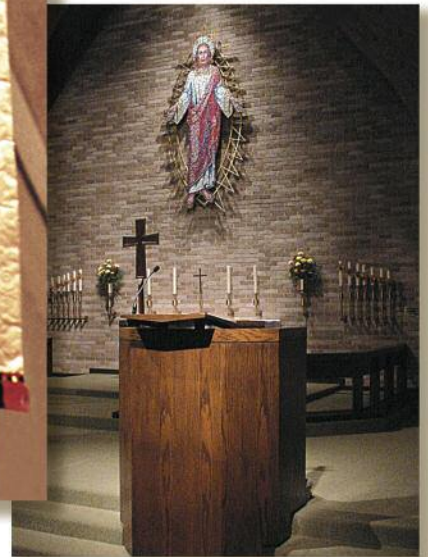
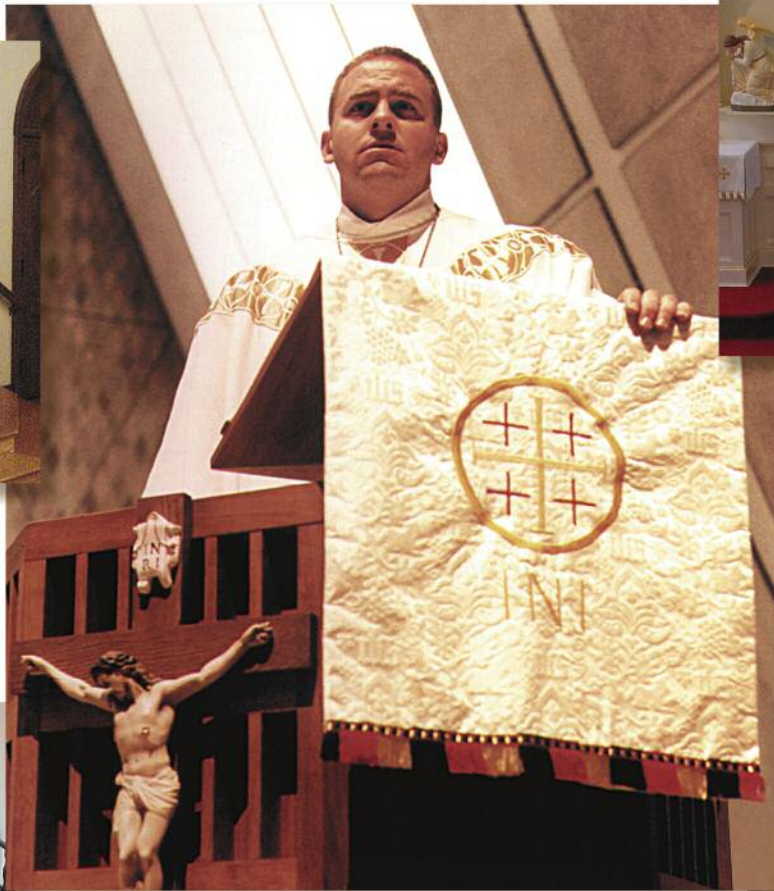


For the

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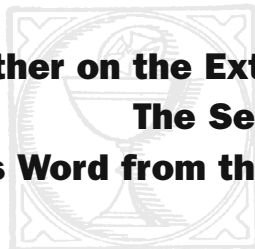


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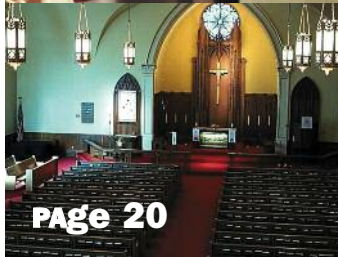
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### 7 **The Sermon Delivers the Goods** By the Rev. Dr. Ronald R. Feuerhahn, Associate Professor of Historical Theology, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.

There is something very special about sermons and, for that matter, about those who speak them—preachers. I say that not because I’m a preacher, for it has nothing to do with me. Rather it is the Office of Preacher that is special. “As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’” (St. Paul, Rom. 10:15 quoting Is. 52:7).

### 10 **The Gift of His Word from the Mouth of My Shepherd** By Deaconess Natalie Watt, Acquisitions Assistant, Walther Library, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

A good sermon comes from a pastor who knows that preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacrament are his vocation and that this, more than anything else, is what he is called by God to do for these people in this congregation. There are times when it is easy for both a pastor and a congregation to forget this understanding of vocation and that a key element of it is in the preaching of the sermon.

### 20 **In the Field** By Monica Robins

Featuring the Rev. Timothy J. Mech, Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Sheboygan, Wis.

## For the **LIFE** of the **WORLD**

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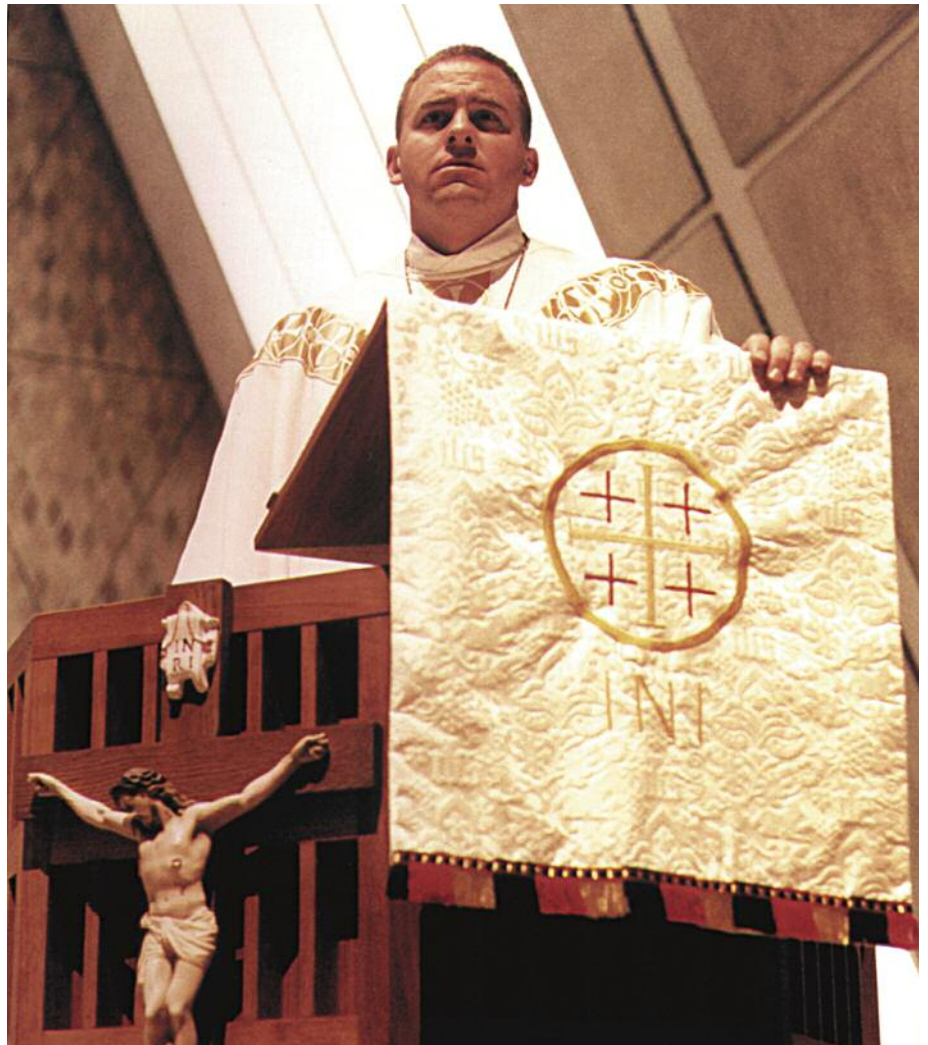
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# Luther External Word

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**Along with the sacraments, preaching of God's Word is a sure mark that His Church—real, spiritually-alive Christian people—is present. This preaching is altogether external, outside us. And as Luther understood and himself preached, the fact that the Word is external has significance that is eternal.**

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“**W**e’re just not being fed,” the twenty-something man and woman shrugged, explaining to their pastor why they were leaving to join a charismatic fellowship nearby. Their sincere smiles and non-chalance made very clear that they didn’t mean it personally. As if anything could be *more* personal to a preacher! And yet, in a way even this couple didn’t understand it really was about something quite outside the pastor himself.

# on the of Preaching

By the Rev. Dr. Carl C. Fickenscher II

“The Lutheran church down there is dead,” a member told another pastor as he asked for a release. He and his family had moved to a small town and found a lot more action for their teenaged son and daughter at the Methodist church.

But was the Lutheran congregation really dead?

A heart “strangely warmed”—or even pulsating wildly with the emotion of “Spirit-filled renewal.” An active youth group. Felt needs being met. Five-step formulas for happier marriage. More people than pews. Sure signs of a lively church?

Martin Luther would direct us to different signs, different marks of a church that’s alive. What’s more, he would warn us against placing confidence in any signs that are purely human or sensed only in our own hearts. The marks of the church on which we can rely, the infallible marks, are quite outside ourselves and are not dependent on any individuals.

The chief among these Luther identifies in his treatise, *On the Councils and the Church*: “Now, wherever you hear or see the word preached, . . . do not doubt that the true [holy Catholic Church], ‘a Christian holy people’ must be there. . . . And even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there” (*Luther’s Works* 41:150). Along with the sacraments, preaching of God’s Word is a sure mark that His Church—real, spiritually-alive Christian people—is present. This preaching is altogether external, outside us. And as Luther understood and himself preached, the fact that the Word is external has significance that is eternal.

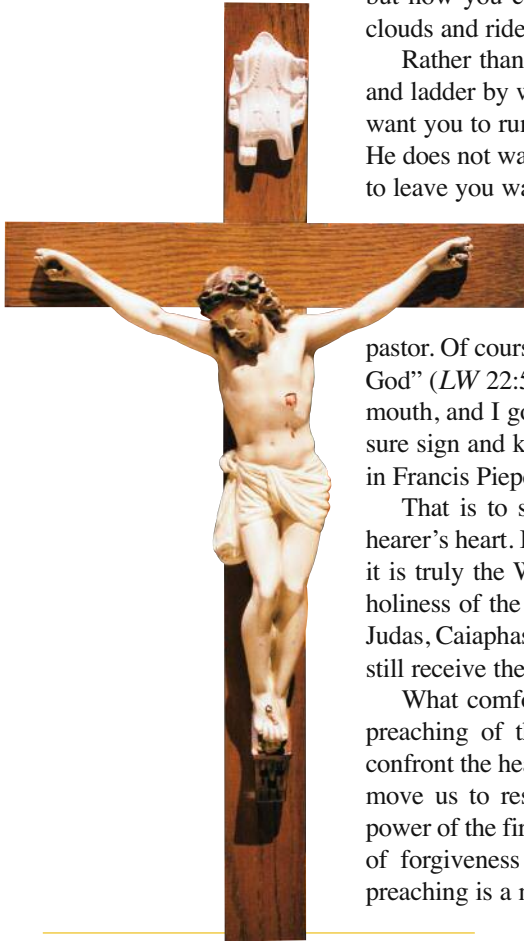
Now, of course, nearly all church-goers would say that preaching is important. Preaching, they would agree, is vital to sustaining the faith and life of the congregation. But how does preaching do that?

A common understanding is that preaching essentially confronts the hearer with information. The hearer is told, ideally, the facts about Christ as Savior. (Less than ideally, those steps toward happier marriage!) Once the information is laid out, however cleverly and persuasively it may have been packaged, the Word has done all it can do. Here endeth the sermon.

Next, according to this understanding, and as a totally separate operation, the hearer must do something with the Word: believe it, reject it, act on it. To be sure, the Holy Spirit aids him in this, but, they say, the Spirit does not come through the Word; He comes directly into the heart, without any means. At least He *may* come. Or He may not. The hearer can only guess, based on how he feels.

In this understanding, then, the efficacy of preaching is obviously speculative, and the tendency is to seek validation in emotion. “If I feel stronger in my faith, it must have been a good sermon.” “If I feel motivated to action, the Holy Spirit must have been moving among us.” Some in Luther’s day devised the slogan, “Spirit! Spirit! The Spirit must do it!” (*LW* 41:170).

But what if the Spirit didn’t seem to be doing it? What if one didn’t feel moved or assured or comforted? How uncertain must it always be to look for assurance inside oneself?! *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, Luther writes, “Do you not see here the devil, the enemy of God’s order? With all his mouthing of the words, ‘Spirit, Spirit, Spirit,’ he tears down the bridge, the path, the ladder, and all the means by which the



Spirit might come to you. . . . He wants to teach you not how the Spirit comes to you but how you come to the Spirit. They would have you learn how to journey on the clouds and ride the wind” (LW 40:147).

Rather than clouds to stand on, Luther pointed to the sure-footing of bridge, path, and ladder by which the Holy Spirit has in fact chosen to come to us: “Christ does not want you to run to and fro in search of the Spirit. . . . He binds us solely to His Word. He does not want to see the Holy Spirit divorced from His Word. . . . He does not want to leave you wandering aimlessly about; He wants you to hear His Word. He declares: “The words which I speak are spiritual”” (LW 23:173).

Indeed, Luther emphasized, when the pastor preaches the truth of Scripture, “To be sure, I do hear a sermon; however I am wont to ask: ‘Who is speaking?’ The pastor? By no means! You do not hear the pastor. Of course, the voice is his, but the words he employs are really spoken to me by God” (LW 22:528). “God has said: When the Word of Christ is preached, I am in your mouth, and I go with the Word through your ears into your heart. So, then, we have a sure sign and know that when the Gospel is preached, God is present” (Luther quoted in Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:140).

That is to say, the Word is external. It is not an inner voice of the Spirit in the hearer’s heart. It comes from outside her. It enters through her ears. What’s more, when it is truly the Word of Scripture, it is not even her pastor’s word. It is Christ’s. “The holiness of the Word and the purity of doctrine are powerful and sure, so that even if Judas, Caiaphas, Pilate, the pope, Harry, or the devil himself preached it, . . . they would still receive the true, pure Word” (LW 41:218).

What comfort, what security that brings! Being completely outside ourselves, the preaching of the Word leaves no speculation to us. The sermon does not simply confront the hearer with information, hoping that the Holy Spirit will happen along and move us to response. Because Christ Himself is speaking, the Word brings all the power of the first words, “Let there be light.” As then, when God speaks, it is so. Words of forgiveness truly forgive. Promises of life actually give heaven. The Word of preaching is a means of grace; it actually delivers what it offers.

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**The Word of preaching is a means of grace; it actually delivers what it offers. We needn’t look inside ourselves and question whether we really believe. Forgiveness, life, salvation are a reality—already fully independent of our response—because they are present in the Word.**

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Yes, to receive the blessings requires faith, but because the promises are objective, outside ourselves, we then have something we can believe in. We needn’t look inside ourselves and question whether we really believe. Forgiveness, life, salvation are a reality—already fully independent of our response—because they are present in the Word. And that objective, external certainty, then, becomes the means by which the Holy Spirit creates faith to receive: “Write in large letters merely this text: ‘which shall believe on Me through their Word.’ . . . This word ‘believe,’ which pertains alone to the heart and the inner man, and ‘through their Word’ belong together and make an inner man. . . . Christ says that they shall believe, that is, become inner or spiritual people, through the Word of the Apostles” (Luther quoted in Pieper 3:187).

A gathering of souls that regularly hears this Word—there is the church. It is alive. And without guessing about feelings, emotions inside those souls, looking outside instead to the preaching of the external Word, we can be sure they are being fed the bread of life.

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