A MAJOR HOMILETICAL CHALLENGE FACING THE YOUNG WELS PASTOR IN 2022:

SERMON FORM

BY

JARED W. LINDEMANN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

PROF. JONATHAN A. MICHEEL, ADVISOR

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMIARY

MEQUON, WI

FEBRUARY 17, 2023

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Young pastors in the WELS face unique homiletical challenges in 2022. A survey was conducted

by the author to discern what issues are most prominent from the perspective of the young

pastor. The survey revealed that a major homiletical challenge for young WELS pastors is found

in the area of sermon form. It is proposed that a major reason for this challenge is that young

pastors are trending away from the theme-and-parts standard at the Seminary toward other

sermon forms. Afterwards, some possible answers are proposed to address this difficulty.

INTRODUCTION

I have heard it said by more than one WELS pastor that the main focus of the first year of
ministry is getting to know the people and figuring out how to prepare a sermon every week.
Filled with ideas about ministry learned in the classroom and precious few ideas learned by
experience, the young[1] pastor goes into his first assignment overwhelmed by the possibilities. He
has been told many dos and don'ts. It would be difficult not to feel the pressure of the varied
vocation he has been training toward for years. So the advice to narrow the focus for the young
pastor can be helpful to bring manageable goals into the picture. If it's true that a major part of
the start of a pastor's ministry is sermon preparation, then there are bound to be some growing
pains as the young pastor begins to get plenty of experience under his belt in a short amount of
time.

Naturally, every generation of WELS preachers has faced different growing pains in
sermon preparation and presentation. Although the doctrine has remained the same within
WELS, there have been plenty of changes which have caused different major issues for different
generations. The teachers, textbooks, culture, homiletical schools of thought, styles of learning,
and endless other factors are constantly changing the different issues which each generation
faces in sermon preparation. A major challenge for young preachers today, as is shown in this
paper by the survey, is in sermon form.

This paper explains a major homiletical issue young pastors are facing in 2022. This issue
was uncovered based on the responses of young preachers in a survey. This paper also reveals

---

[1] The word "young" is used in this paper to denote one who is young in their preaching career, not
necessarily young in age.

why young preachers are struggling with this issue by analyzing sermon structure, reviewing the structure which Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary teaches, and exploring other sermon structures. A third purpose of this paper is to provide some potential answers to young pastors struggling with this issue, understanding that there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

This paper is hopefully practically relevant for many young preachers in 2022. What is discussed in this paper may not be as relevant for the experienced preacher who has fully formed his own styles. It should be noted that the author of this paper is a young preacher himself, not yet graduated from seminary. This means that I am facing this same problem which other young preachers must work through. Part of the reason that I am writing this paper on this subject comes from my own deficiencies and growth in preaching I have experienced in my young preaching career. This paper is, in part, self-discovery of my struggles in preaching. The survey findings aided me in defining a major struggle, while the other resources aided me in exploring that issue more deeply.

As this paper discusses this major homiletical struggle of many young pastors, the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary way of teaching sermon writing is mentioned and discussed. The focus of this paper is not to critique the way which the seminary teaches homiletics. What is mentioned about the teaching done at the seminary is mainly focused in the area of sermon form. The seminary provides an excellent foundation for preaching Christ crucified.

The Survey Process and Analysis

In order to discover what the major homiletical issue is for young pastors in 2022, I conducted a survey. This survey was sent to all current WELS pastors who had graduated from seminary in the years 2019, 2020, and 2021. This selection of years was chosen to include only pastors who were still early in their ministries, without including 2022 graduates who have just recently graduated from seminary. The survey was sent out by email. The instructions in the email can be found in Appendix 1. This survey was conducted using Google Forms. The responses were collected anonymously to ensure that pastors could be open about their homiletical struggles and to ensure that I could remain without personal bias, as I know many of these pastors personally. I received 33 total responses to the survey, including my own test response. For the rest of the paper, I will refer to survey responders as SR1, SR2, SR3, etc.

The questions and permissions contained in this survey can be found in Appendix 2. The questions in this survey were aimed at revealing any mistakes or roadblocks pastors run into as they were preparing sermons and as they were reflecting on their sermons. There were also questions aimed at ascertaining how prepared these young pastors felt coming out of seminary and where they felt deficient after their training at seminary. The final question was, "Do you use structures other than "theme and parts" for your sermons? If so, what structures do you use and about what percentage of the time do you use them?"[2] The answers to this question were the starting point for the direction of the rest of the paper. The answers revealed a truth which was

---

[2] Appendix 2.

surprising to me: many young pastors hardly structure any sermons in the theme-and-parts style at all. When paired with the answers the responders gave for their roadblocks and mistakes, the major struggle of homiletical form became clear.

The survey answers covered a broad spectrum of homiletical issues which the responders had been dealing with. They faced issues with creativity, illustrations, memorization, certain parts of the writing process, delivery, and many practical difficulties like lack of time. One of the most notable issues which continued to be mentioned was in the area of style and form. SR3 stated, "I felt that after I was done writing, I wished that my sermon looked more like my text study than it did." There is an uneasiness in that quote about the general way that the information in a sermon is being communicated. This quote is just one of many examples which are explored in this paper about the homiletical issue of form shared by the responders.

Leaving Behind "Theme and Parts"

The survey responders were asked to share what forms they use when formulating a sermon. The responses surprisingly favored forms other than the theme-and-parts structure taught at seminary. These responses about form being a major issue for them were not reserved to the question at the end of the survey specifically about form. Responses were relatively few that shared the sentiment of SR29 who, after discussing other sermon forms he has tried, stated, "I stick to 'theme and parts.'"

Many responses would line up more with SR12's thinking, "I always hated theme-and-parts sermons, but now that I've been out on my own I've been able to experiment with other styles of outlining." Others like would agree with their lack of theme-and-parts structured sermons, while not having quite as strong of negative feelings toward the familiar style. SR9

shared, "I rarely use 'theme and parts', although sometimes it does fit a text… Most often I have

simply have [sic] one theme, one point that the whole sermon is geared toward supporting." SR

18 agreed, "I don't use 'theme and parts' very often at all… I simply do what you might call

theme and part, (or the Lowry Loop) the theme is the part."

SR27 shared the idea the theme-and-parts form was a problem for him that he had to

overcome,

> I found at the beginning I was too concerned about theme and parts and structuring the
> sermon. The solution I found was to not force myself into that box. Some texts call for a
> law / gospel division. Some call for one line of thought. Some fit very nicely into the
> theme-and-parts format that the seminary teaches. The solution is to not fret about the
> format but to just preach the text to the people.

The theme-and-parts form was restricting for him, and, although the thought may not have been

expressed as directly as SR27, it would seem that the same struggle has been faced by many

young pastors in this generation.

The topic of other forms was discussed in response to the survey question about

homiletical training at the seminary, "What if anything, was lacking in that training? (and how

have you overcome that lack in training?)"[3] SR5 expressed, "It would be blessing [sic] to do a

deep dive into other sermons structures besides 'theme and parts.' I know we touched on the

Lowry Loop really briefly during senior year, but I would have loved learning about different

formats that are especially beneficially depending on the genre of the text." SR19 noted a similar

roadblock and how he overcame this, "In my particular section of Homiletics, inductive

preaching was introduced as a concept but could have been explored / taught more thoroughly. I

'overcame' this by doing further self-study in ministry." It appears that many young pastors

leave behind the theme-and-parts form and are forced to do their own research to find a form that

---

[3] Appendix 2.

5

better suits either their way of thinking, the people's way of thinking, a specific text, or a combination of these. SR11 gave an especially insightful explanation to the role of seminary and learning "theme and parts" as a young pastor grows in the area of homiletical form,

> I think the Seminary does an excellent job of giving us the building blocks of sermon preparation and sermon writing. We've got to have a foundation to build off of before we develop our own styles or preparation, writing, memorization, and delivery. It's kinda like math--you have to learn the formulas before you learn the shortcuts. I don't use theme-and-parts expository sermons every Sunday, but I'm forever glad I learned how to preach starting out with theme-and-parts expository sermons. You've got to know the rules before you can "break" them.

This is the experience of many young pastors today. There is a general move away from "theme and parts" after the seminary toward other forms. The move away from "theme and parts" toward other forms is not itself the problem young pastors are facing. The major homiletical issue is this: I stopped doing "theme and parts." What now?

What now?

Some responders shared that they have found that moving on from the theme-and-parts form helped them with the homiletical issue of sermon form. SR22 shared, "I was very disappointed in my Vicar year when I attempted to branch out and try new things and was told to 'stick to the Seminary method.' The Seminary method of T/P works for some people, but not for everyone. And I felt constricted while writing rather than freed up to speak God's Word to the people." SR22 went on to share that moving on from "theme and parts" freed him up to write clearer sermons,

> I struggle greatly with how I feel the T/P structure limits my ability to cohesively keep the sermon together. I write with one major theme in mind and 2 or 3 "chapters," if you will, to keep the general dynamic of the sermon cohesive. For example: I preached Luke 13 (Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer). The "theme" was "Pray As You've Been Taught." No parts, simply a walking through all of the text as one cohesive unit, rather than trying

to force the text into 2 or 3 different parts… I have found that preaching through the text as a homily (as defined on pp 61-63 in Preach the Gospel) rather than synthetically or analytically has been more productive to my style of sermon preparation, writing and delivery.

Based on the survey responses presented so far, it may seem as though young pastors have found the varied style and freedom which they've desired by moving on from the theme-and-parts form. However this is not the case with all survey responders. While possibly surprising, SR5 is not alone in stating both, "Often, I feel like I follow the same relative structure for each sermon" and that that structure isn't the theme-and-parts form learned at seminary, "Overall, I've found myself using narrative structures the vast majority of time. People love stories and can follow the progression of them."

One might expect a young pastor who is feeling constricted to one form to be stuck in the form he learned at seminary, but that is also not the case for SR14 who said, "It depends on the week, but often times I feel that I fall into the same flow of sermon structure: Intro, context, law, gospel, sanctification… I attempt to add variety, but with the business of day to day ministry it can be easy to fall back on that same kind of structure." SR14 also stated, "I think I tend to use the Lowry Loop. I don't use parts very often." Simply moving on from "theme and parts" does not in itself provide the variety and freedom desired in sermon preparation.

There are also those responses where it seemed as though the responder was having trouble articulating the form which he used. Some of these responses seem to reveal that the responder isn't quite sure what his form is. Although it is difficult to determine with certainty whether the problem is in the articulation itself, in my analysis, or in the lack of form, there are some responses which point more toward the latter. SR30 expressed, "I do [use forms other than 'theme and parts'], but I'm not smart enough to know what these other structures would be considered. Often I will preach a theme without strict parts, especially when preaching parables

and similar stories that provide their own teaching structure in the text that might not be best expressed by 'theme and parts.' Often let the text dictate form, when not using parts." Letting the text dictate the form is certainly a legitimate sermon form; however, "theme without strict parts" was shared by more than just SR30 as, what seems to me, a very broad way to describe form. SR21 used similar terminology, "Most of the time I preach a central theme and don't bother listing/thinking of parts."

So far it has been established that many young WELS pastors are leaving behind or rarely using the theme-and-parts form. They are moving toward other forms, and this homiletical trend has brought unique difficulties for the young pastor. Now that the problem is defined, we move on to learning more about why this homiletical issue may be occurring.

WHY IS SERMON FORM A MAJOR CHALLENGE FOR THIS GENERATION?

WELS Pastor Mark Paustian wrote an article about inductive and deductive styles. "Theme and parts," strictly speaking, is a deductive style. There can certainly be inductive styles used within a deductive form, and "theme and parts" could be adapted to create an inductive form. For the purposes of this paper, "theme and parts" is treated strictly as a deductive style. As Paustian described the movement in his own growth as a preacher from deductive styles to more inductive, as is happening to many young WELS pastors today, he had this to say, "Early in my days as a preacher, there is no doubt that when I ditched deductive preaching, I turned instead to a method I must now refer to as the 'hot mess.'"[4] Anyone who moves on from the sermon form which he's learned at seminary is bound to struggle as he grows. This section of the paper defines

---

[4] Mark Paustian, "Movements in Sermon Writing," *Preach the Word* 24.6 (July/August 2021): *3*.

that struggle in an effort to reach possible solutions. A deeper understanding of sermon form as a whole, the theme-and-parts sermon form learned at seminary, the place of sermon form, and what young pastors in 2022 might want sermons to be can all be useful in bringing clarity to the issue of sermon form.

The Necessity of Structure

The words "form" and "structure" can most often be used interchangeably when speaking about the form a sermon takes. "Structure" is used in this section to highlight the intentionality of the outline of a sermon. The consensus among experts in sermon writing is that structure is necessary.

Experts in sermon writing also agree that planning the structure of a sermon can be a frustrating process. They don't sugarcoat the process. Gerlach and Balge said, "There is no short cut, either for students or for veterans. The tough work of sweating out an outline takes time and effort and energy. It is often an uphill struggle."[5] It is no surprise that the issue of sermon form is a major one for this generation. It has always been a difficult part of sermon preparation.

Arranging thoughts within a structure may not be the most exciting process for some pastors. SR3 expressed the idea that the text study is fun and interesting, but putting that text study work into the form of a sermon is less exciting, "I felt that after I was done writing, I wished that my sermon looked more like my text study than it did." Richard R. Caemmerer, who wrote an influential Missouri Synod homiletical book, spoke to this issue, "This process can be

[5] Joel Gerlach and Richard D. Balge, *Preach the Gospel* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982), 38.

tedious and sometimes frustrating. It seldom provides the excitement of personal discovery, and the preacher may wish that he could omit it."[6] David R. Schmitt, another influential Missouri Synod professor, described the experience of setting text studies into structures, "Sometimes, the ideas just seem to fall together in a natural flow and you have your sermon and, other times, it's like herding cats."[7] If a pastor finds this part of this work frustrating, he's not alone. It is a challenging process.

Before discussing further the frustrating, yet necessary, structure of the sermon, the place of form should be tempered. Gerlach and Balge put it this way, "The preacher who overuses it[structure] irritates his hearers no less than the preacher whose sermons amount to little more than a succession of pious thoughts which are all right and true, but which lack anything to bind them together."[8] Assuming Gerlach and Balge imply the theme-and-parts structure which they lay out, that overuse of structure could come in the form of overexplaining and telegraphing everywhere the sermon is going to go. Doing this week after week could easily irritate listeners.

Structure is also not the only ingredient to crafting an effective sermon. It is not even the main factor. Gerlach and Balge stated, "Ineffectiveness in the pulpit is not ordinarily due to the type of sermon outline a preacher employs."[9] The purpose of learning structure is not to find the "best" structure. There is no "best" structure. Even the same text could be preached effectively in a wide variety of structures. Learning structure is about being intentional in the way a pastor presents the message.

---

[6] Richard R. Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 93.

[7] David R. Schmitt, *Sermon Structures* (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis), 369.

[8] Gerlach and Balge, *Preach the Gospel*, 35.

[9] Gerlach and Balge, *Preach the Gospel*, 59.

Although the structure may not be the beginning and end to crafting a sermon, it is a necessary part of sermon preparation. A pastor needs to make use of a structure. Schmitt explained the necessity of making use of a structure. Once the text study has been completed, "Any of these ideas might make it into the sermon. All of them cannot. So the preacher needs to be selective about what he includes and purposeful about when he includes it as he shapes the experience of the sermon. How does a preacher do that? By using a sermon structure."[10]

A pastor not only needs a sermon structure to limit what thoughts make it into the sermon, but also to organize the progression of those ideas. Gerlach and Balge said, "the mechanical structure will enable you to write organized sermons so that your preaching presents the Word in a clear and uncluttered way, focusing on a central truth and continuing in a single direction."[11]

There may be some who, frustrated by the constraints of sermon structures, are tempted to stop following any form. To that thought, George Sweazy made an excellent analogy;

> A sermon that is intelligently planned toward a purpose is not a limitation but a liberation because it enables the preacher to do what he most wants to do.… Liberty is not looseness. A kite that is released from its tether gets its looseness, but loses its liberty to be a kite. A "free balloon" is the captive of every passing breeze. Jesus said that we discover real living not by wandering all over the map, but on the definite, narrow way.… A preacher does not find freedom by ignoring form and structure; these set him free to be a preacher. In the hours of working on a sermon, there is a kind of buoyancy in developing what is already outlined, but there is a wearisome feeling of heavy going in laboring out a sermon with no clear plan.[12]

Using a sermon structure is freeing. If a pastor feels that structure is constricting for him, the solution is not to begin creating structureless sermons with no clear point and logical flow.

---

[10] Schmitt, *Sermon Structures*, 368.

[11] Gerlach and Balge, *Preach the Gospel*, 67.

[12] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 162.

Structure not only aids a pastor in sermon preparation, but it is also important for the listeners. Gawrisch explained, "A good outline is important for the preacher. It helps him to think through and organize his material clearly. It is important also for the hearers. It enables them to follow the thoughts of the sermon more readily and take them home."[13] The structure within which information is given helps the stickiness and memorability of a sermon.[14]

Although it may not be as obvious as word choice or individual sentences, the structure a pastor uses shapes and is a part of the message which he is sharing. Craddock explained the vital role of the sermon structure, "Form is not simply a rack, a hanger, a line over which to drape one's presentation, but the form itself is active, contributing to what the speaker wishes to say and do, sometimes no less persuasive than the content itself."[15]

Craddock went on to give examples of what he meant. The structure is a part of the message. If a pastor always shapes his sermons as a lawyer would, arguing to make his point in a logical, deductive manner, then that will shape how the listeners are going to think about the Bible or their faith. They may think the Bible always has proving itself as its goal or that they must prove they are right as Christians. If every sermon is formed in the structure of "before and after," like a Lowry's Loop, then the listeners may think the normal way to become a believer is adult conversion. If the pastor is always speaking about how we were before conversion in the beginning of the sermon and how we are now that we believe, then the listeners may overemphasize their own conversion as the beginning and end of their life of faith. A pastor might always organize his sermons as an either/or proposition. Either you listen to God by

---

[13] Wilbert R. Gawrisch, "Homiletics at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary" (paper presented to the World Mission Seminary Conference at Isla Verde, Puerto Rico, August 18-22, 1986), 8.

[14] Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church*, 94.

[15] Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 172.

believing and doing this or you ignore him by believing and doing the other. This structure, if

overused, can lead the listeners to viewing every issue in their life as a vital, make-it-or-break-it

decision to follow God or not. Consistent use of this structure may also oversimplify some of the

complex issues in the lives of the listeners. On the other hand, a pastor might consistently use

make use of a sermon form that always leads listeners to accept both this and that side of an

apparent paradox, i.e. we are sinners and saints. If this is the standard sermon form a pastor uses,

then the listeners may never be confronted to take a firm stance on a clear Biblical teaching.

Sermon structure is absolutely part of what a pastor is communicating to the listeners as he

preaches.[16]

        This argument from Craddock doesn't mean that these sermon forms are unusable but

simply that the pastor ought to be aware of the vital role of structure. It influences not only the

way the pastor organizes the information but also the way that the listeners receive the

information.

        Making use of and understanding structure is important even for pastors like SR19 who

shared, "I am not an outline guy, but I need to write out my whole manuscript to 'see what I

think.' Then, during the revision and editing process it becomes clear to me what textual themes

and thoughts unify the message." This method doesn't remove the need for structure.

        Schmitt shared that it is still necessary to identify the structure of the written sermon

afterwards in order to recognize the progression of the sermon. What would follow the

recognition of the structure is an extensive editing of the written sermon to remove any

unnecessary sections and the possible addition of any necessary transitions or explanations.[17] The

---

[16] Craddock, *Preaching*, 173-174.

[17] Schmitt, *Sermon Structures*, 369.

dangerous thing here is overconfidence in one's abilities to write without a structure, "Unfortunately beginning preachers assume that if a sermon just naturally flows for them, they don't need to be concerned about structure."[18]

Identifying the structure of the sermon is still important for a pastor like SR30 who expressed, "Often let the text dictate form, when not using parts." Even if the text itself is the biggest influence on the form the sermon takes, identifying the logical flow of the sermon is still an important part of the process. Schmitt stated that this is important so that the pastor learns the skill of structuring sermons. The pastor can learn why his sermon worked. He can learn what parts of it worked and what didn't.[19] Identifying the structure of the sermon can be a helpful tool as a pastor grows in sermon preparation. Failure to identify the sermon structure could be a reason why some young WELS pastors are struggling as they move away from "theme and parts." Failure to recognize the importance and role of structure may be a greater reason why others are struggling.

"Theme and Parts"

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary teaches "theme and parts" as the foundational sermon form.[20] Understanding the advantages and disadvantages of learning this form as foundational is vital to the discussion of why young WELS pastors are struggling with sermon form as they grow in preaching.

---

[18] Schmitt, *Sermon Structures*, 369.

[19] Schmitt, *Sermon Structures*, 369.

[20] A full explanation of "theme and parts" will not be given here. Only brief summaries of relevant issues are presented. For a full explanation, refer to *Preach the Gospel* by Gerlach and Balge.

It should not go without saying that the greatest advantage of learning this form at the seminary is the purpose of a sermon which Gerlach and Balge stated, "In essence a sermon is the public proclamation to sinners of God's good news of universal reconciliation and of salvation through faith in Jesus, the Christ."[21] This focus is not reserved only for the theme-and-parts structure. It is a great blessing of *Preach the Gospel* that it focuses on preaching the gospel of Jesus. This focus is not always so evident in homiletical textbooks.

Another advantage of learning the theme-and-parts structure as described in *Preach the Gospel* is the basis in distinguishing law and gospel.[22] This is a necessary skill for the beginner to learn in order to keep the focus on Christ crucified.

The theme-and-parts structure teaches students to find the theme in the text and divide that theme into parts.[23] Learning how to formulate and execute a theme in a sermon is an extremely important skill. Haddon Robinson asserted, "A sermon should be a bullet, not a buckshot."[24] Striving to drive home one main point is a popular encouragement from many preachers. John Henry Jowett said, "I do not think any sermon ought to be preached or even written until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon."[25] Learning "theme and parts" gives the student the foundation of preaching one main point.

Depending on how broadly one defines the theme-and-parts form, it can be a versatile structure. If it is defined as narrowly as Gerlach and Balge define it, it is not an incredibly

---

[21] Gerlach and Balge, *Preach the Gospel*, 4.

[22] Gerlach and Balge, *Preach the Gospel*, 9.

[23] Gerlach and Balge, *Preach the Gospel*, 63.

[24] Daniel Overdorf, *One Year to Better Preaching: 52 Exercises to Hone Your Skills* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2013), 77.

[25] Overdorf, *One Year to Better Preaching*, 78.

versatile structure. Formulating the parts of a sermon is especially narrowly defined in *Preach the Gospel*, down to the grammar employed when writing the parts of the sermon.[26] If "theme and parts" is utilized more broadly, other sermon structures could even be used within the framework of a so-called "theme and parts." For example, one might structure a sermon as a Lowry's Loop and call it a theme-and-parts sermon if you organize in this way: Theme; Part 1) Oops 2) Ugh 3) Aha 4) Whee 5) Yeah.[27]

If one views "theme and parts" strictly without deviating from the rules, following this structure can add difficulties for young pastors which hinder them from writing effective sermons. Granted, there are certainly experienced pastors who have used the theme-and-parts structure for their entire ministry and have been excellent preachers. There is sometimes a consistent breaking of the theme-and-parts rules for those who remain effective preachers within the theme-and-parts construct. As SR11 said, "You've got to know the rules before you can 'break' them." For the young WELS pastor who may feel constricted by the theme-and-parts model, there are enough good resources on sermon structure to provide alternative ways of structuring the sermon.

John Sweetman even went so far as to say that the theme-and-parts form, which he calls "Points-style structure," is too restrictive to learn as foundational, "In some ways, the Points-style structure acted as such a foundational structure until its limitations were exposed by the inductive, narrative approaches of the new homiletic."[28] While I don't completely agree with this,

---

[26] Gerlach and Balge, *Preach the Gospel*, 51.

[27] Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form (expanded edition)* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 26.

[28] John Sweetman, "Towards a Foundational, Flexible, Sermon Structure" in *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 8.2 (September 2008): 37-38.

there is some merit to the idea that, as the times and ways people communicate change, the ways which pastors preach must be adapted.

Caemmerer spoke about this truth, "What makes much of the published sermon literature of a previous age only indirectly exemplary for our time is not simply the changes in language or the way people's minds are crowded with new and different pictures, but the changes in their minds. People do not react to language in the same way as in the past."[29] Caemmerer published this thought in 1959. This idea is nothing new. Some adjustments from generation to generation in the way pastors write sermons are certainly required.

One of the downsides of the theme-and-parts model is in the misuse of it. Some have boiled down "theme and parts" to become part one as law and part two as gospel. Schmitt speaks about this tendency. He doesn't deny this as a possible way to construct a sermon, but he warns against throwing every text into a law and gospel machine and what comes out is the sermon.[30] Doing this with every sermon may consistently ignore the progression of the Biblical text being preached.

Eugene Lowry spoke even stronger against a strict theme-and-parts model, "most books on preaching operate on the common assumption that sermonic organization evolves out of the logic of content. That is, one takes a theme or topic and cuts it up into equal parts (generally three), and then organizes the parts into some kind of logical order. As such the sermon looks like a 'paste-up' even before it appears in the pulpit."[31] I wouldn't say this as strongly as Lowry

---

[29] Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church*, 271.

[30] Schmitt, *Sermon Structures*, 37.

[31] Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot,* xix-xx.

does, but his words do illustrate the dangers and potential shortcomings of solely using the theme-and-parts structure.

While *Preach the Gospel* gives an excellent foundation in preaching Jesus, it would be ignorant to believe that the theme-and-parts structure is perfect. This form learned at seminary is a part of the struggles young pastors are facing in sermon form. This doesn't mean that "theme and parts" needs to be thrown out. This is simply to admit to where this structure which is taught as foundational is lacking. Some of the disadvantages of the theme-and-parts structure come in the ways people have misused the structure. Other disadvantages arrive in the restrictive nature of the structure itself.

Lack of Versatility

Structure is, by nature, restrictive. Some restriction is good. Too much restriction applied in an unnecessary area can be detrimental. John Sweetman, who was critical of a theme-and-parts structure serving as a consistent foundation for a sermon, had this to say after presenting the advantages and disadvantages of multiple sermon structures serving as foundational, "None of these structures appears flexible enough to cater for a wide variety of sermon forms."[32] For Sweetman, versatility in sermon form is essential.

One issue with a lack of versatility in sermon form is that it simply becomes boring. Eugene Lowry, creator of Lowry's Loop, recognized that any one form which is overused will become stale for the people; "It is certainly true that any method utilized Sunday after Sunday in precisely the same fashion will wear thin — particularly when the process structure is clearly

---

[32] Sweetman, "Towards a Foundational, Flexible, Sermon Structure," 37.

visible."[33] It is not only "theme and parts" that can be restrictive for pastor and listener if overused. Sweetman had this to say about Lowry's Loop, "So while Lowry shed new light on preaching narrative, he doesn't now see his homiletical plot as 'the' form for narrative preaching, but one option among many. Homiletical plot is not claimed to be a foundational structure and its restrictive format precludes such a possibility."[34]

One issue with restricting oneself to just one sermon form, no matter what it is, is the wide variety of communication found in Scripture itself. Overdorf made this point,

> Scripture uses a variety of forms to present God's truth, such as historical narrative, parable, poetry, and prophecy. Instead of reflecting this variety in their sermons, however, many preachers construct every sermon in the same manner. They grow comfortable with one sermon form, then design every sermon, regardless of the text with the same cookie-cutter approach.[35]

A homiletical issue for the young WELS pastor could be jamming a certain text into a rigid structure when this same text might have been preached more effectively by that pastor within another outline.

If a pastor feels a lack of creativity in his sermons, it may be due to a close following of the "rules" of certain sermon structures without leaving room for a natural, flowing presentation. Bryan Chapell, after describing some possible forms a pastor could make use of, warned against sticking rigidly to one form,

> I recognize that the detailed instructions devoted to each can lead to a paint-by-the-numbers mind-set... All professors, experienced preachers, and students recognize that attempts to enforce one style of sermonizing is something akin to saying that all artists must paint like da Vinci or that all musicians must compose like Beethoven. The beauty, richness, and craft of noble expression cannot be confined to one form.

---

[33] Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 90.

[34] Sweetman, "Towards a Foundational, Flexible, Sermon Structure," 35.

[35] Overdorf, *One Year to Better Preaching*, 159.

God has given each pastor his own distinct gifts, his own ways of thinking and organizing. Confining oneself to one form and the rules of one form can inhibit the effectiveness of a pastor's own distinct style.

The New Homiletic

The New Homiletic is a sermon movement which began in the 1960s which changed the way pastors were thinking about preaching.[36] The growing pains involved in this homiletical movement can be identified to understand the growing pains of individual young pastors today. Before The New Homiletic, deductive preaching had been the standard in preaching for a long time. Craddock noted that at the beginning of this new movement, young preachers were revolting from the deductive style by abolishing form altogether.[37] Craddock described the time that followed, "This period of reaction and experimentation was not unusual; there is usually, between the razing of the old structure and the building of the new, a time for tents hastily erected on the vacant lot… Now that the dust has settled, many acknowledge that the old sermon forms were not all that inadequate."[38]

This period of "tents hastily erected in a vacant lot"[39] can happen for an individual moving on from the deductive form he learned at seminary. For a pastor reacting harshly against

---

[36] O. Wesley Allen Jr. ed., *The Renewed Homiletic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), Ch 13.

[37] Craddock, *Preaching*, 170.

[38] Craddock, *Preaching*, 171.

[39] Craddock, *Preaching*, 171.

the deductive form, this time might be what Mark Paustian described as the "hot mess"[40] of sermon writing.

This reaction against the deductive form of "theme and parts" could have many sources. One cause of the reaction may simply be the feeling by a pastor that his preaching is stale. By the time a pastor is preaching in his own congregations, he has been exposed to many styles of preaching and knows what stale preaching sounds like to him. His feeling may be similar to Paul Althaus, quoted by John W. Doberstein. Althaus was talking about mid-20th century preaching when he said, "People today are not tired of preaching, but of our kind of preaching."[41] This feeling by a pastor can elicit a reaction against the form he has been using.

This feeling by a pastor that his sermons might be stale may have to do with how he is using that sermon form. This doesn't mean that this sermon form is wrong for everyone or even wrong for himself all the time. O. Wesley Allen Jr. described common mistakes made within deductive, expository sermons, "Another mistake preachers often make in this section (and in all sermons where exegesis is offered to the congregation) is to assume that offering biblical 'commentary' means they must sound like a commentary (in other words, academic)."[42] Allen Jr. also noted, "too often this type of sermon is more informational than inspirational."[43] Seeing the deductive form of "theme and parts" done ineffectively (in his view) may steer a young pastor away from using that same form.

---

[40] Paustian, "Movements in Sermon Writing," 3.

[41] Donald Macleod, *The Problem of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 11.

[42] O. Wesley Allen Jr., *Determining the Form* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 31.

[43] Allen Jr., *Determining the Form*, 34.

In the New Homiletic, the sermon is not so much thought of as a logical argument. Allen Jr. defined the sermon in the New Homiletic, "Preaching is the event in which the biblical text is interpreted…"[44] The sermon being viewed as an event or a moment in time is a different way to view a sermon. The New Homiletic brings in a focus on the hearer, more inductive or narrative preaching, and imagery being the message.[45] With all of these changes in homiletical thought becoming more widespread, it is not surprising that sermon form has become a big challenge for young pastors still trying to find their voice.

Part of this movement gaining growth today is because "America is quickly becoming a secondary oral society."[46] This means that people in America are becoming less focused on literary presentation in favor of orality. This trend affects the way that people communicate. If the influence of the New Homiletic is to focus on the hearer, then the pastor may be forced to formulate sermons in different ways now than pastors have in the past. Chapell described what this shift in thinking for the sake of the hearers may look like,

> Listeners interpret these moves[47] not by dispassionately processing a line of logic along its various branches[48] but rather by engaging these moves as a series of experiences that intersect with their previous and present life contexts. These experiences then become the new contexts that orient and explain later thought in the message. This analysis of the way most people perceive all oral communication, including sermons, advises preachers not to think of their sermons as debate speeches that wrestle listeners into submission with intricate and indisputable propositions of logic but rather as sequences of

---

[44] Allen Jr., *The Renewed Homiletic*, Ch 13.

[45] Allen Jr., *The Renewed Homiletic*, Ch 13.

[46] Gregory K. Hollfield, "By 2050: Preparing Effective Preachers for an Emerging Secondary Oral Society," *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 19.1 (March 2019): 44.

[47] "moves" could be thought of as "parts."

[48] Chapell is not advocating for the removal of all deductive preaching. In this section of his book, he is describing narrative preaching.

impressions that create an experience in which listeners come to understand truth on their own terms.[49]

Lowry also promoted this way of thinking about the sermon; "Our best preaching does in fact feel like a story. It is indeed The Story, and our task is to tell it, to form it, to fashion it — not to organize it."[50] Lowry spoke stronger against deductive forms than I would prefer, but his assertion shows that this is the popular way of teaching homiletics in the era of the New Homiletic. WELS pastors are exposed to Lowry and Chapell at the seminary, but theirs is not the foundational structure taught. This isn't to say that this is a problem. It simply means that growth needs to take place for any young pastor looking to shape their sermons in a way closer to Lowry or Chapell.

The thinking of the New Homiletic to focus on the hearer does not necessitate less focus on preaching the text. In fact, it may require a greater focus on certain aspects of the text which would not have been as prevalent without this way of thinking. As Craddock explained, "Preachers are paying more attention to how a text makes a point and creates a reader experience and, as a result, are often looking to the text for the how as well as the what of the sermon."[51] If the sermon is being viewed as an experience, pastors should also view the text as an experience. If the text creates a certain experience for the reader, the pastor could also strive to create that experience for the listeners of his sermon. As young pastors learn how to do this, there are bound to be growing pains.

---

[49] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 163-164.

[50] Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, xx.

[51] Craddock, *Preaching*, 178.

So far, many possibilities have been presented for why young pastors may be struggling in the area of sermon form: the way structure is viewed, the use or misuse of structure, ignoring the benefits of structure, the potential pitfalls of the theme-and-parts form, the overuse of structure, the difference between the way pastors learn to preach at the seminary and how they preach in their ministries, and the growing pains of learning new ways to think about preaching. Now, some potential answers are shared which could be implemented to help solve some of these issues.

SOME POTENTIAL ANSWERS

Based on the survey answers, a major homiletical issue for young pastors in 2022 was identified. Largely based on a literature review, reasons for that major homiletical issue were suggested. In this section, some potential answers for that problem of sermon form are given based on the survey responses and literature review. This is done with the knowledge that there is no silver bullet answer which will solve this issue for everyone. Different potential answers to this issue will work better for different pastors who think in different ways.

Variety

One of the reasons proposed for why young pastors may be struggling with sermon form is the lack of versatility present in most sermon structures suggested by homiletical experts. These structures which may lack versatility include strict "theme and parts" and Lowry's Loop. Using just one, inflexible structure can leave the preacher feeling as though he does not have a varied style.

A solution for this is to add variety in form. This skill of variety doesn't usually come easy to pastors in sermon writing. Overdorf revealed that pastors' sermons reflect their own tendencies, therefore you have to be intentional to vary your style.[52] There are multiple ways one could attempt to achieve this.

One way a pastor could add variety is to open themselves to breaking some of the rules or perceived rules of the sermon form which he uses. Macleod explained, "Is it right to do this or wrong to do that in constructing a sermon? This, however, is the wrong question. It implies an attempt to live and operate strictly by a set of rules and this can be a sure way to inhibit your own art, individuality, originality, and spontaneity."[53] A student might appreciate the security blanket of strict rules of constructing sermons. A student might even need those rules despite what he wants to do in order to learn what is wise or unwise in sermon writing. The growing pastor who is gaining experience might begin to feel constricted by some of those rules and express variety by breaking some of those rules.

For example, some books on sermon writing give incredibly detailed direction for preparing the sermon. In Caemmerer's *Preaching for the Church*, he wrote about how the pastor should prepare his outline; "He will remember that each rank must have at least two units."[54] This seems more like instructions for a professor's sake in grading papers than a helpful tool in sermon writing. For a pastor to write the most effective sermon, he should write his outlines however helps him the most.

---

[52] Overdorf, *One Year to Better Preaching*, 30.

[53] Macleod, *The Problem of Preaching*, 75.

[54] Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church*, 95.

As another example, a perceived feature of the theme-and-parts form is that, as a

deductive form, only deductive preaching is contained within it. This does not need to be the

case. Schmitt suggested adding variety to a thematic sermon by using different forms within each

part. He said that, while the transitions are logical, the contents of each part need not be logic

based.[55] Paustian suggested something similar,

> We need not huddle on the two ends of the continuum. *Combining* deductive and
> inductive elements keeps preaching fresh. Any time we aren't saying something in the
> most straightforward way we possibly could-by penetrating questions, in narratives we
> don't immediately explain, through images we hope to hang in the basement gallery of
> people's hearts-we are being inductive. We're leaving room for our listeners to complete
> the meanings we intend and be part of their own persuasion, making things more fully
> their own.
>
> There can be entangling moments of induction within a deductive style that has no lack
> of clarity or authority. There can be resolution at the end of a measured time of
> disorientation.
>
> None of us want our preaching to be vanilla. There is a sweet spot between numbing
> ambiguity and spoon-feeding.[56]

Another way to add variety in form is to learn new forms. Craddock mentioned without

disapproval, "It is the practice of some to choose from a stock of outlines a form for the sermon

being prepared."[57] A pastor might have a tool kit of sermon forms from which to choose when he

is finished with his text study and is starting to get an idea of how he would like to preach the

text. This could be a way to avoid the feeling of an unvaried style for a growing pastor.

O. Wesley Allen Jr. had some advice for those wanting to try out different sermon forms.

First, he suggested that a pastor master the sermon form exactly as presented before doing

anything else. For example, if a pastor wanted to learn the structure of The Four Pages by Paul

---

[55] Schmitt, *Sermon Structures*, 375.

[56] Paustian, "Movements in Sermon Writing," 3.

[57] Craddock, *Preaching*, 176.

Scott Wilson, then that pastor would learn it exactly as presented in *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching*. Second, once the pastor fully understands the form as presented, Allen Jr. suggested experimenting with the sermon form to fit each text. Finally, Allen Jr. encouraged pastors that there are more forms to learn.[58] This step-by-step process of adding more forms to the pastor's homiletical tool kit can provide reasonable goals for the pastor who may feel stuck in one form. It not only provides reasonable goals, but also the reminder that there is always more to learn and more ways to grow. It keeps one from learning one new form and organizing every sermon in the same way again, becoming just as unvaried in his form as he was before.

Another way to add variety in form is to allow the text to influence the form. Instead of mainly influencing the content, as the theme-and-parts form tends to encourage, the text could also shape the form which the sermon takes. Overdorf even stated that "the Biblical text should influence the form of the sermon."[59] This would be distinct from a verse-by-verse, homily approach, although that is a legitimate sermon form as well. Allowing the text to dictate the form would be an attempt to recreate the experience of the text for the listeners.

A freer way to think about sermon structure may be to think of a sermon structure as a story with scenes, as Sweetman suggested.[60] This isn't so much a suggestion for a new, specific structure, but a broader way to think about form altogether. It highlights keeping a singular focus in each scene within a sermon. Sweetman's story structure has its advantages in its flexibility to include other sermon structures.

---

[58] Allen Jr., *Determining the Form*, 79.

[59] Overdorf, *One Year to Better Preaching*, 159.

[60] Sweetman, "Towards a Foundational, Flexible, Sermon Structure," 38.

Growth and Experience

Part of the solution to this issue of sermon form for young WELS pastors just comes down to growth and experience. William M. Macgregor of Glasgow spent years hearing sermons from seminary students. At one point, he remarked, "There are only three kinds of sermons: those that are dull; those that are duller; and those that are inconceivably dull."[61] One can't expect to enter the ministry as a master preacher. Experience brings confidence and comfortability in the pulpit. Many lessons are learned simply by trial and error.

There is no shortage of resources advocating for a certain sermon form or providing a different way to think about sermon form. I present here some suggestions for resources to go to depending on how the reader may want to grow in the area of sermon form.

SR31 shared a resource which he heard about from a brother in ministry, "The resource is: https://concordiatheology.org/sermon-structs/." This resource provided by David Schmitt breaks down a wide variety of potential sermon structures. He succinctly provides the unique aspects of each sermon form, often warning against common mistakes made within each. In most places, he also gives examples of the sermon structures so that a person can see what this sermon structure might end up looking like when preached. Schmitt's online resource is excellent for learning about many types of sermon forms. If a person wants to dive into one of these sermon forms by reading all about it before trying it, this resource may not provide enough information, but it could be a good starting point. For a slightly longer breakdown of some of these sermon forms, *Determining the Form* by O. Wesley Allen Jr. is a little more comprehensive on some of the more popular sermon forms.

---

[61] Macleod, *The Problem of Preaching*, 17.

For a WELS pastor looking to explore one new sermon form besides "theme and parts," I would recommend *The Homiletical Plot* by Eugene Lowry. Learning Lowry's Loop can provide a good base in an inductive form. Lowry's Loop is also a fairly brief read for the pastor with not much time on his hands. If a pastor is searching for variety outside of Lowry's Loop, *The Four Pages of the Sermon* by Paul Scott Wilson is another book which provides a sermon form worth exploring. Wilson even provides ways to add variety within his proposed structure in Section VI: Varieties of Sermons.[62]

For more general thoughts on different ways to think about sermon form, I would recommend chapter nine of Craddock's *Preaching*. "Towards a Foundational, Flexible, Sermon Structure" by John Sweetman is an article which gives the shortcomings of some popular sermon forms if they are used as the foundation for every sermon. Sweetman, then, suggests a more general way to think of sermon form which could be adapted to many sermon forms. Sweetman's suggestions are suited to a pastor who is familiar with a wide variety of sermon forms.

At the Seminary Level

The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary does an excellent job equipping young WELS pastors for their call to preach. Many of the solutions to these homiletical difficulties for young pastors seem to be experience and personal experimentation as one grows in sermon preparation. This section of the paper is here to show what Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is doing well in the area of

---

[62] Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 231.

sermon form and some small areas where there could be ways to help the student grow in sermon preparation.

Sweetman wrote, "It is taxing for a preacher to use a different structure for every sermon." It would be especially taxing on a student to come up with a unique form for each sermon he writes. This freedom would not be helpful to the first-year pastor expected to come up with a new sermon form every week. The seminary does well in teaching a structure for the growing preacher to use. In his paper from 1986 about the way the seminary teaches homiletics, Gawrisch answered a question about teaching more loose sermon forms in this way, "It is the consensus of the WLS homiletics department, however, that it is desirable that the student master the theme-and-parts kind of sermon first."[63] It is important to learn the ins and outs of preaching within a structure before branching out to other ways of preaching. The seminary gives a solid homiletical foundation in "theme and parts."

Some suggestions for the seminary to help in the area of sermon form were given by the survey responders. SR11 suggested, "If Seminary could do anything differently, I think it would be to give us more practice in other preaching styles. Senior homiletics felt like it was mainly a review of Junior and Middler homiletics, but I feel like that class could have given us opportunity to stretch our creative legs a bit more." With the changes in homiletics brought by The New Homiletic, there is probably more room for exploring these ideas in the classroom. It was Wilson's conviction that the innovation of The New Homiletic was complete by 2008.[64] Now, in 2022, we can make use of these years of innovation.

---

[63] Gawrisch, "Homiletics at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary", 7.

[64] Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon*, 6.

The homiletics classes at seminary do expose students to Chapell and Lowry, at least in my experience, but SR7 saw a need for more exposure to other forms; "Further structures of sermon-writing. We spend a lot of time on 'theme and parts' and a bit on inductive preaching (Lowry loop), but there are many other potential ways to structure the sermon which I've learned either from other pastors in my circuit or through personal study of preaching resources." SR5 felt the same need, "It would be blessing to do a deep dive into other sermons structures besides 'theme and parts.' I know we touched on the Lowry Loop really briefly during senior year, but I would have loved learning about different formats that are especially beneficially depending on the genre of the text."

SR18 shared a way which the seminary might teach more forms to students by giving them more experience,

> I might have appreciated a more varied approach to preaching. Our first two years it was all about the theme-and-parts, expositional preaching. Senior year we got a little bit of exposure to other kinds of preaching, but I think if guys could maybe try other ways of writing sermons and preaching during their Seminary years, they could figure out what works and what doesn't from an experience stand point, instead of just theoretically (i.e. I've learned expositional preaching is good because x, y, z... vs. I know expositional preaching is good because I've tried the other ways.)

SR14 suggested that this might be an area where the mentor program could be utilized, "Perhaps preaching could be more intentionally incorporated into the mentor program. Maybe encouraging all mentors to read two preaching books with new pastors. I'd say the first year of ministry just let the pastor preach and get their footing. Then, read a book the second and third year after some experience, or at least one preaching book in those three years."

CONCLUSION

Suggestions for Further Research

The suggestions in the previous section for individuals and the seminary are certainly not

exhaustive. These are simply the ideas which came to the forefront in the survey and literature

review. More research could be done to find the most effective ways to grow in sermon

preparation and presentation for different kind of learners. This paper is focused on finding what

young WELS pastors are struggling with homiletically and why they may be struggling in that

area. The potential answers given in this paper may simply be a starting point for more research

to be done.

A resource might be developed which could give young WELS pastors more in-depth

analysis of different sermon forms. Schmitt's online resource is excellent, but it doesn't have

quite as much information on each form as one might want. If a paper could be written detailing

the ins and outs of different forms and how to begin using them, it could be a benefit to young

WELS pastors looking for other structures.

Another avenue for more research could be within the seminary. SR17 even suggested

that a new homiletical textbook could be written,

> I think there needs to be a new book on how to write a sermon. I like the book that we
> currently use, but I think it overemphasizes "theme and parts." To be honest, I think using
> parts makes a sermon more like two mini-sermons rather than one sermon. Having only
> one theme, rather than two parts, makes the sermon more cohesive and comprehensive, in
> my opinion.

While this would be an extensive undertaking, there may be some merit to the idea that another

resource could be written in the wake of the homiletical research done since *Preach the Gospel*

was written. In the shorter term, research could be conducted in the area of how Wisconsin

Lutheran Seminary teaches sermon form compared to how other seminaries teach sermon form. The knowledge gathered from this research could give the seminary direction in improving study on sermon form.

There were many thoughts in the responses of the survey which did not make their way into the main body of this paper. More research could be done on some of these topics. SR19 shared that he struggled with form in the area of finding one theme. This response illustrates that part of the homiletical issue of form is that some people have different ways of thinking and organizing than others;

> Coming up with a theme for a sermon is tremendously difficult for me. Other guys don't seem to have the same issue, but it's easily my least favorite part of writing a sermon. It has something to do with committing to a simple, couple-word unifying thought. I could come up with themes easily if they were allowed to be fifteen words long. The solution I have found is that I am not an outline guy, but I need to write out my whole manuscript to "see what I think." Then, during the revision and editing process it becomes clear to me what textual themes and thoughts unify the message. Since implementing this (waiting till the sermon is written to choose a theme), theme writing has become much easier.

For SR19, it is not a discussion of one form or another, but a broader way of thinking and outlining.

SR2 and others shared a need to focus more on delivery, "We spent a thorough amount of time learning how to write sermons, but did not spend much time being equipped on the memorization and delivery of sermons." SR18 explained his growth in the area of introduction and illustration,

> Something that I long ago cut from my sermons that I consistently found dissatisfactory is doing fluff pieces for my introduction. Silly stories or analogies or whatever for an introduction constantly left a bad taste in my mouth. Today I almost always opt to use another portion of Scripture for my introduction and many times it comes from one of the other readings for the day. Only if there is something relevant in real time news - nationally or locally - will I move away from that model. And very, very rarely, maybe I think of the perfect story/anecdote/or analogy to use for an intro. I just remember sweating it so much trying to think of an intro, but this way is not only easier (because God literally supplies it), but puts the focus where I think it should be, on God's Word!

Final Encouragements

A pastor always needs to remember his call to preach is centered around preaching the gospel. There are some, especially in the movement of the New Homiletic, who were so excited about these recent developments in the world of sermon formation that they didn't make preaching Christ an explicit goal of the sermon.[65] The most persuasive sermon becomes empty without the gospel of Jesus.

It is important to keep in mind that goal of preaching the gospel as a young pastor grows in sermon preparation and presentation. As the pastor's abilities grow and he becomes more confident, the temptation toward pride is real and dangerous. About growing in the area of sermon form, Overdorf wrote, "The sermon form should advance the truth, not overshadow it."[66] A person shouldn't walk away impressed by the pastor's ability, but with the truth of God's Word.[67]

"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" (Eph 4:7). Jesus forgives us for our foolish pride. Jesus shines through where we may be weak. Jesus has given gifts to his church where he has decided they would be best placed. We never forget the grace of Jesus for us on the cross as we strive to grow in sharing that gospel from the pulpit.

---

[65] Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon*, 8.

[66] Overdorf, *One Year to Better Preaching,* 160. Italicized emphasis removed.

[67] Overdorf, *One Year to Better Preaching*, 160.

34

APPENDIX 1. INSTRUCTIONS AND INVITATION GIVEN FOR THE SURVEY

Pastors,

If you could find 20 minutes to fill out this survey on sermon-writing for my senior thesis, I would really appreciate it. It might even be helpful for you to reflect back on sermons you've written.

Thank you for your time and effort,
Jared Lindemann

APPENDIX 2. SURVEY QUESTIONS AND PERMISSIONS

By submitting this survey you are consenting to having your response used and quoted anonymously. The responses may be quoted in the paper, quoted in presentations about the paper, or discussed in conversations surrounding the paper.

What have you found dissatisfactory in the sermons you've written for which you have NOT found a workable solution?

What have you found consistently dissatisfactory about the sermons you've written for which you have found a workable solution? Please provide the recurring mistake and solution in your answer.

In your preparation to give a sermon, what roadblock have you run into for which you have NOT found a workable solution?

In your preparation to give a sermon, what roadblock have you consistently run into for which you have found a workable solution?

On a scale of 1-10 how do you feel your 4 years at Seminary prepared you for your call to preach? 1 – Not at all prepared. 10 – As prepared as possible

What if anything, was lacking in that training? (and how have you overcome that lack in training?)

Do you use structures other than "theme and parts" for your sermons? If so, what structures do you use and about what percentage of the time do you use them?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen Jr., O. Wesley. *Determining the Form.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008.

⸻. ed. *The Renewed Homiletic.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

Caemmerer, Richard R. *Preaching for the Church.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959.

Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon 2nd Edition.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. Accessed by Logos.

Craddock, Fred B. *Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985.

Gawrisch, "Homiletics at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary." Paper presented to the World Mission Seminary Conference at Isla Verde, Puerto Rico, August 18-22, 1986.

Gerlach, Joel and Richard D. Balge. *Preach the Gospel*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982.

Hollfield, Gregory K. "By 2050: Preparing Effective Preachers for an Emerging Secondary Oral Society," *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 19, no. 1 (March 2019): 42-57.

Lowry, Eugene. *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form (expanded edition).* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Macleod, Donald. *The Problem of Preaching*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Overdorf, Daniel. *One Year to Better Preaching: 52 Exercises to Hone Your Skills*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2013.

Paustian, Mark. "Movements in Sermon Writing." *Preach the Word* 24, no. 6 (July/August 2021).

Schmitt, David R. *Sermon Structures* (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis), 369.

Sweetman, John. "Towards a Foundational, Flexible, Sermon Structure" in *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 8, no. 2 (September 2008): 32-49.

Wilson, Paul Scott. *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018.