

THE SERMON
with Emphasis on
the Use of Illustrations
the Introduction,
and Conclusion

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We begin with some extended observations about the sermon and sermon work in general. We will then move on to the three topics specifically listed by the title, (1) the use of illustrations, (2) introduction, (3) and the conclusion.

A prominent American Lutheran theologian one time wrote an essay about the art of writing and delivering sermons. The gist of what he had to say was something like this. The sermon is the most difficult task for the theologian to properly accomplish. It calls on the theologian to make use of all the skills that he has at his disposal. Not only must he have the ability to properly study and analyze the text before him with the use of the original languages, he must be able to properly distinguish Law and Gospel, he must be able to correctly organize the main thoughts of the text so that he can clearly communicate them and address the sins in the lives of his hearers with both Law and Gospel. The theologian's highest privilege is to preach and teach the Word of Truth. What was true 100 years ago was true 2,000 years ago and it just as true today. Preaching is our best opportunity to teach God's Word, and it calls for our very best! Preparing and delivering a given sermon will be the Pastor's primary work each week.

"The business of the Christian minister has been succinctly summed up by St. Paul in three words: 'Preach the Word.' That he is to do publicly from the pulpit and in private, such as in sick calls, private admonitions, and trying to win the unchurched. Essentially this covers the job the Lord has given him. If he exhausts himself in that, it is in a good cause in his God-given sphere. That is what Paul did. After referring to his weariness and painfulness, he added: . . . 'Beside those things that are without, that which comes upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak?' But it is different when this exhaustion is due to unwarranted, extraneous claims upon his time and energy which have nothing to do with his spiritual calling." 1 Preparing the sermon for delivery is the calling that demands our best time and greatest energy. It is a tension, that is, something that is on our minds, that we carry throughout the week.

A brief overview of Bible history reminds us of the place of preaching and the sermon throughout Biblical history. Commenting on Genesis 4:3, Luther speaks of the importance of preaching. "Although in this passage mention is made only of the sacrifice and not of the preaching, it must nevertheless be maintained that they did not offer a sacrifice without the preaching of the Word. For God is not worshiped by means of a speechless work; the work must be accompanied by the Word which rings in the hearts of men and in the ears of God. Thus calling upon the name of God also accompanied this sacrifice." 2 Luther contends that preaching was present from the beginning. This is further elaborated by Genesis 4:26 where the expression $\times \gamma \rho - \alpha$ is used to describe worship. "Calling on the name of the Lord includes the preaching of the Word, faith or trust in God, confession, etc. In the like manner, St. Paul aptly associates these in Rom. 10:13-15." 3 Luther called the pre-flood patriarches and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, priests, who preached to their families. "Abraham was a priest and prophet of God; he chose a definite place at which to teach, pray and sacrifice. These are the proper duties of a priest; by the grace of God we also assume them, in order that among us there may be established a church for God. For these forms of worship must continue from the beginning of the world until its end, even though in the perversion of morals toward the end of the world very few will observe them." 4

Other early preachers were Noah (II Peter 2:5), Moses, the type of the great prophet (Dt. 18:15), Joshua, David, the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, Himself preaching (Mt. 9:35-38, Lk. 5:1, 8:1), and sending out His disciples (Lk. 9:1ff, 10:1ff). Jesus often repeated his command, "Go and preach!" (Mt.

1 Northwestern Lutheran, Feb. 3, 1957, page 35, Editorial by Immanuel P. Frey

2 Luther's Works, American Edition, Vol. 1, pages 247-248

3 Luther's Works, American Edition, Vol. 1, page 327

4 Luther's Works, American Edition, Vol. 2, pages 332-333

28:18-20, Mk. 16:15) This command was intended for all time. "This Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then will the end come." (Mt. 24:14) It has been God's loving concern and providence ever since the Fall that such preaching be done. No period in the world's history has been without preachers of the saving truth.

Κηρύξάτε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον is the motto above the chancel arch in our Semi-nary chapel. Taken from Jesus' parting words to His disciples, these words are addressed to every Christian, but in a special sense to God's publicly called ministers, those who are called to be leaders in the Lord's crusade to gather in His elect from all corners of the globe.

Κηρύξάτε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον reminds us of the chief work of the ministry which we, by the Lord's direction, have chosen as our life's calling and for which we continue to prepare ourselves day by day. Κηρύξάτε means to proclaim publicly as a herald, not as an editor, but as herald of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Proclaim not what you think men need, but what God knows men need, the Good News, His Good News, His who conceived it from eternity and in the fulness of time made it reality by His incarnation, death and resurrection, (Jn 3:16, Rom. 5:18, II Cor. 5:18-21). 5

Preach the Gospel! "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season" (II Tim. 4:2) This is the glorious ministry for which we have prepared. Glorious, indeed, for it concerns the "glorious Gospel of the blessed God" (I Tim. 1:11); the Gospel "concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom, 1:3f); the Gospel of Him, "who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the Word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). This is the Gospel which Paul says "is able to make thee wise unto salvation" (II Tim. 3:15); which he rightly calls "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes" (Rom. 1:16); and of which he says, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (I Tim. 1:15). A glorious ministry, indeed, an enviable privilege and task; to bring this Good News to a world lost in sin and unbelief, a world hopelessly and aimlessly groping about in spiritual darkness, wholly ignorant of what God has done for it in Christ Jesus (I Cor. 2:9). A glorious ministry, indeed, one of which the Savior said, "My food is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work" (Jn. 4:24), and for which the great Apostle Paul spent all his time and effort, his very self, in which he gladly became all things to all men, that he might by all means save some (I Cor. 9:22). 6

Such is the glorious nature of the work to which God has graciously called us! May we give ourselves totally to this work. "Most men in the ministry are good men, but most of them are not first-rate preachers. The tragedy of it is that most of them do not seem to realize that preparing and delivering sermons is the main business of the preacher. The result is, they spend more time and give more nervous energy and hard work to the secondary things than they do to their major task." 7 A veteran pastor, now called to his eternal reward, related how there were numerous times in his ministry that things were not going the way he hoped they would. He said that he learned the hard way that what he needed to look at first was his sermons. When his sermon preparation was not what it should have been, then his sermons were not what they could have been. He related that all too often when he shorted his sermons in preparation, invariably it showed up in the congregation in many different ways. Often times, all that was needed to pick things up in the congregation was his

5 Introduction to Junior Homiletics Notes, WLS, 1973

6 Plass, What Luther Says, III, 1132 (#3616)

7 Ray, Expository Preaching, Quoted in Fritz, Preacher's Manual, page 6, cf. Acts 6:2-4

spending more time on his sermons. The Apology says as much. "There is nothing that so attaches people to the church as good preaching." 8

"Our commission is still that which was given by our Lord Himself to Paul: 'to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith.' Nothing less than that is the great objective of the preacher, as given him by the Lord of Glory Himself. It is this aim and purpose which makes the preacher's office the grandest on earth and bestows upon him honors and laurels incorruptible, undefiled, and that fade not away, compared with which the laurels of a Caesar or a Napoleon are but withered weeds." 9

Homiletics, the art of sermonizing, dealing as it does with this chief work of the minister of Christ, is therefore -- correctly understood -- the chief branch of theology, for which in a sense the other branches are the foundation, and upon which they all converge. 10

The purpose of Christian preaching has been summed up briefly in this way. It is the public proclamation to sinners of salvation through faith in Christ, according to the will of God. It is God's will that preaching be done in good order.

The broad commission, the ministry of the Word, to preach the Gospel, was given to the Church. (Mk 16:15, II Cor. 5:18-20) While every Christian is one of a chosen generation and has the charge or call to spread the Gospel in a personal ministry (Acts 1:8, I Pet. 2:9), the Church was given the charge to prepare people from their ranks to serve in the public ministry. (Eph. 4:11-12) While the public ministry is employed in many differing forms, which can and do change over time, the office of the Pastor, in our circles, still is primarily and preeminently the Predigt Amt, the preaching office, by virtue of his call. "How shall they preach except they be sent? (Rom. 10:15) On the basis of his specialized training and by virtue of his call from God, the Pastor speaks not only to the Church, but also in its behalf as its representative. This two-pronged office, to and for, is carried out most pointedly when he is Christ's ambassador in the pulpit in delivering a sermon.

Since the preacher is Christ's ambassador, (II Cor. 5:20) he must proclaim only Christ's message, God's revealed Word. To do this the sermon must be Scriptural and the best way to be Scriptural is to be textual. The sermon has to proclaim the pure Word. "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about you." (Titus 2:7-8) "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it" (Dt. 4:2, 12:32, Rev. 22:18ff) This calls for very careful preparation. Let not an unprepared person presume to speak in the name of the Lord. One must study the text to know that he has found the true meaning of it; one must study all of Scripture to have the broader understanding, for Scripture is to be interpreted from Scripture. 11

The sermon must also be Christ-centered. There are at least a dozen good reasons for this. (1) Without Christ there is no Christian preaching. (2) We can only know God through Christ, the Son. (3) Holy Spirit takes from Christ and passes the message along. (John 16:13-14) (4) Only Christ can reveal the Father's gracious will. (5) Only Christ can produce saving faith. (6) Only the love of God in Christ can draw us. (7) It will show how Christ has saved us, and our need for Christ, preaching Law and Gospel. (8) The only purpose of sermon is to show the Savior, Christ. (9) We daily need Christ. (10) We need daily reminder of God's grace through Christ, both weak and strong, believer and unbeliever. (11) Christ is always new, He will never become

8 Concordia Triglotta, Apology, page 401, 50

9 Macartney, Preaching Without Notes, Abingdon, 1946, page 9

10 Reu, Homiletics, 1924; reprint, Baker 1968, page 27f

11 Junior Homiletics Notes, WLS, 1973, page 5

monotonous. (12) We preach CHRIST CRUCIFIED. Law and Gospel come together in the cross.

As our commission is to preach the revealed Word of God and Christ the center and core of that Word, we have no call to preach on subjects that are foreign and extraneous to Scripture. Adiaaphora, unless it has become a matter of confession and ceases to be adiaaphora, has no place in the sermon. We are not called to preach on topics or subjects that do not serve the salvation of souls and the sanctified Christian life. "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels." (II Tim. 2:23) "But avoid foolish controversies and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless." (Titus 3:9)

Bond issues for new hospitals, street improvements, school construction, nuclear waste dumps, treatment of minorities, affirmative action, the build down in the military, policy toward the Soviets, government subsidy to various entities, the conduct of a city board, the federal debt, taxes, socialism, communism, etc., etc. are not topics that are edifying to the salvation of souls and sanctified Christian life. We are certainly not called to drag them into the sermon by the ears of a leap of logic when there is no clear reference in the text to the particular axe we might be tempted to grind. Jesus' handling of the Jews' question about taxation in Matthew 22:15-22 applies here. He refused to become embroiled in the issue and simply reminded them of their duty to God and government. Sin needs to be called sin and reprovved, but opinions ought not to be opined in a sermon.

When Scriptural principles are involved and souls are in danger of being misled regarding the Scriptures' position, and when there is a Scriptural position, certain topics may be addressed when there is a direct connection to the text on which you have based your sermon. The reason for the need to be textual is the danger that we ride a subject like a hobby horse and we never get off it. An example would be a subject for which we have an application or reference to 8 weeks in a row, even though it was only in one of the texts that we preached. Topics where there are direct Scriptural principals involved may be addressed and may have a dire need to be addressed, but only in so far as Scripture addresses them. Examples of such topics may be abortion, the attack on the family & marriage, homo-sexual agenda and others. But great care needs to be exercised so that we don't major in the minor.

We always have to return to the direct purpose that a sermon has, that is to lead sinners to Christ. It can be said that the purpose of speaking for God or preaching a sermon is to edify the Church both in adding saints and strengthening the saints. Consider I Corinthians 14 for example. "Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that eh church may be edified. (3-5) . . . Try to excel in gifts that build up the church. (17) . . . All of these things must be done for the strengthening of the church." (26)

The Church is strengthened when we follow Scripture's own guidelines for its use. I Tim. 3:16 lists four uses for us. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for (1) teaching, (2) rebuking, (3) correcting and (4) training in righteousness." A fifth use is comfort as pointed out by Isaiah 40:1.

The first use is teaching or doctrine. If a text is rich in doctrinal content the most natural way to teach doctrine is to expound the text exegetically. By doing this you will not just be repeating dogmatics but presenting doctrine in a textual, lively way that appeals to the listeners.

The second use is rebuking. The thrust of this word is to expose and root out error. God Himself commands this in Titus 1:9-11. "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (9) There are some well placed warnings in this thrust in preaching. a) Don't overdo it. The Gospel and positive preaching has to have priority. b) Know your congregation's needs. Know what you are talking about. c) Don't set up straw men, and go out on a limb. d) Don't touch on error only in passing. Rebuke must be thorough enough that your people will be convinced on the basis of Scripture. This is often not

possible to do in a sermon and some topics may be better addressed in Bible classes or instruction classes. 12

The third use is correcting. The idea here is to straighten out what is wrong. Isaiah tells us that this was almost totally lacking in his day by the inspired words in Is. 56:10-12. "Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain. 'Come,' each one cries, 'let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better.'"

There are some general guidelines for correcting. Always use the text for correcting and let the Word of God do the correcting. Don't drag anything into the sermon. Correct things that are common in the congregation, not simply sin in general, nor what may be wrong in a neighboring congregation. Correct with no respect of persons. Include yourself. Don't correct in a way that individuals can be recognized. Don't refer to anything in a counseling session. Don't correct on the basis of rumor. Correct earnestly, but not self-righteously or judgmentally; kindly and sympathetically, not sarcastically. Reflect Sinai, but lead to Calvary. Be careful not to be too aggressive, especially when starting in the ministry or a congregation that is new to you. Choose your words very carefully. It is a good idea to write out your sermons, and it is an especially good idea to write such corrections out completely, so you can be sure of your words. Don't make correction the regular diet for your congregation. Don't let a sermon become a tirade. Be sure that what you correct is sin, not an adiaphoron. (CF. remarks on last page) 13

The last word in this section is comfort. Isaiah speaks of comfort in its most basic form. "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins." (Isaiah 40:1-2) At the root of all problems and earthly troubles is sin. To properly address a whole host of problems requires that we assure the repentant sinner of his forgiveness time and time again. The feeling that we sometimes have when a visitor is in church is the feeling that we ought to have all the time. As fired up as we are to share Christ and His forgiveness with a new face, that feeling we ought to have every time we have the opportunity to preach a sermon. Our people need to hear that every Sunday, too. It is the Gospel that gives hope and comfort. "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:3-4)

Out of the plain pointed preaching of the forgiveness of sins comes all true comfort. God is a God of love who forgives all sins in Christ. God is a God who does not change even though lives may change suddenly. Comfort is an important emphasis of preaching that we need to emphasize. We tend to forget the trials and troubles of our members, especially as we get to know them well and take their condition in life for granted. We can easily forget the anguish that a family can suffer when a family member not only has cancer, but a cancer in remission. Many other examples could be given. Let it be said that it has happened more than a few times that a sermon with specific comfort has hit home with a person or family that is living with a particular trial. Many times the pastor is not aware of the problem but the preaching of comfort was vitally important. For us to effect patience and keep hope alive for living in this sinful and often disappointing world, as pastors and preachers we need to be filled with the Christian hope and patience ourselves. We need to remember that our people have their sins and weakness. We dare not expect perfect members. If they were perfect there would be no need for pastors. Finally, it is no

12 Junior Homiletics Notes, WLS, 1973, page 6

13 Junior Homiletics Notes, WLS, 1973, page 7

comfort to constantly preach about what a Christian is not to be, that is, you shouldn't be so sad, disappointed etc.

These five subjects or check points are not to be used mechanically, as if to say that they all have to be present in every sermon. But they are markers for which we ought watch in our sermon texts and bring them out prominently when present in the text.

In order for us to properly present Christ at the center of the sermon and correctly use Scripture, Law and Gospel have to be properly divided. Of course, all of us have learned by hard experience that dividing Law and Gospel is a very difficult task to accomplish, yet we strive with all our ability to do it correctly.

C.F.W. Walther treats this topic in the classic book Law and Gospel, and does a beautiful job of it. It is well worth reading repeatedly in our ministry as a reminder of rightly dividing Law and Gospel. A few general observations will be offered in regard to preaching and the sermon and the proper division of Law and Gospel.

(1) Don't divide the congregation into two groups, addressing the Law to some the Gospel to others. Remember that you are speaking to the whole man who is both New Man and Old Adam. While you always have to remember that you are addressing Christians, remember that the Old Adam is always present. (2) Don't preach sanctification without laying the foundation in and of justification. To assume justification without addressing it will invariably result in moralizing. Don't speak of the Christian's sanctification as something which he is expected to produce, but rather as something which God works in him. "It is God who works in you both to will and to act according to His good pleasure." (Phil. 2:13) Reassure your hearers that the power to overcome sin and to live for God flows not from within us, but from Christ's resurrection victory, which is ours through faith. "I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:13). (3) Don't make a new Law out of the Gospel. (4) Don't preach about repentance and faith, but by applying Law and Gospel produce them. In this connection, remember to preach objective justification. (5) Don't direct a man to something in himself, not even his faith, for the certainty of his status as a Christian, but to justification worked and won by Christ. 14

The following quotation is from a sermon preached by Luther in Erfurt on April 7, 1521. This sermon was delivered by Luther during his trip to the Diet of Worms. The text was John 20:19-20. "The Lord said three times to St. Peter: 'Petre amas me? etc.; pasce oves meas' (John 21:15-17) 'Peter, feed, feed, feed my sheep.' What is the meaning of pascere? It mean to feed. How should one feed the sheep? Only by preaching the Word of God, only by preaching faith. Then our Junkers come along and say: Pascere means leges dare, to enact laws, to do the law, but with deception. Yes, they are well fed! They feed the sheep as the butchers do on Easter eve. 15

This feeding the flock is not only done by proper division of Law and Gospel but also by preaching the whole council of God. This does not mean that we have to touch on all six chief parts of the catechism in each sermon, but it does mean that we keep the cross and justification before our hearers every sermon so that they might be truly fed.

For a sermon to be edifying it also has to fit the circumstances of the local congregation to which it is addressed. While many of Luther's sermons are very edifying, they simply could not be used today "off the shelf" without a great deal of modification. Many references, while to the point in his day, can't be understood today unless there is an explanation in a footnote at the bottom of the page. Luther's sermons were tailored to his times. Our sermons need to be pointed at our times.

In no way does this mean that we change to fit the thinking and morals of the days we live in. Paul warns us against this when by inspiration he says,

14 Junior Homiletics Notes, WLS, 1973, page 8

15 Luther's Works, American Edition, Vol. 51, page 64

"For the time will come when men will not put up sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." (II Tim. 4:3) What this does mean is that both sin and grace have to be presented in such a way so that the message gets through to the hearers, if possible meeting them at the point of their need. To be able to do that, we have to know our people. We have to be careful not to talk above their heads and know what their vocabulary is. We need to know the weak areas in our people. We should not be a spy or trouble hunter, but we shouldn't be deaf or blind either. We need to remember the times that we are living in, and the setting our congregation is in, because the make up of a congregation and its circumstances do change over time. We need to become acquainted with the social life in the congregation. If their entertainment and reading material is not proper, we need to be ready to speak against it.

So that Christ may be presented, the truth defended and error corrected, it is necessary that the sermon be logical and clear with a theme or main point that is present throughout the sermon. We dare not lead our listeners on a thought scavenger hunt wondering where all these thoughts are headed. If the theme guides the sermon and controls it, then the scavenger hunt will not take place. It is not enough to be so plain that you can be understood, you also must speak so that you cannot be misunderstood.

The point of the sermon is not to entertain, but to present Christ. In presenting Christ our purpose is not to bore or cure the insomniacs in our congregation. Luther's advice still is fitting. "Steh' frisch auf, tu's Maul auf, hoer' bald auf!" - Set up quick, speak lively, shut up. That advice not only fits the sermon in general but also the use of illustrations, the introduction and conclusion.

There is no set time limit for a sermon, but sermons are much shorter than they were in Reformation days, and even fifty to seventy five years ago. If I remember the account correctly in a Wisconsin congregation's history, the account of their church's dedication in 1860 went something like this. The day break service held outside the church included an hour sermon. After the members went home to chore another service was held inside the building in the morning. It included an hour and a half sermon. After dinner break and afternoon entertainment another service was held at mid-afternoon. That service included a sermon that was one hour and fifteen minutes long. After supper the men went home to do their chores and then returned for evening service. In the evening the sermon was an hour long. The pastor of the congregation was asked how he thought the day had gone. He replied, "It was a pretty good, except there could have been more preaching."

Some sermons that are fifteen minutes long can seem like forty five minutes. "One of the greatest faults of some preachers is someone who has nothing to say, and then goes ahead and says it anyway." On the other hand, some sermons that are twenty five minutes long can seem like fifteen minutes. If you have been married more than six months, your wife will be able to tell you if a sermon was too long.

The point air defense (anything that gets within three miles)...on many of our naval ships is a computer controlled Gatling gun arrangement, called the Phalanx. These guns for a short period of time can throw more ordinance weight than the sixteen inch guns on a battleship because they can fire 6,000 rounds a minute. That's one hundred 50 mm shells a second. A sermon that is well prepared and textually grounded can pack all the ammunition you need in eighteen to twenty two minutes. If the text is long and packed with heavy material you may occasionally go longer if necessary. Occasional sermons, for funerals, weddings, wedding anniversaries, etc., may for good reason be shorter than the 18 to 22 minutes in length, perhaps in the 12 to 15 minute range. However, in the regular Sunday setting we should not avoid treating a text with the excuse we don't want to go more than 15 minutes. As one of my brothers in the ministry used to say, "Sermonettes are for Christianettes."

In order to preach the Word of God it is necessary to begin with the Word of God. A sermon as we understand it, does not begin with a newspaper headline or editorial. Nor does it begin with the report of a shocking sin and crime. It begins with a text. The text, (from texere, to weave) etymologically is that section of Scripture which is woven into the sermon. To use another picture,

the text is the foundation on which the sermon is built. "It is not an easy matter to speak correctly of divine matters. Natural man has no understanding for them. While writing a sermon one must constantly guard against the Old Adam. Every part of the sermon must be tested by the touchstone of Scriptures. The warning must be sounded. Don't corrupt the truth! But to know that we do preach the truth as we have been commanded to do is wonderful comfort. For that reason a text of Scripture ought to serve as the basis for a sermon. This is indeed not an absolute requirement. It is possible to preach a sermon without a definite text. On the other hand, it is possible to use a Biblical text as a basis for a sermon and still inject thoughts which contradict Scripture. But the danger is much greater if one preaches without a text. If one uses texts, he has an inexhaustible source of material, he is backed by the authority of Scripture, and he is less apt to lapse into endless repetition. For that reason, the use of a text is our rule." 16

There are many suitable text series from which to choose. Biblical Texts by Nesper, published by Augsburg Publishing House was an old standard. It included 14 different text series for the church year. Most of the series had Old Testament, Gospel and Epistle selections for each Sunday. In some of the series there were up to six different texts listed for each Sunday. What one needs to remember is that these pericopes were chosen under the former church year, prior to ILCW, which included the three Lenten preparation Sundays and the Trinity season. In many cases in the former church year, the Trinity season included three sub-cycles. These are reflected in the text choices in older pericope systems and historical Gospel and Epistle readings. The propers also reflect the chosen Sunday themes. Retaining service unity will sometimes be difficult or impossible if one attempts to mix an old pericope system and the new church year. If one chooses to use ILCW readings, then he probably should also use ILCW sermon texts. No doubt in the future there will be more pericopes formulated to fit the ILCW/WELS church year so that there will be more choices, which will be a good development. For congregations and pastors that choose to remain with the former church year/hymnal, the logical choice is one of the older pericope systems. The use of a pericope is important because it helps a maintain a balanced approach to the main doctrines and high points of the church year.

One of the sainted veterans of our Synod, Rev. H. C. Nitz, who was a quiet scholar, respected widely even outside of our fellowship circles, left a beautiful example for us upon his death. When he died, a notebook of sermon studies was found in his office. In the notebook were the texts for the next six months with study notes. He was in the progress of working six months ahead of time on his text studies. Granted, he was an extraordinary individual and not many of us can muster that level of organization, none the less, it would be tremendous if we could at least take the cue from him and be working on our text studies at least several weeks ahead. It would help for continuity from one sermon to the next and give us time to reflect on the texts over a period weeks. This is possible if a certain time of day or let's say one morning early in the week is dedicated to this process.

A few reminders about the mechanics of text study may have some value. In studying the text following the initial reading of the text and its context in a number of different versions are three different areas of study. The first is exegetical. This is a study of the original text with the use of lexicon, grammar and concordance. It is a good idea to make a list of parallel passages and other Scripture references at this time. They can be used when it is time to formulate the outline and write the sermon. Don't skip the study of the text. Write down thoughts as they present themselves. Think! Know what the text says. It is also helpful to summarize the thought of each verse in your own words as you study the text. This is helpful later on in the outlining process. Be mindful of the value of the text for our own spiritual life and that of our hearers. Base your thoughts on the text. Use commentaries sparingly and then only good commentaries. I remember Prof. Becker saying the reason that even many Lutherans did not clearly teach objective justification is that too many Lutherans plowed with Lenski's heifer. (A reference to Lenski's commentary on Romans 4-5) Reliance on human authority will not lead to divine certainty. The second is dogmatical. Make use of the Book of Concord. Using

the Scripture index in the back of the Triglotta will quickly point to any use of your text in the confessions. The use of the concordance to the Lutheran Confessions will also be of great help. If one has access to Hoenecke's Dogmatics and can handle the German, it can be a great help. The same is true for Pieper's Dogmatics. For both of these the Scripture index is a great help. The third area is homiletical helps pointed directly at the sermon. "It is better to have a few good books than many of lesser value. Read Luther's sermons and homiletical material produced by orthodox Lutherans. Contemporary works should be examined with care, lest neo-orthodoxy, the social gospel, or the Reformed spirit insinuate themselves into our preaching. Never turn to homiletical helps before you have studied and digested the text and arrived at an outline. Think yourself empty before you read yourself full!" 17

In the study of the text one important aspect we haven't spoken about is the division of the text. One division in all texts is Law-Gospel, but there are other divisions. They may be topical, doctrinal, logical, temporal, etc. Quite often the divisions that are indicated in the original text will be of great help. Ordinarily what develops from the parts of the text are the major parts of the outline. Then from the parts, the theme of the sermon is generally developed. This is no hard and fast rule that the parts have to come first, but sometimes when a theme pops into our head, we are forced to almost contrive the parts to fit the theme, and they wind up not being very textual. That defeats one of our goals, that is, to do textual preaching. A theme grabbed almost from the air can, in the worst case, miss the main point of the text, or perhaps fail to address a major division of the text. It can also easily miss the text color.

Text color is a term that Lenski is said to have coined. It means a variety of things to different people. To some it is using a key word or phrase from the text predominantly in the sermon or in the outline. Just to use a phrase or key word from the text misses what I personally include in the term text color. It has to do with the tone of the text and the setting of the text. To take a text from the Gospels that is almost all Law, for instance, Jesus overturning the money changers' tables, and making the theme and parts all Gospel misses the text coloration entirely, and in all likelihood, that would be a difficult sermon to write and deliver. It is far better to stick with the color or tone of the text, to paint a backdrop for Law or Gospel that is not so predominate in the text. What often happens is that we can very brightly show the Gospel in a few sentences in a text whose color is one of admonition. The text color is what makes each text unique, so that a theme such as, "God loves sinners," may fit many texts in one way, but in another way doesn't fit them at all because the theme's generic approach misses the uniqueness of the text. The point is that text color is very important, especially in formulation of the theme and parts, yet it is something that can be routinely overlooked.

The basic outline is important because it forms the skeleton which supports the rest of the sermon. While it can't be denied that a sermon can be preached without announced main parts, the fact remains that when the parts are not announced, they often do not exist or they are not clearly delineated in the sermon. To back up one step further, when a theme is not announced clearly, often a theme is not carried out in the sermon. The theme may be a declarative sentence, an exclamation, a prepositional phrase, and a question. The question form should be used with discretion. The basic outline is good discipline for the one preaching, because it compels him to remain within definite limits, offers him a guide for arranging his material and makes it easier for him to remember and preach his sermon. It is also important for the hearer, because a well arranged sermon is clearer and easier to follow.

The following questions might be asked when checking the theme and major parts. Does the theme point to Christ and His saving work if at all possible? Does the theme reflect what the inspired text is driving at? Does it summarize the major parts? Is it propositional, i.e. does it state or imply a response, action or goal on the part of the hearer? Is it easily remembered? -- Do the main parts represent the main truths of the text? Are main parts parallel in construction? Are they distinct from each other and not just stating the same

thing positively and negatively? Are the main parts proportionate to each other and proportionate to the portion of the text that each summarizes? Are they constructed so the hearer knows where he is at during the whole sermon? Does each part concern the hearer?

Another point on the theme and major parts is the age old question, "To announce or not to announce?" If we have gone to the trouble to formulate a theme and parts, why hide them? Even assuming that the bulletin lists the theme and parts, we need to remember that many people do not read the bulletin, at least before the service, so announcing them in the sermon is important. If we work at variation in announcing the theme and parts, then most of the objections to announcing them are invalid. It is also vital for the hearer to repeat the major part when making the transition to the new part of the sermon. Always remember that we are communicating Christ crucified, so we don't want to lose anyone because we tried to get cute or assumed people should be able to follow us.

"Our preaching should always be textual and expository. Topical preaching is very popular in many circles today. We all have seen newspaper invitations to attend a sermon series at another church. While hearing a series of 4 or 5 messages on the "Cycle of Life" may appeal to some, one wonders how prominently sin and grace is presented in a topical presentation without a text. While not necessarily unscriptural, it will in the end lack the variety claimed for it, which thorough exposition and application of texts would provide. In addition, topical preaching can easily lead to preaching on pet subjects and to repetition. Finally, it will not satisfy the discriminating hearer, who having heard the text read, wants to hear it expounded and applied." 18 I am sure that more than a few of us have had compliments on a funeral or wedding sermon. Most of the compliments that I have received have simply been that they appreciated that the sermon was based on the text.

There are three different ways to treat a text. The first is a homily. The text is expounded, but almost in Bible class fashion. There usually is a theme, but no parts in the strict sense of the term. This appears to be an easy method, but is actually is the most difficult. Unless it is done well it easily degenerates into rambling. The second text treatment is analytic. This is when the outline is drawn directly from the text. This often includes taking the text in the same order that it occurs in the Bible. The suggestion is made that this is the preferred sermon form, especially when preaching on a text for the first time. It often is the most easily memorized because it follows the order of the text. The third text treatment is called synthetic. The theme is drawn from the text but the parts are taken in a different order than in the text. Some texts almost have to be treated synthetically, because they just can't be cracked analytically. There are different levels of synthetic outlines which we won't touch on here. 19

The next step after the formulation of the basic outline is expanding the outline. It is generally quite helpful to return to one's text study in the outlining process. At this point one adds the subpoints under the basic outline. (Some word processing programs have outlining as one of their capabilities. While I am not into that capability yet, I could see it being very helpful in the sermon writing process.) In adding the main subpoints one is constructing the main subpoints of the sermon. Everything should be pointed at the theme in one way or another. After the expanded outline is complete, then comes what some call the fully expanded outline, or working brief. In the process of these two steps the utilization of definitions, applications, illustrations, Biblical amplification, non-Biblical amplification, takes place. (Those are R. Caemmerer's terms.)

The next step is the writing out of the sermon from the expanded outline. Writing out the sermon is not that large a task because it should be possible to

18 Junior Homiletics Notes, WLS, 1973, page 20

19 Junior Homiletics Notes, WLS, 1973, pages 22-23

write the entire sermon in one sitting, since all the thoughts are present in the fully expanded outline. The sermon can be refined from the first draft and fine tuned so to speak.

"It is important to remember that the sermon is not an essay, which merely elucidates its subject in one or more freely chosen directions, nor a devotional meditation, which is a series of reflections on one or more central thoughts freely chosen, nor a running commentary on verse after verse. The sermon is intended for oratorical delivery, limited to a certain length, a unit resting on a unit text, and aims at a unified effect upon the hearers." 20

"If oral language and literary language are not the same, why write? First, you must plan exactly how you will express the thoughts which are contained in the text and summarized in your outline. Precision, logical order, smooth transitions, clarity, variety in language, correct grammar, current usage, sentence structure and arrangement of paragraphs -- the list is not exhaustive -- are safeguarded by careful writing. Fluency is another prime consideration. To grope for words when you are in the pulpit or to become entangled in a complex sentence distracts the hearer, undermines your composure and creates obstacles for the message. Then, too, doctrinal statements must be carefully thought out and carefully expressed to forestall the inadvertent intrusion of false teaching or ambiguity. Furthermore, references to biblical persons, places and history need to be checked for accuracy so that no incorrectness of detail disturbs your hearers. Even non-biblical references must be checked for accuracy. Careful writing helps you fix the plan and details of the sermon in your mind and thus contributes to a smooth delivery." 21

We now come to the first emphasis listed in the title, illustrations. They fit under the discussion of the expanded outline and the writing of the sermon. It is interesting to note that there is very little discussion of illustrations in many sermon writing text books. Caemmerer, for instance, has two pages on suggested materials for expanding the outline, and only one paragraph on illustrations. That is out of 350 pages in the whole book. Gerlach and Balge devoted a little less than a page to it in their book. It is not as broad a subject as first it might seem, when used in the narrow sense. The dictionary definition for illustrate is as follows: a) to explain; to make clear. b) to make clear or easily understood by examples, comparisons, etc.; exemplify. It seemed to me that when this paper was assigned the term illustration probably had a wider meaning implied than definition "b". It seemed that definition "a" also was intended. That is the basis on which we will discuss illustrations.

The use of illustrations come into practical use at the end of the process of producing a sermon, not at the beginning. They are meant to be used in expanding the outline for the purpose of illuminating the text and its truths. The text and outline comes first, then the illustrative material, not the other way around! Never forget the text. Remember to quote from it in the sermon. If you have an analytic outline that follows the text, it is a good idea to reread the appropriate part of the text as you approach each major part of the sermon. Don't deviate from the outline that you have worked so hard to develop. Keep your theme in mind throughout the sermon. As we have said before, keep your hearers in mind as you decide which elements to include in the sermon.

Illustrations and illustrative material need to be used with sober judgment. It is not filler to get the sermon up to the proper length. A sermon is not telling stories, although that does appeal to some hearers. It can happen that someone thinks a sermon is a very good one, when in fact what it consisted of was a number of illustrations that may or may not have been related to the text. The purpose of a sermon is not to entertain but to edify. Because there are people who think that it is just great to have the pastor tells jokes from the pulpit, humor can easily be misused in a sermon. I know of a Lutheran pastor who made it a practice to begin his time in the pulpit by telling at least one joke and sometimes more than one. Apparently this was accepted by his

20 Junior Homiletics Notes, WLS, 1973, page 25

21 Preach the Gospel, Gerlach & Balge, NPH, 1982, page 97

congregation. He had a community reputation for his humor and was even recognized by a large article in the local paper. Being able to tell jokes and being recognized for it does not make it right in the sermon. Joy is a legitimate emotion which needs to be communicated to a congregation in sermon work, but to have a congregation laughing out loud every Sunday runs counter to the central purpose of preaching Christ crucified. This is not to say that an anecdote that brings a smile to our peoples faces may not be used if it is fitting and makes a point related to the theme and parts. All the same the use of humor needs to be carefully watched. That said, we move on to a number of areas where sermon illustrations can be developed and well used.

Explanation is one way. Illustrative language and words first of all are found in the text itself. Don't overlook the exegetical word study that you have done for word pictures. Often there is a beautiful picture in an original word which does not come out in a translation. Robertson's, Word Pictures, provides a "low impact" word study resource that goes through verse by verse through the New Testament. Don't forget the opportunity that is often present in a text to give a Sunday school or confirmation level explanation of a doctrinal term. If we remember how many blank stares we get in Bible class from our every Sunday members when we ask them to explain justification, sanctification, even redemption, then we can see the need to simply explain terms and words in our sermons.

By the way, it seldom is edifying to rail on a translation in a sermon. To use the expression, "The translation is wrong in this passage", will cause doubt. It is far better to say, "A better translation for this phrase would be." Nor is it beneficial to make a major point of textual criticism in a sermon. Unless we want to explain the concept of text families and manuscript weight in a confrontational setting, and we're willing to spend three hours with a non-understanding family, it is better to handle such textual questions tactfully. For instance, twice in the last six months I have had a text come up in the pericope that had a verse in the footnote at the bottom of the page in the NIV. I read the footnoted verses and included them in the text printed in the bulletin, but I did not base any substantive part of the sermon on the footnoted verse because it was not vital to the presentation of the text. In a way it was handled, but no confrontation or doubt was caused by it.

Other illustrative ideas can come from defining or explaining differences in culture and times. We need to explain all sorts of conditions so different from our time and country. One might call this Bible history review. If Jewish housing, living, conditions, diet, economic system, government system, farming techniques, marriage customs, Jewish religious practices and festivals, the temple service, etc., need to be reviewed by us, we can be sure that it will be of interest to our hearers to informed about them, especially as they shed light on the text, and help expound our theme and parts.

Interpretation is a second way. Often times the Biblical setting and line of thought, especially in the Epistles will be illustrative. In the Old Testament, the historical setting in the O. T. time line can be vital to understanding a text properly. This is also helpful when preaching on the Gospels and also in many cases when preaching on the Epistles. When interpreting prophecies already fulfilled, don't only explain the prophecy but add the fulfillment. When preaching on a parable be sure to bring out the main point of comparison in the sermon and also connect the parable with surrounding context if it is available. In other words, tell why the parable was told. To define doctrines present in the text do not just define the term, but use parallel passages to help explain the doctrine. Let Scripture interpret Scripture. Clear up any apparent or seeming contradictions in the text if possible. An example of this is Matthew 10:34 "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Appropriation is a third way to illustrate and enliven the text and sermon for the hearers. Appropriation is the chief goal and purpose of our preaching. If we fail to use appropriation, we may still have an outwardly interesting sermon, but it will be a rather empty sermon, that has little lasting value to its hearers. Homiletically speaking, it is through appropriation that we reach our hearers. Material for appropriation are the great saving acts of God (e.g., the incarnation, passion, death, resurrection, ascension of Christ, the mission of the Holy Ghost) and every word and statement that holds out some blessed promise to wretched sinners. These truths are the type that call out to faith

to reach out and grab onto them, or appropriate them. For us to be effective it means that we have to appropriate them ourselves first. For this we study and pray so that we can to the best of our ability present these truths as precious, amazing, desirable, undeserved, indispensable treasures to our hearers. We do this knowing the Gospel not only extends these gifts but works acceptance. 22

Application is a fourth way to bring the text alive for today and illustrate it. While appropriation concerns itself with all the saving acts of God's grace, application concerns itself with examples and precepts. The following is an example that shows the distinction between the two. -- I reach out and consider as mine the righteousness of God in Christ, which was the content of Abraham's faith (appropriation), but I imitate and urge others to imitate Abraham's faith (application). -- In application you a) take an example e.g. Peter's confession in Matthew 16, b) draw out the idea in general, i.e. what confession is and c) apply this to yourself and your hearers by showing how we have failed to confess Him and how Peter's example encourages us to confess Christ. Good or bad examples can be used; good for imitation (Mary of Bethany), bad for warning (Ananias and Sapphira). Precepts of God (e.g. "Love your enemies") can also be used for applications.

Several reminders for using applications are in place. 1) Don't force applications when they don't correspond. "They have taken my Lord away," doesn't apply to liberal theologians who deny the deity of Christ. 2) Apply examples of sin in the Bible not only to the unbelieving world but also to the Christian's Old Adam. Remember that the Christian is a dual personality and is both Old Adam and New Man. His Old Adam is just as ungodly and just as wicked as the unbelieving world. Make sure your language ("according to our sinful nature") indicates you are rebuking the Old Adam. 3) In addressing the Christian congregation assume that the New Man has the upper hand, but make it clear that the Old Adam still works within us. Luther said, "Our worst enemy beats within us." Remind them of I Cor. 10:12, "So, if you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall." 4) Remember that proper motivation comes only to New Man through the Gospel promises. Commands, such as "must" and "should" need to be avoided or else one will find himself moralizing. Lettuce preachers can also be in the same classification.

In summary, application rests on appropriation. Absolutely appropriation outranks application. First, preach the Christ for us; then, preach the Christ in us.

Application can approach appropriation. "Place the Lord at the head of the table whenever the text announces His presence. Prominence should not be given to mere mortals, permitting them to overshadow Christ. (Beware of this pitfall particularly in Lenten preaching. e.g. Women at the Cross!?) In the story of the raising of Lazarus, make Christ the subject not Lazarus. Application approaching appropriation applies especially to texts which present the power, love, mercy, and compassion of Christ, or some word of His in a setting involving other characters. 23

A fifth way of illuminating and illustrating the text has been called homiletical invention. This actually takes place in most of the four methods listed above, but it involves getting deep into the text and its meaning. They speak of analysis as unfolding what is in the text itself. Often times we go through this process when we preach on a text that is only one or two verses long and the thought has to be expanded. Care needs to be exercised that we don't go too far afield and lose sight of the text or sermon theme. Another term used is synthesis. This means to cast light on the text from sources outside the text. It is in this connection that the sermon textbooks use the word illustration in the usual sense.

Notice carefully the low importance illustrations have in the whole scheme of the sermon. Illustrations may help but they do not make the sermon. Illustrations are not the sermon. They are employed to help carry out the theme and main points of the text. We mentioned before in different words, that a

22 Junior Homiletics Notes, WLS, 1973, page 27

23 Junior Homiletics Notes, WLS, 1973, pages 27-28

sermon is not 20 minutes of story telling, although there may be some preachers and many hearers who think it is. Luther spoke sharply against preachers in his day who missed the point of preaching, -- Christ and Him crucified. "The reason why the world is so utterly perverted and in error is that for a long time there have been no genuine preachers. There are perhaps three thousand priests, among whom one cannot find four good ones -- God have mercy on us in this crying shame! And when you do get a good preacher, he runs through the Gospel superficially and then follows it up with a fable about the old ass or a story about Dietrich of Berne, or he mixes in something of the pagan teachers, Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, and others, who are all quite contrary to the Gospel, and also contrary to God, for they did not have the knowledge of the light which we possess." 24

Sermon helps and illustrations are not exactly a dime a dozen, but there are many outfits providing them. There are some available from Lutheran sources, but even those need to be used carefully. Some that are provided from Reformed sources can be used but with great care. The temptation is to use them without first providing the text study, theme and outline to hang them on. Another danger is that the generic sermon helps many not really fit the text, and may even contain a reformed emphasis in approach and doctrine. What is not your own tends not become your own and may not fit your style of delivery. It runs the danger of being phony and artificial. I have always had trouble when I was tempted to use someone else's outline, not to mention an expanded outline. This basic rule is true. Home grown and home cooked fresh is better than something canned and warmed over.

Most often we are happier with the result when we sweat over the sermon and with God's help produce something that is our own. One Seminary professor told the story of his brother-in-law who was a pastor. His sermon preparation consisted in pulling the Concordia Pulpit from the shelf on Saturday night, and reading over the presentation for about 20 minutes. The professor said that his brother-in-law had the "gift of gab" and could wing a sermon pretty well the next morning. The sad thing was that he obviously had the gifts to be an excellent preacher, but seldom put in the time that was needed to reach that excellence.

To round out and finish the sermon good illustrative materials are needed. We have mentioned some sources before, but will make a list one more time. 1) Scripture passages are often neglected because of the time that they take to find. What a loss when we fail to use them! 2) Good clear statements from the confessions can well be used if they are not too long so as to lose our listeners. 3) Quotations from Luther and others are often of great value. 4) Hymn verses, especially in closing parts or concluding the sermon can drive home a point. 5) History, church and secular, can be interesting and illustrate well, provided it doesn't take 5 minutes to get to the point of reference. 6) Family life quite often is a mirror of congregational life. Without using names, often many illustrations are right at the end of our nose if we are just looking. 7) Past experiences and acquaintances can be a real gold mine as long as one is careful not to identify by name the place, or what or who you are referring to. Even if we have served a number of different congregations, it is still surprising who knows whom, and stories can come back to haunt us unless we are very careful. 8) Experiences and "expertize" told in the first person, get old in a hurry to a congregation. It is better to toot someone else's horn than ours. 9) Current events in the news can be used, but with care, because they easily dominate the sermon and text to where talking about the current event supersedes the text and theme. 10) Generally one shot at an illustration is enough in a sermon. Sometimes it can work to let an illustration carry through the sermon, but often it doesn't work so well because it dominates the sermon and sometimes there is overkill. 11) Don't use cannonballs to kill flies. Not every point needs illustration. 12) Ask yourself as you ponder each illustration, -- "How does this help to carry out my theme? How does this hold Christ and the cross and the empty tomb before my people?"

The second emphasis is the introduction to the sermon. An introduction is necessary for a complete sermon. Normally we don't begin a sermon with a simple announcement of the subject of the sermon. "The sermon today is about Jesus'

death." But if the purpose for an introduction is just to have one, then it would be better to drop it. A good introduction will gain the good will of the hearers. We assume that the preacher has the good will of his hearers, but he still has to gain the interest of the hearers and start to get them to think along with the message. The introduction lays the groundwork and foundation for the theme. A good beginning is important to carry through the tone of the sermon. It is also important that the preacher be able to make a good beginning to settle in and carry out the message he has planned to bring to his hearers. If the introduction isn't solid, often the rest of the sermon doesn't have a good footing.

Several key words describe an introduction to a sermon. The introduction to the sermon is **purposeful** in leading directly to the theme. A preacher may have a dynamite introduction that is very vivid and rivets the attention of his hearers, but if he has to take two detours and three turns to get to the theme, it was not a good introduction. The introduction is to introduce the sermon, not be a sermonette in front of the sermon. The introduction ought to be **brief** in almost every circumstance. To build a four room porch on a two room house makes no sense. The same thing is true for a four room introduction on a two room sermon. Reu uses the rule of thumb that the introduction should be no longer than 1/8th of the entire sermon. If we apply that rule to a twenty minute sermon, we are left with 2 to 3 minutes for introduction. The introduction has to be **simple**. Be careful that the introduction is not too involved or flowery so that the sermon is anticlimactic. If the introduction is at a fever pitch, you probably will not be able to hold that emotion for 20 minutes and the sermon is perceived as being all down hill. Sentences that are short and to the point are the best for in the introduction. We need to remember that we are attempting to gain our listeners attention.

Sources for introductions are similar to the sources for illustrations. The one big difference is the point or goal of the introduction. While illustrations may apply to a subpoint of the sermon, the introduction's one purpose is to introduce the theme. As a result of the purpose, the introduction that we use may not be the introduction that first popped into our head. An introduction that comes to mind before we have fully settled on theme and parts may be faulty in several ways. It may be stereotyped and similar to what we often use. It may begin too far away from the theme so that energy, words, and time are wasted getting to the theme. When we get to the theme, the connection to the theme may be too tenuous or strained for the introduction to be edifying. Don't be like a left fielder under a high pop up on a windy day. Everyone knows what he's trying to do, but he wanders and weaves all over the place in order to do it. It may treat a subject that is entirely separate from the theme, which results in it being disconnected. It may reach ahead to just one part or point of the sermon. This results in some sermon powder getting wet so it won't go off the way it should because your hearers have already heard it once. These caveats aside, we do take comfort in the fact that occasionally a good introduction will present itself very quickly in the course of our study and preparation. Yet there will be times that an introduction will be mulled over and refined repeatedly. It also happens that if a sermon is preached more than once a Sunday that it may have a different introduction the second time if we were not happy with the way the first one worked.

The sources for introductions are many. The text can lend a variety of introduction ideas. A few of them may be as follows.

- 1) Some phrase or statement in the text.
- 2) The scene in the text, the situation, person or people, some truth or doctrine that it contains.
- 3) Place the text into its context in chapter or book.
- 4) If there is an obvious question or difficulty in the text sometimes it can be cleared up in the introduction.

5) State the reason for this text on this Sunday.

The sermon theme can also be used for introduction ideas. The introduction may show the importance of the theme for the faith and life of the hearers. The introduction may illustrate the theme from Biblical or non-Biblical history, or from the experience of the hearer. The refutation of error that opposes the theme can be used for introduction as long as it is not too polemical in nature. The introduction can lay down the foundation and presuppositions of the theme. A theme that has sanctification at its heart might well be served by an introduction that pointedly explains justification.

The church year and the Sunday theme expressed by the propers for the day can be well used on occasion, for many regular members fail to take note of the changes and variety in the church year. Yet, avoid falling into a pattern by using the church year too often. Important happenings in the life of a congregation can be noted in an introduction. Be sure when using community events and happenings and newspaper articles that they have more than just a passing connection with the text and theme. Something may have happened in the past week that was really striking, but unless it is directly tied to the theme, it is better to save it for another sermon. Also, the reciting of everything that is wrong with the world will seldom key up our hearers for the sermon to come. They live in the world every day and most are tired of it. What we said of illustrations in general, goes here also. We are not actors when we present a sermon. We have to be ourselves. To be otherwise will show in a hurry and the veneer will wear thin rapidly. For that reason we ought to use canned sermon helps sparingly. God has given to us many gifts. We need to do our own work and be confident that God will help us to be effective. Perhaps the key question to ask ourselves about our introductions is this question: "How does my introduction lead the thoughts of my people from the text I read to the theme I am going to present?"

It is fitting that as the sermon ends with a conclusion, we also conclude with a discussion of sermon conclusions. A good conclusion is like the keystone in an arch. It properly completes and rounds out the sermon. A good conclusion is short and to the point. Nothing will tax our hearers more than having to sit for another eight minutes after they have prepared to stand up and were sure the sermon was about to end. To avoid this situation we ought not introduce a new subject in the conclusion. We also need to prepare the conclusion carefully so we don't ramble on not being able to find the ending. Lenski says the following, "Like the first few sentences of a sermon, so the last should be strong and effective. Then, after a little pause, say Amen in such a way that everyone knows that you truly feel and know what the word means."

A number of suggestions are made for conclusions. It can be an encouragement or exhortation, preferably in the first person plural. It can be a searching question to the hearer, but we ought not leave anything unsettled. It may be a gripping, pertinent word of Scripture. It may also be an appropriate hymn verse said from memory so we can have full eye contact. It can be an exclamatory statement, but we ought not be overly dramatic. It may be a prayer of either supplication or adoration. It may recapitulate the parts, but hopefully not in a way that merely repeats them.

The conclusion to a sermon is much like the coda in a symphony. A good coda builds to the final musical statement, and often repeats the main musical themes in the process. A good sermon conclusion does the same thing. What is said last is often remembered best. So it is my personal practice to remind the hearers of the major parts in the conclusion so that they might take them home with them.

The way we conclude is the way most people will remember the sermon. Therefore it is best in almost all cases to end with the Gospel. The following

conclusion meets the test of being brief but not the test of being fitting or positive. "Whoever does not believe will be condemned. Amen."

Appropriation is what we strive for throughout the sermon. That's also true in the conclusion. We hope to enable the hearer to make God's message, his own. If the hearer leaves feeling that the sermon theme and message was for him, then it may well become a part of him and his life.

This was not written to make us all feel bad about what we haven't been doing. It was written to remind us of some time tested methods for producing a Christ a centered sermon that has at its heart the Holy Scriptures. This is a call to return to the basics if we have perhaps drifted from them over time. There are no roses without thorns. There can be no real sermons without real work, but in that work is the real joy of sharing the certain hope of living eternally in heaven with Christ our Savior!

