this practice nurtures the relationship between the pastor and hearers. It helps build a community, which is very important for many of today’s hearers.

The preacher who wishes to influence the hearts of his hearers toward faith and godly living will also want to pay careful attention to his non-verbal communication. In this regard the preacher will want to be well groomed. Messy hair, a dirty and un-ironed alb, and a lopsided stole form distractions for the hearers which will impede their listening. In the same vein, a nervous preacher with over-done gestures will be a distraction to his hearers. On the other hand, honest, relaxed, emotional delivery can be a great aid to holding the hearers’ collective attention.<sup>170</sup>

As the preacher considers both his verbal and non-verbal communication, he will want to remember this key phrase: Be yourself in the pulpit. Today’s hearers value authenticity. As was said earlier in the discussion of Millennials and postmodernism, today’s hearers know when they are being sold a bill of goods, and they are suspicious of authority. Therefore, the man in the pulpit will want to be the same man the hearers encounter in the office, the grocery store, and on the softball field. In the pulpit the preacher is to be a man of honesty, integrity, and Christian love because he is just such a man elsewhere. Good preaching avoids a pulpit tone, in which the preacher alters his voice to sound more authoritative; the overuse of dramatics, in which the preacher overdoes gestures; and a performance mindset, in which the sermon is treated more like a Shakespearean monologue than a proclamation of God’s Word. Such practices can hinder the

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<sup>170</sup> Rogness, 101-102.

communication of the Word because the hearers focus more on the messenger than the message.<sup>171</sup>

In addition to being himself, the preacher will also want to have a good pastoral relationship with the hearers. As Calvin Miller says, “All public speaking works best when the hearers feel that the speaker and themselves are alike. Church members frequently sum up their feelings about their pastor by saying, ‘He’s a regular guy.’ This is the Ole Beck syndrome. People listen best to someone with whom they feel they have something in common.”<sup>172</sup> The pastoral relationship is played out as the preacher identifies himself and the hearers through the sermon. The preacher does this as he expounds their commonly held beliefs via the sermon.<sup>173</sup> He also gives expression to their relationship as he stands before them as their pastor and witness, who went to the Scriptures on their behalf and now presents God’s truth to them honestly, and with love.

In conveying the commonly held beliefs of the congregation, the preacher will want to pay careful attention to the emotions attached to these beliefs. Therefore, a sermon that influences the hearts of the hearers will be preached with emotion. When the preacher delivers a sermon that is full of emotion that matches the message, the hearers will get caught up in his emotions and share them. For example, if the preacher is speaking about God’s love for us in Christ Jesus, but his face is stern, angry, and lacking joy, the congregation will find the words about the joy of the gospel difficult to believe.<sup>174</sup> The preacher who can arouse the emotions of

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<sup>171</sup> Caemmerer, “The Pastor in the Pulpit,” 131.

<sup>172</sup> Calvin Miller, *Spirit, Word, and Story: A Philosophy of Marketplace Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 214.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Caemmerer, “The Pastor in the Pulpit,” 133.

his hearers in a way that is consistent with his message will go a long way toward preaching a message that impacts the hearts of the hearers.

A key to using emotion is to get the hearers involved with the emotion. The closer the hearer feels to the idea being presented, the more intense his or her emotional response will be and the greater the impact will be on his or her life. A prime example of this is David in 2 Samuel 12. In this chapter Nathan the prophet confronts an unrepentant David. In confronting David, Nathan could have launched into a discourse of the Fifth, Sixth, and Ninth Commandments. Instead, he told an emotional story of a rich man who stole and butchered a poor man's ewe lamb. The Bible records David's emotional reaction: "Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity'" (2 Samuel 12:5-6). Clearly Nathan's use of an emotional story impacted the heart of his hearer David, for following Nathan's explanation of the story in which he told David that what the rich man had done to the poor man was on a par with what David had done to Uriah, David confessed his sins and received the Lord's absolution.

One caveat needs to be mentioned concerning preaching with emotion. The preacher needs to guard against emotional eisegesis.<sup>175</sup> While the preacher does want to convey and appeal to the emotion contained in the text, he does not want to import an emotion that is not there. To do so would be to become emotionally manipulative or overly emotional. For example, the preacher is preaching a sermon on the death of Lazarus. The text is filled with the emotions of the mourners, the sisters, and even of Jesus. Tears and sadness are abundant in the story of Lazarus' death and the preacher will most certainly want to touch on those emotions and

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<sup>175</sup> Gregory K Hollified, "Expository Preaching That Touches the Heart," *Preaching* 19, no. 5. (March-April 2004), 22.

convey them to his hearers. However, the preacher could “overdo it” should he himself break down and weep uncontrollably.

Finally, a good delivery will become an even better delivery through practice and review. Once the preacher has chosen his words and written them into a manuscript, he does well to practice, practice, practice. This practice will allow the preacher to experience how the sermon sounds. It will allow the preacher to become comfortable with the sermon content to the point that he can vary his rate of speech, his volume, and his pauses, and preach without notes.

Once the sermon is delivered, the preacher will do well to review his delivery via the means of a tape recording or video recording. Such a review will allow the preacher to study his word choices, sentence structures, rate of speech, variations in volume, gestures, and mannerisms. In short, he will be able to get a good picture of what he sounds like and what he looks like.

When reviewing either the audio or video tape of the sermon, the preacher will want to ask himself some questions concerning his preaching. Keith Willhite, Professor of Pastoral Ministries, at Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas Texas offers this helpful set of questions:

- Is the message clear and easy to follow?
- Did the introduction gain attention and point to a need for this message?
- Did the structure of the message represent the biblical text accurately?
- Can the listeners see that this message came from the passage(s)?
- Do listeners know how to respond to this message?
- Is delivery competent and humble?<sup>176</sup>

While these questions are “yes” and “no” questions, “yes” and “no” answers will not suffice. The preacher needs to answer these questions by saying, “Yes or no, and here is what

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<sup>176</sup> Willhite, 45.

was good about it. Here is what was bad about it.” It may prove helpful to the preacher to have one’s spouse or a trusted colleague review the videotape and answer the same questions.

#### ***Conclusion to Question Four***

Sermon content, introductions and conclusions, sermon style, the use of technology, visual aids, and sermon delivery are just a few of the elements of a sermon that influence the heart of the hearers in the direction of true faith and godly living. The preacher who pays careful attention to these elements will find that his ability to influence his hearers will grow simply because he has grown in his abilities as a preacher. Such is the case when the preacher seeks to present biblical content in a law and gospel manner. Such is the case when the preacher varies his sermon styles and employs technology and visual aids. Such is the case when the preacher works on improving his delivery.

## **Conclusion to the Seminar Paper**

This seminar paper has supported the thesis that in order to influence the heart of the hearer in the direction of faith and a godly life, the preacher needs to know his hearers. This thesis has been supported through the exploration of four questions. The first question was “Why does the preacher need to know his hearers?” The answers given to this question included that God has called the preacher mediately through the congregation to be the one who tends and feeds them through the Word of God. One way the preacher can do that is by knowing his hearers intimately. He will want to know them intimately so that he can take them, their cares, their concerns, and their questions with him to the Scriptures. He will then study the Scriptures on their behalf. He goes as their witness who, on Sunday morning, reports back to them. This report is not a newspaper story. Rather, it is healing and balm that is applied to their lives in an appropriate and timely way with the proper balance of God’s law and gospel. The preacher does this because preaching is pastoral care. It is care that comes from God through the preacher who knows his hearers as a shepherd knows and loves his sheep. The witness/shepherd relationship provides the preacher and hearers with a foundation of trust which allows the hearers to open themselves up to what it is that God is saying to them through the preacher.

The second question which was examined in support of the thesis was, “What does the preacher need to know about his hearers?” It was stated that the preacher will want to know his hearers’ spiritual condition: they are saints and sinners. The preacher will also want to take into account that his hearers are multi-sensual. They have eyes, ears, hands, tongues, and noses. The more the preacher can appeal to these various senses, the greater influence his sermon will have

on his hearers. The preacher will also want to be aware of the various generations to which he preaches because each is different. Traditionalists have a strong work ethic and they respect authority. Members of Generation X and Millennials are engrossed in the electronic communication culture and postmodernism. Baby Boomers seem to have one foot planted in modernity and one in postmodernism. All of this means that each generation has been conditioned to listen to sermons in different ways. The preacher who wishes to influence the hearts of his hearers will do well to keep this in mind and adapt his sermons to each listening style. In addition to this, the preacher will also want to be aware of the current events which impact his hearers' lives. Doing so will allow him to preach even more timely and appropriate sermons.

“How shall the preacher get to know his hearers?” was the third question asked. It was stated that the preacher will get to know his hearers simply by spending time with them through home visits and by attending community activities. He may also wish to employ various means such as questionnaires and study groups. The preacher can also get to know his hearers via the use of his imagination, conversations with his spouse, and preaching the whole counsel of God.

The preacher who has come to know everything that he can about his hearers will then want to construct a sermon which will influence their hearts in the direction of true faith and godly living. Such a sermon will have a solitary aim. It will also include the Lutheran nonnegotiable: it will properly distinguish between law and gospel, so that the unrepentant sinner might be accused and the repentant sinner be forgiven and empowered for true faith and godly living. More often than not, sermons which influence the hearers' hearts will move inductively rather than deductively. Inductive movement encourages the hearers to participate in the sermon as they travel through the text with the preacher and reach the conclusion with him. Conclusions

reached in this way become the possession of the hearers and not just the preacher's.

Nevertheless, some texts wish to be preached in a deductive way, and the preacher will do well to bow to the text's wishes.

In addition to inductive sermons, interactive sermons also provide the hearer with an opportunity to become involved with the sermon, for this style of sermon calls on the hearers to provide many of the stories and examples through which the sermon makes its point.

Story sermons are yet another valuable sermon style. As was previously mentioned, most people like stories simply because they can remember them. No doubt this is because stories appeal to the hearers' senses and emotions in a way in which mere accounting of the facts cannot. In this regard, the preacher who wishes to influence the hearts of his hearers will do well to employ technology and visual aids. These tools also allow the preacher to appeal to the hearers' ears, eyes, and emotions all at the same time, thus creating an impact greater than that of mere words.

No matter what style or tools he uses, even though a sermon may be doctrinally pure, or have the perfect balance of law and gospel, or move inductively, or deductively, and be rich in story, it can still miss the mark due to a bad delivery. Therefore, the preacher will seek to improve his delivery, and as he does, he will pay attention to his verbal and non-verbal communication.

As John H.C. Fritz declares, "It is to be borne in mind that the *ultimate purpose* of all preaching should be to influence the heart of the hearer in the direction of true faith and a godly life."<sup>177</sup> The preacher who knows his hearers will be well prepared to achieve this ultimate purpose.

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<sup>177</sup> Fritz, 78.

## Appendix A

### INRI 3rd Sunday in Advent (12/14/1997) Rejoice!

Aim: To empower the hearers to rejoice in the Lord always.

Philippians 4:4-7 NIV - Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

By now our Christmas preparations are running in high gear. I hope that you have most of your presents purchased. I hope that the dates for your holiday parties have been set. I hope that all the baking is being completed on schedule. I hope that your out-of-town company has their travel arrangements made.

Presents, parties, pastries, and guests. These things have become an integral part of our Christmas celebrations. They can add a dimension of fun and excitement to the holiday. They can also, and often do, add a sense of anxiety to the holiday. We find ourselves saying, "Where shall I get the money for an 'Interactive Barney?'" "What shall I wear to so and so's get together?" "How am I going to get all these cookies baked and mailed?" "When are they coming? How long are they staying? They're bringing the dog?" I hope that these anxieties are working themselves out so that you can sit back and rejoice over the birth of our Savior.

Christmas should be a time for rejoicing. Christ the Lord was born to save us. We should rejoice at this. Often times, however, presents, parties, pastries, and guests fill us with anxiety to the point that we miss out on the rejoicing. God doesn't want that to happen to us. In today's epistle lesson he gives us some concrete ways that will help us to rejoice, not just at Christmas, but always.

Speaking for God St. Paul says, "Do not be anxious about anything."

With these words St. Paul is not trying to convince us that life is beautiful all the time. His life wasn't. Paul had some things to be anxious about. He was imprisoned at least three times. He had been flogged. Five times he received from the Jews forty lashes minus one. Three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned. He found himself shipwrecked three times. Throughout his travels he was in danger from bandits, false brothers, the Jews, and the Gentiles. Often he went without sleep, food, water, shelter, and clothing. As he wrote this letter to the Philippians he did so from prison. Despite all of this, the theme of Paul's letter to them is, "I rejoice. Do you rejoice?"

Like Paul, we have events and circumstances in our lives which can lead us to be anxious. These events and circumstances are bigger than presents, pastries, parties, and out of town guests. We find ourselves dealing with unemployment, financial crisis, marital difficulties, educational nightmares, and health problems. Some of us are asking big questions like, "Why am I here? What am I supposed to do with my life? Which college should I attend? Is it time for a career change? What do others think of me?"

It is into the face of all of this that St. Paul says, "Do not be anxious about anything." He is not telling us to live as though nothing matters. Nor is he saying that we should be unconcerned about our lives. Rather he is saying we should not take ourselves more seriously than need be; we should not get anxious over that which we cannot control.

We will suffer from anxiety so long as we continue to insist that everything be the way we want it. If we want a life which is marked only by success, with all frustrations removed, we will never be able to rejoice this Christmas. We will never live out Paul's words to "Rejoice in the Lord always."

God does not want us to be anxious people. God wants us to be people that rejoice. In our text God tells us how to battle our anxiety and be people who always rejoice. He tells us to pray.

Speaking for God, Paul says, ". . . In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Instead of living a life of care, we are to live a life of prayer. We are to bring our needs, cares, troubles, and desires before God. As children ask their dear father for everything they need, so we ask our heavenly Father for all that we need. We ask him not because he is ignorant of our need, but because we need to discuss with him all our concerns be they large or small, important or unimportant. God wants to hear about these things. He will listen to us as we pray.

Someone will ask, "Prayer? Is that all we can do?" Those who pray regularly do not ask this question. They know that prayer is sufficient. They know that God hears prayer and that he will guide our thoughts, words, and actions if we let him.

As we pray we do so with thanksgiving. We pray this way because God has taken care of us. He has sent his only begotten Son into the flesh to live among us and even die for us. In this way God announced that he has come to take care of us. Jesus took care of our biggest anxieties when he bore our sins and suffered and died on a cross for us. Because of this, God forgives us all our sins. How much more then shall he hear us when we pray and take care of our smaller anxieties as well?

We can pray with confidence. We say this because "The Lord is near." This phrase is somewhat ambiguous. It can mean that the Lord is close to us, present with us, concerned about us, ready to come to our aid, and at hand to assist us. It can also mean that his return is immanent. Jesus will come to reward the faithful, punish the evildoer, heal all ills, and right all wrongs. Most scholars believe the phrase means both. In any event, the Lord's nearness gives us plenty of reason to pray confidently, for it tells us that we do not have to handle our anxieties on our own and that soon we will be delivered from them.

Paul says the result of prayer is that, “. . . the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard (our) hearts and (our) minds in Christ Jesus." Peace is the exact opposite of anxiety. It is the reflection of the tranquility and calm serenity which God has in himself. It is peace which is grounded in the presence and promises of God. It is a peace which says, "Being loved by God, we know that everything is under his control. Nothing causes us to be uneasy, frustrated, or threatened, because everything is placed trustingly into the hands of God through prayer."

As the peace of God fills us, it guards us. It acts like a soldier guarding the gates of our hearts and minds from the invasion of anxiety. It protects us from internal and external difficulties. Peace keeps us safe in Christ Jesus.

The Lord is near. He hears our prayers. He guards us with his peace. These facts fill us with joy. As we experience joy we rejoice.

Our text tells us the way in which we are to rejoice. It says, "Let your gentleness be evident to all." Gentleness is a princely quality in a person. It is marked by a courtesy and respect for the integrity of others which prompts us not to be forever insisting on our own rights. It comes from being filled with the peace of God.

We Christians can be gentle people even in the most difficult of circumstances; we can rejoice at all times. We can do this because we believe that God loves us. We believe our Baptism for God has made us his children. We believe the Holy Communion for God does indeed forgive us our sins. We believe that the Lord is near for soon he will come to take us to heaven. We believe that in heaven we shall reign with Christ. We believe that God has given us all that we need. Gentleness is the compliment to our belief in all these things. It is stimulated and energized by the love God gives us through these things.

As gentle people we need not be selfish and cruel; those things are driven by anxiety. Instead, because we have the peace of God, we can be as meek and gentle as Christ Jesus. When we face opposition, we need not stand up for our rights, for the power of God's love moves us to be merciful towards those who oppose us. The result is our "gentleness (will be) evident to all."

Christmas should be a time for rejoicing. Christ the Lord was born to save us. Let's not let the anxieties of the season and of life get us down. Instead, let's pray, trusting that the Lord is near, guarding us with his peace, empowering us to be gentle; empowering us to rejoice! Amen.

Preached at St. Paul's Lutheran Church - Luzerne, IA  
on December 14, 1997  
by Pastor Max Mons

## Appendix A1

### INRI

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (10/13/2002)

Present Your Requests to God!

Aim: to empower the hearers to submit everything to God in prayer.

Philippians 4:6-7 NIV - <sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

There was a congregation in Philippi whose members suffered from a boatload of worry because they were trying to live the Christian life in the midst of opposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. On the one hand they had to deal with the dogs, men of evil, who were claiming that circumcision was a necessary part of the Christian life. On the other hand, they had to deal with the enemies of the cross, whose god was their stomach. These people were earthly minded. They let their smallest wants and passions rule them. All this opposition can make a person really anxious.

There's a little congregation in Iowa City whose members are suffering from sweaty palms, pounding hearts, sleepless nights, and upset stomachs. And do you know why this crowd is anxious? It's because we're taking midterms!! We're studying for organic chemistry, biology, physics, music theory, history, Spanish, and a host of other classes. We're studying for the GRE, the PCAT, and the MCAT. Some of us are studying for all this stuff at the same time. We're trying to balance 16 credit hours, work, and a social life. We're wondering, "What am I supposed to do with my life?" "How much more will they hike tuition?" "Are we really going to war with Iraq?" "What if my candidate loses the election?" "Is it safe for me to walk to class or is some sniper going to gun me down, too?" And then there is our sin. We Christians are troubled by our sins more than anyone else because we know what we deserve for them. We know that we haven't loved God as we should. We know we haven't loved our neighbors as we should. We try and do the good and live like a Christian, but all too often we end up doing the wrong and evil we so desperately try to avoid. And when that happens the devil comes in and reminds us of just how much we fail to live like Christians. And with that we get anxious. Our palms sweat; our hearts pound and we feel as though there aren't enough anti-acids in the entire world to deal with our stomachs.

There was a pastor who knew all about anxiety, because he himself had faced some anxious times as he went around preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The pastor's name was Paul, and he had been imprisoned at least three times. He had been flogged. Five times he received from the Jews forty lashes minus one. Three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned. He was shipwrecked three times. Throughout his travels he was in danger from bandits, false brothers, the Jews, and the Gentiles. Often he went without sleep, food, water, shelter, and clothing. And when the congregation at Philippi was dealing with their anxiety, Paul was in prison in Rome awaiting trial for his life.

It's this same Paul who tells the Philippians and us how to handle anxiety, he says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Paul says, "Don't be anxious about anything." Anxiety comes about when we try to handle everything on our own and when we worry about things which are beyond our control. When Paul says, "Don't be anxious about anything," he's telling us that we don't have to go it alone. We still need to be responsible, but we don't need to handle everything on our own. Instead, we follow Paul's instructions and "In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." We give it all over to God through prayer. We ask God to help us with everything, trusting that he will answer our prayers and do what is best for us. We have this trust because we are his children through Holy Baptism.

So instead of living a life of care, we live a life of prayer. Now someone is bound to say, "Prayer? Is that all we can do?" And to that we say, "Take a look at this."

He had said it many times, but now it's all coming to fruition. It's time for Jesus to "Suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and (to) be killed and on the third day be raised to life (Matt. 16:21)." The appointed hour for this to happen has come and Jesus knows it. Soon he will be arrested, tried, mocked, beaten, and crucified. He's staring death dead in the face and listen to how he reacts to all of this: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death (Matt. 26)." No doubt his heart is pounding and his stomach is in knots and we know he is sweating; he's sweating blood.

And what does he do about all of this? He doesn't try to handle it on his own. He doesn't give into anxiety; instead, he presents his requests to God. Jesus prays, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will (Mat. 26)." And the Father strengthened Jesus through the ministry of an angel.

From the Garden Jesus went on to suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law. Indeed he was tried, mocked, and beaten. He was killed on a cross and he did all of this for us. He did it to take away our sins and destroy the work of the devil. His resurrection tells us that we are forgiven and that the devil is defeated.

Now I ask you, if that's how God handles that which makes us anxious, namely our sins and the devil, how much more is he ready, willing, and able to help us with our tests, work, relationships, and everything else which makes our palms sweat, our hearts pound, and our stomachs turn? The answer lies in our text: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Did you hear what Paul said? He says that as we present our requests to God, the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus and that's a whole lot better than anxiety. Just think about it.

The peace of God flows from the peace we have with God because of Jesus' death and resurrection for us. It's the inward peace of the soul, which comes from God alone. It's the peace which is grounded in the presence and promises of God. It's the peace which tells us, "I'm loved by God. I can place everything in his hands. I trust that he will take care of everything and answer my prayers and supplications in ways which are good for me. I have no need for anxiety."

The peace of God has this effect on us because it transcends all understanding. That means it gives us far more security than our human thoughts and efforts could ever obtain. It fills us with a deeper calm and satisfaction than our anxious thoughts could ever do.

Not only is that true, but the peace of God also will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. God's peace does a warrior's duty. It stands sentry over our hearts and minds. How comforting that is. Temptations to anxiety will come. Tests will come. Relationships will have their bumps. Our sins and the devil will still mount attacks, but as we give everything over to God his peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus – and he is the very one who has established peace with God and brings us the peace of God.

Dear friends in Christ, don't live a life of care: live a life of prayer. Take your midterms, relationships, your wonders, concerns, and everything else which gives you sweaty palms, pounding hearts, and turning stomachs, and present your requests to God. And when you do, do so with thanksgiving: thanksgiving for Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection for you. Thanksgiving that, because of Jesus, you can present your petitions to God with all boldness and confidence, trusting that God will hear your prayers and answer them according to his love, which is always best for you. And as you do this, kiss your anxiety good-bye for, "The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." In his name. Amen.

Preached at St. Paul's Lutheran Chapel - Iowa City, Iowa  
on October 13, 2002  
by Pastor Max Mons

## Appendix B

### Guiding Questions for Sermon Study Group St. Paul's Lutheran Chapel, Iowa City, Iowa

#### Questions:

1. What are your thoughts on this text? What do you know about it from previous exposure to it?
2. Who is being addressed by the text? How are you similar to and/or different from the people to whom the text originally spoke?
3. Is there anything in this text that surprises you? For example is there anything that makes you say, "I didn't expect that!" or "What's that doing here?"
4. The law of God always accuses us, telling us that we have not lived as God would have us live. What in this text accuses you?
5. The gospel of God brings us comfort and forgiveness. Where do you see gospel in this text and what difference does it make in your life?
6. I hear this text telling me...
7. Hey pastor, when you preach a sermon on this text, be sure to talk about:
8. Other comments:
9. Questions you wished this form asked but didn't, and how would you answer them?

## Appendix C

Taken from  
 Webb B. Garrison's *The Preacher and His Audience*  
 (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1954), 36

### Personal Problem Sheet

Directions: Indicate sex and age to the nearest multiple of 10 years. Then study the list of personal problems: in each case encircle the x in the column which applies to you. Please be honest with yourself: DO NOT PERMIT ANYONE TO SEE THIS SHEET; DO NOT SIGN YOUR NAME. If you have personal problems not listed, please use the blank spaces to write them in and to indicate how serious they are to you.

#### Degree of Seriousness In my Own Life

Personal Problems	<i>No Problem</i>	<i>Minor Problem</i>	<i>Regular Problem</i>	<i>Serious Problem</i>	<i>Critical</i>
1. Personal Relations in the family.....	x	x	x	x	x
2. Unsatisfied desire for money.....	x	x	x	x	x
3. Recognition of self-centeredness.....	x	x	x	x	x
4. Temptation to drink.....	x	x	x	x	x
5. Personal relations on job or in school.....	x	x	x	x	x
6. Sense of guilt from using tobacco.....	x	x	x	x	x
7. Problems related to sex.....	x	x	x	x	x
8. Worry about international affairs.....	x	x	x	x	x
9. Temptation to gamble.....	x	x	x	x	x
10. Sense of guilt about using alcohol.....	x	x	x	x	x
11. Worry about a future depression.....	x	x	x	x	x
12. Sense of guilt from having broken laws of the Bible.....	x	x	x	x	x
13. Worry about attitude of friends	x	x	x	x	x
14. Worry about health.....	x	x	x	x	x
15. Temptation to sexual sin.....	x	x	x	x	x
16. Sense of guilt from dishonesty.....	x	x	x	x	x
17. Unsatisfied desire for recognition.....	x	x	x	x	x
18. Worry about attitude of relatives.....	x	x	x	x	x
19. Sense of guilt from using profanity.....	x	x	x	x	x
20. Sense of guilt from failure to live up to Christian ideals.....	x	x	x	x	x
21. _____	x	x	x	x	x
22. _____	x	x	x	x	x

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Sex \_\_\_\_\_



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