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The Word of the Lord Came  
ALTON F. WEDEL

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# The Word of the Lord Came!

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**T**he Word of the Lord came! This is why I am here, and this is why you are there. If these Wenchel lectures were conceived and born in Dr. Wenchel's kindness and in his concern for more effective preaching, this is where we must begin—the Word of the Lord came!

This is not a sensational announcement. It isn't even new. The men who have preceded me as Wenchel lecturers lacked the quality of mercy. They have raked the fields so thoroughly that there is nothing left to glean. But these lectureships were not intended to make sensational discoveries. Neither were they meant as revelations of new secrets for successful parsons and effective preachers. They were simply meant to be the witness of a soldier summoned back from battle to the validity of our involvement in this war against a vicious enemy, and his plea to young recruits for service not to bug out. The Word of the Lord came! It has drafted you. And that's a fact.

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## IT IS THE WORD OF THE LORD!

### *No Proof*

I cannot prove it—nor can you. We have no evidence to demonstrate conclusively to every questioning mind that God has ever spoken. We cannot even prove the fact of God. We cannot prove that a historic Jesus, Carpenter from Nazareth, rose from death according to the Scriptures. We cannot prove that Christ is Lord and that He has His hands on the controls of history. We cannot prove that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life and that because He lives, we, too, shall conquer death and live. How can preaching be effective if we have no proof for what we preach?

We have not been asked to prove our preaching. We would have to look ridiculous, to say the least, if on this campus we established research laboratories complete with all the tools of chemistry and physics, biochemistry and astrophysics, to search out God and penetrate the mysteries of His nature and provide the answers to the questions of a skeptic world. We have to look ridiculous when as preachers we become attorneys with exhibits A, B, C, and D in the case for Jesus Christ and expect the congregation like a jury to listen to our evidence and swallow it.

Thomas Carlyle tells the story of a country boy invited to a formal dinner in the company of cultured guests, refined and dignified, who got a piece of hot potato in his mouth. With something of a sudden start and stop he quickly took the hot po-

tato from his mouth with his fingers and laid it on his plate again. In the embarrassed atmosphere that quickly spread around the room he said, "You know what? Some fools would have swallowed that!" The Word of the Lord came—not like a system of convincing proof to silence unbelief nor like a hot potato that we have to swallow, but as a power that impels to faith regardless of the proof. We affirm. We do not prove. We proclaim. We do not theorize. For the Kingdom is a venture not in proof but in faith—the most exciting venture that can possibly consume your life. Be prepared for that, and be prepared to get excited.

But can preaching be exciting? Can preaching be effective? Can we expect much from the sermon as we use it in our worship? Obviously not all the preaching that a preacher does is in sermonic form complete with pulpit spotlights properly adjusted to eliminate the "grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt and ominous bird of yore" appearance that Edgar Allen Poe saw in "The Raven." Much of it is done in eyeball confrontation, man to man, and sometimes in dead silence, although dead silence is an art few preachers master. Not every preacher has the benefit of Gothic architecture and stained glass windows and a hand-carved pulpit. For two years I preached in dance halls, where the whisky odor from the night before provided incense fragrance and where crepe streamers overhead helped us to lift our eyes heavenward. Some who attended worship had been there the night before, and the ringing in their ears must have sounded like the bells of Westminster Cathedral. The contrast of the night before and morning after yielded the most effective application. But can sermonic preach-

ing stand inspection at a time when we have more effective ways of doing things? How effective can we be in communicating God's Good News if we depend on preaching? Will changing forms and structures discredit and discard the sermon as an instrument of proclamation? Or are we stuck with it?

Our enlightened age confirms St. Paul's suspicion that preaching is a lot of foolishness. There is no doubt about it, nor is there any doubt about it that a lot of preaching is no more than foolishness, ridden with cliches, couched in archaic phrases, socked in by a dogmatic fog, delivered with a sad and sober-faced expression, and spoken past the needs of men in 1967. We may acknowledge that the Lord's Word came, but if it did, we are content to leave it that way—in the aorist, a once-for-all completed action. It comes no more, and certainly not by the sermon. The pulpit is no competition to that barrage of exhortations and verbal stimuli of our mass media. For many in our day, the Sunday bulletin is more effective than the Sunday sermon and even packs a greater punch than many sermons. To meet our friends at church, the neatly dressed and polished kind, is more to be expected than to meet the Christ. We can tolerate the sermon, for it provides our weekly shower bath of words that gives the clean, the really clean, sensation, and the preacher in his glow of *Heiligkeit* and in his grave and stern decorum and in his somber intonation of the magic phrases from the "upper story of the universe" reminds us wistfully of all that might have been. Sometimes in a desperate attempt at being relevant he grabs the war in Vietnam by the hair, or the new morality, or the social inequalities of our

society, and it's interesting to watch the way he fires up about it. But for the life of me, what was it that he said?

We tolerate it, but we do not expect much from it. We used to criticize the pulpit because the preacher gave dogmatic answers to our questions—like that hot potato that some folks would have swallowed. And there is still a pulpit here and there that provides dogmatic answers complete with page and question number in the '43 edition of the Catechism. And targets no one aims at anymore are set on fence posts and shot down with Bible passages. But generally the pulpit role has changed from one of giving answers to one of raising questions, loosening up the ends that we had nearly tied in confirmation class, and we are left to hang on those loose ends. The pulpit has no answers anymore—it only tries to help us see the problem and the radical predicament of our humanity. First National Bank of Minneapolis advertises as The Answer Bank today, and in its full page ad it lists a hundred elements of heaven—the American variety—that it provides with your cooperation and at a whopping 5 percent. That's language that we understand. The pulpit stands on the periphery of life, the admired remnant of a fading culture, but simply out of touch, and simply not significant. No one pays attention to its sleepy Sunday morning essays on happiness and peace of mind.

### *Preparing to Be Fossils?*

As thinking seminarians—are there any other kind?—you must be aware that in preparing for a ministry of preaching you are preparing for a calling that the modern world has fossilized. Why should you spend

years of preparation for the art of being fossils? In this post-Christian era the obituary of the parish, the usual platform for our preaching, has been read by self-styled professional mourners, and now and then and here and there this creaking, time-worn institution has already been committed, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust with little hope of resurrection. To verbalize the Gospel is to hear the charge of "Jesus talk." To say that the ancient Word is relevant to modern man is to be confronted by a long, blank stare of disbelief. And to hear a preacher say that he needs 20 hours in a week for sermon preparation is to impel a shoulder shrug that counters, "What a foolish waste of time when all those fish are waiting for the bait in Minnetonka." How did we get into this? Why are we here? Where do we go from here?

We are not the first to ask the questions. Neither will we be the last. We have good company—some of it is bearded, as we thought—men like Jeremiah, Amos, and Hosea, or across a couple of centuries Saints Paul and Peter. Luther, too, is in the company, and so is every man who dares to preach today. The members of your faculty must be included, for I know they have to wonder in a weaker moment—and we cannot deny them weaker moments—why life should be consumed in training preachers, particularly at the price we pay them. Our questions are intense today. If we sometimes question our involvement in the war in Vietnam, certainly we also question our involvement in the warfare of the Spirit, and whether we can be effective or significant in stemming tides of lawlessness. Our questions spell uncertainty, and our uncertainty, timidity. We are being shot

at by an arsenal of paperbacks, and we feel threatened, hopeless, gloomy, grim. In my brief two and twenty years, I have never known the church, with special reference to The Lutheran Church — All Synods, to seem as threatened as it is today. But maybe this is what we need, for this, that all the winds are in the wrong direction, must throw us back to our foundations — not to churchmanship, successmanship, one-upmanship, or salesmanship — but to worship with its elements of trust and prayer and praise, and this confession, "Christ is Lord!" Then we are no longer like kittens on a hot tin roof who want to jump, but know not where, but we are standing on the Word that came, and comes, and still must come through us.

The Word of the Lord came. That's our dynamic, and because it is, we can't care less what others think about it. That's our proclamation, and we could not care less what happens to us for it. That's our calling, and because it bears the power of the Lord, it is the most effective calling we can know. That's our commission, and we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard.

#### *Like Men Possessed*

The Word of the Lord came! It came to Jeremiah and tried his heart and mind. He rebelled. He despaired. He suffered. He saw no possible hope in the life of a prophet.

The Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel, and he saw the vision of the valley of the dry bones — a vision you perchance may see one day as you look out from a pulpit perch across a congregation of sleepy Sunday morning saints, or as you wonder why they have no ears to hear, or — and this

especially — as in a sober moment you may search yourself.

The Word of the Lord came to Hosea, and there it took a most peculiar twist, and the judgment and the grace of God were manifested in a most effective way.

The Word of the Lord came to Amos, the farmer from Tekoa in the southern Bible belt, and it concerned him with liturgical renewal, social injustices, a new morality, the separation of the soul from body and the sacred from the secular. But the Yankees told the southern preacher to go home and shear his own sheep first, and that's a switch.

The Lord's Word came to Jonah, but Jonah wanted something more significant. He pivoted and ran the other way until he found himself inside the belly of a fish — as relevant and as significant a place as God could find for him right then. Must I obey a gracious God — merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love — a God who will accept repentance from a people like the Ninevites? My prejudice will not allow it. Take my life, for it is better that I die than that I live.

The Lord's Word came to Micah and to Zephaniah, to Haggai and Zechariah. And the Lord's Word came to Malachi, who dared to say that God would never have an end to preaching, for still another Messenger must come out and still another Word was on the way, and he dared to ask, "Who can endure His coming and who can stand when He appears?"

The Word of the Lord came! And when it came, these prophets were possessed. God took them over. Yahweh confiscated them and used them and sent them on His mission. They did not possess the Word — they were possessed by the Word! Not in

the sense that they became automatons relieved of their humanity and self-will, for the record has it that they sometimes griped about it, sometimes rebelled against it, and sometimes begged relief from it by death itself. For that they could have qualified as students at Concordia or preachers in Missouri. "But Yahweh spoke to me with His impelling power," says Isaiah. "Yahweh put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and Yahweh said to me, 'See, I have put My words in thy mouth,'" says Jeremiah. Like a broken record the story is repeated, "The Word of the Lord came" . . . "The Word of the Lord came" . . . "The Word of the Lord came."

The Word came not as an empty sound but as an operating power—the power of God. It came not like a chain of letters hooked together to form words, but as the action of the Lord, for God was in that Word, and the Word was God—God moving out in judgment and in grace. It was not, in fact, the Word that possessed them, but God Himself. Effective? How much more effective can you get? The Word of the Lord came, and when it came, God grabbed these men, separated them, compelled them, sent them. The Word of the Lord is God's creating power, for "by the word of the Lord the heavens were made." The Word of the Lord is God's redeeming power, for "if you continue in My Word . . . the truth will make you free." The Word of the Lord is God's re-creating power, for the Word of God "is at work in you believers." The Word of the Lord is God's judging word, for "the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day." The Word of the Lord is God's fruitful Word, yielding a hundredfold when it falls into good soil.

The Word of the Lord is simply shorthand for the God who acts. This is our dynamic, not a Word that, because it has been rooted in history, can be buried there but a Word effective in our lives and ministries today as history is now being written. We have been called as bearers of the Word. Someone else can do the less effective jobs with less effective tools. We have been called for this.

### *But That Was Long Ago*

The Word of the Lord came! But that was in the golden era of the prophets. Do you mean to say? Yes, we mean to say it—that "in many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son," for the Word that was "in the beginning" and the Word that "was with God" and the Word that "was God"—that Word "became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. We have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." The Word is more than a communication of what God wants to say to us—it is the Lord Himself. The Speaker communicates not only words, but He communicates Himself, so that what we have seen with our eyes and handled with our hands is, indeed, the Word of life! It is in Jesus Christ that God's Good News has broken into the world, and it is only in Jesus Christ that God's Good News breaks in. We have a more sure Word of prophecy because in Jesus Christ the promises of God are yea and amen. In Jesus Christ we have a ministry of reconciliation. We have a Word that cures. We have a Word that heals. Sick relationships with one another and sick relationships with God and sick relationships with ourselves that make

us sick all over—the disorder we have brought to God's creation and the chaos we have wrought in life and the horror we have caused for others—these are healed by Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, God's great forgiveness Word to man. Whatever you may wish to say about it, you can't call that Good News irrelevant any more than you can call an aspirin irrelevant to headache. We are ambassadors for Christ, not to be engaged in "Jesus talk" but consumed, compelled, committed, and commissioned by His power.

Effective preaching of the Word begins with this conviction of the Word. Effective preaching is the preaching of the Word—not Synod's latest program supported with a film strip and a pep talk canned, sealed, delivered to your desk by air mail just in time to save the effort of the week. Effective preaching is preaching that expects results—God's results, not ours—because the preacher is convinced that God's Word gets results. Effective preaching cannot be equated with effective oratory, but with the power of the Word let loose to bring its own results.

Much of our ineffective preaching is born of ineffective preparation, and much of our ineffective preparation is born of small conviction that the Word will do its work. We permit our time to be consumed in trivia because we deem our churchmanship more vital than our homiletics, our gracious personalities much more effective than our proclamation. Either we do not expect results at all, or at best expect the wrong results—a larger yield per capita, the most successful congregation in the District, or acceptance of the style of architecture we have chosen for the temple. The Word provides no guarantee that we will

ever see results. It does not assure successful Boy Scout Sundays, Laymen's Sundays, Mother's Days, Valparaiso offerings, Synod Sundays, and all the other mighty wonders we are asked to preach about and for which we have to scrounge in Scripture for a pretext. Let that suffice for now. A little more a little later, on whether programs must be preached or whether preaching must be programmed.

### *To Whom It Came and Comes*

The Word of the Lord came! But look a moment now at those to whom it came, and those to whom it comes, and those to whom it still must come! The Scriptures are intensely human, and we dare not forget it. God did not commission angels as His prophets—He commissioned men. His call to service, though it appears in Scripture in dramatic form, took place in earthy ways and dusty places. It came to Moses as he tended flocks in Midian, to Amos as a herdsman in Tekoa, to Ezekiel in Babylon far from the ruined temple of Jerusalem, to Peter, James, and John as they washed nets in Galilee. Moses voiced objections because he lacked the eloquence that would make the world sit up and notice him. Jeremiah backed away because he was too young. Jonah didn't wish to go where God would send him because his heart was filled with prejudice. But the Word of the Lord came. It grabbed these men who wore the dust and ashes of the flesh and used them as the mediators of the Word.

Essential to effective preaching is not only a conviction that the Word is relevant today and brings a person into personal confrontation with the Person but also the conviction that we have had that personal

confrontation and that we are called to speak His Word. We may ask the question Moses asked, "Who am I that I should go?" And we had better ask it. We have seen no special vision in the night watch, nor have we heard the voice of God in thunder calling out our name, nor have we seen our predecessors mount to heaven in a whirlwind and a chariot of fire. *We do not come easily to confidence in the saving power of the Lord through the foolishness of preaching, nor do we come easily to the conviction that the Lord has called us for the foolishness of preaching.* We struggle with His call, and in fact, against it. We are never comfortable in it—who said we were supposed to be? His call defies attempts to package it or program it. It comes to man in different ways, at different ages, and with a large assortment of reactions. But all to whom it comes have this in common that they assert their own unfitness to the very end. Moses was prepared to put himself at God's disposal for anything that God might ask—except to speak. Isaiah begged to be excused from this one thing. Ezekiel would have preferred a different way to bring his message. Chrysostom shrank from the task for years. Karl Barth, if I may dare to quote him, said that preaching is an act of daring, and only the man who would rather not preach and cannot escape from it ought ever to attempt it. Luther—I'm sure that we can safely quote that fellow—confessed that he would escape it if he could. We are unfit. There is no reason why the Word of the Lord should come to us. But God reaches into your life and into mine, taps us on the shoulder, or takes us firmly by the arm as once He chose the least of all the people of the earth to be His people.

Nor does He come to us by way of a dramatic and convincing sign and wonder. He uses trivial events and little people. He comes to us in earthy ways and dusty places. He finds us and commissions us and separates us from the world and sends us to the world—not because of special tools we have but because of special tools He gives us; not because of wisdom gathered but because of wisdom He bestows in Christ. He uses us not because we are more than human. We are too small to wear the robes of clerics if we rely upon our cuteness, cleverness, astute mentality, smooth personality, or even theological perception. We are too small to preach the Word if we believe that a lick and promise will suffice, too small to be ambassadors of Christ if we intend no more than to parrot Bible stories and catechetical clichés. God can use us only when His Word can get to us. He can accept us only by forgiveness.

We do not suggest that our sense of calling renders form, construction, and delivery of the sermon unimportant and homiletics classes obsolete. This heightens their importance—the importance of painstaking preparation, careful thought progression, the artful yet the simple use of language, the stimulating word, the graphic illustration, the poise of person. We are servants of the Word, not lords of words. We are mediators of the Word, not roadblocks in the pathway of the Christ.

#### *And Who Are They?*

But if you ask the question, "Who am I that I should go?" there may be times when you will ask, "And who are they that I should go to them? Who are they that God should bother, or that God should bother me with them?" God sends the



Word through you to people. He does not maintain a list of names recorded in the order of importance, although at times the preacher does. Our parish roles do not include a multitude of the wise by worldly standards, the powerful, the influential, or the noble born, although the preacher is impressed by those who are included. Most of them are average people with that small assortment on the upper side of average and a liberal allotment on the lower side. But each and every one of them is loved of God—none more, none less. One community is just as vital as another, a suburban church is as important as an urban church, a little mission, where the work is one to one, as precious as Saint Transfer by the belt-line freeway, where the work is done by a team to many. People are involved. They come to hear because they hold the Word of God in great respect and tremble at it. They return to listen, Sunday after Sunday, because they need a drink. The wise are tired of their wisdom and prefer this hour set apart to hear The Wisdom. The powerful and influential are anxious as they watch their little private kingdoms totter, and they want to hear the message of the Kingdom and of a King who is big enough to handle it. The noble-born must be reborn. The average man is looking for a power that will make him more than average as a servant of the Christ. The outcaste, the destitute, and the rejected need a message of forgiveness, acceptance, and identity. All of them when looking to themselves draw a blank in life. You dare not let them draw a blank from you.

Indeed, there is in all of them a flesh that must come under judgment, an apathy that must be scourged, and a prejudice that

must be crucified. The parish—even under your direction—can so easily become a pious secular community that venerates the Bible but does not discern its witness. And there are always those who view you as the hatching, matching, and dispatching figurehead of sacred memory, and who manage to fulfill their holy obligation once or twice a year. To all of them the Word must come with its judgment and its grace. And that Word with its demands and promises is on your lips. You may stir up a controversy or incite a revolution, but if it happens, you will have to know whether it was His Word or your own that did it. Or it may well be that nothing happens except the chilling chatter at the doorway, "I sure enjoyed it, preacher," or "You're gonna make a good one someday." The sower simply sowed his seed. And the Word of the Lord that came must grow.

#### *Another Element*

The conviction that the Word of the Lord came, and that it came to you, and that it comes through you to people—these are basic elements in your effective preaching. They determine your content, your attitude, and your approach to the mission of your calling. But to these we add another element that is just as vital—a living knowledge of the people to whom the Word must come and the situations of their lives to which the Word must be applied. Many preachers celebrate Ascension Day each Sunday and soar off into the wild blue yonder far above all sputniks. They just don't seem to know where people live. Their words stick to the back railing of the balcony while a thick, dense fog socks in the runway down below, and they circle overhead to wait for clearance,

but God only knows where they might land. In one last effort to be relevant they will probably remember at least to mention sex, but everyone will wonder how that musty subject got dragged in. Many others take familiar Bible stories and repeat the old, old words the old, old way with no imagination, no new application, but with a deadpan seriousness that would belie the comedy. Not all our sermon preparation dare take place inside the quiet of the study. A lot of it develops in the pressures of the parish and in the press of problems and in confrontation with the burdens on the hearts of people. The role of preacher and the role of pastor cannot be separated. The role of speaker and the role of listener dare not be confused. The more effectively the pastor listens, the more effectively the preacher preaches, and the more effectively the preacher preaches, the more the pastor will be called upon to listen. This is the preacher's burden—the art of keeping quiet now and then. Someone recently described the difference between psychiatrist and clergyman as a difference in their decibels of sound. It's difficult to get the psychiatrist to speak. It's impossible to get the preacher to shut up. He has the answers before he hears the question. He pontificates on every problem. Effective listening, not only to the Word of God but also to the words of people, is effective preparation for effective preaching.

Here we learn to understand how terrifying life can get, how difficult it is, how smashed and bruised and beaten are the lives of people in the pews. In the listening process you understand the needs of people for the healing only Christ can bring. In two weeks, from Passion Sunday to the

Resurrection Festival, four new marital explosions are added to the 24 already in my files as active cases. Three college students come to talk about their doubts and inner conflicts, three couples are prepared for marriage, three new alcoholic cases come to light while another heads for divorce court, two dying persons require deathbed ministry, and later on the ministry extends to their families, a boy in confirmation class whose spirit has been broken needs our help but doesn't take it, two unmarried pregnancies reveal themselves—one involving the very finest people, a boy at age 18 falls inebriated from a balcony and breaks his skull, another phones from county jail, where he is charged with forgery, a teen-age boy and girl conspire in a revolution against her parents. And all the rest have burdens too—insecurity, anxiety, the pressures of their work, the fear of illness and the dread of death, concern for image and success, identity, and purpose. You can hear the pulse beat if you listen to the words that have a way of slipping from behind the well-kept front of those who are the "better" members.

Parish preaching suffers under many pressures. In those two weeks we also had to keep classes going for adults and children, liturgies for 17 services had to be prepared (including *Tre Ore*, *Tenebrae*, and *Lumen Christi*), 11 private celebrations of the Sacrament were held, two days were taken by a meeting of The Lutheran Council in the USA in New York City, an obligation to Concordia Publishing House had to be fulfilled, confirmation classes for adults and children were continued, and we began the preparation of these Wenchel lectures. Anyone who says that parish life

today is nothing but housekeeping chores to preserve the institution and entertain the ladies has been living in a trunk. He does not know whereof he speaks. The parish is, or if it isn't, ought to be, the scene of the most effective preaching. If you can pardon platitudes, that's where the rubber meets the road.

The power of the Word and the needs of people — when these two come together, then your preaching is momentous. When you project your preaching to a target that your people recognize and drop your bombs right where they live, then they will understand. The purpose of your preaching is to heal, to effect a state of wholeness, to bring salvation, to relieve the oppression of the burdens people carry. Humanity is sick, and all of us have been afflicted, and the sickness is much worse than that which penicillin cures, or those that nothing cures. We have no pat answers for the problems, no prescriptions to be filled at Walgreen's, no needles full of wonder drugs. We have the Word — only this and nothing more. But that Word must be communicated. That weapon must be used. The simple Gospel, as we often hear it called, is not so simple as we thought it was. It has to sweep past symptoms and penetrate through long blank stares to where the source of trouble really is, and bring its healing there. But use that Word, for nothing else will do. The Holy Spirit knows no other sword. He knows no other means of bringing re-created order out of our chaotic world.

The Word will comfort, but it never makes us comfortable. The Word demands before it promises. It tears us up before it heals. And it may plunge us into the depths of hell before we see the joy of

heaven. It does not guarantee relief from tension, the calming of our nerves, or that peace of mind that Peale has made appealing. The Word is Jesus Christ standing with us in the conflict, Christ going with us through the valley of the gruesome shadows, Christ supporting us beneath the burdens that we carry, Christ leading us to battle, Christ standing where we still have trouble seeing Him — beyond the wrecks of time.

This is a saved world. The triumph is secure. The end has already been accomplished. This Gospel of the Kingdom must be preached, and in its preaching you will not find your work in vain. Christ is Lord, and God will win.

And if you see no results, what then? Then listen to this — the noblest declaration of pure faith recorded in the Scripture, spoken by Habakkuk, a man who faced life with deep problems in his heart: "Though the fig tree do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." And when you speak with that conviction in the depths of heart, you will hear another question on the lips of those who hear: "Did not our hearts burn within us as He talked to us?"

One of those college men I mentioned started off his dialog abruptly with the question, "What's the point of being a Christian?" Well, answer that one, and you have the point and purpose of your preaching. Could it be this — that the Word of the Lord came — and we can leave the point to God?

## THE PREACHER AS PROFESSIONAL

If it is possible to say that some classes graduated from this seminary have been more productive in subsequent years than others, then I would have to acknowledge that the second class of graduates in 1945 is probably the biggest failure on the record of Concordia, Saint Louis. The second class, I said, for there were two that year — one in January and another in July. Selective Service had decreed that because we had been classified 4-D we could not be privileged to enjoy long summer holidays. We stayed in classes through two Saint Louis summers on a program that the Board for Higher Education called "acceleration," so that what should have been the class of 1946 became the class of Friday the 13th, in July of 1945.

This had a distinct advantage — our enforced monastic celibacy ended one year sooner than we had anticipated; there were fourteen weddings in various Saint Louis churches on the 14th of July. But apparently it also had its disadvantage. We were not the polished and the finished product that reflects the seminary's customary style. In that pre-historic age — before air conditioning — neither faculty nor student body functioned with peak efficiency in the good old Saint Louis summertime, and that fact, coupled with a telescoped curriculum, left its mark on all of us.

In the 22 years since, that class is marked by nonachievement. Admittedly my research isn't too intensive, and speaking only from a faulty memory, the class today, two decades later, does not include a single District president. Not one synodical executive is listed in our number, and only two or three achieved professorships. About

that many entered special ministries, but the only special ministry available was army chaplaincy, and there was neither vision nor initiative to evolve new forms of ministry. Come to think of it, there was another form of special ministry that year that received rave notice in the church press — a tent and trailer mission designed to reach the unchurched throngs among the hill folk of America, but within two years this ministry had faded in a failure and the missionary folded up his tent and sold the trailer and headed for the comforts and security of parsonage life. The rest of us have never come beyond that. We are "just parish pastors." I hear it said today that there must be something wrong with fellows who are "just parish pastors," and that most of them are there because they have no other choice.

"Just parish pastors!" That expression haunts the church today. It conjures up peculiar images — the image of a sometimes synodical promoter and a sometimes ecclesiastical glamor boy, a not too scholarly profession that spins its wheels in churchmanship for which it was not trained, and the vision of a clicking mimeograph, addressograph, postage machine, and folding apparatus, and extensive files of talent cards, membership records, ladies' aid scrapbooks, and snappy bulletin board sentences. And as one who serves the parish as a live option, let me assure you that every bit of it is true. This is exactly what you may expect to find when you get out there — a desk full of communications from people whose image of the parish priest is worse than yours, a stack of "While You Were Out" notes from the secretary that list the phone calls you have to return to people of the community who

are glad to have you aboard, a file for every purpose and a clattering machine for every job. It has become a rather dubious calling, and our recruitment engineers find it increasingly difficult to enlist the flower of the church's manhood for a profession that is simply not significant.

### *Who Is Responsible?*

Who is responsible for this? Who paints this picture of the parish pastor? Where was this image born? At the risk of oversimplifying, this image starts when parish pastors, preachers of the Word and shepherds of the flock, become convinced that preaching is no longer relevant and God's forgiveness Word in Christ no longer meaningful, when they abandon the cross for the success standards of parochial life and decide to strive for a seat to the right hand or the left of the King in the Kingdom, when they are bedeviled into thinking that success can be achieved by following the tried and tested methods described in "How-to" manuals that deluge their desks as good ideas. Doubting whether a ministry of the Word is still significant, they become involved in a ministry of programmed solutions to ineffectiveness that is simply not significant. Then the pulpit becomes no more than a tool for the promotion of the program — a soap box to secure a larger budget to provide a bigger thrust. Now we are bombarded by several arsenals of volumes on the perished parish and editorial critiques of our traditional foundations. The parish pastor is a threatened man whose image in the public eye and in his own is in a state of disrepair. We could continue for several pages more to paint the portrait of perplexity, but we can leave it to your own imagination.

But it doesn't have to be that way, and much that has been written, much that has impressed you and perhaps repelled you from the parish ministry is less than half truth. Your office will have filing cabinets, machinery, and organizational administrative burdens, just as the clinic where you get your cardiograph and the attorney's office where you have your will on file. You will often be distracted by mundane detail, just as your dentist is, who has to keep a file of records, X rays, and account books and who has to make out income taxes just as you do. But you can be faithful to your ministry. Your public image never will amount to much — who ever said it would? As the congregation's figurehead, you will be the object of many a cynic's snarl, but never mind. "We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything"; and to this we add, as insignificant, and yet the most.

### *What Is Your Profession?*

Earlier in these presentations I pressed hard upon your calling under God, His confiscation of your life for service, His possession of your heart for ministry of His compassion to a generation beaten by its self-insistence. In the setting of a highly organized society and in the atmosphere of professional theology, this always sounds a bit impractical, the sacred trappings of a pastoral pep talk. We can be quite cynical about it and discount these claims to a divine imperative as mere imagination or ecclesiastical garbage and insist that those who get there just drift into it. On the

other hand, to thrust the word "professional" into this lofty calling may seem a bit too earthy and degrading. The word "professional," like many other good words in our language, has suffered from the Babylonian confusion. It has been made to sound too cold, too calculating, too routine, impersonal, distasteful. But I mean to use it in its proper sense and see the preacher as his divine commitment relates to his professional commitment. For the preacher is a pro. Not only does God come to His Elijahs hiding in the secure "caves" of their parsonages to ask, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" but people ask us, too: "What do you do for a living? What is your profession?" And sometimes when they hear your answer they may ask, "Then what are you doing here?"

#### *No Differences*

In the Christian concept of vocation there is no difference. Every Christian man is in the full-time service of the Lord and of His church. Every Christian man is occupied in church vocation. For years we've been troubled by a semantic problem. We've permitted the proper distinction between clergy and laity to carry us to the point where we think of the former as full-time Christians and the latter as somehow part-time. Or we think that clergy are somehow more the church than the laity. When our recruitment agents use a term like "full-time service of the church" or the equally misleading "church vocations," they make distinctions that confuse both clergy and laity in their understanding of their common vocation. Perhaps we ought to say "professional servants of the church" and use the word "professional" in its pure and not in its perverted meaning.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is not alone in being rather fuzzy in its doctrine of the ministry and even fuzzier as we attempt to relate that doctrine to the professional aspect of the ministry—to those who get paid for it—paid not too well, but paid. Some have Calls (capital C), and some have mere appointments. Some are ordained, and some are not ordained. Some are men, and of all things, some are women. Some are commissioned, some are installed, and some just stand around and shout about their lack of status while they wait for Synod to make up its mind. The closest that we get to anything at all that makes some sense is to quote Ephesians 4 about the gifts of the ascended Lord for the equipment of the saints for the work of the ministry, and even there we argue about the placement of the comma. But being "just a parish pastor," I cannot solve the theological distinctions. Just bed this fact down in firmness, that the preacher is a pro and that in the exercise of his profession he is responsible not only to his Lord, but Biblically, ecclesiastically, and financially he is also responsible to the congregation he serves. They may not be his judges, but they are his fellows in God's service. His ministry is not his own prerogative, nor is the preacher free to determine his own function. His ministry has as its *raison d'être* only the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, which are the marks of the church and to which he is charged by the assembly of believers. Obviously this is not all he does—nor is it all that any congregation does—but this is the central function that is served or ought to be served by every other function. And the

preacher is a pro. This is his profession. This is his life work.

The ministry as a profession cannot be exalted over other callings and professions. Leaving it to move into another calling is not disgraceful in itself, although the reason may be questioned. Leaving a successful business or vocation to become a minister as a professional does not elevate us to a higher echelon among the saints, although God often finds His men in other callings and impels them to come over. But neither is the ministry as a profession to be degraded. Because he bears the Word, he in his office is worthy of double honor, for in the honor of the man who bears the Word we honor the Word and not the man. What insolence is this that would regard a call to service as a personal honor? But precisely for this reason that we serve the honor of the Lord and hold this office by the effective grace of God, we preachers as professional men among professional men take a back seat to no one. The complex of inferiority that gives rise to a variety of distorted ministries has no place in the ministerium. His ministry deals with the key issues of life and death more than any other. He has the tools for a more effective ministry than any other public servant.

The preacher as pro, therefore, takes pride in his profession and stands tall among the world's professions. And despite complaints about the lack of image, he stands a whole lot taller than he is aware when, following his human tendencies, he engages in self-pity and depression. An outstanding left offensive guard in the National Football League, playing with the champion Green Bay Packers, has been credited with the comment, "It's tough to

be humble when you're great." Frank Lloyd Wright is reported to have said that he was forced to decide between being arrogantly self-confident or hypocritically humble. The line between humility and pride is thin. There is an arrogant self-confidence and there is a false humility, and both are to be shunned. The preacher as a pro takes pride in his profession because he finds no reason in himself for pride, and the more his profession is enhanced, the more unfit he has to feel. He can boast of power that is operative in his profession because he has no power of his own, but in that power he need never fear a second or dillydally in the issues or water down the Word for fear of salary. He does not degrade his office or apologize for it, but he enhances it by every word and deed.

There is no profession in the world where self-esteem is more repugnant. Neither is there a profession where self-esteem is noticed quite as easily. We have not developed an immunity to it. It rears its ugly head in strangest ways and strangest places. In fact, much of the modern preacher's degradation of his office, his apathy in duty, and his nonprofessional approach, even his complaining that his preaching doesn't get results, his dissatisfaction that the congregation doesn't measure up to standards—these are already subtle forms of pride, but subtle only to himself. The humble statement we have often heard in Lutheran pulpits, that by the grace of God we have maintained *Die reine Lehre*, carries an insinuation that reflects a higher self-assumed plateau of purity. A swollen head is always hollow. The preacher needs a swollen heart—swollen with a holy pride and confidence in God, who called him and commissioned him and then enabled him.

We have not been called to wield the lariat by which we drag folks from their miserable little ways and make them think our thoughts. We have been called to use the wash rag and the bucket and to wash their feet. But it's hard, for as soon as that resolve is born, some joker lifts his foot and tramples on your head. One preacher who wanted to impress upon his congregation how important it was that they cooperate a little better with their pastors selected as his text the word in Job 1:14: "The oxen were plowing and the asses feeding beside them." Knowing that you come from God and that you are going to God, you are cast in the role of servant. You are professional. You get paid for washing feet. That's not enough. Be prepared to lose your life for His sake.

#### *Heroic Sacrifices?*

Dare we speak about heroic sacrifices in the practice of our ministerial profession in our age? My experience has been that preachers have their share of comforts. They manage to afford a large variety of household gadgets, a new and air-conditioned model car every other year, and none of them appear too undernourished. They no longer need to live as objects of public patronage. Their professional stipends may not compare too well with others if they are published in cold dollar figures, but no one ever said they should, I hope. And you may call this fuzzy faith, perhaps, but it's amazing how the Lord provides. We dare not measure sacrifices by the dollar yardstick. But if heroic sacrifices may not be demanded, whole-hearted, single-minded dedication to the calling is demanded—and that's the mark of every true professional. The preacher's life is not his own.

His time is not his own. He is subject to the pressures and demands of the burdens on the hearts of those he serves. He is ready to lay down his life for straying sheep. He offers on the altar of his service both to God and to his fellows the best he has and the very best that he is capable of giving and the very best developed skills. He knows no 40-hour week and no 8-hour day. He has one aim—to be the kind of workman who doesn't have to be ashamed—to prepare himself and keep himself prepared for the function of his ministry in Word and sacrament.

This means that growth in professional competence remains a lifelong imperative. This seminary has never graduated a finished product, although some of its products may be finished on the day they graduate. Anyone who spends two decades in the ministry with nothing but his "practical experience" added to whatever he may have learned here is hopelessly out of it. It is doubtful that he will ever get caught up. He identifies himself at conference by introducing his remarks with this familiar preface, "When I was at the seminary," and he concludes by asking, "Where did all these changes come from?" Form 1040 permits deductions under the miscellaneous heading for professional journals, but he cannot produce a canceled check to prove it except the one to Concordia Publishing House in the amount of \$5.40 about October every year. *Time* magazine, however significant it may be and necessary, too, as a canoe to ride on the flowing currents of history in the making, is not a theological journal, but without it a lot of us would never have known a year ago that God was dead, and we are thankful, too, for its refresher course in Reformation history just



three weeks ago, particularly for its favorable report. Credit those two issues of *Time* with the greatest impact that a secular journal has ever had on the American pulpit!

Growth in professional competence requires a subscription to and the study of professional theological journals. It requires the purchase or the borrowing of books that are in-depth studies in theology and not mere sample copies of letters to delinquent contributors. It may require continuing study in the graduate school of this seminary or another. It requires the reading of our great contemporary preachers—not all of them with Lutheran labels—not for purpose of imitation, but for freshness. And to know what is going on inside of people and to be equipped to serve this present age, it may require the perusal of the world's best sellers now and then, a survey of the hopelessness reflected in the modern novel or play, and perhaps an evening at the theater.

Perhaps a word of caution is in order. The preacher as pro must recognize the discipline in which he is expected to be competent, and stick to it. He recognizes that his own profession has its limitations and that he is not expert in every branch of learning and in every professional discipline. The preacher is a mediator of the healing Word, but he is not a medic and does not practice medicine. He has a course or two along the way in the psychology of man, and his ministry requires some understanding of psychology, but he does not qualify as a clinical psychologist. He knows something of the social needs of people, but he is not a social worker. In his staff relations he must honor and respect the competence of those with whom he works

who have been trained in other disciplines—the principal of the Christian day school, the teacher, and the minister of music. The preacher is a pro, and a professional recognizes a professional!

Above all else the preacher as a pro lives in the discipline of the Holy Bible—the vital tool of his profession. Baseball's greatest southpaw, Warren Spahn, was hardly ever seen without a baseball in his hand. He fingered it continually, in winter and in summer, at home and at the ball park, not only when he played, but even when he rested. He had the feel of it. That's the way the preacher fingers Holy Scripture—not just to get a lively text for Sunday's sermon, but to know and feel the will of God—the height and depth, the breadth and length of love. This is his life-long dedication—the study of the Bible. He has to have the feel of it. He studies with his ears wide open, and his heart (and by study we mean to include exegesis, please), to hear what God now speaks to him. How can we convey a message we have never heard or serve as heralds of a voice that has not first addressed itself to us? This is the Book from which we preach, indeed, but it is the voice we preach. It is more than a tool of trade. It is God's message to the needs of men. Pierre Berton, author of *The Comfortable Pew*, more quoted than he ought to be and less heeded than he deserves to be, scorns the preacher who preaches only from the Bible, and he asks us to remember that Jesus as a master of communication preached from life situations. I understand what he means, and he is right in asking for life situations. But life situations dare not be the source of preaching—they are the opportunity for preaching and the goal

of preaching. The content of the Savior's Word was Himself. If we go to our preaching with nothing but our "fifty-two brilliant ideas" or a procession of novelties, we may be amusing, but the Word will never be amazing—neither in its content nor in its results. The preacher as a pro has the Book. He fingers it. He feels it—where it counts. His preparation for next Sunday's sermon started 20 years ago, or maybe 25, when he started living with the Bible. The study of that Word requires time and the discipline of schedule.

But because that preparation started 20 years ago, we cannot assume that Sunday's sermon is prepared. The preacher as a pro cannot ascend the awesome steps and spout forth everything he knows in 20 minutes, although admittedly it might be possible. He cannot be content to see next Sunday be an ordinary Sunday, for he knows that Sunday doesn't fall in ordinary times, and those to whom he preaches are not ordinary people. Every week the shadow of next Sunday's sermon falls across his pathway, and he has to be prepared. He goes at it like a pro. He works at it. He sweats at it. He bleeds at it. He organizes it. He lets it tear him up and put him back together. He lets it tear his people up and put them back together. His sermon dare not be confused with Bible Story Hour, for he must move beyond the explanation and the Bible history to persuasion. His goal is not to offer a description of the Bible characters as though they were no more than statues in a musty old museum, but to make them live as though they stood there next to him or sat in pews and wore the faces of your congregation. He conjures up the vision of people who will hear—where they are and what they need and

what they suffer and what their dominant concerns and interests are, their pressing burdens and their sorry failures. His goal is transformation of a person and a congregation. The text is loaded and it's aimed. But the preacher has to pull the trigger, and that is no mean trick.

The preparation of a sermon begins with the selection of a text. I read the statement somewhere that texts and topics suggest themselves to preachers in the strangest ways. They surely do, we must admit. Some are suggested in the vestry meeting when the treasurer's report is read. Some are suggested in the latest issue from synodical headquarters, complete with outline and illustrations even. Some are suggested by the latest publication of Concordia Publishing House, and those we can be sure of, for they have been censored. Some are selected from the morning paper. Some are dictated by the latest program that the parish is promoting. But to build resistance against temptations such as these, to provide a balanced diet through the year, to discipline oneself in work, and to sweep the latest brain storms off your desk with calm and undisturbed repose, the preacher as a pro plans his preaching program far ahead. He uses a pericope—any one of many. He honors the time-tested church year and with it keeps himself on track. He need not fear that such a plan will be a ball and chain that keeps him from addressing social issues and being relevant to human need. Instead he will discover that such a plan provides his pulpit ministry with freshness, a well-rounded diet, an interesting and lively application, and prevents him from serving up the same old hot dogs Sunday after Sunday. To enlist his congregation in a little preparation,

too, he may share his plan with them in a printed folder or in his medium of parish communication.

So the texts have been selected, and the preacher now is spared the weekly, frantic search for something clever he can preach about. He can go to work on Monday morning. If his task is to pull the trigger of that text, he cannot wait till after using Gunsmoke as an inspiration on the night before. Now the preacher as a pro becomes a craftsman. He reads his text, dissects it, exegizes, finds its theme and unity. He has no need to search for snappy little stories to tee off with. He provides a background and foundation on which to ruminate as he goes out to other ministerial objectives later in the day, or during dead spots in the vestry meeting later on that night. Tuesday is the day for checking out the scholarship that others have provided, particularly if your own, like mine, is limited, or if you heard somewhere that modern Biblical studies have discovered problems here and that we ought to think a second time before we operate with preconceived assumptions. Tuesday, too, is the day that you begin to hear the message—the message that it speaks to you and that it has to speak through you. You determine goals, the something that must happen. You wander back and forth across this text in your imagination, You stare at ceilings. You develop illustrations and “for instances.” You ask in prayer what God intends to speak, for when those who look to you and listen on a Sunday morning hear the Word, they must be able to assert, “This man means me!” You may read someone else’s sermon on this text and listen to his witness to the Word, and when it comes to using someone else’s

thought as though it were your own, you can follow the old rule that says, “Put your fork in the pot and pull it out again, and whatever sticks to the fork is yours.”

On Wednesday morning thought begins to crystalize, the aim that God has taken in that Word begins to show, and you are working on an outline. Don’t get too rigid there. We don’t want to see your bones. We want to hear your message. The outline discipline that you were taught in homiletics class is great—you need it, and perhaps you need a whole lot more of it. It teaches you to think and how to organize the things you think. But never use the outline as a ball and chain. Sit on it loosely. Never use it as a filing cabinet where you can lose your stuff in systematic fashion. You are a pro—free to let God use you, not your outline. On Thursday morning and maybe all day long and maybe into Friday you were writing, or if not writing, then staring into space again, fighting for the words that will convey the thought. Every sentence is a loaded sentence. Every word is chosen for a purpose. The preacher is a pro—and that’s the way pros work—with thoroughness, with precision, with care.

It is in the writing of the sermon that you prepare the communication of the message. That’s why writing is important. Therefore write it out. I remember someone saying in my seminary days that the preacher should write out his sermons for his first 10 years, and I remember how I shuddered at the thought. Now I shudder if it isn’t written out. There may be times when pressures of the parish make this task impossible, but I must admit that in my years I have never known a time like that and I have never preached a Sunday

sermon that had not been written out. Wedding sermons, yes, and funeral sermons, yes, but never Sunday sermons. There may be preachers who can do it, and I know of some who say they do, but I have never heard one do it well.

Writing is the preparation of communication. Your thoughts are not much good to others if you cannot communicate with words. And your words are not much good if they do not communicate in pictures that the congregation understands. You must provide not only a sound track but a sight track too. You have to touch deep places of the heart. You have to use the words that are familiar to your people! An Eskimo sat in his igloo, reading a Shirley Temple Fairy Tale Collection to his little boy. "Little Jack Horner sat in a corner," began the father, when the son broke in to ask, "Daddy, what's a corner?" Use your imagination — struggle for the words, use adjectives, but use them with a purpose. Violate a rule of grammar now and then and put a preposition into a sentence to end up with! Take your people where you find them and lead them where the message wants them. In his little book *Communicating the Gospel*, Halford Luccock tells the parable of a man speaking to a man dying of thirst in the middle of a desert, while the latter's parched throat is begging for a glass of water. It goes like this:

Let us consider the properties of water. Water is a colorless liquid which on being raised to a temperature of 100 degrees Centigrade or 212 degrees Fahrenheit becomes what is called vapour. If, however, on the other hand, the temperature is lowered to 0 degrees Centigrade or 32 degrees Fahrenheit, lo, it is ice. In the final analysis it is discovered to consist of two portions of hydrogen to one of oxy-

gen, hence arises the designation  $H_2O$ . But the man whose throat is parched with thirst cries out, "For the love of God, mister, give me a drink."

Recently I encountered this paragraph in a printed sermon:

Let us, therefore, hold fast to this sound doctrine of the Scripture. Let us not be deceived by illusions of our own righteousness. Let us take comfort in the justifying grace of God and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, and let us serve Him in everlasting righteousness and innocence and blessedness. God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

That paragraph was written by a "seasoned veteran" of the pulpit, but now contrast that with this paragraph addressed to teenagers in the congregation:

When parents seem too strict, even though they insist that their decisions flow out of love and concern for you, the devil sits at your bedside as you pout in the dark and whispers that it isn't so. Color them mean and ugly. He might even suggest that they have entered into a conspiracy to ruin your life. But he scores his greatest victories with slippery ideas like, "Sure, what you did Saturday night was wrong, so wrong that God can't forgive." Or "I wouldn't talk to anyone about that problem. Keep it to yourself, bottle it up. Let your fear and guilt and grief destroy you on the inside because only the weak give in to confession. Don't give in."

That paragraph gets home. It was done by a student of this seminary who vicared in Minneapolis.

Well, unless you had too many funerals, or too many meetings, or too many fishing days or rounds of golf, by sometime Thursday night or Friday morning you will say "Amen." You lay the manuscript aside till

Saturday, and when you pick it up again, you may be in for a surprise. You might be forced to start all over. You didn't say what you intended. You didn't say it clearly. You might discover choice morsels of false doctrine that slipped in somehow, for every now and then we hear false doctrine in the pulpits of Missouri. But two hours more of work, perhaps—to tune the carburetor, change the points, or adjust the gap on the spark plugs so that when you hit the starter, everything will fire. Then you can retire to your television and a beer!

But only half the job is done. Sunday morning in the pulpit the preacher is a pro. Eugene Ormandy once threw his shoulder out of joint while conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra. Ormandy is a pro—he gave himself and everything he had to his profession. This does not mean that we intend to give a demonstration in karate, but neither does it mean that we must give a demonstration in Yoga. It doesn't mean that we will make loud noises like a drum because we're hollow, but neither does it mean that we intend to fiddle around. It doesn't mean that we go at them like an old bull moose, but neither does it mean that we intend to pussyfoot. But it does mean that we will drain ourselves by speaking from the depths of heart, slowly enough for everyone to follow and fast enough to keep them on their toes. Avoid the dead pan look and let your method sparkle with aliveness—sometimes a tilted lip, sometimes a twinkle in your eye—not overdone, but naturally—the way you are, the way you speak, so that your wife will recognize you. When you are finished, you are exhausted but refreshed. And you are ready for the finished product of another pro—the Sunday din-

ner cooked by loving hands—that blessed wife, the treasure of your life and your severest critic.

Time speeds along. There is much we need to say, but little time to say it. You will often feel that way. We should have spoken of the Holy Spirit and the power and guidance He alone supplies. We should have emphasized the use of time and how you guard your life from being consumed by trivia. We should have spent an hour on the necessity of prayer. The omission of these items is not born of oversight but of necessity tonight. Two more points, however, deserve a few more sentences.

If it is possible to underestimate the sermon, it is also possible to overestimate it. The sermon is one element of worship. There are others. Many of our people and many of our preachers regard the liturgy, the hymns, the prayers in worship as nothing more than warm-up calisthenics before the kickoff of the sermon. These elements of worship are not designed to put a handsome frame around the preacher and the sermon. They are essential elements of worship. Done slovenly, without regard for reverence; done independently, without regard for community; done heartlessly, without regard for meaning; the liturgy can turn the worship into one colossal flop. The preacher is a pro—not only as a preacher but also as a celebrant. He selects his hymns with care both as to tune and content. He creates a climate of understanding for the liturgy and a sense of excitement in its use to avoid the age-old criticism that it's nothing but the same old thing. He celebrates with dignity, but not with pompousness—reverently, but naturally. He uses, and he trains the congrega-

tion to use, such outward forms as may assist in meaningful devotion. He exercises care with vestments—in their choice and maintenance. He trains the acolytes and ushers. Worship is to be eventful, the very best of service, for the object of our worship is the God who gave His very best for us.

And then this one thing more. In the understanding of his calling as an ambassador of Christ and in professional dedication to this profession, the preacher will discover that with the Word he also gives himself. The labor drains his energy and saps his strength. The preacher needs to be in shape. In a restless world he needs his rest. In a world that moves on wheels and pushes buttons and sits at desks he needs his exercise—something more than relaxation, box seats at the ball park, and sporadic golf or fishing. He needs exercise that stimulates the circulation, revitalizes, renews, and reinvigorates. It is our responsibility to maintain as best we can the

physical and mental strength that God has given us. That may mean diet. It may mean giving up the cigarettes and pipe before you're hooked. It may mean periodic breaks from your routine and getting out of town. It may mean the discipline of bodily exercise, which profiteth not a little. But certainly it will also mean the recognition of our limitations, a sane view of ourselves, and the discard of our halos so that we do not take ourselves too seriously or get distressed about our lack of image. The preacher is a pro, but the pro is human; if you should discover that some day, don't be discouraged. That's why God chose you.

One question may disturb you after all of this—what's the comfort index? When do I have an image of myself as a successful preacher and of my sermons as effective proclamation? I pray you never do! God offers us no comfort index reading. He charges us to go to work.

Minneapolis, Minn.