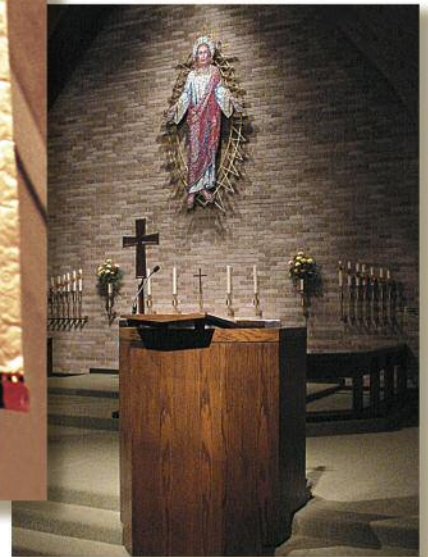
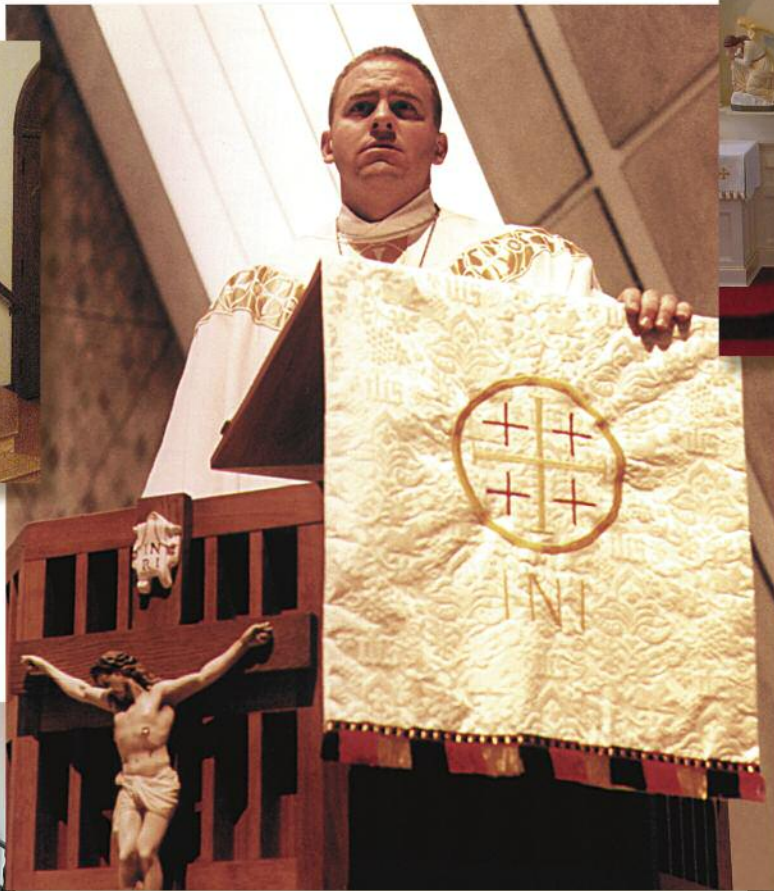


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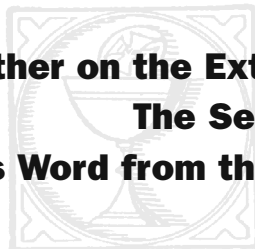


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A heart “strangely warmed”—or even pulsating wildly with the emotion of “Spirit-filled renewal.” An active youth group. Felt needs being met. Five-step formulas for happier marriage. More people than pews. Sure signs of a lively church? Martin Luther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

20 **In the Field** By Monica Robins

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

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Luther included the church in the historical work of Christ. That means that the Word proclaimed, used, and distributed today is part of the historical work of Christ. The historical acts of Christ's life and death "are the beginning of a chain reaction which included God's works among his people today," the works of which you are instruments. Thus the sermon is "nothing less than redemptive history revealed in the Word."



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]. Martin Luther called it the greatest of all offices¹

The Gospels tell us that the ministry of John the Baptist and of our Lord were ministries of preaching: the Baptizer (Matt. 3:1; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) and Jesus (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14; cf. Luke 4:21), after His baptism and temptation, "began to preach."

"The Sermon Delivers the Goods"

By the Rev. Dr. Ronald R. Feuerhahn

In the message of John and Jesus, God was speaking. The Gospel of John identifies Jesus Himself as the very Word of God, the “Word (Logos) was God” (John 1:1). We learn already from the Old Testament, from Genesis Chapter 1 in fact, that the Word of God is creative—“it does what it says”;² God said “Let there be . . .” and there was (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, etc.). When the LORD speaks, things happen (Is. 9:8; 24:3). Later we read that the “Word of the LORD came” to the prophets (Jer. 1:2; Dan. 9:2; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Zep. 1:1; Hag. 1:1, 3; Zech. 1:1, 7; Mal. 1:1).

It is for this reason that Martin Luther gave primacy to the Word of God. In a letter to his friend Nicholas Hausmann, for instance, there is a litany-like repetition: “only with the Word . . . with the Word . . . with the Word . . . only with the Word . . . by the Word.”³ For Luther, the Word of God took various forms; more specifically, the Word of God is Christ, it is Scripture. But, and this may surprise some, it is also the preached Word, the sermon. Therefore, when Luther spoke of the Word of God, he described it in three forms:

1. Christ, the Word (logos?) of God,
2. Scripture, the other “incarnation” of the Word,⁴
3. Preaching, the living Word.

It is the latter of these that is often either not considered or is doubted in our day. However, this view of the proclaimed Word is central to Luther’s understanding of the Word and of the means of grace in general. This is clear, for instance, in the *Schwabach Articles* of 1529, one of the background documents to the *Augsburg Confession*.

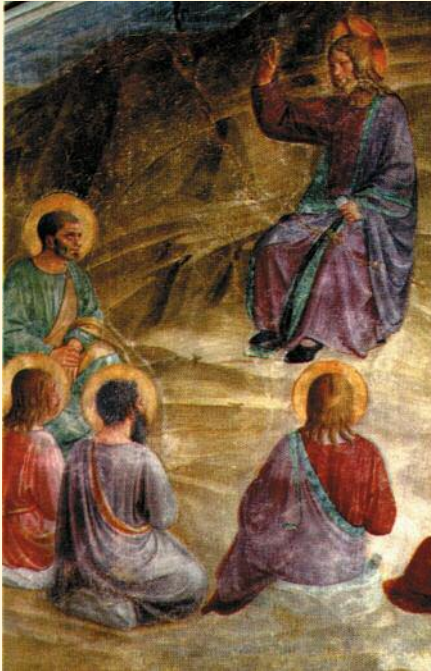
To obtain this faith, or to bestow it upon us men God has instituted the ministry, or the oral word, viz., the Gospel, by which He causes this faith and its power, use and fruit to be proclaimed, and through the same, as a means, bestows faith by His Holy Spirit, as and where He will . . .⁵

“In all its earthly lowliness, the Word brings God to man.”⁶ That includes the preached Word.

Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ or believe in him and have him for our Lord except as it is offered to us by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel.⁷

Luther included the church in the historical work of Christ. That means that the Word proclaimed, used and distributed today is part of the historical work of Christ. The historical acts of Christ’s life and death “are the beginning of a chain reaction which included God’s works among his people today,” the works of which you are instruments.⁸ Thus the sermon is “nothing less than redemptive history revealed in the Word.”⁹ In fact, according to Vilmos Vajta, Luther “insisted that the oral proclamation or preaching is the proper form of the Word.”¹⁰ The sermon was Christ’s continued “‘advent,’ his coming to every generation of men, the means by which he establishes fellowship with his own.”¹¹

Was it perhaps presumptuous of Luther to claim that the word preached by the preacher was nothing less than the Word of God? Perhaps what we should ask first is: Is that really what Luther said? He answers: “I have often said that the office of preaching is not ours but God’s. But whatever is God’s, that we do not do ourselves; but He does it Himself, through the Word and the office, as His own gift and business.”¹² And elsewhere he declared: “Furthermore, Christ Himself is present when I preach.”¹³ In our confessions we have similar statements: Philip Melanchthon stated that God (the Holy Spirit) is present in this ministry (AC V); the office is carried out by divine authority. Later he spoke of its authority.



The sermon is more than talking about the acts of God. It is God’s revelatory activity. Preaching isn’t a communication of information, but it is a sacramental action in which Christ is at work, God is at work.

It is universally acknowledged, even by our opponents, that this power is shared by divine right by all who preside in the churches, whether they are called pastors, presbyters or bishops (Treatise 61, Kolb/Wengert 340).

To Luther, the sermon is more than talking about the acts of God. It is God's revelatory activity.¹⁴ Hermann Sasse observed "that preaching isn't a communication of information, but it is a sacramental action in which Christ is at work, God is at work."¹⁵ The ministry, Luther asserted, "is Christ's continued activity on earth. In the pulpit he speaks through the mouth of the preacher."¹⁶ This office is essential, "for Christ imparts the Word to men, not vertically from above, but rather through the medium of human tongues and voices."¹⁷ This Word of God both forgives and judges. It transforms the "then" into a "now."¹⁸

The title of this article is perhaps misleading, "The Sermon Delivers the Goods." We should rather say that the sermon delivers (gives the gift of) the "Good News," the very forgiveness of sins and salvation. What an event, what a blessed Word from God we hear! It is awesome, is it not, that a preacher, a man, stands as an instrument of God Himself to speak God's own words to us. "For from this we hear what the preaching office is, namely, an office of the Holy Spirit. Even if it is men who preach, baptize, forgive sins, yet the Holy Spirit is preaching and baptizing, whose work and office it is."¹⁹

The Rev. Dr. Feuerhahn is Associate Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.

Notes:

1 *AE* 40:36 - Concerning the Ministry, Late 1523. Elsewhere: "It is an excellent office and word which he here commits to the disciples, and for this reason one should not consider it a slight thing." Excerpt from the Sermon on Easter Tuesday, March 30, 1529, Weimar Edition [hereafter, WA], Volume 28, p. 466, trans. by Charles Schultz.

2 Luther: "What God says, He can also do." WA 54, 257.

3 *AE*, 48:401.10-23; cf. 402.

4 see Olav Valen-Sendstad, *The Word That Can Never Die*, trans. by Norman A. Madson, Sr., & Ahlert H. Strand, St. Louis, Concordia, 1966, esp. Chapter 3, "The View of Christ and of Scripture," 29-53.

5 Article VII, in M. Reu, *The Augsburg Confession, A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction*, Chicago: Wartburg, 1930, *42 (also reprinted in the Concordia Heritage Series).

6 Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship an Interpretation*, Philadelphia, Muhlenberg, 1958, 69.

7 Luther, WA 30I, 188. Cf. 26, 296, quoted in Vajta, 71.

8 Vajta, 71f.

9 Vajta, 72 with ref. to WA 29, 200.

10 Vajta, 77. He supports this with appeals to Luther's references that originally the Gospel was not a book but a sermon (WA 10I, 1, 17; 10I, 1, 626; 12, 259) and the church not a *Federhaus* (Quill house), but a *Mundhaus* (mouth house) (WA 10I, 1, 627; 10I, 1, 14; 7, 526). This may be a Barthian emphasis, but not in itself a misinterpretation of Luther or of the Scriptures. Vajta at least goes on to indicate that the sermon is not to be elevated about the Scriptures.

11 Vajta, 78.

12 "The Sermon on the Mount," *AE* 21:119. A later edition (1534) has "creature" for "business."

13 Sermon on John 8:28, *AE*, 23:386f.

14 Vajta, 17.

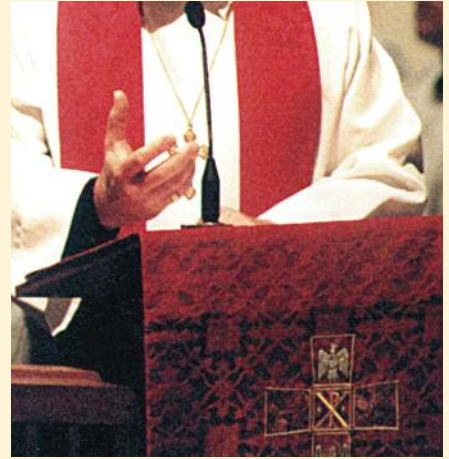
15 John Kleinig in Interview (Dec 13, 1989).

16 WA, 20,350.

17 Vajta, 113.

18 Vajta, 70.

19 WA, 28, 479, trans. by Charles Schultz.



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