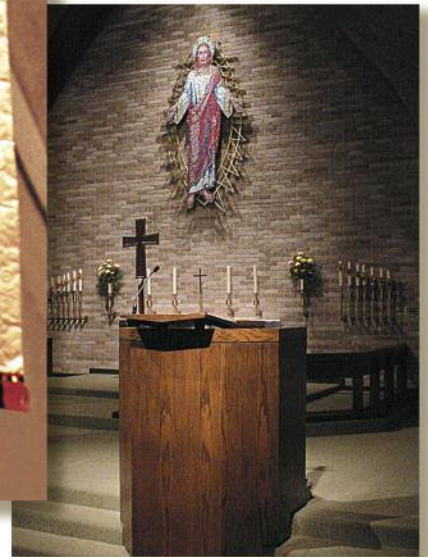
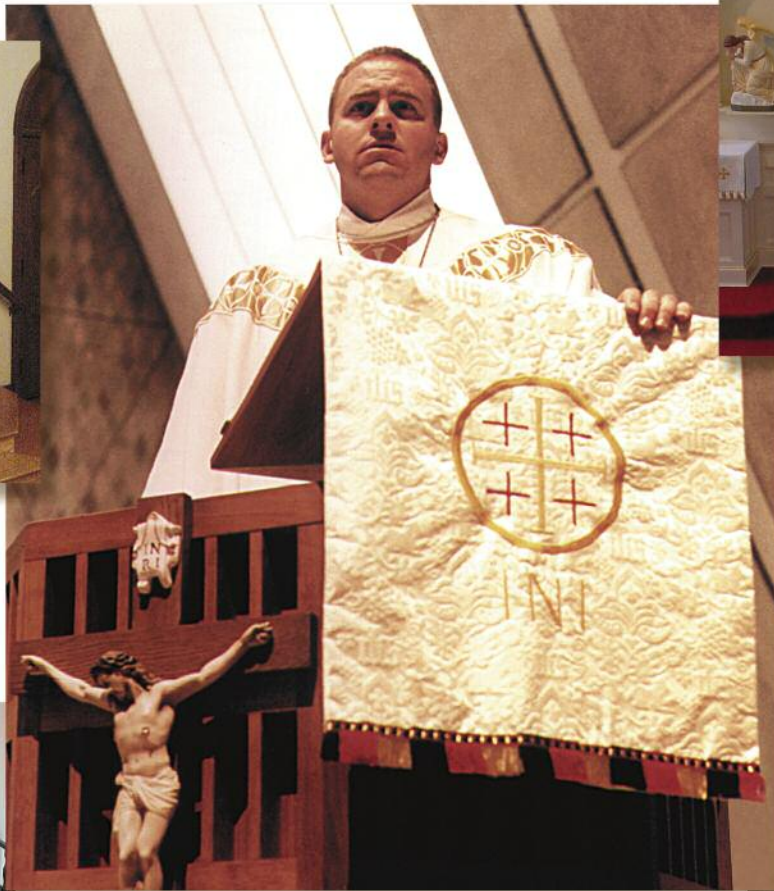


For the

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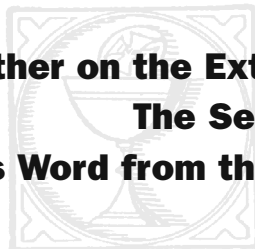


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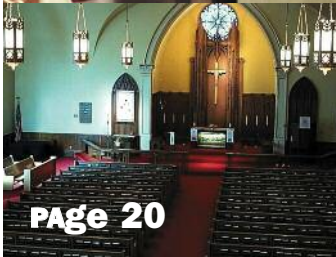
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A heart “strangely warmed”—or even pulsating wildly with the emotion of “Spirit-filled renewal.” An active youth group. Felt needs being met. Five-step formulas for happier marriage. More people than pews. Sure signs of a lively church? Martin Luther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

### 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.

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

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There is an old saying that goes something like “you don’t know what you have until it’s gone.” This came true when I was in a situation where the privilege of attending a “traditional” Lutheran church service was not available. From 1991-1994 I did volunteer mission work in Taipei, Taiwan. This old adage was true in two ways: first, the service, including the preaching, was in Chinese; and second, the church was vacant and an ordained pastor was available only about once a month to preach the sermon and administer the Sacrament. While the time and the experiences in Taiwan were valuable, even life-changing, it was with joy that I returned to the United States and to a church where there was a sermon every week and where I did not have to struggle to understand it.

Over the last seven years I have had the privilege of attending a number of different Lutheran churches—while I was preparing for certification as a deaconess, and then in the first two calls I have had the honor of serving. The following paragraphs contain thoughts about what makes a “good” sermon. These could be said by anyone sitting in the pew, both the laity

# The Gift of from the Mouth of My

and church workers, but are especially relevant to me as a deaconess because this is where a pastor ministers to me each and every Sunday. It is through his preaching that the pastor feeds and nourishes me, that I may in turn assist and support him in the day-to-day activities of the church by serving those in the congregation.

First and foremost, 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. “To obtain such faith, God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments” (AC V, Tappert). This may seem a strange statement with which to begin, but 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. Preparing a sermon, I am quite sure, is very hard work, and the schedule of a pastor is, more often than not, very full and quite hectic. Yet a good sermon requires preparation, and I would hope that my pastor would take the time to do this. After all, the divine service—hearing the Word and receiving the Sacrament—is the one place where I am assured of getting fed that spiritual food that brings life.

What this understanding leads to is a passion for the Gospel. Do not misunderstand this, “passion” does not mean that every Sunday morning there is an entertaining show from the pulpit. It does mean that the pastor understands that his vocation brings about life changes in these people whom God has given him. “Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who



works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel” (AC V). This passion comes through to those of us sitting in the pews week after week listening to what this pastor has to say and as we carry this into each of our respective vocations. This passion comes through to me as a deaconess, because I see the pastor taking the time to prepare by thoroughly studying the texts in the original languages, by reading commentaries to assess the various ways the texts have been interpreted, by discussing the meaning of the texts with his brothers, by applying the rigorous training in theology he received at the seminary, and most importantly, by spending the entire week preparing.

The second aspect of a good sermon concerns the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. In our Lutheran Confessions, the first statement of the “affirmative theses” regarding Law and Gospel is: “We believe, teach, and confess that the distinction between Law and Gospel is an especially glorious light that is to be maintained with great diligence in the church so that, according to St. Paul’s admonition, the Word of God may be divided rightly” (FC V). Law and Gospel are not only vital to a

good sermon but also need to be crystal clear; it should be easy for anyone to think, “Pastor’s words are of the Law here,” or “Pastor is preaching the Gospel here.” But even more than this, these words of the Law need to be directed to me because my self-righteousness must be thwarted each and every week. The Law is supposed to cut the heart—I do not want the pastor to tiptoe around this task. Similarly, the Gospel needs to be for me. This does not mean to proclaim the Gospel in some abstract way that no one can understand, nor does it mean simply to give a

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# Of His Word Shepherd

By Deaconess Natalie Watt

“canned” Gospel statement in every sermon, and it certainly does not mean a falsely emotional or sentimental Gospel. It means, as Matthias Loy wrote in *The Gospel Shows the Father’s Grace* (TLH, 297, verses 2, 3, 5),

“It sets the lamb before our eyes,  
Who made th’ atoning sacrifice,  
And calls the souls with guilt opprest  
To come and find eternal rest.

It brings the Savior’s righteousness  
Our souls to robe in royal dress;  
From all our guilt it brings release  
And gives the troubled conscience peace.  
It bears to all the tidings glad  
And bids their hearts no more be sad;  
The heavy-laden souls it cheers  
And banishes their guilty fears.”

Properly distinguishing and applying Law and Gospel is not an easy task. In the Deaconess Program, heavy emphasis is laid upon this task. It is a very basic and foundational principle of how deaconesses are trained. As the pastor preaches Law and Gospel in every sermon, he is not only convicting me with the Law and comforting me with the Gospel, he is teaching me to properly apply it as I serve those in that congregation.

This leads to the third aspect: the text. I want to hear the context and an explanation of what was happening, what the people were doing, what they might have been thinking, or how their culture and their understanding of religion influenced their actions. On a more practical note, my ears really perk up when a text that I have heard for years is taught in a different way, a new nuance of it is brought out, or something that was “old” is now seemingly “new.” It is wonderful when the Gospel reading is brought together with the Old Testament and the Epistle, and when there is an explanation of why these are the readings for that particular Sunday of the church year or festival.

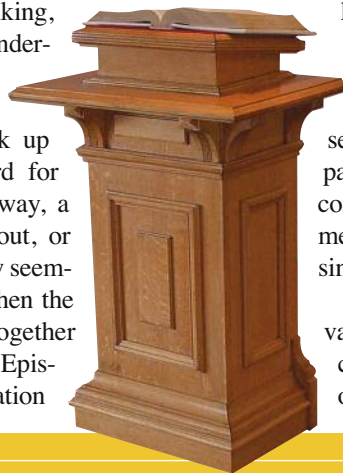
A key part of a good sermon is when the text is tied to the Catechism, as this is what all members of the church need to

know and to study. Luther states, “Let all Christians exercise themselves in the Catechism daily, and constantly put it into practice, guarding themselves with the greatest care and diligence against the poisonous infection of such security or vanity. Let them continue to read and teach, to learn and meditate and ponder” (Large Catechism, Martin Luther’s Preface, 19). As a deaconess, the Catechism is one of the basic tools I use to assist and support the pastor through my service in the congregation. By including it and teaching it in the sermon, the pastor is helping me to following Luther’s admonition.

Finally, what I enjoy most of all is getting something out of the sermon that I can take home with me. There are men and women in the pews who can hear a sermon and recite it nearly verbatim later in the week, but most of us cannot do that. What I need to hear repeated are the key doctrinal concepts, so I can think about them later and discuss them with my family, friends, and other church members. And when all of this is made applicable to my life, to events in the world, our country, the community, and the church, then I am more apt to remember the key concepts.

More importantly, as a deaconess, I can then share these concepts with the congregation members, reminding them of what the pastor said in his sermon. All the service I perform as a deaconess, whether it is teaching the women, training the Sunday school teachers, visiting the sick or homebound, or just talking with people about their lives, is to assist and support the Office of the Holy Ministry, and what better way to do this than by pointing people to the pastor’s very own words in the sermon. I can remind them of what their pastor has already said to them as they come to me with physical, emotional, and mental pains, and, most of all, hurting from sin.

In summary, a “good” sermon captivates me and I forget that I am a deaconess. Rather, I am reminded over and over that I am a child of God, receiving the gift of His Word from the mouth of my shepherd.



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