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CONCORDIA SEMINARY

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

THE USE OF ETERNAL LIFE METAPHORS IN THE FUNERAL SERMON AS A
MEANS OF GRACE

A MAJOR APPLIED PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY STUDIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

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THE USE OF ETERNAL LIFE METAPHORS IN THE FUNERAL SERMON AS A
MEANS OF GRACE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this Major Applied Project was to learn which eternal life metaphors were more comforting to the members of Pilgrim Lutheran Church, in Burton, Michigan. The researcher approached this research project believing that certain metaphors would be more comforting to his members than others. Therefore, the researcher sought to discover *which* eternal life metaphors were more comforting through the use of a research survey. He then held research group interviews to learn *why* these metaphors were more comforting than others. As a result, the researcher is able to apply the insights gained concerning certain Scriptural metaphors to be used in funeral sermons for the benefit of his congregation.

CHAPTER I

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE PROJECT

The Problem of the Project

When people face the loss of a loved one, a truly significant loved one, and when they sit in the pew at a funeral service, the power of the Law has already been at work and continues to do so. They have been crushed by the fact that death has taken their loved one from them and left them helpless and humbled in its wake. The feeling of loss and sadness may be overwhelming as they sit there, perhaps close to the point of despair. They are angry and despondent, troubled and confused.

However, their situation may be graver still. For when a significant loved one dies, there is not only the sharp pain of loss that cuts deep into the heart, but also the dreadful fear of one's own death. All believers know that one day they too will have to face their Maker and stand before the judgment seat of God. This they already know well. Like it or not, they know the Law and that Law accuses them in such a way that there is no escape.

To make matters worse, some of the people in the pew may have no idea where to turn for comfort and strength. They may see no way out of their predicament. The coping mechanisms that they have relied on in the past may simply not be adequate to meet the challenge of this dark hour. The pain of great loss, the dreadful fear, it is all too great.

Nevertheless, they have come to the right place. For what they desperately need is to hear a message of hope from the church; the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ. They need a message that will sustain them through their dark time of mourning and bring them hope for the future. They have come to the right place, a place where God has come to meet them, to comfort them, and to help them. Therefore, the funeral service may be one of the most opportune times to bring a message of hope from the Lord, a time when people will be open and attentive to a word from God. I believe it is!

Into this context the pastor steps and seeks to proclaim the message of consolation from God's Word to those who weep in sadness and shudder with fear. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has prepared a place in his kingdom for all those who believe in his Son. Jesus is the ultimate solution to death, the eternal solution, and the source of the greatest possible consolation in the face of death and the fear of death. God has done it all, and he is seeking to bring this wonderful message of hope and life to those who need it most.

The funeral sermon is the evangelistic opportunity that I welcome as a pastor, to be able to stand before the bereaved and to share with them the hope of eternal life which comes through faith in Jesus Christ. However, my passion to share the good news of Jesus Christ is more than a vocational desire, for I have personally experienced the power of the Gospel at work. The Gospel brought hope into the midst of my despair and peace to my troubled heart when my pastor preached the Gospel at my mother's funeral. I was only seventeen at the time, but hearing the Gospel was a life-changing experience. It was a rebirth for me into the faith, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word. Moreover, though I didn't know it at the time, it was the beginning of my journey into the

ministry. Having been touched by the sweetness of the Gospel in the midst of despair and dread, having felt the Lord's compassion and love when I needed it most, I have always desired to share this same hope-filled message with others in their time of loss and fear. Therefore, I firmly believe that when a pastor enters the pulpit during a funeral ceremony he has the wonderful opportunity to bring the hope of the Gospel to those who need it most, to impart God's means of grace to those who yearn for it.

However, while I believe personally and professionally that preaching the Gospel at a funeral is a great evangelistic moment, several challenges face today's preacher as he approaches the funeral sermon. First, many preachers today have been taught to explain a passage of Scripture in propositional form using the traditional deductive approach.¹ The sermon often takes on a didactic style, with various major and minor points of emphasis. This is not a problem in and of itself. However, this propositional form of preaching becomes problematic when the primary focus of the sermon is to communicate ideas and truths through the use of deductive logic and argumentation alone. People today are much more image-oriented.² They will often hear the Gospel more powerfully through the use of metaphors and images, rather than ideas and logic alone.³ Therefore, propositional forms of preaching, while still necessary and relevant, need to be supplemented with image-based forms of preaching. Today's preacher strives to touch

¹ Richard L. Eslinger, *The Web of Preaching: New Options in Homiletic Method* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 16.

² Robert Hughes and Robert Kysar, *Preaching Doctrine for the Twenty First Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 56.

³ Richard A. Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-literate Age* (Lima, OH: C.S.S. Publishing Co., Inc., 1995), 53.

the whole person, including a person's intellect, emotions and will. In his article, "Preaching Doctrine in a Postmodern Age," Glenn Nielsen addresses this issue, quoting Robert Hughes and Robert Kysar:

People carry away from the sermon mental pictures evoked by the preacher's words; the propositions of the sermons are quickly jettisoned from memory. The images and stories are their key to the message of the sermon. If we want people to remember our sermons (and who does not?), and if they remember stories and images, then we need to fashion those carefully so that they carry the focus and function of the sermon.

But the most important reason imagery has become so vital for preaching is that pictorial language engages the imagination and evokes response. Propositions appeal to the mind. Imagery appeals to the whole person – mind, emotions, and will. Moreover, verbal stories and pictures provoke imagination and hence participation in the sermon.⁴

Therefore, while there are many different types of figurative language in the Bible, including simile, parable, allegory, and metaphor, as well as many others, I will focus specifically on the use of metaphors, for the proper understanding and use of images such as metaphors are essential to the preaching task. Jacob Preus succinctly states: "There is no way to say the Gospel and spell out the implications of the Gospel without words, without metaphors."⁵

Second, even as pastors seek to employ biblical metaphors in the funeral sermon, it is helpful to understand *which* images are more effective in communicating the comfort of the Gospel. Some images may better communicate to contemporary listeners than others. In fact, metaphors are specifically referred to as *dead metaphors*, because they no

⁴Robert Hughes and Robert Kysar, *Preaching Doctrine for the Twenty-first Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 56, quoted in Glenn Nielsen, "Preaching Doctrine in a Postmodern Age," *Concordia Journal* (January 2001): 25.

⁵ Jacob A. O. Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 34.

longer communicate effectively.⁶ *Dead metaphors* may simply be archaic, and, therefore, do not convey any significant meaning to an audience today. Metaphors may also die through their overuse as well as their misuse, so that they fail to convey significant meaning intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually as they once did.⁷ Author Warren Wiersbe underscores this important distinction when he writes:

Live metaphors are the kind that powerfully connects the mind and heart of the hearers so that they want to do something in response to what they learn... Dead metaphors are clichés; and when we hear speakers use them, we respond negatively with boredom and with pity.⁸

We can easily find an example of a *dead metaphor* that is part of our common culture. People today will often say that so-and-so *passed away*.⁹ This is an example of a metaphor that probably died both because of its overuse as well as misuse. It has been overused to the point that we actually use the metaphor as a synonym for death itself. People no longer talk about someone dying, but instead they say that so-and-so *passed away*. Moreover, it has also been misused by our death-denying culture, so that it has also become a euphemism for death. Originally this metaphor was probably derived from the idea of *passing* from this life to the next. But through the process of overuse and misuse it has now lost much of its dynamic force and richness. Therefore, we call it a *dead metaphor*.

⁶Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 47.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1.

My concern for effective Gospel proclamation in the funeral sermon has led me to assume that there are specific biblical metaphors that are more effective in communicating the Gospel than others. I do not challenge the power of the Gospel itself, for there is an important distinction to be made between the *efficaciousness* of God's Word and the *effectiveness* of human communication, as I will demonstrate more thoroughly later.¹⁰ However, for the purposes of this introduction, let me state that in a theological sense, the Word is always "*living and active*" as God's means of grace,¹¹ while in a literary sense, the metaphors themselves can die. To speak of the death of a metaphor is simply to acknowledge that the evocative power and meaning of certain images can fade over time and through use. Therefore, if certain metaphors are *dead metaphors*, lifeless and failing to communicate to a contemporary audience, then this needs to be considered when approaching the funeral sermon. Conversely, if other metaphors are *living metaphors*, living in a literary sense, then they become a good starting point for a pastor as he approaches the funeral sermon.

However, while there is much research to support the need for the use of metaphors in preaching, I have found none that addresses *which* biblical metaphors speak better to contemporary mourners. Therefore, research is needed to discover which metaphors are *living* and which have lost some or much of their metaphorical power.

¹⁰ A detailed presentation of this distinction can also be found in the following article by Glenn Nielsen, "No Longer Dinosaurs: Relating Lutheran Homiletics and Communication Practice," *Concordia Journal* (January 1999): 14-29.

¹¹ Hebrews 4:12. NIV unless otherwise noted.

The Purpose of the Project

As already stated, I believe that the funeral sermons I deliver are some of the most important messages I will ever preach to my congregation, as well as to the nonmembers who are present for the service. It is essential, then, that the images I use in my sermons communicate the comfort and hope which I intend, so that the Spirit may use the images and message efficaciously.

Therefore, working with the presupposition that I will be more effective preaching to my people through the use of *living* biblical metaphors, the purpose of this project was to determine *which* metaphors communicate more effectively the living hope of Christ to the people in my congregation at Pilgrim Lutheran Church, in Burton, Michigan, who have experienced the loss of a significant loved one. In addition, while the primary purpose of this project was to assist me in the pastoral care of my members, it was also hoped that the findings could be beneficial to other pastors in other contexts.

In its simplest form, a *metaphor* is the comparison and interaction of two concepts, identified by a single word or phrase that is metaphorical in nature.¹² Preus writes: “A metaphor is a figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another.”¹³ Additionally, metaphorical language moves from what is known to the listeners to what is unknown, expanding their understanding of existing reality.¹⁴ Therefore, a metaphor is not merely ornamental

¹² Rodney Kennedy, *The Creative Power of Metaphor: A Rhetorical Homiletics* (New York, NY: University Press of America, 1993), 5.

¹³ Preus, 32-33.

¹⁴ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Great Britain: Antony Rowe Ltd., 1980), 145.

language, but language that makes an essential “association between what is known and what is unknown.”¹⁵

The anticipated outcomes of this research are, first of all, to determine through a descriptive study which metaphors relating to death and eternal life are more comforting to the members of Pilgrim Lutheran Church for the purposes of funeral sermons. Second, the research helps me to understand *why* certain metaphors are more comforting to my members than others, providing me with additional insights for my funeral sermon preparations, as well as the pastoral care that follows the funeral. Third, my purpose seeks to discover which metaphors are less helpful to my members so that they can be avoided or modified for use in funeral sermons.

The Process of the Project

In order to determine which Scriptural metaphors relating to death and eternal life were more comforting living metaphors for my congregation I used the research designed below. First, I sent a survey to all the adult members of my congregation. The survey included a list of fifteen death and eternal life metaphors that the Scriptures provide,¹⁶

¹⁵ Preus, 33.

¹⁶ Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in *paradise*.” Revelation 2:10 (Jesus said), “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you *the crown of life*.” Revelation 21:4 (God) will wipe *every tear from their eyes*. Isaiah 65:17 (The Lord said, “Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things *will not be remembered*...” John 14:2 Jesus said, “In *my Father’s house* are many rooms...” Genesis 25:8 Abraham breathed his last and died...and was *gathered to his people*. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have *fallen asleep*. Psalm 16:11 (Lord), you will fill me with joy in your presence, with *eternal pleasures* at your right hand. Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth

and my members were asked to rate them on a Likert scale, from 1 – 5. The research survey purposely sought to ascertain from my members which metaphors were *most comforting* to them.

The survey was done in a confidential manner to ensure that the individual responses were valid. Those who preferred to remain anonymous could do so. However, those members who were interested in taking part in a focus group were asked to indicate their willingness on the survey. The congregational surveys were completed in November 2007.

Next, I compiled the data and made a list of the names of those who were willing to participate in a focus group. I then selected people from these volunteers for two separate groups, all of which had recently experienced a significant loss and/or attended a funeral. This would later enable me to compare the results of these two groups. I contacted the individuals by phone and set up a meeting time for the groups at the church.

Both focus groups were asked to share why certain metaphors were considered comforting to them, and why others were not. The congregational focus groups met in January of 2008. A third focus group included local pastors and took place during their

comparing with the *glory* that will be revealed in us. Romans 8:37 In all these things we are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us. Matthew 11:28 (Jesus said), “Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you *rest*.” Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through *the valley of the shadow of death*, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Matthew 24:34 (Jesus said), “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take *your inheritance*, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” John 5:24 (Jesus said), “Whoever...believes him who sent me has eternal life and...he *has crossed over* from death to life.” John 11:25 (Jesus said), “I am *the resurrection and the life*. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies...”

February 2008 meeting. They were given the original survey containing Gospel metaphors, as well as the results from the survey and the two congregational focus groups. They were then asked to provide me with additional feedback.

At the conclusion of the focus groups I reported the results of my research to my congregation. First, I published the results of the surveys and the conclusions reached by the focus groups in the April 2008 newsletter, *The Pilgrimage*. Second, I met with the individuals of the focus groups again and shared my conclusions with them personally, in order to thank them for their participation and to get any additional feedback and reactions from them. These follow-up meetings took place in April 2008.

The Parameters of the Project

As I approached this topic of preaching the good news in funeral sermons through the use of Gospel metaphors, I did so with the following assumptions. It was my strong conviction that funeral sermons are some of the most significant sermons I will ever preach. From my own personal experience, I have learned just how transformational they can be as the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God to change the hearts and minds of listeners.

It was also my belief that when people have experienced a significant loss they are more open to the Gospel than at any other time in their lives. Moreover, I also hold that this is true even for unbelievers, though they were not part of my research project. For once the Law has done its work through the Word and the power of death, the human heart is broken and humbled and thus ready for the sweetness of the Gospel. Therefore, I

want to take full advantage of such opportunities and present the Gospel in the most effective way possible in my funeral sermons.

Furthermore, I assumed that those images identified as *living metaphors* by my members were also comforting images for them, speaking in a profound way on many different levels. Therefore, while this research project spoke in terms of *living metaphors*, the survey spoke of *comforting passages* from the Scriptures. While the two are not the same, I used *comforting* as the key aspect of what constitutes *living* for the purposes of this project. Then, once I determined which metaphors were most comforting to my members, they could become the foundation for future funeral sermons as I seek to improve the pastoral care that I provide to the people of my congregation.

Moreover, while the Scriptures are filled with metaphors relating to death and eternal life, I limited this project to a selection of fifteen metaphors.¹⁷ In making these selections, I have sought to include representative metaphors from the various literary forms of the Scriptures, including narrative, prophetic, wisdom, gospel, epistle and apocalyptic forms.

The Contents of the Project

Chapter two includes a study of the fifteen Gospel metaphors in their Scriptural context, identifying the metaphorical meaning of these passages and making applications for the funeral sermon. Next, I will examine the proper use of Gospel metaphors as a *means of grace*, and identify how they are to be used for the purpose of proclamation.

¹⁷ For list of metaphors see footnote 12, page 9.

Chapter three explores the recent developments in the understanding of metaphorical language, and then identifies which theoretical perspective is more helpful for proclaiming the Gospel in today's contemporary context.

Chapter four describes the research project as well as the methodology used for the study.

Chapter five evaluates the results of the research project, analyzing the data from both congregational surveys as well as feedback from the focus groups.

Chapter six summarizes the research project and makes recommendations for future study.

The Conclusion

Through this Major Applied Project I had hoped to be better able to provide pastoral care and comfort to the members in my congregation at Pilgrim Lutheran Church, in Burton, Michigan, when they experience a significant loss. I believe that the funeral sermon offers a special evangelistic opportunity to bring God's Word of hope and consolation in Christ to those who are despondent and dismayed. Therefore, through my research I hoped to gain greater insight into Scriptural metaphors related to death and eternal life, to learn how the Holy Spirit uses these metaphors as a means of grace, and to determine which metaphors my members found most comforting. The desired outcome is to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to those who grieve in creative ways that can touch their hearts and change their lives.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROJECT IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

As I proceed with the theological perspective for my Major Applied Project, there are several theological doctrines that are foundational, though they will not be the primary focus of my work. First of all, the Doctrine of the Fall is significant because it identifies the malady or need that will be addressed in the funeral sermon. A significant loss has occurred and this is a direct result of sin and the consequences of sin in this world.

Moreover, the Doctrine of Eternal Life presents the goal for the funeral sermon, to bring the Gospel to those who have experienced a significant loss. It is the hope that will comfort and strengthen them in the face of their loss, and which also seeks to prepare them to face their own mortality. The Gospel metaphors that I will mine from Scripture will relate specifically to this doctrine, and will offer a variety of different ways to express it.

Finally, the Doctrine of the Word informs us that the Word preached in the funeral sermon is the very Word of God. The Holy Scriptures themselves testify that they have been inspired by God and are profitable for teaching and proclamation.¹⁸ This

¹⁸ 2 Timothy 3:16.

Word brings a message of hope and consolation from God and is intended for those who have experienced the significant loss.

While the doctrines listed above are assumed to play vital roles in the funeral sermon, significant other theological matters will be studied in greater depth in this chapter. They include a study of the fifteen death and eternal life metaphors above, an examination of the proper use of these metaphors as a means of grace, and an assessment of how these metaphors are to be used for the purpose of proclamation in the funeral sermon.

The Biblical Foundation

In this section I will study the death and eternal life metaphors themselves, addressing both the context of these Scriptural passages, as well as textual considerations. However, most of all I seek to develop the richness of the metaphors themselves, which will be suggestive about how they might be creatively applied in funeral sermons to bring hope and consolation to the bereaved. Let me restate that a *metaphor* is the comparison and interaction of two concepts, identified by a single word or phrase that is figurative and metaphorical in nature.¹⁹ Moreover, metaphorical language moves from what is known to the listeners to what is unknown, expanding their understanding of existing reality.²⁰ Therefore, a metaphor is not merely decorative language. “A metaphor is a

¹⁹ Rodney Kennedy, 5.

²⁰ G. B. Caird, 145.

figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another.”²¹

Luke 23:43. Jesus answered him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in *paradise*.” (ESV)²²

This is Jesus’ second “word from the cross.”²³ It is Good Friday, and Jesus hangs on the cross just outside the walls of Jerusalem. He has been crucified with two thieves, one on each side. At first, both thieves ridicule and mock Jesus. However, as the dreadful hours pass, one of the thieves has a change of heart and even comes to Jesus’ defense: “Don’t you fear God (he says to the other thief)...since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong... Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”²⁴ In the words that follow, Jesus extends the blessed hope of eternal life, which in the face of death is the only true comfort. “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in *paradise*.”

²¹ Preus, 32-33.

²² The NIV is the primary translation used in this paper unless considerations based on the original languages have persuaded me to use a different translation. Different translations will be identified in the text.

²³ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 347.

²⁴ Luke 23:40-42.

Jesus begins saying, “Truly I say to you” (ἀμὴν σοι λέγω). Here he seeks to reassure the dying thief that his confession and plea have been heard.²⁵ Then Jesus promises the repentant thief that immediately upon his death, “today” (σήμερον), he will be with him in the afterlife.²⁶ St. Ambrose writes: “For life is to be with Christ, because where Christ is, there is the kingdom.”²⁷ With this metaphor Jesus refers to the afterlife, and ultimately to life after the resurrection, as *paradise*. “*Paradise*” (παραδείσῳ), though of Persian origin, denoting a “garden”²⁸ or “garden of delights,”²⁹ it reminds us of the original creation, where Adam and Eve were placed in *paradise* with God. There every blessing of God was present in great abundance. Moreover, as Jesus states, being in *paradise* is being “with me” (μετ’ ἐμοῦ). *Paradise* is inconceivable without being in the blissful presence of Christ, which itself is the greatest of all blessings. Until the resurrection, the thief will remain in the *paradise* which is the presence of Jesus, waiting for the *paradise* of the parousia. Arthur Just writes: “Certainly, this idea (*paradise*)

²⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 375.

²⁶ Jeffrey A Gibbs, “Regaining Biblical Hope: Restoring the Prominence of the Parousia,” *Concordia Journal* (October, 2001): 320.

²⁷ Arthur A. Just, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament – Vol. 3* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 366.

²⁸ William F. Arndt, *Concordia Classic Commentary Series: Luke* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 471.

²⁹ Just, 365.

includes the return to the righteous condition of Adam and Eve before the fall, as in Eden, where they could fully dwell in the presence of God without sin.”³⁰

These words undoubtedly brought great comfort to the dying thief and the application for the funeral sermon is quite obvious. For those who grieve the loss of a Christian loved one, there is the comfort of knowing that he or she is present with Christ in *paradise* following death. Moreover, as the bereaved struggle with thoughts about their own mortality, they can be comforted in knowing that *paradise* awaits them beyond the grave in the resurrection through faith in Christ. William Arndt concludes: “There are few, if any, passages in Scripture that shed more comforting light on the existence of believers in the world beyond the grave.”³¹

Revelation 2:10. (Jesus said) “Be faithful until death, and I will give you *the crown of life*.” (NKJ)

This verse is found in the second letter of the Book of Revelation and it is addressed to the church at Smyrna. In verse 8, Christ identifies himself as “the First and the Last,”³² and as the one “who died and came to life again.”³³ The former title would be a source of great comfort to those who face suffering and death, because it reminds them that Christ is “the first, the cause of the Christian’s faith...and he is the last, the goal

³⁰ Arthur A. Just, *Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture – Luke 9:51-24:53* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 939.

³¹ Arndt, 471.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

and object of the believer's faith and life because he is the Lord and giver of eternal life with the Father."³⁴ The latter designation will be helpful in communicating the Gospel in the funeral sermon. It speaks of how Christ "remained faithful until death" for us, and then came to life again in the resurrection. Thus he has obtained *the crown of life* which he offers by faith in his name.

These original recipients of Smyrna lived at a time of suffering and persecution. Therefore, Christ seeks to encourage them when he says "keep on proving faithful unto death"³⁵ (γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου). Faithfulness on the part of believers here speaks of ongoing repentance and faith despite the adversities they face.³⁶ They should not grow faint or weary. Moreover, Christ seeks to comfort the hearers when he extends to them the promise be faithful until death "and I will give you the crown of life" (καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς). The term *crown*³⁷ refers not to a monarch's crown, but to that of a victor's wreath,³⁸ as verse 11 reminds us, "The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."³⁹ So also, those who persevere in their faith, a victor's prize or *crown* awaits them in the resurrection. It is a *crown* that once bestowed remains forever.

³⁴ Louis A. Brighton, *Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 72.

³⁵ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. 6* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1933), 303.

³⁶ Brighton, 72.

³⁷ Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 445.

³⁸ Luther Poellot, *Concordia Classic Commentary Series: Revelation* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 38.

³⁹ Revelation 2:11, ESV.

However, this *crown of life* is not the result of the perseverance itself, as if eternal life could be obtained by human effort. Rather, it is a prize which Christ has obtained for us when he remained faithful until death and then rose to life again.⁴⁰ Now Christ wears a golden crown of victory which he shares with those who believe in him.⁴¹

This text provides abundant opportunities to proclaim the Gospel to those who need to persevere in the face of fear and sorrow. It extends to the bereaved the promise of obtaining *the crown of life*, which is certain, because it depends on the resurrection of Christ and not on the believers themselves. So long as they persevere in repentance and faith they are sure to obtain this glorious *crown*. Moreover, the promised hope of eternal life through the resurrection of Christ is itself the power to persevere. Additionally, it could be helpful to use the word *crown* as a Gospel handle,⁴² referring first to the crown of thorns that Christ wore during his time of humiliation,⁴³ and then connecting this with Christ's crown of victory. First comes the cross, and then comes the crown.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Poellot, 38.

⁴¹ Brighton, 71.

⁴² Francis C. Rossow, *Gospel Handles: Finding New Connections in Biblical Texts* (St. Louis, MO: 2001). Francis Rossow uses the term "Gospel handle" to identify creative ways of communicating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ based on clues taken from the text itself. In this text, "crown" becomes a handle which the preacher can use to build a presentation of the Gospel that will be fresh and specifically relevant to the text.

⁴³ Brighton, 71.

⁴⁴ Poellot, 38.

Revelation 21:4. (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes.

As the Book of Revelation moves towards its conclusion in this passage, life beyond the parousia is unveiled in an apocalyptic vision. World history has reached its finale, as Satan has been vanquished and Christ has stood in judgment over the living and the dead. Now Christ's promise reaches its fulfillment, the creation of "a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had passed away..."⁴⁵ This is the final destiny of all those who have believed in Christ and remained faithful to him throughout the trials and tribulations of life. They will share in the resurrection of Christ and dwell with him for all eternity.⁴⁶ "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."⁴⁷

It is in this context that we find another metaphor about God's comfort for those who have suffered and sorrowed, "(God) will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (καὶ ἐξαλείψει πᾶν δάκρυον ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν). Louis Brighton writes: "In Rev 21:4 the blessed benefits of God dwelling with his people in the new heaven and earth are described... For God would destroy death and as a result would 'wipe away every tear.'"⁴⁸ Though God is not explicitly mentioned in this verse, the preceding verses identify that God is the agent of the action. In this particular anthropomorphism, God himself is the one who comforts mourners beyond the grave, *wiping the tears from their*

⁴⁵ Revelation 21:1.

⁴⁶ Brighton, 599.

⁴⁷ Revelation 21:3.

⁴⁸ Brighton, 59.

eyes much like a “tender mother” comforts her dear child.⁴⁹ Moreover, the passage says that God *wipes away* “all tears” or “every tear” (πάντα δάκρυον).⁵⁰ Every reminder of the suffering and sorrow of this life will pass away, along with the old heaven and earth. Moreover, though not stated directly, it is certainly implied that joy and happiness will replace the crying and mourning that passes away in the resurrection and the creation of the new heaven and new earth.⁵¹ Luther Poellot summaries this beautifully:

The perfect bliss...is well described for us here on earth in negative terms, partly because we cannot conceive or appreciate perfection in positive terms by reason of the limitations of our mind and understanding and partly because we can appreciate the thought and hope of being relieved of such distress as presses upon us.⁵²

In applying this text in a funeral sermon there is a twofold sense of comfort. First, if extensive suffering immediately preceded the loved one’s death, it is of great comfort to the bereaved that God will *wipe every tear from their eyes* on the day of the resurrection.⁵³ Second, the bereaved themselves can look forward to the time when there will be for them “no more death or mourning or crying”⁵⁴ in the resurrection on the Last Day, for God *will wipe every tear from their eyes*, perhaps even literally.

⁴⁹ Robertson, 467.

⁵⁰ Vincent, 563.

⁵¹ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, eds. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery: An Encyclopedic Exploration of the Images, Symbols, Motifs, Metaphors, Figures of Speech and Literary Patterns of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1998), 364.

⁵² Poellot, 276.

⁵³ Revelation 21:1.

⁵⁴ Revelation 21:4.

Isaiah 65:17. (The Lord said), “Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered...”

As Isaiah nears the end of his prophecy, he has already pronounced judgment upon unfaithful Judah and has brought them to the point of despair.⁵⁵ Now he shares with the remnant of God’s people the hope that they have in the Lord through this apocalyptic vision.⁵⁶ In the broader context of the second half of Isaiah, the prophet has been speaking of the restoration of his people, including specific promises regarding the coming of the Suffering Servant, the Messiah, in chapter 53.⁵⁷ Christ will redeem his people and prepare for them a glorious future. All of this is in preparation for the consummation when Christ will come and stand in glory, bringing to fulfillment all the Lord’s promises to his people.⁵⁸

Specifically, the promise in this passage relates to the creation of “new heavens and a new earth.” This will follow the “...resurrection of the righteousness...,” where the remnant of God’s people will then dwell with Christ in this newly created world or universe, as the old is transformed into the new.⁵⁹ “The former things” (תְּהִיאֲשֵׁנוֹת), that is, all of the suffering and sorrow they have faced in this life will “*not be remembered*”

⁵⁵ John A. Braun, ed., *Sermon Studies on the Old Testament: ILCW Series A* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1998), 54.

⁵⁶ Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman III, 594.

⁵⁷ John A. Braun, ed., *Sermon Studies on the Old Testament: ILCW Series C* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 245.

⁵⁸ F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Vol. 7* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2006), 621.

⁵⁹ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 366.

(וְלֹא תִזְכְּרֶנָּה). This is made even more emphatic in the parallelism in the last portion of verse 17, which reads, “(the former things) will not come to mind.” F. Delitzsch observes: “Jehovah creates a new heaven and a new earth...which so thoroughly satisfy all desires, that there is no thought of the former ones...”⁶⁰ Therefore, the people of God should “be glad and rejoice forever in what (God) will create.”⁶¹ Having described the “former things” that will *not be remembered*, Isaiah continues by vividly describing the positive blessings that will be part of this new creation:

“Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit... The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.⁶²

In this passage there is great comfort for those who mourn. The comfort for them regarding the death of their believing loved one is that he or she will take part in the new creation when all their sorrows will be at an end. Moreover, the bereaved can be assured regarding their own destiny that through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ they too have been redeemed. Therefore, through Christ they will be spared divine wrath,⁶³ and will share in all the blessings that God will establish in the resurrection when he creates the “new heavens and new earth and the former things *will (literally) not be remembered.*”

⁶⁰ Delitzsch, 621.

⁶¹ Isaiah 65:18.

⁶² Isaiah 65: 20-25.

⁶³ Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman III, 755.

John 14:2. Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms...”

The words of this metaphor are spoken by Jesus as part of his farewell discourse to his disciples on the night of his betrayal.⁶⁴ Jesus has told them that he will only be with them “a little longer.”⁶⁵ Moreover, he has informed them that one of them would betray him with the result he would face a humiliating death.⁶⁶ Consequently, the disciples are greatly grieved and their hearts are deeply troubled at the prospect of Jesus’ departure.⁶⁷ Therefore, Jesus invites them to place their trust, their continuous trust, in the Father, and also in him.⁶⁸

Then Jesus continues by extending to his disciples the wonderful promise in the following words, “*In my Father’s house are many rooms*” (ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου μονὰ πολλαὶ εἰσιν). Here Jesus strongly implies that he is the Son of God, calling God “my Father” (τοῦ πατρὸς μου), something he had made even more explicit on other occasions.⁶⁹ Therefore, though the disciples will grieve, Jesus indicates that one day in the resurrection they will be with him again “*in my Father’s house*” (ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου). Jesus will “prepare a place for them” in this eternal house through his

⁶⁴ Richard D. Balge, ed., *Sermon Studies on the Gospels: Series A* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), 192.

⁶⁵ John 13:33.

⁶⁶ John 13:21.

⁶⁷ John 14:1.

⁶⁸ Balge, 193.

⁶⁹ John 10:30.

death, resurrection and exaltation.⁷⁰ Here the resurrection is pictured as God dwelling with his people in a great eternal house or mansion with “many rooms.” The emphasis on “many” (πολλαι) clearly indicates that there are plenty of rooms for all who believe in Christ.⁷¹ This eternal house with its many rooms will be grander than the disciples could ever imagine or conceive. Furthermore, the word “dwelling place” (μοναί) is especially comforting because it suggests the idea of permanence,⁷² in contrast to the ever changing and troubling nature of this world. Finally, if the disciples are going to dwell in the Father’s house then, by implication, God must be their Father as well. Jeffrey Gibbs observes: “Jesus here refers in the first place to his parousia, when he will come again. In the second place, he may be referring to the dwelling of the Father and Son with the believer...”⁷³

In the verse that follows this passage, Jesus makes it clear that his departure is necessary to ensure that all who believe in him will have a place in the “Father’s house.”⁷⁴ Therefore, though his departure at first involved his suffering and death, yet later in the ascension he entered into his glory. Jesus continues, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” Such a promise holds comfort for those who grieve because their Christian loved

⁷⁰ George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: Vol. 36* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 249.

⁷¹ Jaroslav Pelikan. *Luther’s Works, Vol. 24* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 26.

⁷² Balge, 193.

⁷³ Gibbs, 317.

⁷⁴ Beasley-Murray, 249.

one dwells with God,⁷⁵ and in the resurrection that loved one will also be in the Father's house. Moreover this promise will help to calm the fears of the bereaved concerning their own eternal destiny in Christ for, as Martin Luther says, "Rest assured that you will still have room and plenty of it."⁷⁶

Genesis 25:8. Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age...and was *gathered to his people*. (ESV)

As this passage begins, Abraham, the one who would become the great father of the Jewish people, has just died at the "good old age" of 175.⁷⁷ Here death is seen as a "natural and peaceful event when it comes at the end of a long, happy and fulfilled life."⁷⁸ His sons, Isaac and Ishmael, take his body and bury it in the cave of Machpelah,⁷⁹ beside his first wife Sarah.⁸⁰

However, while Abraham's body was buried in the cave his spirit was "*gathered to his people*" (וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל-עַמּוּיָו). This phrase should not be taken literally, as if Abraham was buried with many others in a family grave, for only Sarah was buried in the cave at

⁷⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary, Volume 2* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 936.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Genesis 25:7.

⁷⁸ Werner H. Franzmann, *Bible History Commentary: Old Testament* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 141.

⁷⁹ Genesis 25:9.

⁸⁰ Genesis 23:19.

this time.⁸¹ In addition, *gathered to his people* is also “used in cases where only one ancestor” is buried in a particular spot (1 Kings 11:43) and likewise where none are buried (1 Kings 2:10).⁸² Furthermore, while this phrase could also be thought of as a euphemism for death, this is a minority view. The majority opinion is that “*gathered to his people*” is a clear “reference to immortality.”⁸³ Later, this same metaphor would be used as an announcement for the deaths of both Moses and Aaron, and a total of ten times throughout the Pentateuch.⁸⁴ To be “*gathered to*” (וַיִּאָסֶף אֵל) carries with it the idea of being reunited with others beyond the grave. Moreover, “*people*” (עַמּוֹ) is specifically used to indicate that Abraham was *gathered* to his ancestors, and in particular, his immediate family. “To go to one’s fathers” (Gen 15:15) seems to be a synonymous expression.⁸⁵ C. F. Keil writes:

This expression (“gathered to his people”)...denotes the reunion in Sheol with friends who have gone before, and therefore presupposes faith in the personal continuance of a man after death, as a presentiment which the promises of God had exalted in the case of the patriarchs into a firm assurance of faith (Heb 11:13).⁸⁶

⁸¹ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis: Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 694.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 695.

⁸³ John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 231.

⁸⁴ Philip S. Johnson, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 33.

⁸⁵ Leupold, 694.

⁸⁶ C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Vol. 1* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 168.

Philip Johnson adds: “Most scholars assume this reunion takes place in Sheol, even if Sheol is never mentioned in the same context.”⁸⁷

Therefore, since Abraham “breathed his last and died at a good old age,”⁸⁸ this passage would be very suitable for those who grieve the loss of someone who was older and full of years, like a father or mother. What comfort this metaphor brings to mourners as the lifelong ties of fellowship have been broken by death. The deceased has gone to be with other loved ones and waits in the afterlife with open arms to be reunited with the bereaved one day. In addition, “his people” could be used as a Gospel handle, since we are God’s “people” through faith in the resurrection of Christ.⁸⁹ Though it is challenging to connect this image with the resurrection, nevertheless, Martin Luther says of this passage: “But if there is another people besides the one with which we are now living, there must be a resurrection of the dead.”⁹⁰

1 Thessalonians 4:14. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (ESV)

St. Paul begins this section of his letter to the Thessalonians with exhortations concerning the parousia. He speaks to the believers in the context of death and sadness, encouraging them to receive consolation concerning their fellow believers who have died

⁸⁷ Johnson, 34.

⁸⁸ Genesis 25:8.

⁸⁹ 1 Peter 2:10.

⁹⁰ Martin Luther: Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan (Hrsg.); Oswald, Hilton C. (Hrsg.) ; Lehmann, Helmut T. (Hrsg.): *Luther's Works, Vol. 4 : Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*. Saint Louis : Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1964 (Luther's Works 4), S. 4:329.

in the faith. Even in the face of significant loss the faithful in Christ are “not to grieve as others do who have no hope.”⁹¹ (ESV) The strength of the believers’ hope is founded upon Christ.⁹² They “believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”

In the meantime, as the believers await the return of Christ and the reunion at the resurrection, they are comforted in knowing that their Christian loved one has “fallen asleep” (τοὺς κοιμηθέντας). Here Paul describes the death of the believer’s body as a *sleep*, a peaceful rest in the grave. In fact, this is “the Bible’s favorite way of speaking of those who have died in the faith.”⁹³ Luther makes a keen observation, noting how Paul contrasts the death of Christ with the death of a believer in this verse:

Note particularly that he (Paul) does not say: Since you believe that Christ fell asleep. He rather speaks more sternly of Christ’s death than ours and says: Since we believe that Christ died. But of us he says that we do not die, but only fall asleep.⁹⁴

Moreover, Paul is using the same image that Jesus himself used to assure Jairus and his wife that their little daughter was in God’s care,⁹⁵ saying "She is not dead but asleep."⁹⁶

In this passage Paul also speaks of Jesus as the “connecting link” between “those that

⁹¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

⁹² Gibbs, 313.

⁹³ E. H. Wendland, ed., *Sermon Studies on the Epistles: Series A* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1986), 358.

⁹⁴ Martin Luther: Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan (Hrsg.); Oswald, Hilton C. (Hrsg.) ; Lehmann, Helmut T. (Hrsg.): *Luther's Works, Vol. 51 : Sermons I*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1999, c1959 (Luther's Works 51), S. 51:III-233.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Luke 8:52.

sleep” and the reunion at the resurrection,⁹⁷ saying that “through Jesus” God will at the parousia reunite the living believers with those who have previously *fallen asleep*.

Jeffrey Gibbs observes: “In the face of his own impending death Paul wrote to Timothy and looked, not toward the condition of his soul after the death of his body, but toward the final victory and coming of Christ!”⁹⁸

The application for the funeral sermon is clear. Those who are grieving the loss of a Christian loved one can be encouraged by the image of *sleep*. Concerning the deceased loved one, his or her body is asleep. Whatever struggles and suffering preceded death has ended as the body rests in the grave. However, a body lies down to sleep only to awaken again, refreshed and strengthened. Therefore, in the resurrection the deceased loved one will live again and forever when Christ returns and awakens the deceased from the grave. Lenski observes: “The power of Jesus’ death and resurrection does not stop when we fall asleep (physically died), its efficacy will show itself in all its glory at the parousia.”⁹⁹ Moreover, as the survivors face their own fears about death they can also be comforted in the knowledge that a peaceful rest for the body, followed by the resurrection, awaits all those who believe in Christ. Therefore, just as there is no reason for anyone to fear sleep, so also believers need not fear death.

⁹⁷ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Vol. IV* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1931), 31.

⁹⁸ Gibbs, 320.

⁹⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 330.

Psalm 16:11. (Lord), you will fill me with joy in your presence, with *eternal pleasures* at your right hand.

This Psalm is most likely the work of King David and it expresses the blessedness of belonging to the Lord, both in this life and in the life to come. The Psalm “reaches its climax” in verse 11,¹⁰⁰ as David highlights three blessings that come from the Lord beyond the grave.¹⁰¹ First, he says to the Lord, “You have made known to me the path of life.” Second, “You will fill me with joy in your presence.” Third, “Eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

In this Psalm David states that God is ready to give his good gifts to those who trust in him, those gifts that are found at his “right hand” (בְּיַמֵּינֶךָ). The “right hand” of God is an anthropomorphism denoting the blessings found beyond the grave in the presence of God,¹⁰² a place of honor. Moreover, these blessings are “*eternal pleasures*” or “*delights*” (נְעִמּוֹת נֶצְחָה).¹⁰³ This may also be translated “*pleasures forevermore*.”(ESV) In either case, David is speaking of pleasures that are lasting and which satisfy all human desires.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, they are “true” pleasures, as opposed to the self-indulgent

¹⁰⁰ John A. Braun, ed. *Sermon Studies on Selected Psalms* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002), 37.

¹⁰¹ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of The Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 152.

¹⁰² Psalm 16:11b, “in your presence.”

¹⁰³ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament: Vol. 1* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1981), 382.

¹⁰⁴ Walter R. Roehrs and Martin H. Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary: An Authoritative In-Home Resource for Students of the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 348.

pleasures that one seeks according to the sinful nature.¹⁰⁵ Finally, the greatest pleasure of all is simply to enjoy God himself at his “right hand.”¹⁰⁶ Walter Roehrs speaks of these blessings for believers when he writes: “Even death holds no terrors for him. Because God’s power does not stop at the grave, it cannot sever his ties with the living Lord. *Pleasures forevermore* are in store for him.”¹⁰⁷

In making Gospel application, this passage will comfort those who mourn the loss of a Christian loved one, especially if the deceased endured significant pain in the process of dying. *Eternal pleasures* are theirs to enjoy now, but even greater pleasures await the deceased following the resurrection when all physical, bodily and earthly pleasures are included. Moreover, as the mourners themselves experience the bitter pain of grief, they too can look forward to the day when they will only experience *eternal pleasures* in the resurrection.

Finally, it should be noted that verse 10 is prophetic and points to Christ. Peter himself makes this connection in his Pentecost sermon, saying:

Seeing what was ahead, he (David) spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.¹⁰⁸

Therefore, the funeral sermon will want to capitalize on the fact that *eternal pleasures* result from the work of Christ and in particular the pain which he endured to bring salvation. Christ’s pain brings us *eternal pleasure* in the parousia.

¹⁰⁵ Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman III, 654.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 652.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Acts 2:31-32.

Romans 8:18. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the *glory* that will be revealed in us.

In the chapters preceding this text, St. Paul presents the chief doctrine of the Christian faith that those who believe in Christ are justified by faith, not by the works of the law.¹⁰⁹ Paul then begins chapter eight by speaking of the ultimate benefit of justification by faith: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”¹¹⁰

However, though the believer in Christ is “set free from...death,” eternal death, temporal death is still at work in this present world, and with it the consequence of grief and loss. Therefore, Paul proclaims the ultimate hope that Christians possess by faith, “the *glory* that is to be revealed in us.”¹¹¹ Here Paul uses the metaphor of “glory” (δόξαν) to speak of the “redemption of our bodies,”¹¹² which will take place at the resurrection.¹¹³ “Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”¹¹⁴ Moreover, this *glory* is so great that by comparison the “present sufferings” are

¹⁰⁹ Romans 3:28.

¹¹⁰ Romans 8:1-2.

¹¹¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 542.

¹¹² Romans 8:23.

¹¹³ Lenski, 542.

¹¹⁴ Romans 8:17.

completely overshadowed and diminished.¹¹⁵ “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”¹¹⁶ Lenski observes: “When sufferings and glory are held against each other, the sufferings amount to nothing, no matter how many and how severe they are. This is not an overstatement but simple fact.”¹¹⁷ John Chrysostom adds:

Whatever these sufferings may be, they belong to this present life, but the blessings to come stretch out forever. Since Paul had no way of giving a detailed description of these or of putting them before us in human language, he gives them a name which is used of things we especially desire: glory.¹¹⁸

Finally, this *glory* is to be revealed “in us” (εἰς ἡμᾶς), not “to us,” as some translations have it.¹¹⁹ In other words, this *glory* will be manifested in our bodies,¹²⁰ just as Christ’s body was glorified on the mountain before his disciples and after his resurrection.¹²¹ This hope for *glory* can only be grasped by faith in the resurrection of Christ, for what appears outwardly is the inglorious end of a person’s life in death and

¹¹⁵ Martin Luther: Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan (Hrsg.); Oswald, Hilton C. (Hrsg.) ; Lehmann, Helmut T. (Hrsg.): *Luther's Works, Vol. 28 : 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 15, Lectures on 1 Timothy*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1973 (Luther's Works 28), S. 28:154.

¹¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:17, ESV.

¹¹⁷ Lenski, 530.

¹¹⁸ Gerald Bray, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, Vol. 6 – Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1998), 221-222.

¹¹⁹ Lenski, 531.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Matthew 17:1-9.

decay. But through the Spirit of Christ, who raised Jesus from the grave, God will bring a glorious life to the believer's mortal body on the Last Day.¹²²

Therefore, though the bereaved “groan inwardly”¹²³ with grief and fear, they have the consolation of one day being with Christ and Christian loved ones, in *glory*. The power of this truth brings hope and strength to persevere in the face of grief, knowing that their loved one is now experiencing glory in the sense of being in Christ's presence, though the *glory* will be even greater at the resurrection when it is fully revealed in us. This same *glory* awaits them beyond the grave by faith in Christ.

Romans 8:37. In all these things we are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us.

As Christians live out their lives in this temporal world they face severe trials that threaten to defeat them: troubles, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword.¹²⁴ However, the greatest enemy is death itself, which seeks to bring the believer to final defeat.¹²⁵ In Old Testament times suffering and defeat spoke of “divine abandonment.”¹²⁶ Even today the death of a loved one speaks of defeat also. However, Paul speaks most confidently that those who are in Christ Jesus will ultimately prevail

¹²² Romans 8:11.

¹²³ Romans 8:23.

¹²⁴ Romans 8:35.

¹²⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:26.

¹²⁶ Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman III, 739.

and gain the victory over all these things, including death itself. Nothing will separate believers from the love of Christ.¹²⁷

What enables Paul to speak so confidently? His confidence is in Christ Jesus. Paul uses the “more than conquerors” (ὑπερνικῶμεν) as a metaphor to proclaim the hope of believers in Christ. It conveys the image of continual victory over one’s opponents. Moreover, ὑπερ reminds believers of the superlative nature of this victory as complete and total,¹²⁸ making them “*super-conquerors*.”¹²⁹ Ultimately, however, *conquering* reminds the faithful of Christ’s own victory over death and the devil through his resurrection.¹³⁰ After all, believers conquer, not in their own strength or might, but “through him who loved” them, Christ Jesus. “If God is for us, who can be against us?”¹³¹ E. H. Wendland concludes: “The aorist form of the verb *loved*...points to the love exercised in Christ’s death on the cross.”¹³² Consequently, while death speaks of defeat, Christ has defeated the power of death and the devil through the cross and the

¹²⁷ Romans 8:39.

¹²⁸ Harold H. Bult, *Exegetical Notes: Epistle Texts: Series A – Sundays After Pentecost* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1984), 47.

¹²⁹ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 292.

¹³⁰ Romans 8:38.

¹³¹ Romans 8:31.

¹³² E. H. Wendland, ed., *Sermon Studies on the Epistles: Series A* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1986), 280.

empty tomb, so that all who believe in him will conquer all things through him.¹³³ Paul writes:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹³⁴

St. Augustine observes: “Paul says that he is sure, not merely that he is of the opinion...that neither death nor the promise of temporal life nor any of the other things he lists can separate the believer from God’s love...because Christ has...vanquished them in himself.”¹³⁵

This passage provides abundant consolation for the bereaved. They have the assurance, even as Paul did,¹³⁶ that their loved one will triumph over the grave on the Last Day through Christ’s resurrection. Moreover, as the mourners contemplate their own destiny, they know that Christ has given them the victory over death in advance.¹³⁷ They are *conquerors*! Therefore, the bereaved can say triumphantly with St. Paul, “‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹³⁸

¹³³ Lenski, 575.

¹³⁴ Romans 8:38-39.

¹³⁵ Bray, 242.

¹³⁶ Romans 8:37.

¹³⁷ Buls, 47.

¹³⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:55-57.

Matthew 11:28. (Jesus said), "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

As Jesus continued his ministry throughout Galilee, crowds of people were flocking to him. After speaking to them about John the Baptist, Jesus proceeded to preach to them both Law and Gospel. He pronounced judgment upon the self-righteous cities that rejected him. However, for those who were “weary and burdened,” and who sought to put their hope in him alone, Jesus extended the blessed promise of *rest*.¹³⁹

The metaphor of *rest* is immediately preceded by Jesus’ invitation, “come to me” (Δεῦτε πρὸς με). Jesus himself, who is the very Son of God,¹⁴⁰ is the very source of comfort and *rest*, so that all who desire *rest* need to come to him. This invitation is itself the very means of God’s grace, for it carries with it the efficacious power of Jesus to draw the weary to himself.¹⁴¹ For as Luther reminds us in the Small Catechism, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him.”¹⁴² Moreover, Jesus draws the “weary and burdened” to himself “alone,” and “not to another,”¹⁴³ for this wonderful invitation is extended to “all who are weary and burdened” (πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι). This invitation is truly for

¹³⁹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1997), 222.

¹⁴⁰ Matthew 11:27.

¹⁴¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 456.

¹⁴² Edward W. A. Koehler, *Luther’s Small Catechism: Annotated* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1981), 176.

¹⁴³ R. C. H. Lenski, 456.

“all” (πάντες), but especially for those who are burdened by not knowing Jesus as their Savior, but think that they need to secure salvation themselves.¹⁴⁴ There is no end to such weariness for man cannot obtain his own salvation. Then Jesus pronounces the word of consolation to those who respond to his invitation, “and I will give you *rest*” (καὶ γὰρ ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς). Jesus says “I” will give you *rest*. He is the source of *rest*. In addition, this *rest* is more than ceasing from labor, but rather being refreshed and rejuvenated spiritually in the presence of Christ.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, Jesus’ invitation ultimately points to eternal *rest*, the final *rest* for all believers in Christ and the goal which they desire above all.¹⁴⁶ St. John writes:

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"¹⁴⁷ (ESV)

This text is certainly applicable for the funeral context, in which people are “weary and heavy burdened” with grief and fear. Perhaps the death of the loved one was preceded by an extended period of suffering, and this may have taken its toll upon the caregivers. Additionally, they need to be reminded that the one who died in the faith has obtained eternal *rest*. The writer to the Hebrews emphatically states, “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.”¹⁴⁸ St. Augustine captures this idea best when

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 457.

¹⁴⁵ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol I* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1933), 92.

¹⁴⁶ Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman III, 710.

¹⁴⁷ Revelation 14:13.

¹⁴⁸ Hebrews 4:9.

he writes, “(Lord), you made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in you.”¹⁴⁹

Psalm 23:4. Even though I walk through *the valley of the shadow of death*, I will fear no evil, for you (the Lord) are with me.

Probably no passage of Scripture has brought more comfort to mourners than the twenty-third Psalm. King David uses the beautiful imagery of a shepherd and his sheep to proclaim God’s divine protection for his people.¹⁵⁰ Although this metaphor of a shepherd and his sheep is beyond the experience of most people in the western world, it still communicates powerfully and profoundly to the weak, the sorrowful and the frightened.

This metaphor for our consideration comes from the fourth verse where David speaks of the “valley of death” (בְּנֵיַה צֶלְמָוֶת). The word “valley” is literally translated “to be dark,” but most translators use it as a compound of the words “shadow” and “death,”¹⁵¹ or the “valley of the shadow of death.” Leupold renders it the “valley of deepest darkness.”¹⁵² In agreement, Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman note: “‘Shadow of death’ is a mistranslation going back to the LXX. The Hebrew *salmawet* is not a compound of ‘shadow’ and ‘death’ but is based on the root ‘*lm*, meaning ‘deep

¹⁴⁹ Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman III, 944.

¹⁵⁰ Braun, 65.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 67.

¹⁵² Leupold, 212.

darkness.’”¹⁵³ While this metaphor may or may not speak specifically to the context of death,¹⁵⁴ nevertheless it can represent any of the “dark valleys” people travel through during their sojourn on earth, the darkest of which is death itself. Even as God’s people “walk through” this “dark valley” the Lord remains with them. They do not face any dark valley of life alone, including death. Rather, those in Christ will always have the strength and protection of their Lord and Shepherd.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, the Psalmist says, “I will fear no evil, for you (Lord) are with me!” Walter Roehrs writes:

He (the Good Shepherd) is ever at their side to calm all their fears even, as a well-known hymn has it, “when other helpers fail and comforts flee.” No harm can come to them if they turn to Him for protection. There is no end to the joy over the *goodness and mercy* that His presence guarantees.¹⁵⁶

The comfort for the bereaved in Christ is quite abundant. First and foremost, as they walk through their “dark valley” of sorrow, perhaps feeling overwhelmed by its darkness,¹⁵⁷ they need to realize that the Good Shepherd is with them every step of the way, comforting them and assuring them. His promise of security will be a source of great consolation. Martin Luther writes: “This security Christ has won for us by his death and resurrection, so that he might be the Lord of both the living and the dead, and be able

¹⁵³ Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman III, 780.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Leupold, 212.

¹⁵⁶ Roehrs and Franzmann, 351.

¹⁵⁷ Martin Luther: Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan (Hrsg.); Oswald, Hilton C. (Hrsg.) ; Lehmann, Helmut T. (Hrsg.): *Luther's Works, Vol. 29 : Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1968 (Luther's Works 29), S. 29:11.

to keep us as safe in death as in life.”¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the bereaved can be comforted in the knowledge that their Christian loved one has successfully “walked through” this “dark valley” with Christ,¹⁵⁹ and anticipate the day when he or she will “dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”¹⁶⁰

Matthew 25:34. (Jesus said), “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”

Jesus is alone with his disciples on the Mount of Olives after leaving the temple during holy week, when they ask him, “Tell us...what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”¹⁶¹ (ESV) In response, Jesus tells a series of parables, the third of which is the parable of the sheep and the goats. It is an eschatological passage which concludes Jesus’ fifth discourse in Matthew and points to the final judgment.¹⁶² At that time, Jesus will raise the dead from their graves and commence with the judgment of the nations.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Martin Luther: Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan (Hrsg.); Oswald, Hilton C. (Hrsg.) ; Lehmann, Helmut T. (Hrsg.): *Luther's Works, Vol. 42 : Devotional Writings I*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1999, c1969 (Luther's Works 42), S. 42:III-149.

¹⁵⁹ John 10:11.

¹⁶⁰ Psalm 23:6.

¹⁶¹ Matthew 25:3.

¹⁶² David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 357.

¹⁶³ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 603.

In the parable, “all the nations are gathered before him,”¹⁶⁴ as Jesus sits upon his glorious throne.¹⁶⁵ Jesus himself is the shepherd, or King,¹⁶⁶ who will separate the sheep and goats, giving an *inheritance* to those who believe in him.¹⁶⁷ The “sheep” refer to those who believe in Christ,¹⁶⁸ and whose faith is evident in their works.¹⁶⁹ Though the imagery of the shepherd and his sheep is compelling and is the primary emphasis of the parable, my particular focus is on the “*inheritance*,” “the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.” “Then the King will say to those on his right...*inherit* (κληρονομήσατε) the kingdom.” Moreover, this *inheritance* is “the kingdom” itself,¹⁷⁰ or eternal life, which the faithful receive through faith in the “Son of Man.”¹⁷¹ God has “prepared” this kingdom from the beginning or “the foundation of the world.” Furthermore, an *inheritance* is something given to children. So also, the *inheritance* of the kingdom is given by the Father to his children.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in

¹⁶⁴ Matthew 25: 32.

¹⁶⁵ Matthew 25:31.

¹⁶⁶ Matthew 25:34.

¹⁶⁷ David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Incorporated, 2001), 247.

¹⁶⁸ Keener, 603.

¹⁶⁹ Richard D. Balge, *Sermon Studies on the Gospels: Series A* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), 359.

¹⁷⁰ Lenski, 990.

¹⁷¹ Matthew 25:31.

heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.¹⁷²

Therefore, in the funeral sermon the good news to be proclaimed is that eternal life is the *inheritance* prepared for those who believe in the resurrection of Christ.¹⁷³

“Salvation is not a divine afterthought; on the contrary, salvation history derives from God’s eternal plan.”¹⁷⁴ The mourners can find comfort in the knowledge that when they die in the faith they too will receive this glorious *inheritance* in the resurrection. Luther writes: “If our hearts could grasp the fact that we need not fear the Final Judgment, what joy they would find!”¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, those who mourn the loss of a faithful believer can be comforted in knowing that their loved one is “blessed” in the presence of the Father,¹⁷⁶ anticipating the *inheritance* to be received on the Last Day.

¹⁷² 1 Peter 1:3-4.

¹⁷³ Lenski, 991.

¹⁷⁴ Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman III, 754.

¹⁷⁵ Martin Luther: Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan (Hrsg.); Oswald, Hilton C. (Hrsg.) ; Lehmann, Helmut T. (Hrsg.): *Luther's Works, Vol. 22 : Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1957 (Luther's Works 22), S. 22: vii-380.

¹⁷⁶ Lenski, 990.

John 5:24. (Jesus said), “Whoever...believes him who sent me has eternal life and...he has crossed over from death to life.”

As chapter five opens, Jesus is in Jerusalem for a Jewish festival, though it is not clear whether it is the feast of Tabernacles, Dedication or Passover.¹⁷⁷ Jesus heals a man who has been an invalid for thirty-eight years,¹⁷⁸ but does this on a Sabbath, and therefore, incurs the wrath of the Jewish leaders.¹⁷⁹ In his response, Jesus presents himself as the very Son of the Father,¹⁸⁰ and proclaims to them the way of eternal life. Jesus states that “eternal life” is found in the Father through him. “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.”¹⁸¹

As he continues, Jesus states emphatically, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.”¹⁸² Jesus’ words are words of life, eternal life, for he speaks with divine authority.¹⁸³ “Those who believe ‘hear’ or ‘heed’ Jesus’ voice.”¹⁸⁴ Here “eternal life is set forth both as a present reality to the one

¹⁷⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 121.

¹⁷⁸ John 5:5.

¹⁷⁹ John 5:18.

¹⁸⁰ John 5:19-20.

¹⁸¹ John 5:21.

¹⁸² John 5:24, ESV.

¹⁸³ Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman III, 455.

¹⁸⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary – Vol. 1* (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen Publishers, 2003), 653.

who believes in the Father and listens to the Son, but also a future reality.”¹⁸⁵ In essence, by faith in Jesus the believer has already entered into eternal life,¹⁸⁶ as Jesus’ promise “becomes immediately effective.”¹⁸⁷ Jesus explains what eternal life is by the use of a metaphor, saying that he who believes “has *crossed over* from death to life” (μεταβέβηκεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν). μεταβέβηκεν means “to pass from one place or state to another.”¹⁸⁸ Therefore, the one who believes has “*crossed over* from death to life,” and done so before the death of the body. Furthermore, “*crossed over*” is a perfect active indicative verb, emphasizing that the condition of eternal life, which begins with the birth of faith in Christ, continues on indefinitely into the future, but will be fully realized only on the Day of the Resurrection. In verse 28, Jesus makes an unmistakable reference to this resurrection: “For a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out - those who have done good will rise to live.”¹⁸⁹ Therefore, while the spirit’s communion with Christ is uninterrupted by the death of the body, ultimately the body will “*cross over* from death to life” in the resurrection.

This passage offers great comfort for those who mourn and wonder about their own eternal destiny. Therefore, as they contemplate their own death they can do so with the confidence that by faith they have already *crossed over* from death to life, and that

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 667.

¹⁸⁶ Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman III, 199.

¹⁸⁷ Beasley-Murray, 76.

¹⁸⁸ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Vol. 5* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1932), 86.

¹⁸⁹ John 5:29.

eternal life is theirs, here and now, and will continue forever in the resurrection. In addition, as they mourn their deceased loved one they are reassured that their loved one departed this life already in possession of eternal life and anticipating the parousia.

John 11:25. (Jesus said), “I am *the resurrection and the life*. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies...”¹⁹⁰

In many ways this is the perfect funeral text. Jesus goes to be with his friends, Mary and Martha, after the death of their brother Lazarus. Jesus goes to comfort them, to weep with them,¹⁹¹ and to share with them the hope of the resurrection. When he first meets Martha she is overcome with sorrow. Immediately, Jesus seizes the opportunity to remind her of the hope she has in him – the hope of eternal life. Therefore, Jesus tells Martha that her brother will rise to life,¹⁹² and while Martha believes in the resurrection,¹⁹³ she has no idea that Jesus is about to raise Lazarus to life on that very day.

Following Martha’s confession of faith in the resurrection,¹⁹⁴ Jesus proceeds by saying, “*I am the Resurrection and the Life*” (ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή). I believe that these words should be taken both literally as well as metaphorically. First,

¹⁹⁰ John 11 is one passage that speaks literally of Jesus as “the Life.” After further study and consultation, “the Life” is best understood as literal, though in this paper I have tried to make the case that it might be metaphorical as well.

¹⁹¹ John 11:35.

¹⁹² John 11:23.

¹⁹³ John 11:24.

¹⁹⁴ Keener, 844.

they are to be taken literally. The words “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι) are highly significant, because Jesus does not say that he is the one who raises the dead, though he will in fact do this shortly, but he says, I am “*the Resurrection and the Life*.”¹⁹⁵ In this sense, the words are literal, for there is no resurrection or life apart from Christ. In other words, both resurrection and eternal life are personified in him.¹⁹⁶

However, secondly, when “resurrection” and “life” are in reference to the Last Day, or for that matter when Jesus raises Lazarus from the tomb later that day “resurrection” and “life” are metaphorically pointing away from Jesus himself to a specific event and another reality. For on the Day of the Resurrection, the bodies of believers will “rise up” and “live forever.” Marvin Vincent captures both the literal and metaphorical concepts when he writes: “Jesus is not only the one who effects the resurrection and bestows life; he is himself the resurrection and the life.”¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, this interpretation is also consistent with the many other “I am” sayings recorded in John, (“I am the Good Shepherd,” “I am the Vine,”¹⁹⁸ etc.), which are certainly metaphorical.¹⁹⁹ Finally, the meaning of “the resurrection” and “the life” are further interpreted by Jesus himself in the two clauses that follow: “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies,” that is he will live again in the resurrection, “and whoever lives and believes in me

¹⁹⁵ Vincent, 202.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ John 10:11; John 15:5.

¹⁹⁹ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2005), 143.

will never die,” for the one who lives and believes in Jesus has eternal life.²⁰⁰ Therefore, Jesus assures Martha of the future resurrection on the last day, as well as the present reality of eternal life that is found in him.²⁰¹

Therefore, the bereaved have the consolation of knowing that through Jesus they will be reunited in the resurrection with their Christian loved one through the One who is “the Resurrection.” Moreover, this loved one lives beyond the grave even now through Jesus who is “the Life.” Though they mourn now, very soon their joy will be restored to them, even as Jesus raised Lazarus and returned him to Mary and Martha. Therefore, Bruce observes: “The death of Lazarus, with its impending sequel of resurrection, is to be a paradigm of the grant of eternal life to all believers in Jesus.”²⁰²

The Theological Context

Having analyzed the various metaphors that will be used in my research, I will now explore how metaphors are to be used to proclaim the Gospel in the funeral sermon. I will examine the following topics: the function of Law and Gospel in the sermon, the bondage of the will as a presupposition for preaching, the Word of God as a means of grace, and some suggestions for using the Word as a proclamation of the Gospel.

²⁰⁰ Bruce, 244.

²⁰¹ Beasley-Murray, 191.

²⁰² Bruce, 244.

The Law and Gospel Distinction

As with any theological task, the proper distinction of Law and Gospel in the funeral sermon is crucial. By its nature, the demands of God's Law expose human sinfulness and God's wrath towards sinners.²⁰³ Sinners have transgressed the Law of God and as a result they face the consequences of this transgression, which is death, "for the wages of sin is death."²⁰⁴ Therefore, God's wrath is manifested in the death of the deceased and is undeniably real for those who mourn their loved one's death. In addition, although those who mourn may not wish to admit it, the death of their loved one may have removed every human pretense about their power to influence their own fate.²⁰⁵ They are destined for the grave and there is nothing humanly possible to change their predicament. The Law's primary function in the funeral sermon is to destroy all human illusions and to prepare the hearts of sinners for the proclamation of the Gospel.²⁰⁶ Therefore, in preparing the funeral sermon, preachers must have a clear vision of the predicament of the mourners to whom it is addressed, those who have been crushed by the power of death and the fear of God's wrath.²⁰⁷ Gerald Forde writes:

²⁰³ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, V, 17 in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 584.

²⁰⁴ Romans 6:23.

²⁰⁵ G. O. Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 18.

²⁰⁶ Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1992), 8.

²⁰⁷ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, V, 17 in Kolb and Wengert, 584.

All people will inescapably encounter experiences that shatter their fundamental self-confidence that their lives are manageable – here we are dealing with an experience that is not merely that of hearing the accusing voice of the law. Instead this fundamental experience or encounter carries home the truth that we are unable to control our fate – we are not free in regard to our fate, and we are unaware just how bound we really are.²⁰⁸

However, once sinners are convicted that there is no way of escape from death and God’s wrath, the door to the Gospel is opened by God. In the Gospel God brings the promise of eternal life to those who believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, the only solution to the problem of death.²⁰⁹ Through Christ’s perfect obedience to the Father, and his innocent suffering and death, the wrath of God has been turned away from sinners.²¹⁰ Having accepted the work of Christ, God then raised Christ to life again on the third day, so that all who believe in him might share in the power of his resurrection.²¹¹ In fact, Christ is the first fruits of all who believe,²¹² so that all who rely on his vicarious death and resurrection will take part in the resurrection on the Last Day.²¹³

Therefore, while sinful human beings could do nothing about God’s anger over their sin and the grave as their final destiny, God in Christ has destroyed the work of death by raising Christ from the dead. Therefore, in preaching Law and Gospel in the funeral sermon, the preacher seeks to reveal the human malady of the mourners in its

²⁰⁸ Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 18.

²⁰⁹ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, V, 27 in Kolb and Wengert, 586.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 585.

²¹¹ 1 Corinthians 15:24-27.

²¹² 1 Corinthians 15:20.

²¹³ 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.

various forms, including sorrow, despair, anger, helplessness, and so forth, and then, through the Gospel, offers comfort, strength and deliverance from sin and death through the resurrection of Christ.²¹⁴

The Bondage of the Will

In approaching the proclamation of the Gospel in the funeral sermon, Luther's understanding of the bondage of the human will is a necessary "anthropological presupposition."²¹⁵ Human beings may possess free will in matters below, such as in matters of civil righteousness, but in all matters pertaining to things above, such as justification and salvation, there is only bondage and slavery.²¹⁶ But the fundamental problem runs deeper yet, for Luther's understanding of the bondage of the will means that human beings are not only "...unable to choose..." or contribute to their salvation; their human will is actually opposed to God and ever hostile towards him.²¹⁷ "The bondage of the will means that we find ourselves in a situation where we simply cannot do what is asked of us, and we cannot do it because we will not."²¹⁸ "Left to ourselves, we are simply bound to say no to the gospel's story of the crucified and risen one."²¹⁹

²¹⁴ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, V, 24-25 in Kolb and Wengert, 586.

²¹⁵ Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, 190.

²¹⁶ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, XVIII, 9 in Kolb and Wengert, 234.

²¹⁷ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 44.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, 167.

It is because of this bondage of the human will that proclamation becomes necessary.²²⁰ Preaching is not a matter of presenting an offer to the listeners and then asking them to respond or to make their choice for Jesus, otherwise “one could simply explain matters as clearly as possible and appeal to the human will for a decision.”²²¹ Such decision-making theology is a theology of glory, which ultimately turns the “Gospel into Law,” by presenting Jesus to the listeners and challenging them to respond.²²² Such spiritual hubris is in fact the very mark of the bondage of the will, where human beings defiantly claim to be free when they are in fact hopelessly enslaved in sin.²²³ Ultimately, such a theology of glory leaves one with a God of the Law, which is a God of wrath.²²⁴ The human predicament can only remain unchanged by those who wish to resolve it on human terms.

Therefore, the proclamation of the Gospel presupposes that the human will is not free to make a decision for Christ, but that it is entirely unwilling and unable; it is bound to reject Christ.²²⁵ This bondage of the will is what makes preaching the Gospel a proclamation, a heralding of good news, an announcement of a wrathful God reconciling the world to himself in Christ, “not counting men’s sins against them.”²²⁶ This

²²⁰ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 43.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

²²² *Ibid.*, 24.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 47.

²²⁴ Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, 191.

²²⁵ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II, 59 in Kolb and Wengert, 555.

²²⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:19.

proclamation of the Gospel, this message of God's free grace and forgiveness through faith in Christ is the only solution to the human predicament. God freely offers his grace to those who don't deserve it or even want it and this is the very essence of salvation by grace.²²⁷ Luther concludes: "Hence it follows that free-will without God's grace is not free at all, but is the permanent prisoner and bond-slave of evil, since it cannot turn itself to good."²²⁸

The Means of Grace

To regard the proclamation of the Gospel as the only solution to the human predicament presupposes that the Gospel itself is God's means of grace. If the sinner can do nothing to resolve God's wrath then only God can. In fact, God has already achieved reconciliation with sinners through the saving work of Christ,²²⁹ and through the proclamation of the Gospel in the funeral sermon God now offers these benefits to all sinners.²³⁰

The means of grace used in the funeral sermon has implications for both those who are unconverted as well as those who are converted. First, when considering those who are unconverted, the proclamation of the Gospel is itself God's means of bringing his saving grace to sinners in order to free them from their bondage to death and

²²⁷ Romans 3:22-24.

²²⁸ John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (New York, NY: Anchor Books – Doubleday, 1962), 187.

²²⁹ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, III, 30 in Kolb and Wengert, 567.

²³⁰ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II, 56 in Kolb and Wengert, 554.

judgment.²³¹ The Word of God contains within itself the “inherent power” and “efficacy” to transform the hearts of those who are otherwise bound to oppose God.²³² This divine power of God to bring sinners to faith is found only in the Word.²³³ Therefore, though the human will is bound to reject Christ, it can be transformed by the power of God working through the Word. The Lutheran Confessions observe:

Through these means (the preaching and hearing of his Word), God goes about his work and breaks our hearts and draws people, so that they recognize their sins and God’s wrath through the preaching of the law and feel real terror, regret, and sorrow in their hearts. Through the preaching of the holy gospel of the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ...a spark of faith is ignited in them, and they accept the forgiveness of sin for Christ’s sake and receive the comfort of the promise of the gospel.²³⁴

Furthermore, if it is God who brings about the conversion of sinners through the Word as his means of grace, then the human will is completely passive in its acceptance of the Gospel.²³⁵ Therefore, the proclamation of the Gospel not only conveys information about what God has done in Christ for those who are bound sinners, it also carries with it the “efficacious or operative” power to evoke a response.²³⁶ “It is not we who grasp the gospel, but the gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, that grasps

²³¹ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II, 52 in Kolb and Wengert, 554.

²³² Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics: Volume 1* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 315-317.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 317.

²³⁴ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II, 54 in Kolb and Wengert, 554.

²³⁵ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II, 89 in Kolb and Wengert 561.

²³⁶ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics: Volume 3*, 103.

us.”²³⁷ God does this “grasping” through the proclamation itself, as the Gospel announces the end of God’s wrath and sets the captive sinner free from judgment.²³⁸ The listeners do nothing more than hear the Word of God, as the Scriptures say, “faith comes from hearing the message (of the Gospel).”²³⁹

Therefore, neither the preacher nor the hearer should doubt this grace and activity of the Holy Spirit, but they should be certain that when the Word of God is preached purely and clearly according to God’s command and will and people listen to it seriously and diligently and meditate upon it, God will certainly be present with his grace and give...what human beings otherwise could neither receive nor take on the basis of their own powers.²⁴⁰

On the other hand, the Word also remains a means of grace for the converted, for those who already believe in the resurrection of Christ. However, since their will has already been transformed by God, the means of grace fulfills a different function in the funeral sermon, to comfort and to strengthen them in the hope they already possess. For God, working through the means of grace, not only creates faith but also preserves faith in those who believe.²⁴¹ Therefore, at a time of significant loss, as believers struggle in their grief, they may also struggle to maintain their grasp on the Gospel and their hope in Christ. Doubts and confusion may fill their minds, intensifying their struggle to believe in God’s love and care for them, especially if their loss happened suddenly, unexpectedly, or traumatically. Therefore, they also need the power of God working through the Word

²³⁷ Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, 167.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

²³⁹ Romans 10:17.

²⁴⁰ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II, 55 in Kolb and Wengert, 554.

²⁴¹ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II, 16 in Kolb and Wengert, 546.

to resist all temptations to despair like those “who have no hope.”²⁴² For this very reason St. Paul wrote to believers in Thessalonica:

We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.²⁴³

As a means of grace, the Word itself conveys grace to those who hear it. For just as in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, God delivers his grace through the Word, through the proclamation of the resurrection of Christ, and the listeners are simply the passive recipients of that grace. God alone is active in converting bound sinners and giving them the kingdom, or strengthening and comforting those who already possess it.²⁴⁴ Moreover, in this sense also, proclamation is like Absolution, for following the Confession of Sins in the worship service, the pastor doesn't explain the forgiveness of sins in the Absolution, he gives it.²⁴⁵ In the same manner, proclamation is the act of giving the forgiveness and hope that is needed. Wherever the Gospel is heard by sinners, God is “pronouncing absolution.”²⁴⁶

²⁴² 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

²⁴³ 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18.

²⁴⁴ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, XIII, 5 in Kolb and Wengert, 219-220.

²⁴⁵ Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, 150.

²⁴⁶ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics: Volume 3*, 105.

Mark Mattes and Steven Paulson succinctly identify this aspect of proclamation as God's performative act when they write, "proclamation is God at work."²⁴⁷ Therefore, "God is at work" through his Word in a twofold manner in the funeral sermon: to convert those who despair in their grief because they have no faith or hope in Christ and to comfort and strengthen those whose faith and hope in Christ may have been shaken by the death of their loved one.

Proclamation in the Funeral Sermon

First, since the proclamation of the Gospel is a means of giving God's grace to sinners in the here and now, it needs to be spoken to the listeners as a present-tense reality.²⁴⁸ The language itself needs to reflect what God "is" doing to the listeners in the funeral sermon. Gerhard Forde writes:

The concrete moment of proclamation is the doing of the mighty act of God in the living present. It is not a recital of past acts, but the doing of the act itself. Only when there is an authoritative word from God in the present tense do we escape the threat of the hidden God (the wrathful God). Only then can a faith be created to stand in the face of that threat.²⁴⁹

Certainly the preacher will speak of and inform the listeners regarding what God has done in the past in Christ Jesus, sharing specific points of salvation history, namely, the cross and the resurrection. However, the purpose of the sermon is not primarily to

²⁴⁷ Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, 8.

²⁴⁸ Robert G. Hughes, *A Trumpet in Darkness: Preaching to Mourners* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 76.

²⁴⁹ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 35.

inform, but to transform.²⁵⁰ Therefore, the preacher will proclaim the Gospel also in the present-tense, identifying what God is doing in and through the very Word being preached.

Second, the proclamation of the Gospel needs to be a specific Word from God that speaks to people in a particular time and place.²⁵¹ For this reason, the local preacher, who knows the people for whom the Gospel is intended, is God's chosen instrument in that moment to bring a Word of consolation from God to the listeners.²⁵² With this in mind, the preacher will want to carefully consider the funeral sermon text and the metaphors that he may use.

Furthermore, he will want to listen to the various metaphors which the mourners themselves use to describe their experience of suffering and sorrow.²⁵³ People often use images to communicate how they are experiencing something, such as feeling like they are "lost in the darkness."²⁵⁴ Such metaphorical language can be a theological cue that the preacher will want to consider when selecting a funeral sermon text. He can speak of this darkness in the funeral sermon, identifying directly with the mourners in their grief, but then also becoming a witness to the Light in the midst of darkness, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.²⁵⁵ By seeking to find ways of employing the mourners' own

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 30.

²⁵¹ Lischer, 60.

²⁵² Ibid., 8.

²⁵³ Hughes, 19.

²⁵⁴ LeRoy H. Aden and Robert G. Hughes, *Preaching God's Compassion: Comforting Those Who Suffer* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 67.

experience and linking it to what Scripture says of the hope of eternal life can be a profound way of providing pastoral care from the pulpit.

Third, proclamation is to be concrete and specific, addressing the mourners in their particular predicament.²⁵⁶ Jeffery Gibbs writes, “The Law is there, staring everyone in the face – death. And the sermon should speak explicitly of sin and its effects and its manifestations – including the death of this Christian brother or sister.”²⁵⁷ However, proclamation is also to be an unconditional, divine promise from God in the indicative mood,²⁵⁸ not commanding or asking anything of captive sinners, but offering and declaring the grace of God in Christ Jesus, which frees sinners from their captivity.²⁵⁹ It is a pronouncement of what has already been accomplished in Christ, offering Christ and his promise to those who mourn as the ultimate solution to their predicament.²⁶⁰ “Christ is present in preaching! Hence, preachers need to be bold enough to give Christ to their hearers.”²⁶¹ Therefore, proclamation invites the bereaved

²⁵⁵ John 8:12.

²⁵⁶ Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, 49.

²⁵⁷ Jeffery Gibbs, “Five Things You Should Not Say at Funerals,” *Concordia Journal* (October 2003): 365

²⁵⁸ Lischer, 6.

²⁵⁹ Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, 45-46.

²⁶⁰ Gibbs, 365.

²⁶¹ Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, 21.

to actively participate in the victory of Christ over death, and to experience the power of its consolation.²⁶²

Fourth, Gospel proclamation is to be resurrection proclamation, preaching the victory of God in the risen Christ, which is the power to comfort and transform the hearts and minds of the bereaved.²⁶³ “Resurrection is not only the content of gospel preaching but also its miraculous means.”²⁶⁴ Through the preaching of the resurrection “Christ is made accessible” to the listener.²⁶⁵ As the mourners listen and hear the proclamation of Christ’s resurrection, the Spirit of God seeks to work faith in their hearts, a faith that chases away the fears of God’s judgment and brings them the sweet hope of God’s forgiving grace.²⁶⁶ Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the death, whether a sudden, unexpected death or not, this hope in Christ will essentially be the same – a proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.²⁶⁷

However, there are two dimensions to this hope and both need to be addressed in the funeral sermon.²⁶⁸ Thomas Long speaks about this twofold hope when he writes:

²⁶² William H. Willimon, *Proclamation and Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 77.

²⁶³ Lischer, 28-29.

²⁶⁴ Willimon, 81.

²⁶⁵ Lischer, 29.

²⁶⁶ Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation*, 29.

²⁶⁷ Donald L. Deffner, “Proclaiming Life in Death: The Funeral Sermon,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 58, No. 1 (January 1994): 13.

²⁶⁸ O Wesley Allen, Jr. *Preaching Resurrection* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 8.

Eschatology in the future-present tense rests on the truthfulness of Jesus' promise about the future: that the creation will move toward its divine *telos*, that the will of God for creation and human life will finally prevail no matter what.²⁶⁹

First, hope in Christ brings comfort in the present predicament, as mourners accept the will of God for their deceased loved one as a true blessing from God, coming to terms with the reality of death.²⁷⁰ Second, that the mourners are comforted regarding their own future, as faith in Christ ultimately points to the consummation at the second coming of Christ.

The Summary

I have studied in this chapter the various Scriptural metaphors I will use in my research, and I have sought to theologically analyze how the Holy Spirit uses these metaphors as a means of God's grace. The Word of God alone can bring true and lasting comfort to those who have faced a significant loss, and are seeking to come to terms with the human predicament. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the proclamation of the resurrection, is the answer the mourners need to hear.

²⁶⁹ Thomas G. Long, "The Life to Come: Preaching with Hope," *Concordia Journal* (October 1996): 363.

²⁷⁰ Deffner, 16.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PROJECT IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In Chapter Two, I examined the fifteen metaphors of my research project in their Scriptural contexts, and made notations on how I will use these texts in future funeral sermons. I then assessed how the Holy Spirit works efficaciously through these metaphors (the Word of God) as a means of grace to bring unbelievers to faith and to strengthen believers in their faith after they have experienced a significant loss. In this chapter, I will first explore the historical developments in metaphor theory, and how these developments impact my ministry to the bereaved at Pilgrim Lutheran Church. Secondly, I will then do a literature review regarding recent developments in metaphorical theory, and identify how these theories inform my research project and ministry.

The Historical Context

The word metaphor is derived from the Greek word *metaphora*; *meta* meaning “over,” and *pherein* meaning “to carry.”²⁷¹ According to ancient Greek thought, a metaphor was seen as a tool of figurative language whereby the meaning of one word

²⁷¹ Andrea L. Weiss, *Figurative Language in Biblical Prose Narrative: Metaphor in the Book of Samuel* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2006), 1.

was “carried over” to another. A metaphor was then, viewed as a stylistic device, a comparison of two words, one literal and the other figurative or metaphorical.²⁷² Based on the similarities between these two words, the literal meaning of a word was enhanced or changed by association with the figurative metaphor.²⁷³

The Historical Overview of Metaphor

The above understanding of metaphorical language is generally presumed to originate with Aristotle (384-322 B. C.), when he wrote in *The Poetics* that “metaphor is the transference of a term from one thing to another.”²⁷⁴ For Aristotle, metaphors were essentially semantic comparisons, ornaments of *figurative* language, in contrast to *literal* language.²⁷⁵ As a result, metaphors were not treated with great significance.²⁷⁶ They were viewed as being non-essential, rather than necessary language, merely a stylistic consideration. One author would arbitrarily choose to use certain images to convey meaning, but he could have chosen to use any number of other metaphors to convey the same meaning, or none at all. Therefore, metaphors were merely thought of as redundant, dispensable language, mere words lacking any conceptual content.

²⁷² Mark Johnson, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 5.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁷⁴ Weiss, 1.

²⁷⁵ Johnson, 6.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

At the risk of oversimplification, this basic understanding of metaphorical language made little advancement throughout the New Testament, Patristic and Medieval eras, even during the periods of the Reformation and the Enlightenment. In fact, it would take over two millennia, from the time of Aristotle to the late twentieth century, before metaphorical language would be taken seriously by theorists and theologians alike.²⁷⁷

Andrea Weiss observes:

Aristotle conceives of metaphor as a word-long phenomenon, a distinct word that can be extracted from a sentence and replaced with a related word... Only toward the latter part of the twentieth century...did scholars begin to question the established notion that a metaphor involves the transference or substitution of specific words.²⁷⁸

Mark Johnson adds:

After Aristotle there followed over twenty-three hundred years of elaboration on his remarks. From a philosophical point of view, at least, virtually every major treatment up to the twentieth century is prefigured in Aristotle's account... Thus metaphor, treated traditionally under rhetoric, becomes a stylistic device divorced from serious philosophical argument.²⁷⁹

In the first half of the twentieth century little had changed. Metaphor was still not a subject for serious scholarship, especially among the scientifically minded.²⁸⁰

However, things began to change in the second half of the twentieth century with the widespread emergence of relativism as the accepted philosophical outlook.²⁸¹ Andrea

Weiss observes:

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 8.

²⁷⁸ Weiss, 2.

²⁷⁹ Johnson, 8.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 9.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

Unlike the traditional approach which devalues metaphor “as deviant and parasitic upon normal use,” relativism celebrates metaphor “as an essential characteristic of the creativity of language.” As a result, during the second half of the twentieth century, philosophers, linguists, psychologists, literary critics, and scholars in a wide range of disciplines started to reassess the established, ornamental view of figurative language and to appreciate metaphor as a vital component of language and thought.²⁸²

Although not the first to seriously consider metaphor as the bearer of concepts, Max Black wrote an essay entitled *Metaphor* (1954-55), which is widely considered the seminal work in redirecting the winds of change among scholars.²⁸³ In a later book, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (1962), Black outlined the three basic theories that have been associated with metaphor throughout the centuries: 1) *the substitution view*, 2) *the comparison view*, and 3) *the interaction view*.²⁸⁴ The first two have been the traditional understandings of metaphor,²⁸⁵ while the third is more recent and was originally proposed by Black himself.²⁸⁶

First, *the substitution view* is simply an “indirect way of presenting some intended literal meaning” by substituting a non-literal term for it.²⁸⁷ The similarity present between the two terms is “the sole basis for the act of comprehension” and “the essence

²⁸² Ibid., 11.

²⁸³ Ibid., 13.

²⁸⁴ Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), 35-47.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 36.

²⁸⁶ Johnson, 28.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 24.

of the meaning.”²⁸⁸ Accordingly, the metaphorical statement could be just as easily replaced by “an equivalent literal comparison” without any loss of comprehension.²⁸⁹

Secondly, *the comparison view*, which is a variation of the substitution view,²⁹⁰ is a comparison of similarities between the metaphor and its referent, through which a speaker’s intended meaning is comprehended.²⁹¹ Max Black illustrates and compares these two views:

The chief difference between a substitution view...and the special form of it that I have called a comparison view may be illustrated by the stock example of “Richard is a lion.” On the first view, the sentence means approximately the same as “Richard is brave;” on the second, approximately the same as “Richard is *like* a lion (in being brave),” the added words in brackets being understood but not explicitly stated. In the second translation, as in the first, the metaphorical statement is taken to be standing in place of some literal equivalent. But the comparison view provides a more elaborate paraphrase, inasmuch as the original statement is interpreted as being about lions as well as about Richard.²⁹²

The main objection, however, to both the substitution and comparison views is that they are vague and fail to explain all the dynamics at work in metaphorical language.²⁹³ Mark Johnson states:

The theory simply does not tell us how we are to compute the meaning of any given metaphor. Any two objects are similar in some respects, and the comparison view does not explain how we are able to pick out the relevant similarities in each instance.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁸ Johnson, 27.

²⁸⁹ Black, 35.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Johnson, 25.

²⁹² Black, 36.

²⁹³ Ibid, 37.

²⁹⁴ Johnson, 26.

Moreover, in both the substitution and comparison views, metaphors are ultimately viewed as expendable, since they can be easily replaced by a literal term without any loss of meaning.²⁹⁵

Third, *the interaction view* claims that the metaphor and its referent interact in such a way to produce a new intended meaning.²⁹⁶ Accordingly, it is not the comparison of similarities which identifies a figurative meaning; rather, it is the activity between the metaphor and its referent that actualizes the new understanding. Black identified this interaction dynamic as a “system of associated commonplaces,” where two *common* thoughts are *associated* and active together, with one illuminating the other.²⁹⁷ Mark Turner writes: “The *interaction* is a screening of one system of commonplaces by another to generate a new conceptual organization of, a new perspective on, some object.”²⁹⁸ For example, in the metaphorical statement, “the athlete is a machine,” the term *athlete* interacts with the term *machine*, “to produce emergent metaphorical meaning.”²⁹⁹ The person who reads such a statement may not know exactly which qualities of *athletes* and/or *machines* the author intends to communicate, whether he is saying that the athlete “works hard,” or that he does what he “is trained to do with precision.” “The point here is that understanding a metaphor is not typically a matter of comparing actual properties

²⁹⁵ Black, 46.

²⁹⁶ Johnson, 27.

²⁹⁷ Black, 39-40.

²⁹⁸ Johnson, 28.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

of objects; rather, it is based upon what the terms of the metaphor call to mind for us.”³⁰⁰ Therefore, unlike the substitution and comparison views, the interaction view of metaphor states that a metaphor cannot simply be replaced with a literal term or phrase, since it carries significant meaning within itself.

In 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in their book *Metaphors We Live By*, continued to build on these cognitive aspects of metaphor.³⁰¹ George Lakoff would later write: “In short, the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another.”³⁰² Consequently, metaphor is considered primarily “a figure of thought, as opposed to a figure of speech.”³⁰³

Moreover, contrary to the comparison or substitution approaches to metaphorical theory, the interaction theory claims that sometimes the transfer of meaning in the metaphorical concept is based not on similarities, but upon the dissimilarities that exist between the metaphor and its referent.³⁰⁴ In addition, these dissimilarities in metaphorical language must be “grounded on correlations within experience rather than on similarities.”³⁰⁵ For while there remains a point of comparison between the metaphor and its referent, the comparison is never perfect and, therefore, there will always be

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 16.

³⁰² Andrew Ortony, ed., *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 203.

³⁰³ Weiss, 16.

³⁰⁴ Rodney Kennedy, *The Creative Power of Metaphor: A Rhetorical Homiletics* (New York, NY: University Press of America, 1993), 5.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

elements that are incongruous.³⁰⁶ Mark Johnson identifies this important observation, first made by Richards (1936) and Khatchadourian (1968), when he writes:

...the insight we gain (through the use of metaphor) is often less a product of perceived similarities highlighted by the metaphor and more a result of dissimilarities that force us imaginatively to restructure our way of comprehending things.³⁰⁷

Therefore, in cases where no explicit correspondences exist, metaphorical language actually creates its own similarities where only dissimilarities previously existed.³⁰⁸ The interaction between the two concepts provides a new vantage point and understanding for the listener.³⁰⁹ Sallie McFague observes: “Good metaphors shock, they bring unlikes together, they upset conventions, they involve tension, and they are implicitly revolutionary.”³¹⁰ Rodney Kennedy concurs:

A metaphor is an assertion or judgment of similarity and difference between two thoughts...which redescribes reality in an open-ended way, but has structural as well as epistemic and effective power.³¹¹

Therefore, as understood in our contemporary world, metaphor is not just a linguistic or rhetorical device, for the term carries with it a concept, *form* carries with it

³⁰⁶ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Great Britain: Antony Rowe Ltd., 1980), 145.

³⁰⁷ Johnson, 26.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

³¹⁰ Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1997), 16.

³¹¹ Kennedy, 5.

content.³¹² Through the juxtaposition of two words and concepts, the original word and concept takes on a new and enhanced meaning. For example, when Moses writes that Abraham was “gathered to his people,”³¹³ the concepts of reunion and eternal life are combined to present the hopeful expectation of being with faithful loved ones beyond the grave. The association of ideas in the metaphor enhances the understanding of eternal life. Jacob Preus writes:

We can grasp nothing in itself but only as it is related to and set apart from something else. Because they relate what is known to what is unknown, metaphors make it possible for us to advance in our knowledge of reality.³¹⁴

Therefore, metaphors are not merely linguistic devices, as once thought, but linguistic devices that make reference to realities, and not just words alone.³¹⁵ They are words that carry concepts of reality.³¹⁶

The Implications for My Ministry

The implication of this discussion of metaphorical language is theologically significant. Speaking as a Confessional Lutheran, the metaphors in Scripture are not merely decorative or poetic language, but as I outlined in Chapter Two, they are the very inspired Word of God. Therefore, the realities that these metaphors convey through the

³¹² Jacob A. O. Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 33.

³¹³ Genesis 25:17.

³¹⁴ Preus, 34-35.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

³¹⁶ George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 2.

use of human language, being under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are divine realities, “vehicles for the apprehension of the eternal.”³¹⁷ Articulating views held by St.

Augustine, Bonnie Howe writes:

There is an abyss between the transcendent realm of God and the contingent, finite, fallen world of everyday human life. But the Word – Christ, the Word made flesh, and the Word in Scripture – bridges the gap.³¹⁸

Only the transcendent God himself can bridge this divide, by condescending to our temporal, human level in order to communicate in human language, which is to say, in metaphor.³¹⁹ “In fact, there is no way to say the Gospel and spell out the implications of the Gospel...without metaphors.”³²⁰

Moreover, “there is a difference in the truth claims represented by a revealed metaphor versus an ordinary metaphor.”³²¹ Since revealed metaphors are inspired by the Holy Spirit, their understanding of truth, when correctly represented by the preacher, is infallible. Therefore, the metaphors in Scripture are the very revelatory process that God has chosen to use to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to fallen sinners.

³¹⁷ Bonnie Howe, *Because You Bear This Name: Conceptual Metaphor and the Moral Meaning of 1 Peter* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2006), 31.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ Preus, 34.

³²¹ Mary Therese DesCamp and Eve E. Sweetser, “Metaphors for God: Why and How Do Our Choices Matter for Humans? The Application of Contemporary Cognitive Linguistics Research to the Debate on God and Metaphor.” *Pastoral Psychology* Vol. 53, No. 3, (January 2005): 210.

Furthermore, the concept of eternal life and its many dimensions is expanded through the use of metaphors.³²² As eternal life is proclaimed, using the many and various metaphors of Scripture, each of these metaphors carries with it another dimension of eternal reality. The reality of eternal life is far greater than human language can convey in itself. Nevertheless, as this reality is communicated in the many creative ways of Scripture, it brings the listener one step closer to a full understanding of the reality. Janet Martin Soskice writes, “The theist can reasonably take his talk of God, bound as it is within a wheel of images, as being reality depicting, while at the same time acknowledging its inadequacy as description.”³²³ Then, as the reality of eternal life is expanded in my funeral sermons through the various metaphors of Scripture, it also communicates additional levels of comfort to my members. They begin to look at eternal life in its many facets, with each metaphor building on the others, seeking to offer a more complete understanding of the whole reality.

Finally, since this Word of God and its eternal realities are communicated in metaphorical language, these metaphors are also a means of grace, the very power of God. God uses these metaphors to transform the hearts and minds of those who have experienced a significant loss. Through the proclamation of eternal life, by faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit seeks to draw the listeners to God, in order to give them all the benefits of his grace.³²⁴ Therefore, the different metaphors that God has chosen to

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Janet Martin Soskice. *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 141.

³²⁴ John 6:44.

present in the Scriptures are not just a matter of semantics, nor are they random or arbitrary, but a matter of eternal life itself. The bottom line is that metaphors are tools of the Holy Spirit, which he uses to bring comfort and hope to those in my congregation who are grieving the loss of a significant loved one. Understanding the theoretical views of metaphor is significant but, in the end, theory must be the servant of theology. Theory must assist the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the hope of eternal life through faith in him.

As I see it, the members of my congregation are fairly typical Missouri Synod Lutherans in that they take the Scriptures to be the very Word of God. Therefore, whenever they face a crisis in life, such as the death of a loved one, they want to hear a message of comfort from God's Word. They want to hear the proclamation of the Gospel in the funeral sermon. On many occasions over my seventeen years of ministry at Pilgrim Lutheran Church my members have attended funerals conducted by other pastors, often non-Lutheran ones. Afterwards, many of them have shared with me their disappointment of not clearly hearing the proclamation of the Gospel in the funeral sermon. They would say, "Pastor, all we want to hear is the Gospel!" knowing that it is the Gospel that they truly need. Only the Gospel can bring the comfort and power of God to bear on their lives in times of bereavement.

Although these comments were not about my sermons, I took them to heart. The bereaved do not need to hear about the saintliness of the deceased, nor a pep-talk about bringing Christ into their lives. Lutheran theology is very clear on this point, and my members have been listening to what they have been taught over the years. They also know from experience that only the Gospel can make a difference at a time of significant

loss. Some of these same members have said to me, “Pastor, I don’t know how others make it through their grief without the Gospel, without Christ!” Not very well, I imagine.

Therefore, though I have preached funeral sermons to many of the same people over the years and will continue to do so, God’s Word will continue to provide many creative ways of bringing the Gospel to them. The key is to continue to proclaim the Gospel through the many metaphors which Scripture uses to convey eternal life. Even if my ministry should continue here for another seventeen years, I will never exhaust the creativity of God’s Word, nor its power to bring hope through the Gospel to my members in times of desperate need.

The Literature Review

Before I begin a review of the contemporary understanding of metaphor it will be helpful to first define current research terminology. In its simplest form, a *metaphor* is the comparison and interaction of two concepts, identified by a single word or phrase that is metaphorical.³²⁵ Additionally, metaphorical language moves from what is known to the listeners to what is unknown, expanding their understanding of existing reality.³²⁶

Sallie McFague summarizes:

Most simply, a metaphor is seeing one thing as something else, pretending this is that because we do not know how to think or talk about this so we use that as a way of saying something about it. Thinking metaphorically means spotting a thread of similarity between two similar objects...and using the better known one as a way of speaking about the lesser known.³²⁷

³²⁵ Kennedy, 65.

³²⁶ Caird, 145.

³²⁷ McFague, 15.

Metaphorical Nomenclature

In the interaction of two concepts, the metaphor itself is defined as the *source domain*, because it provides the source of imagery and structure that is being communicated to the hearer.³²⁸ The metaphor is non-literal, and the comparison and interaction is implicit.³²⁹ Next, the *target domain* is the concept that is being contemplated in light of the metaphor, and is the target or direction toward which the metaphor is directed.³³⁰ In this way, the relationship and language of the source domain carries over to the target domain.³³¹ “Each metaphor (source domain) provides structure for comprehending a different aspect of the target domain.”³³² Furthermore, the dynamic of correspondences between the *source domain* and the *target domain* is called *mapping*.³³³ “We use a metaphor to map certain aspects of the source domain onto the target domain, thereby producing a new understanding of that target domain.”³³⁴ Finally *directionality* identifies the relationship between the *source domain* and the *target*

³²⁸ Des Camp and Sweetser, 216.

³²⁹ Caird, 144.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Des Camp and Sweetser, 220.

³³² Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, 53.

³³³ Ibid., 4.

³³⁴ Ibid., 38.

domain as asymmetrical, that is, the content is transferred only in one direction from the source domain to the target domain and not vice versa.³³⁵

Take, for example, the metaphor Jesus uses in John 14:2, “In *my Father’s house* are many rooms.” In this phrase, the metaphor, *my Father’s house*, is the *source domain*, the source of structure for the interaction of concepts. The *target domain*, though not stated explicitly but apparent in the context, is *eternal life*. By the relationship and interaction of these two concepts, *my Father’s house* and *eternal life*, the *source domain* projects meaning onto the *target domain*, *mapping* patterns of thought between the two and also providing the *direction* of the meaning, so that the reader comes to understand that *eternal life* is like a *house*. In this way, through the use of metaphor, Jesus intends to communicate that *eternal life*, like a *house*, is a comfortable and lasting place of residence. The concept of *eternal life* is, therefore, enriched by the interaction with the metaphorical concept of a *house*.

The Cognitive Linguistic Approach

Now that the nomenclature of metaphor research has been established, I will proceed with the literature review. Contemporary metaphorical theory has come to identify the *cognitive linguistic approach* as the preeminent paradigm. According to this theory, metaphors are viewed not merely as linguistic devices, but as linguistic devices that carry cognitive concepts from one domain to another.³³⁶

³³⁵ DesCamp and Sweetser, 215.

³³⁶ Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field guide to Poetic Metaphor*, 103.

Cognitive linguistics argues that metaphor is a matter of thinking, not just a matter of language; human beings use metaphors to conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another. Metaphor imposes structure on thinking, and allows one to reason about, not just talk about, one thing in terms of another.³³⁷

Lakoff and Johnson add:

Any discussion of the uniqueness or idiosyncrasy of a metaphor must therefore take place on two levels: the conceptual level and the linguistic level. A given passage may express a common conceptual metaphor in a way that is linguistically either commonplace or idiosyncratic.³³⁸

Moreover, though it is not within the scope of this project to review all the research being done in the field, it needs to be stated that not only is the conceptual nature of metaphorical language becoming clearer on a theoretical basis, it also has been confirmed by research. Bonnie Howe adds: “Research data support the claim that metaphor is essentially conceptual, not linguistic, in nature, and that metaphorical expressions in language are surface manifestations of conceptual metaphor.”³³⁹ George Lakoff offers this summary statement concerning research into the cognitive linguistic approach: “These are the conclusions (in favor of the cognitive linguistic approach) that best fit the empirical studies of metaphor conducted over the past decade or so.”³⁴⁰

This conceptual understanding of metaphor differs from traditional views of metaphor in at least four significant ways. These concepts are 1) *preexistent*, 2) *experiential*, 3) *conventional*, and 4) *systematic* in nature. First, the conceptual nature of

³³⁷ DesCamp and Sweetser, 215.

³³⁸ Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, 50.

³³⁹ Howe, 60.

³⁴⁰ Ortony, 246.

metaphorical language means that the concepts found in metaphor exist before, and independent of, language.³⁴¹ They are *preexistent*. In fact many theorists today would claim that working with metaphorical concepts is foundational to all learning, and part of the normal processes of cognition.³⁴² Rather than just being a rhetorical device, a matter of semantics, metaphors contain concepts of reality. Bonnie Howe observes: “Metaphors are conceptual; before they are linguistic expressions, they are mental operations that blend and network mental spaces.”³⁴³

Therefore, when Jesus speaks of *the crown of life*,³⁴⁴ two concepts are present and at work, both the source domain, *the crown of life*, and the target domain, *eternal life*. These two concepts already exist, and would already be understood by the audience as separate concepts before their use by Jesus. If these concepts did not preexist in the minds of the listeners, it would not be possible for Jesus to communicate his point.

Second, the conceptual nature of metaphorical language is not arbitrary.³⁴⁵ Rather, it is grounded in the human and cultural *experience* which permeates all discourse and cognitive activity.³⁴⁶ In fact, George Lakoff further claims that metaphorical

³⁴¹ Howe, 61.

³⁴² McFague, 16.

³⁴³ Howe, 107.

³⁴⁴ Revelation 2:10.

³⁴⁵ Ortony, 245.

³⁴⁶ Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, 66.

concepts are the keys to all understanding of human experience.³⁴⁷ People acquire an understanding of ideas through direct human experience within a culture. Therefore, the effectiveness of metaphorical language is primarily the result of its correspondence with peoples' human and cultural experience.³⁴⁸ Lakoff and Johnson write: "We have found...that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system...is fundamentally metaphoric in nature."³⁴⁹ This conclusion has primarily escaped human awareness for so long because people generally function with a conceptual system that is largely unconscious.³⁵⁰ However, today, theorists are keenly aware of the concepts behind the metaphors.

Third, the concepts contained in metaphors are also *conventional* in nature, utilizing ordinary, everyday language and concepts.³⁵¹ "The conceptual metaphor...also depends on conventional knowledge. In order to understand a target domain in terms of a source domain, one must have appropriate knowledge of the source domain."³⁵² In addition, on account of this conventional nature of metaphors, the communication of the concepts they carry becomes "automatic, effortless, and largely unconscious."³⁵³ Since

³⁴⁷ Ortony, 245.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 3.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Howe, 61.

³⁵² Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, 56.

³⁵³ Ibid., 62.

the concepts themselves preexist in the minds of the listener, and common language is able to identify these concepts, mapping information from one domain to another is quite natural. Therefore, since metaphors are idiosyncratic and conventional in nature, this demonstrates that the conventional linguistic expressions of a culture depend on the conceptual nature of these metaphors in order to communicate.³⁵⁴

For example, the metaphors used in my research clearly demonstrate that metaphorical language is grounded in human and cultural experience and are quite conventional in nature: *sleep, pleasures, house, inheritance*, and so forth. As a result, the listener will automatically have a grasp of the source domain, which allows for the mapping of concepts onto the target domain. The metaphor *sleep*,³⁵⁵ which is used by St. Paul to describe the reality of the death of the body, carries with it the implicit ideas of temporary rest, followed by an awakening of the body at another time. Thus, the conventional and experiential nature of the metaphorical language provides the preacher and the listeners with a large, preexistent resource of concepts for communicating the Gospel.

Fourth, the conceptual aspects of metaphor are *systematic* in nature.³⁵⁶ They are generally structured in systematic fashion within categories, so that it is possible to relate to corresponding concepts within a category with relative ease.³⁵⁷ Consequently, there

³⁵⁴ Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, 51.

³⁵⁵ 1 Thessalonians 4:14.

³⁵⁶ Howe, 61.

³⁵⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 52.

exist fixed correspondences and systematic similarities between the structures of the various source domains within a category that are readily available to the preacher.³⁵⁸

This systematic conceptual nature translates into variety in the preaching task. Therefore, since the fundamental cognitive concepts are systematically organized within a particular category there exists an internal and an external coherence³⁵⁹ among these related concepts.³⁶⁰ This structured coherence allows the preacher to share new, yet related ideas, in each funeral sermon, building one concept upon another in the minds of the listeners.

Take for example St. Paul's metaphors of *glory* and *conqueror*.³⁶¹ In a Gentile culture that was steeped in athletic competition, the concept of a *conqueror* carried with it the similar concept of *glory*. Both of these source domains are speaking of the same spiritual reality, eternal life, and each concept, in a systematic way, enhances the other. Therefore, the *conqueror*, the victor, receives the *glory* of victory. *Conquering* and *glory*

³⁵⁸ Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, 51.

³⁵⁹ "Internal coherence" refers to the coherence evident within a specific metaphor. For example, "life is a journey" carries with it concepts such as a beginning, a middle and an end, and perhaps good and bad things along the way. All such aspects are coherent with both "life" and a "journey." On the other hand, external coherence refers to the coherence that exists between related metaphors. Therefore, all "life" metaphors will contain some aspects which are coherent with other "life" metaphors. For example, "life is a play," contains many of the same concepts as "life is a journey," such as a beginning, a middle and an end. Therefore, coherence also exists between the concepts of "journey" and "play."

³⁶⁰ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 17-18.

³⁶¹ Romans 8:38, 8:18.

are viewed as inseparable because they are part of a systematic understanding of concepts. Thus, both concepts are interrelated.

The Conclusions

The four theoretical elements above concerning the cognitive linguistic theory of metaphor are the primary points of theory that inform my project and my funeral preaching. Metaphors are conceptual and not merely linguistic devices and, therefore, carry with them *preexistent* realities behind the language. On account of these preexisting concepts, the metaphor allows the preacher to present eternal realities to the listeners in temporal, human language.

Therefore, in preaching funeral sermons, I can be confident that the hope I am proclaiming is based on eternal realities and are not just sentimental platitudes. Furthermore, since the Gospel hope is based on realities, it communicates true and lasting comfort to the bereaved. Only those who lack the true Gospel of hope have to resort to platitudes, to non-realities, because they have nowhere else to turn.

In addition, the metaphors which remain part of the common *experience* and *conventional* understanding of the listeners are most effective in preaching funeral sermons. These are considered *living metaphors* since their conceptual meaning is alive in the minds of the listeners.³⁶² Conversely, other metaphors are considered *dead metaphors* when the conceptual content is lacking on the cognitive and experiential levels and, therefore, fails to communicate any significant understanding to the listeners. “This

³⁶² Caird, 152.

last stage has arrived when speaker and hearer are unaware of the duality of vehicle [source domain] and tenor [target domain], and treat the word as a new literalism.”³⁶³ However, when a preacher is communicating with a living metaphor, the meaning is commonly understood by both the speaker and the hearer.³⁶⁴ Thus, conventional concepts, grounded in human experience, are indispensable to the communication process.³⁶⁵

Therefore, in proclaiming the Gospel in the funeral sermon, I believe the preacher will want to work *only* with living metaphors because the funeral presents the preacher with a special context. At other times and in other situations, a preacher may venture to use a metaphor that is not part of the listeners’ experiential or linguistic associations by first informing them concerning the metaphors conceptual meaning and relevance.³⁶⁶ However, in the context of a funeral sermon, this is probably asking too much of the listeners, many of whom are physically exhausted and emotionally expended. Therefore, the preacher will want to use imagery that works as effortlessly as possible for the mourners’ benefit.

Finally, the fact that metaphorical language is structured in a *systematic* way provides me with the opportunity to raise the Biblical literacy of my members, making them more familiar with the richness of Bible imagery on a steady basis. Preaching

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, 56.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 60.

regularly on Sundays from the lectionary as part of my overall preaching strategy will enable me to expand my members' Biblical concepts related to eternal life. In this way, I will at times deliberately select metaphors that are unfamiliar to my listeners and then inform them about its use in Scripture. In the process, I can expand their conceptual system outside the context of a crisis, and I will have more Biblical imagery that I can draw upon when writing future funeral sermons.

In my review of current literature related to metaphorical theory, I did not find any resource or research that identified and worked with death and eternal life metaphors in particular. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will develop the methodology that I will utilize in my research on metaphorical language. From this research I will seek to describe how certain members of Pilgrim Lutheran Church perceive various metaphors from the Scriptures concerning death and eternal life, in preparation for future funeral sermons.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT DEVELOPED

In Chapter One, I briefly outlined the process I followed in doing my descriptive research, but in this chapter I will expand on the particulars of my research in greater detail.

The Design of the Study

As I stated previously, I believe that proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ during a funeral sermon in my congregation at Pilgrim Lutheran Church is one of the most important aspects of my entire ministry. Those in my congregation who are grieving need and desire the hope of eternal life to be presented to them from Scripture at their time of significant loss. Only the Gospel has the power to work healing in their hearts and to prepare them for their own eventual death. Therefore, I view the funeral sermon, which is intended to speak to the distraught and the fearful, to be a profound evangelistic opportunity.

Moreover, the hope of eternal life is proclaimed in the Scriptures through the use of metaphorical language. Metaphors carry the conceptual meaning that is transferred from the source to the literal concept of eternal life, and Scripture utilizes many different metaphors to communicate this consolation. Therefore, the *research question* that I considered was whether different kinds of metaphorical language were equally effective

in communicating the Gospel of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ in my specific ministry context. My *research hypothesis* presumed a negative answer to this question. I believed that some metaphors would be more effective in proclaiming the hope of eternal life to the members of Pilgrim Lutheran Church than others. In addition, the least effective metaphors might best be avoided altogether.

To answer my research question, I adopted a *qualitative descriptive* approach to my research. The *purpose* of this research project was, therefore, not to understand variables of causation or to discern relationships that exist among a set of variables,³⁶⁷ but to discover *which* Scriptural metaphors relating to death and eternal life were better understood and more effective in communicating the Gospel to the members of my congregation. Furthermore, through my research, I sought to understand *why* certain metaphors were more comforting than others, and specifically what aspects of the imagery evoked the most positive responses in my members. For it is my intention to incorporate these comforting aspects of metaphorical imagery as significant portions of my future funeral sermons. Therefore, I anticipated that the insights gathered from my research would enable me to be more effective in proclaiming eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ to my members in their hour of sorrow and loss.

The Research Tools and Methodology

My research, first of all, resulted in quantitative data which was gathered from a *research survey*. This *research survey* was distributed to all the confirmed members of

³⁶⁷ Joseph A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Inductive Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 74-75.

my congregation. Secondly, my research resulted in qualitative data which was obtained through *research group interviews*.

The Research Survey

The first step in my research involved sending a *research survey* to the entire confirmed membership of my congregation, totaling 161 members. This survey included a list of fifteen Scriptural metaphors pertaining to death or eternal life which I designed (see Figure 4.1, below). Beginning with a list of several dozen metaphors, I reduced the number to fifteen for my research project. Moreover, I chose these fifteen metaphors in such a manner that the various genres of Scripture would be represented: gospel, Old Testament history, wisdom, prophetic, epistle and apocalyptic literature. Through the use of these fifteen metaphors, the research survey sought to ascertain from my members *which* metaphors were *most comforting* to them in the context of death and loss. This was based on a Likert scale: 1) strongly distressing, 2) distressing, 3) neutral or indifferent, 4) comforting, and 5) strongly comforting.³⁶⁸ This research survey was not intended to meet the demanding criteria of quantitative research, but simply to gather the respondents' perceptions concerning the various Scripture verses.³⁶⁹ These perceptions were then utilized as the basis for some of the qualitative research that would follow in the focus groups.

³⁶⁸ See Appendix E. Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, eds., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 220.

³⁶⁹ See Research Survey, Appendix E, 11-12.

The research surveys were then completed and returned to my office in November of 2007. A total of 95 of the 161 original surveys were returned, giving me a good response total of 59%.³⁷⁰ Furthermore, many of these members had attended a funeral in the past year and so they had some grasp of what it meant to experience a recent loss and to hear a funeral sermon in such a context.

I next compiled the *data* by totaling up the responses from all the surveys. The range of survey responses were then summarized on a data sheet and were prepared to be presented in my research groups. Through this data I was able to determine *which* Scriptural metaphors on eternal life were more comforting to my members than others, and *which* ones were their favorites based on a *frequency distribution*.³⁷¹

The Research Group Interviews

I then made a list of the names of those who were willing to participate in the interview process of my *research groups*.³⁷² The list included seventeen volunteers, all who had attended a funeral in the past year. I was pleased that the volunteers ranged in age from 16 to 68, a distribution that represents most of the age groups within my congregation. I also thought that with such a good representation of age groups within

³⁷⁰ Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley and McKinney state that a survey response needs to reach the threshold of 50% to be considered worthwhile. Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, eds., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 220.

³⁷¹ Derek Rowntree, *Statistics Without Tears: A Primer for Non-Mathematicians* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 38.

³⁷² William R. Myers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program* (Chicago, IL: Exploration Press, 2000).

the volunteer pool I would most likely get the varied representation I desired in each group.³⁷³

Next I scheduled both research groups to take place at the church during the last week of January, 2008, with one group meeting on Thursday evening and the other meeting on Saturday morning. I then contacted the volunteers by phone in early January, 2008. In addition, I decided to construct these groups somewhat randomly, first giving the volunteers the choice of being in one or the other group, whichever worked best for them. By doing it this way, I had hoped to get most or all of the volunteers to participate by eliminating possible scheduling difficulties from the outset. However, when volunteers said they could attend either group I then *purposefully* directed them into one group or the other, hoping to achieve good age and gender representation in both groups.³⁷⁴ A confirmation letter of the research groups dates and times was then sent out to the volunteers the week before the groups were held.³⁷⁵

Before the meetings were held, I went through the present outline with my wife to make sure everything flowed naturally and was easily understandable. I then rehearsed my power-point presentation in the classroom, checking the quality of my recording device, the lighting, and the seating arrangement. I also made a copy of my power-point presentation as a handout in case there would be any technical problems. All my handouts were colored coded for easy reference.

³⁷³ Maxwell, 89.

³⁷⁴ Myers, 48.

³⁷⁵ See Appendices H and I, 15-16.

At the time of the group meetings, we sat around a large square table, facing each other. I sat before the group and presented my interview questions on screen with the power-point presentation.³⁷⁶ Despite the size of the groups, it still seemed to be a comfortable and intimate setting. Each volunteer was given their original research survey, which included the fifteen eternal life metaphors. Another handout was given later which presented the *Frequency Table*. Throughout the meeting I taped our discussion. The group sessions lasted for ninety minutes, and we closed with prayer. Then, at my earliest convenience, I reviewed the tapes of the group meetings and completed a summary of all their responses.

The Research Group Interview Format

In the research groups, I addressed the fifteen metaphors from the research survey. The power-point presentation provided various questions that would enable me to acquire the research data I desired. Going through the list of metaphors, I asked each group to specify what aspects of the image brought them the most comfort.³⁷⁷ Since the research survey already told me *which* metaphors were comforting to them, I now sought to ascertain *why* these metaphors were comforting to them. Therefore, using second person pronouns and present tense verbs,³⁷⁸ I asked the groups to provide me with those specific aspects of the metaphors that appealed to them. What sights and sounds, tastes

³⁷⁶ See the questions from the Power-Point Presentation in Appendix F,13.

³⁷⁷ Maxwell, 94.

³⁷⁸ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 45.

and experiences did these images offer them. These insights would give me the specific direction I needed to preach on the metaphors in my funeral sermons as effectively as possible.

Moreover, through these research group questions, I hoped to address any *validity threats* that may have tainted the research survey data.³⁷⁹ Holding a high opinion of the Scriptures may have led my members to mark many or all of the metaphors favorably, without full consideration. Therefore, in order to secure the validity of the research survey data I asked the group members to specify *why* the metaphors were comforting to them.³⁸⁰ If they truly found certain metaphors to be comforting to them, then I assumed that there must already be comforting concepts in their minds concerning the metaphor. Asking the volunteers to describe these concepts in detail helped to reassure me that they had given the research survey the thoughtful consideration that was needed. Consequently, I believe that the detailed descriptions given to me in the focus groups relating to the fifteen metaphors has helped me to validate the research survey data. Joseph Maxwell identifies this feedback process as the “single most important way of ruling out the possibility” of misinterpretation.³⁸¹

I then shared with the volunteers the results of the research survey and asked them to comment on *what* they found surprising in the survey data and *why*. Next I shared with the groups the surprises I found in the data, asking them for possible explanations. At the conclusion of each group meeting, volunteers were given a copy of the booklet

³⁷⁹ Maxwell, 107.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 106-107.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 111.

entitled *Heaven*,³⁸² which speaks to relevant questions concerning the topic of eternal life. This gift was one of the ways I expressed my appreciation to them for their active involvement in my research project. In the following week, a thank you letter was sent to all the group volunteers,³⁸³ expressing my deep appreciation for their “partnership in the Gospel.”³⁸⁴

An additional focus group was held in February, 2008, which included the pastors in three nearby circuits, totaling approximately 18 clergy members.³⁸⁵ I then shared the results of the research survey and the results of the congregational research groups with the pastors, and asked them for feedback.³⁸⁶ It was also my hope that my study of the use of metaphorical Gospel passages, as well as the research results, might assist them in their own ministries to the bereaved.

At the conclusion of all the research group meetings, I reported the results of my research survey to my congregation and invited group members to meet with me on March 2, 2008.³⁸⁷ This information was also published in the March 2008 newsletter, *The Pilgrimage*. I then met informally with the members of the research groups from my congregation one more time on March 2, 2008, following a worship service, and shared

³⁸² George Beiderwieden, *Heaven* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1961).

³⁸³ See Appendix J, 17.

³⁸⁴ Philippians 1:5.

³⁸⁵ For outline of group see Appendix M, 20.

³⁸⁶ See Appendix L, 18.

³⁸⁷ See Appendix K, 17.

my final conclusions with them. I decided to present the group findings of the fifteen metaphors in a devotional style, incorporating the insights I gathered from the two congregational focus groups as well as my own thoughts from my previous study of these texts.³⁸⁸ I then gave the group members one last opportunity to give me any additional feedback concerning my topic, my research findings, and the future funeral sermons I would prepare in the upcoming years. In addition, I used the occasion to once again express my appreciation to my members for taking such an interest in my topic and for providing me with the essential insights that made my research worthwhile.

The Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented my research tools and methodology, as well as the implementation of the project. It is my hope that if some other pastor wished to conduct similar research in their congregations this information will prove helpful.

In the next chapter, I will present the findings of my research survey, the research focus groups, as well as my final conclusions about the study.

³⁸⁸ For devotional, see Appendix N, 21.

CHAPTER 5

THE PROJECT EVALUATED

I began this project with the *research question* that considered whether different eternal life metaphors were equally effective in communicating the Gospel through faith in Jesus Christ in my specific ministry context. My *research hypothesis* presumed a negative answer to this question, believing that some metaphors would be more effective in proclaiming the hope of eternal life to the members of Pilgrim Lutheran Church than others. I can say that my *research hypothesis* was correct, and the survey data as well as the research group findings below will demonstrate that not all Scriptural metaphors were perceived equally comforting to those who participated in my research. However, I also learned from working with the groups that once they understood the meaning and content of the less popular metaphors they began to view them in a new light. Though it would seem self-evident, the group members reminded me that much care needs to be applied by the preacher to make certain the dynamics and imagery of the metaphor are clearly understood by the listeners before presenting the promises of the Gospel.

The Research Survey Data

I began gathering research data using a research survey (see Appendix E). This survey provided quantitative data, but was not intended to be evaluated statistically. The

data was intended only to determine the frequency of responses among the participants. These responses were later evaluated in the research group interviews.

Certain aspects of the research survey were not surprising to me. Few of my members, as I expected, found the Scriptural metaphors relating to death and eternal life to be either distressing or strongly distressing. In fact, most of the respondents, 75% of them, found the metaphors to be either comforting or strongly comforting. However, what did surprise me was the number of respondents who found that their perception of particular metaphors was neutral or indifferent - 23%. I believed that these were some of the very best eternal life metaphors found in Scripture, and yet nearly a quarter of the respondents felt untouched by them. The reason for this detachment I sought to identify in my research group interviews. Finally, a remaining 2% found some to be either distressing or strongly distressing. At the very least, this suggests that many of the respondents gave thoughtful consideration to the exercise. Later in my research group results I will provide some additional explanation for these findings.

Below are the distribution results for the research survey and the quantitative data mentioned above, utilizing a standard *Frequency Table* (see Table 5.1).³⁸⁹ The original research survey is found in Appendix E. A second *Frequency Table* (see Table 5.2) focuses on the metaphors that were identified as the favorites of my members. A total of 74 respondents indicated a favorite funeral verse, but 64% chose three standard texts: Luke 23:43, Ps 23:4, and John 11:25. All the other Scripture passages received very little attention as favorites. This suggests to me that preaching the many other metaphors will

³⁸⁹ Derek Rowntree, *Statistics Without Tears: A Primer for Non-Mathematicians* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 38.

require homiletic skill in presenting the full imagery of each metaphor in a winsome manner. I will draw additional conclusions below, following the presentation of the research group interview data.

Table 5.1

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Distressing	Distressing	Neutral Indifferent	Comforting	Strongly Comforting
1. Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. ”	0	0	6	33	49
2. Revelation 2:10 (Jesus said), “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. ”	0	5	23	33	25
3. Revelation 21:4 (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes.	0	0	9	50	31
4. Isaiah 65:17 (The Lord said), “Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things (all the bad things) will not be remembered... ”	0	4	21	30	31
5. John 14:2 Jesus said, “ In my Father’s house are many rooms...”	0	0	26	37	24
6. Genesis 25:8 Abraham breathed his last and died... and was gathered to his people.	4	4	49	19	9
7. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.	0	2	20	39	26
8. Psalms 16:11 (Lord), you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.	0	0	19	43	23

9. Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.	0	3	28	33	21
10. Romans 8:37 In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.	1	0	45	30	13
11. Matthew 11:28 (Jesus said), "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest ."	0	1	14	34	39
12. Psalms 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you (the Lord) are with me.	0	1	5	21	60
13. Matthew 24:34 (Jesus said), "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."	0	0	20	43	23
14. John 5:24 (Jesus said), "Whoever...believes him who sent me has eternal life and...he has crossed over from death to life."	0	1	15	38	34
15. John 11:25 (Jesus said), "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies..."	0	0	0	26	63
Totals	(less than 1%)	2%	23%	39%	36%

Table 5.2Number who
chose as favorite

1. Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. ”	17
2. Revelation 2:10 (Jesus said), “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. ”	2
3. Revelation 21:4 (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes.	4
4. Isaiah 65:17 (The Lord said), “Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things (all the bad things) will not be remembered... ”	4
5. John 14:2 Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms...”	2
6. Genesis 25:8 Abraham breathed his last and died... and was gathered to his people.	0
7. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.	4
8. Psalms 16:11 (Lord), you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.	1
9. Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.	1
10. Romans 8:37 In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.	0

11. Matthew 11:28 (Jesus said), “Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ”	7
12. Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you (the Lord) are with me.	17
13. Matthew 24:34 (Jesus said), “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”	1
14. John 5:24 (Jesus said), “Whoever...believes him who sent me has eternal life and...he has crossed over from death to life.”	1
15. John 11:25 (Jesus said), “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies...”	15

A ranking of the favorite metaphor selections is presented in descending order in Appendix G.

The Research Group Interview Findings

Below I will review my descriptive research findings from my research groups, which provided me with explanations for the survey data. The questionnaire for gathering the responses from the volunteers is found in Appendix F. In particular, I was looking for descriptive words from the group members that explained *why* certain metaphors were comforting to them. These insights would then give me specific

direction on how to develop each metaphor in the most effective manner in future funeral sermons in my congregation.

I had nine members present at the Thursday evening session, and eight at the Saturday morning session. Both groups were focused and engaged in the research, with every individual offering several of their own insights and perspectives about the metaphors. These responses provided me with *rich data*, with varied insights and adequate detail.³⁹⁰ I have tried to present the respondents' statements in their own words as much as possible, in order to preserve as much objectivity and to avoid researcher bias.³⁹¹

Luke 23:43. Jesus answered him, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in *paradise*." (ESV)

- Today you will be in paradise is comforting, something I want to hear on my death bed.
- The emphasis on "today," rather than paradise. If I'm going to die today I have nothing to worry about.
- For the unbeliever it would create the desire to be in paradise.
- Everyone can understand "paradise" in their own way, a way that is comforting to them. Even the unbeliever can relate to this image.

³⁹⁰ Joseph A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Inductive Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 110.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

- Paradise reminds us of the Garden of Eden, with the animals all getting along, no sin, just perfection.
- Like Hawaii, a perfect place with beautiful sunsets, nothing can go wrong.
Peaceful with the sounds of the water.

This metaphor was one of the most comforting passages in the survey. The people found great comfort in the knowledge that when they die they are immediately in Paradise and in the presence of Christ. In addition to the immediacy of eternal life, the people found comfort in the nature of eternal life – Paradise. Though the image of Paradise would be defined differently by many of the respondents, it is still a reality that far exceeds the nature of this temporal life.

Revelation 2:10. (Jesus said) “Be faithful until death, and I will give you *the crown of life.*” (NKJ)

- A whole new better life, glorious like a king.
- You achieved the very best. Being the best you can be.
- Royalty. King or queen, with power and authority.
- Reigning with the Lord on a throne.
- “Crown of thorns:” what Christ sacrificed for me. Christ sharing the results of his suffering.
- “I will give you,” the crown is a gift that is given to us.
- Implies eternity, God is not going to take it back.
- Wearing the crown of life is being set apart from unbelievers, you’re special.

I was surprised that this metaphor didn't score more favorably, and I was interested to learn why they responded so cautiously. It appears that the beginning of the passage, "Be faithful until death," was the reason for their apprehension. First of all, I noticed that whenever the word or concept of "death" appeared in the survey it seemed to cause a negative reaction. Secondly, the concept of "faithfulness" worried many of the participants, as they wondered if they are "faithful enough." Since the "crown" is given by Christ as a gift of grace, their ideas of being "faithful enough" is foreign to the text. Therefore, it will be important for me to emphasize the reality of "saved by grace" when preaching on this passage to further assure the listeners that God will keep them faithful to the end by his grace.

Revelation 21:4. (God) will *wipe every tear from their eyes.*

- I could visualize God wiping my face and drying my tears. The idea of actually feeling his touch is very comforting.
- We don't have to be sad anymore; no more tears.
- For people who have been sick or suffering, their tears are gone, and for those at the funeral the idea of God wiping their tears would be comforting.
- God "will" wipe away the tears, so that not only the sorrows of the past, but the sorrows of the future will be wiped away as well.
- The physical touch of God on our faces, emphasizing intimacy with God, is comforting.
- All bad memories are gone, and peace takes its place.
- Like a Mom wiping away the tears of her child and making everything better.

This passage rated quite well as it speaks of an end to the mourning that is such a part of this fallen world, and is an essential part of the Christian hope. It is also a passage that many could relate to when they were children, and Mom or Dad comforted them and wiped the tears from their eyes. The idea of the heavenly Father wiping away their tears spoke very powerfully, as it pictures the Father to the participants in an almost incarnational sense. As Jesus often used the touch of his hand when healing, comforting or blessing others, so the participants view the Father acting in this compassionate way.

Isaiah 65:17. (The Lord said), “Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things (all the bad things) *will not be remembered...*”

- God will be creating everything new, and everything that was bad will not be around anymore.
- All the bad things of this life will not be remembered; never have to think about them again. We start over with God in heaven.
- The good things will be remembered is another aspect of that comfort.
- The things “not remembered” include the sins of this life, so that one can understand this to mean that since our sins are forgiven now, they are not remembered even now.
- This would be comforting for the person in the pew who considers his own sins, to know that those sins are already forgiven and nothing is preventing them from going to heaven.
- All the terrible things that happen globally will not be remembered, like all the bad things on the news each night.

- The people in the pew will forget all about how the deceased suffered and died.
- The things we can't get our mind off of, things that keep us awake at night and trouble us will never happen again.
- The "replays" of troubling memories and thoughts will be replaced with peace and forgiveness.
- In the end heaven comes down to earth.

Since life is filled with so many difficulties, it was not surprising that this metaphor was comforting to many respondents. As with other metaphors, the group participants understood the metaphor within its context. Therefore, the idea of living in a new heaven and a new earth, with no memory of past sins, failures, hurts and troubles, was indeed comforting. On the other hand, a few respondents to the survey actually found the metaphor distressing, and it appears that they may have concluded that all memory, including good memories, would be forgotten beyond the grave. However, no one in the group understood the metaphor negatively, but instead found it comforting.

John 14:2. Jesus said, "In *my Father's house* are many rooms..."

- "Many rooms" mean that there is enough room in heaven for me and everyone.
- "My father's house" is comforting because God claims me as his child and wants me to be with him forever. This is wonderful.
- A place where we fit in and a place where we want to be.
- A large dinning room table where everyone gathers and socializes forever.
- The whole Christian family is together; we are a family.

- Jesus' Father's house, and so Jesus' Father is our Father.
- Everybody is together and don't have to worry about relocating or being evicted.
- The person in the pew needs to know that God is their Father, so that the text will be comforting.
- It makes me feel special that Jesus is preparing a special place for me.
- Each room matching our personality and unique identity.

This metaphor was generally viewed positively by survey respondents, though only two of them considered it a favorite, and a large number were indifferent towards it. However, the concept of *my Father's house* was comforting to all the group members because they could easily visualize it. They were very descriptive in their interpretation of the metaphor. To see themselves in a beautiful mansion, surrounded by friends and family, engaged in delightful activities and joined by the heavenly Father were all comforting concepts.

Genesis 25:8. Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age...and was ***gathered to his people.*** (ESV)

- Going to be with relatives, and being gathered together with them as in a reunion.
- Being with people that you love and miss.
- The image of people just waiting for you with open arms to greet you, and gather you to themselves.
- Being in the arms of loved ones.
- Abraham returning to his tribe, his people.

Of all the metaphors in the survey this one ranked the lowest, with some of the respondents considering it distressing and even strongly distressing. Again, since this passage vividly spoke of death, I believe it was troublesome to many, and this concept overshadowed the metaphor itself. When I discussed this metaphor with the group consternation seemed to describe their view of the metaphor. They simply didn't understand what it meant with the little context that was provided. However, once I explained its meaning in its original setting the group members began to view it quite positively. To view death as a reunion of believers beyond the grave was certainly a comforting thought to all group members.

1 Thessalonians 4:14. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have *fallen asleep*. (ESV)

- If we sleep then we will wake up in heaven.
- You die with your faith, and so you fall asleep in Christ.
- We only fall asleep for a time, because Christ will come and wake us.
- I think it would be comforting to children who don't like to think of the body rotting in the casket, because kids do focus on morbid thoughts of dead bodies. This gives them a more positive image to visualize.
- Sleep verses death.
- Falling asleep means it's not the end.

Though this is part of a commonly used epistle reading for a funeral service it still ranked fairly low on the surveys. I first postulated that the reason might have to do with

the concept of death as a *sleep*, with people associating death morbidly with going to sleep each night, or of thinking of the body sleeping in a casket. However in the group discussions the participants thought of the sleep metaphor quite positively. For the group members, the concepts of sleeping and waking were very comforting. It's no wonder that the concept of sleep is commonly used for death in the Scriptures.

Psalm 16:11. (Lord), you will fill me with joy in your presence, with *eternal pleasures* at your right hand.

- Almost as good as paradise.
- “Joy in his presence” was the key for me.
- Singing with the choir of heaven, with perfect pitch.
- Just being happy, always happy.
- The first and greatest pleasure is to be with Christ.
- Feasting and eating without calories.
- The pleasure of reunion.
- No one will be mad anymore, and no reason to cry.
- Like being in a garden.
- All the senses are being used.
- Pleasures at God's right hand, meaning who knows what other kinds of pleasures God has to offer us, things we have never thought of or experienced. God has the capacity to make us happy.
- Unlike even positive earthly experiences where something always seems to go wrong.

- Peace of mind.
- I can relate to joyfulness better than pleasures. Joys of birds and wilderness, beauty, etc.
- Like the happiest experience we've ever had on earth, only better.
- The pleasure of being surrounded by happy people.

Living in such a pleasure-oriented culture, I believed that this metaphor would be especially comforting because the participants were easily able to visualize ideas relating to pleasure. They know the types of experiences that are pleasing to them, and to imagine such experiences lasting for eternity only served to heighten their appeal. What did surprise me, however, was how realistic the group members perceived temporal pleasures. They realized the limitations of pleasure in this life, and how pleasure can turn to boredom in excess. Therefore, the concept of eternal pleasure retained a sense of mystery for them, though they still anticipate the time when they will experience eternal pleasures.

Romans 8:18. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the *glory* that will be revealed in us.

- There will be so much glory that it will completely wipe out all the suffering we have had, and we will have nothing to worry about.
- Glory is bright and shining, so beautiful. White like we can't imagine.
- "Glory will be revealed in us," and we don't usually think of ourselves as glorious.

- Clean and pure.
- Good verses the bad.
- All we see is the negative in ourselves, not the glory which is to come.

This metaphor did not rank especially well on the survey, and I believe this had to do with the vagueness of the concept of *glory*. The group participants were generally comforted by this metaphor. However, it was the thought of an end to all suffering that was most comforting to them, more than the metaphor of glory. After I explained further that in the resurrection this glory will be revealed in us, in our own bodies, it became even more comforting to them. To have perfectly healthy bodies as God intended from the beginning, with the absence of all suffering.

Romans 8:37. In all these things we are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us.

- Victory over the devil, and over all the things that tempt us.
- We are “more” than conquerors.
- Good imagery for one who has been a soldier.
- “Through him,” meaning that we are conquerors through Christ.
- “Who loved us,” this we need to continually hear that God loves us.
- Conquering sins, death, devil, depression, worry, habits, fears, illness, failures, guilt and regrets, etc.
- All of the bad things will be behind us.

This metaphor ranked very low on the surveys, with a majority of respondents claiming that they were indifferent to the metaphor itself. Again, this surprised me, because we live in such a competitive culture and at a time of war. I would have thought that the concept of being conquerors would be highly favorable. However, once I explained the metaphor in its broader context it immediately was perceived more favorably by the group participants. The context I provided in the survey was simply too limiting and led to confusion regarding its meaning.

Matthew 11:28. (Jesus said), “Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you *rest*.”

- No pressure or stress.
- The contrast between rest and weary or burdened, a great sense of relief.
- Peacefulness, comfort.
- An end to all the hustle and bustle of life.
- We can relax without thinking that there is something else we should be doing.
- I see Jesus’ invitation as an invitation to prayer. When you are weary you can always go to God in prayer and lay your burdens on him, and say what you want. He will help us, and so talking to God brings a sense of rest and I feel better.
- The rest for those who are burdened and weary at the funeral.
- Let Jesus take the burden.
- An invitation to everyday comfort, because we need this rest now, today.

This metaphor received very positive responses in both the survey and the group meetings, because the people could identify with the idea of weariness and burdens, as well as the need for rest. The context also helped significantly, for it is the incarnate Jesus whom they can more readily identify with, who is offering the invitation. Therefore, the more vivid the metaphors, the more comforting they were with my members. The challenge in preaching on all fifteen of these metaphors will be to make them all vivid and easy to identify with in the minds of the listeners.

Psalm 23:4. Even though I walk through *the valley of the shadow of death*, I will fear no evil, for you (the Lord) are with me.

- The Lord is with us.
- We need fear no evil.
- No need to fear death.
- God is with us in the valley and that takes the scary part out of it.
- Peace of mind to the mourners as they contemplate their own deaths. God is with them to lead them through all the dark valleys of life.
- The valley of being without the deceased, and now we have to make it through life without him or her.

It came as no surprise to me that Psalm 23 was one of the favorite funeral passages, but it did surprise me that the metaphor I chose from this text ranked so favorably. The metaphor is actually related more to death and dying, rather than eternal life, experiences that people greatly fear. Nevertheless, the people found it very comforting. Again, it is

the context of the Lord being with them in their dying moments, and watching over them as their shepherd, that brings them comfort. I also asked the group if a passage like Psalm 23 can be too familiar to be comforting, and they replied, “no.” They recognize that the Word of God can speak to them in different ways at different times to meet their needs even if it is a familiar passage.

Matthew 25:34. (Jesus said), “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take *your inheritance*, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”

- We are his children.
- God has set something aside for us that is wonderful.
- It’s been there for us throughout our lives, since the beginning of time.
- The inheritance was initiated at creation, and he has been preparing it for us all along, and when it is ready he will come and take us to be with him.
- An inheritance is a gift, not something we’ve earned.

This metaphor did rate fairly well, but not as an individual favorite. The concept of inheritance is easy for them to identify with and easy to understand. However, when it came to picking a favorite verse there were many other more familiar ones they found comforting.

John 5:24. (Jesus said), “Whoever...believes him who sent me has eternal life and...he *has crossed over* from death to life.”

- We have eternal life right now. The moment we believe we cross over to eternal life. We have already crossed over.
- We’ve made it.
- No longer destined for hell, but have crossed over to eternal life.
- People would generally think of crossing over from life to death, but the verse says from death to life.
- Crossing over from eternal death to eternal life, now.
- We’ve crossed over the river from death to the other side of life.
- The deceased have crossed over to a far better place.

Though this metaphor received fairly positive responses on the survey, only one person identified it as their personal favorite. Nevertheless, the group spoke quite favorably of it, especially its emphasis upon having eternal life here and now. Often eternal life is considered a future reality in terms of either heaven or the resurrection. However, it was very comforting for the participants to think of themselves as already living eternal life, here and now, through faith in Christ.

John 11:25. (Jesus said), “I am *the resurrection and the life*. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies...”

- We can confidently say there’s nothing to be afraid of, because Jesus has already died and rose again.

- We shouldn't worry about death because Jesus is life.
- Jesus is the resurrection and life. They both come through Jesus.
- Jesus went through death and resurrection shortly after saying this, demonstrating that he is the resurrection and the life.
- Eternal life in the body, not some mystical experience or out-of-body reality. A physical reality.

This metaphor received the highest rating of all, with no negative or neutral responses. Placed in the context of significant loss, Jesus comes to comfort Martha and Mary, and the words he spoke continue to comfort mourners to this day. Knowing that through Jesus the mourners will share in the resurrection, of which he is the first-fruits, is the primary hope of the Christian faith. To be with Christ and fellow believers, in newly resurrected bodies is one of the most powerful images in Scripture.³⁹²

Additional Thoughts on Funeral Sermons

In addition to the above responses for each of the fifteen metaphors, I have listed below some further observations and insights gained from the group meetings which are helpful to me as I minister to those who grieve in my congregation.

- 23% of the responses were neutral: Those who marked neutral perhaps didn't fully understand the metaphor or what the passages were communicating. Or

³⁹² For a list of favorite eternal life texts not presented in my research but suggested by my members see Appendix C.

perhaps people had a bad day when they filled out the survey and just didn't give it as much thought.

- If people can't visualize the image being presented or are not able to understand it, they will be confused or disinterested.
- The negative and neutral responses totaled about 25% of all the responses, addressing what I considered the primary validity threat: that people would simply respond favorably to all the metaphors because of their high opinion of Scripture. They still have a high opinion of Scripture, but thoughtful consideration of these passages led them to honest responses.
- If the pastor knows that the deceased was a believer and can share some thoughts about the deceased with the congregation it is of great comfort. This is especially true if words of faith were spoken to the pastor before the person died. Sharing this kind of personal experience is powerfully comforting. (There was no suggestion of eulogy present in these remarks).
- It's so much more comforting when the pastor doing the funeral sermon knew the deceased well and knows the mourners well. The message and ceremony become so much more comforting and personal. Strong relationships between pastor and people create a trusting and intimate environment for the sharing of sorrow together as well as the hope offered in Scripture.
- Too many pastors eulogize and never get around to preaching the Gospel. We are blessed to hear the Gospel in our church.
- Don't speak about the funeral as a celebration. That's not where the people are at. Even though they are comforted knowing that their loved one is in heaven they do

not feel like celebrating. Instead, they are feeling sorrow, anger, weariness, and see nothing to celebrate.

The Pastors' Focus Group Findings

I met with 18 circuit pastors on February 5, 2008, and shared with them the results of the research survey and research groups.³⁹³ It was my hope that they might benefit from my research in their own ministries to the bereaved. Below I have listed some of their responses and feedback. Many of these responses reflect my own conclusions.

- Stick with one metaphor and don't try to mix too many other images.
- Preaching in metaphors may be difficult to the hearing impaired, because it is more difficult to communicate in such abstract ways.
- Some were concerned about the metaphor on death as a "sleep," believing that it could be problematic for children to associate sleep with death.
- Perhaps instead of a Likert scale I could have used a continuum scale, from 1-10, without providing possible responses.
- The concern was raised about how unbelievers might respond to these same metaphors.
- The need to get to know the people well in advance of funeral situations so that pastors can better minister to their needs.

³⁹³ See Appendix M for discussion format.

- The need to teach these metaphors more regularly from the pulpit concerning metaphorical images, providing a greater reference of metaphors for the future.
- They expressed concern that members may have simply put down favorable responses because that is what they expected I was looking for, or they were reluctant to speak negatively of any Scripture.
- Having this sort of variety is greatly helpful.
- “Excellent!”

Many of the comments at the pastors’ group meeting were in agreement with other ideas I have expressed in this MAP. Overall, they seemed to find the topic and research information helpful, generating creative ways for them to preach their own funeral sermons. They evaluated my project critically, and certainly would adapt the information I gave them to their own circumstances. However, the group presentation was probably more helpful to the younger pastors, vicars and deacons who were present, while less helpful to the more experienced pastors.

Summary Statement about Research

Though my research hypothesis was confirmed and not all the metaphors were seen equally as comforting, the assumption that metaphors perceived negatively are *dead metaphors* would be a terrible misrepresentation. I found in my group discussions that once the people better understood the context and meaning of certain metaphors, they were then able to see them as comforting and as living metaphors as well.

All of this suggests that the preacher need not be timid about using the rich imagery in Scripture relating to eternal life, even images that seem archaic and perhaps hard to understand. However, the preacher must carefully present the context and meaning of the metaphors first, and as succinctly as possible, in order for them to be effective. Through this research I have learned that no Scriptural metaphor needs to be excluded because they are unfamiliar, but that the preacher can take full advantage of the great creativity found in Scripture concerning eternal life. Some images will always be favorites and more comforting than other metaphors and different contexts may suggest certain metaphors as being appropriate or inappropriate. However, no metaphor in Scripture needs to be ruled out completely or absolutely.

Therefore, any metaphors that I might have initially considered *dead metaphors*, because they no longer carry conceptual meaning, can be made into *living metaphors* with a careful presentation of the metaphor in its original context.³⁹⁴ The preacher can take the time to instruct the listeners about the conceptual meaning of the metaphor and then make the proper application. The more the group members seemed to learn about the metaphors the more alive they became for them. The dead metaphors seemed to come to life for the participants after learning what they originally meant. Therefore, though I'm not sure how much one can generalize from these findings and apply them to

³⁹⁴ While earlier I stated that the use of propositions in preaching could be problematic, there are times when propositions are necessary to bring dead metaphors back to life.

other contexts, I do feel comfortable saying that these fifteen Gospel metaphors could be effectively used within my own congregation.³⁹⁵

There is no doubt that the research instruments and findings are mostly subjective in nature, though I tried to prevent my own bias from interfering. However, considering my objectives for doing this research, this is precisely the type of information I was seeking.³⁹⁶ I have been delighted by the response of my members in wanting to assist me, and especially pleased to acquire their many insights listed above. It has given me more confidence in proclaiming the Gospel in funeral sermons, reassuring me that the comforting words of Scripture related to the funeral context can never be exhausted.

Moreover, the group members themselves seemed to delight in being in the groups and to grow in their understanding of God's promises relating to eternal life. I believe they felt that their insights were taken seriously and were important to my work as their pastor. Every member participated extensively throughout, keeping focused and engaged throughout the ninety minute sessions. They were even comfortable enough with me and each other to share very personal thoughts, ideas and personal experiences with grief and loss. The Gospel of Jesus Christ had a significant influence upon their lives, and they seemed privileged to be part of a project that would help to bring this same Gospel to other grieving members and non-members in the future.

³⁹⁵ Maxwell, 115.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 74.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Metaphors are something that we experience. Hearing a live metaphor and understanding it is a transaction that involves more than the intellect; and it can lead to a changed perspective on life. When that happens, our response to the preacher is, “Yes, now I see what you’re saying!” And with this response comes an emotional and spiritual experience that makes the truth of the metaphor a part of our inner person. We may find ourselves echoing the words of the Emmaus disciples: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”³⁹⁷ (Luke 24:32)

Contributions to Ministry

Implications for the Specific Contest

I have found through my research survey what the favorite metaphors are for many of my members. In addition, through the research groups I have discovered that if metaphors on eternal life are presented properly, addressing the context, the author’s original meaning, as well as its application, then it would seem that nearly any Scriptural metaphor could be used effectively in a funeral sermon. I have reached this conclusion after discussion on several metaphors that initially received a negative assessment on the research surveys. However, after I informed the group members of the metaphorical meaning they began to see them quite favorably and in a new light.

³⁹⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 47.

Therefore, I will seek to take full advantage of the many creative ways in which the Scriptures portray eternal life in metaphorical language. Such metaphorical creativity not only avoids redundancy in funeral messages, but also broadens the understanding of eternal life among my members by offering its many Scriptural facets. God evidently thought it wise to present eternal life in so many different images, and the great variety of metaphors found in Scripture makes the preachers' work more creative and his ministry more fruitful.

In addition, while I will seek to utilize the many creative images of Scripture, I was also reminded in the research groups that even using favorite and well known images, such as the Good Shepherd,³⁹⁸ can still be beneficial. As I was reminded by one of my group members, the Holy Spirit can use a passage well known to the listeners and still present it with new and profound meaning. Therefore, familiar images from Scripture may be especially comforting at a time of bereavement when mourners need to turn to something familiar and previously comforting to them.

The research I have completed will benefit the congregation I serve as I am better equipped to present the living Word of God to them in their time of significant loss.³⁹⁹ Moreover, it has already had a positive influence on those who participated in the research groups. They have grown through the experience of being in this focused study on God's Word.

³⁹⁸ John 10; Psalm 23.

³⁹⁹ However, the research involved only my members, people who already believe in Christ. It is unclear how unbelievers might respond to the same research.

Since I have learned through both the research survey and the research groups that people do have their favorite images concerning eternal life, I will seek whenever possible to use their favorites as the basis for their funeral sermons. A number of my members have already told me about the texts and hymns they would like used at their own funerals.

However, if such a favorite is not provided to me in advance and does not come to mind for the mourners, I will then seek to match Scripture metaphors with the metaphors the mourners use to describe their experience of grief and sorrow. For example, if they speak of their experience as a *burden* or state that they are *weary*, I would likely choose a text like Matthew 11:28, where Jesus invites them to come to him and receive *rest*. In this way, pastoral care, which began when I was notified of a member's death, would continue in the sermon, and then also throughout follow-up care. However, if neither of these approaches offers a needed image, I would likely pick a text and its metaphor based on liturgical considerations.

The theological research of the fifteen metaphors in Chapter Two, combined with the responses and insights acquired from my research groups, has already given me the foundation for fifteen new funeral sermons. These metaphors, and the research findings, were presented to the group members in devotional form as a final summation of our study together. Therefore, I will combine my study of God's Word with the group research findings in order to develop these new funeral sermons.

From my experience in both groups, I was struck by the theological acumen of my members. They understood these metaphors as God's means of grace. Therefore, while I must do my best in choosing a funeral text and metaphor, and preparing a funeral

sermon, the final results come from God. All of this research has its place, but it must be seen in the service of God's own work of comforting and healing, converting and saving souls.

Since all the research group members had attended a funeral in the previous year, many of them were still grieving. Others were preparing themselves for loss, having family members that were at different stages of dying. Therefore, for them, this research exercise was more than just research. They seemed to derive special comfort from our time together, our sharing, and the metaphors themselves. God was present doing the work of comforting and healing through the hope and promises we discussed from his Word.

Implications for the Broader Context

Although it is difficult to generalize how my research would benefit other pastors in their ministries, I do believe that they could benefit by learning to search the Scriptures for the many different metaphors on eternal life and to utilize them in their own funeral sermons. Moreover, since it is safe to say that the members of other churches will have their own favorite metaphors, pastors will do well to identify them and to use them in their sermons. Pastors may even wish to present their own research survey within their congregations to discover such favorites, and to follow them up with discussion groups. In addition, pastors may wish to be guided by the liturgical setting when picking an eternal life metaphor (see Appendix A and B). However, regardless of how the metaphor and text are selected, the preacher will want to make use of the full potential of

metaphorical language in communicating comfort and proclaiming eternal life to the listeners.

Even though it is true that certain metaphors are *dead* and other metaphors are *living*, I believe that I have learned from my research that even metaphors that are outdated or overused can be rejuvenated and contemporized to address the needs of grieving people today. This will require study and skill on the part of the preacher, but I no longer see any reason to avoid metaphors that have lost their evocative appeal. These metaphors spoke powerfully to believers in the past, and by the power of the Holy Spirit these metaphors can be resurrected in order to speak profoundly to mourners today concerning the resurrected Christ. Careful thought and consideration should still precede any selection of a metaphor and text for a funeral, but I no longer believe that certain metaphors should be eliminated from the start.

Many studies have been done regarding the use of metaphorical language, identifying how basic and essential metaphors are to human cognition and communication. The work that I have done in my research builds on these insights, and seeks to apply them particularly to the funeral setting. Scripture itself assumes the significance of metaphorical language, communicating all the transcendent spiritual realities through metaphors. Previous research that has been done in the past few decades regarding metaphorical language all seem to agree on how essential it is to human cognition and communication. I, therefore, stand in agreement with the broad acceptance and the need for the use of metaphorical language in our postmodern context.

Contributions to Personal and Professional Growth

Through the time I spent with the research groups, the bond between me and my members has been significantly strengthened. I was able to see that they were committed to helping me to be successful in my research, and they were able to see that I truly valued and desired to gather their insights for the benefit of my ministry. The groups had the feel of a Bible study, rather than a research activity, and the Lord used this opportunity to strengthen us all in our faith and fellowship.

The entire project has helped me to revitalize my own mission in ministry of bringing the promise of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have experienced a significant loss. Helping others at times of significant loss is what originally propelled me into the ministry decades ago, and doing this project at this time in my ministry has enabled me to reestablish my passion for ministry and evangelistic proclamation in my preaching. As I stated in Chapter One, proclaiming the resurrection to grieving souls is the most significant work I do as a pastor, and now that I have reached the end of my research project I can say even more confidently that I believe this is true.

Recommendations

As a result of my literary and field research, I offer the following applications and recommendations:

1. The preacher and people will benefit when funeral sermon texts are chosen from the rich deposits of metaphors found in Holy Scripture. These different images have been inspired by God and chosen to be part of his Word. Moreover, these

metaphors work together to present the many different facets of eternal life over time, enriching the members' appreciation for what God has prepared for them beyond the grave.

2. The preacher will want to consider and select those eternal life metaphors that are comforting to his members, ones that reflect the wishes of the deceased or the specific needs of the mourners. Such selections can only be derived through sustained pastoral care. However, if the preacher is still unable to find a corresponding metaphor to meet the mourners' needs, he may wish to consider the liturgical context when choosing a funeral text and metaphor, connecting the message to the festivals and seasons of the church year.⁴⁰⁰
3. The preacher will want to develop strong relationships with his members so that he is better able to empathize with the mourners and to understand their specific pastoral needs. Strong relationships also mean strong trust between the parishioners and the pastor, and this will aid the preacher as he seeks to confidently proclaim the hope that all believers have in Christ Jesus. The members of his flock will have developed the trust needed for him to bring them the consolation they need.
4. The preacher will want to do careful sermon preparation in order to more fully develop the potential of each metaphor. A careful understanding of the context

⁴⁰⁰ See Appendix A and B.

and the original meaning of the image will be most important. He will want the metaphor to impact today's listeners as it did the original audience. However, in taking the time to develop the metaphorical meaning the preacher must be aware of the limitations of time that can be devoted to such instruction in the funeral sermon. Due to the likelihood that the mourners will be physical and emotionally exhausted, the preacher will not want to use an image that is overly complicated.

5. The preacher will want to trust that the metaphor he uses will be effective because this is the way that people naturally think and seek to understand their world. Therefore, as the preacher seeks to proclaim the transcendent realities of eternal life, metaphorical language will be the necessary tool to communicate and to make the connection between God and the listeners. God himself has placed these metaphors in the Scriptures for our benefit.
6. The preacher will ultimately want to place his trust in the efficacious power of God's Word as the Holy Spirit uses a Scriptural metaphor as God's own means of grace to save lost and condemned sinners. God's Word, presented in metaphor, is the power to comfort and to convert, through the proclamation of Jesus Christ crucified and risen for all sinners. It is the only true hope for those who have faced a significant loss.
7. The preacher will want to make the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ central to the entire funeral sermon. This proclamation will also need to be

made with the understanding of human bondage to sin, death and despair. Then the proclamation of the Gospel will be presented as an unconditional promise from God to the bereaved and it will possess the power to deliver them from their bondage. Through the power of Christ's resurrection the grace of God will be conveyed to the hearers.

8. Though it was not within the scope of my research study to correlate eternal life metaphors in any gender-specific way, it might be beneficial to learn if gender plays any role in the appreciation of such metaphors. Moreover, one might wish to learn how specific age groups would respond to the many different metaphors of Scripture. Then, if such correlations can be established, such insights may allow a preacher to be even more personal in the funeral sermon and better able to reach the different types of listeners at a given funeral.

I have found the entire research project to be a great learning experience. I was delighted to discover the rich metaphors provided by God in the Holy Scriptures related to eternal life. I was challenged by the deep theological and theoretical reflection that this project demanded. I was pleased to see the eagerness of my members as they helped me with my project, and to realize just how relevant this topic was for them.

APPENDIX A
LITURGICAL SUGGESTIONS

The following are suggestions, merely suggestions, for the timing of a funeral sermon, though they could be used at any time during the Church Year.

Luke 23:43. Jesus answered him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in *paradise.*”

This text obviously works well in a Lenten setting.

Revelation 2:10. (Jesus said) “Be faithful until death, and I will give you *the crown of life.*”

Since Sundays in late Pentecost carry themes related to the end of times, and has been used in lectionaries for both the 21st and 26th Sundays of Trinity, this text would be appropriate at the end of the church year.¹

Revelation 21:4. (God) will *wipe every tear from their eyes.*

Since this text is used in the lectionary for Easter, series C, it would serve well during the late Easter season.²

¹ Paul W. Nesper, *Biblical Texts* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, no date), 442.

² *The Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), xix.

Isaiah 65:17. (The Lord said), “Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things (all the bad things) will not be remembered....

This passage has previously been used in various lectionaries on the 4th and 27th Sundays of Trinity.³ However, I believe its theme would be more appropriate later in the season of Trinity, rather than earlier.

John 14:2. Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms....

This text is used during the Easter season, series A.⁴

Genesis 25:8. Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.

This passage does not appear in any lectionaries that I am aware of, and so it would be appropriate at any time of the church year.

1 Thessalonians 4:14. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

This passage is a portion of the epistle lesson used during the last few weeks of the church year, series A.⁵ This would be an appropriate time for this text.

³ Nesper, 415.

⁴ *The Lutheran Service Book*, xv.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Psalm 16:11. (Lord), you will fill me with joy in your presence, with *eternal pleasures* at your right hand.

This Psalm is used for Easter, or the first week after Easter.⁶ Therefore, it could be used any time during the Easter Season.

Romans 8:18. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the *glory* that will be revealed in us.

This passage is used midway through the season of Pentecost, and thus would fit well throughout most of the season.⁷

Romans 8:37. In all these things we are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us.

This text is highly versatile for it appears in various lectionaries during the Christmas season, Lent, as well as Pentecost.⁸

Matthew 11:28. (Jesus said), “Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you *rest*.”

In previous lectionaries this passage has been used in Advent, Epiphany, and Trinity,⁹ and so it would be appropriate throughout the year.

⁶ John A. Braun, ed. *Sermon Studies on Selected Psalms* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002), 38.

⁷ *The Lutheran Service Book*, xv.

⁸ Nesper, 433.

Psalm 23:4. Even though I walk through *the valley of the shadow of death*, I will fear no evil, for you (the Lord) are with me.

This text works especially well during the Easter Season, but is also appropriate throughout the year.

Matthew 25:34. (Jesus said), “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”

Since this verse is part of the Proper for the last Sunday of the Church Year, Series A,¹⁰ it would work well in late Pentecost.

John 5:24. (Jesus said), “Whoever...believes him who sent me has eternal life and...he *has crossed over from death to life.*”

Historically, this text has been used throughout the season of Pentecost.¹¹

John 11:25. (Jesus said), “I am *the resurrection and the life*. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies...”

This passage would work well at any time of the year but it would work especially well after Easter.

⁹ Nesper, 419.

¹⁰ *The Lutheran Service Book*, xv.

¹¹ Nesper, 426.

APPENDIX B
LITURGICAL SUGGESTIONS
ARRANGED ACCORDING TO SEASON

Advent

Genesis 25:8. Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.

Epiphany

Matthew 11:28. (Jesus said), “Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you *rest*.”

Lent

Luke 23:43. Jesus answered him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in *paradise*.”

Romans 8:37. In all these things we are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us.

Easter

Revelation 21:4. (God) will *wipe every tear from their eyes*.

John 14:2. Jesus said, “In *my Father’s house* are many rooms....

Psalms 16:11. (Lord), you will fill me with joy in your presence, with *eternal pleasures* at your right hand.

John 11:25. (Jesus said), “I am *the resurrection and the life*. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies...”

Pentecost (early)

Romans 8:18. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the *glory* that will be revealed in us.

Psalms 23:4. Even though I walk through *the valley of the shadow of death*, I will fear no evil, for you (the Lord) are with me.

John 5:24. (Jesus said), “Whoever...believes him who sent me has eternal life and...he *has crossed over* from death to life.”

Pentecost (late)

Revelation 2:10. (Jesus said) “Be faithful until death, and I will give you *the crown of life*.”

1 Thessalonians 4:14. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have *fallen asleep*.

Isaiah 65:17. (The Lord said), “Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things (all the bad things) *will not be remembered*....”

Matthew 25:34. (Jesus said), “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”

APPENDIX C
ADDITIONAL FUNERAL PASSAGES
SUGGESTED BY CONGREGATION

These are additional passages that my members found comforting at a time of loss. The translation used is the New International Version.

Psalm 23:1: The LORD is my shepherd I shall not be in want.

Romans 8:28: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

John 3:16-17: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

2 Timothy 4:7-8: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Philippians 1:21: For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Jeremiah 29:11: For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

John 10:27-28: My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

Psalms 68:20: Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death.

Luke 2:29-32: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

APPENDIX D

CONGREGATIONAL LETTER

ACCOMPANYING RESEARCH SURVEY

November 1, 2007

Dear member(s) of Pilgrim,

Greetings in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ!

As I continue my work on the Doctor of Ministry degree, I have reached the point where I need to complete what is called the Major Applied Project. This is a large research project that will assist me in my pastoral care here at Pilgrim.

However, in order to complete the Major Applied Project I need your assistance.

Enclosed you will find a survey. I would greatly appreciate it if you would complete it.

(I have included a survey for each adult member of your household). **Your prompt response is essential for the effectiveness of my Project!**

The survey lists 15 different Bible passages that are appropriate for funeral sermons. Each passage communicates a different “image” or “word picture” (*identified in bold on the survey*) of the hope that we have in Christ Jesus. What I would like to determine is which of these images would be most comforting to you at a time of loss. Please rate them on the scale provided, from 1-5, following the instructions on the survey.

When you have completed the survey simply place it in the self-addressed envelope and return it to the church. The deadline for the research survey is **November 15th**. All the information will be kept confidential.

In January of 2008, I will host two different focus groups, consisting of 7 members each. The purpose of these meetings will be to discuss your responses and to gain further guidance from you regarding the Bible passages in the survey. If you would be willing to participate in one of these groups for a 90 minute session, simply sign your name at the end of the survey and indicate whether you have attended a funeral (*any funeral*) in the past 12 months.

The results of the surveys and focus groups will appear in the March Newsletter.

Thank you for your assistance, and may the Lord richly bless you!

In His service and yours!

Rev. Daniel Wonderly

APPENDIX E

RESEARCH SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to identify which Biblical passages relating to death and eternal life are most comforting to you in times of grief and loss.

First, consider each image below (in bold print), and measure how comforting or distressing it is for you.

Second, read through the list a second time, and circle the three images you feel are your favorites.

Third, read through the list a third time, and put a star by the one you feel is your favorite of all.

If your favorite image and passage is not listed, please include it.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Distressing	Distressing	Neutral Indifferent	Comforting	Strongly Comforting
1. Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. ”	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
2. Revelation 2:10 (Jesus said), “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. ”	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
3. Revelation 21:4 (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
4. Isaiah 65:17 (The Lord said), “Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things (all the bad things) will not be remembered... ”	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
5. John 14:2 Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms...”	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
6. Genesis 25:8 Abraham breathed his last and died... and was gathered to his people.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

- | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <p>7. 1 Thessalonians 4:14
 For since we believe that Jesus died
 and rose again,
 even so, through Jesus,
 God will bring with him
 those who have fallen asleep.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>8. Psalm 16:11
 (Lord), you will fill me with
 joy in your presence,
 with eternal pleasures
 at your right hand.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>9. Romans 8:18
 I consider that our present sufferings
 are not worth comparing with the glory
 that will be revealed in us.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>10. Romans 8:37
 In all these things we are
 more than conquerors
 through him who loved us.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>11. Matthew 11:28
 (Jesus said), “Come to me,
 all who are weary and burdened,
 and I will give you rest.”</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>12. Psalm 23:4
 Even though I walk through
 the valley of the shadow of death,
 I will fear no evil,
 for you (the Lord) are with me.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>13. Matthew 24:34
 (Jesus said), “Come, you who are
 blessed by my Father;
 take your inheritance,
 the kingdom prepared for you
 since the creation of the world.”</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>14. John 5:24
 (Jesus said), “Whoever...believes
 him who sent me
 has eternal life and...he has crossed over
 from death to life.”</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>15. John 11:25
 (Jesus said), “I am the resurrection
 and the life.
 He who believes in me will live,
 even though he dies...”</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

APPENDIX F

GROUP RESEARCH INTERVIEW

Opening Statement of Purpose and Prayer

What is your favorite verse and why? What is its specific appeal for you?

PART I

1. Briefly explain *how* you understand each metaphor or image.
2. *What* are the specific aspects of comfort and hope (if any) that you receive from each metaphor.
3. *How* does this comfort and hope relate to your understanding of eternal life?

PART II

1. Review survey data.
2. *What* surprises you about the results? *Why?*
3. *What* doesn't surprise you? *Why?*
4. Results I found surprising. *How* would you explain my observations?

PART III

1. If you have attended a funeral in the past year, *how* was the deceased related to you?
2. *What* comfort or hope (if any) did you receive from the funeral sermon?
3. Was something said in the funeral sermon that was unhelpful or upsetting to you? If so, *what?*

Are there any additional suggestions that you could make that would help me improve my funeral sermons?

APPENDIX G
RANKING OF PASSAGES CHOSEN
AS MEMBERS' FAVORITES

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Number who chose as favorite</i>
Psalm 23:4	17
Luke 23:43	15
John 11:25	15
Matthew 11:28	7
Revelation 21:4	4
Isaiah 65:17	4
1 Thessalonians 4:14	4
Revelation 2:10	2
John 14:2	2
Psalm 16:11	1
Romans 8:18	1
Matthew 24:34	1
John 5:24	1
Genesis 25:8	0
Romans 8:37	0

APPENDIX H

REMINDER LETTER FOR GROUP VOLUNTEERS

January 17, 2008

Dear _____,

Greetings in the name of Christ, our Lord and Savior!

I am writing to you to confirm the upcoming focus group meeting that will take place on **Thursday evening, January 24th, at 7:00 p.m.**

I look forward to receiving insights from you and the rest of the group regarding the many Bible verses you evaluated last November in my research survey.

God's blessings!

In Christ,

Rev. Daniel Wonderly

APPENDIX I

REMINDER LETTER FOR GROUP VOLUNTEERS

January 17, 2008

Dear _____,

Greetings in the name of Christ, our Lord and Savior!

I am writing to you to confirm the upcoming focus group meeting that will take place on **Saturday morning, January 26th, at 11:00 a.m.**

I look forward to receiving insights from you and the rest of the group regarding the many Bible verses you evaluated last November in my research survey.

God's blessings!

In Christ,

Rev. Daniel Wonderly

APPENDIX J

THANK YOU LETTER TO GROUP VOLUNTEERS

January 29, 2008

Dear _____,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord!

As I seek to express my appreciation to you for your participation in my focus group, the words of St. Paul come to mind:

“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:3-6)

Your partnership with me in the Gospel has helped me to improve my preaching ability, and in particular my funeral sermons.

It is my hope that many of our members, as well as non-members, will benefit from our research together.

God’s richest blessings!

In Christ,

Rev, Dan Wonderly

APPENDIX K
LETTER TO GROUP VOLUNTEERS REGARDING THE
PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

February 26, 2008

Dear _____,

Greetings in the name of our Suffering Savior, Jesus Christ!

For the final stage of my research project, I will be presenting my findings to you in devotional form following the worship service and coffee hour, on Sunday, March 2.

You are invited to attend this short session.

Your faithfulness in working with me on my research project has been significant, giving me many insights that will better enable me to minister to this congregation in the future.

God's blessings to you and your family as you await the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord at Easter!

In Christ,

Rev. Dan Wonderly

APPENDIX L

PASTORS' CONFERENCE ADVERTIZING

Flint Tri-Circuit Meeting

Tuesday, February 6

TIME: 9am Worship. 9:45-noon programming.

LOCATION: Pilgrim Burton (Dan Wonderly)

PRESENTATIONS:

'The Truth Project' Apologetics Series
Heb Kriesel & 'Gabriel Messengers'
Dan Wonderly on Funeral Sermons

BIBLE STUDY: David Hensler – starting at Acts 2:14

APPENDIX M

PASTORS FOCUS GROUP

1. Opening statement regarding the purpose of my research, and what input I desire from them.
2. Presentation of the *survey* results.
3. Go through the list of metaphors and share with them comments from my members made during the *focus groups*.
4. What impact, if any, might the results of this research have upon your choice of funeral texts and the proclamation of the Gospel in your funeral sermons?

APPENDIX N
DEVOTIONS FOR GROUP VOLUNTEERS
BASED ON THEIR INSIGHTS

The group research responses below are presented as a narrative of thoughts and insights shared with me in the two focus groups. I have simply tried to put their responses together into a complete unit of thought, doing some organizing and using some paraphrasing. The hope is that these devotions would be a reminder of our work together, but also serve as devotional reading for the research group members.

Special thanks to those who volunteered their time and shared their insights:

Trent Dockter	Joey Slosar	Dan Slosar
Linda Slosar	Sharyn Schalk	Vicki Wilson
Chad Swett	Sonnie Robinson	Cindy Shields
Jodi Hines	Dan Tyler	Brenda Beasant
Sean Kirley	Bonnie Dean	Fran Benaway
Fred Benaway	Sandy Wonderly	

Luke 23:43. Jesus answered him,

“Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in *paradise*.”

Jesus says that *today* we will be in paradise, that is, on the very day that we die we enter with him into heaven. And if the day we die we enter into paradise, then there is really nothing for us to worry about. There is no need to fear death or dying, no need to fear the unknown.

But just what will it be like? Perhaps it will be like the Garden of Eden before the fall, with all the animals and people getting along, a place where no sin is to be found, just perfection. Or maybe it will be like Hawaii, a place of beauty, with beautiful sunsets, and the peaceful sound of the waves on the beach.

And even though everyone may have a different idea of what paradise is going to be like, it will certainly far exceed any human conception. This is good news for us, because no matter how wonderful we imagine paradise, it will only be better. And this is good news to the unbeliever as well, for that’s what the dying thief was before he was nailed to the cross next to Jesus. It holds a great attraction for everyone.

Certainly these are the words we want to hear on our own deathbed, and then, in the next instant, paradise with Jesus!

Jesus, remember me in your kingdom. Amen.

**Revelation 2:10. (Jesus said) “Be faithful until death,
and I will give you *the crown of life.*”**

Jesus says that we’ll wear a crown of life beyond the grave, living as royalty, kings and queens in the heavenly kingdom. We will be vested with power and authority, as we sit on thrones and reign with Christ over his kingdom for all eternity.

We are certain to wear this crown of life, because Christ has worn the crown of thorns for us. In this way, he has taken our sins upon himself, suffering and dying for our unfaithfulness. But after wearing the humiliating crown of thorns and the death that followed, Jesus was raised from the dead and then from the earth to wear the glorious crown of life.

Now, by his goodness, Jesus offers us the crown as a gift, earned by him, but intended for us. In addition, he promises to keep us faithful until death, by his Spirit, so that we can be certain that we will wear the crown of life just as he intends.

Jesus, enable me to be faithful until death and receive the crown of life.

Amen.

Revelation 21:4. (God) will *wipe every tear from their eyes.*

Think of a little child who has fallen and hurt himself. Tears streak down his tiny cheeks. Quickly he gets on his feet and runs to his mother for comfort. She picks him up in her arms, and with her gentle touch, she wipes away the tears from the child's eyes.

This is the image of what God does for those who grieve and sorrow. When we enter the kingdom of heaven, every tear will be forever wiped from our faces. We won't be sad anymore, all the bad memories will be gone, and the suffering that caused the tears will also be forever gone. Peace will then take the place of tears.

Imagine the gentle touch of your Father's hand as he dries the tears in your eyes this day. For while we remain here, there is much that can cause us to sorrow, including the loss of a loved one. But God promises that one day all the tears will be gone, and just having this hope dries some of the tears even now.

**Dear Father, may your gentle touch dry our tears of sorrow
and make us joyful again. Amen.**

Isaiah 65:17. (The Lord said),

“Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth.

The former things (all the bad things) *will not be remembered....*

Memory can be a blessing or a curse. To remember the happy times, moments spent with loved ones, are a cherished possession. But memory of the bad times, these are memories that we would like to forget.

God promises that one day we will no longer remember all the bad things of this life. No longer will we remember our sins or the sins of others, and the great pain they have caused. No longer will we remember our failures and regrets. No longer will the troubling “replays” in our minds keep us awake and anxious throughout the night. Even all the terrible scenes of global catastrophes that are etched deep in our memory banks will be completely erased. Then instead of such haunting memories there will be only peace and cherished memories.

Even now, through Jesus Christ, God does not remember our sins. They are forgiven and forgotten, and by God’s grace, they will be forgotten by us too some day. This will be a time when heaven comes down to earth and makes everything new. A new heaven and new earth, and a new beginning that will last forever.

Lord, help us to forgive and to forget, and to share in your everlasting peace. Amen.

John 14:2. Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many rooms..."

Jesus is talking about his Father's house, a mansion above. But Jesus' Father is our Father also. And so, his Father's house is our Father's house too. Through faith in Christ, his Father has become our Father. We are special and God wants us to be part of his eternal family and live in his wonderful heavenly home.

Christ has gone to heaven to prepare a place for us, a place in his Father's house. This is a place like a large mansion, with many rooms, so many rooms that there are rooms for everyone. Even rooms waiting for those who do not yet believe in Christ.

We image each room custom made to reflect our unique personalities and identities. This will be a place where we all fit in, a place where we will gather together in a large hall and socialize and celebrate. We will be one large Christian family, together, forever, and happy.

Never will we have to worry about being evicted, or forced to relocate. Instead, we will finally be at home in our Father's house.

**Jesus, thank you for making your Father our Father,
and for preparing a wonderful home for us in heaven. Amen.**

**Genesis 25:8. Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age...
and was *gathered to his people*.**

Family reunions are always a special time, when we are gathered together with people we love but seldom see. However, family reunions always end with separation, as people await the next reunion.

Heaven itself will be a special place of reunion, a place where we gather together as a Christian family and are reunited with loved ones. We will be with those we love and miss, and perhaps have not seen for many years. And yet, neither they nor we will never have to go away again. This reunion is forever, a celebration of celebrations.

Just imagine your loved ones in heaven, standing with open arms, just waiting to gather you to themselves in a loving embrace. Being in the arms of special loved ones, and in his arms of Jesus forever.

**Lord, help us to anticipate this great reunion when we will all gather together
beyond the grave. Amen.**

**1 Thessalonians 4:14. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again,
even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him
those who have *fallen asleep*.**

Imagine it's the end of a long hard day. You've worked hard and toiled, and become weary and exhausted. It's a time when you look forward to the end of the day and a good night's rest.

The Bible often speaks of the death of the body as a sleep, a peaceful rest in the grave. By speaking in this way, the Bible seeks to calm our fears. We are generally not afraid at night to lie down and go to sleep, in fact, as adults we probably look forward to it. And so with death, God desires that we not be afraid of death, but that even we find comfort in it.

And just as a person lies down to sleep, she does so with the intention of waking in the morning. And so, after our bodies have rested in their graves for a time, Christ will come and wake us. He will lift us off our beds and carry us to be with him in heaven. Just as Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will raise us to everlasting life.

Jesus, take away all fear of death and bring your rest to our hearts and minds.

Amen.

**Psalm 16:11. (Lord), you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with *eternal pleasures* at your right hand.**

Just imagine, being happy and joyful all the time. It's simply hard to imagine, but one day it will be our reality. When we arrive in heaven we will find that the greatest of all joys is being in the presence of our Lord and seeing him in all his glory, face to face. In heaven we will sing with angel choirs, feast on the finest foods, and see God's beauty all around us in nature.

And unlike earthly pleasures that do not fulfill or satisfy for very long, the pleasures of heaven are pleasures that eternally satisfy every human desire. Everyone will live together in harmony, being blissfully happy, and without ever getting mad anymore.

God will be the one who will fill us up and satisfy us. Every joy will be at his right hand, and they will be ours to enjoy. All our senses will be fully alive and we will experience things like never before.

**Lord, help us to see the joys of this life
as a foretaste of the greater pleasures to come. Amen.**

**Romans 8:18. I consider that our present sufferings
are not worth comparing
with the *glory* that will be revealed in us.**

The suffering and sorrow of this life can be overwhelming at times. But in the midst of our difficulty there is hope, hope that the glory of God will be revealed in us. In fact, when we arrive in heaven there will be so much glory that it will completely wipe out all memory of the suffering we have experienced. As St. Paul says, our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory to be revealed in us.

In addition, this glory to come will be revealed, not just around us, but actually in us, in our bodies. The same bodies that suffer will become glorious. We don't usually think of ourselves as glorious. Rather we are inclined to think of ourselves negatively and disparagingly. But the glory of heaven will be in us, in our resurrected bodies, through faith in Christ. We will be bright and shining, and we will be clean and pure.

And so, in the end, the glory of heaven will far outweigh, far surpass, our present sufferings in this life.

**Jesus, help me to meditate on the glory to come and to find strength,
because our temporary sufferings aren't worth comparing to it. Amen.**

**Romans 8:37. In all these things
we are *more than conquerors*
through him who loved us.**

Sometimes it seems that all around us, and even in our own lives, we see only failure and defeat. And yet, Jesus promises us that through him we will ultimately be victorious; victorious over sin, death and the devil. In addition, some day we will conquer our depression and illness, our worry and fear, our failures and temptations, our guilt and regrets, even our bad habits.

In addition, we will be more than conquerors because of Jesus' love for us. This is what we continually need to hear, that God loves us. And that his love for us led him to the cross, where he conquered all things, so that through him we too might one day conquer all things. Then, one day in heaven, all the bad things will be forever behind us.

But as good as all this sounds, there will still be more, more than we can ever think or imagine.

**Jesus, thank you for being our conqueror and that through your victories
we will ultimately share in these victories ourselves. Amen.**

**Matthew 11:28. (Jesus said), “Come to me,
all who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you *rest*.”**

Each day is often characterized by the hustle and bustle of life. We are run ragged by the stresses and pressures of life, which make us weary in our bodies and souls. We are overwhelmed by the responsibility and demands placed upon us, so that we carry burdens too hard to bear.

But in this beautiful invitation, Jesus calls us to come to him, to give him our burdens and to find rest in him. Such an invitation is welcomed by all of us, and offers us the relief that we desire and need. In Christ, and his great love for us, we can learn to relax, without thinking that there must always be something else that we should be doing.

To seek Jesus out in prayer is the wonderful opportunity to lay all our burdens upon him, whether it be suffering or sorrow, in order that we might find peace and comfort in him.

Jesus, help me to heed your invitation each day, so that whatever is making me weary and burdened, may be lifted, and I might find my rest in you. Amen.

**Psalm 23:4. Even though I walk
through *the valley of the shadow of death*,
I will fear no evil,
for you (the Lord) are with me.**

Someone once said that there's nothing to fear but fear itself. Such confidence echoes throughout this beloved Psalm. The Lord Jesus is with us, and so we really don't need to fear evil. We need not even fear death or dying.

For though we will all one day pass through the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus will be with us. He is our Good Shepherd, who lovingly watches over us. And having Jesus with us in whatever dark valley we find ourselves takes the scary part out of it. In fact, we can walk through anything with Jesus at our side.

So whether our valley today involves being without a certain loved one, or whether it involves contemplation of our own death, Jesus remains with us. And he is always with us to comfort and sustain us. Now we can truly be at peace and know that everything will be alright.

Lord Jesus, walk with us this day, wherever you may lead us. And should it mean walking through some dark valley, let us be comforted by your presence. Amen.

**Matthew 25:34. (Jesus said), “Come, you who are blessed by my Father;
take *your inheritance*, the kingdom
prepared for you since the creation of the world.”**

How wonderful it is to be the children of God. To know that God loves us in Jesus Christ, that he has prepared an inheritance for us, and to know that these preparations have been going on since the creation of the world. That’s a long time and a lot of work. And when everything is ready Jesus will come and take us to be with him in heaven.

Just imagine how wonderful this inheritance must be! There is no need it can’t satisfy. And just contemplate how special we must be to receive such a gift, an inheritance equal to the kingdom of God.

And what a blessing it is to know that our inheritance is something that God freely gives to us in Christ. It’s not something we must earn or deserve. It is something that he alone gives to us, so there should never be any doubt our inheritance is just waiting for us.

Jesus, as we face the difficulties and deprivations of life it is good to know that we will lack nothing beyond the grave for an eternal inheritance awaits us. Amen.

**John 5:24. (Jesus said), “Whoever...believes him who sent me
has eternal life and...
he *has crossed over* from death to life.”**

The beautiful part of this passage is that by believing in Christ as our Savior, we have already crossed over from death to life, that is, from eternal death to eternal life. We are living in eternity right now, and will be forever!

It's a wonderful feeling to know that we have already crossed over, and we've made it. The worst that could ever happen to us is already behind us. It's just as if we had crossed over a raging river to the other side and now all the danger has passed, it's water under the bridge.

Generally people would think the opposite of what Jesus says that in the end we pass over from life to death. But for the believer Jesus says that we have already passed over from death to life. And then someday we'll cross over from death in the grave to life beyond the grave, where all who believe in Christ will gather.

Jesus, what a comfort it is to know that we have passed over from death to life. May this reality change our perspective and bring us daily peace. Amen.

John 11:25. (Jesus said), “I am *the resurrection and the life.*

He who believes in me will live,

even though he dies...”

Since Jesus is the resurrection and the life we shouldn't fear death at all. If he went into the grave, only to come out of it again, so shall we, because he is our resurrection and our life. He has already demonstrated that resurrection works, and it leads to eternity in heaven. Both resurrection and life come through Jesus and both belong to us by faith in Jesus.

Someday, we will live in new bodies beyond the grave. We will not continue in some out-of-body reality, but will have physical bodies and be the same people we are now, only better. And we will be with other Christian loved ones, to enjoy these relationships together forever.

So what is there to fear? Our loved ones who have died in the faith will share in the resurrection at the last day, and so shall we, by faith in Jesus. Yes, now there may be sorrow when a loved one dies, but we know that's not the end of the relationship, only an intermission.

Jesus, help us to live in the awareness that we will never truly die, and that our bodies too will rise to life again, to be with you and with one another. Amen.

APPENDIX O
METAPHORS CONSIDERED BY NOT INCLUDED
IN RESEARCH SURVEY

(All these passages appear in the New International Version)

Isaiah 65:25: The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all *my holy mountain*," says the LORD.

Revelation 21:2: I saw the Holy City, *the new Jerusalem*, coming down out of heaven from God...

2 Corinthians 5:1: Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, *an eternal house in heaven*, not built by human hands.

1 Corinthians 15:54: When the perishable has been *clothed with the imperishable*, and the mortal with immortality...

1 Corinthians 15:54: "Death has been *swallowed up in victory*."

Matthew 5:12: Rejoice and be glad, because *great is your reward* in heaven...

1 Peter 1:3-4: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into *an inheritance* that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you...

Luke 14:15: "Blessed is the man who will *eat at the feast* in the kingdom of God."

1 Corinthians 15:42: So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is *sown* is perishable, it is raised imperishable...

1 Corinthians 15:44: ...it is sown a natural body, it is raised a *spiritual body*. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Revelation 22:5: And they will *reign* for ever and ever.

Revelation 22:1: Then the angel showed me the river of *the water of life*, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Revelation 2:7: To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from *the tree of life*, which is in the paradise of God.

Revelation 3:5: He who overcomes will, like them, be *dressed in white*.

Revelation 3:5: He who overcomes...I will never blot out his name from *the book of life*...

Matthew 5:6: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will *be filled*.

Matthew 5:8: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will *see God*.

John 16:22: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and *no one will take away your joy*.

Romans 8:23: Not only so, but we ourselves...groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, *the redemption of our bodies*.

Mark 10:14: Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for *the kingdom of God* belongs to such as these."

John 10:27-28: My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; *no one can snatch them out of my hand*.

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the *way* and the *truth* and the *life*. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Philippians 1:21: For to me, to live is Christ and to die is *gain*.

Psalms 23:6 - 24:1 I will *dwell in the house of the LORD* forever.

Luke 2:29: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now *dismiss your servant in peace*. For my eyes have seen your salvation..."

Hebrews 11:14: People who say such things show that they are looking *for a country of their own*.

Revelation 21:6: To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from *the spring of the water of life*.

Romans 14:8: If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, *we belong to the Lord*.

John 14:3: And if I go and *prepare a place for you*, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Psalms 31:5: *Into your hands* I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD.

Psalms 116:15: Precious *in the sight of the LORD* is the death of his saints.

Matthew 13:43: Then the righteous will *shine like the sun* in the kingdom of their Father.

Matthew 24:13: ...he who stands firm to the end will be *saved*.

Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but *the gift of God* is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Philippians 3:20-21 But our *citizenship* is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

1 John 3:2: But we know that when he appears, *we shall be like him*, for we shall see him as he is.

Psalms 126:5: Those who sow in tears will *reap with songs of joy*.

APPENDIX P
RESEARCH SURVEY RESULTS
PUBLISHED IN NEWSLETTER

Dear fellow members of Pilgrim,

Last November I sent out a research survey for you to fill out. I was very pleased with the response. At the time I mentioned that the results of the survey would be published in the March 2008 Newsletter. The results appear below.

First, in the *Frequency Table* (Table 5.1) you will see how our members responded to the survey based on how comforting the Bible passages were perceived by them. 75% of the respondents found the passages to be either comforting or very comforting to them.

In the second table (Table 5.2) you will see a distribution of passages that were identified as favorites by our respondents. 68% of our respondents chose three passages in particular.

I would like to thank you for your participation in my research. It has been very helpful to me in carrying out my ministry here at Pilgrim.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan

Table 5.1

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Distressing	Distressing	Neutral Indifferent	Comforting	Strongly Comforting
1. Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. ”	0	0	6	33	49
2. Revelation 2:10 (Jesus said), “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. ”	0	5	23	33	25
3. Revelation 21:4 (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes.	0	0	9	50	31
4. Isaiah 65:17 (The Lord said), “Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things (all the bad things) will not be remembered... ”	0	4	21	30	31
5. John 14:2 Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms...”	0	0	26	37	24
6. Genesis 25:8 Abraham breathed his last and died... and was gathered to his people.	4	4	49	19	9
7. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.	0	2	20	39	26
8. Psalms 16:11 (Lord), you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.	0	0	19	43	23
9. Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.	0	3	28	33	21

10. Romans 8:37 In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.	1	0	45	30	13
11. Matthew 11:28 (Jesus said), "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest ."	0	1	14	34	39
12. Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you (the Lord) are with me.	0	1	5	21	60
13. Matthew 24:34 (Jesus said), "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."	0	0	20	43	23
14. John 5:24 (Jesus said), "Whoever...believes him who sent me has eternal life and...he has crossed over from death to life."	0	1	15	38	34
15. John 11:25 (Jesus said), "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies..."	0	0	0	26	63
Totals	(less than 1%)	2%	23%	39%	36%

Table 5.2

Number who
chose as favorite

1. Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. ”	17
2. Revelation 2:10 (Jesus said), “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. ”	2
3. Revelation 21:4 (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes.	4
4. Isaiah 65:17 (The Lord said), “Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things (all the bad things) will not be remembered... ”	4
5. John 14:2 Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms...”	2
6. Genesis 25:8 Abraham breathed his last and died... and was gathered to his people.	0
7. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.	4
8. Psalms 16:11 (Lord), you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.	1
9. Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.	1

10. **Romans 8:37** 0
In all these things we are
more than conquerors
through him who loved us.
11. **Matthew 11:28** 7
(Jesus said), "Come to me,
all who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you **rest**."
12. **Psalm 23:4** 17
Even though I walk through
the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you (the Lord) are with me.
13. **Matthew 24:34** 1
(Jesus said), "Come, you who are
blessed by my Father;
take **your inheritance,**
the kingdom prepared for you
since the creation of the world."
14. **John 5:24** 1
(Jesus said), "Whoever...believes
him who sent me
has eternal life and...he **has crossed over**
from death to life."
15. **John 11:25** 15
(Jesus said), "I am **the resurrection**
and the life.
He who believes in me will live,
even though he dies..."
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