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Dedicated to the Memory of  
Robert David Preus (1924-1995)

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**Dedicated to the Memory of  
Robert David Preus (1924-1995):  
President, Colleague, Teacher, and Friend**

## Chapel Sermon on 2 Timothy 4 Winter Call Service, February 4, 1986

Robert D. Preus

Let us all pray. Lord God our heavenly Father, we thank You for these men who are going out into a ministry of the Word. Give them a rich measure of Your Holy Spirit and make them pious and faithful pastors. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Christian friends, grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today I want to talk to you on the basis of this text, which is the best text possible for an occasion like this, on the subject of what you are to do as a pastor. Your paramount duty as a pastor is to preach the Word. Because it is not the fine education you have received here, and it is not your own spiritual acquired or not acquired gifts, and it is not synodical programs which will build the church of Christ, but the Word. The Word you preach.

Without doubt, I believe, the greatest minister of the Word since the time of the Apostle Paul was Martin Luther. He was asked one day how he, one man, could do so many things in such a short life and that this great Reformation movement, the greatest evangelistic movement the world has ever known since apostolic days, could have happened. And he replied, "I did nothing. God did it all! While my good friend Amsdorf and I were just sitting around drinking Wittenberg beer, the Word did it."

The Word—what does Paul have in mind here in our text when he tells Timothy to "preach the Word?" Is he telling Timothy to preach some of Paul's animadversions and theories about God and grace and salvation? Or is he exhorting Timothy to preach Timothy's own theories about such great themes? No. He is exhorting Timothy to preach God's Word, a divine Word from God revealed to this human race.

But is there such a Word? And if so, where is this Word? In the verses immediately preceding our text, Paul tells us very clearly what that Word is. It is the Word of sacred Scripture. You remember he talks about all Scripture being inspired and so forth. And he says many things about that Word of Scripture which Timothy *and you* are commissioned to preach. First of all, it is a clear Word because Timothy understood it from childhood, having

been taught it by his pious grandmother and mother. Paul goes on to say that it is a divine Word, inspired, breathed forth from the very mouth of God Himself. There are pastors today, even in the Lutheran Church, who say that there is nowhere in the Scriptures that actually we are told that the Bible itself *is* the Word of God. But that is exactly what Paul tells us in those words preceding our text when he tells us about the inspiration of holy writ. And he uses present tense. That Word of Scripture which will be Timothy's basis for everything he teaches and preaches and does as a minister, is not some Word that was once spoken or written down but is no longer accessible and available today. No, it *is* the Word of God and it will be the Word of God to you, too.

Paul goes on. It is a powerful Word. It is able. It has the intrinsic power to make Timothy wise, or anyone wise, unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. That is exactly what it did with Timothy. He was saved by that powerful, Christ-centered, Gospel Word of Scripture. Then Paul finally says that the Scriptures are the source of Timothy's doctrine and all his activity as a pastor. And that it is useful for all kinds of things: for preaching and teaching the doctrine, for straightening people out, for convincing people, and for everything he has to do as a pastor. That's the Word of God that you will be preaching as pastors.

Now here in our text Paul tells Timothy what he as a pastor is to do with that Word: he is to preach it. That does not just mean preparing a sermon throughout every week and delivering it well-executed on a Sunday. The word "preached" here in our text means something far broader than that. It means to declare, to witness, to proclaim, to teach, to get the Word out. Everything in your ministry will encompass getting the Word out. Whether you are ministering to some sick and dying person, whether you are organizing this or that, whether you are teaching the children in confirmation class, whether you are counseling with some poor, bewildered, frightened person—*everything* that you do in your ministry will be for the sake of getting the Word out! Everything that has gone into and contributed to your education and formation here at this seminary—chapel services, exegesis, dogmatics, parish administration—is for the sake of your getting that Word out. Everything that has

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happened in your life, from the day of your baptism to this very moment. All of the wonderful, providential blessings with which God has showered you, all the crosses that have descended upon you, all, without exception have come for the sake of you getting this Word out. Therefore, you cannot, you must not, allow anything—not love or personal loyalty or synodical programs or anything—deter you from getting that Word out!

Why? Because it is a saving Word, Paul tells us. No other message in the world can save a person. And, believe me, this world of ours needs to be saved. Every man, woman, and child on this globe needs to be saved. Why? Because all of us are sinners. That is part of the message that you are to preach, the message of the Word. To tell the world, to tell your parishioners, that they are sinners—real, concrete, hard boiled sinners, as Luther used to say. Lost, helpless, ruined sinners, because ruin is always the result of sin: ruined marriages, ruined opportunities, ruined jobs and occupations, ruined friendships, ruined lives, and worse, infinitely worse, eternal ruin, damnation. That is the message of the Word.

But it has another message, doesn't it—salvation—rescue from ruin; rescue planned meticulously by God Himself from eternity. Rescue, salvation brought about infallibly, powerfully by Christ the Son of God who came into this world and became incarnate to be our substitute and to live the whole law of God being under that law, subjecting Himself to it. He suffered and died in our place. That is salvation—perfect, free salvation—offered, and not only offered but conferred in that Word which you are to preach. Eternal salvation—that's the message of the Word. And that is why you dare not allow anything keep you from preaching it.

Not too long ago I asked a friend—he wasn't a Lutheran—what are the three most overrated things in the world. He said, "The Ministry," and never got to point two or three. Why? Not because you're going to be such bad people. Because of the Word you preach. Invincible indifference—that's what you'll run up against. What are going to do about it? Well you know what you're going to do. There's only one thing you can do. You're going to preach the Word in season and out of season! That's what Paul goes on to say here in our text. He explains a little more how we are to get

this Word out, to preach it. He says be instant, be ready, in season and out of season. Be instant, that means to be ready, be prepared, be on hand, be wherever the Word is needed in season and out of season. When it seems the ideal, propitious time for applying the Word and when it doesn't. When it seems that you will succeed and when it seems that you will fail. Be there always with the Word.

There's more involved. Paul says, "reprove." That means to convince people with the Word, to argue the Word, apply the Word, comfort with the Word, help people with the Word whenever you possibly can. Help them to believe it and to apply it to themselves.

Paul goes on—"rebuke"—a very strong word. A terrifying word, it means to censure, to scold, to bawl a person out, to condemn, to show him that he's wrong, guilty before God. The law never makes a person feel good, it makes them feel bad, guilty, lost. And let me tell you it's no fun preaching the law. People don't like it. They don't like you, they don't like God, and they don't like the law. But you have to do it—because Paul says "rebuke."

And then finally, the great exhortation. "Exhort," he says, "with all long-suffering and doctrine." What doctrine? The doctrine of the gospel. And here Paul is telling you to comfort people, to strengthen people, to help them with the Word. Comfort them with the only thing in this world that can offer a poor sinner comfort, the gospel; the gospel of a loving, gracious, forgiving God. That will be the burden of your ministry. That is the real, essential element of getting the Word out—to comfort with it. And that, I guarantee you, is going to be the crown of your ministry, the glory of your ministry. You'll see that mighty gospel Word you preach at work. You'll see hardened, unregenerate sinners repent at the foot of the cross and confess that Jesus Christ is their Savior. You'll see lives transformed. You'll see poor, miserable, sad, troubled people smile and laugh at the same time they are crying, because you've brought them comfort. And you'll see old, forsaken, dying people die with a smile on their face, knowing that they are going to go to that place God the Son has prepared for them because *you* preached the Word. It is the most rewarding, glorious calling in the world.

Let me conclude with a little table talk from Luther. I hope you

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like your call. I know you will. Now if there are a few things about it you don't like, remember this little story of Luther's. He was talking about his wife, Katy. And he said, "She is not a very good looking woman." If you've ever seen her picture, I think you'll agree with him. "And she's not a particularly bright woman. She's not the most spiritual woman I've ever met. But God gave her to me. And she's mine. And I love her." And that will be your attitude as you posture, your attitude as you enter the ministry to preach the Word to your congregation.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.