

## Session 1

### “WORKMEN APPROVED” A Workshop on the Craft of Preaching

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a **workman** who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

A couple of years ago, I had the privilege of meeting Sam Maloof, the master designer and craftsman of wood. Maloof is best known for his wonderfully sculpted chairs and rocking chairs, which are on display at the Smithsonian. As I listened to this 88 year old master speak about his work, several things impressed me.

The first was the way his craft was fully integrated into his life. Woodworking was not a job, but a vocation in the fullest and truest sense of that word. You didn’t get the impression that working on the house or digging in the garden or conversing with visitors to the shop was in any way foreign to his vocation as a craftsman and designer. It was all one, integrated whole.

The second was his casual yet reverential appreciation for his material and the form and function of the furniture he designed. In dogmatics we would identify that with the “formal” and “material” principles. He knew his stuff in such a deep and familiar way that he made it all look so easy; and yet the focus and attention he gave told you that even the 1000th chair was not easy. You might experience the same thing listening to a master musician at his instrument. The two are almost one with each other.

The third thing that impressed me were those hands. Strong, thick, calloused, firm yet gentle. Able to saw through a piece of oak, yet sensitive enough to note the tiniest imperfection in a finish. And of course, there was the obligatory missing part of a finger, the tip of his ring finger, I believe. The record of the inattentive moment, probably late in the day when you should have taken a cue from God’s creative week and simply said “Good” and called it a day, but you had to make the one last cut. But even Maloof’s stubbed finger somehow fit the grip of a craftsman.

I thought of how much our work is similar. He works in a shop; we in a study. He works with wood; we with text. His tools are saws and chisels and routers; dangerous in unskilled hands, yet marvelously sharp and precise; our tools are grammar, syntax, exegesis, history, doctrine - equally dangerous in the wrong hands but in the hands of a craftsman, they are marvelously creative instruments bringing the Word of life to people.

That brings me to this verse from the apostle Paul, nearing his death in a Roman prison, to his younger colleague and confident Timothy, who apprenticed with Paul on his second journey and now was a master craftsman in his own right. Paul writes, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a **workman** who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). That, I believe, is our

goal: to be approved, skilled workmen who have no reason to be ashamed of our craftsmanship, rightly handling the material of our faith, “the Word of truth.” That is, I believe, why are all here together.

We are here as fellow craftsman. I would imagine that some of us just completed our apprenticeship; others here are truly master craftsman. Speaking for myself, I view my first two tours through the 3 year lectionary as my apprenticeship (it takes at least 7 years to make a sushi chef!). The last seven years have brought me to the level of journeyman preacher. None of us can rest on our past work. A preacher is only as good as his next sermon.

With the goal of being workman approved, I would like to guide us through four different topics over the course of our retreat, leaving ample time for conversation among ourselves. I envision this as a gathering of craftsman. One thing I admire about craftsman is their ability to be brutally critical of each other’s work, and yet respectful and admiring at the same time. A craftsman recognizes that there is always more than one way to accomplish a particular thing. There are at least a dozen ways to make dovetail joints, for example. Every text of Scripture has dozens of serviceable sermons in them, each suited for a particular time, place, and purpose.

Since our time together is brief and concentrated, I will focus on these four topics:

1. Preaching as Theology - Scriptural and Confessional Foundations
2. Preaching as Doxology - Liturgical and Sacramental Context
3. Preaching as Rhetoric - The Poetics of Persuasion
4. Preaching as Craft - From Text to Pulpit

## Session 1: Preaching as Theology

### PUTTING TOGETHER SOME PIECES

#### DICTIONARY DEFINITION

To preach - *verb, intransitive, from the Latin praedicare*. 1. To deliver a sermon. 2. To give advice or urge a course of action, especially in a meddlesome or tedious way [The Doubleday Dictionary (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1975), 570]. Well, that’s not terribly optimistic, is it? It sounds like the adolescent being lectured on the dangers of staying out all night with her friends.

#### NEW TESTAMENT

Greek has 28 words that all are translated “preach” by our homiletically challenged English. Now there’s a language that honors the spoken word! Here is but a sampling:

κηρυσσω - to cry aloud, proclaim, declare an event, the town crier, the king's herald.  
That's pretty much the gist of it.

ἄγγελω - to herald, to deliver a message, and from it the lovely noun, ἄγγελος, angel or messenger, who may be the bearer of good news or bad, depending on who sent him and what the message is.

εὐαγγελίζομαι . the word for bringing home good news from the battlefield. "The fight is o'er, the battle won." Good news indeed! And when the good news is Jesus' victory over sin and death, that is 200-proof good news with no ice, water, or sweet Vermouth much less ginger ale or even a twist - the kind of good news that could make an Augustinian monk giddy enough to nail down 95 theses and start a Reformation.

προφητεω - not foretelling but forthtelling; speaking the Word into the present context

Preaching begins in the mouth of God, with His Word and breath. The Scriptures are the exhaled (θεοπνευστος . 2 Tim 3:16) record of God's preaching through Moses and the prophets, the apostles and evangelists. God speaks His Word in the Spirit to His people, and through His people to the world. The Scriptures reveal the God who speaks, His living Word in action.

Through the preached Word all things were made. "Let there be," and there was. Just like that. God makes something out of nothing with His Word, which is frightfully good news for the preacher on a Sunday morning. Mary conceived by the preached word of the angel. John came preaching baptism in the wilderness, preparing the people for the coming Messiah. Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom of God. Jesus is the divine Word Incarnate, the very Word through whom all things are made and in whom all things hold together, the creative and redemptive Word made flesh, dwelling among us. He is the Mystery hidden for the ages, the Lamb slain from the foundations of the world, manifest in the fullness of time, "vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16). He is the apostle of the Father, sent to reveal the Father in the Spirit, to reconcile the world to God in His death, to announce coming of the kingdom of God in His flesh.

Preaching, along with teaching and healing, are Jesus' messianic agenda. Straight on the heels of His baptism and temptation in the wilderness, Jesus came preaching the good news that in Him, in His flesh, the kingdom of God had appeared to men. In the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus, setting aside the bulletin handout for that Saturday and rolled the scroll open to the prophet Isaiah and applied the passage to himself: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19) This, Jesus declared, was fulfilled that very day in the ears of his hearers. When John the Baptizer inquired from Herod's prison whether they had the

right messiah, or should they start searching for another, Jesus again reports the preaching agenda: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news preached to them. (Luke 7:22)

Jesus sent His disciples to preach, preparing His way with the promise, "He who hears you, hears me" (Luke 10:16). He binds His words to their words, His mouth to their mouths. In His resurrection, Jesus mandated that repentance unto the forgiveness of sins be preached to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47), that the good news of His atoning death be preached to all creation (Mark 16:15). And so the apostles proclaimed Jesus as Lord and Christ, the crucified, risen, reigning Savior of the world, exhorting their hearers to trust in His completed work of salvation and be baptized in His name (Acts 2:38). They preached in the temple, the synagogue, the marketplace, and in their divine services. When scattered by persecution, they preached. When imprisoned, they preached. When put on trial before kings, they preached. Some, like Philip, were known as εὐαγγελισταί . Gospel preachers, heralds of good news (Acts 21:8).

St. Paul's apostolic ambition was to preach Christ where the name of Christ had not yet been heard, recognizing that faith comes by hearing (Rom 10:17; 15:20). He viewed his work of preaching to the Gentiles as a priestly service of the gospel of God (Rom 15:16). Confronted with religious Jews, who demanded miraculous signs and intellectual Greeks who were impressed by power points of rhetoric and wisdom, Paul preached the foolish weakness of the dead Jew on a cross - a stumbling block to the religious, and foolishness to the academics, but to the ear of faith the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:18-25).

Paul saw himself as a steward of the mysteries of God, a pot-rattling, short-order cook, dishing out the meat and potatoes of Jesus' death and resurrection (1 Cor 4:1). He was a cracked pot concealing the heavenly treasures of Christ beneath the humble clay of the preacher (2 Cor 4:7). Paul called his work an ambassadorship, God was making his reconciling appeal to the world through the word of preaching (2 Cor. 5:20). He said that he was under orders to preach the gospel, and woe to him if he didn't . Paul often refused rightful pay for his preaching, not wishing to be a burden as he proclaimed the free grace of God in Christ (1 Cor. 9:16-18). His parting exhortation to a young pastor named Timothy: "Preach the Word, in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2).

Only in the Revelation does preaching ultimately give way to praise. The Revelation is more for the eye than it is for the ear, revealing in picture-words the victory of the Lamb now hidden from our eyes. Now we see dimly, through the cataracts of sin and death. Now the cloud envelopes Jesus in His glory and buries Him under water, words, bread and wine. We may not yet look on Him. And so we must, as Kenneth Korby is so fond of saying, "stick our eyes in our ears and listen." Faith comes by hearing the preached Word of Christ (Rom 10:17).

## THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

You might say that the Reformation was really a reformation of the pulpit as much as it was a reformation of the church. Actually, to reform the pulpit is ultimately to reform the church. Luther noted that the preached Word did all the work of the reformation, even as he, Philip, and Amsdorf drank Wittenberg beer.

A few thoughts gleaned from the confessional writings:

The Lutheran Confessions acknowledge the centrality of the preached Word. Not only did the Reformation restore gospel preaching to the pulpit, it restored the preached Word to the center of theology and worship.

In the Augsburg Confession, the preaching of the Gospel flows directly from the article of justification. “To obtain such faith, God established the preaching office (*Predigtamt*), gave Gospel and Sacrament, through which He, as through means, gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith where and when He wills, in those who hear the Gospel.” (AC 5.1, German text). Behind this article lies Luther’s understanding of the external Word as the means through which the Holy Spirit works. In the seventh Schwabach article Luther speaks of the preaching office (*Predigtamt*) or “mouthed Word” (*mundlich Wort*) of the Gospel (Bekenntnisschriften, 59). The gospel is an earthy, incarnate, creaturely Word delivered from mouth to ear.

In the Smalcald articles, Luther enumerates the preaching of the Gospel first among the manifold means by which the richness of God’s grace in Jesus is revealed (SA IV). “Apart from this external Word, God will not deal with us,” Luther says, and any dealing with us apart from the external Word is of the devil (SA VIII.10-11). We don’t wait for inner voices, and we wouldn’t trust one if we heard one. In fact, we know that nothing good dwells in us, so there’s no use listening to what goes on inside our heads and hearts anyway. The Gospel comes from outside of us, an external Word from mouth to ear. The Church is a flock “sheep who hearken to the voice of their Shepherd,” as any seven year-old knows (at least the seven-year olds in Luther’s day) (SA XII.1-2).

The preached Word is the abiding content of the Sabbath. Though the form of the Sabbath as the seventh day rest is fulfilled in the death of Christ, the content of the Sabbath in the Word remains in the preached Word. “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise his Word and the preaching of the same, but deem it holy and gladly hear and learn it” (Small Catechism I, 5-6, Tappert, 342).

In the 3rd article of the Creed in the Large Catechism, Luther notes that without the preached Word, the work of Christ would remain a hidden treasure buried in your backyard unused and unenjoyed.

Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by His sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation. (LC III.38, Tappert 415)

The Word seeks faith, and it creates the faith it seeks. Faith is a creature of the Word, and therefore, so is the Church that is called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified, and kept with Jesus Christ in the one, true faith by the Spirit who works through the Word.

The creative and redemptive Word operates in divine freedom. The Spirit works “when and where He pleases in those who hear the Gospel.” This is no magical word, no incantation. The sower sows the seed, and while he eats, sleeps, or drinks Wittenberg beer, the seed does its seedy thing automatically, the sower knows not how. The when and where of faith is God’s business, the speaking and hearing of the Word, that’s the business of preaching.

Because faith is a creature of the Word, the preaching of the Gospel and the administering of the sacraments are the definitive, visible marks by which the Church can be recognized. The Church is essentially hidden from view but revealed by the Word of Baptism, Sermon, and Supper. Likewise, the true and essential unity of the Church in Christ, which is also a hidden mystery of faith, is revealed in the pure proclamation of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments according to the institution of Jesus as Augsburg article 7 confesses (AC 7 and 8).

In Article 15 of the Augsburg Confession, Melancthon states that the chief worship of God is to preach the Gospel. He carries this idea forward into Article 24 on the sacrifice of the Mass, where he states that the divine service was instituted precisely for the purpose of proclaiming the Lord’s death. Melancthon counts the proclamation of the Gospel along with faith, prayer, and thanksgiving as “eucharistic sacrifices” or “sacrifices of praise.” In this way, the Mass can rightly be called a “sacrifice,” not to atone for sin or merit forgiveness but in thankful response for Christ’s sacrifice. Preaching is the “new and pure sacrifice” of the sons of Levi (Ap 24.34), the daily sacrifice of the New Testament. In a bit of creative allegorizing, Melancthon identifies preaching with the drink offering of the Old Testament sacrifices. As the people of the Old Testament were sprinkled by the blood of the sacrifice, so now the people of the New Testament are sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb of God through the preaching of the Gospel (Ap 24.36-37).

In the 28th article of the Augsburg Confession, and also in the Tractate, preaching the Gospel is the proper use and exercise of the authority of the keys, that is, pastoral authority. The chief task of the preaching office is *preaching*. Eternal gifts and treasures

are imparted through preaching, namely the righteousness of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life, gifts which can be received by no other means (AC 28.8). To preach is to properly exercise pastoral authority with the promise of Jesus Christ, "He who hears you, hears me" (Ap 28.19).

The Formula states that preaching reveals the mystery of our election in Jesus Christ. The Book of Life is laid open to faith by the preached Word (Ep XI.13). God is present and active in preaching to make known and audible our redemption in Jesus Christ, working repentance and faith, killing and making alive, calling men to eternal salvation, drawing all to Himself, converting them, begetting them anew, and sanctifying them through His holy Word (SD II.56). The preaching and the hearing of God's Word are the Spirit's instrument in, with, and through which he wills to act efficaciously, to convert men to God, and to work in them both to will and to achieve (SD II.53).

## SUMMA

1. Preaching is the authoritative proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ from a text of Scripture for the death and life of the sinner/saint.
2. Preaching is an eschatological event (kairos) in time/place (chronos) that reveals and applies the mystery of Jesus' "once for all people" (per πάντοτε) "once for all time" death and resurrection in the here and now. "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."
3. Preaching is a manifestation of the "sacramental Word" who is Jesus Christ, the hidden Word Incarnate. Christian preaching is, of necessity, Christo-centric.
4. Since "faith comes by hearing," preaching is not an option in the church. As Melancthon noted, without the preached Word, the church will perish. For this reason, the preaching office is likewise not an option in the church, but wherever the church is gathered, there the preaching office exists and must be heard.
5. Preaching is both to the Church and for the Church. (Vertical/Horizontal) It is to the Church, Christ addressing the Church through His Office. And it is for the Church, speaking the faith once delivered on behalf of the whole Church.

## Session 2: PREACHING AS DOXOLOGY

Preaching is an act of praise (doxology). The goal is that this praise be “right praise” (orthodoxy).

Preaching is the verbalized theology of the church, making audible and applying what the church believes, teaches, and confesses from the Scriptures. The sermon articulates the faith of the church (*fides quae creditur*) for the faith of the church (*fides qua creditur*).

Preaching as doxology occurs within a doxological, liturgical framework - “liturgical preaching”

What is “liturgical preaching”?

1. Liturgical preaching has its place between font (Baptism) and altar (Lord’s Supper)

a. It flows out of Baptism and points to Baptism.  
as Creation (of water and Spirit) is the decisive “beginning” of the Scripture  
preaching is directed *primarily* to the baptized (those who have the Spirit)  
*secondarily* to the unbaptized (for whom evangelization is primary)

b. It points toward the Lord’s Supper as the culmination of table fellowship  
table fellowship consists of two things: teaching and food  
as in John 6 - to believe Jesus’ words and to eat His flesh  
(see Arthur Just’s commentary on Luke)

2. Liturgical preaching occurs within the cycles of the church year  
texts are interpreted within the context of the works of Father, Son, Spirit  
Advent/Christmas/Epiphany - incarnation, revelation, new creation  
Lent/Easter - redemption, death, resurrection, ascension  
Pentecost - sanctification, faith/life

Fast / Feast  
Promise to Fulfillment

3. Liturgical preaching is under the discipline of the Lectionary

Lectionary  
provides an interpretive matrix:  
OT / Gospel - prophesy / fulfillment (3yr)  
Epistle / Gospel - interpretation / event (1yr)  
freedom from the tyranny of the urgent  
protects the hearers against the tyranny of the preacher



topical sermons tend to be like topical anesthetics - skin deep  
(Capon)

Notice the order:

OT (prophet) / Epistle (apostles) / Gospel (evangelist) / Creed / Sermon

#### 4. Liturgical preaching unfolds the “mystery” of the Liturgy

The liturgy as “icon” - needs to be explained by one who is in the know  
Liturgical catechesis / commentary

Kyrie - the prayer of the church; faith as a beggar before God

Gloria in Excelsis - incarnation

Creed - the “triunity” of God (see also Te Deum)

Sanctus - eschatological kingdom of Christ

Agnus Dei - atoning sacrifice

Benedictus - the church as end time forerunner

Magnificat - the church as virgin mother of all believers

Nunc Dimittis - the church as the temple in which Christ is presented

5. Liturgical preaching is sacramental preaching, revealing the sacraments as the on-going miraculous “signs” of Christ. What Christ did there and then, He does for us here and now in Baptism, the preached Word, the Lord’s Supper. “Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

## Session 3: Preaching as Rhetoric - Poetics of Preaching

Connecting the Word with the hearer  
from text to people

Who are our hearers? What is the condition of their hearing?

“Postmodern”

- language deconstruction
- historic revision
- relativism
- anti-institutional (emergent church movement)

Cultural Characteristics

- tribalism (Apple vs PC; Sprint vs Verizon; rap vs classical)
- communication without communion or community (cell phone; email; mySpace)
- individualistic (iPod)
- visual/audio (instead of audio/visual) (the ubiquitous Screen)
- commitment phobic (marriage, congregation)
- historically ignorant (Da Vinci Code)
- brains are rewired (Leonard Sweet)
- critics of the Word instead of hearers
- everyone an expert (internet theology)

Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric is an attempt to systematically describe civic rhetoric as a human art or skill (techne). He identifies three different types of rhetorical proof:

- ethos: character and credibility of the speaker
- pathos: speaking to the heart
- logos: speaking to the head

Today's preaching must be:

- Textual
- Contextual
- Relational
- Community-oriented
- Didactic
- Apologetic (today more than ever; think Easter here! DaVinci Code)
- Sacramental
- Dialogical (rhetorically - use of questions)
- Vivid, immediate
- Authoritative not Institutional (Thus says the Lord...)

Personal

Tough Minded (logos) and Tender Hearted (pathos)

What goes on in preaching?

four types of discourse (David Schmidt - Liturgical Preaching, 29-30)

textual exposition

theological confession

evangelical proclamation (Law/Gospel)

hearer depiction / identification

Rhetorical Tools - for a complete list, see <http://www.virtualsalt.com/rhetoric.htm>

repetition ("I had a dream")

word play

puns

alliteration (careful here; don't get cute)

acrostic (somewhat overused; can be pedantic)

rhyming

image play

metaphor

bricolage

metaphor

analogy

typology (historic analogy)

Choice of person (first/second/third)

first person - Romans 7 (very powerful); can be egocentric

2nd person - "you" and "you all"

great in the Gospel ("for you")

very risky in the Law ("you are the man!")

3rd person - safe but generic

rhetorical questions (Some will ask....)

rhetorical quotations (Some will say...)

misdirection - Amos ("For three sins of Edom, and for four...")

humor - what is the place of humor in preaching?

Writing for the Ear

poetic (rhyme and rhythm of a sentence)

sentence length / phraseology

image-oriented (painting verbal pictures)

playful (fatherly speech; father at the thanksgiving table)

nickle words, five-dollar concepts (see the Gospel of John)

The challenge of dogmatic language - a tension

can't afford to lose the great biblical terms

can't afford to leave them outside the vernacular

ANALOGY is a powerful ally here (All theology is analogy - see Capon "Hunting the Divine Fox")

## VERBAL POTHOLES - THINGS THAT CAUSE THE BRAIN TO SPRAIN

information overload (one main point; 3 or 4 subsidiary points)

jargon

cliches (seek new ways to say old things)

logical fallacies

ad hominum

straw man

post hoc ergo propter hoc (false cause)

false analogy

irrelevencies

## Session 4 - Preaching as Craft - From Text to Pulpit

### The challenge of letting the text speak

- the imposition of outlines
- pretexts instead of texts and contexts
  - “goal-oriented” vs Jesus-oriented
- purpose driven vs corpus driven
- communion vs communication

### Problems with PowerPoint

- speaker driven rather than hearer driven
- inflexible; you are committed to your power points
- visual crutches for speaker and hearer
- a picture is worth 1000 words, except when it comes to faith

### Law / Gospel

- a paradoxical tension, not a categorical division
- not Law “but” Gospel; not Law “and” Gospel
- death and life not good and evil
- “He kills and He makes alive”
- not the rehab of the sinner but the death of the sinner
- the church as hospice (not hospital - in a hospital you get better)
- cultivate a “passion for the Passion” (Capon)

### Seeking the “Jesus Point” of the text (Norman Nagel)

- what of Jesus is this text trying to deliver?
- what gets in the way of the delivery of Jesus? (sin diagnosis, Law)

### Study

- approach a sermon as an iconographer writing an icon
- prayer, study, ongoing conversation

living with the text; brooding like the Spirit hovering over the Deep

### Concordances

- the handbook of the Holy Spirit
- connecting the images (water, lamb, blood, etc)

### Word books

- very helpful; it’s all in the words

### Use commentaries with caution

- many written by Reformed; non-sacramental
- tend to turn sermons into lectures