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Preaching On Great Chapters Of The Bible During Trinity

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Preaching On Great Chapters of the Bible During Trinity

In considering the Title of this paper, bear in mind that preaching on great chapters means choosing your own texts. Although one might find a pericope system based primarily within one book of the Bible, nothing in Nesper, or the wisdom of our Seminary Librarian, or even so much as alluded to in Reu, touches on such a pericope of great chapters. Our Seminary Homiletics professors strongly advise against choosing your own texts. As I recall Homiletical papers within our District and Conference during the years, the writers echo the Seminary warning against choosing your own texts. This writer is in agreement with those professors and pastors.

As a practical lesson for myself, I recall my home pastor (from 3rd. grade on) mentioning to me 20 years later that He had begun choosing his own themes and texts to preach for the first time during that Trinity season.

What should we say then? Put the practise of preaching on great chapters out of our minds (thus also ignore this paper)? If you are recently beginning your ministry, as for such choice of texts, I advise you to forget it. The disadvantages to such free choice (which will be mentioned as we continue the paper and should serve your benefit- that you will not ignore the paper) will support that advice. If, by the grace of our Lord, you have been given experience and wisdom through many years in His ministry, I would not fault you in practising such choice of texts. It could be "just the thing" which will best benefit your congregation. Your knowledge and practical experience within certain chapters and at preaching will enable you to do what a more recent minister cannot.

We should come to agreement as to what "Preaching On Great Chapters" means. It could mean: (A) Preaching on (1) Great chapter as text for the Sunday. Another Great Chapter would be text for the following Sunday. (B) Preaching a series of texts found within one Great Chapter, each text on consecutive Sundays until that Great Chapter is completed.

I seriously doubt practice (A) would work. That for the following reasons:

1. The concentration of our people during the reading of a text is short. The subject matter of one whole chapter would often extend beyond their memory. (Hence they cannot recall just what you are expounding in the sermon.) This happens even when shorter texts are used.

2. The pastor would <sup>not</sup> be able to do justice to the scope of his text. Just the fact that that particular chapter is considered "Great" would mean it holds many important and edifying truths which deserve consideration and presentation in the sermon. For example, Exodus 20 and Matthew 6 (Decalogue and Lord's Prayer) should be considered Great Chapters. None of us would consider 35 minutes long enough to preach on either of those Chief Doctrines as a whole; and they are just part of those chapters.

Considering the physical limitations of people and text, to preach on (1) whole Great Chapter as the text is not suitable.

Practise (B) frees the pastor to choose the size of his text. If he does such choice with care, his text will neither hold too much nor too little. It will not overburden him to preach it, nor his people to hear it. Practise (B) can work. But should it? - - - At this point let it suffice us to agree that we are talking about "Preaching during Trinity on a series of texts found within One Great Chapter, each text on consecutive Sundays until that Great Chapter is completed."

(Here -- pause - if there be discussion)

A much harder thing for us to agree on may be--

What is a Great Chapter of the Bible?

If each of us were to study the matter, then be permitted to present only one Great Chapter as our choice, how soon would you expect that ensuing discussion to terminate?

The individual who chooses to preach on them tends to judge freely which chapters are "Great". To many people, a Great Chapter is one which has especially spoken God's truths to them. This becomes a highly subjective choice. One problem with this is that a chapter which speaks effectively to our needs may not speak to our fellow parishoner's needs. This problem leads to the main disadvantage in the choice of "free texts", namely, neglecting to preach the whole counsel of God. The existing pericope systems were chosen with that in mind. Rather than give ourselves over to free choice of Great Chapters, a better way would be to use the judgment of other men through the ages. We can base our choice of a "Great Chapter" on those most often chosen in the pericopes listed in Nesper's "Biblical Texts." In the "Index According to the Books of the Bible" pages 407-442, we can find which chapters have more often been broken into various texts. There we can also see which chapters are preached from for a wider variety of occasions. By such choice the chief Old Testament Chapter is Isaiah 40. It is listed 13 times . Isaiah 55 was used 9 times. Lamentations 3 was used 8 times. Isaiah 49 was used 7 times. And Psalms 103, Isaiah 53, Isaiah 61, Daniel 9, and Malachi 3 were each used 6 times. If you did the same, you would already have 67 texts from "Great" Old Testament Chapters of the Bible. Your texts would have been chosen as to their scope by other men and tested over centuries.

The same criteria could apply to our choice of New Testament Great Chapters. However, there the number of times a chapter is used increases greatly because the mass of material is less. (A Gospel pericope system is restricted to 4 Books rather than to the whole Old Testament.)

If we hold to this "most often preached from" method of choosing Great Chapters, there are still some problems to deal with within this system. Not on each occasion are the texts listed for a Trinity Sunday. Often different pericope systems use the exact same text for differing occasions (Is. 40:26-31 was used Sun. after Christmas; New Years Day; and 3rd. Sun. after Easter). Notice also that not once is it used for Trinity. The theme mentioned for that text is: "God Giveth Power and Strength." That theme could easily fit into the Life of the Christian theme of Trinity season.

To sum up the thoughts on What a Great Chapter of the Bible is, I believe we can understand the benefit of choosing on the basis of those Chapters most often used in the pericope systems. Likewise, that would give us texts from within those Chapters (texts) which have been chosen for complete and edifying thoughts and which other preachers have used in the past.

(Here -- pause- if there be discussion)

To do justice to the Topic, we should consider the Advantages and Disadvantages of "Preaching On Great Chapters of the Bible During Trinity."

What advantages are expected from such practice?

1. Continuity in line of thought--

Although separate texts from within a chapter may not present the same theme, yet the line of thought goes on and may be comprehended. When 5 or 6 texts come from one chapter, the situation (who is speaking- to whom it is spoken-what are the external cir-

cumstances-what is the desired result) often remains the same. Familiarity with those circumstances due to repetition would be welcomed by the congregation.

## 2. Familiarity with the chapter by both pastor and congregation--

As you preach from within one chapter repeatedly, as you study it repeatedly for each sermon, it will become a favorite Chapter for you. As our people have their favorite (often memorized) verses, so many of them enjoy familiarity with certain chapters and books of the Bible. (as the 23rd. Psalm) Some members refer to them as "their chapter". Preaching from Great Chapters may make entire chapters or sections of books familiar to the people.

What disadvantages are present from such practice?

### 1. One may preach favorite themes rather than the whole counsel of God.

Even following the choice of a Great Chapter based on all the pericope systems, one may find himself repeatedly using the same theme. That should warn like flashing red lights that you may not be preaching a rounded presentation of the major truths of Christian Doctrine.

### 2. Correlating your text with Introit, Collect, Epistle, Gradual, Gospel, Hymns.

This is desirable since the parts of the worship service ought to form a whole. They ought to all fit under one Theme for the Day. It is possible to start with a general theme from your text and work backwards (then finding a day which fits your theme) in Gehrke's "Planning The Church Service" to fit other propers to your theme. Or, one could go so far as to make free choice of all such parts. However, the more free choice the more subjective the presentation. I advise against it.

The pericope systems as we have them are not the only ones compiled. They are the ones that have lasted. If you have the desire and opportunity to correlate another, well rounded system, base it on "Great Chapters" "An Entire Book" or some other scheme. Write it up and your fellow pastors will consider its worthiness. I doubt that we will practise it in order to test it (as our Synod seemed willing to do with the ILC<sup>w</sup> Lectionary), but we will give it due attention. As I believe we have given this matter. End

Gehrke, Ralph. Planning the Service. St. Louis: CPH. 1961

Nesper, Paul W. Biblical Texts. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961

Reu, M. Homiletics. Translated by Albert Steinhaeuser. 2nd ed. Chicago:Wartburg Publishing House, 1924.