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GIVING PERMISSION FOR CREATIVE PREACHING IN

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD:

RETURNING TO OUR CREATIVE ROOTS

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my beautiful wife Kathy for her patience with me and support of me throughout my research and writing. Also to the people of Immanuel Lutheran of Loveland, Colorado, for the passion they have for the mission the Lord has given us and the willingness to try new things with me for the sake of the Gospel.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores preaching, particularly within the context of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). The use of multi-media and interactive preaching, among other creative approaches, can effectively communicate the Gospel to all ages, engage the congregation, and relate Christ and His Word to daily life. Such creativity is found throughout God's Word, is seen significantly at the time of the Reformation, and has historically been part of the rich evangelical nature of the LCMS. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, there was significant upheaval within the LCMS, and part of the outcome following that time was an unstated curtailing of creativity which continues to be felt today. I examine a variety of issues that influenced this curtailing, including a major cultural shift from modernity, a breakdown of trust in authority, fear of possible recrimination, and long-standing tensions between the "priesthood of believers" and the Office of the Ministry, among others. To better understand the purpose of and approach to preaching, as well as the freedom given to utilize creativity and a variety of styles, I examine the Bible and the approach Jesus, Paul, and Peter had to preaching and teaching. I explore the Protestant Reformation and the significant impact Martin Luther and the other reformers had on preaching and the creativity at work in that period of history. I also examine the LCMS and what the rich history of our church body suggests can be done when it comes to creativity in ministry and in preaching. Scripture and history provide the basis for permission that has been given to all preachers of God's Word to employ a variety of creative approaches and styles in order to most effectively proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people in our culture today.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Pastor Jim had been serving in his current congregation in south-central

Wisconsin for about seven years now. Life and ministry have been pretty normal for Jim

as he has enjoyed pastoring the people in what he would consider a typical, traditional

Lutheran congregation. There were usually about one hundred twenty-five people in

Sunday worship, and the congregation was a bit older, with an average age of around

sixty-two. Jim is thirty-nine, and when the congregation called him seven years ago they

were hoping his being a "younger" pastor might attract some younger families into the

congregation. However, over those seven years there had been no measurable change in

the demographics of the congregation.

Jim considered himself a decent preacher. He prepared faithfully for each

Sunday's sermon as he had been taught in seminary: Biblically based, Christocentric,

entertaining stories, and appropriate applications. As he preached from the pulpit week in

and week out, he strove to communicate the Gospel in a way that would help the people

in his congregation clearly hear the message of Jesus' love, forgiveness, and hope, while

recognizing Jesus in their daily lives.

On vacation, Jim visited another congregation in his denomination. What he

experienced in that visit challenged his thinking concerning his preaching. There were

young families, many children, along with a good share of older adults in worship. The

pastor came out from behind the pulpit to preach. During the sermon, there were guided

conversations occurring among the congregational members as well as with the pastor.

There were questions asked from the pastor and answers shared among those in the

congregation, stories told of God at work in people's daily lives, and even a short movie clip. The people, including adults, youth, and children, all seemed genuinely engaged with the pastor, with each other, and with the Word itself.

He left worship that morning feeling torn. Was that appropriate? He had never seen anyone "preach" like that before. It was not just the pastor speaking; he actually felt that what some of the people had to say resonated more with him than what the pastor shared. It seemed real, but was it right? Questions were swirling in his head:

- Were Law and Gospel clearly distinguished and proclaimed? He had not heard anything to the contrary.

- Was Christ central? Absolutely. Jesus was included in the questions asked, the stories shared, the responses from the congregation, and what the pastor had to say.

- Were the basic tenets of preaching present? While the style was very different, the basics of what he was taught about preaching at seminary came through.

- What difference did that style of preaching make when it comes to the demographics of the congregation, particularly all the children and young families who were there?

Jim returned to his congregation simultaneously troubled, excited, and nervous, wanting to think more about the effectiveness of his own preaching in light of this recent experience.

Changes Abound!

A striking feature of our society today is the rate at which dramatic changes are taking place. One of these changes is a shift from being satisfied with observing events to a strong desire for life to be participatory in many different areas (the NFL and Fantasy Football; being invited to sing along at your favorite artist's concert; social media's multiple avenues to share your life with the rest of the world; the rise in popularity of karaoke; Doritos' invitation to submit ideas for their Superbowl commercial; Lay's "Do Us A Flavor" contest to create a new potato chip flavor; and the possibility for anyone to become a performer through the numerous audition shows for "ordinary people" such as American Idol, The Voice, and The X-Factor, to name a few). The Church would do well not to ignore this very biblical idea of participation when it comes to how she functions as well. Far from being just another fad, this opportunity to involve people on a more intimate level in worship, including the sermon, should be embraced by the Church as an opportunity to speak the Gospel message of Jesus Christ in a fresh way into the hearts of people, young and old, across our USAmerican[1] culture.

As an ordained pastor in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (hereafter abbreviated as LCMS), it is particularly to my fellow pastors within this denomination that I offer this work. The LCMS has a rich history of creativity in mission and ministry dating back to its founding in 1847.[2] I will lift up some powerful examples of bold,

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[1] "USAmerica" is a phrase I first heard used by Dr. Leonard Sweet to differentiate between the United States and our fellow North, Central, and South American neighbors (http://leonardsweet.com/about/).

[2] Mike Newman, "The Real LCMS: Strands of DNA from the Movement called 'Missouri'," filmed January 28, 2015, accessed July 22, 2015, Vimeo video, 44:01, https://player.vimeo.com/video/119789356.

creative ministry from the history of the LCMS in order to help us remember our roots and urge us toward a recovery of being on the front lines as cultural movers and shakers for the sake of the Gospel.

I believe some of the creativity within the LCMS has been stifled or lost over the years. It is possible that some of this has simply crept up on us as we have been busy with ministry, keeping the saved saved, caring for members' needs, and taking care of the week-to-week matters before us. Another factor could be churches' and church leaders' reactions to various cultural influences that have been allowed to shape the LCMS instead of vice versa. I will explore some factors that came into play in the late 1960s and early 1970s around what is referred to as the Exodus from Concordia Seminary, including issues regarding how Scripture is approached (particularly with regard to the historical-critical method), the view of the Church, the role and authority of the pastor, and the consequent effects on preaching. From that period of time, I believe preaching styles have been impacted significantly by fear and anxiety which arose out of the years immediately preceding and following the Exodus and the breach of trust that occurred on multiple levels between pastors, people, and leaders of the LCMS.

In juxtaposition to those fears, I was encouraged to learn that current homiletics classes at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis are teaching a variety of preaching styles, some of which involve more creative approaches like the use of media such as art work and pictures.[3] However, there is still room to grow when it comes to reclaiming our creative roots in preaching the Gospel even more effectively in today's culture.

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[3] Ben Haupt and David Schmitt, "Reading and Preaching the Scriptures in a Digital Age," sectional presentation and personal conversation with the author at the Day of Homiletical Reflection, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, May 6, 2015.

I will share insights from professors at our two LCMS seminaries regarding what current homiletical training entails and the various approaches that are taught, including what are considered essentials when it comes to preaching. Worship and preaching are often the prime opportunities a pastor has to interact with the greatest number of people at once. That opportunity is nothing new. However, given our current cultural shifts, how does this opportunity inform what shapes the sermon? When it comes to sermon essentials, are those opportunities constants for all preachers at all times? If so, can those essentials be presented or shared in different forms? If not, why not? These are important questions when it comes to allaying concerns that something "essential" is missing when any kind of changes to preaching are considered. I will take time to look more thoroughly at what sermon essentials include and how those essentials can be integrated with other creative styles of preaching.

The issue of pastoral authority is another area within the LCMS that warrants further exploration. Since the time of Martin Luther and the Reformation, Lutherans have heralded the biblical idea of the "priesthood of believers." I will consider the way Luther lived out this idea in his own ministry and in his preaching throughout the period of the Reformation. What is the tension that exists between pastoral authority and the priesthood of believers when it comes to carrying out various functions of the ministry, particularly preaching? I will offer an overview of some of the historical tensions still present today that impact the pressure local pastors may feel when it comes to how they choose to conduct ministry, including incorporating different preaching styles. I will spend time delving into these historical and theological underpinnings to set the stage and rationale for pastors returning to the creative roots of the LCMS.

I will examine Scripture for what God has to offer in his Word when it comes to preaching. Jesus provides numerous examples of how he preached and engaged people with his message of the Kingdom of God. To better understand what Jesus and the New Testament[4] writers meant concerning preaching, teaching, and proclaiming the Gospel, it will be helpful to briefly delve into several of the New Testament Greek words that are often translated "to preach" and are associated with teaching and proclamation. I will also look to Peter and Paul for insights as to how they approached the preaching and teaching task, and the freedom and creativity with which they went about it.

Communication is foundational to preaching. We cannot disregard communication fundamentals that hold true for all human beings and how we are wired when it comes to communicating, including how people listen and how people learn. As communicators of the Gospel, it behooves us to do our very best to keep our preaching and teaching clear of as many impediments as we can. On the positive side of that coin, it is also important that the Gospel is presented in as convincing, appealing, and engaging a way as humanly possible.

In our present society, social media is a significant element of everyday life and appears in a growing number of formats. As preachers who are "in the world but not of the world,"[5] we must be aware of those tools that are around us. The various social media tools certainly provide plenty of new, exciting, and challenging opportunities to consider when it comes to how we preach and communicate today. This also includes

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[4] Throughout this dissertation I use the terms "Old Testament" and "New Testament" rather than "Hebrew Bible" and "Christian Scriptures." While in academic circles these terms would be appropriately understood, my church body and my intended audience are more familiar with the terms, "Old Testament" and "New Testament."

[5] John 17:16.

understanding what an effective use of multi-media might look like. Our culture is in the midst of a shift from a word-based culture to a visual-based culture.[6] Movies have become a significant part of our culture's collective language and means of communicating. If pastors ignore this, we are missing a tremendous opportunity to speak to a large segment of our population. I offer examples for using movies and other video platforms in preaching as pastors consider how to speak the various languages of our present culture. I will conclude by looking briefly at the use of various other media to expand on the creative possibilities for preaching.

Several authors, including Leonard Sweet and Rick Chromey, have written books offering fresh insights and encouragement to explore new styles of preaching.[7] I will be tapping into some of their ideas to further encourage pastors to push what, for some, may be uncharted territory in preaching, utilizing styles very different from what they were taught in seminary. This is not necessarily new to the pastoral landscape in the United States, but it is new territory for many of my fellow pastors of the LCMS.

The five hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his ninety-five theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church occurs on October 31, 2017. Luther placed a strong emphasis on preaching and the Word of God. The preachers of Luther's day were so driven to preach about indulgences and skewed toward raising money for Rome that they neglected to proclaim the core message of the free gift God's grace that comes to us in Christ Jesus. There was the confusion of Law and Gospel when it came to their

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[6] Leonard Sweet, comments made while introducing semiotics during Orlando Advance for Doctor of Ministry program in *Semiotics and Future Studies*, September 3, 2013.

[7] Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), and Rick Chromey, *Sermons Reimagined: Preaching to a Fluid Culture* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2015).

preaching. While Luther did not use the actual terms Law and Gospel, he made clear the confusion that was being created when indulgence preachers taught that forgiveness of sins could be purchased. The ramifications of that preaching were wide-reaching and had a significant impact on Luther as he continued to study the Scriptures and discover what, or, more accurately, *who* the true heart and soul of the Word of God is. He then took great pains to share Jesus Christ with clarity through his preaching and teaching.[8]

Luther's emphasis on proper preaching and on the Word of God relates closely to the application of God's Word in people's lives. This, too, is worthy of exploring further and seeing where we have come after five hundred years. Related to the upcoming Reformation anniversary, I will briefly look at the somewhat curious sociological and church-related phenomenon of the five-hundred-year cycles of civilizations[9] and of various reformations within the Church.[10] In short, it seems we are ready both as a civilization and as a Church for another major shift and/or reformation to take place as we find ourselves now in a post-postmodern, visual, and digital society.

The preaching task is tied closely to the critical importance of the preacher's need to understand his culture in order to best communicate the Gospel. While at present we have now moved culturally into post-postmodernity, and it is likely that we will continue moving into whatever may follow, it is important to reflect on the seismic cultural shifts that have taken us from modernity to postmodernity. To better understand the need for a

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[8] Email conversation with Randy Golter, October 18, 2015.

[9] Andrew Targowski, *Information Technology and Societal Development* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2009).

[10] Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012).

shift in the approach to preaching, I will explore some of the hallmarks of modernism, under which many present-day pastors were trained. I will compare and contrast the key points of modernity and postmodernity to better understand what makes this shift so challenging for many experienced pastors today.

I will explore more deeply how modernity shaped the culture in which many Baby Boomers were raised, including many pastors currently in the field, and how modernity shaped their training and their thinking. We are in a transition period culturally and historically, with another five-hundred-year moment as we move from modernity to postmodernity and beyond, all of which is creating a whole new world in which to preach the Gospel.

I also explore some of the basic tenets of postmodernity. In doing so, I contrast postmodernity with the modernistic approach, what is changing in our culture, and ultimately, what impact this has on the Church. Postmodernity is not just the next fad in a series of movements that are coming and going in society, but we are truly in the midst of a "monumental transition, moving from modernity to postmodernity."[11] This cultural shift is impacting the Church, local congregations, pastors, and the way pastors and Christians approach outreach, programming, worship, and preaching. It will not suffice to simply "wait it out" and continue to do things the way we have always done them before or to give this fad time to pass so we can return to that with which we are most comfortable. If the Church chooses to bury her head in the sand and wait it out, the Church may continue to fade into irrelevance in the minds of many, becoming merely an

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[11] Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 10.

archaic monument of what once was and not making as much of a difference as it is called to make in our world and for eternity. The chapter on postmodernism and what is beyond is essential to sharing the "why" as well as the "how" of approaching preaching in new and creative ways.

The mission our Lord has put before us does not allow us to sit back arrogantly and think that the way we have always "done church" was good enough for previous generations and has been good enough for us and therefore will be good enough for future generations. I do not pretend to know all of the answers, nor am I pretentious enough to believe that there is any one answer to the challenges we face. On the contrary, in order to follow the Lord's lead in discovering the "what next" for us as God's people (and in particular for those who are in leadership positions in his Church), it is critical for us to understand this culture and its contrasts to past generations.

Beyond the larger movement from modernity to postmodernity, it is important to look at the people behind the movement and how their ideals play out in our culture today. I will profile Millennials (those born between 1982 and 2000[12]) in order to better understand the most recent generation that is now moving into power. One of the key elements that Millennials are looking for are authentic relationships. If there is no authenticity, then there is no basis to continue listening.[13] Authenticity in preaching is critical if the preacher is to be given an ear in today's culture. How does that authenticity come through? How can preaching be relational, even with hundreds of people in the

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[12] Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), 4.

[13] Josh Packard and Thom Schultz, "The Rise of the Dones," presentation at the Future of the Church Summit at Group Publishing, October 21, 2015.

congregation? These are questions that must be answered, and I will offer some possible ways to address them.

It is important to note, however, that it is not just Millennials who are pushing this cultural shift with their own generational agenda. The likes, dislikes, preferences, thought processes, and leadership of Millennials are impacting people of every generation. This can be seen by what television series are most popular, the way movies are produced, opinions on various social issues such as same-sex marriage and life issues, who is going to the polls to vote and how they are voting, and even what commercials look like on television.

I will provide examples of different styles of preaching to assist in better understanding how these different approaches can be put to use in a congregational setting. For those motivated to take a step toward trying different preaching styles but wondering where to begin, I will share my story and the journey I have been on over twenty-eight years of ministry. I will offer practical suggestions on how to engage a congregation, no matter how large or small.

It is my prayer that the history explored, the research done, the observations made, and the suggestions offered in this dissertation will be recognized as permission that is given to pastors and congregations alike, particularly those sisters and brothers in the LCMS, to exercise the freedom we have in Jesus Christ in ministry and in preaching. For the sake of the Gospel and the mission our Savior has given us, we must return to the creative, mission-driven, and Christ-centered roots of the LCMS in order to be a voice of hope and life in our culture today for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 2:

BIBLICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is imperative when addressing such an important topic as preaching of the
Gospel that we look first to the Bible, the very source of foundational truth for my life
and my calling as a pastor. Here we explore what direction our Lord gives us as well as
insights that can be gained from the Scriptures when it comes to creatively and
powerfully preaching the Gospel.

In this chapter, I will dig deeper into the terminology the Lord uses in his Word
regarding preaching. I will also draw from examples in both the Old and New
Testaments, including a very specific examination of Jesus' approach to preaching and
teaching, as well as the preaching of the apostles Peter and Paul. What we discover will
help us to better understand the importance of how we communicate the Gospel message
of Jesus Christ. We will also recognize what our Lord has to say regarding both creativity
and authority when proclaiming his Good News.

Greek Terminology

First we must understand the terminology the Bible uses to speak of preaching.
There are thirty-three Greek verbs in the New Testament which we call preaching.[1] The
most commonly used Greek verb for preaching in the New Testament is κηρύσσω
kērussō (proclaim aloud, publicly preach, herald, announce, tell, declare) and it appears

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[1] Bill Schmelder, Homiletics 101 class, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, lecture September 1985.

approximately sixty times.[2] Its primary synonyms are εὐαγγελίζω *euangelizō* (bring or

announce good news, proclaim, preach), ἀναγγέλλειν *anangellein* (to declare),

ἀπαγγέλλειν *apangellein* (to announce), διαγγέλλειν *diangellein* (to proclaim),

ἐξαγγέλλειν *exangellein* (to make known), and καταγγέλλειν *katangellein* (to proclaim).[3]

The main verb, κηρύσσειν *kērussein,* gives the sense of a herald making a proclamation.

Within the context of the Bible, this refers to the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus

Christ being heralded to all people, particularly to those who are not yet Christian. There

is an outreach orientation associated with this set of verbs, as ἀποστέλλειν *apostellein* (to

send) is linked with κηρύσσειν *kērussein* in multiple places in the New Testament. "True

proclamation does not take place through Scripture alone, but through its exposition…

God does not send books to men; He sends messengers."[4] And those messengers are

called to proclaim the message of the Gospel to change hearts. "The goal of proclamation

in the hearers is faith rather than understanding... Jesus does not bring a new doctrine

which claims the intellect. He brings a message which demands faith."[5]

The proclamation associated with synagogue worship leads us to the second

major grouping of Greek words related to preaching, which is διδάσκειν *didaskein* (to

teach).[6] The verb διδάσκειν *didaskein* deals more specifically with teaching, doctrine, and

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[2] P. H. Menoud, "Preaching," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia, Vol. 3 (K-Q)*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962 and 1986), 868.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Gerhard Friedrich, "κήρυξ, κηρύσσω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 712.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 713.

the exposition of Scripture. It is thought of as instruction in the faith for the newly converted and its use could be described as catechetical preaching. διδάσκειν *didaskein* by Jesus is prominent throughout the Gospels, both within and outside of the synagogue.

The Herald

κηρύσσω *kērussō*, the most commonly used New Testament verb for preaching, has some significant nuances. According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, "κηρύσσειν does not mean the delivery of a learned and edifying or hortatory discourse in well-chosen words and a pleasant voice. It is the declaration of an event."[7] There is a message—news that needs to be shared—and there is a sense of urgency connected with that proclamation.

The person making such a proclamation is referred to as a κήρυξ *kērux* (preacher, herald). In the Greek world and Roman Empire, a κήρυξ *kērux* had a significant place in the royal court. Every prince had at least one κήρυξ *kērux* and they were highly regarded; their position held both political and religious significance and authority.[8] The proclamation they often carried was heralding of the news of Caesar, not only suggesting good news but the news or proclamation of Caesar himself. Their proclamation carried authority, a message given from a good leader. This would be an important carry-over into the way the Lord would choose and use his heralds and the message they proclaimed. The message, while not necessarily "good news" to all hearers, would nevertheless be a message of authority from a good leader.

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[7] Ibid., 703.

[8] Ibid., 684.

The most colorful example of a κήρυξ *kērux* in this sense of the term from the New Testament is John the Baptist, who preached in the desert, not in the comforts of a formalized congregation. Through his preaching, he called people out of their comfort zones, shaking them to their very core, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is near and calling for repentance.[9]

Some of the first preaching we hear from Jesus is parallel to John's in that he is preaching a message of repentance.[10] There was an urgency about Jesus' preaching as well, knowing his time on earth was short. And Jesus was clear that one of his express purposes in coming to earth was to preach, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom.[11]

An important part of Jesus' ministry was sending out his disciples with that very same message and that very same urgency.[12] We are in that same line of followers who hear Jesus' words and cannot help but take them to heart. Therefore, when it comes to our preaching today, there must be this sense of urgent proclamation included. Our preaching should not be just a collection of tear-jerking stories, clever alliterations, memorable illustrations, or a well-crafted speech—it must convey Jesus' urgent message of hope, life, and the Kingdom of God.

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[9] Mark 1:4, Matthew 3:1, Luke 3:3.

[10] Matthew 4:17.

[11] Mark 1:38-39.

[12] Mark 6:12.

The Center of Preaching

We must remember *what* we are proclaiming, *who* we are proclaiming, *to what ends* we are preaching, and the *urgency* with which we are called to preach. Jesus' preaching was centered on the coming of the Kingdom of God and the love, grace, and forgiveness he came to bring. After Jesus' ascension into heaven, the preaching of the apostles shifted slightly to focus more on Christ himself through whom we see and receive the Kingdom of God. "The reality of the resurrection constitutes the fullness of the early Christian *kerygma*."[13]

Therefore our preaching, too, must be centered on Jesus, the Savior of the world, the Almighty God, and Creator of all. Our preaching must have the purpose of directing people to Jesus so they will come to know and believe in him. Our preaching is about instilling hope, grace, forgiveness, and life, all of which flow from Jesus Christ. These are matters of life and death and not matters to be taken lightly. Preachers are heralds and proclaimers of this message. The preaching task is not for the faint of heart, but for those willing to speak the Word of God clearly even when it may not be a popular message to share. Lives and souls are at stake for here and for eternity!

Jesus' Preaching

We never find Jesus preaching from a pulpit. More often than not, Jesus' preaching took place on the highways and by-ways of life. However, there is one occasion where Jesus preaches in what appears to be a worship setting in the

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[13] Friedrich, "κήρυξ, κηρύσσω," in *TDNT*, 3:711.

synagogue.[14] The "sermon," or at least what Luke recorded of it for us, is only one line. Jesus begins by reading from the prophet Isaiah, rolls up the scroll, and hands it back to the attendant. Then, with everyone focused on him, Jesus says, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."[15] As Luke records this event, including Jesus' additional clarifying comments about who he truly is, it infuriated the people in the synagogue into a mob mentality, forcing him out of the synagogue to the edge of a cliff, ready to throw him to his death.[16] The point of Jesus' sermon was clear: he was the Son of God and the fulfillment of the many prophecies in the Old Testament about the coming Messiah. A lesson for preachers today is that our preaching must also be this clear and point to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's plan, even though such preaching may not be accepted by all who hear it.

With regard to preaching in the synagogue, while the specific terminology of κηρύσσω *kērussō* is not used, we know Jesus frequented the synagogue regularly. In fact, there are numerous occasions where we are told that Jesus went to the synagogues and was teaching (διδάσκειν *didaskein*).[17] It is interesting to note that many times Jesus' teaching in the synagogue is also accompanied by his healing people and casting out demons. It appears that these times involved far more than people simply sitting and listening to a sermon or to Jesus' teaching. The people were engaged—there were multi-sensory things happening—and they were responding. Those responses included a mix of

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[14] Luke 4:16-30.

[15] Luke 4:21.

[16] Luke 4:22-30.

[17] Matthew 4:23; Matthew 9:35; Matthew 13:54; Mark 1:21; Mark 6:2; Luke 4:15-16; Luke 6:6; Luke 13:10; John 6:59; John 18:20.

emotions, from feeling anger and hatred and readying to throw stones, to receptive listening, questioning, and desiring to hear more.

We hear most of Jesus' teaching and preaching in Scripture outside of the synagogue. The largest body of Jesus' preaching is found in Matthew 5-7 and is referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. Another significant gathering is known as Jesus' Sermon on the Plain and is found in Luke 6:17-49. Scattered throughout the Gospels are a multitude of examples of Jesus' teaching and preaching. Taking just a cursory glance at Jesus' approach to preaching and teaching throughout the Gospels, we discover some consistent and significant insights.

The Content and Methods of Jesus' Preaching

An important point to be made is regarding the content of Jesus' teaching and preaching, which went beyond mere morals and values.

> Preaching is not a lecture on the nature of God's kingdom. It is proclamation, the declaration of an event. If Jesus came to preach, this means that He was sent to announce the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ [kingdom of God], and therewith to bring it. The other items of content mentioned are to be understood in the light of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. The summons to repentance (Mt. 3:1 f.; Mt. 4:17) stands in closest relationship to the preaching of God's kingdom. The reason and cause of μετάνοια [remorse, repentance, turning about, change of mind] is not the badness of man; it is the imminence of the βασιλεία [kingship, royal power, kingdom, dignity, reign]. Man must amend himself because God is coming, because His rule is near. Repentance does not bring in the kingdom. It creates the possibility of participation in it.[18]

Preaching is to engage people in the Kingdom of God and in God's relationship with us. It is intended to be life-changing, participatory, and emotionally and intellectually engaging. It invites, even begs, for response. An intriguing example of this was when

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[18] Friedrich, "κήρυξ, κηρύσσω," in *TDNT*, 3:710-711.

Jesus heals a demon-possessed man but does not allow the man to come along with him and his disciples, even though he was begging to do so.[19] Instead Jesus "leaves him behind as a preacher, and the man goes through Decapolis like a herald, proclaiming what Jesus has done for him."[20] This is the intended result: that Jesus' κηρύσσω *kērussō* and demonstration of the Kingdom of God leads to this man's κηρύσσω *kērussō* and proclaiming to his family and others of Jesus and his Kingdom!

Jesus' preaching flowed out of the day-to-day of his life. He healed and preached. He performed miracles and preached. Repeatedly, Jesus' life was encompassed with the desire for people to have hope, for lives to be changed, for forgiveness to be experienced, for his grace and love to be known, and for the Kingdom of God to come to them.

It is also important to view how Jesus taught and preached and the multiple methods he used. That Jesus did not use one template for his preaching and teaching is significant in and of itself. His most prominent method was storytelling. Jesus knew the power of a story. When a good story is told, our ears perk up. Our minds go to work trying to figure out where the plot is going, what will happen to the main characters, where we can find ourselves in this story, and what conclusions we can draw from it.

Jesus told approximately forty different stories which are recorded in the Gospels. Within Jesus' storytelling are a multitude of important components, some of which can stand on their own as different methods or considerations to incorporate into preaching and teaching today.

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[19] Mark 5:18-20.

[20] Friedrich, "κήρυξ, κηρύσσω," in *TDNT*, 3:709.

Jesus spoke in practical, down-to-earth terms, and his teaching was never merely theories or rhetoric.[21] That does not mean that his teachings were shallow and simplistic. In fact, it was just the opposite. Jesus knew how to teach deep truths in simple and practical terms. It is true that he would at times explain them and at other times would allow his teaching to be shrouded in some mystery. Yet throughout the Gospels we cannot help but notice Jesus speaking the language of the people, meaning that he knew his audience and addressed them accordingly. The examples Jesus drew from in that agricultural-based society were stories about farmers, animals, and vegetation. Fishing and politics were also in the forefront of both society and Jesus' stories. He told stories based on cultural tensions. He spoke about relationships, including enemies, friends, and marriage. Jesus' examples were ones to which the people listening could easily relate because they were part and parcel of their day-to-day lives.

There are times when we hear Jesus lecturing, particularly in his Sermons on the Mount and the Plain. But within those lectures are stories and accessible examples Jesus used to keep his hearers engaged. Jesus also readily took advantage of teachable moments. When something happened or a question was posed to him, he used it to teach of his Father and the Kingdom.

Another method we discover from Jesus is his use of questions. It is interesting how many times Jesus is asked a question and his response is another question. While there were times that Jesus used this method to confound individuals or groups of people who were trying to trick or trap him, Jesus' use of this method in his teaching and preaching was also very engaging. He did not come just to give simple answers to

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[21] Ibid., 713.

complex questions about life. Life, even a life of following Jesus, is not a life of simple

answers. Life for us today has not gotten any easier. Asking questions was a way of

forcing his followers and those in the crowds to do some critical thinking of their own, to

help them reflect on their lives, their thinking, and their assumptions, and compare them

to what Jesus had to say about the Kingdom and about himself.

It is also worth noting that Jesus' teaching and preaching included both Law and

Gospel.[22] In addition to speaking of love, forgiveness, and grace, there are times Jesus

confronts sin, evil, and living that is contrary to God's Word. He did this prominently

with the religious leaders of the day, calling out their obsession with following the rules,

and their quick judgment of people based on appearance or vocation.[23] He also spoke the

Law to common people, such as the woman caught in adultery[24] and the Samaritan

woman he met at a community well.[25] He addressed matters of sin and the Law as they

relate to everyday people in his longer sermons, using examples such as adultery and

hatred, divorce and revenge.

Just because much of the preaching and teaching that we have from Jesus is not in

the synagogue does not mean his methods are not transferrable to sermons in our worship

services today. In fact, I would argue the opposite. We must look at how Jesus very

successfully and powerfully conveyed his message and put those same methods to work

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[22] The phrase "Law and Gospel" as it relates to preaching will receive a fuller treatment and explanation in Chapter Four. Briefly, it is the recognition that we read in the Bible the condemnation of sin (Law) as well as the comfort of forgiveness and Christ's love (Gospel).

[23] Matthew 9:10-13; Luke 10:25-29 (and the story that follows of the Good Samaritan); Luke 15:1-3 (and the following three stories of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son).

[24] John 8:1-11.

[25] John 4:1-42.

in our preaching and teaching—as well as in our daily lives. For us today, the Gospels were written for community, possibly community worship, which would make them readily accessible for preaching and teaching.

Authority

There is one more topic that needs to be addressed from the standpoint of Jesus' preaching and that is the topic of authority. After Jesus finished preaching his Sermon on the Mount, we are told, "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."[26] Similar words were said of Jesus by the people after his teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.[27] What exactly was it that amazed the people and prompted them to raise this issue of authority? Was it Jesus' tone of voice? Was it just that Jesus' style was different than that to which they were accustomed? Was it that Jesus' teaching rang true to the Scriptures, more so than they were used to hearing from the religious leaders of the day? I would submit that it is likely a little bit of each.

While we do not have an audio recording of Jesus preaching, I can imagine the author of the Scriptures would be able to speak with more than a little authority and have real confidence about that which he is explaining. He knows what he intended and exactly what it all means. Jesus also did not have any problem breaking from the normal practices of the religious teachers of the day, who tended simply to share the opinions of others and let their hearers make their own choice. Jesus was more direct. "He did not

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[26] Matthew 7:28-29.

[27] Mark 1:22,27; Luke 4:32,36.

expound Scripture like the rabbis… His teaching was proclamation. He declared what God was doing among them today… His teaching concerning the coming of the kingdom of God was an address demanding a decision either for it or against it. Hence His preaching was very different from that of the scribes at synagogue worship."[28] Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom, at times simply, at times more profoundly, but always pointing his preaching directly to people's lives and inviting them to reconsider how they understood the Scriptures. The people who heard Jesus took note of this difference and were amazed at his teaching.

A common approach to preaching and teaching for a rabbi in the first century was to quote not just from the Scriptures themselves but to quote from other rabbis and other human authorities to support their own teaching.[29] Jesus, to our knowledge, did not quote anyone else; he simply spoke authoritatively from himself. He spoke the truth of his own Word with certainty and conviction because it is the truth and he is the truth.[30] Jesus' authority is divine authority.

The Preaching of Jesus' Disciples

There is also value in viewing the approach of Jesus' apostles as he commissioned and sent them to preach and teach in his name. The content of the preaching of Jesus' disciples is a slight but significant shift from Jesus' own preaching. The disciples ultimately proclaim an event: Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness

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[28] Friedrich, "κήρυξ, κηρύσσω," in *TDNT*, 3:713.

[29] Robert G. Hoerber, ed., *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 1460 (note on Matthew 7:29) and 1502 (note on Mark 1:22).

[30] John 14:6; Hebrews 13:8.

of sins and the offering of new life in Christ. The proclamation of the message of salvation is centered on Jesus; you cannot proclaim the Kingdom without mentioning the King. "Through preaching Jesus is proclaimed as the Messiah (Ac. 8:5), as the Son of God (9:20). Whether one speaks of the crucified (1 C. 1:23) or the risen Lord (1 C. 15:12), the reference is always to the total Christ who has become the Lord by death and resurrection, and who is proclaimed as such, 2 C. 4:5."[31] I would contend that if our preaching and teaching is not about Jesus, we are not aligned with the one true apostolic Church, the mission we have been given as Christians, or our calling as pastors of the Lord's Church. As Jesus' disciples, we preach Christ crucified,[32] risen, and ascended as Lord and Savior of all.

The Apostle Peter has one of the most significant sermons preached in the New Testament, recorded in Acts 2. This is the sermon Peter preached at Pentecost when three thousand people came to believe in Jesus and were baptized. There are several foundational assumptions about preaching we can glean from Peter's sermon. The first is that this sermon was Spirit-driven. Earlier, both before Jesus went to the cross and then several times between rising from the dead and ascending into heaven, Jesus had given explicit instructions to his disciples to wait for the gift he was sending before they did anything. At Pentecost, Jesus sent the gift he had promised, the Holy Spirit who came on his disciples in dramatic fashion. One of the outcomes of the Spirit coming on the disciples was Peter's response to people saying these men had just had too much wine to

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[31] Friedrich, "κήρυξ, κηρύσσω," in *TDNT*, 3:711.

[32] 1 Corinthians 1:23.

drink. He stood up and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he proclaimed to the crowd what could arguably be the most powerful sermon ever preached.

A second example is Peter's use of Scripture; he spoke clearly of Jesus being the Messiah; he called the people out for their sin of not believing in Jesus but crucifying him instead; he laid the foundation of the history of God's chosen people by telling the Story through the great King David; and he concluded by reiterating the centrality and power of Jesus, the resurrected Christ.

A third example is the response of the people: those who heard Peter's sermon responded by asking what they should do. The "what now" of Peter's sermon was clear: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."[33] Peter points them back to the same gifts of the Spirit and God's grace which he himself received from Jesus.

Another prominent example of the apostles' preaching is from Paul in Greece, recorded in Acts 17:16-34. As we discovered with Jesus, Paul did his preaching both in the synagogue and in the marketplace. Here in Athens, this powerful sermon was not preached in the marketplace, but very specifically at a meeting of the Areopagus. What we discover from Paul's approach to preaching includes the following: he knew his audience, which included many philosophers; he spoke their language, which included quoting a popular poet and holding up an object significant to their culture (an altar with an inscription that read, "To an Unknown God"); he used Scripture to tell the Story of God and his plan for humanity; he spoke both Law and Gospel; and he spoke about Jesus

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[33] Acts 2:38.

and the resurrection. Not all of this was well-received, but it did open a door of opportunity to speak further with some others.

In addition to specific sermons preached by Jesus' disciples, we can also glean some valuable insights about preaching from several other verses in the New Testament. The first is from the apostle John who, near the end of his Gospel account, wrote this: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."[34] The application to preaching is the centrality of knowing what our mission and purpose is as God's people, as his Church, and as pastors: to help people come to believe in Jesus as the Christ. So we use God's Word as a basis for telling God's Story and revealing Jesus as the main character from beginning to end.

In a similar way, the apostle Paul, writing to his apprentice Timothy, holds up the significant part the Scriptures play when it comes to believing in Jesus.

> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.[35]

The importance of using Scripture as the basis for our preaching cannot be overemphasized. God's Word points us continually to Jesus and our preaching must do likewise.

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[34] John 20:30-31.

[35] 2 Timothy 3:14-16.

Paul continues this thought as he gives Timothy the specific charge to preach. You will notice some of those key elements of preaching here again: "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."[36]

Old Testament Considerations

Up to this point I have dwelt solely in the New Testament with this scriptural study on preaching. I would be remiss to give the impression that there is nothing apropos from the Old Testament. I could easily point to any one of the many prophets whom God used to tell his Story and speak his message of hope as they preached Law and Gospel; spoke of the promised Messiah; and knew their audience, speaking to their particular time and culture, but I am going to direct us to the time of the return of the exiles. Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the king and was given permission to help lead the exiles back home to Jerusalem. Ezra was a priest and teacher of the Torah. Look for the key elements of preaching that were going on in about 445 BC in this passage.

> The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, *making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read*. Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of

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[36] 2 Timothy 4:1-2.

the Lord is your strength." The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve." Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, *because they now understood the words that had been made known to them* (emphasis added).[37]

From Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites came instruction: teaching and preaching as they opened God's Word. There are several elements that are worth noting, including the serious yet joyful and emotional nature of hearing the Word of God read and taught, and the opportunity the people were given to respond to God's Word. But the most significant for me comes in verses eight and twelve when we are told that through the preaching and teaching, *the people were able to understand God's Word*. If, as preachers, we are not helping people understand what God is saying to them through his Word, we are missing a critical point of preaching. When we preach in a way that helps people understand what God is saying and it becomes clear what that means for their lives, the Kingdom of God opens up! Understanding God's Word is life-altering, as was evident in the people in Nehemiah's time, who were moved to tears and, ultimately, to serving other people with great joy as they understood more clearly the powerful love that God had for them.

Conclusion

As evidenced in Scripture, preaching must be Spirit-driven, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we prepare and as we speak of Jesus. It must be centered on Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection. We must use God's Word as the basis of the sermon. Preaching must include both Law and Gospel; we cannot be afraid to speak clearly on

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[37] Nehemiah 8:7-12.

matters of sin and the need for repentance, and we must be equally clear about the complete gift of forgiveness found in Christ and the life he has given us through his resurrection. Preachers must know their audience, which includes their congregation and their community. We then must speak the language of our audience, using examples and stories that all can relate to and understand. We must engage the people and provide an opportunity for them to respond. And, through it all, we must help them to understand God's Word and see Jesus.

CHAPTER 3:

MODERNITY, POSTMODERNITY, AND BEYOND

Introduction

USAmerica is in the throes of a major cultural shift. This upheaval has been

observed over the last twenty-five years or so by various authors and culture-watchers

such as Leonard Sweet,[1] James K.A. Smith,[2] and Rick Chromey.[3] The significance of this

cultural shift to the Church cannot be overstated. It impacts the way people think, shop,

eat, play, exercise, read, and learn. This shift is affecting retailers of all sorts, advertisers

and marketers, Wall Street and financial planners, education from preschool to post-

graduate studies, employers, entrepreneurs, politicians, and city governments. With all

these various circles being affected by this shift, the Church certainly cannot escape the

impact.

In this chapter, I will explore the importance of the Church's understanding of this

current cultural shift and, ultimately, the impact it has on preaching. In order to best

understand what is happening in our culture today, we need to look at it from several

different angles. First, we will consider an interesting phenomenon that is suggested by E.

Alan Meece and also Phyllis Tickle: five-hundred-year cycles that have been observed

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[1] Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 33, 48, 51, 54 (and more). Sweet has been speaking of these cultural shifts for years now and you can find his insights in many of his writings, past and present, including some of his earliest works such as *FaithQuakes* in 1994 and *Aqua Church* and *SoulTsunami* in 1999.

[2] James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 9-13.

[3] Rick Chromey, *Sermons Reimagined: Preaching to a Fluid Culture* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2015), 13.

for the last five-thousand-plus years, as well as the regularity and significance of those five-hundred-year cycles. Next, we need to go back to reflect specifically on the previous five hundred years to understand what has been and what is most recently being transitioned *from*: this period of history known as modernity. Then we must consider the shift which has taken place from modernity to postmodernity, noting the particular benchmarks of postmodernity, the specific areas postmodernity impacts in our culture, and some of the practical changes this cultural shift brings to society in general and to the Church in particular.

While we are already moving from postmodernity into what some are calling post-postmodernity, the significant changes attributed to "postmodernity" that have been experienced over the course of these last several decades and have been closely studied and researched, are worth noting for our present time. We must reflect on and consider the implications of major changes in attitudes, approaches to business and life, and the corresponding lifestyle changes that affect the way ministry and preaching must be approached.

It should also be noted that the five-hundred-year cycles which Meece and Tickle have observed, in addition to the terms modernity, postmodernity, post-postmodernity, as well as what lies beyond, are simply suggestions and ideas that help us better understand what we have and are experiencing. What I am going to share with you in this chapter are very simplified examples of what we have experienced over the past five hundred years as we strive toward more effectively carrying out what our Lord has called us to do today—to speak of Jesus and to share the Good News he came to bring with the people in our world today.

All of this is important groundwork to consider when it comes to how preaching is approached in our current culture. We have choices to make as a Church. I will put those choices on the table as we ponder the future and consider what the Lord would have us do as the world continues to change dramatically all around us.

Five-Hundred-Year Cycles

The observation of five-hundred-year cycles is not unique to the Church; there have been notable events that have coincided with these five-hundred-year cycles in many fields. E. Alan Meece ties the five-hundred-year cycles of civilization to the conjunction of the planets Neptune and Pluto, which align every 491 years. While his emphasis lies in areas other than Christianity with his views of these mystical occurrences due to this alignment of the planets and the corresponding explosion of creativity and change around the world, he does offer interesting evidence of these powerful cycles in human history.[4]

Despite my disagreement with Meece's premise as well as some of his conclusions, the historical facts of what have occurred in these cycles are fascinating. In the following chart, Meece reviews five thousand years of history and highlights the times of alignment of Neptune and Pluto that he notes marked the beginning of the transitions in cultures around the world, transitions that lasted for about one hundred years:

> Reviewing the pattern [of the alignment of Neptune and Pluto] then; we have the conjunctions, which correspond to crucial turning points in the times of transition:

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[4] E. Alan Meece, "The Fortunes of Civilization (The Neptune-Pluto Cycle)," *Horoscope for the New Millennium* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications and E. Alan Meece, 1997), accessed January 9, 2016, http://philosopherswheel.com/fortunes.htm.

- 1892   Modern art, atomic physics, fall of European empires, etc.
- 1399   Early Renaissance, Great Schism, first explorers, Turk invasions, Aztecs, etc.
- 905   Cluniac reforms, early European dynasties, Fall of Tang Dynasty, Fall of Mayans, Viking and Magyar invasions, etc.
- 411 A.D. Fall of Rome, fall of Tsin, barbarian invasions, Mayan cities, Ghana.
- 83 B.C.   Sulla, Roman civil wars/conquests, Baghavad-Gita, etc.
- 577 B.C. Axis Age of enlightenment, Neo Babylonia, Celtic expansion, etc.
- 1071 B.C. Fall of New Kingdom in Egypt, Dorian invasions, Israel and Judea founded, fall of Shang and rise of Chou dynasty in China, etc.
- 1565 B.C. New Kingdom of Egypt founded, civilizations of Mycenae and Minoan Crete began, Shang Dynasty, Aryan invasions in India, Olmecs.
- 2058 B.C. Middle Kingdom of Egypt founded, Fall of Ur to Semitic invasions (probably after 2000 B.C.), Old Palace Crete, Chinese Hsia Dynasty.
- 2552 B.C. Old Kingdom of Egypt founded, Great Pyramids built, Ur & Akkad founded.
- 3045 B.C. Narmer founded Egypt, Sumerian cities, Indus Valley civilization.

One hundred years later came the Golden Age or Renaissance:
- 2000   New Age Renaissance, global and green awakening.
- 1500   Discovery of New World; High Renaissance of Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Durer, etc.; Moguls, Suleiman, Ming China, etc.
- 1000   Ottonian and Byzantine Renaissance, Sung China, Tamil India, etc.
- 520 A.D. Byzantine golden age, Mayan golden age, Hindu revival, Benedictine Order, Theodoric, etc.
- 10 A.D.   Roman golden age, Sun pyramid, Mahayana Buddhism, Christ, etc.
- 470 B.C. Greek golden age, Greek and Roman Republics, Persian Empire, Buddhism, Benares, Chinese classic age, etc.
- 970 B.C. Israeli golden age (David and Solomon), Assyria, Korea, etc.
- 1470 B.C. Crete golden age (Minos), Egyptian golden age of Thutmose III, etc.
- 1960 B.C. Babylon, Rock tombs of Egypt built, etc.
- 2460 B.C. Ur golden age, Great Pyramid paintings.
- 2950 B.C. Sumerian golden age.[5]

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[5] Ibid.

While I find it an interesting coincidence, I do not believe major events and "explosions of creativity" are brought about by the mere alignment of planets in our solar system. I believe the Lord is at work and behind these major shifts in cultures and societies around the world.

Phyllis Tickle, in her book *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*, takes a more biblical approach in her observation of these five-hundred-year cycles. She quotes Mark Dyer, an Anglican bishop who noted "that about every five hundred years the Church feels compelled to hold a giant rummage sale."[6] It is during these "rummage sales" that there are major shifts within the institution of the Church as well as with attitudes toward and approaches to the Christian faith.

Dyer observes that "about every five hundred years the empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at the time, become an intolerable carapace that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur."[7] As Meece does on a secular scale, Tickle notes the specific biblical and Church-related events that occurred at or around these five-hundred-year cycles. Those events include:

- The Protestant Reformation with Martin Luther and the eventual break with the Roman Catholic Church in the early 1500s.

- The Great Schism in 1054 and the divide over the *filioque* (the debate over whether the Holy Spirit descends just from God the Father or if the Spirit descends equally from God the Father and God the Son). This was a defining

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[6] Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 16.

[7] Ibid., 16.

time of the Church because out of that controversy, coupled with the
accompanying ecclesiastical politics, "Greek and/or Eastern Orthodoxy would be
the faith of the Eastern world, and Roman Catholicism would be the dominant
expression of Christianity in the West."[8]

- "The Fall of the Roman Empire" or "The Coming of the Dark Ages." Gregory I
  became Pope in 590 and remained so until his death in 604; he was a significant
  leader of change in this time, building on the work of St. Benedict and guiding
  Christianity into monasticism, which would be a dominant expression of
  Christianity over the next five centuries. Pope Gregory I took a continent that
  was in total upheaval and led it into "some kind of ecclesio-political coherence."[9]

- The Council of Chalcedon in 451. The Eastern emperor Marcian convened the
  Fourth Ecumenical Council of the Church, and the incarnation of Jesus was at the
  forefront of the debate. This council was the beginning of what we recognize
  today as three major divisions of the faith: Western Christianity (Roman
  Catholicism and Protestantism), Eastern or Greek Orthodoxy (existing primarily
  in Greece, Asia Minor, Eastern Europe, and Russia, but also in North America,
  China, Finland, and Japan), and Oriental Orthodoxy (Coptic, Ethiopian,
  Armenian, and Syrian Christianity).[10]

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[8] Ibid., 20-21.

[9] Ibid., 21.

[10] Ibid., 23-24.

- The birth of Christianity in the first century. This new time for God's Church was ushered in by the birth, ministry, teachings, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

- The Babylonian Captivity five hundred years before Christ. With the Babylonian Captivity came the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the scattering of Judaism.

- "The Age of the Judges and the establishment of the monarchy out of which King David and the Davidic line would come in preparation for Messiah."[11] From about 900 B.C. to 200 B.C. is Elijah, and Jeremiah alongside King David; Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, Siddhartha, Buddha, and Homer also lived in this era.[12]

As I stated earlier, I do not believe these five-hundred-year cycles to be mere coincidence. I believe the Lord in his infinite wisdom knows why these intervals are important and why change needs to be introduced at these particular intervals for his Church to continue the work of carrying out the mission he has given us.

We find ourselves at the beginning of the 21st century, and from a calendar standpoint we are in position to experience the effects of the next of these five-hundred-year cycles. As in centuries past, we are experiencing a major upheaval within the culture and, correspondingly, within the Church. Bishop Dyer noted that when such upheavals take place there are always at least three consistent corollary events:

> First, a new, more vital form of Christianity does indeed emerge. Second, the organized expression of Christianity which up until then had been the dominant

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[11] Ibid., 29.

[12] Ibid., 30.

one is reconstituted into a more pure and less ossified expression of its former self… The third result is of equal, if not greater significance, though. That is, every time the incrustations of an overly established Christianity have been broken open, the faith has spread—and been spread—dramatically into new geographic and demographic areas, thereby increasing exponentially the range and depth of Christianity's reach as a result of its time of unease and distress.[13]

Might it be possible that a "new, more vital form of Christianity" is arising before our very eyes, a Christianity that looks different from what has been experienced in our lifetimes? And could this expression of Christianity be true to the faith of past generations, be biblically based and Christ-centered, and yet not be bound by the present "incrustations," structures, and institutions? And might a postmodern expression of Christianity be an even more powerful tool the Lord wishes to use to spread his Word of hope, love, and life for this new time in history?

As we consider the preaching task in today's culture, we must understand the changes happening in the transition from modernity. Instead of understanding these sweeping changes moving across the landscape of culture as a threat or even as an enemy to Christianity, we in the Church should have an eye toward learning what we can from postmodernism and, with careful discernment, embracing postmodern elements as we are able, asking and anticipating how the Lord might use postmodernity to accomplish his mission.

The changes being attributed to postmodernity can best be understood by first looking closely at modernity, the predominant way of thinking for the past five hundred years, before studying postmodernity. The better we understand where we have been and why we think, act, and believe as we do, the better we can understand the changes that

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[13] Ibid., 16.

are happening all around us, how they can be used and embraced for purposes of spreading the Gospel, and specifically how they can help the preacher more effectively communicate that Good News to our current culture.

If indeed postmodernity, and what lies ahead, is not simply a passing fad of a new generation or two, but rather an entirely new way of thinking and approaching even the most basic tasks in life, then we have a responsibility to study, to listen, and to better understand this new way of life.

Modernity

Modernity—the foundation on which we have been standing for the past five hundred years—was brought to the United States several hundred years ago with the migration of Europeans to North America. Modernity has essentially been the accepted way of thinking, living, and doing business for the duration of our country's existence.

The wheels of modernity began to turn with the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s but did not fully come into its own until around 1650. The Enlightenment and the Age of Reason, a period of time from roughly 1650 to 1800, is considered by many to be the mother of modernity.[14] Modernism and many of its tenets have carried into our present-day, post-enlightenment period. And, as you will see, the influence of modernist thinking is strong.

I discovered that trying to find a succinct way to define modernity is an elusive task. What exactly is it? Author and theologian Heath White approaches it this way:

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[14] Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 60.

"Faith in the power of reason is the central pillar of the modern worldview."[15] German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) provided some additional foundational pieces for the emergence of modernism beyond the 1800s with his centrality of the autonomous self, his focus on the individual, and an "exalted sense of the importance of the self."[16]

Another root of modernist thinking is the development of science and the scientific movement, where truth is conceived of as only that which can be observed and measured empirically. "The modern, post-Enlightenment mind assumes that knowledge is certain, objective, and good."[17] Therefore, "with the proper use of reason, any problem—social, political, personal, or ethical—could be overcome. From faith in reason came hope in progress."[18] In many ways, science became the god of modernity. The modern view and this hope in progress manifested itself in the belief that things would continually become better and better and there would be increasing agreement. The more people knew and understood, the better life would be, and the more unity would be evident. This also assumed an innate goodness in people and that everything would be used for the good of all.[19] Modernism carried an optimism which fed this country and served as a basis for hope.

This manifested itself in the United States through the years of the Industrial Revolution and the World Wars. In fact, one of the hallmarks of the United States during

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[15] Heath White, *Post-Modernism 101: A First Course for the Curious Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 37.

[16] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 78-80.

[17] Ibid., 81.

[18] White, *Post-Modernism 101*, 39.

[19] Ibid., 39-40.

that time was the optimism we held. There was nothing we could not do if only we put our best minds to it. We could overcome any obstacle, any adversity, any evil force in the world, and we were certain that there was a rational, reasonable, and logical way to solve any problem.

These building blocks of modernism naturally lent themselves to the creation and promotion of a growing bureaucracy, hierarchy, and institutionalism across all areas of society, including business, government, and the Church. In each of these areas there was a logical progression of growth when it came to how to pass on information, leadership and management styles, how to address and fix problems of all sorts, and how to make life better for everyone.

Modernity and the Church

Modernism played itself out in the Church in a multitude of ways, and it continues to have a dominant hand. Denominationalism, for example, may have developed primarily out of theological disagreements, but the Lord has leveraged those disagreements in a positive way when it comes to carrying out his work. Within denominations and even within individual congregations, more and more layers of administration were created, following proven business models. This was done as a way to share resources, to equip and train clergy and congregations, to keep congregations aligned and working in similar ways through the use of common hymnals, liturgies, and educational materials, and to efficiently utilize financial and people resources. There was a logic to this structure and a reasonable progression to follow when it came to keeping clergy and congregations aligned across the country.

Several negative elements have also emerged out of modernism. All too easily, Christianity can end up being reduced "to just another collection of propositions. Our beliefs are encapsulated in 'statements of faith' that simply catalog a collection of statements about God, Jesus, the Spirit, sin, redemption, and so on. Knowledge is reduced to biblical information that can be encapsulated and encoded."[20] This is not to say that statements of faith, such as the historic Christian creeds, are of no value. But care must be taken to rightly use them, without allowing such statements to become merely hollow recitations.

Also, emotion and feelings, generally speaking, have been relegated to a lesser place within the modern Church, particularly in the Lutheran Church, which has traditionally been heavily populated with people of northern European descent. In the early years of modernism, many of Martin Luther's writings voiced regular warnings against an emphasis on feelings and emotions. He attacked those he called the Enthusiasts, who emphasized hearing God's voice directly through one's soul in mystical experiences that were often accompanied with emotional responses, which went beyond what is found in God's Word. For Luther, it was a biblical matter, not a cultural matter; therefore, he followed those warnings by directing people back to the Bible, explaining that his confidence and teaching was found in the Holy Scriptures and not a new revelation of the Spirit.[21] There is a poem attributed to Luther expressing his sentiment about feelings versus God's Word:

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[20] Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 74.

[21] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 28:69-72, 79. There are many other places throughout Luther's writings where he warns not to trust our feelings but to come back continually to God's Word. There are also multiple references and

Feelings come and feelings go,
And feelings are deceiving;
My warrant is the Word of God—
Naught else is worth believing.[22]

Luther's directives from the 1500s, while primarily biblically motivated, carried

significant influence into later modern times. Within Lutheran churches, there remains

strong and ongoing skepticism toward anything emotional in worship, faith, or preaching.

For many, emotions are suspect because they are not rational; they cannot be counted on

due to their fluid nature and their lack of solid footing in reason. It is said that one must

not rely on emotions, or even accept any type of emotional response when it comes to

matters of faith, but one must instead go back to what can be known rationally and

intellectually through the written Word of God. Perhaps strict rationalism is not what is

needed. This is not to swing the pendulum completely away from the power that God's

Word offers us but to note some of the underlying influence for the movement away from

emotion and toward the rational present even in Luther's time. The challenge is

attempting to maintain a healthy balance between the cognitive and the affective

dimensions of our human nature.

Modernity and the Eucharist

Worship and the Eucharist provide additional examples of our modernist

tendencies having a significant influence on the Church and on faith. With regard to the

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warnings Luther gives against those he refers to as the Enthusiasts. I note this one place but there are many more that could be mentioned.

[22] James Swan, "Luther: For Feelings Come and Feelings Go, and Feelings are Deceiving; My Warrant is the Word of God, Naught Else is Worth Believing," Beggars All: Reformation and Apologetics, June 28, 2015, accessed January 29, 2016, http://beggarsallreformation.blogspot.com/2015/06/luther-for-feelings-come-and-feelings.html.

Eucharist, many in Christendom have rejected the understanding of the Eucharist as either transubstantiation (believed and practiced by Roman Catholicism) or "real presence" (believed and practiced by Lutheranism), and have instead practiced a representative or symbolic understanding—because it is more rational.[23] In many church bodies over the last four hundred years, the minimum age of those admitted to the Eucharist has raised because it is believed that before being admitted to the Eucharist one needs to be able to examine oneself and to rationally understand what is taking place within the Eucharist. The irony in this requirement to somehow be able to rationally understand the Eucharist before being allowed to receive it is that the Eucharist is still held as mystery, specifically within the Lutheran Church and those who hold to a "real presence" understanding of the Eucharist. We humans simply cannot comprehend it.

To contrast this, in pre-modern times the high point of worship was the Eucharist, that moment in the worship service that was filled with the mystery of experiencing the very presence of Jesus Christ in receiving his body and blood. Yes, there was congregational singing, prayers, Bible readings, a short sermon, receiving the offering, and the use of the Psalms, but all these things led up to the essential part of worship, the divine encounter with God in bread and wine.[24]

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[23] White, *Post-Modernism 101*, 34.

[24] Ibid.

The Elevation of the Sermon

In modernity, the high point in worship shifted to the sermon, commenting on or drawing out some truth or practical teaching from one or more Bible passages.[25] Consider what the sermon has traditionally been throughout these modern times:

> It takes the form of a lecture: the speaker talks for twenty minutes or so, without interruption, showing his audience the truths that the Bible contains. The congregation listens passively for the most part, though some people may take notes. The goal is the transmission of knowledge. Upon leaving, the members of the congregation are supposed to know something that they didn't know before, or have some truth that they already knew refreshed in their minds.[26]

Spiritual growth in modernity is not so much the experience of the presence of Christ in your life (which includes some element of mystery and wonder), but is more of a rational process; thus, the deeper the knowledge of the Scriptures, the more measurable the spiritual growth. And that is the key: "Teaching, therefore, is the main function of the church."[27] The sermon has been elevated, additional worship time has been given over to it, and it has become primarily a didactic endeavor rather than one facet of worship where the worshiper is brought into the very presence of Almighty God.

James K.A. Smith expresses this when he writes,

> Modernist, fundamentalist worship and spirituality reflected this [approach]: focused on a didactic sermon meant to convey the ideas that make up the "system" of Christian truth, evangelical worship services have fostered a talking-head Christianity that accords well with the "thinking things" of Cartesian modernity, but not with the robust, fleshy, communal beings that God called into being in Adam and Eve. The iconoclasm and ritual-phobia of evangelical worship

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[25] Ibid., 34-35.

[26] Ibid., 35.

[27] Ibid.

bear direct affinity with the disenchanted world bequeathed to us by the immanentism of modern science.[28]

There was a stress on the rational progression of the sermon and how it all must flow together logically through each point to the "therefore" of the conclusion. That, by and large, was expected by the people in the congregation and consequently the pastor delivered it.

There is obviously much more that occurs across the multitude of congregations, pastors, worship services, and sermons than the few highlights expressed in these paragraphs of the impact of modernist thinking on the Church. I am confident that there are many congregations who uphold the power and mystery of the Eucharist. I believe that for many congregations, worship is not simply knowledge-based, absent of any emotion or sense of awe. Not every sermon is "Ten Steps to a Better Marriage" or "Five Steps to a Stronger Faith." There are many good sermons which point directly to Jesus, that speak to the ongoing intersection of faith and life, and that hold out God's grace and love in beautiful—and sometimes emotional—ways. Yet modernistic tendencies are easily recognizable in many worship services and sermons.

One example is the modernistic approach to the teaching of homiletics at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis that I experienced in the 1980s while I was a student there. The sermon was to be lecture-based with a standard set of expectations that were rational and had a logical flow. Elements to be included were an introduction with a good story and a presentation of the goal of the sermon, then the malady or the Law where sin is exposed, followed by the Gospel presented very clearly with Christ's crucifixion and

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[28] Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 136.

resurrection at the center and explicitly stated, some application to our daily lives could

be proposed, and then a riveting conclusion that restated the goal. This was not a bad

method of preaching to teach to the next generation of pastors: it fit the expectations of

congregations and has been a culturally acceptable way of communicating God's Word

for many years. The people in the pews have heard it and received it, and it has worked

because it was an accepted process of how learning and communicating happened across

many areas of society, including schools, businesses, marketing, and politics. It was how

our current Builder, Boomer, and Buster generations were raised and for whom it now

comes naturally. It is also a reasonably safe way to understand the world, God's Word,

and our lives.

It can be said, at least generally speaking, that modernity has "worked" to some

degree for the past five hundred years for the culture as well as for the Church.

> Twentieth-century evangelicals have devoted much energy to the task of
> demonstrating the credibility of the Christian faith to a culture that glorifies
> reason and deifies science. Evangelical presentations of the gospel have often
> been accompanied by a rational apologetic that appeals to proofs for the existence
> of God, the trustworthiness of the Bible, and the historicity of Jesus' resurrection.
> Evangelical systematic theologies have generally focused on the propositional
> content of the faith, seeking to provide a logical presentation of Christian
> doctrine.[29]

This is not to say that there have not been troubles and hardships during these past five

hundred years. The horrendous destruction to human life and property in the two world

wars of the twentieth century broke the optimism that had become widespread by the

nineteenth century. This disruption seems to have been largely unanticipated. These wars

brought to the forefront the recognition of evil in the heart of man. The Industrial

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[29] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 161.

Revolution brought prosperity and wealth and technological developments—which have obviously continued—as the world had never before known. But along with those tremendous developments came the terrible cost to human freedom and dignity for the workers.[30] These hardships and challenges to our lives and thinking have helped pave the way for the next cultural shift.

There is a yearning for more in this present generation: a yearning to not simply be told what to think or what to do but to be engaged in life, a yearning to experience the Gospel instead of just hearing about it and knowing it. That yearning is being expressed across our entire culture and multiple generations, not only by our younger people but, interestingly, by more and more of those in our older generations as well.

The Beginnings of Postmodernism

In USAmerica, a crack in modernist thinking began to appear quite abruptly in the 1960s. There was great social upheaval that coincided with several monumental shifts in society. Several of those shifts included losing trust in institutions due to the lies propagated at the highest levels of government with Watergate; the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War and the perception of poor decisions made by leadership; the consequent reactions and protests to that war; Martin Luther King, Jr. and his opposition to and resistance of the government at multiple levels through non-violent protests, speeches, and marches; the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy; and the hippie movement with free love, peace

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[30] Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000).

marches, and much of what can be associated with, if not attributed to, the Jesus Movement that had significant impact both societally and inside the Church. The 1960s mark the publicly recognizable beginnings of postmodernism.

That being said, movement toward postmodernity actually began much earlier and on an entirely different continent. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, five German philosophers, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Friedrich Nietzsche, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, and a prominent Swiss philosopher, Ferdinand de Saussure, are credited with laying some of the fertile groundwork in new areas of language and philosophy, namely hermeneutics and semiotics.[31] Their work paved the way for further development by four twentieth-century philosophers considered to be the central voices of postmodernity: three French philosophers, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and Michel Foucault, and an American philosopher, Richard Rorty.[32]

The work of these philosophers, in addition to others who could be considered precursors to postmodernity, is of great importance to the bigger picture of postmodernity. However, to delve into their work, their philosophies, or their contributions goes beyond the scope of this paper. I commend them to your further study if you wish to explore the roots of postmodernity more thoroughly.

As we are in the throes of this "monumental transition, moving from modernity to postmodernity,"[33] it is important to begin by defining postmodernity. However, as it was

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[31] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 83-117.

[32] Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 21-22, and Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 123.

[33] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 10.

with defining modernity, this task is somewhat difficult. Postmodernism is still a relatively new cultural movement that at its core remains elusive and it resists strict definitions. Theologian Tyron Inbody compares it to "'intellectual Velcro dragged across culture' which 'can be used to characterize almost anything one approves or disapproves.'"[34] Postmodernity is still coming into its own and as such is defined at times more by what it is not than by what it is—that is, a reaction to and movement away from modernity.

As we try to understand postmodernity, we must keep in mind that "postmodernism does not make a clean break from modernism. There are both continuities and discontinuities between modernity and postmodernity."[35] These will become more apparent as I identify some of the characteristics of postmodernism especially pertinent to Christianity and as I explore the practical, and often difficult, applications for preaching the Gospel in our postmodern culture.

Characteristics of Postmodernism

While this dissertation is not intended as an all-encompassing treatment of postmodernity, what follows are some of its readily discernible characteristics that are most applicable to the issues at hand with regard to the Church's mandate to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ with the people in our culture.

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[34] Tyron Inbody, "Postmodernism: Intellectual Velcro Dragged Across Culture," *Theology Today 57*, no 4 (January 1995): 524, quoted in Daniel J. Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism," *Cross Currents* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1997-98), accessed March 5, 2016, http://www.crosscurrents.org/adams.htm.

[35] Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 26.

The Place of Knowledge

In its most basic form, postmodernity assumes that reason is not the only path to knowledge but that other things, such as emotion and intuition, have their place in the search for knowledge as well. In contrast to modernity, postmodernity entails an actual "rejection of the emphasis on rational discovery through the scientific method"[36] and a "rejection of classical metaphysical thought and movement from objectivity to subjectivity."[37] Postmoderns believe that knowledge equals neither truth nor objectivity.[38]

The long-held notion that intellectual knowledge and a rational understanding of God's Word is most important—a notion dating back to Reformation times—played a significant role for that time and in that culture and has continued to be beneficial for the proclamation of the Gospel over these past five hundred years. However, we lost the acknowledgement that emotion and intuition also have a place at the table when it comes to fully understanding God and his Word. Luther was up against the Enthusiasts who held an unhealthy and unbalanced dependence upon emotion, and thus Luther swung the pendulum to the extreme of knowledge and objective fact in response. Emotion is a gift God has given to us and is part of who we are as created beings. There is value in recognizing that our emotions are not invalid when it comes to spiritual matters but can be one of several powerful tools used by the preacher when proclaiming God's Word.

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[36] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 12.

[37] Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism."

[38] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 7.

Absolutes

In 1905, Albert Einstein was unwittingly part of an early movement toward postmodernism when he published his paper postulating a "special theory of relativity," overthrowing "any notion that there might be such a thing as absolute space or absolute time by showing that both are dependent upon an observer and that each of them is perceived differently, depending on the observer doing the observing."[39]

Einstein's theory of relativity gave birth to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, which, when most simply stated, says "you can measure the speed of something… or you can measure its position; but you cannot measure them both." This, taken to logical conclusions, leads some to the claim that there is no absolute truth, only truth relative to the perceiver.[40]

The door was opened to questioning absolutes; suddenly, concepts such as space and time, which, in the Western worldview, were always believed to be unshakable elements, were thrown into question. If space and time are no longer as "unshakable" as we once believed, what else might lack stability? Or, to ask this from another perspective, why not question anything and everything else around us?

Einstein's work and questioning of previously held beliefs also opened up the idea that we all have our own observations and interpretations of this world. If this is so, why shouldn't my individual observations and interpretations be equally as valid as someone else's? The door has been opened to the individualization of truth, one of the hallmarks of postmodernity.

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[39] Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 78.

[40] Ibid., 79.

Pushing Einstein's ideas even further, postmodernism holds that the "universe is not mechanistic and dualistic but rather historical, relational, and personal,"[41] and that reality is relative, indeterminate, and participatory. Twentieth-century philosopher Martin Heidegger writes, "Truth is not absolute and autonomous… it's relational."[42] Heidegger argued that truth is related to the need for being fully and totally engaged in the world (past, present, and future) in order to experience it and, in time, to be able to determine "truth." Put another way and in a bit broader context, "truth is relative to the community in which we participate."[43] For the postmodern, context is king, and that context is determined not by one person explaining it, but by the community together discovering, determining, and defining the context and ultimately the "truth" of the situation.

Community

This leads to another characteristic of postmodernity. While modernity had an almost extreme emphasis on the individual, in postmodernity, human autonomy is rejected: a person "is always part of a larger sociological matrix which includes history, culture, economics, religion, politics, and philosophical worldview."[44] Wholeness is of utmost importance over and against individuality. Community is significant in postmodernity, and discovering life with others in an experiential and participatory way is a key to life. "Community is a bedrock concept for 18- to 29-year-olds. Authentic, reciprocal relationships that provide support and camaraderie are more important than

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[41] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 7.

[42] Ibid., 106.

[43] Ibid., 8.

[44] Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism."

any… program. They desire honest and vulnerable connections that will see them through the transitions of their lives. They want to intimately journey through life together."[45] Likewise, well-being is discovered in symbiosis with others and, in fact, with all of creation, not in single pursuit, but as a whole. Life is viewed as organic, and this interdependent and symbiotic view of life is a characteristic that needs attention and nurturing.[46]

The Church is well-positioned to take full advantage of the value placed on community, relationships, and our symbiotic life together. The Church is organized as a gathering place for individuals and families on a weekly basis in worship. How can the Church best use this desire for people to be in relationship with each other? Among many options, I believe it is possible to leverage this desire even within the sermon. The preacher can provide opportunities within the context of the sermon for people to share with one another around the topic being preached on that day. Deep relationships are not going to be created fully in a brief interaction during the time of the sermon, but the door can be cracked and the opportunity given for more conversation to continue outside of the sermon and worship setting.

Allowing those in the congregation to reflect on their personal challenges that relate to the topic and to the Scriptural text for the day, and to perhaps even share those challenges with one another in smaller groups of people or with the whole congregation, can help create a sense of community. This manner of fostering community can help

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[45] Deborah Koehn Loyd, "Building on the Foundations of the Future: The Millennial Church" DMin diss., Bakke Graduate University, Seattle, WA, 2011, 32.

[46] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 14-15.

individuals discover new insights about Scriptural truth, others' lives, and one's own life and faith.

Stories can also be a means of creating community. When stories of a more communal nature are told—stories that relate an aspect of shared history in the congregation or in the community—they can serve to foster or strengthen the sense of community within the congregation. Or when stories of a more individual nature are told, they can provide opportunities for others in the congregation to come alongside the individual to offer encouragement and support, another facet of community building.

With each of these suggestions surrounding community, it is important for the pastor to provide options (yet another desire within postmodernism). For example, rather than the preacher dictating that people talk or share ("Turn to your neighbor and…"), I have found that questions are better received if I say, "I would like you to reflect on this for a moment, and, if you are comfortable doing so, talk about this with someone sitting near you." This allows personal choice, it acknowledges differences in personality, and it provides the person in the pew the option to go as far as she is willing to go.

Apparent Inconsistencies and Contradictions

If you have not yet noticed, the last couple of pages have held multiple inconsistencies and apparent contradictions regarding the characteristics of postmodernity. I intentionally offer these inconsistencies because this, too, is how the postmodern experiences, understands, and accepts knowledge, truth, and life. Yet another important characteristic of postmodernity is the idea that diametrically opposed ideas can be embraced and believed at the same time by the same person.

This embracing of seemingly contradictory ideas is not an altogether foreign concept for Christians, particularly Lutherans. The phrase, *simul iustus et peccator* (simultaneously saint and sinner), highlights one such "contradiction" that is fully embraced as it speaks of the spiritual realities with which Christians live. Briefly, it means that we believe we are saints because of Jesus' work on the cross, and through faith in him we are declared perfect, holy, and righteous. At the same time, we know we are people, even as Christians, who struggle with temptations and sin in our lives. One does not negate the other—both realities live within us at the same time.

One example of the contradictions embraced by postmoderns is community. On the one hand, community and the process of discovering truth together is a high value in postmodernism. On the other hand, because it is believed that there is no absolute truth, I am free to hold to what I believe to be "my" truth, and it is assumed and even expected that you will respect the "truth" I hold just as it is assumed and expected that I will respect the "truth" you hold, even if they are on opposite ends of the spectrum (what is referred to as the individualization of truth). In postmodern thinking, there is the challenge of embracing apparent contradictions in many areas of life. At the same time, for postmoderns this embracing of different "truths" does not necessarily threaten or diminish the togetherness of community or the relationships within the community.

The Information Age

In general terms, modernity was characterized by the Industrial Age and the production of goods. Similarly, postmodernity is placed within the Information Age, with

a focus on producing information.[47] The way information is shared today shapes our culture and our lives. Technology, Wi-Fi, social media, and all sorts of apps and opportunities in our digital world have reshaped the way we view, receive, and share information. The ongoing advances in digital technology continue to move us further and further away from a value or even an acceptance of delayed gratification and are taking us at lightning speed toward the expectation of immediacy in every area of life. We text, snapchat, email, or post on any of the many social media outlets, and we expect an immediate reply, a "like," or a picture in return. The multitude of social media outlets and multi-player gaming opportunities provide yet another means for being in community and connecting with people both around the world and across the street. These new technologies are simultaneously serving to individualize our lives as we are engrossed in our phones and our various screens whether we are alone or in physical proximity with others, and providing unique opportunities for community.

The internet has changed the way we access information, the way we learn, and the way teachers teach. We can affirm our own "truths" or even make them up, with any number of blogging sites and YouTube channels. No longer is access to information the critical step in learning. It is sorting through the vast amounts of information and determining what is accurate, what is important, and what is needed for a particular project, assignment, task, or situation. Faith, biblical, and spiritual matters are all impacted by this new access to information. This can be seen as a blessing as well as a challenge. Many today "are more apt to see and communicate spiritual truths through popular media content and characters than biblical or scriptural narratives. This is not

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[47] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 17-18.

evidence of lack of faith or spirituality. It is, rather, that their spiritual instruction and language comes from multiple sources, texts, and contexts."[48] How do we help people navigate through this new digital world with its plethora of information and commentary, and also understand the truths of God's Word? What is authoritative? What is true? What is wrong? What is harmful? "Accepting little at face value, the younger generation brings tough questions and they want their intensity to be matched by spiritual challenges from leaders."[49]

Institutions and Authority

Postmodernity is suspicious of institutions and authorities, whether self-proclaimed or traditional, where authority is simply conferred upon the individual or position. This "generation sees membership of a faith group as somewhat on the same footing to them as their membership of a fitness club, an environmental action group, etc. They have more faith identification than identity."[50] That is to say, many today can identify with faith-related group activities, but they are not recognizing their identity as being found in their faith or their faith group. Gone is an inherent trust in institutions and authority figures. Our current culture perceives the way institutions and authority figures handle information, a significant currency in our world today, as keeping it to themselves

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[48] Pauline Hope Cheong, Peter Fischer-Nielsen, Stefan Gelfgren, and Charles Ess, eds., *Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture: Perspectives, Practices and Futures* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 73.

[49] Loyd, "Building on the Foundations of the Future," 32.

[50] Cheong et al., *Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture*, 72.

and doling it out as they see fit. Today, information is meant to be shared openly, not hoarded.

There is a great preaching opportunity afforded with this particular postmodern characteristic. By utilizing storytelling, from the earlier section on community, the preacher could engage the congregation by sharing a story of how he sensed and came to understand God's call into pastoral ministry. This approach could serve to break down some of the negative stereotypes of authoritarianism from the pastor or the Church and, in turn, build trust in the pastor and his position of authority by expressing the humble calling that it is. What is assumed, of course, is that the story is conveyed with genuineness, truth, and authenticity. Without these, it could serve to fuel suspicions.

The suspicions postmodernity has of institutions and authorities flow from another basic tenet of postmodernity: the process of deconstruction. Deconstruction means that the meaning of a word is not inherent in the text but is dependent upon the perspective of the reader and his interpretation of it. While deconstruction has its roots in semiotics, the applications of deconstruction propel us far beyond just words.[51] The meaning emerges through interaction with others and with the world at large, and can be thought of as peeling back the many layers of an onion, delving further and further, discovering more and varied meanings. Hence, many different meanings are possible for the same word, the same event, or the same experience. Deconstruction "is a way of delegitimating the standard, accepted meaning of texts, a method which goes straight to the heart of traditional understandings of authority."[52] From a practical standpoint,

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[51] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 7.

[52] Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism."

deconstruction plays a critical role in this area of authority as it relates to Scripture, the office of the pastoral ministry, and the Church; therefore, this topic of authority will be addressed in depth later.

Global Connectivity and Praxis

Another key facet of postmodernity, closely related to community, is networking. "Hierarchical structures have been replaced by a more decentralized, participatory form of decision making."[53] While the optimism of modernity for human progress may be slipping, there has not been a plunge into despair for postmoderns: the desire to improve is still present, but it tends to be a more broadly based desire for improving the conditions in the world, particularly for those marginalized in the modernist era. Therefore, the sharing of information and the networking that goes on can be done on a smaller, non-corporate scale for the betterment of smaller segments of the population anywhere in the world.

This leads us to another major theme of postmodernism: praxis. From a theological perspective, praxis can be stated as such: "Theology is not only to be *thought*; it is also to be *lived*."[54] Praxis is "serious concern for the practical ethical aspects of human life."[55] This has to do with care for people, especially those who have been marginalized within any given society. While information is most certainly an important commodity in postmodernity, when weighed against praxis, information is merely a

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[53] Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 18.

[54] Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism."

[55] Ibid.

means to a greater end. Postmoderns are not interested in gaining more knowledge for knowledge's sake—they want to do something with it. The entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in our current postmodern culture, and with that spirit comes the desire to make a difference.

Praxis provides yet another great preaching opportunity for the work of the Church throughout the world. Stories can be told of mission work being done in the community and around the world through individual missionaries the congregation supports, through partner organizations such as LCMS World Missions, Samaritan's Purse, Angel Tree, or through a local homeless shelter or food kitchen. As stories are told of help being given and lives being changed, trust in the institution of the Church grows as the concern for people in need is addressed. What can be gained is an appreciation that the Church does not only care about perpetuating the institution, but that it is truly about the love of Christ being lived out.

Mystery and Spirituality

Another aspect of postmodernity is an interest in and openness to spiritual matters. However, the general distrust of institutions has created an unusual dichotomy between religion and spirituality along with its corresponding challenges. David Schmitt, a professor of homiletics at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, explains this dichotomy:

> Religion is the formal organization of dogmatic statements about faith and rules for its practice. Spirituality is the personal appropriation from these systems of whatever the individual deems helpful for his or her personal spiritual formation. Such a culture produces practitioners of a private spirituality who often come to the church as they would to a religious supply store, looking for items they might use, as one person told me, in her "journey to resurrectedness." Such practical spirituality reduces Christianity to one among many systems of thought, one among many frameworks for the practice of belief. Hearers begin to pick and choose among beliefs in these various religious systems and try out different

practices to see what happens to their faith. Such thinking obscures the active agent in faith. It hides the fact that there is something over which we have no choice and no control: God, who directly intervenes in human history.[56]

This move from modernity to postmodernity and an openness of postmoderns to spiritual matters is creating some interesting, positive, and unanticipated results. "Not only are new religious movements coming into being, but even more significant is that traditional religions are experiencing revival and renewal."[57] It is interesting to see some of these unexpected outcomes. "In actual fact there is a direct relationship between the decline of modernism and the rise of traditional religions. In recent decades there has been both a decline and delegitimation of such quasi-religious movements as communism, secular nationalism, and the Western belief in the inevitability of human progress."[58] It seems that part of the interest in spiritual matters comes in reaction to the modernist view of the scientific ability/need to have an explanation for everything and the belief in the invincibility of science. In modernity, this was taken to such an extreme that the element of mystery had all but been removed from life. In postmodernity, there is a rejection of the invincibility of science and an embracing of mystery as well as being comfortable with not having to rationally understand or explain everything.

Spirituality carries with it the essence of the mysterious. Not everything can be touched or seen or explained, and this has garnered some interest from our postmodern

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[56] David R. Schmitt, "The Tapestry of Preaching," *Concordia Journal* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 111.

[57] Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism."

[58] "Religious Violence Rips India," *Christian Century* 109, no. 38 (1992): 1184, quoted in Daniel J. Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism," *Cross Currents* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1997-98), accessed March 5, 2016, http://www.crosscurrents.org/adams.htm.

culture. For the Church and the preacher, this provides a wonderful opening with regard to spiritual matters, mystery, and the value postmodernity places on participation.

> Mission opportunity comes about… in light of the fact that modernity and its empirical approach to all questions could not penetrate the spiritual veil where mystery resides. For the person of this age, faith is not something to be proven, but experienced. It is not adherence to formulas, but participation in something beyond perception… How does this create opportunity for mission and how does a Lutheran approach to proclamation meet this challenge? It does so in two ways. First, because our preaching is embedded in the liturgy, it connects the orality of the Word with the mystery of the sacraments. Whereas the Word makes plain the narrative that reveals the God of history and the Christ of Scripture, the sacraments tangibly connect us to the mysterious presence of the One who is known in preaching and who walks among us as the Word is proclaimed. Through Word and rite, the existence of God is not proven, but the heart is reached and the person becomes a new creation. Second, because Lutheran proclamation is both oral and artistic, there is a valued roominess in the symbols with which we express our faith.[59]

Not every sermon must explain the faith or simply give new rules for living. But the sermon can embrace some of the mysteries of faith and the God we know and believe in.

In addition to the postmodern rejection of the invincibility of science, there is also a rejection of modernity's belief and optimism in human progress. While it may not be a full embrace, there is at least an acceptance of the reality that there are unavoidable aspects of life which we experience, including suffering, difficulties, and even societal regression at times. Accepting those realities opens the door to more readily embrace the spiritual and the mysteries of life that are not all "cause and effect." That embrace includes the acceptance of mystery and of both good and evil in the world, along with the tension between the two. The way this tension between good and evil plays out in real life is readily accepted from a spiritual and biblical perspective as part of life's journey.

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[59] Clayton J. Schmit, "What Lutherans Have to Offer Mission in Preaching," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 363.

Not everything can be understood or explained, and this embracing of mystery is significant within postmodern thought.

This tension that mystery creates has been a tension the Church has lived with for millennia. The intrigue postmoderns have with mystery, coupled with one angle on the pushback against absolutes, can create another segue for the Church to step into postmodernity. Consider this:

> The polarities of theology are clearly presented—God and the world, Christ and culture, text and context, the universal and the particular. Indeed, the Incarnation which is the central event and doctrine of the Christian faith, involves both of these polarities—"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." At various times and places in the history of the Christian church, theology has moved toward one of these polarities at the expense of the other. It has then become necessary to call theology back to that central place of balance between the two polarities, back to a "Middle Way" if you will. As we do theology in this postmodern age, we would do well to keep this balance in mind and avoid the excessive fragmentation of postmodernism.[60]

Mystery is a hallmark of the Church, and to dismiss or even avoid mystery in our preaching of the Gospel would be a significant opportunity missed in our postmodern culture.

Story

The final characteristic of postmodernity I will share in the context of this dissertation is the embracing of story, which I touched on earlier. The power of storytelling is wrapped into several characteristics embraced by postmodernity. "Film is the new lingua franca of not just American culture but, increasingly, global culture. Further, it is a powerful 'incarnational' medium that can reveal truth about our world,

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[60] Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism."

opening up our experience in a way that propositions and textbooks cannot."[61] Whether it is movies from Hollywood, commercials by Budweiser, conversations with a co-worker over a lunch break, or personal experiences shared during a worship service, stories carry a tremendous amount of influence in our postmodern culture. They invite an individual to speak from her own perspective in sharing her story, allowing the individual to speak of her "truth" without challenge. Storytelling has been integral to perpetuating community for thousands of years. Stories invite others into your story—and thus, your life. The emotions conveyed through the context of a story are important as they also elicit emotions in the listener. In that way, stories are also engaging by being, at the very least, passively participatory.

Concerns Over Postmodernism

At face value, many of these characteristics of postmodernism can appear to be in direct opposition to the Christian faith and can seem to leave the Christian in an untenable position. When it comes to postmodernity (and, interestingly enough, modernity as well), the most significant issue for the Christian is that postmodernity is "characterized by an idolatrous notion of self-sufficiency and a deep naturalism."[62] That is, because postmodernity is so deeply grounded in the self, it has a difficult time with the concept of grace.

Other significant concerns for Christians include the thought that there is no such thing in postmodernism as absolutes, when the Christian faith and the Scriptures are filled

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[61] Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 24.

[62] Ibid., 26.

with absolutes, not the least of which is the centrality of Jesus Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life."[63] Another is the distrust of institutions and authority when the role of the Church as the body of Christ and the role of pastors as shepherds and leaders of congregations has long been part of the history of the Church. The ability to embrace and even defend several seemingly conflicting ideas at the same time seems contradictory to the truths we proclaim. These are just a few characteristics of postmodernity which threaten the Church and the Christian faith.

Embracing Postmodernity

Some Christians fear that if we simply accept some of the assumptions and premises of postmodernism, it means modernism has failed and, by implication, churches which have leaned heavily on modernist assumptions and platforms are destined to fail as well.

> On this view, the church has spent four hundred years enslaved in an Egypt of modern presuppositions and consequently has forgotten much of the best of what it has to offer. The advent of postmodernism is an opportunity to rethink both the presentation and the content of the good news about Christ, to draw more deeply on the truth of the gospel by coming at it in new ways. To learn about postmodernism, then, helps us to rediscover what Christianity is all about.[64]

While it is true that many elements of postmodernity are in direct contradiction to Christianity, postmodernity must not be summarily dismissed. With a solid grounding of our Christian faith and a firm understanding of where differences lie between postmodernity and Christianity, opening our eyes to some of the positives of postmodernity is important for Christians and, specifically, pastors. Our God continues to

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[63] John 14:6.

[64] White, *Post-Modernism 101*, 18-19.

be at work in every age and in every society, amidst the good and the evils each culture brings to the table.

"At root, what is at stake in postmodernism is the relationship between faith and reason,"[65] and here we need to understand that postmodernity is not the enemy. For as many reasons that postmodernity is, in places, in contradiction and even at enmity with Christianity, there are also opportunities postmodernity provides for the Christian faith to thrive in this cultural milieu, opportunities that are both challenging and exciting. It will require continued deep theological study, thought, and conversation. It will require a boldness and courage to engage in potentially threatening and difficult conversations. It will require Christians to be in genuine relationships with people who are not necessarily believers. It will require a willingness and openness to read the Scriptures with fresh eyes.

The combination of postmodernity's embrace of story, the respect of each individual's right to have and share her own story, and the openness to spiritual matters provides a wonderful platform for sharing, proclaiming, and living out the message of the Gospel. People today are looking for people who are genuine and real. It does not get any more genuine and real than the Gospel, which deals with the realities of evil, suffering, and hardship in a way nothing else in this world can. What Jesus Christ offers in his Word is a powerful answer to so much of what postmodernity is looking for. Now is not the time to speak pious platitudes or wear plastic smiles.

> Postmodernism opens the space for Christian witness to be bold in its proclamation, its narration of the story. While in modernity science was the emperor who set the rules for what counted as truth and castigated faith as fable, postmodernity has shown us the emperor's nudity. As such, we no longer need to

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[65] Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 71.

apologize for faith—we can be unapologetic in our kerygmatic proclamation of the gospel narrative.[66]

Yes, Christians hold that there is a truth we know to be embodied in Jesus Christ, a truth revealed in the Scriptures, that there is a single metanarrative that includes all people and all times (that God loves us in Jesus), and that God's Story continues to be told and written in the stories of our lives. Postmodern culture ideally provides Christians with a great platform from which to share the stories of our faith and of our God.

> The new apologetic of postmodernity will echo the patient presuppositionalist apologetic of Schaeffer—getting everyone's presuppositions on the table and then narrating the story of Christian faith, allowing others to see the way in which it makes sense of our experience and our world. While the new apologetics will be an *un*apologetics, it will at the same time be characterized by faithful storytelling, not demonstration. It must be kerygmatic and charismatic: proclaiming the story of the gospel in the power of the Spirit.[67]

The desire for participation is another powerful segue from culture to faith as "the postmodern church seeks to initiate listeners into the narrative,"[68] inviting people to see their story as part of God's Story.

New Horizons

Culturally, life is never stagnant but ever-moving, ever-shifting, ever-transforming. Within the Church I believe we are still struggling with some facets of this transition from modernity to postmodernity. Nevertheless, changes continue to happen and there is already movement beyond postmodernity. Post-postmodernity

> seems to be taking the "postmodern condition" (postmodernity) as a given and creating new remixed works disassociated from the modern-postmodern

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[66] Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 70-71.

[67] Ibid., 74.

[68] Ibid., 77.

arguments and oppositions. The post-postmodern takes the "always already" mixed condition of sources, identities, and new works as a *given*, not a question or *problem*. The metaphors of "network" and "convergence" in creative subcultures (e.g., musicians, artists, designers, writers) are seen to be live operations or conditions received and re-performed, not just abstractions. From this more recent perspective, living in remixed hybridity is thus *obligatory,* not a choice, since it is the foundation for participating in a living, networked, globally connected culture.[69]

These new cultural changes of post-postmodernity, similar to modernity and postmodernity, will continue to pose threats, bring challenges, and provide opportunities to the Church and her multiple facets of ministry, including preaching, that will require bold, creative, and thoughtful study and conversations. What will follow post-postmodernism? Who knows? But what we do know is that the Lord assures us that he will be present with us, whatever the next cultural shift may be. And he will also continue to provide people of faith, preachers, teachers, and proclaimers of the Gospel to speak his message of life into those times.

This monumental transition from modernity to postmodernity and beyond is opening doors never before considered by Christians to share and live out their faith. It provides fresh opportunities for congregations to remember their mission and purpose. It allows pastors to reconsider how they might share the Good News of Jesus through their preaching. It is a whole new world—a beautiful, challenging, and ever-changing world—brimming with opportunity for a bold, creative expression and proclamation of the Gospel.

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[69] Martin Irvine, "'The Postmodern' 'Postmodernism' 'Postmodernity': Approaches to Po-Mo," Georgetown University, September 9, 2013, accessed October 20, 2017, http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/pomo.html.

CHAPTER 4:

AUTHORITY, LEADERSHIP, AND OUTREACH

Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you
Is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'.[1]

As one of the great musicians of the last sixty years, Bob Dylan spoke a prophetic

word in his song, "The Times They Are a-Changin'," back in 1964. The momentum of

Dylan's words seemed only to grow through those tumultuous years of the 1960s and

have never been truer than they are today. As Dylan sings, the waters have grown and the

Church had "better start swimmin' or we'll sink like a stone!" While the Lord's Church

will endure and we know that "the gates of Hades will not overcome it,"[2] the Church is

continuing to lose its voice in our society. "It doesn't matter how carefully the preacher

prepares or delivers the sermon or how well the musicians perform. *That formula just*

doesn't work for most people anymore. If today's Church wants to reach beyond the

shrinking church-inclined attendees, it will need to consider new and different ways to

engage people."[3]

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[1] Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are a-Changin'," released January 13, 1964, Columbia Records.

[2] Matthew 16:18.

[3] Schultz and Schultz, *Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore*, 43.

Based on of our understanding from Chapter Three of the movement from modernity into postmodernity, this chapter will take a step back into history once again, from a church history perspective, dealing particularly with those matters related to the history, heritage, and challenges of the LCMS, as well as looking back to the Reformation driven by Martin Luther. As we have discovered, how people view institutions and those in positions of authority, as well as in how information is shared and received, has drastically changed.[4] The tensions around the matters of authority of the Word of God, pastors, and the Church will be addressed in the pages that follow. Because of their interconnected nature, it is nearly impossible to look at each one individually. So, the three topics will intermingle throughout this chapter.

When it comes to issues of authority, it is interesting to note that the tension over these matters is not new. They are issues that have been wrestled with, to varying degrees, throughout the history of the Church. The grappling experienced over the past five hundred years, and particularly in the last fifty years, necessitate yet another response by churches, particularly in the way pastors must approach preaching to clearly communicate the Gospel.

Authority of the Bible

The first matter of authority to be addressed is the authority of the Bible. Within the LCMS, we hold the authority of God's Word at the highest level, believing the Bible

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[4] Mary Klages, "Postmodernism," University of Colorado, Boulder, English Department, accessed April 10, 2014, http://www.bdavetian.com/Postmodernism.html.

to be exactly what we call it: the very words of God which were inspired by God himself,[5] taking 2 Timothy 3:14-16 to heart:

> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, *which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed* and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (emphasis added).

This high view of Scripture also flows from what the apostle John wrote at the end of his Gospel: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."[6] In the LCMS, as in some other denominations, we believe all Scripture points us to Jesus; that is where the strength of its authority lies and why it must be foundational in preaching.

That belief, however, is at odds with much of our postmodern culture. With the postmodern hesitancy to ascribe absolute truth to anyone or anything, placing any level of authority in the Bible can be troublesome.[7] Before we deal with this conflict of values directly, it would be helpful to understand some of the history regarding how we arrived at this view of Scripture. In order to do that, we need to go back to the time leading up to the Reformation.

In the premodern world, the period prior to the Reformation, people more readily placed their trust in various authorities, including the institutions of government and the

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[5] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, "Belief and Practice," accessed April 4, 2014, http://www.lcms.org/belief-and-practice.

[6] John 20:30-31.

[7] Heath White, *Post-Modernism 101,* 116-117.

Church, and the leaders within those institutions. The political structure of those times

placed power with the secular leaders of the day, the kings and nobles, and their authority

was bolstered by longstanding tradition.

> Before the modern period in Europe, feudalism was the near-universal form of government. People were subjects of a lord, not citizens of a republic… The church, like the feudal society, was organized hierarchically, with the local priest answering to a bishop, and the bishop answering to the pope in Rome… The church was a person's connection to God… Moreover, the religious authorities set the content of the faith—its dogmas and doctrines, and the proper interpretation of scripture. In this they depended on the Bible, reason, and the tradition of councils and church fathers. Reading the Bible was discouraged among laypeople, on the grounds that they lacked the education and proper understanding of the faith to interpret it correctly.[8]

In premodern times, the trust laypeople put in the authority of the Bible was due

to several very practical issues. First, the extremely low literacy rate among laypeople

was a significant deterrent for such people to even consider desiring or owning a Bible. It

also elevated the need for people to put their trust in authorities such as priests to not only

read what the Bible said but also to interpret its meaning for them. Illiteracy and the high

cost of books were factors that kept the Bible out of the common person's hands.

However, not all held to the belief that laypeople should not be entrusted with the

Holy Scriptures. John Wycliffe, who died in 1384, had the dream of putting Scripture in

the language of the people. "But Wycliffe's cause, powerfully presented as it was, was

limited in a way that the messages of the later reformers would not be. Wycliffe lived

before Gutenberg. They lived after him."[9] The limitations that Wycliffe faced were

indeed torn down by Gutenberg's invention of the printing press.

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[8] Ibid., 24-25.

[9] Tickle, *The Great Emergence,* 52.

As a young monk, Martin Luther pored over the Scriptures, and the more he dug into them, the more convicted he was that the Church's teaching was not aligned with the Word of God. With Luther nailing his ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg, the Reformation era was ushered in. In that same timeframe, Gutenberg invented the printing press, a comparatively efficient way of mass producing written materials. "It was in Gutenberg that authority was able to be moved to the Book."[10]

Luther embraced this invention and leveraged it in a significant way with his prolific writing, exposing what he saw as errors in the Church and engaging the common people more and more. The most significant of Luther's writings was putting the Bible into German, the language of the people. It was his passion to put God's Word into the hands of the laity, men *and* women (which was also counter-cultural), and allow them to read the scriptures for themselves: "the shop girl with the bishops."[11]

Luther emphasized education, which likely grew out of his own study of God's Word and the impact it had on his life. With Gutenberg's printing press, more opportunities for learning and reading helped the literacy rate rise, which, in turn accelerated the drive toward rationalism, the Enlightenment, and modernity.[12]

Related to this was the seismic shift Luther introduced to worship. Prior to Luther, the sermon held a relatively minor place in the worship service. Luther's passion for the Word of God, his desire to put that Word into the hands of all people, and his emphasis on education all served to elevate the sermon to a more central place in worship. Through

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[10] Ibid., 53.

[11] Carl C. Fickenscher II, "Preaching for (and from) the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation," (presentation, Spring Tri-Circuit Pastors Conference, Estes Park, CO, April 19-21, 2016).

[12] Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 46.

his study of the Bible, Luther saw it as and believed it to be the literal Word of God and the power of salvation and therefore preached it as such—a radically new concept.[13]

With the Reformation, the answer to the question, "Where is the authority?" landed firmly on the Scriptures: s*ola Scriptura, Scriptura sola*, "only the Scriptures and the Scriptures only."[14] "Martin Luther implicitly leaned on this new doctrine in his famous defense before the pope's representatives at Worms in 1521: 'Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God.'"[15] Luther's famous stand, questioning the authority of the pope and the Church, would also lay early groundwork for postmodernity's view of the authority of pastors and the Church.

Luther and the other reformers built the Church on the principle of the authority of the Bible and in relatively short time, joined it with the concept of the priesthood of believers,[16] which is another critical concept regarding authority that will be explored shortly.

This high view of Scripture and its authority would continue within the Lutheran Church through the founding and early years of the LCMS. C.F.W. Walther, one of the

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[13] Fickenscher, "Preaching for (and from) the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation."

[14] Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 45.

[15] White, *Post-Modernism 101*, 27-28.

[16] Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 45.

LCMS's early leaders, emphasized the need to "preach the Word of God in truth and purity"[17] and to keep the Bible as the foundation on which the sermon is built.

<div style="text-align:center">Pastoral Authority</div>

At this juncture, we must introduce a second matter of authority, that of pastoral authority, because of the intertwining of this authority with the authority of the Bible that began with the Reformation. The significance of these issues comes into play when considering appropriate levels of engagement of laypeople regarding the sermon.

The tension between the authority of the Bible and the authority of the pastor existed even in Luther's time. Luther's introduction of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* was tantamount to "a rejection of the ecclesiastical authority of the Catholic hierarchy."[18] When Nicolaus Copernicus, a clergyman as well as an astronomer and a contemporary of Luther, put forward his claim that the earth was not the center of the universe, this was a bold affront to the Church and its authority as well. Accompanying Copernicus' claim was the idea that the earth was not flat, and because "the Church's cosmology and theology had been solidly grounded on a flat earth, a tiered universe, and the centrality of Earth to the creation,"[19] many of the Church's teachings came crashing down and raised questions about the authority of the Church. Teaching that Heaven was above and Hell was below did not fit anymore. "Had Christian priests and the holy fathers been subject to error and ignorance all along? Was the Church capable of being wrong? Yes. It was that

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[17] C. F. W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 67.

[18] White, *Post-Modernism 101*, 27.

[19] Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 55.

simple and that devastating."[20] The door had been opened to questioning the authority of the Church and her ordained leaders.

The Priesthood of Believers

Luther himself acknowledged that a tension exists in Scripture between the authority of the Church and her priests and the authority that lies with the priesthood of all believers, a new term that was not coined by Luther but grew out of several of his writings. The priesthood of believers refers to the biblical truth that all Christians have direct access to God without any need for mediation outside of Christ himself. The phrase was embraced particularly by laypeople regarding their important place within the Body of Christ.

Luther spoke to this tension in the context of what he referred to as the tyranny of the papacy. But his approach was to recognize the both/and nature of the priesthood between ordained priests and the baptized people of God. Luther spoke of it in terms of the differences between "office" and "work," that there are necessary distinctions to be made, not to lord it over anyone,[21] but in order to work together in a complementary way in carrying out Christ's mission given to the Church.

> Luther here speaks both of the laity as priests, and of the clergy as priests. The clergy are there for the giving out of "the Word of God and the Sacraments, which is their work and office." The laity are there for receiving the gifts and living them out in their callings. Whatever their calling as laity, that calling neither makes them a lower level of Christian, nor inferior in their service to God below the

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[20] Ibid., 56.

[21] Norman Nagel, "Luther and the Priesthood of all Believers," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (October 1997): 291-294. Luther specifically speaks to the distinctions of "office" and "work" in *To the Christian Nobility*.

clergy. Their calling is their priestly service to God as they serve their neighbors in their calling.[22]

Luther writes about 1 Peter 2:9,

There is no "two-level" Church, with clergy above and laity below, or laity above (who hires and fires) and clergy below, or two churches, one visible and the other invisible. There are no levels—only where our Lord has put himself there for us (*dir da*) to give out his saving, enlivening gifts as he has ordained the Means of Grace to do, and put the *Predigtamt* there for the giving out of his gifts surely and locatedly in the Means of Grace (*instrumenta prima, instrumentum secundum*).[23]

It seems Luther was comfortable with the tension that he saw in the Scriptures between ordained priests and the laity. Each has their role in the work of God's Kingdom and it does not necessitate division or a fight for power or control. However, the reality of life in a sin-filled and broken world demonstrates that a completely peaceful coexistence within this tension is not realistic.

Tension in the Early Years of the LCMS

Moving ahead three hundred and fifty years, the tension between ordained pastors and the priesthood of believers reemerged when the LCMS was in its formative years and some practical applications came to the forefront. There were influential pastoral voices on both sides of this issue, causing more wrestling and debate. Pastor J. A. A. Grabau believed strongly in the importance of the doctrine of the ministry and the importance of the pastoral office needing to lead and influence congregations. Pastor G. H. Loeber was one of the leading advocates for the laypeople of the congregation having more voice and influence.

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[22] Ibid., 291-292.

[23] Ibid., 286.

The backdrop to this matter in the early 1800s was the hierarchical arrangement

of the Lutheran Church in Germany, with pastors having voice and vote and the people of

the congregations having little say in matters of the Church. The interconnectedness of

church and state influenced this tension as well. In 1838, a large group of about seven

hundred Lutherans chose to leave Germany and come to the United States, and one of the

first issues at hand was how this new church would be organized.[24] Would it be patterned

after the church in Germany or would the change in locale bring about a change in

structure and in leadership? This matter came to a head practically upon landing on the

shores of St. Louis, Missouri. Martin Stephan, the lead pastor of this group of Lutheran

immigrants, grabbed the reins of power but within several months was deposed and

excommunicated for his abuse of that power and of his position—events that launched

this little group into two years of turmoil and distrust between clergy and laypeople.[25]

The spiritual turmoil in which the Saxon immigrants in Perry County found

themselves was palpable. In the early 1840s, Grabau wrote a letter from Germany stating

a major concern he had regarding some of his congregations in the United States. Those

congregations had asked laymen to perform ministerial acts because of their inability to

secure pastors to serve them due to the pastoral shortage. Grabau considered this a

violation of the doctrine of the ministry, as he believed that only properly called and

ordained pastors could administer the Sacraments. The response of Loeber, Pastor

Gruber, and Pastor C.F.W. Walther included this:

> …with respect to the so-much-emphasized church ordinances essentials and non-
> essentials have been confused and thereby Christian liberty has been curtailed;

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[24] John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., *Ministry in Missouri Until 1962: An Historical Analysis of the Doctrine of the Ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (Hueneme, CA: J.C. Wohlrabe, 1992), 3.

[25] Ibid., 4.

more has been ascribed to the ministerial office than belongs to it, and thus the spiritual priesthood of the believers has been forced into the background… To say that a congregation must obey its pastor in all things not contrary to God's Word goes beyond the word of the Savior: "Whosoever heareth you, heareth Me." Only when and inasmuch as the pastor proclaims the Word of God, can he demand obedience, and the decision whether or not he is proclaiming God's commands rests with the individual Christian. The efficacy of the means of grace does not depend on the office of the ministry, but on Christ's Word. The Saxons recognized in Grabau's position the same errors used by Stephan to gain control over his congregation.[26]

The fears of abusive power on the part of the clergy were real and borne out of firsthand experience. Walther and other pastors had also experienced it, being part of that group of seven hundred who immigrated together, and were sensitive to both sides of the issue.

It was Walther, as the new leader of the group, who ultimately drafted what would be seen as a mediating position between the two extremes, a position that did not completely buy into one side or the other but rather retained what he believed was a healthy and biblical tension between the two.

> This position… favored neither those who would place the ministry over the church and the priesthood of all believers, nor those who would place the church and the priesthood of all believers over the ministry. Both the church and the ministry stood side by side, and to a certain extent, both the church and the ministry stood in tension. However, there was also a close relation between the office of the ministry and the congregation and between the office of the ministry and the function of that office.[27]

Unfortunately, this did not settle the matter. Because it favored neither side but recognized value in both, there continued to be a struggle over control within that tension. The LCMS was formally organized in 1847, and

> the first constitution of the Missouri Synod contained several articles which demonstrated or had a bearing on its understanding of the doctrine of the ministry. Concerning this, Carl Mundinger noted: "By putting real power into the laymen's

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[26] Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod 1847-1947* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 138-139.

[27] Wohlrabe, *Ministry in Missouri Until 1962,* 3.

hands the founders of the Missouri Synod nurtured and developed a sturdy and informed laity… The power and authority given to the laymen, on the other hand, was not permitted in any way to undermine or affect adversely the authority and dignity of the holy ministry. The principle of pastoral leadership was honored. The provisions of congregational and synodical polity not only made effective leadership on the part of the pastor possible, but probable."[28]

Another influential pastor in Germany, Wilhelm Loehe, who provided many pastors to the Church in the United States, eventually broke from the LCMS because he felt congregations had been given too much power and that the power of the clergy had been curtailed in the constitution of the Missouri Synod.[29] "Loehe did not believe that every Christian has all the rights and privileges of the Office of the Keys nor that the office of the ministry is derived from the spiritual priesthood of the believers."[30]

Yet the LCMS as a church body "held to the Scriptural truths that since the Christians are called a royal priesthood, they must have the power to elect ministers" and not all power rests in ordination and the ministry, although they should use good sense by consulting other pastors and working together.[31]

The debate over this tension continued and, in 1851, C.F.W. Walther prepared an outline of a book to present to the Synod in convention. This book was in the form of theses which would eventually be adopted by the convention. Here are several of the theses he would propose which relate specifically to preaching:

IV. The preaching office is no particular, holier order [estate] over against the ordinary Christian order [estate], as was the Levitical priesthood, but is an office of service.

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[28] Carl S. Mundinger, *Government in the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 218-219, as quoted from John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., *Ministry in Missouri Until 1962*, 8.

[29] Baepler, *A Century of Grace*, 143.

[30] Ibid., 144.

[31] Ibid., 141.

V.   The preaching office has the authority to preach the Gospel and administer the holy sacraments and the authority of spiritual judgment [a spiritual tribunal].

IX.   To the preaching office belongs respect and absolute obedience when the preacher expounds [presents] God's Word, yet the preacher has no lordship in the church; he therefore has no right to make new laws, arbitrarily to arrange adiaphora and ceremonies in the church, and to impose and carry out the ban [excommunication] alone, without prior knowledge [recognition] of the whole congregation.

X.   To the preaching office indeed belongs by divine right also the office [function] to judge doctrine, yet laymen also have this right as well; therefore these same also have seat and vote in ecclesiastical courts and councils with the preachers.[32]

John Wohlrabe, in his writing of the history of the LCMS, provides an excellent summation of each side of this tension between the priesthood of believers and the Office of the Public Ministry present during the formative years of the synod:

Because the Missouri Synod's doctrine of the ministry was grounded in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, it had a soteriological context centering first and foremost on the believer's relationship to God as he is justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Through this relationship, all believers have all churchly authority and power, that is, the office of the keys, the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. Yet, God does not will that all believers exercise this authority publicly. For this, God instituted the public office of the ministry. It is distinct from the office that all believers have in that its function is to exercise the power and authority of all believers publicly on behalf of all. This power and authority is transferred to the office by way of the call. The Missouri Synod maintained that God established this office and He calls an individual to this office, but He works mediately through the call of a congregation… Finally, it was stressed that the public office of the ministry was not a special order in society, but instead an office of service. Its authority and responsibility rested solely in the area of Word and Sacrament. However, both laymen and ministers were given the responsibility for judging doctrine and determining other matters in the church, even excommunication. The Missouri Synod's position on the doctrine of the ministry attempted to maintain an equilibrium and a tension between the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the ministry. However, there was a close relation between the office of the public

[32] Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, *Die Stimme Unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt* (Erlangen: Verlag von Andreas Deichert, 1852), 174-221, as quoted from John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., *Ministry in Missouri Until 1962*, 9.

ministry and the congregation. There was also a close relation between the office of the ministry and the function of that office.[33]

With this understanding, it is easy to recognize how this tension has come to be. Pastors are often seen in this role of priest, carrying out various tasks and functions on behalf of the people. However, many of those tasks are not necessarily exclusive to the Office of the Ministry, tasks such as visiting the sick or homebound, leadership of various ministry teams, attending to the finances of the congregation, or leading different aspects of the worship service such as reading Scripture or serving the Lord's Supper.

A Clash of Authority

Moving forward to the 1950s and 1960s, there is an added dimension to this tension and it came with changing cultural views and the transition that was occurring from modernity to postmodernity. As Daniel Adams observes, "In the past, cultural and religious knowledge and value was effectively controlled by the intellectual and political elite. Parents controlled their children, teachers controlled their students, clergy controlled their parishioners, politicians controlled the citizens, and so on."[34] For many communities in early America, the pastor was the most educated person in the entire community. With that education came a level of respect for his authority and what he had to say. People looked to the pastor to share his knowledge from the pulpit, trusting that his years of education and training in the matters of God and his Word were worthy of

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[33] Wohlrabe, *Ministry in Missouri Until 1962,* 15.

[34] Daniel J. Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism," *Cross Currents* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1997-98), accessed March 5, 2016, http://www.crosscurrents.org/adams.htm.

their attention for the furthering of their own faith and in understanding what it meant to

follow Jesus.

That respect for and trust in pastoral authority carried over for many years. And

so it was that "the pastor standing up in the pulpit in the early 1960s was still a major

authority."[35] But pastoral authority was beginning to wane along with the trust of

institutions, organizations, and churches in the 1960s. Philip Clayton observes:

> Contests over the right to interpret scripture were really a way-station to
> modernism, halfway between the premodern and modern worlds, for under sola
> Scriptura, the Bible is still an unquestioned authority. It did not remain so as the
> modern period wore on. If conscientious individuals could question the church's
> traditional interpretations of the Bible, could they not question the claims of the
> Bible itself?[36]

This clash of authority, the inherent tensions within society, the cultural

transitions that were beginning to arise, all came to a head within the LCMS in the 1960s

and 1970s. What was occurring in the culture drove some significant decisions and a

notable change of direction for the LCMS. Remember, the 1960s and 1970s were a

period in the United States filled with upheaval: President Kennedy was assassinated, the

Civil Rights Movement and racial tensions touched every sector of society, the lengthy

Vietnam War was rife with controversy and protests, the Student Rights Movement and

the Ecology Movement were both beginning, there was distrust of government with

Watergate, women's rights, Roe v. Wade, etc., and, along with that, a growing distrust of

many established organizations.[37] For the Church, the West Coast gave birth to the Jesus

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[35] Philip Clayton, "Theology and the Church After Google," *Princeton Theological Review* 17, no. 43 (Fall 2010): 15.

[36] White, *Post-Modernism 101*, 28.

[37] Tracy Allen, "The Jesus Movement of the 70s: Bell-Bottoms + Bible = Jesus Freak," accessed April 10, 2014,

Movement, which was tied to the hippie counterculture of the 1960s, posing a threat to the established Church and the denominational system because this movement crossed denominational boundaries. The Jesus Movement impacted worship styles, musical styles, and the authority of Scripture, pastors, and denominations. This movement reinforced the idea of freedom in these areas within the Church on multiple fronts, placing primary emphasis on relevancy.[38]

The Historical-Critical Method

During this period in time, some serious questions and suspicions had subtly crept into the Church, questions and suspicions that would have major ramifications for the LCMS and would eventually serve to create what are still ongoing fears and anxieties for pastors and congregations when it comes to considering change and creativity in ministry. What did *sola Scriptura* really mean? Questions arose about how to read the words of Scripture: literally? metaphorically? actually? Debates began over which words do and do not belong to the Scriptures, how much editorializing has been done over years of transcription and passing along the Scriptures, and again the question of authority came into play: where did the authority lie?[39]

These questions and suspicions came under the umbrella of higher criticism, or the historical-critical method of interpreting Scripture. The influence of higher criticism

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http://www.icyte.com/system/snapshots/fs1/2/8/4/0/2840404a2ebe3a3a1c6cfc183fa3b3c4b7105c74/index.html.

[38] David de Sabatino, "The Jesus Movement of the 70s: History of the Jesus Movement," accessed April 10, 2014, http://www.icyte.com/system/snapshots/fs1/2/8/4/0/2840404a2ebe3a3a1c6cfc183fa3b3c4b7105c74/index.html.

[39] Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 46.

continued to grow in the institutions of higher learning, including many seminaries,

affecting the way the Bible was approached. The historical-critical method comes

> out of the rationalistic Enlightenment and differs from traditional biblical
> scholarship in that it insists on treating the Bible not as an unquestioned authority,
> but as one ancient book among others. All biblical statements are therefore open
> to challenge before the court of sovereign human reason. Historical criticism
> understands itself simply as the general scientific method applied to past events,
> namely history. This means that the critic and his reason are judge and jury, while
> the Bible, like all other ancient documents, is on trial, whether as defendant or as
> witness; for even as a witness its credibility depends entirely on the findings of
> the critical "court." This situation, of course, represents a complete reversal of the
> classic roles of reason and Scripture in Lutheran theology. Under the new, critical
> regime, reason is the master and Scripture is servant, whereas formerly it was the
> other way round.[40]

Higher criticism was already gaining momentum in Europe and came to the

United States in the late 1940s and 1950s, where it started to influence thinking in various

institutions of higher learning. Those seeds of thought began to flourish and grow by the

1960s partly due to the radical cultural shifts that were occurring.

Higher criticism was viewed by many within the LCMS as a serious threat to the

authority of Scripture.[41] This threat of the higher-critical method of interpreting Scripture

was explored by professors at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and leaders within the

LCMS during 1963 and 1964, following a paper written by St. Louis seminary professor

Dr. Norman Habel. In his paper, Habel publicly raised the idea that Genesis 2 and 3 could

legitimately be interpreted symbolically rather than historical fact.[42]

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[40] Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 119-120.

[41] Ibid., 119-120.

[42] Concordia Seminary, Board of Control, *Exodus from Concordia: A Report on the 1974 Walkout*, Concordia College: St. Louis, MO, 1977, 7.

Dr. Martin Franzmann, a professor of New Testament theology who taught with Habel on the faculty at Concordia, offered this criticism of the historical-critical method:

> The historical-critical method cannot be considered as merely a theologically neutral tool or technique of interpretation, comparable to textual criticism, grammar or lexicography. None of these latter undertakes to pass a value judgment on the historical substance of revelation; the historical-critical method does. The historical method assigns to the interpreter the capacity and the authority to distinguish between "the facts which matter and the facts which don't."[43]

Defining and arguing against use of the increasingly common historical-critical method of interpreting Scripture, resolutions made at the 1962 synodical convention reflected the Synod's concern over its use:

> A basic characteristic of this method is that it regards and interprets the Bible as a human document like all other historical documents. As a result, its users invariably claim to find errors and even doctrinal diversity within the Bible and frequently question the miraculous, supernatural, and revelatory aspects of the Scriptures.[44]

The Exodus from Concordia Seminary

After years of investigations, convention dictates, political jockeying, and the reaction of those fearing how the historical-critical method could negatively impact the biblically conservative LCMS, it all culminated on February 19, 1974 with a highly publicized "Exodus" from Concordia Seminary. The events surrounding the Exodus would prove to have long-lasting effects on the LCMS, effects still being felt today. This Exodus included a vast majority of the students and faculty of the St. Louis seminary walking out of the seminary to protest what was seen as censorship and the actions being

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[43] Ibid., 12.

[44] Ibid., 2.

taken against various faculty members.[45] This Exodus would dramatically change the landscape of the major Lutheran denominations in the United States.

Reflecting on this, I believe that some were reacting in a way that was influenced by both the culture of modernity and the incoming cultural influences of postmodernity: higher criticism is tied strongly to reason and rationalism, hallmarks of modernity; there was also, by the actions specifically surrounding the Exodus of Concordia Seminary, a demonstration of anti-authoritarianism, a characteristic of postmodernity.

However, with what Habel surfaced with his initial questioning of how Genesis 2 and 3 could be interpreted, there was legitimate concern over how these issues would impact the authority of Scripture. Suddenly, with the introduction of historical criticism, everything in the Bible became vulnerable and suspect, to the extreme of even questioning the bodily resurrection of Jesus. This posed a tremendous threat to the traditional, conservative view that had been embraced by the LCMS throughout its history. Flowing out of these events would also be several additional, long-lasting effects on the LCMS related to trust issues, paranoia, and curtailing of creativity as a result of the broken trust felt amongst clergy, leaders, and laypeople alike.

Another critique of historical criticism that addresses the matter of authority was offered by G. Maier in *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*: "Historical criticism, to be true to itself, must keep itself unfettered by any authority save that of human reason. But this very feature has condemned the method to ultimate sterility and bankruptcy. This

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[45] Ibid., 119-128.

approach to the Bible, based on unbridled human rationality alone, is now coming to be recognized as a blind alley."[46]

　　While I personally have significant concerns over historical criticism, I cannot help but see some interesting irony with the events at Concordia Seminary and in the LCMS in the 1960s and 1970s, and the Reformation of the 1500s. At the time of Luther, the priests and religious hierarchy of the Church were skeptical and even fearful of putting the Bible into the hands of laypeople. It was believed that laypeople could not appropriately handle God's Word. They feared laypeople could do irreparable harm: they would probably interpret it and read it "wrong," missing or messing up important theological and doctrinal points. For the LCMS in the 1960s and 1970s, seminary professors and others who were considered trusted and respected scholars of the Church were the ones who were called out for pushing the envelope of how to interpret the Scriptures by endorsing or even considering the use of higher criticism. While there were fellow scholars who expressed concern, there were also informed laypeople raising some important questions of those exploring and using higher criticism. The laypeople and other pastors and leaders within the LCMS who were questioning the use of higher criticism were looked upon by some as embracing archaic belief systems and unable to move into the present day and a higher level of thinking and of understanding the Scriptures. Major trust issues developed over this controversy between the laypeople and those perceived as the theological elite.

　　So much of what occurred during the time surrounding the Exodus was filled with high emotions, anger, and grief, much of which served to deteriorate trust and undermine

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[46] Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, 121.

pastoral authority. For example, there were accusations made of the Board of Control of Concordia Seminary, referencing "evil, injustice, corruption, moral bankruptcy, and similar vices for the decisions they made in those fateful days."[47] Questions posed to the faculty of St. Louis by synodical president Dr. John Behnken "were never publicly answered by the faculty of Concordia Seminary. As a consequence of this and other unanswered concerns expressed by various officials of the Synod, uncertainty and suspicion concerning the faculty's doctrinal position were increased throughout the Synod."[48] From both sides of the issue, even the disagreements among the faculty at St. Louis, the result was more and more un-Christian behavior, assumptions and accusations being made, speaking past one another, withholding information, not always fully answering questions, and not answering the questions at all.[49] This included accusations by the faculty minority who stated, "The faculty majority has wronged the President of Synod. It has done this not only by distorting the facts and by its slurs against him and his manner of conducting the investigation [of the faculty], but also by expressly calling his act unscriptural, unethical, divisive, and detrimental."[50] There was public protest, organized politicking, and demonstrations, all staged with leaks to news stations so this could be aired on TV, newspapers, and radio.[51]

The consequences of all this within the LCMS was that there was uncertainty at best and fear at worst over who was watching who or if a congregation member or fellow

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[47] *Exodus from Concordia*, 2.

[48] Ibid., 12.

[49] Ibid., 23.

[50] Ibid., 26.

[51] Ibid., 61-63.

pastor would report to a higher authority (Circuit Counselor, District President, or Synod President) any teaching or practice that was questionable as to its orthodoxy and purportedly not aligning with the teachings of the LCMS. What was once a close-knit family was suddenly being torn apart, with fellow pastors and laypeople questioning the faithfulness and orthodoxy of other pastors and laypeople. Nobody knew who they could trust at any level. It was a very, very painful time. For pastors who lived through those years, still today there are tears that flow when these matters are talked about because of how relationships were torn apart and trust was lost. The atmosphere of fear and the resulting brokenness in relationships and in trust among congregations, pastors, and laypeople proved to be a truly terrible time for everyone associated with the LCMS.

While this is admittedly an oversimplification of many complicated events over the span of many years, these are some of the struggles and issues that significantly shaped the LCMS into what it is today. The ramifications of those years continue to be felt fifty years later, particularly with regard to the matters of authority and distrust. More will be addressed about the impact this breakdown of trust has had on preaching later in this chapter.

Authority Today

While the trust in and the authority of Scripture is solid and not under fire in the LCMS today, that is not the case for our culture in general. Many people today recognize that the Bible is an important book, or at least that it is *supposed* to be an important book. But for how many people is the Bible a living and breathing reality that points to Jesus and shapes their lives? The claim of the authority of the Bible and the belief that it could actually shape our lives makes some people nervous. In our culture today, there are many

different things to which people ascribe such authority to influence them: books, music,

movies, TV shows, political pundits, and so on.

> But *should* the Bible play such a role—and preeminently so? The Christian
> church has long answered that question in the affirmative. Among other things,
> Christianity is a book religion. The Bible is our book. These factors make the in-
> depth preaching and teaching of the Bible absolutely essential. What is a book
> religion without a deep acquaintance with the book?[52]

When we consider the Bible today and what authority it holds, this belief lies not

in a veneration of the Bible as a mere book, but because we believe the Bible to be the

living, breathing Word of God; as the Gospel writer John records, "The Word became

flesh and made his dwelling among us."[53] Jesus and the Bible are synonymous.

Another approach to answering these questions of authority lies in the

understanding of truth. The internet has opened new challenges in trying to understand

truth and share a common understanding of it. In premodernity and modernity,

> knowledge was power, and therefore the diffusion of knowledge was strictly
> controlled. Those who were responsible for the diffusion of knowledge often
> underwent years of specialized education and training and had to pass an
> examination of their peers before they were allowed to become practitioners of
> their particular specialty. With postmodernity, however, comes a momentous
> change; no longer can cultural and religious knowledge and value be effectively
> controlled by the intellectual and political elite.[54]

Phyllis Tickle, in *The Great Emergence,* states how significant the internet is,

relative to what was experienced five hundred years ago in the Reformation:

> It would be quite literally impossible to exaggerate the central importance to the
> Great Emergence of the Internet and the World Wide Web. By the same token
> and in absolutely analogous ways, it would be impossible to overstate the

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[52] Brent A. Strawn, "Going Deep with the Bible in Preaching," Ministry Matters, May 1, 2014, accessed May 8, 2014, http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/article/entry/4978/going-deep-with-the-bible-in-preaching#.U2uRq-3Q1C0.email.

[53] John 1:14.

[54] Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism."

importance to the Great Reformation of the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in 1440 and his subsequent development of movable type and oil-based inks.[55]

Primarily thanks to the Internet, "authorities" are no longer needed when it comes to accessing information of any sort. People are comfortable searching, reading, and deciding for themselves what they are going to believe or give credibility to. This is changing the way teachers teach on every level, from preschool through post-graduate school. This is also changing the way the Church teaches the faith, approaches education from Sunday School to adult Bible classes, and preaches the Gospel—or at least it should if we want to be effective in speaking to our culture today.

In our Google world, we have become our own authorities. We are able to post and define whatever we believe to be true. We also have the profound ability to even alter truth. Experiments have been successfully conducted over altering benign truths such as the world elephant population.[56] Facebook and other social media and blog sites have become the places where "truths" are now being proposed and argued for. Individuals can post anything and everything, no matter how inane, and posit their argument for truth. These are snapshots of our times, where anyone can decide what is true and what is not true based on what each individual thinks and not necessarily on any outside authority or objective truth.

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[55] Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 53.

[56] Rachel Johnson, "Gospel Truth in the Age of Google," *Princeton Theological Review* 17, no. 43 (Fall 2010): 35-36. The "experiment" Johnson refers to is when comedian Steven Colbert challenged his audience to go to Wikipedia and edit the entry on elephants to state that the elephant population in Africa had tripled in six months. Suddenly this resource's truthfulness and integrity was questionable.

The understanding of and seeking truth in a Google world dramatically changes the way the preacher and the Church must approach how Scripture is used as a basis for truth when it comes to faith, religion, and spirituality.

With the availability of so many different online tools, it is tempting to use the Bible only to proof text or provide one-line answers to complicated questions. "For an increasing number of people, the Bible as a stable document is being replaced by the Bible as a searchable database."[57] This approach to the Bible changes the dynamics of how the Bible is understood. Instead of seeing the Bible as God's Story, beginning with Genesis and running fluidly through Revelation with a myriad of interconnections throughout the sixty-six books and letters that comprise the Bible, it can more readily be seen as a disjunct collection of unrelated writings and historical data or simply a means to prove a particular point by way of chapter and verse citation.

How does the Church, specifically the LCMS, which holds a very conservative view of Scripture as being God's inerrant and infallible Word, deal with such a culturally loose view of truth and the Bible? The answer to this question will play a key role when discerning how we preach the Gospel in our culture today. The Scriptures being one among many potential authorities for our lives creates a great challenge when preaching.

Within the LCMS, we continue to place our trust in the power of Jesus Christ through the very Word of God. It is an admittedly counter-cultural approach, yet one we believe can speak to our postmodern world. When we preach from the basis of God's Word, we offer our postmodern world "a most needed word: not our words, not the

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[57] Ched Spellman, "The Canon After Google: Implications of a Digitized and Destabilized Codex," *Princeton Theological Review* 17, no. 43 (Fall 2010): 41.

preacher's opinions… but God's Word. It is a living Word, read from Scripture each

Sunday morning, proclaimed anew from the pulpit, incarnated through the flesh and

voice of the preacher so that Christ walks among his people."[58]

When we acknowledge the authority of God in his Word, there is so much more

being communicated through our preaching. In Lutheran preaching, we expound not on

our own thoughts and ideas, but on God's authority and his inspired words. As David

Schmitt explains,

> That is what textual exposition communicates to the hearers: God is alive and
> active, at work in the world he created. Scripture is not simply a body of
> teachings, dislocated from history, and it is not simply a collection of stories,
> metaphorical worlds we choose to live in, but it is the historic revelation of a very
> real God who has intervened in human history. This God brings death, and he
> brings life. He takes into his hands a people, with all of the forms and functions of
> their language, and uses these people and their speech to communicate and give
> witness to his holy work.[59]

This is the task of the preacher, a task that continues to grow more challenging in our

postmodern world, with its waning respect for authority.

The Authority of the Pastor and the Church Today

"Pastors still stand up in pulpits today, and some still view themselves as

indispensable purveyors of truth."[60] However, today there is

> a deeper, cultural shift that no longer sees external authority structures—be it the
> church, the government or anything else—as the place where truth can be
> found… Whereas for most of Christian history the institutional church was where

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[58] Clayton J. Schmit, "What Lutherans Have to Offer Mission in Preaching," 358.

[59] David R. Schmitt, "The Tapestry of Preaching," *Concordia Journal* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 112.

[60] Clayton, "Theology and the Church After Google," 15.

one would go to understand what was true of God and humans, now people find a truth inside themselves and search for validation of that truth externally.[61]

This does not have to be taken to the extreme in saying that truth is relative (despite this being a central tenet of the philosophy of postmodernism and accepted by significant numbers of people in our society today), but it does imply that people are not looking solely to pastors or to institutions as the places where they believe truth can be found. More and more there is an acceptance that, for even committed followers of Jesus, everyone is on their own spiritual journey, and that journey may or may not include the Church or pastors for guidance.[62] This is not to say that there is no longer a need for pastors or theologians or those who devote their lives to the in-depth study of the Word of God with all its intricacies and nuances. But how can pastors be part of the conversations and help guide people to the way of truth we embrace as Christians?[63]

Packard and Hope share some additional insight into what has changed in our culture when it comes to authority:

> In order to answer the question about what's different about our era, we must focus on those elements of our society that have affected people's ability to be engaged with organized religion. The two most important macro-level trends are undoubtedly the loss of trust in social institutions in general and religious leaders in particular and the perception that religious institutions are no longer tied into the daily life of individuals as intimately as they once were. In other words, they're increasingly considered irrelevant.[64]

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[61] Joshua Pease, "Barna Study Introduces Us to the 'I Love Jesus but Not the Church' Crowd," April 5, 2017, accessed April 10, 2017, http://churchleaders.com/news/301823-barna-study-introduces-us-love-jesus-not-church-crowd.html?utm_source=outreach-cl-daily-nl&utm_medium=email&utm_content=text-link&utm_campaign=cl-daily-nl&maropost_id=742304066&mpweb=256-3166598-742304066.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Luke 20:21; John 14:6.

[64] Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope, *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People Are DONE with Church but Not Their Faith* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing [group.com], 2015), Kindle, loc. 231.

For pastors and the Church to recapture a place in the conversation and a relevant voice in our culture, there are some things to which we must give attention, because the role of pastor and Church are changing.

A foundational piece that is required to navigate these difficult waters is humility. Humility is critical if pastors are to carry out this new role with enthusiasm, grace, integrity, and a voice that will be heard. It is not to say that what was done previously was wrong or that previous theological methods or preaching styles were misguided and now we are here to set it all right. But in many ways what is needed now is to rekindle interest in theological matters and to enable the engagement of people and the exploration of real questions, and then to provide a place where this engagement and conversation can happen.[65] Much more needs to be said about the engagement of people relative to preaching, which I will address in the final chapter.

When it comes to having or reclaiming a voice for the Church in our current culture amidst competing "authorities" in people's lives, there are two foundational pieces for pastors and churches that are needed. It is going to take strong relational work and creative approaches to ministry that take into consideration our cultural values but do not align with any values that may compromise our Christian faith. Clayton speaks of the "cultural creatives" who are "able to hear and interpret the pulse of our age. They are scouts for discovering existing communities and hosts for the emergence of new communities. They are the bridgers of conversations. They are lovers of what the church

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[65] Clayton, "Theology and the Church After Google," 17.

has been and welcomers of what she is becoming."[66] Pastors need to be "bridgers of

conversation" and the Church should be the place to elicit more "cultural creatives."

As was discussed earlier, postmodernity values openness to many different points

of view. The positive side of this value is that many today are very open to talking about

spiritual matters, which means that there are many open places at the cultural table.

> What's important to understand about the non-churched Christian audience is that
> they are *not* saying theology, community, discipleship and accountability don't
> matter… It's that they don't perceive the institutional church to be a place where
> they'll effectively experience these things… they're just not certain it is relevant
> to their lives.[67]

If these spiritual issues *do* matter to people, how can we reassert that the Church *is* a

place where these things can not only be found but also experienced and discussed as

relevant issues to their lives? That is a challenge we face and one where preaching can

play a significant role in helping the Church regain our place at the table.

The shifting roles, expectations, and needs being raised by these postmodern

times are creating significant challenges, anxiety, and even confusion within the Church.

> Traditionally, the theologian was the "keeper of the faith." He… was responsible
> for doctrinal purity; it was his task to make sure that what folks got in sermons
> and Christian books was "the faith once given." Of course, there were some
> interpretive issues that had to be worked out, and the faith had to be applied to the
> specific challenges of one's own day and age. Yet this task was held primarily as
> the trust for a professional class within the church, the pastors and theologians.[68]

That has changed in today's world. While not having to agree with all points of view,

today's leaders who influence faith and action are those who moderate or enable

conversations and who are willing to "see, state, and honor the spirituality within those

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[66] Ibid., 16.

[67] Pease, "Barna Study Introduces Us to the 'I Love Jesus but Not the Church' Crowd."

[68] Clayton, "Theology and the Church After Google," 16.

they meet—both inside and outside the church."[69] Notice that it is not a necessity to agree with all points of view but a willingness to listen. If Christian leaders can help facilitate conversations, respectfully listening to varying points of view and offering appropriate biblical truths as part of those conversations, the opportunity is open to not only be heard but to influence and allow the Holy Spirit to work.

While this can be hard, if the pastor today can view his role not solely as "an authority who dispenses settled truths, wise words, and the sole path to salvation,"[70] but also as a host and facilitator of conversations, using his foundational grasp of God's Word and the truths of the Christian faith to be shared as part of those conversations, in the long run there may be much more to be gained in today's culture.

Understanding this new role for the pastor and utilizing his authority in a very different way from generations past, this facilitation of conversations can have a powerful influence in preaching as well. A thoughtful and well-prepared sermon can include the opportunity for people to join in the conversation and offer their perspectives and experiences to the topic at hand. For the sermon, this does not mean that all scriptural truths are up for grabs. But sermon preparation must take a different approach with the people of the congregation in mind, considering how to meaningfully allow people to enter the conversation, thinking about relevant points of contact with the scriptures and theme being considered, and even allowing for those areas of differing points of view or ideas to be raised and held up to God's Word.

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[69] Ibid., 15-16.

[70] Ibid., 15.

Care does need to be taken, however, that the pastor not just hold up simplistic "straw dogs" to be easily knocked to the ground. The opportunity to allow for genuine input, real experiences, and personal engagement must be present, otherwise the exercise will be futile and will be seen as childish, insincere, and a waste of time. To do this requires a different mindset of the pastor when it comes to his preparation and presentation of the sermon. But if the dialogue during the sermon is genuine, doors will more likely remain open for conversations to continue.

The Tension Over Authority

This diminishing respect for the pastor's authority today adds to this tension between the priesthood of believers and the Office of the Ministry. This tension is still quite evident in the LCMS and can be recognized in the variety of ways congregations choose to structure and organize themselves. The LCMS as a church body provides congregational autonomy. Therefore, the individual congregations can decide how much authority resides in the pastoral office versus how much freedom is given to the laypeople of the congregation.

Congregations and their pastors throughout the Synod tend to lean toward one end or the other on the spectrum between the priesthood of believers and the Office of the Ministry. Some will keep a "pastor only" approach to worship and preaching with little or no involvement or engagement of the laypeople. To my knowledge, there are no congregations in the LCMS who hold the other extreme, where worship and preaching are completely in the hands of laypeople. However, between the two extremes lie a multitude of congregations embracing the working together of pastors and laypeople. There is tremendous room for creativity along this spectrum in how pastors and the

people of the congregation join hands—through the preparation of the sermon, during the sermon, and in the follow-up and/or evaluation of the sermon, to name a few.

The atmosphere of distrust which has surfaced at several key junctures in the history of the LCMS has been a chief cause for the curtailing of such creativity and congenial working together. About one year prior to the Exodus events, on June 21, 1973, just before the New Orleans synodical convention, the LCMS's First Vice-President, Dr. Roland Wiederaenders, acknowledged some of the factors that were involved in creating the climate of distrust among pastors and congregations that began in the 1960s and 1970s within the LCMS. He writes,

> Despite repeated efforts we have not dealt honestly with our pastor and people. We have refused to state our changing theological position in open, honest, forthright, simple and clear words. Over and over again we said that nothing was changing when all the while we were aware of changes taking place. Either we should have informed our pastors and people that changes were taking place and, if possible, convinced them from Scripture that these changes were in full harmony with "Thus saith the Lord!" or we should have stopped playing games as we gave assurance that no changes were taking place. With increasing measure the synodical trumpet has been giving an uncertain sound… Quite generally our pastors and almost entirely our laity became more and more confused. Confusion led to uncertainty. Uncertainty led to polarization. Polarization destroyed credibility. Loss of credibility destroyed the possibility for meaningful discussion. The loss of meaningful discussion set the stage for a head on collision.[71]

This climate was stifling to creativity in preaching, teaching, cooperative ministry efforts, and other ministry activities. There was a fear of recrimination over anything that could cause someone to question another's faithfulness to the LCMS, its teachings, and the Scriptures.

That atmosphere of distrust, while perhaps not as emotionally charged as it was during the period surrounding the Exodus, has continued through my years of ministry

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[71] *Exodus from Concordia*, preface (no page number).

and is still evident today. The pendulum swung to the extreme right of the spectrum in

theology and practice in the 1970s, and it has been slow to swing back to center. While

the trust in and authority of Scripture is solid in the LCMS today, the matter of trust

among pastors, church leaders, and laypeople is a different story. The matters of distrust

seem to be the significant reasons underlying the freedom or lack thereof to consider

different and creative approaches to carrying out ministry and, in particular, to preaching.

John Kleinig, a retired lecturer and professor at Luther Seminary in Australia,

commented on our recent and ongoing struggles with trust, fear, and paranoia. He said

that as a church body and as brothers and sisters in Christ we should be operating "not

[from] a hermeneutic of suspicion," but one of trust, listening to each other and learning

from each other.[72]

There have been other examples in the LCMS that I have observed and

experienced of what I consider unhealthy approaches to disagreement. Rather than

dialoguing over the issues, the disagreements led to reporting fellow pastors and

congregations to higher authorities within the Synod. These have included matters

surrounding the tragedy of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, responses to

school shootings, inter-Lutheran relationships, differing approaches to practicing the

Lord's Supper, contemporary versus traditional styles of worship, women's roles in

congregations and in leadership, and creative approaches to carrying out ministry. These

less-than-healthy dealings with differences among us within the LCMS have continued to

foster an atmosphere of distrust.

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[72] John W. Kleinig, LCMS Rocky Mountain District Pastors Conference, Breckenridge, CO, October 12-14, 2016.

A History of Creativity and Change

While fear, paranoia, and distrust have hampered creativity, I believe it is helpful to remember that creativity and change have long been part of the DNA of Lutherans and, specifically, of the LCMS. Permit this extremely brief survey of our Lutheran history to be a starting point for remembering.

Starting with Martin Luther in the Reformation period, while his desire was the reform of the Church, that time period served as a breeding ground for creativity and change, based on the freedoms Luther recognized were given by our Lord in the Gospel. As was previously mentioned, Luther put the Bible into the hands of laypeople and he expanded and elevated the place and importance of the sermon in worship. Luther also wrote new hymns for the Church, wrote new orders of worship, and emphasized the importance of not only reading the Word but memorizing it and continuing to learn it. To foster that emphasis, he resourced and encouraged the heads of the home to do just that through his *Small Catechism*. To aid in many of these changes, Luther significantly leveraged the new technology of his day, Gutenberg's printing press. He lifted the ban on marriage for priests and was himself married and had children. Luther also took a dramatically different approach to preaching than had been considered and practiced previously, breaking many of the accepted "rules" for preaching in his day (more detail on this will be taken up in the next chapter).

Luther's emphasis on education was carried on by the LCMS. Ministry through Lutheran schools was embraced from the time the first German immigrants landed on

American soil.[73] Lutheran education was seen as the responsibility of every member of the congregation, not just the parents of school children, as the ministry of the school was to attain the same goals as public schools but keeping the religious objectives uppermost at all times.[74] Even today, many LCMS churches operate early childhood centers, elementary schools, middle schools, and even high schools. In addition to its two seminaries, the Concordia University System includes ten colleges and universities affiliated with the LCMS, an exemplary educational system.[75]

In 1858, the first Lutheran hospital was opened in St. Louis. That was accompanied by a training school for nurses. Human care ministries, including hospitals, homes for the aged, orphanages, training of deaconesses, an institute for the deaf, and child welfare institutions[76] were all significant outreach efforts of the LCMS, many of which are still functioning today.

During the early years of the LCMS, laypeople conducted Word and Sacrament ministry amidst the tension between the priesthood of believers and the Office of the Ministry. Also in those early years,

> many were dissatisfied with the home-mission approach of their church body which still focused on German immigrants; the parochial German attitude of their Synod which still clung to a language that was alien to their country; the mind set of their leaders who were confronting a changing society with what were considered to be antiquated ideas.[77]

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[73] Baepler, *A Century of Grace*, 207.

[74] Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 368.

[75] https://www.lcms.org/cus

[76] Baepler, *A Century of Grace*, 352-353.

[77] Wohlrabe, *Ministry in Missouri Until 1962,* 33.

The tension over language for this German church body was palpable and emotional. Even considering a change to the use of English in churches was significant on multiple levels.[78] This demonstrated how the human desire to resist change could be overtaken by the power of the Lord's mission. On July 10, 1872, multiple synods met to form the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, where a paper was presented by Professor M. Loy, entitled "Our Duty to the English-Speaking Population of This Country." Part of Thesis 5 reads: "…our pastors, if at all possible, should preach the Gospel in English, until those of the English tongue can call a pastor of their own."[79]

The recognition of the need for expansion of mission work to foreign countries was pursued in the late 1800s, and in 1895 the first Lutheran missionaries to India began their work.[80]

In January of 1918, the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau began a publication called, "The American Lutheran," carrying the slogan, "A Changeless Christ for a Changing World." The purpose behind this publication was to offer pastors various creative ideas on evangelism, worship, finances, Christian education, and other ministry-related topics.[81]

In 1939, ministry was begun to immigrants from Europe who were displaced because of World War II. Over the years, this ministry has grown and expanded to

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[78] Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 356-362.

[79] Baepler, *A Century of Grace*, 160.

[80] Ibid., 181.

[81] Wohlrabe, *Ministry in Missouri Until 1962,* 34.

welcome and help relocate any refugees entering the United States.[82] Much creativity was

evident through this ministry, helping immigrants find a church home, offering food,

helping secure jobs, and providing adoptive families to assist in resettling in the United

States.

Technology and innovation have been used very effectively within the LCMS.

The Synod had the foresight to recognize the need for its own publication facilities and so

established what would become Concordia Publishing House in 1869.[83] Similar foresight

was used in recognizing the opportunity to join the airwaves of radio when, in 1923, the

chairman of the Board of Control of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, discussed the

possibility of erecting a radio station at the seminary. The purpose behind this was

expressly for "spreading the truth of God's Word to counteract the error, deception, and

unbelief which were being broadcast daily throughout the country."[84]

On October 26, 1924 at 2:45pm, station KFUO had its first broadcast. From there,

the Lutheran Laymen's League, early and major advocates and financial supporters of the

use of this new technology, continued to explore even more creative ways to use it. On

October 2, 1930, *The Lutheran Hour* radio program was begun by the Lutheran

Laymen's League, naming Dr. Walter A. Maier its first speaker, a position he would hold

until 1950. This religious program was broadcast coast to coast over thirty-eight stations

every Thursday evening.[85] The reach of this program would expand globally beginning in

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[82] Linda Hartke, "A Brief History of LIRS," September 25, 2011, accessed May 15, 2017, http://blog.lirs.org/a-brief-history-of-lirs/.

[83] Baepler, *A Century of Grace*, 149-151.

[84] Ibid., 309-310.

[85] Ibid., 311.

1940 with its first broadcast in Spanish. Following in Maier's footsteps have been Armin Oldsen, Lawrence Acker, Oswald Hoffmann, Wallace Schulz, Dale Meyer, Ken Klaus, and Gregory Seltz, all of whom have shared God's changeless Word and offered comfort and hope to millions around the world.[86]

Part of that creativity included another major endeavor sponsored once again by the Lutheran Laymen's League, this time into the realm of television, another new medium whose influence was growing dramatically. A TV series examining contemporary moral problems and offering Christian solutions entitled *This Is the Life* aired for the first time in 1952. The program was even able to draw some famous actors for guest appearances, including Jack Nicholson, Buddy Ebsen, and Leonard Nimoy. Through the ongoing efforts of the Lutheran Laymen's League (now Lutheran Hour Ministries), still today they continue to push into many new and creative television, video, DVD, and online opportunities to spread the Gospel to all people and share powerful resources to help people through the message of Jesus Christ.[87]

Continuing Creative Change

We believe our God is living and active, is not done with his creative work, and is constantly ahead of whatever may be going on in our world. He knows everything, even before it happens. We are living in a time of rapid change, and in such times, I do not believe God calls us to hunker down and circle the wagons. It is a time to step out, to experiment, to let God and the creativity he has placed in us go to work. I am not

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[86] Lutheran Hour Ministries, "Our History," Lutheran Hour Ministries, accessed May 5, 2017, https://www.lhm.org/about/ourhistory.asp.

[87] Ibid.

advocating changing the Word of God but rather how we share that Word with the people of our communities and world, as we in the LCMS have done so effectively throughout our history.

This is one place where the tension between trust, fear, paranoia, and tradition clash with the permission and Gospel freedom to be creative and innovative within God's Church. The LCMS should be the front-runner, leading the charge for such creativity because of our firm grasp of grace which flows out of our Reformation theology. It is this grace we receive through faith in Jesus that provides our foundation on which we serve, minister, live, and preach.

While I personally take a conservative approach to the Scriptures and believe that the Bible is God's inerrant and inspired Word, I see a lot of room for the Lord's creativity (and subsequently my creativity, too) within those boundaries. While I have kept the scope of this dissertation within the realm of Lutheranism and more narrowly the LCMS, my guess is that these issues of biblical authority, pastoral authority, institutional challenges, trust, fear, paranoia, change, creativity, and freedom in the Gospel are not unique to the LCMS, but rather are issues that many pastors and churches have been dealing with. My hope is that this historical look at these issues through the lens of Lutheranism is a helpful resource when considering your particular circumstances. In the final chapters, I will offer more practical responses to the opportunities that lie before us when it comes specifically to preaching.

The LCMS is at a critical juncture when it comes to these issues of authority. The times they are a-changin'. Can we as pastors and leaders within the Church adjust with the times without compromising the message we preach of Christ Jesus? Can we

recognize the changes within our culture and how information is shared and received and adjust our preaching methods accordingly? We must do this in order to effectively proclaim the Good News to the people in the communities in which we live. Pride and ego must be set aside. We must trust in the power and strength of God's Word to stand firm. We must believe that our methods of preaching and communicating the Gospel can change and still remain faithful to the Word. If we do not, we might "sink like a stone"! [88]

[88] Dylan, "The Times They Are a-Changin'."

CHAPTER 5:

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF PREACHING

In this chapter, I will consider the changing landscape of preaching and how we
have arrived where we are today when it comes to the sermon and the preaching of it. I
will reflect on the question of what makes a solid Lutheran sermon. We will return to
Luther once again and his transformative and creative approaches to preaching. I will also
share some of the current thinking and teaching at our two LCMS seminaries.

Opportunities

The opportunities we have today to preach God's Word in creative ways are vast.
The resources, the technology, a changing cultural landscape, all provide open doors to
considering different styles and approaches to preaching. David Schmitt, in his article
"The Tapestry of Preaching," notes: "In the past twenty years, the field of homiletics has
broken open. Story, image, biblical poetics, drama, narrative, film, conversation,
teaching, these are simply a few of the many approaches offered for pastors in the
formation of their sermons."[1]

As discussions take place in "church circles" about what forms of preaching are
most effective, in some corners a false dichotomy is being heralded about preaching that
is creating unnecessary divisions and argumentation within the Church. On one side of
this discussion is the notion that the "traditional" form of preaching, i.e., the lecture
format, is dead and must give way to more creative forms that should more readily

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[1] David R. Schmitt, "The Tapestry of Preaching," *Concordia Journal* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 121.

engage the hearers and are supposedly more effective in communicating the Gospel to our current culture.

On the other side of the discussion are those who would contend that all that is needed is the Word proclaimed and the Holy Spirit will do the rest. Therefore, the style with which the Word is preached does not matter and all creative forms are just ways to try to satisfy the "itching ears" of people who do not want to put up with sound doctrine but are looking for preaching that will merely satisfy their own desires.[2]

Why must we battle so? Our strong stand on God's Word being foundational for giving direction to our theology and practice should drive us to a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" approach to preaching.

I was encouraged with the current instruction at our two LCMS seminaries with regard to preaching. Conversations with homiletics professors David Schmitt and Peter Nafzger of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri and with Lawrence Rast and Carl Fickenscher of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana were enlightening. I discovered that current teaching falls much more in line with a "both/and" approach to preaching when it comes to form, which is to say that from the seminaries' perspective, there is not one "right" way for preaching to be done stylistically. The lecture method is still the foundational style being taught for the preached sermon, but "responsible" creativity is encouraged with the caveat that the creativity used should not overshadow the message of the Gospel. I will share more in Chapter Six on what is deemed responsible creativity and some specific examples of creativity being encouraged at the seminaries.

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[2] 2 Timothy 4:3.

Martin Luther's Methods

Within our Lutheran tradition of preaching, it is important to understand how preaching has been defined as well as what constitutes the necessary components of a solid sermon. The Reformation era in the early 1500s was one of the most significant eras for preaching next to the apostolic period. Reformers Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli were influential in dramatically changing preaching and its place in worship. Prior to the Reformation, most preaching was not done by parish pastors but by travelling monks.[3] The role of the sermon was relatively minor in the worship service, with the Lord's Supper having the place of prominence.

Luther was instrumental in bringing about significant changes to worship and to preaching, much of it considerably creative. He wrote several new orders of worship, which included worship in the vernacular of the people. He also wrote and introduced into worship new songs and hymnody, which we might consider in retrospect to be along the lines of contemporary music for his time.[4]

Luther is the one who brought the Word of God, including the sermon, to the forefront in worship. He raised preaching and the Word of God to be recognized as a means of grace. The thought that through preaching, God was right in the congregation's

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[3] Carl C. Fickenscher II, "Preaching for (and from) the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation."

[4] Martin Luther, *Christian in Society II,* Walther I. Brandt, ed., 45; *Luther's Works: American Edition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), 165-166; also Martin Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns,* Ulrich S. Leupold, ed., 53; *Luther's Works: American Edition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965); this entire volume of *Luther's Works* focuses on his various thoughts and opinions on worship, liturgy, and sermons, and also exhibits some of his creative work; and finally, Martin Luther, "Works of Martin Luther Vol. 6," The Ages Digital Library Collections, Books for the Ages, AGES Software, Albany OR, Version 1.0, 1997, accessed August 28, 2017, http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/LUT_WRK6.PDF. This site contains multiple writings and examples of Luther's creativity in worship, while speaking to the ongoing tension between respect for and retaining the old while considering the opportunities for creating the new.

midst giving them heaven, was a brand-new concept.[5] The significant place of preaching in the worship service developed quickly, so that soon both the sermon and the Supper were high points in worship.[6]

Luther and the other main reformers were so focused on the content of preaching that they disregarded some of the preaching methods in which they had been trained. There was a lot of rule-breaking and significant shifts from their current preaching practices which these reformers introduced; they had something to say, that so drove them to say it regardless of the form. This was evidenced by the sheer number of sermons preached—for Luther and other Reformation preachers, to preach four times a day was not uncommon.[7] This drive to preach opened the door to much innovation in preaching as the sermon was being significantly transformed during this time in history.[8]

The Bible as the Source of Preaching

One of the significant shifts in preaching made by Luther and the Reformers was the source(s) used by a preacher. The Reformers turned to the Bible as their primary source of preaching. Prior to this, the Bible was but one of many resources used by preachers, which included Aesop's Fables, books about saints, and nature stories.

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[5] Carl C. Fickenscher II, "The Contribution of the Reformation to Preaching," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (October 1994): 262.

[6] Ibid., 264.

[7] Martin Luther, *Table Talk,* ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert, 54, *Luther's Works: American Edition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 282.

[8] This idea of rule breaking and creating new preaching "rules" was also emphasized by Elmer Carl Kiessling, *The Early Sermons of Luther and Their Relation to the Pre-Reformation Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1935), 146, as quoted by Carl C. Fickenscher II, "The Contribution of the Reformation to Preaching," 255.

Sermons were primarily moralizing; there was not much Gospel, that is, the Good News of what Jesus did on the cross to bring forgiveness and life to people. With Luther, Scripture rose above all these other sources for preaching because the Gospel could not be found in clearer form anywhere else. That message of the Gospel was the heart of preaching for Luther. During the Middle Ages, the prevailing hermeneutic when it came to the interpretation of Scripture was allegory, which Luther had used extensively as well. But through his study of God's Word, Luther moved beyond reading the Bible as allegory to an elevated understanding of the Bible as the literal Word of God and preaching it as such.[9]

As the Scriptures became the sole foundation for preaching, the sermons became more Christocentric. This, too, was a huge change Luther introduced. Much of pre-Reformation preaching included Jesus, but it was primarily as example and, in essence, another Law-giver. Luther preached clearly on the doctrine of justification, featuring the cross and the human Jesus, which go hand-in-hand, and never in a cold, dogmatic way. Rather, he always spoke of Jesus as the Savior of souls.[10] It was also not just the New Testament that pointed to Jesus. Luther recognized that the entire Old Testament was about Christ as well, with the New Testament writers proclaiming what the Old Testament was already saying.[11]

In a New Year's Day sermon on Galatians 3, Luther said that the highest art in Christendom is distinguishing Law and Gospel. He saw that it was through the preaching

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[9] Fickenscher, "The Contribution of the Reformation to Preaching," 265.

[10] Fickenscher, "Preaching for (and from) the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation."

[11] Ibid.

of Law and Gospel that Christ would be most rightly and clearly proclaimed in

preaching.[12] I will have more to say on the matter of Law and Gospel shortly.

Expository Preaching

Another new, creative approach to preaching that Luther introduced was the idea

of expository preaching, *die schriftauslegende Predigt* ("the sermon laying out

Scripture").[13] Luther's expository preaching was done in a variety of settings beyond the

Sunday morning worship service: in the home, during the week for chapel services, and

when he would not use the lectionary but instead would preach through a book of the

Bible.

For Luther, expository preaching was not merely a verse-by-verse

teaching/preaching, but was a verse-by-verse approach that included multiple concentric

circles around a particular point of the text of Scripture being preached.[14] The most

significant difference in Luther's approach to expository preaching was that the

application was contextual—that is, he would look at the big picture of the larger section

on which he was preaching and consider the full context. He determined the central

thought of that larger section, and every verse would revolve around this central thought

("What does verse one contribute to the central thought?"). This approach is key because

it keeps bringing everything back to Jesus. This helps the preacher and the hearer to see

Jesus and keeps Jesus in the whole, rather than taking little pieces of Scripture out of

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[12] Fickenscher, "The Contribution of the Reformation to Preaching," 269-270.

[13] Ibid., 267.

[14] Fickenscher, "Preaching for (and from) the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation."

context, which can make it easy to miss Jesus.[15] This idea of having a central thought has

translated into today's version of recognizing a theme in the text.

The Central Point of the Sermon

Preaching a sermon around a central thought was a point of emphasis for Luther.

"Preachers should not let their minds and mouths run wild, Luther counseled. 'A preacher

should remain with the main point and do what he intended, so that point can be

understood.' No dallying or playing with extraneous ideas, he insisted."[16] Luther was, at

least in theory, opposed to verbosity. When he was asked for brief instructions on how to

preach, he replied, "First, you must learn to go up to the pulpit. Second, you must know

that you should stay there for a time. Third, you must learn to get down again."[17] Luther

insisted that the preacher should not go longer than one hour with the sermon and that he

keep it simple and understandable, stating, "It is best not to make the sermon long and to

speak simply and on the level of the children."[18] In fact, Luther was said to have thought

of his children and preached with the desire that they could understand.[19] This is not to

say preaching should be simplistic, but the preacher needs to know his congregation and

to speak on a level that everyone in the congregation, including children, youth, and

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Robert Kolb, "Luther's Suggestions for Preaching," *Concordia Journal* 43, nos. 1 and 2
(Winter/Spring 2017): 113.

[17] Luther, *Table Talk*, 393.

[18] Kolb, "Luther's Suggestions for Preaching," 113.

[19] Fickenscher, "Preaching for (and from) the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation."

adults, can understand. Being able to give a one-sentence summary of his sermon was a demonstration of his focus on a central thought as well as his simplicity.[20]

The Relational Aspect of Preaching

Preaching was not to be a scholastic lecture, but a pastor speaking to his flock. Luther said, "We preach publicly for the sake of plain people."[21] Related to simplicity of the sermon was the relational component of preaching. When it came to preaching, Luther understood that it had to do with much more than expounding on Scripture. He recognized the value of the preacher's relationship with people. He saw preaching as lifting up the laity and affirming the preacher's relationship with them. In turn, relationships give the preacher the opportunity to chide and prod and speak into the lives of the people in his congregation.[22] It is these relationships that allow him to truly speak the Word of God into people's lives in a way that speaks to the realities of daily living and helpful application.

So important is this relationship of pastor to people that Luther wrote up his "Ten Commandments for Preachers," which would be good for preachers today to bear in mind when taking up the preaching task:

1) Teach so people can follow you

2) Have a sense of humor

3) Be able to speak well

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[20] Fickenscher, "The Contribution of the Reformation to Preaching," 257.

[21] Luther, *Table Talk,* 383.

[22] Fickenscher, "The Contribution of the Reformation to Preaching," 272.

4) Have a good voice

5) Have a good memory

6) Know when to stop

7) Be sure of one's doctrine

8) Be ready to venture body, blood, wealth and honor for the Word of God

9) Be ready to be mocked and jeered

10) Nothing is seen more readily in the preacher than your faults[23]

Illustrations in the Sermon

Contrary to other preachers and previously practiced methods, Luther brought change even to the illustrations and stories he would tell from the pulpit. For him, it was not about sensationalizing or manipulating peoples' emotions in order to engage them. Some of the itinerant preachers of Luther's day used lively illustrations, some even quite obscene, in order to capture the attention of the people. But Luther "spurned the idea of showmanship in the pulpit. He was, however, an excellent illustrator. His premise was that contemporary life was a participation in the divine drama."[24] But for Luther it once again came back to his relationship with the people in his congregation and how the illustrations needed to flow out of their lives in order to be realistic and applicable, and making God's Word real in their lives.

Luther believed all of life is wrapped together and preaching needs to be more holistic when it comes to the realities of life in this world without the arbitrary and even

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[23] Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 40, as quoted by Carl C. Fickenscher, "The Contribution of the Reformation to Preaching," 273.

[24] Fickenscher, "The Contribution of the Reformation to Preaching," 274.

harmful distinctions often made between issues of faith and the church and issues of life and vocation. Luther did not pull any punches in his preaching, either. He believed the issues of the day needed to be in the pulpit. People wanted and needed to know how God's Word speaks to life, vocation, and the issues everyone was talking about during the week.[25]

Luther's changes to preaching were monumental. Although in the years that followed Luther and the other reformers, many preachers reverted to the traditional rules, styles, and practices of preaching, the passion exhibited in the Reformation years that drove those changes in preaching demonstrated the freedom that is part of the Gospel of Christ and is a significant element of our Lutheran heritage.

C.F.W. Walther

Jump ahead approximately three hundred fifty years to the mid-1800s and the beginning of the LCMS. C.F.W. Walther was the primary voice and influence in the LCMS and across the United States as our church body's first president, concurrently serving as professor and the first president of Concordia Seminary, and a frequent essayist at conferences across the country. One of the more influential aspects of Walther was a series of thirty-nine informal lectures that he gave on Friday evenings to students at Concordia Seminary on the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. These lectures have since been transcribed and published in the book *Law and Gospel* and have been seminal for the teaching of homiletics in the LCMS ever since.

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[25] Fickenscher, "Preaching for (and from) the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation."

Walther, like Luther, had much to write concerning both the significance and the preaching of the sermon. Several noteworthy matters that Walther raised for preaching, in many cases echoing Luther, included the importance of not just speaking the Word of God but having a goal:

> the chief fault in the sermons of our time is that they are mostly aimless…, believing preachers for the most part think they have done their official duty if what they have proclaimed has been the Word of God… Just as bad and useless are preachers who have no plan in their sermons and pursue no goal. Their sermons may contain many fine thoughts, but they will have no effect.[26]

Walther also emphasized the need to "preach the Word of God in truth and purity"[27] and to preach with passion and enthusiasm, that the preacher have a "burning desire to pour out his heart before his hearers."[28] Walther was clear that the sermon should not be a theological treatise but that

> one must not only proclaim the truth but also speak so simply that even the uneducated can understand it. We must preach so that it is as clear to everyone as the noonday sun: "That [Jesus] is the only way to salvation." It would not be surprising if God would hurl bolts of lightning at preachers who have high-flown language in their manuscript in order to show off their oratorical skills.[29]

Walther held a high view of the sermon, even higher than Luther, as can be seen when he explains the purpose of preaching:

> The sermon is the central point of every worship service. What is the preacher to effect by his preaching? Remember: He must alarm the secure sinners and rouse them from their sleep of sin; then he must bring the terrified to faith; then he must lead the faithful to certainty with regard to their state of grace and their salvation; those made certain he must them bring to sanctification; and he must strengthen

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[26] C. F. W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 63.

[27] Ibid., 67.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 98.

the sanctified in their holy and blessed estate and preserve them in it until the end. What a task![30]

Sermons in Walther's day were logical and deductive, as was common in the modernistic era. And contrary to most current Lutheran practices, an eight-page, forty-five-minute sermon was the norm for Walther and his contemporaries.[31]

Mid-Twentieth-Century Homiletics

Take another one-hundred-fifty-year jump to the mid- to late-twentieth century. Roughly fifty years ago, both from within and beyond the confines of the LCMS, and in conjunction with some of the societal upheaval in our country in the 1960s and 1970s, pivotal work was being done to re-examine the preaching task by people such as H. Grady David and his book *Design for Preaching*, Fred Craddock's *As One Without Authority*, and Richard Caemmerer's *Preaching for the Church*.

These men, in different ways, were all part of initiating significant changes to the approach to homiletics (beginning what some would call "the new homiletic"), breaking from a purely deductive structure and the idea that one size fits all. A variety of different elements began to be introduced and encouraged in sermons, including such things as storytelling as a form, narrative forms, and the preacher inviting the congregation into his own journey of discovery of what the text is saying.

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[30] Ibid., 125.

[31] From Walther's *Law and Gospel, 30th evening lectures* (June 5, 1885): "Let me urge upon you in general to take a survey of the pericopes on which you are going to preach and to note beforehand particular passages that suggest subjects to you on which you feel you ought to preach. If you wait till Wednesday or Thursday with looking up the pericope for the coming Sunday and after a superficial reading decide on some topic which will yield you eight pages of manuscript, sufficient for a talk of forty-five minutes, you act like an abominable hireling." Accessed May 10, 2017, http://lutherantheology.com/uploads/works/walther/LG/lecture-30.html.

Turn of the Century

Another nuance that demonstrates this changing landscape of preaching today is that within the past twenty years, a great deal of attention has been given to understanding the different ways people listen and learn. Attention must be given to speaking to the whole person. This assumes that preachers have a desire for those in their congregations to learn, retain, and put into practice what is being preached from the Word of God. If that assumption is correct, then one must acknowledge that not all people learn, retain, and process information in the same way. This recognition has a tremendous impact on the conscientious preacher when it comes to sermon preparation.

When crafting a sermon today, the preacher should be aware that his congregation will be comprised of people who receive information in a variety of ways. "Research shows that 30 percent or less of the population is made up of auditory learners. Most of the population processes information and thoughts primarily in other ways."[32] When it comes to spoken or written communication, on average only five to ten percent of that material is retained, a sobering statistic. When other types of media are used, the average retention rate rises to twenty-five percent. And when there is some direct involvement included in the presentation, the average retention rate soars to eighty to ninety percent.[33]

There have also been great strides made in recent years toward understanding the intricacies of our brains and how they function. When it comes to hearing and processing words,

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[32] Schultz and Schultz, *Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore: And How 4 Acts of Love Will Make Your Church Irresistible*, 42.

[33] J. Burns, *The Youth Builder* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1988), 184, as quoted in Schultz and Schultz, *Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How to Fix It*, 109.

brain researchers tell us most people think somewhere between 600–800 words a minute, but most people, including preachers, only talk between 115–130 words a minute. No doubt everyone can remember a time when they have been physically present for a speech or a sermon, but their mind was somewhere else. This should not surprise us, given the disparity of thinking and talking speeds. It is to be expected that our thoughts will race away, unless the speaker gives us a reason to slow our brains down to the speed she or he is able to talk.[34]

While learning is not the full emphasis or drive in the sermon (there is also spiritual formation, the experience of being in worship with the full body of Christ, and the shaping of hearts, attitudes, and minds, to consider), it is one of the components that must be considered when preaching.

Communication Basics

Taking these statistics from communication experts seriously, there are three basic communication tips that relate directly to preaching. First, the preacher should know his people, as Luther recognized back in the 1500s, including their needs, their lifestyles, and events or matters that shape their thinking, their fears, and their hopes. Second, to best communicate, the pastor should involve or engage his people in some way. There are a multitude of creative ways that people can be involved or engaged in the sermon, specific examples of which I will address in the last chapter. And third, the pastor should consider using visuals, which could include props, handouts, movie clips, dramas, or pictures.[35]

When it comes to the preacher understanding his congregation, relationships are vital. Thom and Joani Schultz write,

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[34] Thomas G. Rogers, "What and How of North American Lutheran Preaching," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 265.

[35] Schultz and Schultz, *Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church*, 194-197.

> We live in an information-soaked world. When it comes to spiritual things, most people don't sense they're lacking hard data. They're lacking the soft stuff of the soul. Their desired relationship with God seems more at home at Starbucks than in a lecture hall. Like any relationship, they sense that growth in a relationship with God comes more from give-and-take than passive consumption of someone's lecture.[36]

Relationships demonstrate that we are real, that Jesus is real, and that the faith is real.

These considerations regarding basic communication are not simply to be cute or to appeal to "itching ears" or to just give people what they want to hear by dumbing down God's Word. People truly do hear, learn, process, and receive information in a variety of ways and it is important for the preacher to be aware of this if he is going to communicate the message of Jesus clearly and effectively. To do this will require thoughtfulness and creativity when it comes to considering how the sermon is constructed and how it is delivered.

What About the Sermon?

In 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Paul contrasts the foolishness of the message of the cross that he was proclaiming with the preachers, teachers, and philosophers of his time, who were viewed as the wise ones with their rhetorical methods of speaking and debate.[37] This raised a question for me: If "preaching" is not beautiful or rhetorical or up to the standards of the day (however those standards might be defined at any given time and by any particular culture), what does that say for the medium of the message? If it is all about content (Jesus), cannot that content be conveyed in a variety of ways as long as the

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[36] Schultz and Schultz, *Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore*, 42.

[37] Matt O'Reilly, "Faith Comes from Hearing: The Scandal or Preaching in a Digital Age," *Princeton Theological Review* 17, no. 43 (Fall 2010): 51.

message of Christ is clear? Paul said in Romans 15:20 that it has always been his ambition to preach the Gospel, particularly to those who do not know Jesus as the Christ. To him it was not about the medium but about the message shared in a way that was clear, winsome, received, and ultimately believed. And it is here that I believe we must take our cue from Paul in our present day with all the resources we have available to us.

As I have mentioned, not all people are auditory learners, so merely preaching the sermon in a lecture format is not going to reach all people. However, Matt O'Reilly asserts that "for Paul, faith cannot be brought to birth apart from the spoken word,"[38] using Romans 10:14-17 as the basis for his argument. While I agree that our preaching must clearly be about Christ, I disagree that this clarity can only be made through the spoken word. Can we convey the message of Jesus through other media such as images, metaphor, story, art, or conversations in addition to the spoken word from the pastor in the pulpit? What would Paul say today in our media-soaked and image-based culture?

I do not believe it is merely the social sciences that are driving a move toward creativity and a broader approach to preaching styles. Our creative God has provided us with resources; he has created people with a wide variety of gifts, abilities, needs, and tendencies; and he desires for us to recognize and utilize them all. David Schmitt reminds us, "If we consider this to be the work that God does as you preach, we recognize that the sermon is a multi-faceted speech act, an artful tapestry."[39]

This appeal to all our senses is, interestingly, not something new in the twenty-first century. Martin Luther was a major proponent of this type of creativity. He writes in

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[38] Matt O'Reilly, "Faith Comes from Hearing," 48.

[39] Schmitt, "The Tapestry of Preaching," 108.

the Large Catechism: "Yes, [the object of faith] must be external so that it can be perceived and grasped by the senses and thus brought into the heart."[40] As Michael Aune notes:

> It is this openness to image, symbol, and the receptivity of the senses that put the early Lutherans at odds with the Swiss Reformers who saw non-scriptural music, art, and symbol as dangerous to faith and worship. Luther saw them as vehicles of proclamation and wrote what hymns he could to disseminate the faith. We know that his Roman adversaries deplored him for ruining more souls with his hymns than his preaching. This theological stance created a warm climate in the Lutheran Church for symbol, art, ritual, and liturgy to be used as means for the expression of the mysteries of the Gospel.[41]

Schmitt also speaks of this "mystery of preaching," and he emphasizes how there is not one pattern or style or structure that God intends for the preacher to follow. He comes back to this tapestry idea, a confluence of ideas and weaving together of stories and Scripture, application and teaching, wonder and awe, Law and Gospel, and God at work when it comes to considering the possibilities of what a sermon could be.[42]

The work being done at our two LCMS seminaries is impressive when it comes to teaching the art of preaching in our world today. I discovered when interviewing a professor at a seminary in another denomination that because of curriculum demands, there are only two dedicated homiletics courses offered at that seminary, and then they attempt to weave preaching to some degree into other biblical classes.[43] By contrast, at

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[40] Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 440.

[41] Michael Aune, *To Move the Heart: Rhetoric and Ritual in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon* (San Francisco: Christian Universities Press, 1994), 57-58 as quoted by Clayton J. Schmit, "What Lutherans Have to Offer Mission in Preaching," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 360.

[42] Schmitt, "The Tapestry of Preaching," 109.

[43] Scott Hoezee, telephone interview with Glen Schlecht, September 29, 2016.

Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, there are four required homiletics courses and one required homiletics elective. Some examples of the elective options currently offered include Creative Preaching, Law and Gospel, Narrative Preaching, and Sermon Structures. There are also rigorous assessments for all seminary students throughout their four years of seminary education, which include field work experiences and an entire year of vicarage, both of which include multiple preaching opportunities outside of the classroom.[44] The sheer number of homiletics courses that are both offered and required throughout the four-year curriculum at Concordia speak to the high value placed on preaching within the LCMS today.

Sermon Essentials

As I have demonstrated, this high value on preaching in the LCMS has been the case from the time of Martin Luther, and it is still evident today. With that understanding, it is important to be clear on what specific elements might be considered non-negotiables for a solid Lutheran sermon.

Schmitt works with the following definition of preaching for his teaching of homiletics: "Preaching is authoritative public discourse, based on a text of Scripture, centered in the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, for the benefit of the hearers in faith and life."[45]

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[44] David Schmitt, email message to Glen Schlecht, November 11, 2016. See Appendix 1 for a detailed look at the Homiletics Curriculum and further explanation of what is offered, taught, and assessed.

[45] Schmitt, "The Tapestry of Preaching," 107.

Based on a Text of Scripture

Taking a cue from Martin Luther when he helped the Church rediscover and unleash the power of God's Word in Reformation times, the sermon must be biblically based and not merely a collection of ideas or thoughts from the preacher or other sources. Scripture is to be the source for preaching. One reason for this is our foundational understanding that all Scripture points to Jesus. It is not to say that other sources cannot or should not be used. On the contrary, it is important and helpful to use a variety of non-biblical materials to aid in understanding and applying God's Word and Christ's power to our lives. But Scripture is to be the source, not the after-thought.

Centered in the Death and Resurrection of Christ

The sermon is to have Jesus at the center. Luther emphasized that the sermon must deliver the message of Jesus Christ.[46] We must preach Christ and him crucified and risen from the dead. Jesus serves as the power source for life now and life forever. It is in Christ that we hear clearly God's multitude of promises that are central to making life livable, namely the assurance of forgiveness, grace, hope, and life that God desires to pour out on us. Without Jesus, the sermon can too easily become just another how-to or self-help message with some Scriptural encouragement along the way. Just as Scripture cannot be an add-on, so Jesus cannot be a flowery accoutrement mentioned in order to try to make something sound biblical or even Christian.

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[46] Kolb, "Luther's Suggestions for Preaching," 112.

For the Benefit of the Hearers in Faith and Life

On the other side of the spectrum, the sermon should not simply be a reiterating of

doctrine or a theological lecture with no connection made to the daily lives of the hearers.

"No Latin, Greek, or Hebrew should divert the hearer from the plain truth" spoken in the

language of the hearer.[47] The goal is not for people to walk away from the sermon saying

that it was interesting or factual. The sermon is to build "a bridge from Scripture to the

congregation, facilitating the conversation between God and the people hearing the

proclamation."[48] The goal is for people to walk away saying how real the sermon was for

them, both in the challenges, difficulties, and dealings with sin, and with the hope and

encouragement offered because of what Jesus has brought to bear on the hearer's life. It

must take the depth and breadth of God's Word and the love and power of Jesus Christ

and help the hearer know how these gifts of God speak into life in this world.

Law and Gospel

The intention is not just to speak love and hope, although that must certainly be

predominant, but God through his Word also calls us out when it comes to sin in our

lives. Schmitt refers to this as "evangelical proclamation," or Law and Gospel. This

> is the heart of Lutheran preaching. Through it, we enact Christ's command that
> repentance and forgiveness of sins be preached in his name. Presently, this type of
> discourse sets Lutheran preaching apart from much that surrounds us. While
> others see the sermon as an opportunity to proclaim God's wisdom for daily
> living, to teach the fundamentals of the faith, to tell stories of God's working, or
> to do the text again to the people, the Lutheran preacher understands that the
> sermon might indeed do any of these things but it will do it within the framework
> of the office of preaching. God established the preaching office that people might

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[47] Ibid., 111.

[48] Ibid., 114.

obtain faith through the proclamation of the gospel. Without the proper distinction of law and gospel, Scripture remains a closed book. God, therefore, calls pastors who rightly divide the word of truth into the preaching office so that the Scriptures are opened and the sermon is centered in the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sin. God, through the sermon, continues to intervene in the world he has created, speaking the word that brings people to life and working salvation in their midst… Weaving this discourse into the body of the sermon is the art and the heart of true Lutheran preaching.[49]

C.F.W. Walther spent several years giving informal lectures to seminary students which eventually were codified into a classic book, *Law and Gospel*. Law and Gospel are not ideas imposed on the Bible but rather flow straight out of Scripture and describe how God has consistently dealt with his people throughout the biblical narrative and how he continues dealing with his people today. Reading Scripture with "Law and Gospel eyes" can be a helpful tool, not only for understanding and applying God's Word to our lives but also for preaching in a similarly practical manner. Law and Gospel preaching is not intended to be formulaic, although that can easily happen; rather, when it comes to the Law, the question must be asked from God's Word, "Where am I, the hearer, being called out and convicted for my sin, disobedience, and rebellion against God and his ways?" To avoid applying the Law in formula, take a cue from the text of God's Word from which the sermon is based and use those very specific examples and language in applying the Law to what is happening in the lives of the people, the community, and the world.

Similarly, it is critical that the Gospel not be conveyed in a formulaic way. Yes, Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins and bring us forgiveness and, yes, that is central to the Gospel and our preaching. But to simply state it in the same way week after

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[49] Schmitt, "The Tapestry of Preaching," 116-117. This quote includes two references from Martin Luther, Theodore G. Tappert, trans. and ed., "The Augsburg Confession, Article V. The Office of the Ministry," and "The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, Article V. Law and Gospel, 1," *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 31, 558.

week is lazy and not being faithful to the preaching task. God's Word is rich in

expressing the message of the Good News of Jesus in a variety of ways. The preacher

must take his cue from Scripture and express that message of forgiveness, unconditional

love, and hope in such a way that it applies directly to the hearer so that the comfort and

help our Lord provides is received in a real and personal way. Just as our Lord creatively

stated his love and promises to us, so we are also called to share that same message in

creative and practical ways. As Schmitt teaches,

> Evangelical proclamation is not the formulaic repetition of law and gospel
> vocables at some point in the sermon, as if God works by magical incantation.
> Instead, it is a living proclamation of God's gracious work among his people that
> varies in vocables from Sunday to Sunday. Just as the text varies from Sunday to
> Sunday and yet always remains God's word, so too the language of law and
> gospel varies from Sunday to Sunday and yet always proclaims God's gracious
> work. Preachers do well to attend to the metaphors of Scripture.[50]

These are the essentials of Lutheran preaching: based on Scripture, centered in

Christ, applicable to life, and utilizing both Law and Gospel. If these essentials are

covered in the sermon preparation and delivery, there is tremendous space available

within these bounds for creativity. Preaching is an art. It was not intended to be formulaic

but creative, alive, and fresh, a word from God that speaks into the lives of the hearers.

Schmitt emphasizes that as long as the preacher forms "a sermon that is based on a text of

Scripture, centered in the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, for

the benefit of the hearers in faith and life,"[51] there are multiple ways that these basic

elements can be presented to make the sermon come alive. And he reminds us that "they

are not always found in the same proportion or communicated in the same manner. At

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[50] Schmitt, "The Tapestry of Preaching," 118.

[51] Ibid., 121.

certain times with certain texts and certain people, certain [elements] tend to predominate. Yet they are all present, and it is through the artful interweaving of these four that the preacher faithfully serves God in the office of preaching."[52] As the preacher evaluates his sermon, out of necessity it must not only include identifying the presence of the basic elements of a sermon "but also maintaining an artful composition… that is appropriate for one's preaching occasion."[53]

At present within the LCMS, we have a solid foundation in the Word of God on which we must continue to stand. We must funnel our energy and resources into asking and exploring additional effective ways of helping people engage with God and his Word. We must put fear aside, push through the discomforts we may feel, and let our God do his work in and through us for the sake of the many people in our communities and around the world who do not know Jesus. That is what Chapter Six will offer: not one answer but a variety of suggestions, examples, and ideas, all of which I hope will ignite the creativity within you, the preacher. My hope is to point you to the permission that has been given in Scripture and throughout our Lutheran heritage and to inspire you to do more and more creative thinking, conversations, experimentation, and trial-and-error with the people with whom you are serving so that we might faithfully fulfill the mission the Lord has given to us.

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

Contention with Creativity

In Chapter Two, I examined some of the different approaches Jesus and his disciples took toward creatively preaching and teaching God's Word. However, some point to Romans 10:12-15 as the reason sermons must utilize lecture only and should not include methods such as dialogue, conversation, visuals, or video. The rationale is that any changes in the form of a sermon have a direct impact on the content of the message. Among those dissenters are Richard John Neuhaus, who said, "Experiment in preaching will avoid regular dependence upon visual aids and other gimcrackery in the pulpit. Such nonsense is not experiment with, but abandonment of, preaching—for preaching is the business of the spoken word."[54]

Key to this point of view is in Romans 10:14, which reads, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" The argument is that faith comes by hearing. It cannot come from a picture or a video or from participants sharing their point of view. It must come from hearing the specific spoken message of the Gospel. I agree that the specifics of who Jesus is and what he did for us must be articulated. However, Paul had no other frame of reference than the spoken word. He could tell stories, he could put together a logical proposition, and he could use metaphors to demonstrate and illustrate the Gospel for people, all of which he did. In our digital age, can we not tell stories and present metaphors using various digital tools? I am not advocating for the elimination of the spoken word. I am advocating for the utilization

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[54] Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 188, quoted in O'Reilly, "Faith Comes from Hearing: The Scandal or Preaching in a Digital Age," 45.

of various creative methods and technology to illustrate and demonstrate the specific

message of the Gospel being preached.

How do people "hear" today? I would contend that not all of our "hearing" comes

strictly from the spoken word. We can "hear" with our eyes as we watch a video that

visually illustrates particular truths of God's Word. Through a still image or video, the

heart of the "hearer" can be moved to better understand and even feel what God's Word

is communicating to us. Through pondering a question posed by the preacher and the

ensuing conversation or dialogue among several people or even the entire congregation,

new insights into the Gospel might be gained as a person may "hear" the message of

Jesus in a new way. I am not proposing the lecture style of preaching be dismissed as a

totally ineffective or inappropriate way to proclaim the Gospel. The message of the

Gospel can be communicated effectively with this style, as it has been for literally

thousands of years. It is the misuse and lazy approach to preparation and delivery that can

make the lecture style counterproductive.

What is the Church?

Another challenge that must be acknowledged when considering changes in

preaching style is the understanding of the Church and her mission. How "church" is

defined and understood will necessarily shape how we approach the preaching task.

In many ways, the Church has brought this upon herself, not making a necessary

shift from a programmatic approach to ministry to a more mission-oriented approach.

Programs, which were not only acceptable but effective for many years, including

maintaining a youth group, a Sunday School, a Vacation Bible School, an Older Adults

weekday Bible study, a quilting group, etc., were staples in the Church. These programs

were designed primarily to foster spiritual growth and fellowship for church members and, perhaps, also as opportunities for outreach, activities or events where church members could invite others with similar interests to participate. But many believed their communities to already be essentially "churched" and did not recognize a need for outreach to the people in their communities. Therefore, the growth of the church came primarily by birth and marriage. If "church" today is understood as merely another group or club with which to align or join, or an institution to be maintained, preaching will remain simply a means to the end of sustaining the organization and not much more. Satisfying the members, making the budget, and keeping the organization running become more the priority than communicating the Gospel in a way that speaks to people both inside and outside the "club." This is partially why recent generations have not been eager to step into the Church.

However, the Lord has used the absence of the recent generations from the Church to bring his Church back to rethinking why it exists. If the Church is not an institution to be maintained with programs to be run, buildings to be built, and a budget to be kept, what is it?

We are again driven back to Scripture for the answer. The various Great Commission passages[55] state very clearly the Church's primary reason for existence: to proclaim the Gospel and to help people come to know and believe in Jesus. I would also point to the "body of Christ" language that Paul uses when talking about the Church in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Some of the key points in those chapters return us to the vital importance of relationships when it comes to living as followers of Christ and carrying

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[55] Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:16; Acts 1:8.

out the Great Commission. Preaching may not be solely about outreach, but if the sermon and its delivery in a worship service are not considered when talking about the multiple components involved in the outreach of a congregation, something significant is being overlooked.

There are many still today, both pastors and lay people, who view the pastor as the indispensable purveyor of truth.[56] Philip Clayton, in his article "Theology and the Church after Google," promotes another idea worthy of consideration, given the changing cultural milieu. That idea is viewing the pastor today as serving as a host, not merely as "an authority who dispenses settled truths, wise words, and the sole path to salvation."[57] His idea is that those who influence our faith and life in Christ are those who either convene, moderate, or enable conversations to take place that change our lives and can transform us and the way we look at ourselves and our world. This concept of pastor as host holds some positive possibilities. It links with, conveys, and facilitates the important work of the hospitality of the Church and its leaders. It does not have the pastor in the center or at the head of every conversation; there is a trust that the Holy Spirit can lead people on paths of discovery and change for their lives. The role of the host is to create a comfortable setting, get people together, start conversations, and build bridges to help facilitate conversation and action.[58] It is not to say that the pastor has no role other than to facilitate conversations. The God-given authority with which a pastor has been bestowed is not something to off-handedly dismiss. The pastor should be engaged and participating

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[56] Clayton, "Theology and the Church After Google," 15.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 15-16.

in the conversations, speaking and sharing from his knowledge and understanding of God's Word as well. How that engagement and, to an important degree, leadership happens takes real pastoral care flowing from a pastoral heart and love for people who need Jesus. It is in situations such as this that appropriate authority can be acknowledged and respected when utilized well.

Leonard Sweet expresses this about preaching and the role of the pastor: "You don't have to give all the answers—you need to trust the Spirit to fill in the blanks. We lift Him up and get out of the way."[59] In a similar vein, Sweet says, "Don't give the point—let the Holy Spirit provide the application for them. You can be suggestive to prime the pump but don't give the one point, a one-size-fits-all 'answer.' You have to trust the Spirit who will help you apply."[60]

I agree with Matt O'Reilly when he speaks out against preaching styles that ultimately leave out what I have expressed as sermon essentials. He writes,

> The service where participants can choose to express themselves through various interactive experiences means they may not even encounter the spoken word. The pastor who takes a progressional dialogue approach to preaching by initiating a conversation but hesitating to make authoritative pronouncements about the meaning of scripture hardly comes close to the Pauline expectation for content specificity. To leave the sermon open to any direction the group might take it grants no guarantee that the specific message of the cross will be heard. The result of such an approach leaves open the possibility that the specific content of the gospel will not be heard, which would make it impossible for faith and salvation to come through the hearing of the word of the cross.[61]

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[59] Leonard Sweet, (lecture for Doctor of Ministry program in Semiotics and Future Studies, Orlando, FL, September 3, 2013).

[60] Ibid.

[61] O'Reilly, "Faith Comes from Hearing," 48.

This is an important role the preacher must take on. He must ensure the message of the

Gospel is explicitly included in the sermon, regardless of the style that may be employed.

There is another hazard that can arise from the preacher's desire to make his sermons

relevant and meaningful by utilizing a variety of preaching styles or media, and that

hazard is neglecting the role God plays in the world, rather emphasizing peoples' needs

and attempting to be more applicable to peoples' lives. If God's role is neglected or

minimized, the sermon can become simply a self-help message. Out of a desire to express

pastoral care when preaching, we speak to the various needs of people, which are real

needs, but we must remain aware so we do not lose the Christocentric base for the

sermon and so we do not slip into a purely human-centered, do-it-yourself message where

God is relegated to the sidelines. That is not to say real needs should not be addressed,

but we must ensure that people are not distracted by media or styles used but rather that it

is the Lord to whom people are pointed.[62]

When various media or different styles are used in a sermon, it is the

responsibility of the preacher to ensure that the Gospel is still preached and the content of

the Gospel is made clear. To do anything less would be irresponsible and potentially even

harmful to peoples' eternal well-being if done regularly. It comes back to why we exist as

a Church and how we care for and about people who do and do not yet know Jesus.

Ongoing evaluation of forms and styles must be part of the preacher's work in sermon

preparation. To ask questions like: "What effect will changes of form have upon the

content of the message? How do we understand the goal of preaching, and are new

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[62] David J. Peter, "Reaching Out Without Losing Balance: Maintaining a Theological Center of Gravity in Preaching," *Concordia Journal* 35, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 254-262.

homiletic and media forms sufficient to accomplish this goal?"[63] Is the Gospel being clearly articulated? Is there faithfulness to the meaning of the particular scriptural text being illustrated? I fully believe that we can have visual, image-based, and conversational preaching styles that are content-specific, Christocentric, faithful to the scriptures, and aligned with Christ's mission for his Church.

I asked Lawrence Rast of Concordia Theological Seminary about the changing role of pastors from his vantage point as a seminary president. I was encouraged to hear him agree that not only is the role of the pastor changing but that it needs to change in our digital world. Rast agreed that even at the seminary the methods of teaching have to change, and that there are parallels between the pedagogical process and preaching today. He expressed that it is especially challenging when it comes to preaching as we have a limited time within which to work. How do we engage people with our Christology and the authority of Scripture, the foundations of our faith, all within a twenty- to twenty-five-minute sermon?[64]

Rast posed the question of how we in the LCMS are going to respond to the challenges and changes happening today. He concluded his comments at a conference he led by saying that all of what we do as pastors is going to be evaluated within the context of the relationships we have with the people. "If you talk about who God is but have no relationship, people won't give you the time of day… THIS IS THE POINT: I know

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[63] O'Reilly, "Faith Comes from Hearing," 45-46.

[64] Lawrence R. Rast, Jr., personal conversation with Glen Schlecht at Pastor's Conference of the Rocky Mountain District, LCMS, Breckenridge, CO, October 3, 2013.

you're overwhelmed but it's about relationships and being with the people!"[65] What I appreciate in that statement is his acknowledgement that our challenge is not in protecting the institution of a seminary or a congregation or even a church body. It is also not about protecting our theological heritage or our position and authority as pastors, but that it is about reaching people who do not know Jesus, as well as preaching to those in our congregation who do know him.

It is the responsibility of the pastor to know the people of his congregation and the people of his community. It is his responsibility to let his preaching flow out of those relationships to fulfill his calling as pastor.

> Preaching is a lively calling. You stand there at the intersection of God's intervention into the lives of his people. Faithful preaching involves an artful composition… God has not delivered a book of old sermons for preachers to repeat through the years. No, he has done something better. He has called a living person into the office of preaching to handle his word rightly. He has called one who is apt to teach and able rightly to divide the word of truth. As you preach, on this day, with this text, for these people, God intervenes. Your sermon is a holy event. It is God's saving intervention into the temporal order of this world.[66]

The conclusion of this dissertation will take the essential elements of the sermon and delve deeper into the preacher's job of putting these to work within our challenging cultural milieu. I will look at how the preacher can help the hearer apply God's Word to their lives by considering ways to engage people in the sermon, and share some practical ways to make this happen.

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[65] Lawrence R. Rast, Jr., "Living as Lutherans in Changing Times" (lecture, Rocky Mountain District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Pastor's Conference, Breckenridge, CO, October 4, 2013).

[66] Schmitt, "The Tapestry of Preaching," 126.

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

At this juncture in history, with the celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of the Great Reformation and with what appears to be another significant societal change in the recurring five-hundred-year cycles, it is time for the Church to take a serious look at how we are addressing and engaging with people. I am urging pastors to recapture the spirit of Luther and his work of reformation when it comes to our formal proclamation of the Gospel through the sermon. As he recognized the dramatically changing times in which he was living, so must we recognize the dramatically changing times in which we are living and be willing, for the sake of the Gospel, to consider how we engage people with the Lord and his message through our preaching.

Questions abound! How much of the way we have approached the task of preaching in the past would be good to retain? What could change? How much change should be introduced? What change will help a particular congregation and what change could hurt it? How much change should be introduced not so much for the sake of those presently in the congregation but for the sake of those who need to be reached and who need to hear this life-changing message of Jesus? These are important considerations begging for our attention. This is a time of transition, though I do not believe it is yet clear where the transition is heading; that is what makes these times so challenging and at the same time so exciting. There is not a "one-answer-fits-all" for this myriad of questions. Each pastor and each congregation will need to prayerfully ask and answer these questions for themselves and their community.

As we are part of the transition, we find ourselves dealing with tensions at many different junctures because we are preaching to people who are living along all points of three different spectrums. The first spectrum that preachers are dealing with is the spectrum of belief and unbelief. As a pastor of a congregation, the people of that congregation are a significant part of who the pastor thinks about when crafting a sermon. However, pastors should also consider visitors, who may or may not be believers and who may or may not have any knowledge or understanding of the Christian faith. In addition, that spectrum should also include the people whom the pastor and congregation hope to reach in their community and the considerations of how best to do that.

A second spectrum preachers must consider is closely related to the spectrum of belief and unbelief. As we have acknowledged the transitional times we are in, between modernity and postmodernity, the people in our congregations and in our communities are also in transition. There are those who have lived primarily in a culture with a modernity mindset and there are those who have been formed by a postmodern culture.

A third spectrum that must be considered by preachers has to do with change. There will be people of the congregation who do not want to change and cannot understand why change has to occur when it comes to preaching style. Others in the congregation can understand why change is needed and are willing to travel down that path of change, even if they are not comfortable with it. And for still others in the congregation, change cannot happen fast enough or often enough.[1]

With all of these dynamics at work, it is understandable how challenging it can be to even consider introducing other preaching styles beyond traditional lecture. I am not

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[1] For a practical and pastoral approach to making change, see Appendix 2.

proposing a single method or answer. Instead, I propose that we return to our roots in the LCMS: roots that are deep and rich when it comes to our theology and grounding in God's Word, roots that are as profoundly creative as the God we worship and serve. It would be appropriate to follow in the steps of Jesus, who did not preach and teach as the religious leaders of his time, but instead amazed the crowds who heard him because he taught with authority.[2] That authority came not only from who Jesus is—the very Son of God—but it was derived from the Word he inspired people to write, which was primarily a word of life and hope for all who would believe in him. Jesus' preaching was not just about rules or how to live. It was about the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of love and grace, a Kingdom ruled by the Lamb on the throne.[3] Jesus came to speak clearly about what had become clouded and lost among the rules. He came to address sin with repentance and forgiveness. He came to address life's issues with real and eternal answers found in his Gospel.

Not all of what follows is new or unique. Some preachers, within and outside of the LCMS, are already doing new and creative preaching, some even far beyond what I am suggesting. Others may be reading this with trepidation, fear, and uncertainty. Stand on the firm footings with which you have been trained. Use the tools, resources, and solid theological teaching as a stepping-off point. And continue to faithfully study and exegete God's unchanging Word while at the same time exegeting our culture in order to speak to and give hope to the people in this ever-changing world.

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[2] Matthew 7:28-29.

[3] Revelation 5:13; 6:16; 7:9; 7:10; 7:17; 22:1; 22:3.

Engaging People in the Sermon

Regardless of the style or form of the sermon, the preacher must engage the hearers with the message being shared. Here, too, there is a spectrum of what that engagement could involve and along that entire spectrum is room for an array of creativity.

On one end of the spectrum is what I call passive engagement. This typically occurs more often with a lecture style of preaching. The preacher seeks to engage the people in heart and mind as he exegetes the Word of God and uses applicable stories and illustrations which are intended to fire the imagination and draw people into the sermon and ultimately into God's Word. The delivery of the sermon also plays an important role here, as a passionate and heart-felt delivery can serve to keep people engaged. Basic communication skills, including eye contact, appropriate gestures, voice inflection, and a delivery that moves beyond a dry reading of the sermon manuscript are important considerations when preaching.

Traditionally this has been the haven for a preacher's creativity. Using the power of the pen and voice through words, stories, and structuring the sermon in such a way that enlivens people's imaginations and helps them connect with God's Word has long been understood as the creative and necessary work of the preacher. Throughout modernity, the logical flow, the points raised, and the structure of the sermon have been important components in engaging people with God's Word. Add to that the creative element of dramatic vocalization as was utilized so well by such LCMS preachers as Walter A. Maier and Oswald Hoffmann, two of the radio voices of The Lutheran Hour, and you have another powerful dynamic at work to engage people in the sermon. While not all

preachers have the vocal gifts of a Maier or Hoffmann, all preachers have the responsibility to develop the skills necessary for creatively using pen and voice to the best of their ability.

On the other end of the spectrum is what I call active engagement. Active engagement includes various levels of participation and hands-on involvement with the sermon, either in preparation, delivery, or evaluation. Many elements of active engagement align well with the expectations and needs of people in these postmodern times. Active engagement also offers the preacher a plethora of opportunities for creativity.[4]

Engagement of people with the sermon and with God's Word is critical. In our present culture, people of all ages desire to engage more and be part of what God is doing in our world. Because engagement is so critical, it is here that I am urging preachers to unleash their God-given creativity and make full use of all the tools, people, and resources at the preacher's disposal in today's technology and information-rich society and to tap into our rich history as the LCMS to creatively proclaim the Gospel.

One way this can happen is by inviting congregational members and people of the community to be part of sermon preparation. That could include Bible studies, small groups, or a team of people the preacher meets with to talk about the sermon, issues going on in the world, country, or community, and questions that could be addressed in the sermon. This could also be done through any number of different social media channels, in either open or closed/invitation-only groups. One of the advantages of utilizing an open group is the opportunity for those outside the pastor's congregation to

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[4] David Schmitt, phone interview by Glen Schlecht, September 28, 2016.

participate, both Christians and those who may not be Christian, across the country and potentially from around the world. The perspective that can be gained from a broader worldview can be helpful in better understanding issues that either the pastor or members might otherwise miss. An added missional advantage is that this type of practice can also communicate an openness to people who might be exploring or questioning faith or spiritual matters and could ultimately provide an open door to someone coming to faith in Jesus or at least provide the opportunity to take steps in that direction. These "gatherings," either in person or through social media, could include a study of the particular text that is going to serve as the basis for the sermon, specific questions the preacher asks in order to gain others' perspectives or with regard to a particular application, or open-ended questions to help determine what people hear when they think about a certain topic, verse, or section of Scripture. The preacher can then use this information to help shape the sermon in such a way that is most helpful and applicable to the needs of the people.

Similarly, engagement can take place after the sermon with small groups, either in person or through social media, to further discuss what began in the sermon. This can provide a wonderful forum for more in-depth study, discussion, and application to take place as questions can be asked in a more relaxed setting, more conclusions could be drawn, and additional applications made by the group. The preacher can also use this forum as an ongoing learning opportunity for himself by asking for feedback as to what the group believed worked and did not work for a particular sermon. From such feedback the pastor may also see the need for a follow-up sermon the next week to help people understand more of this particular text and its applications.

And finally, active engagement can take place during the sermon itself. There are a multitude of platforms that can be used to engage people. Some examples include the use of video, still pictures, audio, social media, the arts, PowerPoint, questions, and dialogue. To demonstrate how this can happen, here is the journey the Lord took me on to better understand some of the principles and ideas that I am presenting in this dissertation.

My Story

My personal journey toward creative preaching began in my pre-seminary days at Concordia College—St. Paul (now Concordia University) during the spring of my freshman year. I vividly remember my roommate, Gary Johnson, and I joking about how we were going to be a different kind of pastor. In 1982, that idea entailed the simplistic notion that we were not going to be pastors who stood in front of people wearing suits and ties but rather our attire was going to consist of shorts and T-shirts! That was something we could relate to and believed others in our congregations would be able to relate to as well. I finished my pre-seminary training at Concordia—St. Paul with a solid foundation in biblical languages and a healthy dose of preaching examples, both positive and negative, from the daily chapels held on campus over those four years. I find it interesting that from those four years, I have only two distinct memories from chapel. One was when my head football coach actually came to chapel only to be chastised for bringing his cup of coffee in with him. And the second was a sermon by Professor Randy Sherren. While I do not remember many of the specific details of the sermon, I do remember how he made his point of frustration, giving up, failure, and being exhausted from life. I can still see him rolling his eyes and his head dropping squarely (and quite

intentionally) onto the microphone on the pulpit, providing a reverberating "bang," and a powerful and real life "Charlie Brown" type example of failure and disappointment, while also managing to wake up every dozing student (and professor) in the chapel. I put that in the categories of creativity, relevancy to his college student congregation, and a unique use of technology!

My seminary education at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri was another huge step in my journey. Here my foundation was strengthened when it came to the application of God's Word in every aspect of ministry. I grew in appreciation for the strong theological undergirding of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and our historical connection to Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s. The professors cared deeply about me as an individual, and that pastoral care, both in and out of the classroom, has translated into my understanding of the value of relationships and of being real and genuine, whether that was at a hospital bedside, in a shut-in's home, or preaching God's Word. At seminary, I was again exposed to more examples of both good and poor preaching in the daily chapels. I was also taught the basics of preaching by some excellent professors: proper exegesis of a passage utilizing the original languages of Greek and Hebrew, the use of illustrations, the critical importance of distinguishing between Law and Gospel, the place of justification and sanctification, the ability to let the text dictate how the sermon would be preached, and the absolute necessity of the centrality of Christ, his atoning work on the cross, and his victorious resurrection in every sermon.

Francis "Rev" Rossow opened the door to some creative approaches to preaching, teaching us what he called "Gospel handles." It was a unique way of approaching some

challenging texts that did not, at first glance, appear to have anything to say about Jesus or the Gospel, but was in fact a method to appropriately and creatively bring the Gospel to the text.[5] Louis Brighton demonstrated what real passion looked like; I remember him "preaching" with fire and passion in every class he taught, sharing examples from life in his congregation before coming to teach at seminary, and delving deeply into the intricate meanings of the texts, masterfully using the original languages to bring new understanding to light. Bill Schmelder taught the importance of paying attention to the myriad of details surrounding preaching so as not to distract from the centrality of Jesus and his grace.

One of the more influential learnings I had regarding preaching came during my year on vicarage at Bethany Lutheran Church in Alexandria, Virginia. John Zeile was my supervising pastor, and part of what he required of me was that he looked over every sermon I wrote before I preached it. Etched on my brain is the visual of seeing on my manuscript the words, "So what?!" scribbled in his handwriting. The sermons I had written were theologically correct, but he pushed me constantly to ask myself, "What difference does any of this make to the people sitting in the pews?" If I could not answer that question, why bother preaching? It was a powerful reminder to me that I had to know the people, the circumstances, the crises, the challenges, and the lives people were living, and I had to strive to bring God's Word to them in a way that had meaning and purpose. Preaching was not just a theological exercise or an excuse for me to flaunt my knowledge

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[5] Francis C. Rossow, *Gospel Handles: Finding New Connections in Biblical Texts* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2001).

of Greek and Hebrew or do any number of theological gymnastics. There had to be a touch-point on the hearers' lives. That teaching has never left me.

Bethany also had a preschool, and being part of a rotation of leading a weekly chapel was part of my responsibilities on vicarage. This was another important learning experience for me. As I needed to create about fifteen to twenty chapel messages, I was forced to bring the message of Jesus down to a 3- and 4- and 5-year-old level. I had to be creative and engaging with the children in each chapel service; otherwise I would lose their attention in a second. This was some of the first proving grounds for me to intentionally think about how to involve children, through questions and objects, as I shared the message of Jesus and his love. I also learned early on about the need for flexibility and, with children, to be prepared for anything that could be said and how to think on my feet and respond accordingly.

At seminary, I was taught to preach essentially what I considered a three-point sermon: I was to build it around the mantra of "Goal, Malady, Means." Simply put, I had to know the goal of the sermon, what the sin-related issues (maladies) pertinent to this text included, and the Gospel (means) presented using the language of the text on which I was preaching. I clung to that model for many of my early years of ministry and it served me well.

The next chapter in my learning came about five years into ministry. "Worship Wars" were flaring up across the country and within our church body as contemporary worship had begun to make its presence known in the LCMS. I personally had no experience with contemporary worship—ever! As I looked biblically at this issue, as I studied it and read articles about the pros and cons, what I saw in all of it was the passion

to reach people who did not know Jesus. I felt a strong pull, despite my lack of experience with this form of worship and my lack of understanding anything about it, that this was something I needed to take seriously. I related it to Jesus speaking the language of the people, living among them instead of above them as many of the religious leaders seemed to have been doing. I took a cue from Martin Luther and some of the worship reforms that he brought about, particularly with writing new hymns that were "contemporary" for his day. All of this pushed me to think more about not only the way worship services were structured and introducing new music that would eventually be led with guitars, drums, keyboard, and a team of vocalists, but also about how I was preaching.

One of the early introductions of a contemporary style of worship to our congregation happened in the spring of 1995 when we started a new worship service on Wednesday nights. The format was simple and included some simple contemporary music led on the piano, a time of confession and forgiveness, Scripture reading, prayer, and a sermon. I had determined that I would not preach from the pulpit for this service but that the sermon would instead be more of a Bible study. I would ask questions and dialogue with the congregation about the text. I thought this would engage people in the congregation in a different way than was happening with a typical Sunday morning sermon. The text I would lead the "Bible study/sermon" on would be the text on which I was going to preach the following Sunday. So the Wednesday night sermon in many ways amounted to some additional Sunday sermon study and preparation for me. It also served as a way for me to test the waters on various issues, to discover how people were thinking about what different questions the Scripture text would raise as they related to

our everyday life. It helped me better craft examples and my preaching on Sunday to where I sensed people were at, based on responses and discussion in those Wednesday messages. We held the Wednesday worship services for a little over three years until the interest had waned. But God used it and it opened more doors of discovery for me as well as helped me grow in confidence of doing more active and unscripted conversation with the congregation within the context of preaching.

There was a different but parallel idea that arose at about the same time. I have grown in my love for movies over the years, and that love for movies seemed to be a growing phenomenon in our culture as more and more multiplexes appeared. Movies were our culture's new means of expressing and communicating ideas, beyond serving as simply entertainment. More and more conversations I had with people were around movies that were coming out, especially with the huge advancements in special effects and movie storytelling being made by George Lucas and Steven Spielberg beginning in the late 1970s. There was something going on here that felt like a swelling tide.

One of my early ventures into creativity was using the song "A Whole New World," from the Disney movie *Aladdin*, as part of a sermon. I simply made a point and then played the song track. To make that happen, I had to have someone in my congregation who was somewhat tech-savvy pull that song from the video and then play it over our sound system. That was around 1994. The thinking continued. Some years later, I talked with some of those same tech-savvy people in my congregation and asked if there was any way we could figure out how to show a movie clip in our 1958 A-frame, traditional-style sanctuary. And they found a way! On October 31, 1999, as part of the Reformation service sermon, we dimmed the lights and I showed a short clip of *Indiana*

Jones and the Last Crusade to illustrate a point about faith. With that step taken on

Reformation Sunday 1999, a new world of illustrations and connecting with people had

opened up for me.

It started with a VHS player hooked up to a projector and hidden in the lectern,

and a screen on a stand beside the altar, all of which needed to be put up and taken down

whenever I wanted to show a video clip. Several times we hung a sheet-type screen on a

cable strung across the back wall of the chancel and set up the projector behind the altar,

which was pretty labor intensive every time I wanted to show a clip, so it didn't happen

too often in those early days.

However, it was not long after that the amazing tech-savvy people in the

congregation figured out a more permanent solution. In October 2002, they installed a

retractable screen and retractable projector (using parts from a garage door opener), both

of which remained relatively out-of-sight, as it was important to be sensitive to the

integrity of the holy space of the chancel area. At the same time, another volunteer set up

a computer that would run Media Shout onto which we could load video clips from a

VHS player any time we needed them, plus show the lyrics of all the contemporary

worship songs.

Our equipment was not necessarily "state of the art" at that time; lots of larger

churches were using video and screens for words and images by then. However, we were

quite innovative in two areas. The first was doing all of this on a shoestring budget, but

getting professional quality results. Our congregation had a lot of members at the time

who were skeptical of the need for or propriety of using such technology, and requesting

$10,000 for a professional AV installation was out of the question.

The second innovation was how we blended the technology into the existing traditional architecture of the church by using the retractable screen and projector. This allowed us to move forward with technology without offending the more conservative element of the congregation, which was crucial at the time. Ron Riedel, a key tech-savvy individual in our congregation, shared with me,

> I believe that we were one of the few historically very conservative/traditional Lutheran churches who made the transition to contemporary worship without a serious "worship war," and without a significant division in the congregation. I believe the combination of your pastoral leadership in this area, and some good creative thinking in the tech department, made that possible.[6]

In the fall of 1997, we added a third worship service on Sunday mornings. We already had worship services at 8:00 and 10:45, and it was decided to put this additional worship service at 9:30. It would be modeled after what was done on Wednesday nights and would be a more contemporary, casual, and informal style of worship, trying to appeal to those who may not have had a Lutheran background or may not have been familiar or comfortable with that tradition.

Starting in early 2001, I gathered a team of people that included several staff members as well as congregational members of various ages and with various backgrounds. The purpose of the team was to study worship from a biblical standpoint and, out of that study, to develop a theology of worship for our congregation.[7] It was intended to help our congregation, in the midst of the struggles in the LCMS surrounding contemporary worship, to ensure that what we were doing was biblically based when it came to worship.

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[6] Ron Riedel, email conversation with Glen Schlecht on September 21, 2016.

[7] See Immanuel Lutheran Church's *Theology of Worship*, in Appendix 3.

The practical outcome of that study was that in November 2002 we did a major overhaul of our Sunday morning worship, both in schedule and in form. We went back to two worship services at 8:00 and 10:30 but clearly delineated the 8:00 service as a traditional style of worship and the 10:30 service as a contemporary style of worship. Over the coming years, there was a pastoral sensitivity to which I clung regarding the difference in styles and the preferences that the people attending those particular worship services had. On a practical level, that meant I would preach the same sermon on a Sunday morning but would approach it in two very different ways. For the traditional service, I would generally not show movie clips and I would preach from the pulpit. For the contemporary service, I would show movie clips, not preach from the pulpit, and the preaching would many times include questions I would pose to the congregation for times of dialogue during the sermon. The first time I included questions as part of the sermon was in 1998. On March 29 of that year, I asked a question during the sermon but did not ask for any verbal responses. I simply asked a question, invited people to think about it, and gave them time to do that. Then on July 11, 1999, I asked a question during the sermon and actually invited some conversation among the congregation and then with me on what they had talked about.

Gradually we have come to the place where the sermons for both worship services are now the same. While it did not please everyone and some people left our congregation because of it, I felt more and more the need to provide a more engaging and visual experience for those attending both styles of worship. There are still distinct characteristics regarding the music and the general "feel" to the flow of each of the services, but the preaching style is now similar for both. My ongoing desire is to help

people engage with God's Word and with Jesus in the sermon in a way that speaks to their lives with pertinent examples, current movie clips, and questions that help them think about God and His Word in their life.

Another element, related to my vicarage experience, was that Immanuel had a Lutheran School which was begun in 1976. Part of the weekly schedule was Wednesday chapel services for the whole school, which is now preschool through eighth grade. As with my vicarage experience, the chapel services at Immanuel once again forced me to think outside the box when it came to crafting a message that would speak to the span of three-year-olds through eighth graders. I needed to think creatively in a way that would involve and engage all the children, that would not speak above or below any of the age groups, and would clearly convey the message of Jesus to each of them. Leading chapels for our school ministry on an ongoing basis was formative for my preaching.

When we changed our worship schedule in 2002, we also began having children's messages on a weekly basis. As a congregation, we value having children in worship and families worshiping together, and because of that we believed we needed to do as much as we could to make sure children were engaged throughout the worship services as well. With children's messages, as in the chapel services for our school, I honed the skills of being prepared for any kinds of responses that could come from the "mouths of babes," of being able to appropriately incorporate them into the message I had prepared, and of remaining flexible throughout my message. These have become invaluable skills when it comes to some of the dialogue I have with the congregation today during the sermon. As with the children, when I ask questions of the congregation, I am not sure what all the responses are going to be to the questions I ask. There are times that I have a good idea,

but there are other times that I have no idea. Sometimes the questions I ask are of a very

personal nature and I invite people's stories to be shared, which I cannot script ahead of

time. I have had many experiences where what is shared is very moving, much more so

than I could have prepared or shared with any illustration of my own. Allowing people to

share with one another how God is working in their lives is so very powerful!

As I continued to think about how best to engage people with God's Word and in

the sermon, I have also incorporated several resources in addition to the sermon. One is a

week of daily devotions that flow from Sunday's sermon called "Bring It Home"

devotions,[8] the idea being that this would help people keep thinking about what we talked

about on Sunday from different angles and with some deeper study. The second is called

"What Now?" I started this with the change in worship schedule in November 2002, and

the idea behind it is that every sermon I preach ends with a "What Now?"[9] It is a slightly

different take on the "So what?" from my vicarage pastor, giving people some practical,

tangible, often hands-on ways to talk about or live out the message in their lives that

week. All of this is done with the desire to help people take their faith seriously and to

know that God takes them seriously; it is to help them to believe that God in His Word

has a desire to be part of their daily lives and is not simply a Sunday-worship-hour-only

God.

My journey was not one that was undertaken with specific goals or ends in mind.

The beauty of this for me is to see how God continues to work, shape, mold, and

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[8] Credit for this idea goes to Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Bloomington, MN. In the early years of writing "Bring It Home" devotions, I adapted their materials before solely writing them on my own.

[9] See Appendix 4 for specific examples of "What Now?"

accomplish what he knows needs to be done for the furthering of his Kingdom. As I reflect on where I am in this journey, it is a place I never would have imagined thirty years earlier. But the Lord knows what we need, and he surrounded me with people and opportunities that planted seeds in my heart that have germinated and grown. He instilled a passion inside of me to follow him wherever he leads me. My desire to be a faithful pastor and faithful child of God helps keep my eyes fixed on him and whatever he has in store for me.

Your Story

If the Lord can use me in the ways that he has over my lifetime, including the changes in attitude and direction that I experienced and the refining of various skills and abilities that he gave to me to use in ways I had not anticipated, I am confident that he can accomplish these types of things in anyone—including you.

While I do not believe that a lecture style of preaching is bad or obsolete, I do believe that in our culture today, more is required: more variety, more creativity, both within a lecture style and beyond it. In advocating a return to our LCMS creative roots, there can also be an argument made that those roots run much deeper than our own church body. It comes back to remembering our purpose as a Church and our responsibility as pastors and leaders within it. In preaching, our responsibility is not simply to share the message of Jesus; it is to make sure that the message is received. Moving beyond lecture, or monologue, is actually remarkably similar to the method of worship of the early church. Frank Viola and George Barna, writing in their book *Pagan Christianity: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices*, reveal some of the most common practices of worship in the early church, including:

- Active participation and interruptions by the audience were common.
- Prophets and priests spoke extemporaneously and out of a present burden, rather than from a set script.
- There is no indication that Old Testament prophets or priests gave regular speeches to God's people. Instead, the nature of Old Testament preaching was sporadic, fluid and open for audience participation. Preaching in the ancient synagogue followed a similar pattern.[10]

Wayne Oates, in *Pastoral Counseling*, put it this way:

The original proclamation of the Christian message was a two-way conversation… but when the oratorical schools of the Western world laid hold of the Christian message, they made Christian preaching something vastly different. Oratory tended to take the place of conversation. The greatness of the orator took the place of the astounding event of Jesus Christ. And the dialogue between speaker and listener faded into a monologue.[11]

There is value in returning to some of that conversation. Allowing those in the congregation to engage and be part of the sermon can be a dynamic element to people when it comes to making the Christian faith their own. The message of Christ can become more than something they are told—it can become part of who they are and the lives they are living.

Conversations During the Sermon

Incorporating conversation or dialogue during the sermon itself is a style I use regularly at present. Conversation can take place on multiple levels: among the people gathered for worship, in pairs, in smaller groups, in families, and between preacher and people. I use this conversational style of preaching during our regular Sunday morning

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[10] Phil Cooke, "You're Going to Be Ignored If Your Preaching Is a Monologue," Church Leaders, October 9, 2013, accessed October 21, 2013, http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/144440-communication-is-a-two-way-conversation.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=clpastors_newsletter&utm_content=10/10/2013+9:52:11+AM.

[11] Ibid.

worship times, where we have anywhere between seventy-five and two hundred people. I use it during our midweek Advent and Lent services, where there may number between ten and fifty people. And I use it during major festival celebrations such as Christmas and Easter where there may be well over three hundred people in the sanctuary. I have even used it on occasion with funeral and wedding sermons.

The ways in which I employ dialogue in the sermon varies.

- At times, it will serve as a way to introduce the theme for the day. To do that, I would ask a leading question that may or may not be "spiritual" in nature but helps people begin thinking about where the sermon is going. For example, I may say, "Suppose someone comes up to you and asks, 'What is love?' How do you respond?"

- Other times I will use a question to illustrate a particular point, and rather than me coming up with various examples, I allow the people in the congregation to do that. An example of this would be, "What are some things in this world we are tempted to try to make our foundation?"

- There is also opportunity with questions to invite personal stories. To open this opportunity, I asked in a sermon from 1 Peter on suffering, "What kinds of persecution or suffering have you experienced or have you heard from others that are coming at you because of your faith in Jesus?"

- Questions and dialogue can also be used to help the people dig deeper into the text. When preaching on Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet, I asked, "What was going on here? What was the point Jesus was driving home?"

- Dialogue can also be used effectively to help people think about personal application, such as in connection with the parable of the Good Samaritan. I asked, "Who is your neighbor? Who are the people in your life whom Jesus really wants you to notice—people you know as well as those you may not know?" I followed that up with another question: "Are there people in your life who need Jesus, who need someone to show them some love, who could use some compassion? And what are some ways that you can be a neighbor, showing the love of Jesus?"

For reference, I have included in Appendix 5 many more examples of actual questions I have used.

When using questions, there are some things I have learned along the way which make using them more effective and people more receptive to them. After I ask a question, I always invite people to sit and think about the question and, *if they are comfortable with it*, to go ahead and talk with some of the people they are sitting around. That way the opportunity for conversation is given but is not forced; people are given options with what to do. I have discovered that many people who are not talking with others are, in fact, thinking about the question. Many people who felt uncomfortable sharing in front of a whole congregation have approached me after worship to share their thoughts with me one-on-one.

After giving people about a minute or so to think or talk about the question, most often I will repeat the question and then invite people to respond. In our congregation, people will raise their hands and I will acknowledge them, most often by name, listen to their response and then repeat it so everyone can hear and receive what was said. I then

may expound briefly on the point, idea, or thought they raised, or I may simply thank them and go to the next person. There have been times that I have had microphones available and I had our ushers go with the microphone to those I acknowledge. I will typically do that when I anticipate or am asking for longer responses or there is the potential for personal stories. Otherwise I have found that most people will offer a relatively brief response, in which case it is not worth the time or effort to use microphones. While I often will ask for responses, depending on the nature of the question or perhaps a time issue, there are times that I will simply move on without taking responses.

What should the preacher do if a response is given that is contradictory to God's Word? I have experienced this on several occasions. In cases such as this, great pastoral care must be taken so as not to embarrass the individual or allow the error to stand by silent approval. It is important to acknowledge the error by saying something such as, "Thank you for sharing that thought, but it seems from this passage there is something different that God is saying here." Following that would include the option to gently and pastorally correct the error or offer to continue the conversation after the worship service. Times like this provide the pastor the opportunity to gain further respect from his people but also include the danger of losing it, depending on how the situation is handled.

I have been asked if it is the same people who always respond. My experience has been that there are some who will regularly offer responses, but I am always surprised how particular questions or topics strike different people and what a wide variety of people are willing to offer their insights or responses. As I just mentioned, regardless of who is responding, I have found that many in the congregation are engaged with me, with

each other, and with God in his Word. I cannot count the times people, members and visitors alike, have commented to me that there is no sleeping during sermons here. And it is true. People across the spectrum of ages, from children to older adults, are actively and genuinely engaged.

Another significant benefit of this conversational style is that children are always involved. Even though we have a children's message immediately preceding the regular sermon, I have found that the children stay engaged with the regular sermon as well. The use of dialogue provides parents the opportunity to engage their children in the discussion and talk together as a family. Oftentimes I will call on children to share their answers as part of the response time. Sometimes their responses are very childlike and at other times quite profound. It is a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge how all of us gathered for worship, young and old, are valued children of God and are equally and importantly part of his family.

Video

The use of video in a sermon can also be a way to engage people, particularly those who are more visual learners as well as those for whom movies communicate on a deeper level. When I refer to the use of video, there are several options. One is the use of actual movie clips. If you do not feel you can think of clips on your own, there are several websites that are available, such as ScreenVue and WingClips, which offer helpful suggestions and topical references. Another option is to purchase video vignettes or videos that have been created specifically to address a particular topic or holiday. Websites such as SkitGuys, SermonSpice, and Igniter Media can serve as helpful resources in this regard. A third option that I have used is to create your own videos. If

you have people in your congregation or community who have gifts in producing short videos or helping with "man on the street"-type interviews or other artistic video presentations, by all means make use of them! I have had people as young as middle-school age produce some amazing videos as well as high school, college-aged, and adult producers. There have also been opportunities over the years to have adults and youth working together on various video projects for worship, the benefits of which are multiplied.

Similar to dialogue, there are different ways to utilize video in a sermon. I have used a video clip as an introduction to the sermon. I have used video to enhance or visually illustrate a particular point. Videos can be used in conjunction with dialogue. To do this, I will set up what people are going to see and ask them to watch or listen for certain things. Then after the clip I will invite people to think about or talk with others about a particular question or takeaway from the clip. Finally, I have also used videos to conclude a sermon. For reference, I have included in Appendix 6 specific examples of videos I have used and the ways in which they were incorporated into the sermon.

When using video, there are a number of things to which attention must be given. First and most basic is an integrity issue. Make sure that what you are doing is legal and that you have purchased a license to show videos at your church. CVLI (Church Video License) is a commonly used licensing company that will cover most movies that are available for showing. For other non-movie video clips (topical clips or SkitGuys videos, for example), purchase what you are going to use and do not borrow, copy, or use "previews" of these materials.

It is important to remember that videos used during the sermon are a tool, not an end in themselves. Videos should be used with care and sensitivity with the following matters kept in mind. Personally, I will not show any clip from a movie with an R-rating, even if the clip itself is "clean" of any violence, profanity, or sexuality. Whether it is intended or not, and even when it is explicitly stated that you are not endorsing the movie, it will be perceived by many as an endorsement. For this reason, when considering the use of any movie with any rating, the theme of the movie must be taken into account. If there is any questionable content or themes, no matter how "perfect" the clip may be to highlight or illustrate your point, it is not worth showing it in worship. If in doubt, seek another opinion from another staff member, a trusted leader, or a parent of a young child. If there is any hesitancy in your mind as the preacher, I recommend not using the clip. Make or illustrate your point in another way.

When I use a movie clip, I will often give a very brief statement of explanation for what is going to be shown. It may require a set-up or background on the characters. But if it requires too much to be said in order for it to be useful, it defeats the purpose of the clip. Do not let the clip take over the sermon. Again, remember that the purpose of using a video is to *illustrate* a point and not to *be* the point.

Depending on the sound system in your worship space as well as the various ages of people in worship, consideration should be given to using subtitles to make sure that the dialogue in the clip can be understood. If there is any uncertainty about the "hear-ability" of the clip and if subtitles are available, I would suggest using them to ensure that all are able to hear the clip and to understand the point being made.

Even with all the caveats and sensitivity required, movies and video are a powerful medium to utilize because it is a language of our culture today. This is a language that is recognized and embraced by people of all ages, from young children to older adults.

Other Examples of Creative Elements for Preaching

With many people plugged into various social media, there are multiple opportunities to make creative use of these tools in preaching as well. I have already mentioned some possibilities pre- and post-sermon regarding social media discussion groups. I have heard some preachers use Twitter to allow people to interact or ask questions during the message, even having the feed running live on a screen up front. With the familiarity of many with such tools as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Vimeo, and more, I am confident that there could well be some creative use of any of these with regard to preaching. On several occasions I have encouraged people to pull out their phones and send a text or email message to someone as an outcome or application of the sermon. I have also invited people to both text and email me responses to a particular question that I posed during the sermon. For one sermon I shared some of the texts and emails and remarked on some of the responses. For another sermon I looked at the messages later, outside of worship, letting the act of responding during the message be active engagement for the congregation. There have been sermons where I have asked an individual at our sound booth to transcribe single-word responses to my question on the screen so all in the congregation could see them.

Still pictures are another potential use of technology in the sermon, either projecting a picture or even providing a paper copy for worshipers. Leonard Sweet has

utilized a videographer in some of his presentations in which he invited his technology "partner," live during his presentation, to search and put up on the screen various items from the internet that reflected what he was addressing. On another occasion I witnessed an artist creating a work of art during a message that illustrated the main theme.

There are also plenty of non-technological opportunities for the pastor to be creative in the sermon. The preacher can ask people to raise their hands in response to questions or invite them to write down responses to a particular question or thought. Opportunities may be provided for people to respond by giving the option of bringing something forward to the altar as part of the sermon. Again, as a reference, I have included some specific examples of other creative ideas I have used in Appendix 7.

God at Work

There is much that can be done using creative elements in the sermon. Make use of the gifts and abilities that God has given you and the people of the congregation. Invite ideas and brainstorming from creative people in the congregation and in the community. Explore the willingness and the desire of the congregation to try new approaches to preaching for the sake of fulfilling the mission the Lord has given his Church to reach out to all people.

When all is said and done in the delivery of the sermon, "the greatest praise of preaching lies not in what people say about the sermon but in what God does through it. While faithful preachers are those who evaluate their sermons, faithful sermons are the

ones in which God does what God desires to do through the office of preaching. God is at

work through the sermon, reaching out to his people with words of salvation."[12]

A Final Word of Encouragement

With all this, be the pastor God has called you to be as you serve the people in

your congregation and in the community in which you serve. As Lutherans, we have the

best of all worlds: we have a solid foundation on the Word of God, we are centered in

Christ Jesus, we have a healthy understanding of God's grace, and we have clarity on the

mission we have been given by our Lord. That is our history, back to Luther and the

Reformation, and back to Jesus himself. Standing firmly on these bases, the door is open

wide to use the creative gifts our creative God has placed within us and before us.

> Lutheran proclamation, the expression of the good news of Jesus Christ, comes in
> many forms and the Lutheran Church has always been a place where oration and
> art coexist as forms by which the gospel enters through the senses to move the
> heart. What do Lutherans have to offer mission in preaching? A balance between
> Word and sacrament, a clear understanding that the promise of the Gospel is to be
> held in tension with, yet has dominion over the mandate of the Law, and the
> appreciation that any form, oral or artistic, that serves the gospel and brings about
> new creation is proclamation.[13]

Preacher, put fear aside and step boldly into this world of people in desperate

need to hear and experience the powerful message of Jesus Christ. I pray that from this

work you would not only be encouraged but that, based on Scripture, our Lutheran

history from the time of the Reformation, and our rich LCMS history, you would

recognize the permission you have been given to be bold and creative in your preaching

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[12] David R. Schmitt, "The Tapestry of Preaching," *Concordia Journal* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 107-108.

[13] Clayton J. Schmit, "What Lutherans Have to Offer Mission in Preaching," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 361.

and ministry. When considering the important work the Lord has placed on your shoulders in preaching that message of hope, love, forgiveness, and life we receive in Jesus, do not hold back. Use all the gifts the Lord has put into you and into your people to express that message of Jesus week in and week out from your pulpit. We are living in a whole new world, a world very similar to the world of the Reformation in the 1500s, a world teeming with change and opportunity, a world not necessarily friendly with the Church and yet at the same time a world open to conversation about spiritual matters. The Church must have a voice in this new world, speaking the language of the people of today. You have the tools, the education, and the solid foundation. Cling to our rich heritage and our powerful and meaningful roots and step boldly and fearlessly into this world with creativity and with love, and preach Jesus.

APPENDIX 1:

HOM CURRICULAR SEQUENCE

		Homiletics Curriculum	
Course	**Course Material**	**Integration with Other Courses**	**Preparation for Evidence in Assignments and Outcomes**
P-3 Homiletics (15 weeks)			
	Definition of Preaching	Integrates with theology of the Word in S1 and with Office of the Ministry in P1 and with Creeds and Confessions in S2	M13.4-E2 Integrative Personal Essay on Preaching
	Sermon Preparation Form	Integrates textual focus/function and Christocentricty from E1 and integrates law/gospel and Christocentricity from S1	M13.1-E2 Preaching/Teaching/Worship Sermon Supporting Materials M13.2-E2 Sermon Preparation Form, OT M13.2-E5 Sermon Preparation Form, NT M13.3-E2 Sermon Preparation Form, Occasional M13.3-E5 Sermon Preparation Form, Series M13.3-E8 Sermon Preparation Form, Wedding M13.3-E12 Sermon Preparation Form, Funeral
	Preaching NT texts	Integrates with E1 and E 2 Gospels	M13.2 – E6 New Testament manuscript
	Exegeting a Congregation	Integrates with P1, Field Work activity, and P2. Congregational exegesis builds throughout the curriculum from field work experience in relation to P1 and P2 to Tisdale's congregational exegesis in P3 to specific exegesis of occasions in P4,	M13.1-E3 Preaching/Teaching/Worship Project Reflection in Student Final Vicarage Report M13.3-E1 Preaching Profile, Occasional M13.3-E4a Preaching Profile, Series M13.3-E7 Preaching Profile, Wedding

		weddings and funerals in P6, and series in P4 and P7.	M13.3-E11 Preaching Profile, Funeral M13.4-E2 Integrative Essay on Personal Theology of Preaching
	Exegetical Study Form	Integrates with E1 where a form of study is introduced and integrates with the overall trajectory of M2 Exegetical Theology	M13.2-E1 Exegetical Study Form, OT M13.2-E4 Exegetical Study Form, NT
	Delivery	Delivery builds throughout the curriculum from sermon delivered before small feedback group and then before class in P3 to sermon delivered in field work congregation in P7, to sermons delivered on vicarage, and assessment in P10.	M13.1-E2 Manuscript and Delivery, Preaching/Teaching/Worship Event M13.2-E3 Manuscript and Delivery, OT M13.2-E6 Manuscript and Delivery, NT M13.4-E1 Initial and Final Student Vicarage Report
	Feedback Group	Use of feedback groups builds throughout the curriculum, moving from small collaborative learning group outside of class, to full group in class in P3, to congregational group in field work congregation in P7, to congregational group on vicarage and assessment in P10.	M13.4-E1 Initial and Final Student Vicarage Report
	Self-evaluation	Self-evaluation builds throughout the curriculum, moving from self-evaluation in relation to class response to delivered sermon in P3, to self-evaluation in relation to congregational feedback group in field work congregation in P7, to self-evaluation in relation to congregational feedback group in vicarage congregation on vicarage and assessment in P10.	M13.4-E1 Initial and Final Student Vicarage Report

P-4 Worship and the Word (15 weeks)			
	Preaching Profile	Integrates with congregational exegesis in P3 but specifically directed toward occasions and situations addressed by a liturgical or catechetical series.	M13.3-E1 Preaching Profile, Occasional M13.3-E4a Preaching Profile, Series
	Occasional Preaching	Integrates with preaching in P3, adding specialization of occasions.	M13.1-E2 Preaching/Teaching/Worship Sermon Supporting Materials M13.3-E2 Sermon preparation form, Occasional M13.3-E3 Sermon manuscript, Occasional
	Liturgical Series	Integrates with preaching in P3, adding specialization of liturgical setting and series	M13.3-E4b Sermon series outline, Series M13.3-E5 Sermon preparation form, Series M13.3-E6 Sermon manuscript, Series
	Catechetical Series	Integrates with preaching in P3, adding specialization of catechesis and series; integrates with field work experience and P5 in reference to catechesis.	M13.3-E4b Sermon series outline, Series M13.3-E5 Sermon preparation form, Series M13.3-E6 Sermon manuscript, Series
P-6 Pastoral Care and the Word (15 weeks)			
	Preaching Profile	Integrates with congregational exegesis in P3 but specifically directed toward weddings and funerals.	M13.3-E7 Preaching profile, wedding M13.3-E11 Preaching profile, funeral
	Wedding Sermons	Integrates with preaching in P3 and occasional preaching in P4, adding specialization of weddings.	M13.3-E8 Sermon preparation form, wedding M13.3-E9 Sermon manuscript, wedding
	Funeral Sermons	Integrates with preaching in P3 and occasional preaching in P4, adding specialization of funerals.	M13.3-E12 Sermon preparation form, funeral M13.3-E13 Sermon manuscript, funeral

P-7 Reading and Preaching the Word of God (15 weeks)			
	Preaching OT Texts	Integrates with E1 and E 3 Torah and E 4 Prophets; integrates with preaching in P3.	M13.2-E2 Sermon Preparation form, OT M13.2-E3 Sermon Manuscript, OT
	Delivery	Integrates with delivery in P3, adding delivery, feedback group, and self-evaluation in a field work congregation	M13.2-E3 Sermon delivery, OT
	Exegetical Study form for OT text	Integrates with E1 where a form of study is introduced and integrates with the overall trajectory of M2 Exegetical Theology	M13.2-E1 Exegetical Study form, OT
	Preaching Profile	Integrates with congregational exegesis in P3 but specifically directed toward situations addressed by a topical or expository series.	M13.3-E4a Preaching Profile, Series
	Topical Series	Integrates with preaching in P3, with series preaching in P4, adding specialization of a topical series; integrates with S1, S2, and/or S3 depending upon topic	M13.3-E4b Sermon series outline, Series M13.3-E5 Sermon preparation form, Series M13.3-E6 Sermon manuscript, Series
	Expository Series	Integrates with preaching in P3, with series preaching in P4, adding specialization of an expository series; integrates with E1, E2, E3 and/or E4 depending upon the biblical book	M13.3-E4b Sermon series outline, Series M13.3-E5 Sermon preparation form, Series M13.3-E6 Sermon manuscript, Series
Vicarage and/or Field Work Assessment	**M13.1** **Preaching/Teaching/Worship Event** (E1, E2, and E3) **M13.2** **Preaching OT Sermon and NT Sermon** (E1, E2, and E3 for OT, E4, E5, and E6 for NT, and E7) **M13.3** **Composing Occasional, Wedding, Funeral, and Series** (E1, E2, and E3 for Occasional, E4a, E4b, E5, and E6 for Series, E7, E8, and E9 for Wedding, and E10, E11, and E12 for Funeral) **M13.4** **Regular Preaching on Vicarage** (E3)		

P-10 Preaching Elective (7 weeks)			
	Integrative Essay on Personal Theology of Preaching	Integrates with definition of preaching in P3; congregational exegesis in P3, P4, P6, and P7; and self-evaluation in P3, P7, and vicarage.	**Assessment M13.4-E2 Integrative Essay on Personal Theology of Preaching**
	Delivery	Integrates with delivery in P3 and P7, and delivery, feedback group, and self-evaluation on vicarage.	**Assessment M13.4-E1 Initial and Final Student Vicarage Report**

APPENDIX 2:

INTRODUCING NEW STYLES: A MATTER OF PASTORAL CARE

As you consider changes to your preaching style with more active engagement, it is important to approach these changes with good pastoral care. That means if you plan to implement some new elements to your preaching, do not surprise the congregation and the congregation's leaders by simply doing something new one weekend. As a pastor, one must understand the different ways people react to change and be sensitive to all. What follows are some suggestions when considering introducing new elements to preaching.

First and foremost, pray over your congregation, your leadership, and the mission your congregation has been called to fulfill in Christ. Pray and seek the Lord's guidance as you navigate what can be waters fraught with resistance. Ask him for wisdom as you consider the needs in your congregation and community and how those can be fulfilled through making changes to your preaching style.

Education of the key leaders is important. Be clear about why you are considering implementing some new or creative elements to your preaching. Let the leaders know that the purpose for the changes is not to be cute or creative for creativity's sake or even to be cutting edge. The purpose must come back to the mission the Church has been given by our Lord. Changes in peaching must connect to the desire to help people come to faith and to believe in Jesus, to engage with the Lord and his Word, and to be in a growing relationship with the Savior.

Education and communication must then move beyond leaders to the congregation and should come from a variety of angles, utilizing the opportunities that are common for your congregation. These could include one-on-one conversations with key leaders and staff, Bible studies, speaking to this topic and having discussions about it at leadership team meetings, and blogging, writing, or utilizing the congregation's normal communication channels. As pastor, understand your congregation and what needs must be met, when, how far, and how quickly to stretch the congregation in new areas, and also when to step back. Especially as changes are made, allow ongoing feedback and conversation around the concerns people have, using those as opportunities to continue to educate about the reasons behind the changes. And do not forget to celebrate and share positive stories of successes for people surrounding the changes that have been implemented.

A challenging tension exists here when making changes such as this. The tension is that there will be push-back and criticism as a normal reaction of people to changes made to worship and their church, to which people are typically very emotionally and passionately connected. It will seem much easier to relent and give up on the changes than to give the changes some time and to continue to explore whether or not they are bringing about the desired effect in alignment with the mission. Again, pastoral care must be practiced and dialogue with key leaders must continue.

Another consideration when approaching change is to understand that as a preacher you must always keep the main thing as the main thing. Whether it is shared stories, technology, or other forms of active engagement, these are all merely tools to be

used in service to the Gospel. The tools are not the Gospel! So make sure the tools you use do not distract from Jesus but rather lead people to him. When all is said and done, Christ must be preached along with the forgiveness and comfort and hope he has come to bring. If that does not happen, then no amount of active engagement, creative elements, or different styles can save a sermon.

If you are considering making changes in your preaching style, another excellent resource is from Pastor Ed Seely's essay, "Defusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the Church." In this essay, he explains how helpful findings in the field of diffusion research, a subfield of communication, facilitate the adoption of innovations in social systems, including churches. He also explains why this research, which has been done in secular social science, can be applied in the Church.[1]

There is one final matter of sensitivity. Care must be taken to use the various forms of active engagement, or any creative elements, in moderation. Too much of a good thing is no longer a good thing if people lose sight of Jesus in the process. Consider what forms or styles or creative elements might best serve a particular text of Scripture or theme for a sermon. Do not overload any given sermon with too many different forms or ideas. Keep it simple and strive to have all the elements of the sermon point people in a single direction. Do not force a certain form or format into a sermon that does not fit or serve the Gospel. Always keep in mind the purpose of the sermon.

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[1] Edward D. Seely, "Defusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the Church," 2006, accessed August 25, 2017, http://www.fromacorntooak12.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Defusing-Fear-of-Innovations-Facilitating-Change-in-the-Church.pdf.

A THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

A Theology of Worship
of Immanuel Lutheran Church
February 2002/July 2010

A Philosophy of Worship

It is the mission of Immanuel Lutheran Church and School to make disciples ASAP.[1]
One of the ways we accomplish that is through corporate worship, that is, by
"announcing and celebrating Jesus' love through Word and Sacrament." This *Philosophy
of Worship* serves as a foundational statement when evaluating, forming, and developing
the corporate worship life of Immanuel Lutheran Church and helps answer the question,
"What is worship?"

The Priority of Worship at Immanuel

From a biblical standpoint, corporate worship takes the number one priority within the
ministries of Immanuel Lutheran Church. This is not meant to diminish the importance of
other ministries or activities but we recognize that the Lord desires our worship above all
else. Everything that we *are* and everything we *do* as individuals and as a community of
faith flows from the context of worship. While all of life is an act of worship (See
Romans 12:1) this document will focus specifically on our corporate worship as a
community of faith.

Throughout the Old Testament, after great acts of God, the response of faithful people
was to worship, to set up an altar, to sacrifice or give an offering. (See Noah in Genesis
8:18-21; Miriam in Exodus 15:20-21; Abraham in his travels in Genesis 12:7-8, with the
near sacrifice of his son Isaac in Genesis 22:1-14; Isaac in Genesis 26:24-25; Jacob at
Bethel in Genesis 28:16-22; Moses after defeating an enemy in Exodus 17:14-16.) In the
commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, we are told to "have no other gods
before the Lord our God" and that we are to "remember the Sabbath day by keeping it
holy." In the New Testament, Jesus permitted a woman to worship Him by anointing Him
with expensive perfume, much to the dismay of some. Jesus went on to explain why what
she did was so important. (See Luke 7:36-50 and John 12:3-8.)

We further base our priority of corporate worship on the call from God to His people to
come together to worship Him. (See Exodus 24:1; Deut. 4:10; Psalms 47, 66, 95, 96, 100,

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[1] **Mission:** Transform lives by loving, learning, and living in Jesus

Vision: We reveal the love and grace of Jesus to our community by our Radical Hospitality,
Transformational Learning, and Fearless Living.

133, and 150; Matthew 11:28-29 and John 4:24).We are called to respond to who God is (God the Father, Creator of the universe), what God has done (God the Son, Redeemer of the world) and what God continues to do in our lives (God the Spirit, Comforter and Counselor.) God's call for us to worship Him is not vague. And, like all of God's commands, it comes from a context of love and out of wisdom in knowing what is best for His people to live life on earth to the full.

Based on God's call to worship Him and what He desires our response to be, we summarize the practice of worship at Immanuel Lutheran through this foundational statement: *worship is all people coming together to experience, respond to, and grow in God's love.* The following sections clarify each part of this statement.

"Worship is all people coming together to experience, respond to, and grow in Jesus' love"

Worship is...All People

We invite and encourage *all people* of all ages, of all walks of life, in whatever stage of their faith journey, to come, participate, and participate in the corporate worship services at Immanuel, trusting and praying God to do His work among us and through us.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, when God's covenant people came together, children were part of the gathering. In the same way, we recognize the importance of including children within the context of worship, knowing the blessings they can receive and the blessings they can be. We affirm, as Jesus did, that even the youngest among our community of faith are important (Mark 10:13-16) and we include children in the phrase *All People*. Children possess the gift of faith through Baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39; Matthew 18:3-6). Because of that, they have gifts and talents to offer and share. As *A Family Place*, Immanuel not only encourages children's participation in worship but also places a high value on families worshiping together.

We also include those outside the Christian faith in the phrase *All People* and believe that a congregation's worship service is one of its prime outreach tools. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus gives the Great Commission to us as His people. In that Commission we are commanded to "make disciples of all nations," by baptizing and teaching. While that Bible passage is not a specific statement regarding worship, we believe that Baptism and Teaching are vital parts of corporate worship. There were no distinctions made regarding who should or should not be reached out to, but rather that we were to target *all people*. In another instance, when Jesus was cleansing the Temple in Mark 11, He stated that, "My house will be called a house of prayer for *all nations*." Reading the Psalms we hear regularly of "the nations." The spirit of the Psalms is that worship is to have an impact on *all nations*; the Lord ultimately desires that *all* be drawn to worship. (See Psalm 33, 47, 57, 67, 72, 96, 98, 148.)

All worship is a re-enactment and celebration of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We trust that as Jesus is present in worship (Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them"), the Holy Spirit is present as well (John 4:23, "Jesus said, 'Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true

worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.'") And the Holy Spirit will do His work of conversion, conviction, and growth when and where and how He chooses (John 3:8), including within the context of a worship service. While people attending a worship service may not have a relationship with Jesus – and because of that not be able to truly worship Him – they can watch, observe, and be impacted by the Holy Spirit and God's Word. We dare not limit God in His work nor underestimate the power of His Word to touch people's hearts as it is spoken, sung, heard, shared, experienced, and proclaimed (1 Peter 2:8-12).

Worship is...Coming Together
Within the concept of all people "coming together" we focus on relationships and community.

We recognize the vertical relationship (our relationship with Jesus) as the main reason for our coming together in worship. It is from that central relationship with Jesus that this "coming together" finds its true meaning and power (Acts 4:12). In Baptism and through God's Word, God establishes a personal relationship with each one of us. It is the Lord in our hearts that draws us to Jesus in the first place and continues to motivate us to come together (John 6:44: "Jesus said, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.'"). Through our time spent in worship, study of God's Word, and prayer, we can come to know the Lord more and more and our relationship with Him deepens. It is our commonality in Jesus that brings us together as a community of faith to worship Him.

It is from that vertical relationship with Jesus and our oneness in Him that we find motivation to establish and develop our horizontal relationships, that is, our relationships with each other (1 John 4:7-8). We come together in our diversity in many areas of life (age, culture, occupations, interests, etc.) precisely because of our common faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

Coming together amidst great diversity is not easy. The reality is, coming together is hard work and, at times, very messy as there can be many different kinds of people with many different backgrounds gathering at the same time. This can create situations with which we may be uncomfortable. Yet we are not called to be comfortable but we are called to be one in Jesus. It is OK – even preferable – to recognize and include the beautiful mosaic and variety of people with all our differences coming together to celebrate our oneness in Jesus (Galatians 3:26-29).

As we deal with those differences, we have a God-directed responsibility to deal with each other in forgiveness, just as we have been forgiven. We work to restore broken relationships out of love for Jesus and for each other.[2] There is a true joy evident among

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[2] Seeking forgiveness of sins is the highest form of worship: Apology to the Augsburg Confession IV "Justification," 154. Referring to the story of the woman who came to Jesus at the home of Simon the Pharisee, read Luke 7:47, "The woman came, believing that she should seek the forgiveness of sins from Christ. This is the highest way of worshiping Christ. Nothing greater could she ascribe to him. By looking for the forgiveness of sins from him, she truly acknowledged Him to be the Messiah. To truly believe means to think of Christ in this way, and in this way to worship him and take hold of him."

God's people as we live out our faith and practice His forgiveness in such a way. Using again the picture of Jesus cleansing the Temple in Jerusalem, we know that worship and activity at the Temple was segregated in multiple ways (Jews/Gentiles, men/women, clergy/non-clergy, etc.). Yet Jesus proclaimed, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

It is important that we strive to know one another, just as we strive to know Jesus. As we come together, no one should be made to feel like an outsider who doesn't belong. With Jesus' love in our hearts, we look for opportunities to reach out, welcome, and love all who come together in worship. Our relationship with Jesus should move us to deepen and strengthen our relationships with one another. Thus our relationships with one another should serve to deepen and strengthen our relationship with Jesus.

The Lord creates this sense of community among us. Within community, not only do we come together but we also "do" together. (See the sections, **_Worship is...To Respond,_** and **_Worship is...To Grow_** for more on this.) As a community of faith gathered for worship, it is appropriate to celebrate our oneness and sense of community and to encourage this to be a part of the worship experience.

Jesus breaks down all the walls that divide us as a diverse people (Ephesians 2:13-22). He invites us to come together regularly to deepen our relationship with Him and with one another and to celebrate our oneness in Him.

Worship is...To Experience

The Lord intended worship to be a time to engage all our senses. To read of worship in the Psalms, we find emotion, music, deep reflection, learning, and celebration (See Psalms 145, 148, 149, 150). Worship is an encounter with the living God, being in the very presence of the Lord Himself. He tells us, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). Jesus said, "Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). Jesus also said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). As we read the Epistles we know that we are created with varieties of spiritual gifts and talents (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:8-11). The social sciences inform us of varieties in learning styles, personalities, and behaviors. To help all people experience Jesus' love in worship means that we also need to engage all our senses. While not dependant on our experiences or senses, we value them as gifts to enhance worship and our experience of Jesus' love, making worship more memorable and meaningful.

Worship is participatory, not a spectator sport. Just as in other areas of life, the Lord desires us to use and share our gifts and talents in worship. There are different levels of participation: for some, simply coming to worship is a level of involvement (more will be said about this in the next section, **_Worship is...To Respond._)** For many others, actively participating in times of worship makes the experience of worship even more meaningful - singing, ringing, ushering, serving communion, reading Scripture, etc. Providing

multiple ways to be involved in worship serves not only to offer support to worship services but provides additional ways for individuals and families to experience worship.

To experience God's love in Jesus includes both lows and highs. We experience appropriate guilt, sorrow over sin, and terror of a holy God as well as the joy and peace of knowing His love and forgiveness. This also includes vicarious experiences: listening to others tell of God's action in their lives, testimonies of what God is doing, storytelling to make a spiritual point, etc.

It's important to find a balance when talking about the arena of experience. Jesus raises this in Luke 10:27 when He says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind." Our experience of God is not just emotion or intellectual learning or activity, but a combination and healthy balance of all of these areas. So we value visual experiences or stimulation with colors and the arts, aural with music and speech and sound, touch with human contact, aromas that elicit certain responses and memories, quiet reflection that pushes us deep into our souls, order and tradition that appeal to our logic, taste with Holy Communion, intellect with challenging questions that engage our minds, stories that touch our hearts, movement that involves our bodies. We are created as whole beings with many facets and so it is important to engage the whole person in worship with varieties of experiences.

The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the ultimate experience of our worship and the very presence of God. As such, they also serve as God's stamp of approval on experience as we look at the multi-sensory way in which He created these means of grace.

Worship is...To Respond

Worshiping God naturally elicits a response. It is important for worship planners to intentionally create appropriate opportunities for worshipers to respond, both within the context of worship as well as outside of the worship setting. We would present opportunities to all people so the individual worshiper can respond in a way that is appropriate for her/him out of love for the Lord and not out of guilt or manipulation.

We recognize two different kinds of responses: short-term responses during a worship service (standing, sitting, singing, clapping, praying, confessing, crying, laughing, greeting, offering, introspection, meditation, silence, liturgical responses, testimonials, etc.) and long-term, life-changing commitments made over a lifetime but are elicited during a worship service (inviting friends to worship, meeting with someone to pray after services, behavioral or lifestyle changes, practical opportunities for serving and demonstrating compassion toward other people, becoming involved in a ministry, etc.).

The response not only can, but prayerfully will be, acted out in daily life. When worship is concluded in the sanctuary, the congregation is sent out into God's world to our respective callings. Within those various callings we respond to Christ's love and gifts by being compassionate, loving, and caring for others, and in so doing we demonstrate the love of Christ in a concrete way, often at the same time being blessed ourselves. Another

way we respond is to act on the fact that Jesus has broken down the sinful walls of individualism, by forgiving those who have hurt us, and actively working to cement together our community of faith.

The challenge is balancing the "life-change" responses we desire with allowing the experience and relationship with God to blossom and grow. We want people to "fall in love" with God and to respond to that relationship. We recognize the wide spectrum of people who come together in worship, with many different responses at many different levels. The act itself of coming to worship is a response of faith, as we know that people sometimes overcome many obstacles just to be at worship.

Worship is...To Grow

Worship not only fosters evangelism but discipleship as well. In Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, He includes "teaching" as a way of making disciples of all nations. The worship experience gives us an opportunity to learn more about God each week.

To expect growth assumes current inadequacy and immaturity. We must admit that we're not in a place of spiritual maturity where we should stay. But growth means change and change means some level of discomfort and tension. Growth is intertwined with the previous section, ***"Worship is...To Respond."*** That is because growth produces a response and the act of responding often generates more growth (Hebrews 5:12-6:3). The Marks of Discipleship[3] are specific areas of our spiritual lives that lend themselves to the areas of worship and growth. These are the basics of the Christian's life. Worship is intended to be intellectually stimulating. There is an emphasis on the mind and on accumulation of knowledge. However, this growth needs to be relevant and

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[3] Discipleship is the Christian's intentional journey in grace. Jesus commanded the Church to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:18). The goal of a disciple is maturity in Jesus Christ... "to grow into the maturity of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

Being disciples of Jesus Christ is what Immanuel is all about. The Marks of Discipleship are significant components of our spiritual growth spoken of regularly by our Lord and laid out clearly in the Scriptures. While they are not "requirements," we lift these Marks of Discipleship as clarifiers. They help us more fully experience the joy and responsibilities of our faith. The Marks of Discipleship are the benchmarks to strive for especially for our leaders in the ministry. However, all members of Immanuel are encouraged to be continually growing in their relationship with Jesus Christ through the use of and growth in these Marks of Discipleship.

1. Personal faith demonstrated in daily *scripture* reading; Psalm 119:105
2. Personal faith demonstrated in daily *prayer*; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-19
3. Weekly *worship*; Psalm 122:1 and Hebrews 10:23-25
4. Active Christian *giving* through
    a. serving in a ministry at Immanuel; 1Corinthians 12:4-13
    b. tithing, or a commitment to move to tithing; Malachi 3:10 and 2 Corinthians 8:12
    c. involvement in at least one mission project outside of Immanuel at least once a year; Matthew 25:31-46
5. Commitment to ministry through *relationships*, be a team player; Mark 6:7
6. Intentional spiritual *growth*; growth plan including regular Bible study with fellow believers; Ephesians 4:11-16
7. *Discipleship* of at least one other person. Romans 15:1-2, (3-6)

connected to real life, to our current culture and society, and to the day-to-day world in which we each live. While growth is part of worship, it should be stated that growth obviously must continue outside of a worship service (Romans 12:1-3).

Worship is...In Jesus' Love

It is important that we state once again, very clearly, that the focus of our worship is on Jesus and His love for us (Hebrews 12:2). The focus is not on a generic god or even simply on God as our creator. Our reason for being and our reason for living is found in the message of the Gospel: the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and for our salvation.

We must understand God's role in worship. It is God who draws us here (John 6:44), it is God who has initiated a relationship with us, it is God who has taken the initiative in giving to us His Word, His Son, His Holy Spirit, His means of grace in Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and it is God who speaks to us. God delights in us, in "those who fear Him." (See Psalm 33:18-21; 34:7-11; 103:11-17; 147:10-11.)

Worship is about God... and it is about us, a beautiful intertwining of this relationship. It is a gift from God Himself that allows us to come into His presence, to seek Him, to celebrate Him, to experience Him, to grow in Him and to be a community of grace and Christian love, the family of Christ.

APPENDIX 4:

"WHAT NOW?" EXAMPLES

At the end of nearly every sermon I preach, I use what I call, "What Now?" This is something for people to consider doing or thinking about as follow-up to the sermon for that day. What follows are actual examples of these resources.

What Now?
1. Consider some ways that you can strive toward embracing the 3rd Commandment in your life. Some ideas could include: a recommitment to being more regular in worship, regularly utilizing the *What Now?*, having more conversation about worship or the sermon with friends or family afterward, volunteering to help in a Worship Support position (as an usher, greeter, etc.), being more intentional, deliberate, or focused during worship, etc.
2. Consider memorizing (or re-memorizing) the 3rd Commandment and Martin Luther's Explanation of it: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

What Now?
Consider one person in your life who may be going through a difficult time right now that you can reach out to love, support, and encourage. We are here to be the embodiment of Jesus to share His love and grace, to oppose the attacks of the devil and the discouragement so prevalent all around us. Let Jesus' love show through you this week into the life of at least one person!

What Now?
If someone asked you, "Why do you believe in Jesus?" or "How do you keep going after all that you have been through?," what would you tell them? How would you express what Jesus means to you? How does the hope you have in Jesus make a difference in your life? Take time today or this week to put your thoughts down in writing. I'd love to hear some of what you're thinking! Jot me a note or email me at gschlecht@ImmanuelLoveland.org.

What Now?
Think of someone within your sphere of influence – a family member, co-worker, friend or acquaintance – into whose life you could speak some positive encouragement with regard to how valuable they are in God's sight and in yours. Then tell them – in person, by phone, with a text or email. And don't limit yourself to just one person…

What Now?
First, think about what walls you have put up that are hindering some of the relationships in your life. Then, pray about those relationships and ask the Lord to help in the dismantling of those walls and to strengthen those relationships.

What Now?
1. Pray throughout this week for Christians around the world who are undergoing persecution and who are suffering for their faith.
2. If you are experiencing suffering, consider giving praise to our Lord as a starting point for asking Him to help you through it.

What Now?
In light of Jesus' Easter victory, how can you live on that firm foundation of Jesus? What changes can He help you make with your priorities? What storms are you going through right now that He can help see you through? Trust His promises. Believe His Word. Let Him be your firm foundation for life.

What Now?
Wake up each morning this week remembering who you are to Jesus. You are precious, you are loved, and you are His special treasure! Embrace that promise for yourself. Then look for others in your life who need to hear it this week and tell them how precious, loved and special they are!

APPENDIX 5:

EXAMPLES OF DIALOG QUESTIONS

The following are examples of actual questions that I have used in recent sermons. I categorized them according to the various uses and places in the sermon. While I don't state it after every question, most often I invite people to think about the question or, if they are comfortable, to talk with some people sitting near them. After a few moments, I'll invite people to share their responses.

Introducing the topic:
- What makes Jesus so great?
- How do you see God as your provider? How can we talk about our heavenly Father providing for all our needs? What does that look like?
- And that's what we're exploring today. So to get our minds wrapped around today's subject matter, I want to start with some word association. Ready? I say "church," you say… [take responses and if there are more than I want to receive, end this part with an opportunity for all to say their response to each other, all at the same time] One more, ready? I say "saint," you say…[again, end with an opportunity for all to say their response to each other, all at the same time]
- So being a mom is one way that some might describe or identify themselves. How would you describe yourself, essentially answering the question, "Who am I?" Take a moment to do that. [Then…] In general terms, what categories did you use to describe or identify yourself? [offer the following and ask people to raise their hands for: age, vocation, positions held, money made, children, grandchildren, where lived, hobbies, likes/dislikes, sports teams, beliefs, faith] [then also ask for and give people opportunity to share specific descriptions]
- Let's start by having you think about the awesome relationships in your life. What makes them awesome?
- Now, take a moment to think or talk about how you would describe your lifestyle.
- I think it's worth taking a few minutes to consider what some of that "reality" is for us today when it comes to the "darkness that covers the earth and thick darkness [that] is over the people." Think about that, talk with a few others around you if you're comfortable with it, and identify some of the darkness that is around us – on a personal level and a more global level.
- Someone comes up to you and asks, "What is love?" How do you respond?

Illustrations or application of Law or Gospel:
- I would contend that our Christian faith finds itself at times competing with our allegiances to our American way of life. What do I mean by that? I'd like to invite you to give some thought to that or talk about it for a moment, if you're comfortable doing that. It's not a matter of getting into my head, as there are not just one or two answers that I'm looking for. I believe there are a lot things about

our way of life here in the U.S. that compete with our faith in Jesus, for our time, money, passion, energy, talents, kids, hearts. What are those things?

- What are some things in this world that we're tempted to try to make our foundation?
- There is hope because this light is a light that the darkness cannot overcome. Real briefly, what exactly is that light that Jesus shines into our hearts that we receive and can know and truly experience in the day-to-day of our lives right here and now?
- What makes it hard to love someone? Let's pause and take a few minutes to think specifically about that one. What makes it hard to love someone? Reflect and, if you're comfortable doing it, talk with some of the people around you.

Application:
- How does that impact the way we live our lives in this Kingdom of His in this world when we view God as King over us and over all this world?
- I want to give you just a moment to reflect on some of what that means for you and what the Father has wrapped into you as His child. Think or talk for a moment about what abilities He's given you to create and make things and to be creative. How does that look for you in your life? – and don't just think artists because it's much bigger than that. What are your abilities and how do you create and make and be creative? [talk, then share a few to see the bigger picture/broader spectrum of God's work in us]
- For a sermon on the Prodigal Son story: Let's start with the younger son. Consider his personality, his actions, and as much as we can see it, his heart. What are the points with which you can identify with him? Think/talk/make a list. [then share] So the older son was more "Pharisee-like" in his attitude. With that, what was the older son's personality, his actions, and his heart as we ask ourselves what are the points with which you and I can identify with this older son? [then share]
- Take a moment to think about that – tangible, real, practical ways that we can cherish this gift of life.
- So let's make this business of love very personal for our lives together as God's people of Immanuel. Take a moment to consider how we can show love to everyone who walks through these doors in simple, powerful, even radical ways.
- Who is your neighbor? Who are the people in your life whom Jesus really wants you to notice? – people you know as well as those you may not know, people you see at the grocery store or the coffee shop or here in worship with you; people you work with or are simply in the same company with; classmates a couple lockers down from you; people around you in your neighborhood; people you see at the gym who work out at the same time as you.
- Are there people in your life who need Jesus, who need someone to show them some love, who could use some compassion? And what are some ways that you can be a neighbor, showing the love of Jesus?

Depth and Digging into the Word:
- And I want you to think about, and talk about this – why does the Lord God place such significance on His name, that we get this in the Lord's Prayer and in one of the Commandments? You might begin by thinking about this from a human standpoint to at least get us started, and why your name is important to you?
- What does this name, "I AM," tell us about God?
- What was the deal with Jesus making His disciples wait for a month and a half before doing anything, plus waiting until Jesus was actually gone? If I were in charge, as soon as Jesus appeared behind those locked doors that first Easter morning, I would've said, "See, I told you – now get up and let's go, let's get to work, we've got stuff to do, and a world to turn upside down!" But, as always, there was purpose behind why Jesus' didn't do that. Why wait? I'm going to give you a moment to process that and think about it.
- I want to give you an opportunity to reflect for a moment on some of the realities surrounding the devil – who he is, what he does, what his purpose and goals are.
- That idea of remaining or abiding in God's love is one of three key concepts for today. So let's take a few minutes to think about that. What does it mean to remain in God's love or to abide in His love? How do we do that and what does that look like? Take a moment to think about that and, if comfortable, talk about it with some people sitting around you.
- Here's the question I want you to consider and, if comfortable, talk about for a moment with some of the people sitting around you: When you are remaining/abiding in Him and His love, and obeying what He has to say, loving each other, what kind of fruit can we expect or hope to see? What will be the by-product of God's love at work in us and through us as we share it with others?
- Check out the Pharisee's prayer in :11-12 [on screen] – "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. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'" What do you think of his prayer? What are you gut reactions to that?
- [With the Maundy Thursday sermon and Jesus' story of the great banquet] What was going on here? What was the point Jesus was driving home?

Personal Stories:
- What kinds of persecution or suffering have you experienced or have you heard from others that are coming because of faith in Jesus?
- I want you to take a moment now to think about a time in your life when it felt like hope was slipping away – or you had lost it [put on the screen "…losing hope…"] or if you haven't had a time like that which you can remember, think about some of the things that can cause people to lose hope today.
- The Great Wall of China [I had shared details of the building of the Great Wall earlier] With that in mind, let's consider some of the impenetrable, impassible great walls that go up in our lives – these are among the things that can make life and relationships so difficult. How many of you are aching over relationships right now, for one reason or another? Using this imagery of walls, think about

some of the difficult relationships in your life. What are the walls we build in our relationships that makes them difficult or challenging – and why?

- To help us start to wrap our minds around this, I want to ask you to think about some of the trials that you've experienced in your life – any kind of trials at all. I realize this can be a very personal matter and may be difficult to share so I want you to at least think about it – and, if you're willing, to be real and to share perhaps with someone you're sitting near.
- Think about a time when you felt abandoned or alone.
- Would anyone be willing to share some of the ways you did that this past week? [it was in regard to specific ways and encouragement to share Christ's love that was talked about the week prior]
- How 'bout you? Were there times when you didn't "get it"? Take a moment to think about that, talk if comfortable. Satan is all about snatching up that seed, creating confusion, doubt, misunderstanding.

APPENDIX 6:

VIDEO

- On Father's Day, I utilized this at the beginning of the sermon: "With both aspects of 'father' in mind, I want to start with this video clip. It's all about being a dad but as you watch, I encourage you to think about some parallels you might pick up that also point us to our heavenly Father." [watch clip https://skitguys.com/videos/item/fatherhood. After the clip:] "Wasn't that cool? What did you hear or see that points us to our Father in heaven as well?" [I the invite people to think or talk about this together and then I invite them to share responses with me and the whole congregation.]
- For a sermon on facing trials and challenges, this came as an example: "And the second thing we're urged to do may also sound somewhat counter-intuitive. But He asks us to praise Him, our God, in the midst of our trials. An awesome example of this comes from the movie, *Facing the Giants*. The character we're going to hear from is the high school head football coach. He's gone through the ringer – struggles with his team, with losing, with a lack of effort on the players' part, and then on a personal level, struggling with infertility, with finances, with car troubles, and with house troubles. Through all of these trials, the Lord brought coach to this point:" [watch *Facing the Giants*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJ8p9BlX9ro. After the clip, I said:] "When we're down and hurting, the last thing it seems we should do is to praise God."
- From a sermon on Easter with the metaphor of "foundation," I used this: "Those are some of the things I'd like to encourage you to keep thinking about as we watch this next video, written and produced by my son David, that wraps together the Easter story with this metaphor and imagery of Jesus as our firm foundation.
  - Be thinking about and listening for what Easter truly is all about,
  - who Jesus is for us today,
  - the foundations we lay for ourselves,
  - the storms we face,
  - and where our hope lies. Here we go!"
  [Watch David's video: "The Firm Foundation" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOw2HLGzt-Y&feature=youtu.be. After the video:] "I want to give you a few moments to process what you just saw. You can think about this or, I encourage you, if you're comfortable with this, to talk with someone about what you heard in this video. What spoke to you?"
- For a New Years sermon, I used this as illustrative of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8: "I'd like to take us on a visual review of those verses again, all those different pairings of events – using the 1965 song by The Byrds who used Ecclesiastes 3 as the text for their hit song, "Turn, Turn, Turn." As you watch and listen, think about what of these "times" or seasons have you been through this past year?" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIBu2p8FR3o

- This was an illustration for Life Sunday: "I want to share with you this short video which speaks powerfully and beautifully to the gift that life is in every regard:" https://skitguys.com/videos/item/life-is-sacred
- Introducing the theme for the day, which was "Love," I started the sermon with this clip from Shrek 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ELdGlYrMpM. After the clip I said: "That was Shrek and Fiona's honeymoon and an awesome picture of what married love is."
  I concluded the sermon with this: "Let's end with this beautiful reminder of what love is and how Love Works (which was the series' theme)." [Skit Guys video – "Love Anthem"]

APPENDIX 7:

OTHER IDEAS

- Interviews can be used as a way to help people share faith stories where questions are asked to prompt and help the story be told and to help relate specific points, of both Law and Gospel, of Jesus, of struggle, of faith. Interviews can be done live or video recorded. I will often give those I'm interviewing the questions I would like them to respond to and the topic of the sermon so they have an idea of why I've asked them to share part of their story.
- Invite people to write down responses. This example of what I used for around the New Year. "I don't know if you do this as part of your New Year's tradition or not but let's take just a moment to think about this past year – in fact, I'd like for you to jot down a few memorable events of the past year. Use your announcements or the scribble pads or a prayer request card and start your list."
- On Easter Sunday we had handed out small, colorful squares of paper and during the sermon I invited people to write down things in their lives they were struggling with, sins and otherwise, and then invited them to bring those forward, folded up, and place them onto a nail on the cross we had in the front of the sanctuary. The cross had long nails all over it on which people could put their pieces of paper.
- Invite people to text or email. "Turn to someone right now and tell them they're awesome, amazing, wonderful, beautiful, handsome. If you have your phones with you, text someone you know and tell them how special they are, how much they mean to you, that they are loved – by you and by Jesus."
- A simple response is to invite people to raise their hands. Two examples of questions I asked are this:
  - o "Have any of you been there at one time or another? Are there things in the Bible or about God that you just don't understand?"
  - o Next the priest and the Levite, two religious leaders who see this man dying on the road but simply pass by and don't help. How many think of these guys as the bad guys of the story? [after introducing all the characters:] So there are the characters. With whom do you identify and with whom do you enter into this story? Quick show of hands (you can raise them for more than one) – who helps you enter into this story that you can relate to? The man beaten and left for dead, the priest or Levite, or the Good Samaritan [take them one at a time and invite people to raise their hands – and it can be for more than one]
- Here is an example of the use of still pictures. I introduced this with the following: "I want you to imagine that you're walking thru an art gallery and you're looking at various pictures that take us thru Jesus' Passion, those events surrounding Jesus' suffering and death." [have still pictures of each of the following and put them on the screen as I describe them]
  - o First, we see a painting of Jesus being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.
  - o Then we see one of Him being beaten and flogged.

- The next is of the soldiers mocking and spitting on Him.
- Another shows Him crowned with thorns and wearing a scarlet robe on His shoulders.
- The last we see is Jesus on the cross as He lays down His life for us.
  [After the pictures have all been shown and described, I said:] Having just seen these paintings and images that are fresh in our minds, listen again to these two stories Jesus told: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

  How do you hear those stories in light of the images and paintings of Jesus' Passion that we just looked at? What do the stories mean to you? I want to give you a minute or so to think about that and talk about it with those around you. [With this particular situation, I did not ask for thoughts or responses to be shared with the larger group, but simply let people engage with each other]

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