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### Improving the Communication of the Gospel Through Preaching: A Systematic Congregational Process

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IMPROVING THE COMMUNICATION OF THE GOSPEL  
THROUGH PREACHING: A SYSTEMATIC CONGREGATIONAL PROCESS

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MAY 1, 1994

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THROUGH PREACHING: A SYSTEMATIC CONGREGATIONAL PROCESS

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SUBMITTED TO THE DIRECTOR OF  
THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM  
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FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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## CHAPTER 1

### PREACHING THE GOSPEL: A UNIQUE RHETORICAL ACTIVITY

#### The Unique Message of Preaching

"We have this treasure . . . ." (All Scripture quotes are from the NIV.) That treasure is what makes Christian preaching unique. When Paul wrote these words to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 4:7a), he was talking about the message of ". . . the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you . . ." (2 Corinthians 1:19). He was talking about "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Luther also talks about the glory of God being "hidden in Christ." He says that it is not the "front part" of God's glory we see, but His "hind part" revealed in the sufferings of Christ.<sup>1</sup> The message of Christian preaching is centered around and flows from the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul's treasure, then, was the peculiar message that God has revealed Himself and His love for the human race, not in a flash of divine overwhelming glory, but in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, who suffered and died upon a cross.

This message, then, has great significance for sinful

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, translated by Robert Schulz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 25.

human beings. The message declares that people by nature are incapable of action when it comes to the things of God. This message proclaims God's action whereby He accepts the sufferings of Christ as payment for our sins, imputes Christ's righteousness to us and declares that we are righteous. Indeed, in this message God Himself is heard. Luther writes, "Here God speaks. God Himself has said it and I repeat it. Whoever cannot boast like that about his sermon should leave preaching alone, for he surely denies and blasphemes God."<sup>2</sup>

"We have this treasure . . . ." The message of Christian preaching is a unique treasure. It is a message that differs from all other rhetoric because it is based in God's Word. Christian preaching is about glory seen in a cross and about God's gracious action toward rebellious people unable to act. The message of preaching is how God Himself communicates the forgiveness of sins and the acceptance of the sinner before God because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

The message of Christian preaching, then, is unique because of the content of the message and who has revealed it. But the distinctiveness does not stop there. This particular form of rhetoric carries its own power to bring about change.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 12.

The Power of the Message

"We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." Paul makes it clear that although he has a treasure to proclaim he has no more say about the effectiveness of its life-giving power than a clay jar does about the refreshing qualities of the water it contains. In fact, clay jars can often be worn and rough and cracked. They may be "hard pressed," "perplexed," "persecuted," "struck down," as Paul indicates in 2 Corinthians 4. It is as a "cracked pot" that Paul sees himself when he talks of being the "chief of sinners." Since the fall into sin we are all "jars of clay." The image of God in which we were created has been "cracked" by sin. We are all "dead" in our transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1). We cannot understand the "things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:14) nor is it our will to do so (John 1:13).

The Lutheran Confessions summarize this Scriptural teaching of our depravity in many places.

Through the fall of our first parents man is so corrupted that in divine things, concerning our conversion and salvation, he is by nature blind and does not and cannot understand the Word of God when it is preached, but considers it foolishness; nor does he of himself approach God, but he is and remains an enemy of God until by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word which is preached and heard, purely out of grace and without any cooperation on his part, he is converted, becomes a believer, is regenerated and renewed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Book of Concord, ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 520-521.

Without the grace, help and activity of the Holy Spirit man is not capable of making himself acceptable to God, of fearing God and believing in God with his whole heart, or of expelling inborn evil lusts from his heart.<sup>4</sup>

Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

This Biblical principle of people's corruption concerning the things of God reveals the necessity--if there is to be salvation at all--of God Himself working through the message. There is no other way. Those who are "dead in their trespasses and sins" can respond only to being "made alive" (Ephesians 2:1-4). Only God can arouse the dead.

This truth simultaneously humbles and uplifts the preacher. It humbles him by removing from him any hint of power to convert or strengthen the hearts of those to whom he preaches. Holsten Fagerberg, when referring to sections such as those above in the Confessions says, "He who works is God; the pastor simply fulfills a necessary obligation."<sup>6</sup> Richard Caemmerer offers a similar thought, "The preacher is indeed unable to add to the power of the Word of God, and it remains the one means of changing the heart in God's direction."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>6</sup> Holsten Fagerberg, A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions, translated by Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 246.

<sup>7</sup> Richard R. Caemmerer, Preaching for the Church (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 41-42.



Augustine, who was schooled in classical rhetoric and who contributed greatly to the advancement of rhetoric in relation to Christian preaching, agrees, "Persuasion cannot be accomplished by rhetorical means unless the truth is first known or simultaneously revealed by divine grace."<sup>8</sup> Knowing that the power is in the message, the "treasure," keeps the preacher mindful that he is a "jar of clay."

However, the knowledge of the power of God at work in the message can also be uplifting for the preacher. Such knowledge removes from him the burden of guilt that can come when he feels inadequate or out of control because "nothing seems to change" in the lives of his people. Paul Althaus writes, "The preachers can preach the law and gospel, but they have no control over the way in which they strike and convert people."<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther's often quoted statement not only speaks of the power of the Word, but of the relief it can bring to the preacher.

I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And when, while I slept or drank Wittenburg beer with my Philip or my Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a Prince or Emperor inflicted such damage upon it. I did nothing. The Word did it all.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>George Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times (University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 152.

<sup>9</sup>The Theology of Martin Luther, 39.

<sup>10</sup>John R. W. Stott, Between Two Worlds (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982), 25.

Stott also offers words of assurance for the preacher as he quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer. "The preacher should be assured that Christ enters the congregation through those words which he proclaims from the Scriptures."<sup>11</sup>

Because of our sinful nature we cannot act toward God. He must act toward us in grace if we are to have a relationship with Him. This He does through His message. Thus the message of Christian preaching is unique. It is God's holy Word, and (through the power of the Holy Spirit) it alone effects change in the hearts of those who hear it.

"We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." The message of Christian preaching is unique because of the message itself and because of the power inherent in that message. But God has also ordained that His special message with its singular power be communicated through ordinary people. He has chosen human words to communicate His divine Word. As John Stott says, "It is God's speech which makes our speech necessary."<sup>12</sup>

#### The Vehicle for the Message

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). God has chosen to communicate His message through

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 15.

means. Considering the great unfathomable gulf between the infinite and the finite, between God and people, there must be some vehicle, some bridge, to bring the hidden mysteries of God into the hearts of people. Our confessions tell us, "God the Holy Spirit, however, does not effect conversion without means."<sup>13</sup> Harold Senkbeil, in a reference to Luther's concept of a "hidden God," writes:

Remember, our God is a God who hides in order to make himself known. And he hides in the strangest of places! --In the Word of the Gospel proclaimed in human speech and attached to the humble elements of water, bread and wine. Through these channels he still comes into intimate contact with people, just as he did when he hid in a virgin's womb, a manger, a cross and a tomb.<sup>14</sup>

In a similar vein, Paul Althaus talks about how God enters into a saving encounter with human beings only by "clothing himself and causing himself to be found at a place he himself designated. That place is Christ. Where can we find Christ?" He answers by quoting Luther, "No one will find him any place except in God's Word."<sup>15</sup>

God uses means to communicate His unequaled and powerful message, and one of those means is His Word. Further, one of the ways His Word is communicated is through the Office of the Ministry and the preaching of the Gospel.

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the

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<sup>13</sup> Book of Concord, 470.

<sup>14</sup> Harold Senkbeil, Sanctification: Christ in Action (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1989), 129.

<sup>15</sup> The Theology of Martin Luther, 35.

sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.<sup>16</sup>

Preaching is the special medium whereby the Holy Spirit can be active in the church.<sup>17</sup>

This being a medium for the activity of God's Spirit makes preaching no insignificant matter. The power for conversion and spiritual growth, as always, remains with the Word. Nevertheless, to be a tool in God's hand which He uses to bring spiritual life back into His people is a distinct privilege. Indeed, it is a high honor. "The proclamation of that redeeming grace is the highest work to which any man can be called."<sup>18</sup> Caemmerer writes, "This is the preacher's power: God uses him in His high business, and He gives him His own Word to speak."<sup>19</sup>

Since, as the Scripture and the Confessions state, "Justification takes place through the Word,"<sup>20</sup> preaching that Word is not only a high privilege, but a great responsibility. The preacher is communicating a singularly powerful life-giving Word through which God Himself is at work in the lives of His people. The preacher has nothing to say about the "when and the where" of the Spirit's working

<sup>16</sup> Book of Concord, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Fagerberg, 97.

<sup>18</sup> Stott, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Caemmerer, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Book of Concord, 116

when the Word is proclaimed. He does, however, have much to do with *how* that word is proclaimed and communicated.

The first two sections of this chapter dealt with the distinctiveness of preaching the Gospel. It is a special message with its own unique power. But God has elected to communicate this message through human words and speech. That fact makes preaching the Gospel also a rhetorical activity. It is a *unique* rhetorical activity. Although the preacher has nothing whatsoever to do with the uniqueness of the Gospel, he does--or at least he *can*--have plenty to do with the rhetorical aspects of this task. Indeed, rhetoric as a form of verbal communication involves certain skills. These skills can be learned, practiced, improved upon. They can be applied to preaching the Gospel so that communication of this life-giving message might be improved.

#### The Message and Rhetorical Activity

Aristotle's writings concerning rhetoric have been used as the basis for much modern rhetorical theory. Obviously, Aristotle did not write about preaching the message of the Gospel. The rhetoric he was concerned with was judicial and forensic, arguing cases of law, trying to persuade people to a particular opinion.

Yet, Aristotle's thoughts about the delivery of speech give us an insight into the need for treating preaching as a rhetorical activity. He writes,

Not that it is right to do so but it is inevitable. Strict justice, indeed, if applicable to rhetoric, would confine itself to seeking such a delivery as would cause neither pain nor pleasure. For the right condition is that the battle should be fought out on the facts of the case alone; and therefore everything outside the direct proof is really superfluous; although extraneous matters are highly effective . . . owing to the depraved character of the audience.<sup>21</sup>

Aristotle did not want to talk about delivery.

Ideally, it shouldn't matter; only the facts presented should. Delivery was "superfluous," "extraneous." At the same time, he must concede that it is "highly effective." The reason for this ambiguity is the "depraved audience." In other words, delivery is important because it affects how an audience *listens* to the facts. Audiences of Aristotle's day were evidently not made up of perfect people! They needed help listening, staying "tuned in," and understanding as the facts were being presented.

Some might say today that designating preaching the Gospel to be a rhetorical activity is "superfluous" and "extraneous" since the Gospel carries with it its own power. After all, Paul wrote, "The power is of God and not of ourselves." Ideally, this is true. But one of the vehicles God has chosen to share the message of the Gospel is verbal communication. When it comes to verbal communication of the Gospel, one thing is the same as it was in Aristotle's day. The audience is still depraved. To go Aristotle one better,

<sup>21</sup>Lester A. Thonnsen, Craig A. Baird, and Brandon Waldo, Speech Criticism, 2nd edition (Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Kreiger Publishing Company, 1970), 73.

the preacher is depraved as well!

The use of depraved here is in a spiritual, not an intellectual, sense. Even the spiritually reborn, those who stand righteous in the eyes of God, still have the depraved nature clinging to them. Thus pastors cannot improve the power of the Gospel, but they can affect the proclamation of the Gospel so that it is more readily heard. Audiences-- congregations from our perspective--can improve, not on the effectiveness of the Gospel, but their listening to the Gospel. Such improvement can happen when preaching is seen as a special message with inherent power and as a very real rhetorical activity.

Augustine realized this in the 5th century when he abandoned paganism for Christianity. He saw that he could use rhetorical rules to help communicate Biblical truths to listeners. Books One through Three of his On Christian Doctrine were devoted to the discovery of those truths. Book Four is concerned with teaching what has been discovered. This is where the art of rhetoric can be effectual.

Augustine writes:

For since by means of the art of rhetoric both truth and falsehood are urged, who would dare to say that truth should stand in the person of its defenders unarmed against lying, so that they who wish to urge falsehoods may know how to make their listeners benevolent, or attentive, or docile in their presentation, while the defenders of truth are ignorant of that art? Should they speak briefly, clearly, and plausibly while the defenders of truth speak so that they tire their listeners, make themselves difficult to understand and what they have to say dubious? Should they oppose the truth with fallacious arguments and

assert falsehoods, while the defenders of truth have no ability either to defend the truth or to oppose the false? Who is so foolish as to think this to be wisdom?<sup>22</sup>

For Augustine good rhetoric or the "faculty of eloquence" was indifferent.<sup>23</sup> There was nothing inherently evil nor virtuous about it. Being eloquent and following the rules of rhetoric was of great value in promoting evil or good. Augustine's point was that if rhetoric was used to move people to listen and be attentive to falsehood, why not use it to move people to listen and be attentive to the truth. Since God's Word is not just any truth but the saving truth, this would be wisdom, indeed.

Augustine's conclusion is valid today as well. A well-known textbook on contemporary public speaking says, "Speaking in public is a serious intellectual enterprise that requires disciplined habits of subject selection, analysis, and research."<sup>24</sup> Since a sermon is "speaking in public," why should it be any less an "intellectual enterprise" that requires discipline in both discovering the truth of a text and proclaiming that truth? Studying and learning and practicing good rhetorical methodology does not automatically

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, translated by D. W. Robertson Jr. (Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing: Indianapolis, 1958), 118.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Michael and Suzanne Osborn, Public Speaking (Houghton Mifflin, 1988), 2-3.



identify a preacher as being caught up in the secular. Indeed, good delivery, eye contact, inflection, voice, well-organized material, and other sound principles of public speaking ought to be applied to the preaching of the Gospel. To do otherwise would be an insult to the message. To do otherwise would be foolish.

Clyde Fant approaches the tension between the "what" of preaching (theology) and the "how" of preaching (rhetoric) by speaking of "incarnational preaching." "Form, methodology and delivery are nothing more, and nothing less, than the Word of God taking on flesh and dwelling among us." He goes on to say, "Freeing the pure soul of Christian proclamation--its content--from the wicked body of actual pulpit practice--its presentation--will not do."<sup>25</sup>

Francis Rossow uses two different metaphors to communicate similar thoughts. "The Gospel is God's gift. We create the package in which God's gift comes to people."<sup>26</sup> "The power and energy are all God's, but the lens [creative pulpit language] brings that power and energy to bear on specific people."<sup>27</sup>

The peculiarity of the message of the Gospel, then, does not preclude the fact that preaching is a rhetorical

<sup>25</sup> Clyde Fant, Preaching for Today, Expanded edition, (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), xiv.

<sup>26</sup> Francis Rossow, Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively (St. Louis: Concordia, 1983), 9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

activity. On the contrary, the uniqueness of the message of the Gospel compels the use of the very best of rhetorical skill. Caemmerer wrote, "Since the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection has such superhuman and eternal power and purpose, men should preach it with force, persuasiveness, and the impress of God's own seriousness and design."<sup>28</sup>

This means preachers can make use of rhetorical theory and glean from this vast field of knowledge such grains of information that can be useful in preaching. For example, preachers can make use of the classical canon of *inventio*.<sup>29</sup> They do not "invent" what to say, but they can use the same type of disciplined and intense study inherent in the original use of the term and apply that to their exegetical procedures.

As another example, the preacher today can talk about the classical rhetorical concepts of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*.<sup>30</sup> *Logos* is the content of what is preached. For the Lutheran Christian that is the holy Scriptures, the "only rule and norm." The Lutheran preacher's task is not just to proclaim the *logos*, but to apply it correctly to his hearers.

This is the subject of Thesis III of Walther's Law and Gospel where he writes, "A mere objective presentation of the

<sup>28</sup>Caemmerer, 6.

<sup>29</sup>Kennedy, 382.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 383.

various doctrines is not sufficient to this end."<sup>31</sup> The content of Lutheran preaching is divided into Law and Gospel. However, it is more than just Law and Gospel proclaimed. Lutheran preaching is Law and Gospel applied to the lives of the hearers with meaning for individuals. Walther states, "Preach so that every hearer feels: 'He means me. He has painted the hypocrite exactly as I am.' . . . The penitent person must soon feel while listening to the pastor: 'That comfort is meant for me; I am to appropriate it.'"<sup>32</sup>

*Pathos* is the emotional force in the rhetorical situation. The word "emotion" can raise a "red flag" in Lutheran circles where feelings are often down-played in favor of objectivity. Nevertheless, emotion is a very real part of who people are. The preacher needs to address the whole person, including the emotions. He needs to be aware of that which affects the emotions, such as what is going on in the world, in the community, in the lives of the people in the congregation.

*Ethos* is how the speaker is perceived. Quintilian once said that good rhetoric is a good man speaking well.<sup>33</sup> Who the preacher is has much to do with how what he says is perceived. The opposite is also true. As one modern writer

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<sup>31</sup>C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), 53.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Kennedy, 100.

put it, "The humdrum speech conveys a humdrum person, whether that characterization is deserved or not."<sup>34</sup> According to Augustine, the true *ethos* of preachers was "humbleness before God, their love of others, and their knowledge of sacred works."<sup>35</sup>

The preacher can make use of modern day theories and concepts that have grown from such classical ideas. Today there is talk about more familiar (but not that much different) terms such as "the speech transaction," "the speaker," "the situation," "the message," "the channel," "the listeners."<sup>36</sup> But whatever the terms, the modern day preacher need not shy away from things like "the artful use of verbal and non-verbal symbols"<sup>37</sup> or "preaching the creative gospel creatively."<sup>38</sup>

Such things as noted above are only a few of the things that can be used by the preacher to improve his rhetorical skills. However, some caution is in order. First, while immersed in the above ideas he must never forget the basic premise of this section. The preacher and the words he uses are but vehicles for the message of the Gospel.

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<sup>34</sup>Osborn, 3.

<sup>35</sup>Kennedy, 396.

<sup>36</sup>Gronbeck, McKerron, Ehninger and Monroe, Principles and Types of Speech Communication, 11th edition (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1990), 2.

<sup>37</sup>Osborn, 18.

<sup>38</sup>Rossow, 1.

The preacher is to impress people with the Truth, not with his artistry. He is still a "jar of clay." But he is a jar of clay in the hands of God. God desires to use him as a utensil to carry "living water," as a tool to "work the works of God." Caemmerer even saw the preacher as a weapon in God's hands. "God wants to use the preacher as a rifle through which the projectile of the Spirit sinks deep into the heart of the hearer to kill death and explode into life."<sup>39</sup> The preacher must not forget what he is and whose he is.

Another caution is stated clearly by Stott. "Technique can only make us orators; if we want to be preachers, theology is what we need."<sup>40</sup> Theology must come first. Theology tells the preacher what he is proclaiming and who is in charge and at work through that proclamation. When we realize this theology and its importance, then comes --necessarily I would maintain--concern about technique.

It has been said, "The standard of preaching in the modern world is deplorable,"<sup>41</sup> and "The words of religion are worn down like pebbles, they no longer clash, they no longer wound, they simply roll with the stream."<sup>42</sup> Are such

<sup>39</sup>Caemmerer, 49.

<sup>40</sup>Stott, 92.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 7

<sup>42</sup>Reul L. Howe, Partners in Preaching--Clergy and Laity in Dialogue (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), 18.

statements true? Unfortunately they may be, more at certain times and in certain places, less at other times and places. Preaching the message of the Gospel is a unique rhetorical activity. This means it is God's message and God's power at work in that message. Being rhetorical means that the preacher can also be at work improving his skills, being the best "clay jar" he can be and, thus, doing his part in moving the truth of the above statements from the "more" to the "less."

The Unique Message of the Gospel, Rhetoric, and The Congregation

There is one more aspect that must be considered for this project. It is glaringly obvious, but extremely important. Communication of the Gospel, like other forms of communication, is a two-way street. The preacher must have someone to preach to!

"He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:43).

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message . . ."  
(Romans 10:17).

Hearing the sermon is just as important and holy a business as preaching it. Without listening, speaking is void. Both hearing and the speaking of God's Word are necessary, and both are accompanied by the promise of the Holy Spirit who "calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth."<sup>43</sup>

The importance of the hearers has long been

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<sup>43</sup>William Roen, The Inward Ear (New York: Alban Institute, 1989), x.

appreciated. Aristotle maintained that what an audience knows and wants and can make use of must be the chief content in all rhetorical situations. He wrote, "For a speech is composed of three elements, viz. the speaker, the subject of the speech, and the persons addressed; and the end or object of the speech is determined by the last, viz. by the audience."<sup>44</sup> Cicero, who built upon Aristotle's rhetorical theories, commented "The proper concern of an orator . . . is language of power and elegance accommodated to the feelings and understanding of mankind."<sup>45</sup> Preaching as rhetorical speech may be monologue in appearance but at the same time it is governed by the principles of dialogue.<sup>46</sup>

All the above is true of any public speaking. But preaching is different. We have seen this difference in its message--the Gospel of Jesus--and its power in the Gospel message itself. But preaching is also unique in terms of the audience. Preaching is a community event. The office of the ministry is established by God, and He calls men into that office through the mediation of a local congregation of believers. The preacher's authority, then, is not his own. It is bestowed by the congregation who calls him. He is responsible to God and to God's people.

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<sup>44</sup>Thonnsen, 65.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>46</sup>Reul L. Howe, Partners in Preaching - Clergy and Laity in Dialogue (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), 45.

Clyde Reid wrote, "God does not act through the preacher alone, but through the hearers as well," and "Preacher and people together bring into being the Church's sermon."<sup>47</sup> There is a God-ordained relationship between pastor and congregation that makes the preaching of a sermon unique among all other forms of public speaking. The pastor is not just preaching the unique message of the Gospel to anyone. He is preaching it to God's own people who have been entrusted to his care, and he is doing so on their behalf.

Part of a preacher's caring for his people and an integral part of his sermon, then, is knowing well, not only the text, but the community of believers he has been called to serve. "Every stage of preparation for preaching, as well as preaching itself, requires that the preacher be equally concerned for the Word from God and for the people to whom the Word must come."<sup>48</sup> Putting it another way, the preacher must be concerned with the Word, with the words he uses to "gift wrap" the Word, and with those to whom the Word and the words are addressed. As Stott humorously puts it, "Talk to a person. Don't merely spray the solar system with words."<sup>49</sup> Part of the preacher's dialogical task is to address himself to the cares and concerns of his congregation.

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<sup>47</sup> Clyde Reid, Two-Way Communication thru Small Groups in Relation to Preaching (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 102.

<sup>48</sup> Caemmerer, xii.

<sup>49</sup> Stott, 255.



The very meaning of the word "dialogue," however, informs us that the responsibility for the communicative process is not entirely on the shoulders of the preacher. As Roen states, "Preaching is the mutual work of the preacher and the congregation."<sup>50</sup> Since listening is part of the rhetorical activity of preaching, certain principles of rhetoric can again be used to help sharpen this skill. Osborn says that speaking is an act that both deserves critical appreciation and requires sophisticated listening skills.<sup>51</sup> Words like "culture," "motivation," "active listening," "objectivity," and "interpretation"<sup>52</sup> do not have to be seen as words of heresy. Christians can learn about and use such listening skills as part of their responsibility in the preaching process.

Therefore, there are certain things that a congregation can learn about listening to sermons. Members of congregations can be schooled in the sermon's unique message and the power of that message. As preachers learn to write and preach sermons through study, discipline and hard work, so members of the congregation can learn to listen to sermons through study, discipline and hard work. They can better understand what is happening during that

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<sup>50</sup> Roen, xi.

<sup>51</sup> Osborn, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 61-63.

accustomed "sermon time"--who's really speaking and who's power is at work--so that it becomes less habitual and ordinary and more unique and extraordinary. As Paul Althaus says, ". . . no one should think that he is so learned or so holy that he may despise or miss the most insignificant sermon."<sup>53</sup>

Once again a word of caution is in order. When it comes to the dialogical factors involved in preaching between pastor and the congregation, the proper tension between rhetorical activity and the distinctiveness of preaching the message of the Gospel must be maintained. While making use of the skills of rhetorical communication and listening, both preacher and people must remember at all times the uniqueness of the message, the unique power of the message, and the unique community setting in which that message is proclaimed.

#### A Process for Improving the Communication of the Message

What follows in this paper is a systematic process to be used within the community of believers to help improve the communication of this special and powerful message of the Gospel. This process will be built around the fact that preaching is a rhetorical activity and, most importantly, that preaching is a unique rhetorical activity. Because preaching is rhetorical there is always room for improvement. Because preaching shares such a singular precious treasure,

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<sup>53</sup>The Theology of Martin Luther, 40.

improvement in communicating that treasure ought to be a fundamental aspect of preaching. As Caemmerer put it, if the preacher is not improving he is "practicing mistakes."<sup>54</sup>

The structure of the process stems from four steps suggested by Ken Andersen that can be used when analyzing rhetorical activity: *prior analysis*, which takes place during the advanced planning; *immediate analysis*, which takes place just before the actual act of communication; *concurrent analysis*, which takes place during the communication; *postanalysis*, which takes place after the communicative activity.<sup>55</sup>

The process will have the following outline:

Prior Analysis - Education

Assessing needs through survey

Immediate Analysis - A weekly Bible study group to work with the text for the following Sunday

Concurrent Analysis - Sermon Evaluation Forms for the congregation  
Sermon Evaluation Forms for a select, trained committee

Post Analysis - Processing all Evaluation Forms by the committee  
Sharing results with the pastor

In concluding this chapter it would be good to return to where it began. "We have this treasure in jars of clay so that the all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."

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<sup>54</sup>Caemmerer, 119.

<sup>55</sup>Ken Andersen, Persuasion: Theory & Practice (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), 144.

This process is not an attempt to improve the treasure. It is an attempt at working with the "jars of clay"--the pastor who is called to carry the treasure to the people, and the people who receive the treasure. This process will recognize and maintain the proper tension between the unique message of the Gospel and rhetorical activity so that the communication of this precious Gospel can be improved and the Holy Spirit can touch the lives of more and more people.

## CHAPTER 2

### A CONGREGATIONAL PROCESS FOR IMPROVING THE COMMUNICATION OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH PREACHING

#### Introduction

This chapter will contain the details of the process outlined at the end of Chapter 1. By way of introduction it is important to understand the "how" and "what" of this process. How was it formulated? What is its focus?

The process was formulated with the help of a committee selected by the pastor from the congregation. An effort was made to get a representative cross-section of members. The committee consisted of the following: a retired widow, a single woman, age 31, who is a speech teacher, an elder who is married with children ages 12 and 15, a 16 year old male, a 33 year old husband and father of a 4 year old, and a 41 year old wife and mother of 3 teenagers.

The committee met for six consecutive weeks. The basic concepts of Chapter 1 were studied using "rough" copies of the Bible study which is included in this chapter. Their input was used to help shape the form of the final Bible study. This same committee will be used later when the process is put into action. They will help with the congregational survey, serve on the Bible study group for the "immediate analysis" phase, and form the evaluation team for

the "post analysis." Their training and experience will thus prove helpful for the overall evaluation of the process in Chapter 3.

During the six weeks the committee also helped to focus the "what" of this process. Such a process cannot begin to deal with all aspects of improving communication skills. Even the communication skills involved in the unique rhetorical activity of preaching prove to be too broad a spectrum to pursue realistically. Input from the committee helped narrow the field of possibilities to those which were perceived to be of most importance.

The following is a list of items that were brought up and used as a base upon which the process would focus.

Knowing the congregation	Language
Voice	Gestures
Style	Eye contact
Delivery	Organization of materials
Sincerity	Knowledge of subject
Facial expressions	Listening skills

From this group two that came to the fore were knowing the congregation and knowledge of the subject. It was also felt that sincerity played an important role in both of these. Next came organization of materials and listening skills. Interestingly, delivery and those things associated with it--voice, language, gestures, eye contact--were discussed more under listening skills than anywhere else. For this group at least, delivery was not expected to be flamboyant and polished as much as interesting, engaging and without distracting from listening. Voice, language, gestures, eye

contact were not expected to be perfect; however, they were expected to be done in such a way that they did not distract the listener.

The committee decided that knowing the congregation, organization of materials, listening skills, and delivery (specifically how it relates to listening) were communication skills that could be addressed by the proposed process. Sincerity and knowledge of the subject--certainly extremely important--were seen to be more personal for the pastor and not so much subject to improvement by this process. Of course, the possibility does exist for the pastor who involves himself in this entire process to become more sincere about his preaching and more motivated to grow in the wonderful knowledge he has been called to share.

The above areas of communication will be addressed in the four stages of this process--Prior Analysis, Immediate Analysis, Concurrent Analysis and Post Analysis. Introductions to the various parts of these stages will indicate which of the communication skills are being taken into consideration.

#### Prior Analysis

Prior Analysis in this process will consist of two stages: education and needs assessment. The education stage will consist of a six-week Bible study, and the needs assessment will be developed with the help of a committee

formed from people who attended the Bible study.

#### Education Stage

What follows is a six-week Bible study consisting of a complete Teacher's Guide and a Student Guide. It is entitled "Pastor and Parishioners: Partners in Preaching." This title was chosen to emphasize the dialogical aspects involved in the communication of the Gospel through preaching. The pastor and his parishioners are partners in preaching in that they are working together in the communication process that is to take place during the sermon. Pastor and parishioners share in an interactive process involving communication skills of speaking and listening.

The study was designed to follow the basic outline of Chapter 1. Its goal is to teach as many members as possible the unique and powerful message of Scripture we are to preach, the way it is proclaimed in Scripture, and the role that both preacher and parishioner have in the communication of that message. Incorporated into the study are some of the important communication skills talked about above. Knowing the congregation and listening skills receive the major emphasis, although there is room to discuss others.

The study will consist of the following lessons:

- Lesson 1 - The Unique Message of Preaching
- Lesson 2 - The Power of the Message
- Lesson 3 - Jesus Preaching the Message
- Lesson 4 - The Apostles Preaching the Message
- Lesson 5 - The Pastor Preaching the Message
- Lesson 6 - The Parishioners Listening to the Message



PASTOR AND PARISHIONER:

PARTNERS IN PREACHING



Teacher Guide

### Introduction for the Teacher

This Bible study follows along closely with the outline of the first chapter in this process. The teacher should be familiar with this chapter and use it as a resource for supplemental information and quotes where appropriate in the lessons. Since the entire study is directed toward the pastor and parishioner, it is recommend that it be taught by the pastor. This will allow the pastor and parishioner to talk to one another in regard to preaching and not about one another! Such exchange will prove to be valuable in deriving the most benefit from this Bible study and the process of which it is a part. In order for the other phases of this process to have their maximum effect, it is recommended that this Bible study be highly publicized and be offered at different times during the week to give every member the opportunity to attend.

### Introduction

You're familiar with the scene. It's Sunday morning. The sermon has begun. You look around. The pews are not as full as they could be. There's Ralph, third pew from the back, closing his eyes two minutes into the sermon (He's not sleeping, of course, he just listens better that way!). Four of the choir members are reading their bulletins, the deacons are in the narthex discussing who that is with Mildred Robinson, and the three Blake children are systematically smashing Cheerios into the pew cushion!

The pastor? Well, he's pontificating prolifically on how the substitutionary atonement of our merciful and gracious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is sufficient propitiation for all iniquities incurred either through omission, commission or concupiscence and that such salvific regeneration is actualized, not by any innate initiative on the part of the unregenerate Old Adam, but only through the New Man which can comprehend this evangelical proclamation only through the power of God's ever present Spirit, that great Comforter who "turns men's hearts to destruction and saith, 'Returneth, ye children of men.'"

All the while the pastor is saying this he is wondering in the back of his mind why Ralph has his eyes closed, what the deacons are talking about, why the bulletins are being read in the choir, and what in the world are those Blake kids up to now!

Sometimes it seems as if the message of the sermon is just not being communicated. People are not listening. The pastor is not easy to listen to.

This Bible study is the first step in a process that has as its goal to improve the communication of the Gospel through preaching. It is entitled, "Pastor and Parishioner: Partners in Preaching." "Yipes! Does this mean I'll have to preach on Sunday morning?" No, not at all. Being "Partners in Preaching" means something other than actually doing the preaching yourself.

It means both the pastor and his members getting to know one another better. It means helping the pastor understand what your needs and desires are when it comes to preaching. Being a partner means learning how to listen, especially to sermons, and giving your pastor some occasional feedback to sermons so that he can better serve you. This partnership also means learning more about Biblical preaching and the message it has to communicate.

So, welcome "partners"! May God bless your study that you may grow in your knowledge and faith and that His Son might be glorified.

LESSON ONE  
THE UNIQUE MESSAGE OF PREACHING

Introduction

Preaching is unique. In this lesson we begin to study this uniqueness by looking at the specific message of preaching. For preaching claims, first and foremost, to have a distinct subject matter.

All forms of public speaking have a message of one kind or another to share. However, the message of Christian preaching is different from all of them. In other forms of public speaking you encounter a human message--"buy my product," "improve your skills," "get fired up," "vote for me." In preaching you encounter a divine message. A German theologian, Paul Althaus, speaking of preaching wrote, "Here God speaks. God himself has said it and I repeat it. Whoever cannot boast like that about his sermon should leave preaching alone, for he surely denies and blasphemes God" (The Theology of Martin Luther, 12).

When the hymnals are closed after the sermon hymn and people shift and position themselves to get ready to listen to the sermon, when the pastor steps into the pulpit to get ready to preach the sermon, something special is about to happen. A message unlike any other is about to be proclaimed and heard. This lesson will focus on the

uniqueness of the message of preaching by asking two questions. "Whose message is it?" and "Who's the message about?"

*[A note to the teacher. Answers and words not appearing in the student's guide are in bold-faced italics. This lesson will appear very simple, especially to those regular in Bible Study. You can probably move quickly. The goal of this lesson is not so much to teach something new, but to emphasize what many know but perhaps take for granted--the wonderful uniqueness of the Christian message.]*

#### Whose Message Is It?

The prophets were God's "preachers" in the Old Testament. They were called to share messages with God's people, the people of Israel, with people from other nations, with individuals from kings to common ordinary people. The messages varied, but the source was always the same. Let's look at Jeremiah as an example.

Look up Jeremiah 1:4-9. Identify the following:

The source of the message that came to Jeremiah (vs. 4).

*The Word of the LORD.*

The content of the message (vs. 5).

*Jeremiah was known and set apart and appointed by God to be a prophet.*

Jeremiah's reaction to the message (vs. 6).

*"I do not know how to speak. I am only a child."*

God's response to Jeremiah's fears (vss. 7-9).

*He is not to fear. He will say whatever the Lord commands him. But the LORD will be with him.*

So, whose message was Jeremiah to proclaim?

*The LORD's message.*

To see how clearly whose message this is just glance ahead in Jeremiah to 1:11, 1:12, 1:13, 1:14, 2:1, 2:4, 2:5. Things do not change in the New Testament. Let's look at some of God's "preachers" there. Study the following verses and answer the questions.

Acts 15:35-36 - What was it that Paul and Barnabas had preached on their first missionary journey?

*The Word of the Lord.*

Acts 8:25 - What was it that Peter and John proclaimed to the Samaritans?

*The Word of the Lord.*

What else is this called in the very same verse?

*The Gospel, that is the "Good News" of what God had done for them in Christ.*

Romans 10:17 - What is the source of the message according to this verse?

*The Word of Christ.*

2 Thessalonians 3:1 - Whose message does Paul pray will be spread rapidly and be honored?

*The message of the Lord.*

So, whose message did the Apostles proclaim?

*The message of the Lord. The Word of the Lord. The Gospel of Christ.*

Simple enough! However, the source of the message is very important to remember. Where do many of the messages we hear come from, even those claiming to be Biblical? (See Galatians 1:11 and Matthew 15:9.)

*Galatians 1:11 - Something people make up.*

*Matthew 15:9 - Their teachings are rules taught by people.*

*The sinful human race likes to make up its own messages. These messages can then be tailored to fit personal*

*agendas better that way! There are a lot of "man made" messages in our world. This may be a good time to discuss one or two that may be prevalent at the time in your particular area (eg. New Age Movement, Humanism).*

#### Who's the Message About?

The answer to this question is just as important to understand and reaffirm as the one above. Quickly glance at the opening verses of each of the four Gospels and the Book of Acts. The message of the Word of the Lord is about \_\_\_\_\_ [Jesus]\_\_\_\_\_!

Let's break this message about Jesus into two parts--who He is and what He came to do.

#### Who Jesus Is

All of the following verses deal with preaching. What was being preached? To find out complete the equation behind each verse.

Acts 9:20 - Jesus = *The Son of God*

Acts 10:42 - Jesus = *Judge of the living and the dead*

Acts 18:5 - Jesus = *The Christ*

2 Corinthians 4:5 - Jesus = *Lord*

Add to these verses John 1:1, 1 John 5:20, John 20:28, and what is your conclusion?

*The message of Christian preaching is not just any good news about any person. It is the singular message about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Lord, the Savior and Judge of the world. There is no other message like it!*

#### What Jesus Came to Do

What message is Paul referring to when he talks about preaching in these two verses?

1 Corinthians 1:18 - *The foolish message of the cross.*

1 Corinthians 1:23 - *Christ crucified on that cross.*



What message about Jesus' activities is so vital in the following?

Acts 17:18 - *The Good News about Jesus and the resurrection.*

1 Corinthians 15:12-14, 20-22 - *Here we find not only the Good News of the resurrection, but the necessity of the resurrection and the meaning of the resurrection for all who believe. They too will be raised.*

There are over 75 direct references to these two events in the preaching of the Apostles!

Discuss the meaning and importance of these two events. You may want to use as a reference point Luther's explanation to the Second Article.

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.  
This is most certainly true.

*Here is a good chance to review the basics of Christ's atoning sacrifice and of His glorious resurrection. This Good News can lose its impact and importance. It becomes "old hat" so to speak. You may want to have the class discuss this quote from Reul Howe's book, Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue. "It is custom that destroys us. The evangelical revelation should give us souls of fire, but custom creates in us the souls of automatons. The words of religion are worn down like pebbles, they no longer clash, they no longer wound, they simply roll with the stream" (Howe 1967, 6).*

Can you think of any religions that destroy the biblical message by what they teach about who Jesus is and what He came to do?

*Again use examples that are known in your area such as*

*the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, or other cults.*

Why is it so important that our preaching focus on Jesus?

*End this lesson with a positive affirmation of what we preach. Use this question as a transition into the conclusion.*

### Conclusion

Christian preaching is unique because of the specific content of its preaching. It proclaims God's message given through His Son Jesus Christ. It declares Jesus Christ as God's Son. It is centered on what Jesus did in His life, death and resurrection to restore the sin-broken relationship between God and humanity. There is no other message like it in the world!

But there is something else that makes the message of preaching unique. It carries with it a unique power. This will be the subject of Lesson Two.

LESSON TWO  
THE POWER OF THE MESSAGE

Introduction

In the last lesson we discovered that Christian preaching was unique because of whose message it was (God's message in Christ) and because of who the message was about (Jesus Christ, who he is and what he has done). But there is more to the uniqueness of this message.

In other forms of public speaking, the effectiveness of the message depends upon the speaker. Whatever "tricks of the trade" and skills that person has must be used to drive the point home in order to bring about the desired effect in those listening. The salesperson depends upon a "sales pitch." The coach depends upon his or her ability to motivate. The lawyer depends upon speaking skills to persuade people and change their minds.

This reliance on the speaker's skills is not the way it is with the message of preaching. Paul wrote, "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Also, consider Luther's words. "It is easy enough for someone to preach the word to me, but only God can put it into my heart. He must speak it in my heart or nothing at all will come of it" (The Theology of Martin Luther, 39). In this

lesson we will look at the power and role of God the Holy Spirit when it comes to the message of Christian preaching.

A Review of Luther's Explanation of the Third Article

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers, and will at the last day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

Remember some of those questions that followed this explanation in your catechism?

164. Why is it necessary that the Holy Ghost work this faith in you?

According to the Scriptures I am by nature spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God; therefore I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.

Look up some of the proof texts given for this.

**1 Corinthians 2:14 - *The man without the Spirit cannot accept the things of God. They are foolishness. They cannot be understood because they are spiritually discerned.***

**Ephesians 2:1 - *You were dead in your sins. Spiritually we are born dead. Dead people cannot and do not respond to anything. They cannot "decide to follow Jesus." They cannot make a "decision for Christ." There is only one thing a dead person can possibly respond to and that is being made alive again.***

**1 Corinthians 12:3 - *No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.***

165. What has the Holy Ghost done to bring you to Christ and thus to sanctify you?

The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, that is, He has invited me to partake of Christ's blessings, which are offered to me in the Gospel.

**2 Thessalonians 2:14 - *You are called through the Gospel. You are called to share in the Glory of Jesus.***

**2 Timothy 1:9 - *We are called, not because of anything we have done, but because of God's purpose and grace. Being called "before the beginning of time" certainly precludes any actions on our part.***

Besides the Small Catechism, our Lutheran Confessions summarize these same thoughts in the Formula of Concord.

Through the fall of our first parents man is so corrupted that in divine things, concerning our conversion and salvation, he is by nature blind and does not and cannot understand the Word of God when it is preached, but considers it foolishness; nor does he of himself approach God, but he is and remains an enemy of God until by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word which is preached and heard, purely out of grace and without any cooperation on his part, he is converted, becomes a believer, is regenerated and renewed (Book of Concord, 520-521).

### The Spirit and the Message

We now look at some verses that deal directly with preaching the message as it relates to the power of God and His Holy Spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:17. Why is Paul saying he did not preach with words of "human wisdom"?

***Paul knew the power was not in his skill at using words regardless of how "wise" they might be. Similarly, the rhetorical skills of the modern preacher cannot bring about the conversion of the sinner. That power belongs to the Holy Spirit as He works through the message of the cross of Christ.***

A few verses later in 1:21 whom does Paul give credit to for saving those who believed?

***God was pleased to save them.***

Through what did God do this, however?

*This was accomplished through preaching.*

What is "foolish" about preaching? (Be careful here if your pastor is present!)

*The message appears to be foolish. God being born of a virgin, God in human flesh, God taking the form of a slave, God with no place to lay His head, God suffering, God dying on a cross--what foolishness! The foolishness of preaching could also be seen in how foolish it seems that God should use mere people to proclaim such a divine message with such inadequate human words.*

In the next chapter whose power is Paul again talking about (2:4)?

*The power is the Spirit's power.*

Read Acts 16:14. Here is a very clear statement about the working of the Holy Spirit. What role does the message play in this situation?

*The Holy Spirit opened the heart of Lydia. It was in response to Paul's message. The message became the vehicle for the Spirit's power.*

Paul talks about his preaching not being with "wise and persuasive words." However, when we look at samples of Paul's preaching in the New Testament it seems like his words are very wise and persuasive. He always seems to find the right thing to say at the right time.

Knowing what you now know about the power of the message, discuss this question. In what sense can preaching be "wise and persuasive" and in what sense can it not?

*Preaching is not "wise and persuasive" when it comes to bringing anyone to faith. There is no power in preaching itself to convert anyone. The power to crush sinful hearts with the Law and restore them again with the Gospel belongs solely to God the Holy Spirit. However, since preaching is the vehicle the Spirit has chosen to work through, then the preacher's words and communication skills do become important. These should be as "wise and persuasive" as possible. This tension is key in understanding and working through this process.*

How does Romans 10:17 show why the preacher's communication skills need to be "wise and persuasive"?

*Romans 10:17 reminds us that faith comes from "hearing the message." The power is in the message but it must be heard. This is where communication skills come in.*

How do Hebrews 4:12 and Isaiah 55:10-11 speak of the Spirit's power in God's Word and that the words conveying God's message need to be wise and persuasive?

*Hebrews 4:12 again reminds us of the "living" power of God's word that mere humans proclaim.*

*Isaiah 55:10-11 is saying that God works through His Word and--a new thought--according to His purpose. This, of course, may not always be the same purpose the preacher has in mind or the same purpose the congregation wants to hear.*

### Conclusion

"I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel."

We must conclude that the Holy Spirit is the sole power when it comes to opening hearts and bringing people to faith. We must also conclude that one of the ways the Holy Spirit does this is through the message of the Gospel as it is proclaimed by the pastor.

The power comes through the Word, and God has chosen to share that Word through the "vehicle" of words. Therefore, even though Christian preaching is unique in that it is a unique message that carries with it its own unique power, it is also similar to other forms of public speaking. Words have to be spoken. Words have to be heard. Words have to be understood. Communication must take place. Communication involves not only the preacher but the listeners, the

congregation.

We cannot improve the power of the Word of the Gospel. However, communication of that Word can be improved through increased preaching and listening skills. With this in mind we will begin in our next lesson to focus on ways to accomplish this.



## LESSON THREE

### JESUS PREACHING THE MESSAGE

#### Introduction

We have seen that Christian preaching is a unique form of verbal communication. It has a unique message to proclaim because it is God's message of Good News (Gospel) about Jesus Christ and all that He has accomplished for sinful humanity. It is also unique because the message of Jesus Christ, the message of the Gospel, carries with it its own power to call people "out of darkness into His marvelous light." The Holy Spirit working through the Word, as proclaimed by the preacher, has the power to turn people around and bring them to faith.

Nevertheless, preaching is still verbal communication. God has chosen to communicate the message of the Gospel through ordinary human words. Since preaching is communication that involves a speaker and listeners, it can be improved. In this lesson we begin to discover ways to do that.

We start with the preaching of Jesus in the Gospel according to Matthew. This study will not so much be a detailed analysis of the content of Jesus' preaching, but rather a study of the context of His preaching. In other words, to whom was Jesus speaking, what led up to His

speaking, what do His words imply about His knowledge of His hearers and their needs, and the way He communicated with them? Before looking at these questions, and dealing exclusively with Matthew, it would be well to remind ourselves of the importance Jesus placed on preaching.

Look briefly at Mark 1:38 and Luke 4:43. If you look at the context of these two verses you will discover that preaching was more important to Jesus than \_\_[healing]\_.

*Use these verses not only to answer the question but to give people a feel of looking at the context. In the pilot of this study the group seemed to need help getting away from the verse itself and discussing its meaning. The work that follows will be all contextual. Those with "red letter" editions will find the work a little easier as the context can be visually separated from the content.*

To get an idea of just how important preaching was to Jesus considering the following questions.

What was the very first thing Jesus did after He was tempted in the wilderness by Satan (Matthew 4:17)?

*Jesus began to preach.*

During the temptation itself, what importance does Jesus place on the Word of God (Matthew 4:4)?

*The Word of God, the Word that Jesus would preach, the Word the Apostles would preach, the Word preached today is life itself.*

What was an all-important aspect of the last thing Jesus commanded to His Apostles (Matthew 28:20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:45-47)?

*Jesus' teachings, the Good News, the forgiveness of sins, were to be preached to the whole world. Proclamation of Jesus life, death and resurrection would be essential.*

Preaching the "Good News of the Kingdom" was of the utmost importance to Jesus. Now we are ready to study the context of His preaching and some of the skills Jesus used to communicate this "Good News" to His listeners.

Matthew 5-7

No doubt Jesus' most famous sermon is the Sermon on the Mount. As Jesus begins this sermon, what is He responding to (5:1, also 4:23-25)?

*Jesus had been going throughout all of Galilee preaching the Good News and healing. The news was spreading and people were coming from everywhere. A large crowd had gathered. Many were suffering and sick and demon-possessed. Jesus goes up on a mountainside to teach this large crowd. Note that this comes first. Healing comes after the teaching has stopped (8:1-17).*

In this sermon Jesus uses the phrase "You have heard that it was said" several times (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). What does this imply about Jesus' knowledge of His hearers?

*He knew they knew their Scripture. Most had come from Jewish territories. He wasn't talking to Biblical illiterates.*

How did His hearers perceive Jesus (7:28-29)?

*He taught as one with authority. He didn't have to quote some famous Rabbi. He knew what He was talking about. This made an impact upon the people. It made them take notice and listen.*

Matthew 11

What was Jesus purpose for traveling through Galilee at this time (1)?

*He purpose was to teach and preach.*

What prompted His words in 4-19 (2-3)?

*Jesus was prompted by a question from John's disciples.*

What prompted His words in 21-30 (20)?

*Jesus refers to the cities where His miracles had been performed. They had not repented.*

Matthew 12-13

In these two chapters Jesus speaks several times on different occasions. Below are verses in which Jesus is speaking. Search the verses before each section to discover the reason for His words.

*12:3-8 - The Pharisees were challenging Jesus because the disciples were picking heads of grain on the Sabbath.*

*12:11-13 - Jesus responds to a question about healing on the Sabbath.*

*12:25-37 - Because of a healing Jesus is accused of being in league with Satan.*

*12:39-45 - The Pharisees ask Jesus for some miraculous sign.*

*13:11-23 - Jesus responds to a question by His disciples.*

*13:37-43 - Jesus responds again to His disciples as they ask for an explanation of His parable of the weeds.*

### Matthew 18

This chapter contains two discourses of Jesus, 3-20 and 22-35. What directly precedes these words (18:1, 18:21)?

*Both are preceded by questions from disciples. "Who is the greatest?" and "How many times should I forgive?"*

### Matthew 24-25

These chapters contain a long discourse by Jesus in regard to the end times. Once again, what got all of this started (24:1-3)?

*The disciples call His attention to the buildings of the temple.*

### Discussion

By now it should be clear that Jesus just didn't walk around speaking words. He spoke words in response to people, their needs, their thoughts, their questions. Jesus knew His listeners. He was in dialogue with them. In fact, most of

Jesus' words in the New Testament were direct responses to something His listeners did or said or asked. The people respected Him as an authority, someone who knew what He was taking about.

In light of this lesson discuss the following questions.

1. In what sense were Jesus' words dialogical?

*His words were addressed to specific people in specific situations. He was responding to their questions, needs, and thoughts. He was in dialog because He knew who they were and where they were at.*

2. Why was Jesus able to respond to people and their needs so well?

*He knew what it was they needed. Perhaps it wasn't always what they thought they needed, but Jesus knew what He was talking about and how to apply it to the lives of His listeners.*

3. Can you think of some ways that a pastor can get to know his people and have a better idea of their needs?

*Answers will certainly vary. You may suggest things like home visits, "cottage meetings," congregational surveys, being "out and about" in public events.*

4. Can you think of some ways that members of a congregation can communicate their thoughts, needs, questions to the pastor?

*Again there will hopefully be a variety of answers to discuss. Some examples might be through a "preaching suggestion box" in the narthex, writing a note, attend Bible studies and other church events.*

### Conclusion

Obviously the preaching of the Gospel did not end with Jesus. It was to be preached to the ends of the earth until the end of time. Jesus chose the Apostles to begin this task. In our effort to improve the communication of the Gospel through preaching, it would do us well to look at a sample of their preaching. That will be the task of our next lesson.

## LESSON FOUR

### THE APOSTLES PREACHING THE MESSAGE

#### Introduction

Jesus came to preach. He came to preach Good News in response to the needs of people. His greatest proclamation of that Good News, of course, was not just His Words, but His actions in suffering, dying, rising again, and ascending to the right hand of the Father.

This does not, however, mean an end to preaching the Good News nor the need for people to hear it. Jesus intended His apostles to carry on the preaching.

They were trained to do so (Mark 3:14, Luke 9:2).

*Their training was "on the job," being with Jesus. Their training was "doing," being sent out.*

They were commanded to do so (Mark 16:15).

*Jesus' parting words to them were words that underscored the importance and urgency of preaching the Good News.*

They would feel compelled to do so (1 Corinthians 9:16).

*Here is a good place to review the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching. It was not human power that compelled Paul and the others. It would take more than human will to continue preaching in the face of hardship and persecution. The Spirit compelled them.*

Their preaching of the message would have an effect (John 17:20).

*The Spirit, working through the message proclaimed by the disciples, would bring people to faith.*

We now take a look at some of the Apostolic preaching.

Peter - Acts 2:14-41

What incident prompted this sermon (1-13)?

*Remind everyone that this is contextual study again. Peter's words are prompted by the events of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.*

Who is he addressing? (14)

*"Fellow Jews." Peter's audience is mostly Jewish. Jews from everywhere would be there for the Feast of Pentecost.*

What does Peter use as a starting point for his sermon (15)?

*He begins by addressing the amazement and perplexity of the crowd (12) and the accusation of having "too much wine" (13). Peter "hooks" his message into what the people are wondering and asking about.*

Where does he quote from (16-21, 25-28, 34)?

*Peter quotes from the Old Testament--Joel, Psalm 16 and Psalm 110. This he could freely do because of his Jewish audience.*

Who does he center on (22)?

*Peter uses his Old Testament "text" and quickly focuses upon Jesus.*

What events in Jesus life does he speak of (22, 23, 24, 31-33)?

*Peter speaks of Jesus' miracles, His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension and subsequent giving of His Holy Spirit.*

What conclusion does he come to about Jesus? (36)

*Jesus is the Lord and Christ of the Jewish people.*

What was it in the sermon that "crushed" the people who were listening (23, 36)?

*They had crucified their Messiah.*

To what does Peter call these people (38)?

*Peter calls them to repentance and baptism.*



What, then, would they receive (38)?

*They would receive the gift of the Spirit and eternal life. Peter brings this entire event full circle back to them and what it can mean in their lives.*

What is the response (41-42)?

*Many baptisms, many conversions and a devotion to learning and growing together in this wonderful truth.*

Here is a quick review of the main points of this sermon.

1. Peter responds to a specific situation and uses it to preach the Gospel.
2. He knows whom he is speaking to: "Fellow Jews."
3. He, therefore, uses the Old Testament as a base of authority.
4. He gets the people to see their sin.
5. He proclaims the cross and the resurrection.
6. He calls them to repentance and baptism and, therefore, forgiveness.

Now compare this to another sermon by Peter. Look up Acts 10:34-48. Here Peter is speaking to the Roman Centurion Cornelius and the people gathered in his home. Previously in a vision God has made it clear to Peter that the message of salvation is for all, including the Gentiles.

As you read over Peter's sermon in verses 34-43 compare it to the points made in the last question. What element is missing? In other words, what does Peter leave out as he starts this sermon in v. 36?

*Peter does not quote from the Old Testament as a basis for his message.*

Why would he do this?

*Although Cornelius was a "God-fearer" (10:2) and would have probably had some familiarity with the Old Testament, he had also gathered many "relatives and close friends" (10:24) who may not have. It is entirely a Gentile audience.*

Notice, however, all the other elements are there. Peter responds to a specific situation; he knows his hearers (Gentiles); he proclaims Jesus--His crucifixion and resurrection (39-40); and he uses the Law to show sin's judgment (42). Baptism and forgiveness then follow (43, 46).

Another Apostolic preacher would be Paul. Since we have had some practice with Peter's sermons we'll divide into small groups and compare two of Paul's sermons.

Look for similarities and differences. Why are they similar? Why are they different?

Acts 13:13-43

*Synagogue (Jewish) setting.*

*Uses Old Testament Scriptures and history of Jewish people.*

*Shows Jesus is the promised Messiah.*

*Talks of Jesus' death, resurrection and forgiveness.*

*Is invited back. People want to hear more.*

Acts 17:16-34

*Greek setting.*

*No Scriptures. Uses pagan statue and even quotes philosophers.*

*Talks of God as the God of all creation. A God not made with human hands.*

*Speaks of Jesus the judge of the world who was raised from the dead.*

*Some sneer. Others want to hear more.*

*Feel free to add to this list and get as detailed as you would like. The point is that the message remains the same but the communication of that message reflects the setting and audience.*

Discussion

1. What are some elements that you think are important for pastors to include in sermons today?

*Try to be quiet and let the members of the class speak!*

2. What influence do you think the context of your particular congregation (rural, town, city, mission) should have on the pastor's sermon, his use of words, illustrations, examples?

*Again let the class offer their thoughts. You may want to have some statistics or demographics for your particular area to enhance the discussion. For example, people in the pilot found it amazing that 40% of the people in our rural county were not churched.*

3. Who is the pastor speaking to in your congregation? In other words, what kind of people, cultures, ethnic groups, professions, vocations, age groups make up your congregation?.

*Prior to this class have someone put together a profile of your congregation if one has not been recently done.*

### Conclusion

In this lesson we have seen that the Apostles continued to preach about the Good News of Jesus Christ. Their preaching focused on Jesus and the significance of His life, death and resurrection. However, like Jesus, they did not just proclaim words. They communicated to people. The Apostles' preaching was dialogical. People's culture, needs, knowledge of Scripture and other variables were used by these preachers to help select and shape and organize the words they chose to communicate the life-giving message of Christ. Today's preacher has been called to do the same. This will be the subject of our next lesson.

## LESSON FIVE

### THE PASTOR PREACHING THE MESSAGE

#### Introduction

Preaching the Good News did not end with Jesus. It did not end with the Apostles. God, through a local congregation, continues to call men to shepherd His flock, and preaching continues to be a part of that calling. Paul's charge to young Pastor Timothy can still be applied to pastors today.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

In the last two lessons we have studied the preaching of Jesus and of Peter and Paul. Our purpose was to learn from them things important in the communication of the message of the Gospel. We saw the importance of the preacher knowing his subject matter, being a devoted student of Scripture and a servant of God Himself. The importance of the pastor knowing his congregation was also made clear. As much as possible the pastor is to be in touch with the needs of his people and apply the Word of God to those needs. He is to be dialogical. We learned that communication can be enhanced when the pastor knows the background and

lifestyles of the people he is preaching to so he can speak to them as he proclaims Christ.

The purpose of this lesson is two-fold. First, its goal is to show the process a pastor goes through in order to bring the Word of God into the lives of his congregation. In this regard we will see how the pastor attempts to apply some of the things we learned from the preaching of Jesus and the Apostles.

A second goal is to begin to help the members of the congregation to be better listeners. This subject of the congregation's responsibility in preaching will be taken up in more detail in Lesson Six. At this point, however, it is hoped that understanding the process that goes into writing a sermon will be useful for members as they listen to this unique form of public speaking.

*Note - The following study was used with the pilot group the week before the text was preached. That seemed to add to their interest. You may want to use one of your own sermon studies for this lesson, either one you have just preached or one you will be preaching.*

*The study does contain some "technical" material in the textual study and in reference to Greek words. This was not included to "show-off" but to give the class a better understanding of the good training their pastors get in this area. The purpose is not so much that they understand perfectly everything that a pastor does, but that they get a feel for the process and the amount of work involved.*

*The pilot group found this Lesson one of the most interesting. Most had never before realized that this kind of study was part of a pastor's work schedule. They did find it very helpful in the listening process.*

A Sermon Study for Matthew 21:28-32 - Pentecost 19A

Establish the Text

From time to time you have undoubtedly noticed differences in Bible translations. One of the reasons these differences occur is because of variations in the Greek text from which translations come. The first thing a pastor must do is look at the Greek and see if any of these "textual variants" exist.

*There are other reasons for differences that you may want to spend a few minutes talking about. For example: the date of the translation, the translator's purpose and subsequent word choice, the difference between paraphrase and translation.*

There is a textual variant in this text that is so well attested to that it is used in some translations. This variant has the son who said "I will" first in the story and the son who said "I will not" second. The NAS, Williams, Phillips and NEB go with the latter. KJV, NKJ, RSV, Beck and NIV have the former. By comparing these differences with the original, the pastor can also check the accuracy of the translation which is ordinarily used in the worship service.

Textual evidence seems to lean toward the "I will not" being first. Plus, this is the most difficult translation since the logical order would have it the other way around.

Propers of the Day

The "Propers" are those parts of the worship service listed below that change from Sunday to Sunday. These are chosen as a unit to help develop the theme of the day. Most churches follow a three-year series where the Propers repeat every three years. For example, this study is for the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Series A. Next year we will be in series B, the following year series C and then back to A. In this way a large portion of Scripture and all major Church doctrines can be covered. The Propers for each Sunday can be found in the front of the hymnal. Many churches use bulletin inserts that contain the Propers.

Old Testament - Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 - Here we see the LORD's call to Israel to repent and live. He calls them to get a "new heart and a new spirit." If a righteous man turns from his righteousness he will die. If a wicked man turns from his wickedness he will live. This certainly reminds us of the two sons in our text.

Epistle - Philippians 2:1-11 - Here Paul asks the Philippians to have the attitude of Christ. It is the attitude of humility. Part of humility is the attitude of repentance that is talked about in our text.

Gospel - text

Introit - God's name is to be praised for He will vindicate His people and have compassion on them.

Collect - The Collect is a prayer to please God in both will and deed through the help of His grace. He is the strength of all who trust in Him. The "willing" and "doing" again remind us of the sons of our text.

Context

It is Monday of Holy Week. Jesus has returned to Jerusalem after spending the night in Bethany. As He is teaching in the Temple Courts, His authority is questioned by the chief priests and elders. They are thwarted by Jesus' question about where John's authority came from. Jesus refuses to tell the source of His authority and then moves directly into our text where He makes use of John's ministry to explain the parable.

After He finishes this parable and the parable of the landowner and the vineyard (33-44), we learn that those listening--chief priests and Pharisees--knew very well that Jesus was directing these parables at them. They perceived clearly Jesus' condemnation of their unbelief.

Text

28 - Whom is Jesus addressing in this text (see 23, 45)? "What do you think" gets their attention in typical Rabbinic style by asking them to listen and give an opinion. "Vineyard"--any knowledgeable Jew would make the connection between the vineyard and the nation of Israel. The vineyard was often used as an analogy to God's chosen nation. Look at Isaiah 5:1-7 as an example.

Many of Jesus' parables had to do with vineyards (20:1-16, 21:33-42, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9-19).

The son is not asked to work in the vineyard. He is told. The Greek word *hupage* is imperative. Sons are expected to work in the vineyard.

29 - The first son refuses to work in the vineyard. But later he "changed his mind" (*metamelaitheis*) and went. *metamelaitheis* is the same word translated "repent" in

the NIV in verse 32. The meaning is the same. *metamelaitheis* literally means to change one's mind or to turn around and go another direction. That is what repentance is all about.

30 - The second son is given the same command. His response is outwardly very positive and even addresses his father with respect, "I will, sir" but he never went.

31 - Now Jesus asks for the opinion of those chief priests and elders who were listening. The question was almost an insult since the answer was so easy. The son who changed his mind is the one who did his father's will. Now comes the real insult of the text! Jesus explains His point. The "tax collectors and prostitutes," a phrase representing all kinds of sinners, were the kind of folks that were considered unworthy of even hearing about God. In the eyes of the religious leaders, they were most certainly damned and had no chance of salvation. But Jesus turns the tables and says these known sinners will enter God's Kingdom ahead of the religious leaders who thought they were so good!

32 - Now Jesus explains why the tables will be turned. In doing so He refers back to John the Baptist (24-26). John's purpose was to show the "way of righteousness." That "way" was not being "religious" and being obedient. It was the way of repentance. Like the first son, these sinners had recognized their sin and "changed their minds," repented. Even after seeing that way demonstrated again and again as John baptized sinners in the Jordan, the religious leaders did not understand. They believed in their own righteousness and therefore saw no need of repentance.

Gospel Parallels - This parable occurs only in Matthew.

Other Passages

Luke 7:29-30

29 (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John.

30 But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

Matthew 3:1-3

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea



2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

Luke 3:12-13

12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

13 "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

Luke 7:36-39

36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,

38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is--that she is a sinner."

Luke 18:11-14

11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector.

12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

2 Peter 2:21

21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.

#### Thought Progression

Jesus tells the parable of the two sons to show the value of repentance over pretense.

He applies the parable to the Jewish religious leaders showing them the consequences of their unbelief.

Central Thought The way of righteousness (being good) is repentance over one's unrighteousness (not being good) and trusting in the righteous One.

Everything the pastor has done up to this point has led him to this Central Thought. He has arrived at the meaning of the text. Now he must focus upon the task of communicating this message to his particular congregation through the sermon. The pastor must blend his knowledge of the subject matter with his knowledge of the hearers to begin this process. One way of accomplishing this is through establishing a Goal for the sermon, a Malady the text addresses, and the Means offered in the text to overcome the malady.

Goal To increase our joy of knowing that goodness (righteousness) is not the result of being good but of being forgiven.

Malady We often either despair because of our lack of goodness or we boast in our goodness.

Means Jesus is the good Son who came to do the Father's will and share His goodness with us.

"Hooks" The movie "The Good Son." Michael Jordan. Bad Crops.

#### Theme

"How to Have Goodness without Being Good"  
 "Good People Finish Last"  
 "Goodness without Being Good"  
 "The Good Son"

#### Outline

Introduction - Compare the movie, "The Good Son," with our text.

Transition - "Who is the good son in our text?"

- I. The second son is not the good son.
  - A. He was respectful to his father.
  - B. He is compared to the religious leaders of the day.

- C. He sounded good and looked good, but he refused to work in the vineyard. He really wasn't good.
  - D. He is like people we know today, including ourselves. We, too, need repentance.
- II. The first son is not the good son.
- A. He was disrespectful to his father.
  - B. He is compared to "tax collectors and prostitutes."
  - C. He eventually went to work in the vineyard, but that in itself didn't make him good.
  - D. He is like people we know today, including ourselves. We, too, need repentance.
- III. The Son of God is the good Son!
- A. He came to do His Father's will in His life, death and resurrection.
  - B. He came to save the "not good."
    - 1. Like the religious leaders (But they would not admit to their need).
    - 2. Like "tax collectors and prostitutes."
    - 3. Like us.
  - C. He really was good and shares with us His goodness.
  - D. How wonderful to know someone like that!

This is a sample of what a pastor may go through as he is preparing to share with his people the Word of God. But remember, communication of a sermon involves more than the pastor. The congregation must also be involved. That is the subject of our final lesson.

## LESSON SIX

### THE PARISHIONERS LISTENING TO THE MESSAGE

#### Introduction

We have been talking about the pastor and preaching the message in the last lessons. But consider the following quote from The Inward Ear by William Roen:

Hearing the sermon is just as important and holy a business as preaching it. Without listening, speaking is void. Both hearing and the speaking of God's Word are necessary, and both are accompanied by the promise of the Holy Spirit who "calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth" (Roen 1989, x).

Scripture not only commands and promises to bless preaching; it commands and promises to bless listening.

#### Hearing the Message

The command "Hear the Word of the Lord" occurs many times in the Old Testament. Look up some or all of the following verses just to get a feel of who (and even what!) was supposed to "hear."

*You may want to have individuals each look up a different reading and then share with the group who or what in their reading was supposed to "hear." It is not necessary to spend a great deal of time on this section.*

Isaiah 1:10 - *Other nations*      Ezekiel 16:35 - *Prostitute*

Jeremiah 2:4 - *House of Jacob*      Ezekiel 20:47 - *Forest*

Jeremiah 7:2 - *Judah*      Ezekiel 34:7 - *Shepherds*

Jeremiah 9:20 - *Women*      Ezekiel 36:1 - *Mountains*

Jeremiah 19:3 - *Kings*      Ezekiel 37:4 - *Bones*

Jeremiah 22:29 - *The land*      Hosea 4:1 - *Israelites*

Evidently "Hearing the Word of the LORD" was extremely important!

Look up Romans 10:14-17 and discuss why hearing the Word of the Lord is so important.

*Hearing the Word is important because that is the vehicle the Spirit uses to bring faith.*

What else is associated with hearing the Word of the Lord that makes it important (Luke 11:28, Revelation 1:3)?

*There are blessings promised for those who hear. You many want to ask for some examples of such blessings--comfort, hope, strength, assurance, forgiveness.*

Sometimes, however, things can get in the way of our hearing. God says in Isaiah 42:20, "You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing." (Obviously he is not referring to your congregation!)

According to the following verses, what are some things that can get in the way of our hearing?

Matthew 13:15 - *This passage is a severe judgment upon those who, because of hardened hearts, reject the Word. Our sinful nature is still at work and sometimes we may not want to listen to the Word because of various things that may be going on in our lives.*

Mark 4:15 - *When we are distracted, not listening, the Word is not heard. Satan loves this as he snatches it from us.*

Mark 8:17-21 - *In this passage Jesus is frustrated with His disciples. Can't they see? Can't they hear? When we look at things only from our perspective it sometimes becomes impossible to hear and understand the perspective of someone else. The disciples were thinking one way, Jesus another. They just weren't getting it!*

2 Timothy 4:3 - *You hear what you want to hear. You don't hear what you don't want to hear. Every*

*pastor has examples of something that was "heard" in a sermon that was never said.*

Can you think of other things that get in the way of hearing the message? Think particularly about things that get in the way on Sunday morning as you are listening (trying to?) to the sermon.

*Lead the discussion so that the class not only talks about things that may be going on in their lives that affect their concentration, but also about little things that may go on in a worship service that may do the same--babies crying, the neighbor mowing their lawn, the one candle that didn't light.*

*Or perhaps they have habits they don't even realize that get in the way--reading the bulletin during the sermon (thinking of course that you can do both), going for a quick bathroom break (you won't miss that much).*

*You may even want to be brave and ask if there is anything the pastor does while preaching that is distracting!*

Although there is much that gets in the way of our hearing, we should not give up. We are not alone in this process.

What assurance are we given in John 8:47?

*As people claimed by God in our baptism and with His Spirit within us, we can hear His Word as it is proclaimed. The Spirit promises to work in our lives through a sermon, and He will!*

What does 1 Corinthians 2:6-15 say about hearing the word of the Lord that is comforting?

*Since we have the Spirit of God, the mysteries of God are revealed to us. It is His power that does that, not ours. The Holy Spirit will help us hear, really hear, the Word of God.*

Remember how we have been saying that Christian preaching is very special? It is a unique message with its own unique power. This lesson is leading us to something else that can only be said about preaching. Preaching is shared in and heard by a unique community, the Church.

Look up Ephesians 2:19-22 and 1 Peter 2:5 and discuss some of the things that are unique about the community in which the Word of the Lord is shared.

*Some of these may have already come out in the above questions. We are a community of God's people. We are His temple, the place where His Spirit dwells. If His Spirit dwells among us then His Spirit is active among us. He is there to work through those things which call and bind this community together, the Word and Sacraments. There is no other "listening audience" that can compare to a local congregation that has been "called, gathered, and enlightened."*

How does the church help or hinder your hearing of the sermon?

*Allow the class to respond with their thoughts. Discussion could center on things like the church fostering a sense of community, providing opportunities for education about preaching and listening skills such as this process, or discussion may move along more practical lines with things like sound system, structural distractions, placement of the pulpit, provisions for the hearing impaired, sermon outline printed in bulletin, "cry room" provided or not.*

Regardless of the helps or hindrances you may discover, it is important to remember that as Christ's Church you are "called, gathered, and enlightened" listeners. The Holy Spirit has promised to be at work in His Church.

But, as we have also seen, there is still the communication of words taking place. The sermon is a dialogical form of communication. Preaching involves both the pastor and the congregation. Just as a pastor can improve his preaching skills to become a better communicator, so members of a congregation can improve their listening skills to become better hearers of the Word.

This study ends with two means to help you participate in improving the communication of the Good News of Jesus through preaching. What follows are some tips for listening to a sermon. At the end of the lesson you will be given an opportunity to participate more directly in the preaching process.

### Tips for Listening to a Sermon

Listening is hard work. Listening to a sermon may be even harder work! But there are things you can do to make it easier and improve the communication of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

1. Remember this is God's Word, a unique message is being shared. This gives utmost importance to the task.
2. Pray for the Holy Spirit's help in understanding. We need assistance to overcome our sinful nature which keeps us from hearing the message.
3. Remember the sermon writing process of Lesson Five. Your pastor has worked hard. Work hard as well as you listen for things like goal, malady, means.
4. Prepare yourself for hearing! If possible read the text as you are waiting for worship to begin. What questions does it raise? How does it speak to you?
5. Look at the sermon theme in the bulletin. Compare it to the text.
6. Listen to the other readings for the day. Is there a common thread between them and the text?
7. Do any of the thoughts of the text seem to be reflected in the hymns?
8. When it is time for the actual sermon, avoid as many distractions as possible.
9. Listen carefully as the pastor begins. Often the pastor will tell you "where he is going" in the introduction.
10. Listen for understanding. Try to identify the structure or outline and the main ideas. Concentrate on these. Are there appropriate illustrations and explanations to help you understand main ideas?
11. Listen to be affected. Is there a purpose or goal stated? Relate this goal to your life and what needs to be changed according to God's Word.
12. Follow along in your Bible or from a bulletin insert if provided. Keep the Bible passage central.
13. Keep in mind how the text applied to the person(s) it was written to.



14. Allow the text to speak to you and to modern problems. Be ready to say and do the text in your life.
15. Use "feedback" during the sermon--smile, frown, nod, give a questioning look. This helps the pastor know that you are listening and understanding or not understanding.

After the sermon:

16. Was the Good News of Jesus Christ clear and meaningful?
17. Do you have a better understanding of the text and how it applies to you?
18. Was the thought process clear?
19. Were there questions you had that were not answered?
20. In what ways do you feel uplifted or motivated?

These are some suggestions for developing better listening skills. Perhaps you can think of others that have been helpful to you. Share them with the group.

You have now completed the first phase of a process to help improve the communication of the Gospel through preaching. There are other phases to come. These phases will involve assessing the needs of our congregation in regard to preaching, a study group to go over the sermon text with the pastor prior to the sermon, and an evaluation of sermons from time to time.

The success of this process will be based on members and the pastor being willing to participate. A committee is going to be formed shortly to help set up this process and participate in it. Would you be willing to serve on such a committee? If so fill out the form on the following page and leave it with your Bible study leader or pastor.

Also, a study group will eventually be formed to study

the sermon text with the pastor prior to the sermon. Would you be willing to participate in such a group? If so indicate it on the form.

Thanks for your cooperation!

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\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would be willing to participate on a committee to help organize the next phases of this process.

\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would be willing to participate in a pre-sermon study group.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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PASTOR AND PARISHIONER:

PARTNERS IN PREACHING



Student Guide

### Introduction

You're familiar with the scene. It's Sunday morning. The sermon has begun. You look around. The pews are not as full as they could be. There's Ralph, third pew from the back, closing his eyes two minutes into the sermon (He's not sleeping, of course, he just listens better that way!). Four of the choir members are reading their bulletins, the deacons are in the narthex discussing who that is with Mildred Robinson, and the three Blake children are systematically smashing Cheerios into the pew cushion!

The pastor? Well, he's pontificating prolifically on how the substitutionary atonement of our merciful and gracious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is sufficient propitiation for all iniquities incurred either through omission, commission or concupiscence and that such salvific regeneration is actualized, not by any innate initiative on the part of the unregenerate Old Adam, but only through the New Man which can comprehend this evangelical proclamation only through the power of God's ever present Spirit, that great Comforter who "turns men's hearts to destruction and saith, 'Returneth, ye children of men.'"

All the while he is saying this he is wondering in the back of his mind why Ralph has his eyes closed, what the deacons are talking about, why the bulletins are being read in the choir, and what in the world are those Blake kids up to now!

Sometimes it seems as if the message of the sermon is just not being communicated. People are not listening. The pastor is not easy to listen to.

This Bible study is the first step in a process that has as its goal to improve the communication of the Gospel through preaching. It is entitled, "Pastor and Parishioner: Partners in Preaching." "Yipes! Does this mean I'll have to preach on Sunday morning?" No, not at all. Being "Partners in Preaching" means something other than actually doing the preaching yourself.

It means both the pastor and his members getting to know one another better. It means helping the pastor understand what your needs and desires are when it comes to preaching. Being partners means learning how to listen, especially to sermons, and giving your pastor some occasional feedback to sermons so that he can better serve you. This partnership also means learning more about Biblical preaching and the message it has to communicate.

So, welcome "partners"! May God bless your study that you may grow in your knowledge and faith and that His Son might be glorified.

## LESSON ONE

### THE UNIQUE MESSAGE OF PREACHING

#### Introduction

Preaching is unique. In this lesson we begin to study this uniqueness by looking at the specific message of preaching. For preaching claims, first and foremost, to have a distinct subject matter.

All forms of public speaking have a message of one kind or another to share. However, the message of Christian preaching is different from all of them. In other forms of public speaking you encounter a human message--"buy my product," "improve your skills," "get fired up," "vote for me." In preaching you encounter a divine message. A German theologian, Paul Althaus, speaking of preaching wrote, "Here God speaks. God himself has said it and I repeat it. Whoever cannot boast like that about his sermon should leave preaching alone, for he surely denies and blasphemes God" (The Theology of Martin Luther, 12).

When the hymnals are closed after the sermon hymn and people shift and position themselves to get ready to listen to the sermon, when the pastor steps into the pulpit to get ready to preach the sermon, something special is about to happen. A message unlike any other is about to be proclaimed and heard. This lesson will focus on the

uniqueness of the message of preaching by asking two questions. "Whose message is it?" and "Who's the message about?"

#### Whose Message Is It?

The prophets were God's "preachers" in the Old Testament. They were called to share messages with God's people, the people of Israel, with people from other nations, with individuals from kings to common ordinary people. The messages varied, but the source was always the same. Let's look at Jeremiah as an example.

Look up Jeremiah 1:4-9. Identify the following:

The source of the message that came to Jeremiah (vs. 4).

The content of the message (vs. 5).

Jeremiah's reaction to the message (vs. 6).

God's response to Jeremiah's fears (vss. 7-9).

So, whose message was Jeremiah to proclaim?

To see how clearly whose message this is just glance ahead in Jeremiah to 1:11, 1:12, 1:13, 1:14, 2:1, 2:4, 2:5.

Things do not change in the New Testament. Let's look at some of God's "preachers" there. Study the following verses and answer the questions.

Acts 15:35-36 - What was it that Paul and Barnabas had preached on their first missionary journey?

Acts 8:25 - What was it that Peter and John proclaimed to the Samaritans?

What else is this called in the very same verse?

Romans 10:17 - What is the source of the message according to this verse?

2 Thessalonians 3:1 - Whose message does Paul pray will be spread rapidly and be honored?

So, whose message did the Apostles proclaim?

Simple enough! However, the source of the message is very important to remember. Where do many of the messages we hear come from, even those claiming to be Biblical (Galatians 1:11 and Matthew 15:9)?

#### Who's the Message About?

The answer to this question is just as important to understand and reaffirm as the one above. Quickly glance at the opening verses of each of the four Gospels and the Book of Acts. The message of the Word of the Lord is about \_\_\_\_\_!

Let's break this message about Jesus into two parts--who He is and what He came to do.

#### Who Jesus Is

All of the following verses deal with preaching. What was being preached? To find out complete the equation behind each verse.

Acts 9:20 - Jesus =

Acts 10:42 - Jesus =

Acts 18:5 - Jesus =

2 Corinthians 4:5 - Jesus =

Add to these verses John 1:1, 1 John 5:20, John 20:28, and what is your conclusion?



What Jesus Came to Do

What message is Paul referring to when he talks about preaching in these two verses?

1 Corinthians 1:18 -

1 Corinthians 1:23 -

What message about Jesus' activities is so vital in the following?

Acts 17:18 -

1 Corinthians 15:12-14, 20-22 -

There are over 75 direct references to these two events in the preaching of the Apostles!

Discuss the meaning and importance of these two events. You may want to use as a reference point Luther's explanation to the Second Article.

*I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.  
This is most certainly true.*

Can you think of any religions that destroy the Biblical message by what they teach about who Jesus is and what He came to do?

Why is it so important that our preaching focus on Jesus?

### Conclusion

Christian preaching is unique because of the specific content of its preaching. It proclaims God's message given through His Son Jesus Christ. It declares Jesus Christ as God's Son. It is centered on what Jesus did in His life, death and resurrection to restore the sin-broken relationship between God and humanity. There is no other message like it in the world!

But there is something else that makes the message of preaching unique. It carries with it a unique power. This will be the subject of Lesson Two.

## LESSON TWO

### THE POWER OF THE MESSAGE

#### Introduction

In the last lesson we discovered that Christian preaching was unique because of whose message it was (God's message in Christ) and because of who the message was about (Jesus Christ, who He is and what He has done). But there is more to the uniqueness of this message.

In other forms of public speaking, the effectiveness of the message depends upon the speaker. Whatever "tricks of the trade" and skills that person has must be used to drive the point home in order to bring about the desired effect in those listening. The salesperson depends upon a "sales pitch." The coach depends upon his or her ability to motivate. The lawyer depends upon speaking skills to persuade people and change their minds.

This reliance on the speakers skills is not the way it is with the message of preaching. Paul wrote, "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Also, consider Luther's words. "It is easy enough for someone to preach the word to me, but only God can put it into my heart. He must speak it in my heart or nothing at all will come of it" (The Theology of Martin Luther, 39). In this

lesson we will look at the power and role of God the Holy Spirit when it comes to the message of Christian preaching.

A Review of Luther's Explanation of the Third Article

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers, and will at the last day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

Remember some of those questions that followed this explanation in your catechism?

164. Why is it necessary that the Holy Ghost work this faith in you?

According to the Scriptures I am by nature spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God; therefore I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.

Look up some of the proof texts given for this.

1 Corinthians 2:14 -

Ephesians 2:1 -

1 Corinthians 12:3 -

165. What has the Holy Ghost done to bring you to Christ and thus to sanctify you?

The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, that is, He has invited me to partake of Christ's blessings, which are offered to me in the Gospel.

2 Thessalonians 2:14 -

2 Timothy 1:9 -

Besides the Small Catechism, our Lutheran Confessions summarize these same thoughts in the Formula of Concord.

Through the fall of our first parents man is so corrupted that in divine things, concerning our conversion and salvation, he is by nature blind and does not and cannot understand the Word of God when it is preached, but considers it foolishness; nor does he of himself approach God, but he is and remains an enemy of God until by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word which is preached and heard, purely out of grace and without any cooperation on his part, he is converted, becomes a believer, is regenerated and renewed (Book of Concord, 520-521).

The Spirit and the Message

We now look at some verses that deal directly with preaching the message as it relates to the power of God and His Holy Spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:17. Why is Paul saying he did not preach with words of "human wisdom"?

A few verses later in 1:21 whom does Paul give credit to for saving those who believed?

Through what did God do this, however?

What is "foolish" about preaching? (Be careful here if your pastor is present!)

In the next chapter whose power is Paul again talking about (2:4)?

Read Acts 16:14. Here is a very clear statement about the working of the Holy Spirit. What role does the message play in this situation?

Paul talks about his preaching not being with "wise and persuasive words." However, when we look at samples of Paul's preaching in the New Testament it seems like his words are very wise and persuasive. He always seems to find the right thing to say at the right time.

Knowing what you now know about the power of the message, discuss this question. In what sense can preaching be "wise and persuasive" and in what sense can it not?

How does Romans 10:17 show why the preacher's communication skills need to be "wise and persuasive"?

How do Hebrews 4:12 and Isaiah 55:10-11 speak of the Spirit's power in God's Word and that the words conveying God's message need to be wise and persuasive?

### Conclusion

**"I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel."**

We must conclude that the Holy Spirit is the sole power when it comes to opening hearts and bringing people to faith. We must also conclude that one of the ways the Holy Spirit does this is through the message of the Gospel as it is proclaimed by the pastor.

The power comes through the Word, and God has chosen to share that Word through the "vehicle" of words. Therefore, even though Christian preaching is unique in that it is a unique message that carries with it its own unique power, it is also similar to other forms of public speaking. Words have to be spoken. Words have to be heard. Words have to be understood. Communication must take place. Communication

involves not only the preacher but the listeners, the congregation.

We cannot improve the power of the Word of the Gospel. However, communication of that Word can be improved through increased preaching and listening skills. With this in mind we will begin in our next lesson to focus on ways to accomplish this.

## LESSON THREE

### JESUS PREACHING THE MESSAGE

#### Introduction

We have seen that Christian preaching is a unique form of verbal communication. It has a unique message to proclaim because it is God's message of Good News (Gospel) about Jesus Christ and all that He has accomplished for sinful humanity. It is also unique because the message of Jesus Christ, the message of the Gospel, carries with it its own power to call people "out of darkness into His marvelous light." The Holy Spirit working through the Word, as proclaimed by the preacher, has the power to turn people around and bring them to faith.

Nevertheless, preaching is still verbal communication. God has chosen to communicate the message of the Gospel through ordinary human words. Since preaching is communication that involves a speaker and listeners, it can be improved. In this lesson we begin to discover ways to do that.

We start with the preaching of Jesus in the Gospel according to Matthew. This study will not so much be a detailed analysis of the content of Jesus' preaching, but rather a study of the context of His preaching. In other words, to whom was Jesus speaking, what led up to His



speaking, what do His words imply about His knowledge of His hearers and their needs, and the way He communicated with them? Before looking at these questions, and dealing exclusively with Matthew, it would be well to remind ourselves of the importance Jesus placed on preaching.

Look briefly at Mark 1:38 and Luke 4:43. If you look at the context of these two verses you will discover that preaching was more important to Jesus than \_\_\_\_\_.

To get an idea of just how important preaching was to Jesus considering the following questions.

What was the very first thing Jesus did after He was tempted in the wilderness by Satan (Matthew 4:17)?

During the temptation itself, what importance does Jesus place on the Word of God (Matthew 4:4)?

What was an all-important aspect of the last thing Jesus commanded to His Apostles (Matthew 28:20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:45-47)?

Preaching the "Good News of the Kingdom" was of the utmost importance to Jesus. Now we are ready to study the context of His preaching and some of the skills Jesus used to communicate this "Good News" to His listeners.

#### Matthew 5-7

Now doubt Jesus' most famous sermon is the Sermon on the Mount. As Jesus begins this sermon, what is He responding to (5:1, also 4:23-25)?

In this sermon Jesus uses the phrase "You have heard that it was said" several times (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). What does this imply about Jesus' knowledge of His hearers?

How did His hearers perceive Jesus (7:28-29)?

Matthew 11

What was Jesus purpose for traveling through Galilee at this time (1)?

What prompted His words in 4-19 (2-3)?

What prompted His words in 21-30 (20)?

Matthew 12-13

In these two chapters Jesus speaks several times on different occasions. Below are verses in which Jesus is speaking. Search the verses before each section to discover the reason for His words.

12:3-8 -

12:11-13 -

12:25-37 -

12:39-45 -

13:11-23 -

13:37-43 -

### Matthew 18

This chapter contains two discourses of Jesus, 3-20 and 22-35. What directly precedes these words (18:1, 18:21)?

### Matthew 24-25

These chapters contain a long discourse by Jesus in regard to the end times. Once again, what got all of this started (24:1-3)?

### Discussion

By now it should be clear that Jesus just didn't walk around speaking words. He spoke words in response to people, their needs, their thoughts, their questions. Jesus knew His listeners. He was in dialogue with them. In fact, most of Jesus' words in the New Testament were direct responses to something His listeners did or said or asked. The people respected Him as an authority, someone who knew what He was taking about.

In light of this lesson discuss the following questions.

1. In what sense were Jesus' words dialogical?
2. Why was Jesus able to respond to people and their needs so well?
3. Can you think of some ways that a pastor can get to know his people and have a better idea of their needs?
4. Can you think of some ways that members of a congregation can communicate their thoughts, needs, questions to the pastor?

### Conclusion

Obviously the preaching of the Gospel did not end with Jesus. It was to be preached to the ends of the earth until the end of time. Jesus chose the Apostles to begin this task. In our effort to improve the communication of the Gospel through preaching, it would do us well to look at a sample of their preaching. That will be the task of our next lesson.

## LESSON FOUR

### THE APOSTLES PREACHING THE MESSAGE

#### Introduction

Jesus came to preach. He came to preach Good News in response to the needs of people. His greatest proclamation of that Good News, of course, was not just His Words, but His actions in suffering, dying, rising again, and ascending to the right hand of the Father.

This does not, however, mean an end to preaching the Good News nor the need for people to hear it. Jesus intended His apostles to carry on the preaching.

They were trained to do so ( Mark 3:14, Luke 9:2).

They were commanded to do so (Mark 16:15).

They would feel compelled to do so (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Their preaching of the message would have an effect (John 17:20).

We now take a look at some of the Apostolic preaching.

#### Peter - Acts 2:14-41

What incident prompted this sermon (1-13)?

Who is he addressing (14)?

What does Peter use as a starting point for his sermon (15)?

Where does he quote from (16-21, 25-28, 34)?

Who does he center on (22)?

What events in Jesus life does he speak of (22, 23, 24, 31-33)?

What conclusion does he come to about Jesus (36)?

What was it in the sermon that "crushed" the people who were listening (23, 36)?

To what does Peter call these people (38)?

What, then, would they receive (38)?

What is the response (41-42)?

Here is a quick review of the main points of this sermon.

1. Peter responds to a specific situation and uses it to preach the Gospel.
2. He knows whom he is speaking to: "Fellow Jews."
3. He, therefore, uses the Old Testament as a base of authority.
4. He gets the people to see their sin.
5. He proclaims the cross and the resurrection.
6. He calls them to repentance and baptism and, therefore, forgiveness.

Now compare this to another sermon by Peter. Look up Acts 10:34-48. Here Peter is speaking to the Roman Centurion Cornelius and the people gathered in his home. Previously in a vision God has made it clear to Peter that the message of salvation is for all, including the Gentiles.

As you read over Peter's sermon in verses 34-43 compare it to the points made in the last question. What element is missing? In other words, what does Peter leave out as he starts this sermon in v. 36?

Why would he do this?

Notice, however, all the other elements are there. Peter responds to a specific situation; he knows his hearers (Gentiles); he proclaims Jesus--His crucifixion and resurrection (39-40); and he uses the Law to show sin's judgment (42). Baptism and forgiveness then follow (43, 46).

Another Apostolic preacher would be Paul. Since we have had some practice with Peter's sermons we'll divide into small groups and compare two of Paul's sermons.

Look for similarities and differences. Why are they similar? Why are they different?

Acts 13:13-43

Acts 17:16-34

### Discussion

1. What are some elements that you think are important for pastors to include in sermons today?
2. What influence do you think the context of your particular congregation (rural, town, city, mission) should have on the pastor's sermon, his use of words, illustrations, examples?
3. Who is the pastor speaking to in your congregation? In other words, what kind of people, cultures, ethnic groups, professions, vocations, age groups make up your congregation?.

### Conclusion

In this lesson we have seen that the Apostles continued to preach about the Good News of Jesus Christ. Their preaching focused on Jesus and the significance of His life, death and resurrection. However, like Jesus, they did not just proclaim words. They communicated to people. The Apostles' preaching was dialogical. People's culture, needs, knowledge of Scripture and other variables were used by these preachers to help select and shape and organize the words they chose to communicate the life-giving message of Christ. Today's preacher has been called to do the same. This will be the subject of our next lesson.



## LESSON FIVE

### THE PASTOR PREACHING THE MESSAGE

#### Introduction

Preaching the Good News did not end with Jesus. It did not end with the Apostles. God, through a local congregation, continues to call men to shepherd His flock, and preaching continues to be a part of that calling. Paul's charge to young Pastor Timothy can still be applied to pastors today.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

In the last two lessons we have studied the preaching of Jesus and of Peter and Paul. Our purpose was to learn from them things important in the communication of the message of the Gospel. We saw the importance of the preacher knowing his subject matter, being a devoted student of Scripture and a servant of God Himself. The importance of the pastor knowing his congregation was also made clear. As much as possible the pastor is to be in touch with the needs of his people and apply the Word of God to those needs. He is to be dialogical. We learned that communication can be enhanced when the pastor knows the background and

lifestyles of the people he is preaching to so he can speak to them as he proclaims Christ.

The purpose of this lesson is two-fold. First, its goal is to show the process a pastor goes through in order to bring the Word of God into the lives of his congregation. In this regard we will see how the pastor attempts to apply some of the things we learned from the preaching of Jesus and the Apostles.

A second goal is to begin to help the members of the congregation to be better listeners. This subject of the congregation's responsibility in preaching will be taken up in more detail in Lesson Six. At this point, however, it is hoped that understanding the process that goes into writing a sermon will be useful for members as they listen to this unique form of public speaking.

#### A Sermon Study for Matthew 21:28-32 - Pentecost 19A

##### Establish the Text

From time to time you have undoubtedly noticed differences in Bible translations. One of the reasons these difference occur is because of variations in the Greek text from which translations come. The first thing a pastor must do is look at the Greek and see if any of these "textual variants" exist.

There is a textual variant in this text that is so well attested to that it is used in some translations. This variant has the son who said "I will" first in the story and the son who said "I will not" second. The NAS, Williams, Phillips and NEB go with the latter. KJV, NKJ, RSV, Beck and NIV have the former. By comparing these differences with the original, the pastor can also check the accuracy of the translation which is ordinarily used in the worship service.

Textual evidence seems to lean toward the "I will not" being first. Plus, this is the most difficult translation since

the logical order would have it the other way around.

#### Propers of the Day

The "Propers" are those parts of the worship service listed below that change from Sunday to Sunday. These are chosen as a unit to help develop the theme of the day. Most churches follow a three-year series where the Propers repeat every three years. For example, this study is for the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Series A. Next year we will be in series B, the following year series C and then back to A. In this way a large portion of Scripture and all major Church doctrines can be covered. The Propers for each Sunday can be found in the front of the hymnal. Many churches use bulletin inserts that contain all the Propers.

Old Testament - Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 - Here we see the LORD's call to Israel to repent and live. He calls them to get a "new heart and a new spirit." If a righteous man turns from his righteousness he will die. If a wicked man turns from his wickedness he will live. This certainly reminds us of the two sons in our text.

Epistle - Philippians 2:1-11 - Here Paul asks the Philippians to have the attitude of Christ. It is the attitude of humility. Part of humility is the attitude of repentance that is talked about in our text.

Gospel - text

Introit - God's name is to be praised for He will vindicate His people and have compassion on them.

Collect - The Collect is a prayer to please God in both will and deed through the help of His grace. He is the strength of all who trust in Him. The "willing" and "doing" again remind us of the sons of our text.

#### Context

It is Monday of Holy Week. Jesus has returned to Jerusalem after spending the night in Bethany. As He is teaching in the Temple Courts, His authority is questioned by the chief priests and elders. They are thwarted by Jesus' question about where John's authority came from. Jesus refuses to tell the source of His authority and then moves directly into our text where He makes use of John's ministry to explain the parable.

After He finishes this parable and the parable of the landowner and the vineyard (33-44), we learn that those listening--chief priests and Pharisees--knew very well that Jesus was directing these parables at them. They perceived clearly Jesus' condemnation of their unbelief.

Text

28 - Whom is Jesus addressing in this text (see 23, 45)?

"What do you think" gets their attention in typical Rabbinic style by asking them to listen and give an opinion.

"Vineyard"--any knowledgeable Jew would make the connection between the vineyard and the nation of Israel. The vineyard was often used as an analogy to God's chosen nation. Look at Isaiah 5:1-7 as an example.

Many of Jesus' parables had to do with vineyards (20:1-16, 21:33-42, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9-19).

The son is not asked to work in the vineyard. He is told. The Greek word hupage is imperative. Sons are expected to work in the vineyard.

29 - The first son refuses to work in the vineyard. But later he "changed his mind" (metamelaitheis) and went. metamelaitheis is the same word translated "repent" in the NIV in verse 32. The meaning is the same. metamelaitheis literally means to change one's mind or to turn around and go another direction. That is what repentance is all about.

30 - The second son is given the same command. His response is outwardly very positive and even addresses his father with respect, "I will, sir," but he never went.

31 - Now Jesus asks for the opinion of those chief priests and elders who were listening. The question was almost an insult since the answer was so easy. The son who changed his mind is the one who did his father's will. Now comes the real insult of the text! Jesus explains His point. The "tax collectors and prostitutes," a phrase representing all kinds of sinners, were the kind of folks that were considered unworthy of even hearing about God. In the eyes of the religious leaders, they were most certainly damned and had no chance of salvation. But Jesus turns the tables and says these known sinners will enter God's Kingdom ahead of the religious leaders who thought they were so good!

32 - Now Jesus explains why the tables will be turned. In doing so He refers back to John the Baptist (24-26). John's purpose was to show the "way of righteousness." That "way" was not being "religious" and being obedient. It was the way of repentance. Like the first son, these sinners had recognized their sin and "changed their minds," repented. Even after seeing that way demonstrated again and again as John baptized sinners in the Jordan, the religious leaders did not understand. They believed in their own righteousness and therefore saw no need of repentance.

Gospel Parallels - This parable occurs only in Matthew.

Other Passages

Luke 7:29-30

29 (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John.

30 But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

Matthew 3:1-3

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea

2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

Luke 3:12-13

12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

13 "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

Luke 7:36-39

36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,

38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is--that she is a sinner."

Luke 18:11-14

11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector.

12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

2 Peter 2:21

21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.

### Thought Progression

Jesus tells the parable of the two sons to show the value of repentance over pretense.

He applies the parable to the Jewish religious leaders showing them the consequences of their unbelief.

Central Thought The way of righteousness (being good) is repentance over one's unrighteousness (not being good) and trusting in the righteous One.

Everything the pastor has done up to this point has led him to this Central Thought. He has arrived at the meaning of the text. Now he must focus upon the task of communicating this message to his particular congregation through the sermon. The pastor must blend his knowledge of the subject matter with his knowledge of the hearers to begin this process. One way of accomplishing this is through establishing a Goal for the sermon, a Malady the text addresses, and the Means offered in the text to overcome the malady.

Goal To increase our joy of knowing that goodness (righteousness) is not the result of being good but of being forgiven.

Malady We often either despair because of our lack of goodness or we boast in our goodness.

Means Jesus is the good Son who came to do the Father's will and share His goodness with us.

"Hooks" The movie "The Good Son." Michael Jordan. Bad Crops.

### Theme

"How to Have Goodness without Being Good"  
 "Good People Finish Last"  
 "Goodness without Being Good"  
 "The Good Son"

### Outline

Introduction - Compare the movie, "The Good Son," with our text.

Transition - "Who is the good son in our text?"

- I. The second son is not the good son.
  - A. He was respectful to his father.
  - B. He is compared to the religious leaders of the day.
  - C. He sounded good and looked good, but he refused to work in the vineyard. He really wasn't good.
  - D. He is like people we know today, including ourselves. We, too, need repentance.
  
- II. The first son is not the good son.
  - A. He was disrespectful to his father.
  - B. He is compared to "tax collectors and prostitutes."
  - C. He eventually went to work in the vineyard, but that in itself didn't make him good.
  - D. He is like people we know today, including ourselves. We, too, need repentance.
  
- III. The Son of God is the good Son!
  - A. He came to do His Father's will in His life, death and resurrection.
  - B. He came to save the "not good."
    - 1. Like the religious leaders (But they would not admit to their need).
    - 2. Like "tax collectors and prostitutes."
    - 3. Like us.
  - C. He really was good and shares with us His goodness.
  - D. How wonderful to know someone like that!

This is a sample of what a pastor may go through as he is preparing to share with his people the Word of God. But remember, communication of a sermon involves more than the pastor. The congregation must also be involved. That is the subject of our final lesson.

## LESSON SIX

### THE PARISHIONERS LISTENING TO THE MESSAGE

#### Introduction

We have been talking about the pastor and preaching the message in the last lessons. But consider the following quote from The Inward Ear by William Roen:

Hearing the sermon is just as important and holy a business as preaching it. Without listening, speaking is void. Both hearing and the speaking of God's Word are necessary, and both are accompanied by the promise of the Holy Spirit who "calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth" (Roen 1989, x).

Scripture not only commands and promises to bless preaching; it commands and promises to bless listening.

#### Hearing the Message

The command "Hear the Word of the Lord" occurs many times in the Old Testament. Look up some or all of the following verses just to get a feel of who (and even what!) was supposed to "hear."

Isaiah 1:10 -	Ezekiel 16:35 -
Jeremiah 2:4 -	Ezekiel 20:47 -
Jeremiah 7:2 -	Ezekiel 34:7 -
Jeremiah 9:20 -	Ezekiel 36:1 -
Jeremiah 19:3 -	Ezekiel 37:4 -
Jeremiah 22:29 -	Hosea 4:1 -

Evidently "Hearing the word of the LORD" was extremely important!

Look up Romans 10:14-17 and discuss why hearing the Word of the Lord is so important.



What else is associated with hearing the Word of the Lord that makes it important (Luke 11:28, Revelation 1:3)?

Sometimes, however, things can get in the way of our hearing. God says in Isaiah 42:20, "You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing." (Obviously he is not referring to your congregation!)

According to the following verses, what are some things that can get in the way of our hearing?

Matthew 13:15 -

Mark 4:15 -

Mark 8:17-21 -

2 Timothy 4:3 -

Can you think of other things that get in the way of hearing the message? Think particularly about things that get in the way on Sunday morning as you are listening (trying to?) to the sermon.

Although there is much that gets in the way of our hearing, we should not give up. We are not alone in this process.

What assurance are we given in John 8:47?

What does 1 Corinthians 2:6-15 say about hearing the word of the Lord that is comforting?

Remember how we have been saying that Christian preaching is very special? It is a unique message with its own unique power. This lesson is leading us to something else that can only be said about preaching. Preaching is shared in and heard by a unique community, the Church.

Look up Ephesians 2:19-22 and 1 Peter 2:5 and discuss some of the things that are unique about the community in which the Word of the Lord is shared.

How does the church help or hinder your hearing of the sermon?

Regardless of the helps or hindrances you may discover, it is important to remember that as Christ's Church you are "called, gathered, and enlightened" listeners. The Holy Spirit has promised to be at work in His Church.

But, as we have also seen, there is still the communication of words taking place. The sermon is a dialogical form of communication. Preaching involves both the pastor and the congregation. Just as a pastor can improve his preaching skills to become a better communicator, so members of a congregation can improve their listening skills to become better hearers of the Word.

This study ends with two means to help you participate in improving the communication of the Good News of Jesus through preaching: tips for listening to a sermon, and an opportunity to participate more directly in the preaching process.

#### Tips for Listening to a Sermon

Listening is hard work. Listening to a sermon may be even harder work! But there are things you can do to make it easier and improve the communication of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

1. Remember this is God's Word, a unique message is being shared. This gives utmost importance to the task.
2. Pray for the Holy Spirit's help in understanding. We need assistance to overcome our sinful nature which keeps

us from hearing the message.

3. Remember the sermon writing process of Lesson Five. Your pastor has worked hard. You work hard as well and listen for things like goal, malady and means.
4. Prepare yourself for hearing! If possible read the text as you are waiting for worship to begin. What questions does it raise? How does it speak to you?
5. Look at the sermon theme in the bulletin. Compare it to the text.
6. Listen to the other readings for the day. Is there a common thread between them and the text?
7. Do any of the thoughts of the text seem to be reflected in the hymns?
8. When it is time for the actual sermon, avoid as many distractions as possible.
9. Listen carefully as the pastor begins. Often the pastor will tell you "where he is going" in the introduction.
10. Listen for understanding. Try to identify the structure or outline and the main ideas. Concentrate on these. Are there appropriate illustrations and explanations to help you understand main ideas?
11. Listen to be affected. Is there a purpose or goal stated? Relate this goal to your life and what needs to be changed according to God's Word.
12. Follow along in your Bible or from a bulletin insert if provided. Keep the Bible passage central.
13. Keep in mind how the text applied to the person(s) it was written to.
14. Allow the text to speak to you and to modern problems. Be ready to say and do the text in your life.
15. Use "feedback" during the sermon--smile, frown, nod, give a questioning look. This helps the pastor know that you are listening and understanding or not understanding.

After the sermon:

16. Was the Good News of Jesus Christ clear and meaningful?

17. Do you have a better understanding of the text and how it applies to you?
18. Was the thought process clear?
19. Were there questions you had that were not answered?
20. In what ways do you feel uplifted or motivated?

These are some suggestions for developing better listening skills. Perhaps you can think of others that have been helpful to you. Share them with the group.

You have now completed the first phase of a process to help improve the communication of the Gospel through preaching. There are other phases to come. These phases will involve assessing the needs of our congregation in regard to preaching, a study group to go over the sermon text with the pastor prior to the sermon, and an evaluation of sermons from time to time.

The success of this process will be based on members and the pastor being willing to participate. A committee is going to be formed shortly to help set up this process and participate in it. Would you be willing to serve on such a committee? If so fill out the form on the bottom of this page and leave it with your Bible study leader or pastor.

Also, a study group will eventually be formed to study the sermon text with the pastor prior to the sermon. Would you be willing to participate in such a group? If so indicate it on the form on the following page.

Thanks for your cooperation!

---

\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would be willing to participate on a committee to help organize the next phases of this process.

\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would be willing to participate in a pre-sermon study group.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Needs Assessment Stage

"The minister may not be so preoccupied with the content of the message or the delivery that he is oblivious to the needs of the listeners."<sup>56</sup> The pastor knowing his congregation and their needs was given high priority by the pilot committee working on this project. In the preceding Bible Study it was shown how Jesus and the Apostles responded to people and their needs. If those needs were not addressed directly, at least they became a starting point for a message that lifted the hearers to a higher plain where they could see that even greater needs have been satisfied through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To be truly dialogical this process must not only consider what the preacher perceives the needs of his people to be, it must ask the people what they perceive their needs to be.

This stage in the process will also include preparation for the final stage of evaluation. A good evaluation must include not only what the preacher thinks should be evaluated but also what the people think should be evaluated. In other words, before asking people to evaluate if a sermon was good, they must be asked what they think makes a good sermon.

The purpose of this stage of the process, then, will be two-fold. It will seek to assess people's ideas of what their needs are in terms of preaching, and it will seek their

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<sup>56</sup>Howe, 6.

response as to what should be some criteria by which to evaluate a sermon.

Before proceeding it is important to note that underlying this entire stage is the presupposition that people may not be aware of their greatest needs. The purpose of a needs assessment survey is not to find out what people want to hear so that the preacher can then, as Paul put it, "tickle" their ears. Rather, the purpose is to assess people's ideas of their needs and what is going on in their lives so that the preacher can proclaim what they need to hear. The assessment is a tool whereby the people can express their thoughts and concerns to the pastor. It is an instrument the pastor can use to help him address those thoughts and concerns with the message of the Gospel or use them as a starting point to address even greater concerns.

Based on the forms received following the Bible study, a committee can be formed to help with the needs assessment survey and to help work through the rest of the process. This will give a core of people who have now had some grounding in the preaching process and are already familiar with what is going to take place. If the volunteers from the Bible study do not represent a sufficient cross section, those who are on the committee may select others.

The following is a suggested form for needs assessment. It is recommended that this form be handed out and filled out following a regular Sunday morning worship service. This way

people will be in a more appropriate mood and setting for what they are being asked. It will also assure a much better response than if forms are sent home. Take the time to explain the form and its purpose. If desired, forms could be mailed to those not in attendance.



**NEEDS ASSESSMENT FORM**

In an effort to involve the congregation more in the preaching process so that both preaching and listening skills can be improved, as well as the communication of the Gospel, please complete the following:

1. What are some basic needs, problems or issues you would like to hear addressed from the pulpit?

2. Place an X on the line to show what is more important to you in a sermon: Biblical truths applied to a particular problem (e.g., marriage) or a Biblical truth applied to life in general (e.g., love your neighbor).

Particular problem\_\_\_\_\_Life in General

3. Place an X on the line to show what you think is a good balance between preaching on one of the readings for the day and preaching on specific topics (e.g., resisting temptation).

Readings\_\_\_\_\_Topics

4. Please complete this statement: "A sermon is most enjoyable when . . .

5. Please complete this statement: "A sermon is least enjoyable when . . .

6. In addition to #4 and #5 above, what other things make a good sermon?

## Immediate Analysis

### Pre-sermon Study Group

Much dialog has already taken place in this process during the "prior analysis." Now it is time for "immediate analysis." This will involve dialogue between the pastor and congregational members on the specific text for the upcoming Sunday. Since names have already been solicited for this group during the Bible study, a core group should be readily available.

Selecting a time for this study will vary considerably depending upon local practices and schedules. The committee's input would be helpful here. At the author's church we have used Wednesday mornings for this study. This allows the pastor time to have first studied the text himself. We hold two Bible studies. One is a breakfast study at 6:30 A.M. Coffee and rolls are served and the setting is very informal. This allows many people to come prior to going to work or school. The other study is at 9:30 A.M. This group is usually made up of retired people, people who do not work outside the home, and those who work in the evening. We have found this arrangement provides a relatively good cross-section of the congregation.

Once the time has been set, promote the class within the congregation. Contact personally all those who have previously expressed an interest. At the same time, invite all other members through newsletter articles, bulletin

announcements, or other written communications. Such announcements are a good time to review the entire process and keep it before the congregation.

If possible advertise the text and subject matter the week before or offer a monthly schedule in your newsletter or in the bulletin. Such advertising may draw people with a special interest or special knowledge of a particular subject. Their input would only increase the value of the study group.

The format for the class itself should be simple and informal. It is suggested that the pastor have the text thoroughly studied in advance. He could explain the setting and context and give a brief synopsis of the text. However, his comments should be limited. He should not present a complete sermon study with central thought and outline. This would tend to damper discussion. The pastor could have in mind some leading questions, especially in regard to the application of the text. From then on his posture should be one of listening and dialoguing with the members of the study.

As a personal note, having been doing this now for several years, I can attest to its helpfulness both for myself in gaining insights and ideas, and for the participants in facilitating their listening on Sunday morning. I will sometimes quote something that was discussed at the study or share an illustration that came from the

study group. Members have commented on how much more they seem to gain from the sermon after attending such a study.

### Concurrent Analysis

#### Sermon Evaluation Forms

This stage of the process will help focus upon improving organization of materials and delivery of the sermon. These were areas which have not been specifically addressed up to this point in the process, but which the pilot committee felt important and could be improved. Questions on the evaluation form were designed to try and address these areas. However, insights on the pastor's knowledge of the congregation and on listening skills should also flow from such an evaluation process. When the process itself is being used within a congregation, answers from questions 4-6 on the Needs Assessment Form also need to be considered in formulating the evaluation form. The form that follows can certainly be adapted for each particular setting.

**SERMON EVALUATION FORM**  
 Sunday, \_\_\_\_\_, 199\_

The purpose of this form is to (1) help improve the pastor's communication of the unique message of the Gospel God has given to his Church, and (2) help improve the listening to that unique message. Please complete this form after the sermon.

1. Before the sermon, did you feel you understood the text for the sermon?  
 \_\_\_Yes, very much \_\_\_Yes, somewhat \_\_\_No, not much at all
2. Was the pastor prepared to preach today's sermon?  
 \_\_\_Yes, very much \_\_\_Yes, somewhat \_\_\_No, not much at all
3. Were YOU prepared to listen to today's sermon?  
 \_\_\_Yes, very much \_\_\_Yes, somewhat \_\_\_No, not much at all
4. Was the sermon clear and easy to follow?  
 \_\_\_Yes, very easy \_\_\_Yes, somewhat \_\_\_No, not much at all
5. Was the pastor easy to listen to?  
 \_\_\_Yes, very easy \_\_\_Yes, somewhat \_\_\_No, not much at all
6. How often did your mind wander during the sermon?  
 \_\_\_Never \_\_\_Seldom, a few times \_\_\_Often, never into it
7. Did the sermon help YOU understand the text better?  
 \_\_\_Yes, much better \_\_\_Yes, somewhat \_\_\_No, not much
8. When is a sermon most meaningful to YOU? (Please rank order: 1,2,3)  
 \_\_\_When the text is meaningful \_\_\_When I listened carefully  
 \_\_\_When the pastor preached well
9. If a friend asks you what this sermon was about, what would you say?  
 \_\_\_ I can't remember \_\_\_It had something to do with \_\_\_\_\_

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It was about \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Other comments:

## Post Analysis

Committee Evaluation and Sharing with the Pastor

After the congregation has evaluated a sermon on a particular Sunday, the committee is to meet and go over the evaluation forms. This meeting should take place on Sunday, after church if possible, or as close to the actual delivery of the sermon as possible. It is recommended that the pastor not be present for this meeting. The results should first be tabulated numerically and then discussed. If there are apparent weaknesses in the sermon or its delivery, constructive suggestions to give to the pastor should be discussed. Of course, strengths and positive comments should also be shared. The committee should keep in mind those areas that this process was particularly designed to improve: knowing the congregation, organization of materials, listening skills and delivery.

Finally, the committee should share the results with the pastor. Again, this should happen as soon as possible. Perhaps the committee could meet over lunch following the worship service and then have the pastor come over to the church after lunch. The tabulated results of the evaluation forms should be shared and discussed, weaknesses and strengths discussed, and ways of improving weaknesses talked over. Prior to this the pastor may want to offer his own self-evaluation for comparison. He may have comments and observations about the congregation in terms of how well they

listened, distractions that he noticed and the like. In any case, the meeting ought to be friendly and positive. Keep in mind the bottom line of the whole process, that is, that the communication of the unique message of the Gospel be improved.

## CHAPTER 3

### EVALUATION OF THE CONGREGATIONAL PROCESS

#### Introduction

This chapter will present the results of the process as it was conducted at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Garner, IA. Each stage of the process--Prior Analysis, Immediate Analysis, Concurrent Analysis, Post Analysis--will be presented in turn. Raw data will be given in those stages where appropriate. Evaluation and comments will then be offered.

The goal of the process, improving the communication of the Gospel through preaching, was the central focus as the evaluations were made. The specific communication skills decided on by the pilot committee that could be addressed by this process were also used as a guide in evaluation. These were: knowing the congregation, organization of materials, listening skills, and delivery.

#### Prior Analysis

##### Education Stage

Prior Analysis consisted of two stages: education and needs assessment. We consider first the education stage.

The education phase of this process consisted of the six-week Bible study given in Chapter Two. The Bible Study was conducted on Sunday mornings during the regular Adult



Bible Study hour. Average attendance for the six weeks was 42. The class represented a good cross-section of the congregation. The only exception were high school youth who have their own Bible study during the same time period. The class was taught by the pastor. Evaluation of the study was informal and consisted of questions and discussion during and following each lesson.

The response to the Bible study was very positive. This was enhanced, I believe, by the fact that the class seemed pleased to be the pilot group for the study and that they were helping their pastor with his Doctor of Ministry Project. Their willingness to make constructive comments, not only about the content of the study itself, but also about the format and style of the study, was overwhelming.

It became apparent quite early in the study that the prior assumption that much of the material in the first four lessons was "review" and "easy," especially for veteran Bible students, was erroneous. General consensus was that there was too much given in too little time. The members' interest in what the Bible had to say about preaching was beyond expectation. They genuinely wanted more time and more detail, especially in Lessons Three and Four dealing with the preaching of Jesus and the Apostles.

As anticipated, getting class members to think about the context of a particular set of verses rather than the content of the verses themselves was a challenge. It was

rewarding, however, to watch the people "catch on" and see them grow in their ability for this kind of study.

The most insightful lesson for the group overall appeared to be Lesson Two dealing with the unique power of the message. At the same time this was somewhat of a surprise for the instructor. It was not that the class members were unaware of the power of God's Word. On the contrary, connecting the power of the Word with the Sacraments and the written Word was something that almost went without saying.

The insight seemed to be in connecting the power of the Word with the verbal message of preaching. Again, it was not that the people were ignorant of this or that it did not make sense. They just had not thought about it in the same way they did the written Word or the Sacraments. The distinction between what takes place through the communication of the Gospel in preaching and what takes place in other forms of verbal communication was helpful for them in understanding the uniqueness of Christian preaching.

It was consistent with the pilot committee that the lesson that generated the most interest was Lesson 5 on the pastor preaching the message. The people found the process a pastor goes through in preparation for the sermon extremely interesting in terms of the detail involved and the amount of time required. It didn't work well to hurry through that process just to give them an idea of what it was like. They

were interested in detail, how things were arrived at and adding their own thoughts and conclusions. An entire lesson period could easily be devoted to this process alone. In terms of aiding in listening to a sermon, class members felt it would be very helpful.

Another place it was obvious that more time was needed was for the discussion questions. Questions asking for class members' opinions on various items such as distractions in the church or what a pastor could do to get to know his people better were of particular interest. People had many and, most importantly, very valid and useful opinions. Members seemed pleased to be asked for such opinions and happy to have a chance to share them. Giving more time for this important input and being more systematic about recording their thoughts would help improve the entire process.

Overall the Bible Study went very well and was well received. It gave a good base as to why this form of verbal communication was unique. The movement from Jesus to the Apostles, to the pastor, to the people listening, helped connect the people with the true source and purpose of preaching. The discussion and opinion questions were invaluable for the pastor in getting to know his people better.

One major shortcoming was a lack of a formal written evaluation at the end of the study. With the input received

during the study, it was apparent people were willing to express themselves in terms of critique. Perhaps a written format would have provided even more insight from the members of the class and helped in the evaluation of the process as a whole.

#### Needs Assessment Stage

This stage was accomplished by using the Needs Assessment Form included in the last chapter. The form was handed out on Sunday morning following the worship service, and people were encouraged to fill it out before they left.

The response was gratifying in two respects. First, the total number of responses equaled about 80% of those given the forms. This gives a good representative mix and far exceeds the percentage we have received back from surveys given for other reasons. Second, the quality of the answers was beyond expectation. It was evident that many people took time and put some good thought into their responses. It was as if they had been waiting to be asked! A good portion of the people used the back of the form for additional comments.

The negative side to the response is trying to tabulate and evaluate such a large number and wide variety of answers in a meaningful way! An attempt has been made below to do that. The survey questions will be looked at one at a time. The raw data will be presented, followed by comments.

1. **What are some basic needs, problems or issues you would like to hear addressed from the pulpit?**

The wide variety of individual answers were grouped as best they could be into various topics. Once these were listed there seemed to be a natural division between those that dealt with "Doctrinal" issues and those that dealt with "Practical" issues. Below is a listing of the topics under each major heading. The number following the topic represents the number of times the topic was mentioned.

Doctrinal Issues

The Word of God - 2  
 Spiritual gifts - 2  
 Excommunication - 2  
 Angels - 1  
 Law\Gospel - 1  
 Biblical giving - 1  
 Relation to other  
     church bodies - 1

Practical Issues

Marriage and family - 14  
 Living as a Christian in  
     a non-Christian world - 11  
 Life issues - 10  
 Current events - 7  
 The world's morals - 5  
 Witness to others - 1  
 Daily devotions - 1  
 Disease\suffering - 1  
 Gambling - 1

It is clear that a majority of the respondents (73%) were thinking about practical needs, problems and issues. In this category "marriage and family," "living as a Christian in a non-Christian world," and "life issues" were important to a fairly large number of people. All the responses in the "Practical" category seem to have one thing in common. They all, in one way or another, relate to the individual and their relationship to the environment around them, whether that be family or things in the world in general. This is going to prove consistent with the majority of responses in the following questions as well. Further comment will be

reserved until these are considered.

2. Place an X on the line to show what is more important to you in a sermon: Biblical truths applied to a particular problem (e.g., marriage) or a Biblical truth applied to life in general (e.g., love your neighbor).

Particular Problem \_\_\_\_\_ Life in General

In this question and in question 3, all responses were marked on the line. Five areas along the line were then selected and the number of responses in each area counted. The areas were: those toward the middle of the line, those leaning toward the "Particular Problem" side, those solidly on the "Particular Problem" side, those leaning toward the "Life in General" side, and those solidly on the "Life in General" side. The results are as follows in terms of percentage of those responding.

	<u>Solid</u>	<u>Leaning</u>	<u>Middle</u>
Particular Problem	33%	28%	
Life in General	13%	16%	10%

Adding the "leaning" to the "solid," the majority (61%) came down on the side of a particular problem. Also, more people were willing to indicate a solid desire in this category than any other.

3. Place an X on the line to show what you think is a good balance between preaching on one of the readings for the day and preaching on specific topics (e.g., resisting temptation).

Readings \_\_\_\_\_ Topics

Using the same criteria above the results are as follows:

	<u>Solid</u>	<u>Leaning</u>	<u>Middle</u>
Readings	8%	14%	
Topics	25%	34%	19%

Again combining the "leaning" and the "solid" the majority (59%) were on the topic end of the scale.

4. Please complete this statement: "A sermon is most enjoyable when . . ."

In tabulating the results for questions 4-6, the responses were categorized under the four communication skills the pilot committee felt this process could address. In doing this it will help get a picture of the importance the congregation places on these particular categories. Under each of the categories is listed the specific response and the times that response, or one similar, occurred.

Knowing the Congregation

Relates to my life - 34  
Involves issues of today - 5  
(Total = 39)

Organization

Contains clear Gospel - 4  
Short and to the point - 3  
Has varied format - 3  
Based on God's Word - 2  
(Total = 12)

Listening

I hear the message  
of forgiveness - 2  
I open my heart  
to hear - 1  
(Total = 3)

Delivery

Good presentation - 11  
Contains humor - 9  
Understandable - 7  
Pastor is sincere - 5  
Good illustrations - 3  
Conversational - 1  
(Total = 37)

5. Please complete this statement: "A sermon is least enjoyable when . . .

Knowing the Congregation

Does not relate to my life - 10  
(Total = 10)

Organization

Too long - 10  
Too much Law - 7  
All about Biblical facts - 3  
Gets off the subject - 3  
Makes no sense - 2  
Deals with finances - 2  
Dwells on sin - 1  
Negative approach - 1  
(Total = 29)

Listening

Distractions around - 2  
Can't be heard - 1  
When I'm sleepy - 1  
(Total = 4)

Delivery

Read with no feeling - 6  
Cannot understand - 5  
Monotone voice - 4  
Repetitive - 4  
Dull - 1  
Pastor is angry - 1  
(Total = 21)

6. In addition to #4 and #5 above, what other things make a good sermon?

Knowing the Congregation

Relates to my life - 5  
Challenges the congregation - 1  
Offers specific helps - 1  
(Total = 7)

Organization

Not too long - 5  
Lots of Gospel - 4  
Biblical content - 2  
Simple format - 2  
Organized well - 1  
Pastor prepared - 1  
Balance of Law\Gospel - 1  
(Total = 16)

Listening

Can be heard - 1  
Church is warm - 1  
(Total = 2)

Delivery

Enthusiastic delivery - 10  
Good illustrations - 4  
Good voice - 3  
Humor - 3  
Caring, honest delivery - 2  
Action (gestures) - 1  
Variety of styles - 1  
(Total = 24)



Other

When music of service relates - 2  
 Guest preachers - 1  
 When it increases our faith - 1  
 When you feel God has spoken - 1  
 It gives you spiritual insight - 1  
 (Total = 6)

Totaling the responses of the categories for all questions we have the following results.

Knowing the congregation - 56  
 Organization of materials - 57  
 Listening - 9  
 Delivery - 82  
 (Total - 204)

One point seems quite consistent in this survey, the people of St. Paul want to hear things in sermons that relate to their personal lives. They want to hear about marriage and family, about forgiveness, about issues that they must live with and deal with on a daily basis. Perhaps the one category under question 1 sums it all up. People want to hear about things that help them "live as Christians in a non-Christian world."

It would seem that this same desire is what moved the majority of people to be inclined toward wanting a particular problem addressed (question 2) and choosing a sermon on a particular topic rather than the readings (question 3). Most members appear to want specific issues of faith dealt with rather than the generalities of faith.

Relating the sermon to the lives of members was by far

the number one response in questions 4 and 6 dealing with what makes a good sermon. Add to these the responses to question 5 that a sermon is least enjoyable when it does not relate to my life and the number of responses becomes even more telling.

The importance of relating sermons to the lives of the members relates directly to the importance of the pastor knowing his people. This was a key element that the pilot committee thought this process should address. The discussion questions from Lessons 3 and 4 in the Bible Study and the results of this survey should send a clear message to the pastor about knowing his people and communicating the Gospel so that it relates to their lives. This doesn't mean the pastor should abandon preaching on the readings and engage in full-time topical preaching. However, when preaching on the readings, or any text, care must be taken to relate the message to his people.

Another striking result of this survey is the significance the members place on delivery of the sermon. A total of 82 responses (40%) make comments about delivery in one way or another. Good, sincere, enthusiastic delivery was important. This reflects the pilot committee's thoughts that delivery does not need to be flamboyant and highly polished as much as engaging and easy to listen to. These results, as well, have the potential to improve the communication of the Gospel if the pastor takes them to heart and is diligent in

his efforts to improve his delivery.

There was equal amount of importance placed on organization of materials. The number of responses that fit under this category was surprising. The people have an ear for how sermons are (or are not) organized. An abundance of words is not as important as words that are simple, clear, easy to follow and to the point. Perhaps one particular comment summarizes the majority. "Sermons should be as easy to follow and understand as are the children's sermons." The communication of the Gospel can be improved when the pastor puts time into good organization of his sermon.

The dearth of responses under the category of listening perhaps reveals the fact that people are much less aware of their responsibility in the communication process than they are the pastor's. These results reflect a need for education in this area. A comment made by one of the members following the completion of the Bible Study is worthy of consideration here. It was suggested that special classes be held which occasionally focus on Lesson 6 of the Bible study. A "How to Listen to Sermons" class might do much to improve the communication of the Gospel.

Overall, the Needs Assessment Survey proved very valuable as part of this process. It has shown that the process can reveal people's needs and expectations when it comes to preaching. The enthusiastic and voluminous response shows that people want to share these things. If

taken seriously and applied diligently to the various communication skills addressed, this survey can help improve the communication of the Gospel through preaching.

#### Immediate Analysis

The "Immediate Analysis" stage consisted of a pre-sermon study group. Provisions were made at the end of the Bible study for formation of such a group. At St. Paul, where the process was initially run, a study group like this was already in existence. This group meets informally every Wednesday morning at 6:30. What follows is a synopsis of what took place during the study of the text used for the sermon that would be evaluated the following Sunday. After the synopsis, brief comments will be made evaluating this portion of the process.

The text covered 1 John 3:11-20. This reading was not part of the pericopes, but was chosen for our observance of Life Sunday on February 13, 1994.

After the text was read by the group, the pastor explained that it was for Life Sunday and that he selected it because he wanted to go beyond condemning abortion and euthanasia and focus on the Christian's responsibility to love and care for all who are hurting because of bad choices in regard to life issues. With that explanation of the setting of the proclamation, the text was studied in more detail.

Discussion of Cain killing his brother Abel because

Abel's actions were righteous led to consideration of verse 13, "Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you." The members of the class were quick to apply this to our church body's stance on life issues and how it runs contrary to so much of what the world today is teaching. The importance of continuing to stand up for the truth was discussed.

There were questions raised about verse 15, "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him." Although the class knew there was forgiveness for murderers and those who hate, this verse troubled some because it seemed to say just the opposite. It was noted that the same reaction might be anticipated on Sunday morning. Further discussion on the matter centered around the need for repentance and the fact that forgiveness and eternal life do not really abide in any of us apart from God's acting toward us.

This group is familiar with talking about Law and Gospel. Someone stated that verse 16 was good Gospel. "This is how we know what love is; Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." Someone else pointed out the Law in the last half of the verse. Some discussion followed on this point and on the fact that just seeing Jesus as an example for our actions was Law motivation.

There were good comments made about what it means to

love with "actions and in truth." The idea of standing up for God's truth in regard to life issues came up again. Discussion also centered around various examples of how we can love in action.

The study concluded with thoughts shared on the idea of love showing we belong to the truth. Therefore "we set our hearts at rest in His presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts." Members talked about how the conscience condemns. The phrase "God is greater than our hearts" was seen as very comforting and a powerful Gospel message.

After the closing prayer one of the members said, "Pastor, if you are going to preach about putting hearts at rest, you'll have a great sermon." The seeds of a theme began to grow in the pastor's mind!

Studies such as described above have always proved to be of great value. In this particular case it helped to get an idea of people's thoughts about life issues and the church's stand on these issues. The study helped focus on possible questions that may need to be addressed in the sermon. Comments and questions about Law and Gospel in the text proved very helpful in how to focus on and clarify these points. The pastor was also given an idea of how well he was or was not communicating a particular point of the text that seemed difficult for members to understand.

When the pastor teaches a little and listens a lot, a

pre-sermon study group such as this can prove very helpful in improving the communication of the Gospel through preaching.

#### Concurrent Analysis

This stage of the process consisted of a "Sermon Evaluation Form" used by members of the congregation during one of the pastor's sermons. At St. Paul these were handed out to people as they were ushered into church. They were given to all family members who were considered old enough to participate.

Prior to the beginning of worship the forms were explained and members were encouraged to use them during and after the sermon. They were told that a committee would be meeting following the service so forms needed to be turned in as they left. Extra time was allotted immediately following the sermon while the offerings were being gathered for people to complete the forms.

As with the "Needs Assessment Forms," response was overwhelming. Two hundred and twenty-four forms were handed in. That was estimated to be around 97% of those who were given the opportunity to participate! The quantity and quality of the comments made on the forms were equally commendable. Again, it was as if people were pleased to be asked and given an opportunity to participate.

#### Post Analysis

The "Post Analysis" stage consisted of the pilot committee tabulating the results of the evaluation form and

sharing those results with the pastor. Before presenting those results and evaluating them, the sermon that was evaluated is included below. This will be preceded by the central thought, goal, malady, means, theme and outline from the sermon study.

**Text:** 1 John 3:11-20

**Central Thought:** Christian love in action shows that we belong to the Truth and puts our hearts at rest.

**Goal:** The goal is to grow in our appreciation of Christ's love that puts our hearts at rest and in our doing of that love.

**Malady:** The world today misunderstands Christian love because they do not know the Truth.

**Means:** Jesus Christ, who laid down His life for us, is both the example and source of Christian love.

**Theme:** Love Puts Hearts at Rest

**Outline:**

Introduction - Use statistical results to show there are troubled hearts among us.

I. "Love Puts Hearts at Rest" is A Message You Can Hear

A. It shows you belong to the Truth.

B. The Truth is, you are loved.

C. Your hearts are put at rest.

II. "Love Puts Hearts at Rest" is A Message You Can Do

A. Love is action.

B. Love is truth.

C. Loving in action and truth helps put others' hearts at rest.



Sermon for Life Sunday  
1 John 3:11-20  
"Love Puts Hearts At Rest"

If we can trust the statistics, then chances are there is someone sitting out there or listening to this on the radio that has had an abortion. If we can trust the statistics, then it is almost certain that there are people listening who know someone who has had an abortion or who has been involved in an abortion decision with someone very close to them. If we can trust the statistics, then chances are very good that there are people among us who have had to deal with an end-of-life decision involving feeding tubes or respirators or cancer treatments. If we can trust the statistics in regard to all of these things, then it is certain that there are people listening this morning with troubled hearts. Because you cannot deal with these kinds of heart-wrenching issues without being troubled. And we don't need any statistics to remind us that there are troubled hearts out there for all kinds of other reasons as well.

But God has Good News for you this morning. Love puts hearts at rest. This morning let's see if we can grow in our appreciation of that love and in our doing of that love.

"Love Puts Hearts at Rest." First, let's consider that as a message you can hear. John tells us that love shows "we belong to the truth." Now understand that when John talks about love in this text he is talking about our

love for one another. He's talking about the love that exists between brothers and sisters in Christ. One of the joys of being a pastor is that you are in a position to see this kind of love going on. Most of the time it is seen in little things. People ask how Arnold Steege is doing in Rochester. "What's his address? I'd like to send him a card?" That's Christian love and concern. Someone took a plate of goodies over to Bill Schrader as he was recovering from his heart surgery, not because they knew Bill all that well, but because he was a member of the congregation. That's Christian love. Our hearts continue to join in prayer and go out to Rolly Petersen who is battling cancer. That's Christian love.

Those kinds of things are going on all the time and without any flag waving. Yet, every time Christian love is extended, even in the smallest way, it is like a little flag does appear that says, "You belong to the Truth. You belong to the One who is the Truth. You belong to Jesus." When you see a branch with an apple hanging on it, you know that branch has to be attached to an apple tree. When you see someone producing Christian love, you know they have to be attached to Christ. He is the source of that kind of love.

You belong to the Truth and the Truth is you are loved. The Truth is that Jesus loved you so much that He laid aside the glory that the disciples got a glimpse of when He was transfigured (that's the original Gospel reading for

today that you have on your inserts), and walked the road to the cross (that's where we will be going as we begin the season of Lent this week). The Truth is He took your sins with Him to that cross and suffered God's anger in your place. The Truth is that just as Christ was raised from the dead so we now walk in newness of life. As John says in our text, when we love, when we know we are attached to the Truth, we also know that we have "passed from death to life."

All of this, John says, "puts our hearts at rest in [God's] presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts and He knows everything." When your heart condemns you, when that voice of your conscience says, "What you did was wrong. You're bad. You're no better than Cain who murdered his brother. How can you expect to have eternal life abiding in you?" God speaks with a greater voice and says, "What you did was wrong, but for Jesus' sake I forgive you. It's okay. You're going to be alright. You're good because Jesus has given you His goodness. Don't let your hearts be troubled. Put your hearts at rest."

"Love Puts Hearts At Rest." That's a message for you to hear this morning and appreciate more and more. But it is also a message that you can do so that you can help other hearts be at rest. John reminds us of the action of love all through this text. He reminds us that it is a message "heard from the beginning." Way back in Leviticus we find that message you learned in your catechism as the summary of the

Second Table of the Law. It is the message repeated by Jesus in our Gospel for this morning. "Love your neighbor as yourself." That's action. In verse 16 John writes, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." That's action. In verse 18 John says it very clearly, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."

Love is action. But we dare not go on here until we point out that other word associated with love in our text, "truth." The world totally misunderstands Christian love. To the world love means tolerating anything and everything. "You're against abortion? How unloving! It takes away a woman's right to choose." "You're against allowing those whose quality of life has deteriorated to take their own life? How unloving to make someone suffer." To love "in truth" means that sometimes the world is going to hate you, the way wicked Cain hated righteous Abel. The world can't stand the truth for the truth reveals falsehood and evil. That's why the truth is constantly being attacked, along with those who proclaim it.

But the Christian Church dare not love without the truth. It must stand and in love proclaim the clear truth of Scripture. When it comes to life issues, which we are concentrating on today, that means proclaiming that life is sacred to God. God is the author of life and the Redeemer of

life. Life and death are in God's hands. Therefore, the loving truth is, abortion is wrong. Mercy killing is wrong.

Having said that, we can go on. For love dare not end with just stating the truth of what is right and wrong. Love that shows we belong to the truth is to be shared so that others might find what they need to put hearts at rest. Love is action.

You have seen the Moss Foundation commercials on TV. There is one where a mother sees this child at various stages of development. She says, "If you think having an abortion is easy and it doesn't bother you, think again. I keep seeing the child I never had." There's a picture of a woman with a troubled heart. There are thousands and thousands like her all across our country. Maybe there are some like her here this morning. As much as abortion is portrayed as a "simple procedure," it is not. Abortion is an unnatural surgical procedure. It is an assault on the baby and an assault on the mother whose body is preparing itself physically and emotionally for life, not death. When you consider that there are 1.8 million abortions performed every year in our country, that's a lot of troubled hearts.

These women with troubled hearts, and others similarly troubled because of bad choices, need the action of Christian love and caring, not condemnation. Only love that finds its example and its source in Jesus Christ who "laid down His life for us" can put such troubled hearts to rest. His is a

love that forgives. His is a love that can remove shame and guilt. His is a love that can nourish and strengthen and rebuild broken hearts and put them at rest. When others' hearts condemn them in the presence of God, when others hear the voice of their conscience accusing them, you can be for them that greater voice of God that says, "It's okay. You're going to be alright. God forgives you for Jesus' sake. Don't let your hearts be troubled. Put your hearts at rest." Then you can ask, "How can I help make it easier? What can I do?"

Perhaps you know someone with whom you can share the love that puts hearts at rest. Perhaps you know someone you can do something for in a specific way and put that love into action. If not, you can support those who do. Organizations like Lutheran Family Service, Lutherans for Life and Caring Pregnancy Centers do not exist, as so many assume, to speak against abortion. They exist to speak for the sanctity of life and to help people make the beautiful choice of life. But when other choices are made, they also exist to bring God's Word of love in Jesus Christ to troubled hearts. They exist to bring God's people of love to troubled hearts. They exist to speak and be the love that puts hearts at rest.

"This is how we know what love is; Jesus Christ laid down His life for us." There is only one kind of love that can really put hearts at rest. Jesus Christ is not only the example of that love, He is the source of that love. When

you are attached to Him not only can your hearts be at rest, you are capable of love that can put other hearts at rest. "This is how we know what love is; Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers (and sisters)." Amen.

The pilot committee met immediately following the service and compiled the data from the evaluation forms. The form is reproduced below with the data included. Comments will be made following each section of the form.

**SERMON EVALUATION FORM**  
Sunday, February 13, 1994

The purpose of this form is to (1) help improve the pastor's communication of the unique message of the Gospel God has given to his Church, and (2) help improve the listening to that unique message. Please complete this form after the sermon.

1. Before the sermon, did you feel you understood the text for the sermon? 66 Yes, very much 81 Yes, somewhat 9 No, not much at all
2. Was the pastor prepared to preach today's sermon? 148 Yes, very much 15 Yes, somewhat 3 No, not much at all
3. Were YOU prepared to listen to today's sermon? 94 Yes, very much 68 Yes, somewhat 3 No, not much at all
4. Was the sermon clear and easy to follow? 121 Yes, very easy 31 Yes, somewhat 2 No, not much at all
5. Was the pastor easy to listen to? 142 Yes, very easy 14 Yes, somewhat 1 No, not much at all
6. How often did your mind wander during the sermon? 21 Never 122 Seldom, a few times 7 Often, never into it

7. Did the sermon help YOU understand the text better?  
97 Yes, much better 54 Yes, somewhat 3 No, not much

The responses in questions 2 and 4 suggest that the vast majority of the members felt the organization of the sermon was good. The pastor appeared prepared and the sermon was easy to follow. The numbers in question 5 suggest that the pastor's delivery was such that most felt the sermon was easy to listen to. The combination of "Never" and "Seldom, a few times" in question 6 support this as well. For the most part the organization and delivery kept the people's attention.

Comparing questions 1 and 7 would indicate that several people did understand the text better following the sermon. However, the high marks for organization and delivery indicated above suggest that these numbers for better understanding could have been expected to be higher than they were. A possible explanation for this is that the text was chosen to coincide with a specific topic because of the observance of Life Sunday. Exposition of the text perhaps suffered because of its application to the topic.

8. When is a sermon most meaningful to YOU? (Please rank order: 1,2,3)

	<u>1's</u>	<u>2's</u>	<u>3's</u>
____When the text is meaningful	52	25	38
____When I listened carefully	69	31	28
____When the pastor preached well	37	46	33

For some reason this question seemed to be confusing. Many respondents simply checked one of the statements rather



than rank them in order. The committee also struggled with the best way to present the results so that they would present meaningful information. The above format was chosen as a way to present the data as clearly as possible.

It is of interest to note that "listening carefully" received the most "1's" and was also the highest rated even in combining "1's" and "2's." While the "Needs Assessment Form" was skewed heavily toward the importance of good organization and delivery, the "Sermon Evaluation Form" indicates that many people realize the importance of good listening skills in gaining meaning from a sermon. Note in conjunction with this that the sermon being "preached well" received the least amount of "1's." It is insightful to realize that people expect things of themselves as well as the pastor when it comes to preaching.

In question 9 there was really no distinction made by the members between "It had something to do with . . ." and "It was about . . ." People either answered one or the other and rarely tried to differentiate between the two. In future forms the latter could be eliminated. The results below combine answers from both of these. The number of respondents who had the same or similar comments is seen on the right of each category.

9. If a friend asks you what this sermon was about, what would you say?

3 I can't remember

\_\_\_\_\_It had something to do with . . .

Christian love in action - 45  
 Troubled hearts need Christian love - 34  
 Christian love and truth - 30  
 Abortion - 22  
 God's love is the source of Christian love - 13  
 Living in the truth - 8  
 Troubling decisions - 3  
 Sanctity of life - 4

The fact that there was a wide variety of answers may indicate a lack of clarity on the pastor's part in presenting the central thought. However it can be said that the top three responses, taken in combination, come close to expressing the main point. It also may be instructive for the pastor to notice the majority of the responses are phrased in terms of Law rather than Gospel.

Another factor that is relevant and appears to be verified in these responses is that a special Sunday with a particular focus can influence the way people hear a sermon. The relatively high number who indicated "abortion" as what the sermon was about is evidence of this. Looking back at the introduction to the sermon, the first words were about abortion and other life issues. This, it would seem, would help solidify people's pre-conceived ideas about the sermon and have an affect on their listening as the sermon progressed. Such factors are important for the pastor to be aware of as he prepares to communicate the Gospel in his sermon.

#### 10. Other comments:

There were a good number of "other comments," some of

them quite long and involved. The committee allowed the pastor to read these and help categorize them.

The majority of these comments were positive, kind, and encouraging. Some examples: "Excellent message from God's holy Word. Excellent application. An important reminder to me as a Christian of how I must reach out to help the hurting." "Keep up the good work! It has seldom happened that I went home having missed the point." "Great points made in relation to Christ's love in regard to the sanctity of life. So glad LCMS takes a Biblical stand on issues."

There were a couple responses that were very negative and both had to do with disagreements with "your view on abortion" rather than the sermon itself. One respondent even took the opportunity to attack the pastor as a person. At least the evaluation allowed such feelings and anger to be vented.

Some comments were critical but in a constructive sense. One example that stood out was, "You never mentioned the man in relation to all of this." How very true that was. The sermon contained nothing about the "troubled hearts" that, for example, the father of an aborted child may have. This was definitely an oversight in the application of the text.

There were other comments that had to do with sermons in general. For example, "The sermons that are most meaningful are those in which things going on around us are brought in so these things can be related to the text. The

text should be the foundation, but make it personal." "I find sermons that follow in a series very meaningful. Maybe because they go into depth and I think about the subject all week long, therefore I may be more prepared the following Sunday."

Others offered suggestions like, "Why not publish the text for the next Sunday in this Sunday's bulletin. That would help us in preparing to listen to the sermon."

The comments in this section were very helpful and insightful. It appears to have been a good vehicle for members to encourage and critique their pastor's preaching and to offer suggestions. People appreciated having the chance to express their thoughts. Several forms concluded with something like, "Thanks for this opportunity." It was also helpful in allowing the pastor another avenue to be in dialogue with his members.

### Conclusion

"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." We have been given a wonderfully unique and power-filled message to proclaim. It is Christ's message--the good news of forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. One of the means He has given us and commanded us to use to share this message is preaching. Preaching involves communication. The purpose of this entire process was to improve the communication of the Gospel through preaching. The particular communication skills that it focused upon

were: the pastor knowing his congregation, organization of the sermon, delivery of the sermon, and listening to the sermon.

After concluding the process it appears that it can be an effective tool in improving the communication of the Gospel. Through the Bible Study, Needs Assessment Survey, and Sermon Evaluation Form, there were many and varied opportunities to address the particular communication skills that were the focus of the process. Through the various opportunities for dialogue between the pastor and his people, an ample format was given for improvement of these skills.

Perhaps the most positive aspect of the process was the way in which it was received by the members. This has been alluded to at other points in this chapter but deserves repeating. It seems that the process was perceived by the people as the pastor saying, "I would like your help. I would like to work together with you to improve the communication of the Gospel in my preaching." To which the congregation responded, "Wow! No one has ever asked that before. We would be glad to help. What can we do?" It was this willingness to help and participate that gave vitality to the process and made it exciting, fun and effective.

Nevertheless, there is certainly room for improvement. Because of the time restraints of this paper, the process had to be hurried along faster than it was intended. More time would have given more members the opportunity to be involved. It would have also allowed for more concentration on the

various communication skills as they came up in the Bible study and in the other instruments used. There is also room for changes in the instruments themselves. This is particularly true of the Sermon Evaluation Form. As noted earlier, questions 8 and 9 on this form need to be reevaluated in terms of their clarity and simplicity. Thought should also be given to the necessity of question 6 on the Needs Assessment Form.

Another observation that may prove helpful is that the youth were not involved in the Bible study. Provision should be made for their involvement. They were involved in the Needs Assessment and Sermon Evaluation. Since the Needs Assessment was filled out during one of their regular Bible study sessions on Sunday morning, their forms were separate from the rest of the congregation. Their responses were some of the most open, honest and helpful. Their already good insight into preaching would have been enhanced had they had opportunity to participate in the Bible study.

The pastor and members of St. Paul both enjoyed and benefited greatly from this process. The pastor not only learned more about his people, but learned more about what they were thinking in regard to preaching in general and his preaching in particular. The members not only learned more about preaching, but also about their role as listeners. Together, everyone learned more about the communication of the greatest message in the world--the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what its all about! To Him be the glory!

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